

Why Isn't Harold Camping Right?

The Preterism Doctrine

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Well, today is kind of a significant day, is it not? According to the 89 year old Harold Camping, this is the day that the end begins.

Camping is a fairly well known religious radio personality, and this marks the second time that Camping has predicted the return of Christ, the destruction of the world and the rapture would occur. It seems as though there is nothing else in and about Christianity that seems to stir up so much interest as these three subjects, so much interest to Camping and his group that they have organized a nationwide publicity tour called Project Caravan. Camping and his group have organized this in order to get the word out to people and, of course, hoping to precipitate these people's conversion.

This flurry of religious activity accentuates what I've said in these commentaries the last couple of weeks ["How Little They Know" and "Franchising the Faith"]. But in this case, it's not so much what Americans as a whole seem not to know about the Bible; this time, it's how much or how little religious teachers know about what the Bible says.

For example, there are some fairly clearly stated events given in Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13 that immediately precede Christ's return, and these events have not yet occurred, at least to our vision. Yes, the times are becoming more like the days of Noah, as Jesus said, but we certainly haven't reached the worst yet.

In addition, Christ Himself clearly states in Matthew 24:36 that no one knows the day nor hour of His return, and that includes angels and Himself as well. Now that's pretty clear. So, how can Camping be right? How can he know? In addition, we might add to this: How can he know so positively as to mount Project Caravan and its campaign to make his thoughts known? People are especially asking what I'm sure that you already did: How in the world does he explain away this statement that Jesus made and come up with a seemingly different answer?

There is a lot more than just that statement within Matthew 24, because verses 4-6 warn all who read to be careful that people do not deceive you:

Matthew 24:4-6 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

Verse 11 warns that many false prophets will arise and deceive many:

Matthew 24:11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

Matthew 24:24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

Matthew 24:42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

Finally, He admonishes us in verses 25-28 to be faithful and wise and avoid saying in our heart, "My master delays his coming":

Matthew 24:45-48 "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,'

In other words, there are six specific warnings not to let ourselves become overly concerned about the time of His return to take over His earthly responsibilities. So why, then, is such a thing like Camping's prediction occurring?

If we allow that he is sincere, it will still occur because of at least one major reason. You might remember the sermon that I opened the Feast with last year on perspective ["The Handwriting Is On the Wall (2010)"], meaning that the angle from which one looks at something, be it an event or a thing, often determines how one interprets that event or thing. If one looks at something biblical from a perspective of being unconverted, it may have a major impact on the conclusion that he reaches.

For example, when Camping was asked about Matthew 24:36, he said that he believes what Jesus said was intended *only* for the ears of those listening at that time. In other words, the apostles.

There are very sincere religious folk called preterists. "Preterist" is a term that came into the English language from Latin, and it signifies completed past action. A preterist interprets Matthew 24 as already fulfilled by the time of the 70 AD destruction of the Temple.

Many of you are familiar with the writings of commentator Adam Clarke. Did you know that he was a preterist in regard to Matthew 24? He believed it was already fulfilled in his day. Modern commentary authors, who are also fairly well known preterists, include William Lane, who has put out his own commentary, and R. C. Sproul. I've got quite a number of his books.

The overwhelming majority of modern commentaries are written by futurists. A futurist believes that Christ return is premillennial. In other words, Matthew 24 is not fulfilled yet. Herbert Armstrong was a futurist, and so am I. All futurists—hang on to this—also have a measure of preteristic belief in that they acknowledge that some prophecies are already fulfilled. For example, all 60-some prophecies that strictly apply to Christ first coming to Earth are viewed in this manner. They are already fulfilled.

I say this so that you will understand that these preteristic people are not completely cockeyed in the way that they look at things—in their perspective. The futurist strongly believes that most prophecies are intended by God to be interpreted with a primary and fairly insignificant former fulfillment, and a latter, very significant, end time fulfillment. They believe this because they can see historical proofs of this having already occurred.

I believe that the Bible prophecies regarding Christ's return are overwhelmingly premillennial. And at the same time, I also believe that they are written in such a way as to provide incentive for believers to continue to deliberately sacrifice themselves to seeking Him, regardless of when they live. In other words, the anticipation of Christ's return is always present. I do not mean every moment, but I'm talking about a period of time.

Thus, the signs of Christ's return might apply at almost any time in man's history, because most of the signs that Christ gave are very general in nature. For example, "you will hear of wars and rumors of wars." Wars just keep occurring over and over and over again. "You will hear of earthquakes in different places"—over and over and over again, throughout history.

But at the same time that this occurs, better and more honest searching of the prophecies make some signs point to a very specific and more certain period of time. For example, right in Matthew 24:22, it says,

Matthew 24:22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Then Jesus added that the times immediately before His return will be like the days of Noah. This points very specifically to about 1950—a time beginning right around then—and continues right on up to today. Beginning with the time of the hydrogen bomb, which is capable of wiping life right off the earth. Mass electronic communication, in which worldwide communication is almost instantaneous. And how about chemical warfare? Those capabilities, combined with the extreme immorality and anti-Christ spirit, infusing the behavior of mankind on a worldwide basis at almost the same time everywhere.

This is a reality: God wrote the Bible so that we *wouldn't* be able to figure out the time of Christ's return until He specifically allows Christ to reveal it. And He hasn't done that yet. He specifically, repeatedly says, "Then you shall know." And He did this in a book specifically written to Israel. I'm talking about the book of Ezekiel. In context, the "then you shall know" in the book of Ezekiel appears to be when the prophecies are in the process of being fulfilled. *Bing!* The light goes off. Until then, we have to concentrate on getting prepared, and then you will be doing God's will and you'll be prepared.