

BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY

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1994? — Not!

(Part 1)

This issue of _____ begins a second series of studies. The first series, Vols. I:1 –V:4, concerned the chronology of the Bible itself. We saw, first, that the Bible is indeed concerned with chronology, contains much chronological information, and that the chronology in the Bible is complete from creation to the cross. We also dealt in detail with the chronological data in order to uncover precisely what the chronology of the Bible is.

After a break of four months (May-August 1993) we now begin the second series of studies (which is why this September issue is No. 5 of Volume V). In this second series we shall take up particular topics, including (1) erroneous interpretations of Biblical chronology, which is our topic this time, (2) revisionist views of the history of the ancient world, and (3) particular questions of Biblical interpretation that may arise.

If this *Biblical* _____ newsletter develops as I hope, we shall have guest essays from time to time. As a working theologian, my own field is Biblical interpretation, not ancient history. I can describe in these newsletters the debates that are underway in the area of revisionist history, but I cannot evaluate them. Thus I hope that we can draw on the labors Christians who are committed to Biblical chronology and who are working in the area of ancient history.

This month we begin an extended review of the book 1994? by Harold Camping (New York: Vantage Press, 1992). In this book the author suggests that Jesus will return in 1994, and bases his argument on Biblical chronology. Mr. Camping's peculiar views of Biblical chronology were first set forth in book form in his _____ *Biblical Solution Timetable*

(Oakland, CA: Family Stations, 1974). Camping's views are sufficiently eccentric that I did not discuss them in the first series of newsletters. I personally know of no scholar who agrees with his view of Genesis 5 & 11, though there may be some.

I'm not in the habit of taking seriously people who try to predict the time of Jesus' return. I would not take

up Camping's two books now, except for one thing: Mr. Camping is the founder and president of the Family Radio network, which broadcasts worldwide. He speaks on this network and hosts a talk show. As a result, his book 1994? has received very wide promotion and distribution. Mr. Camping is a Calvinistic amillennialist, and his quackodox book has circulated all over the Presbyterian and Reformed world. Most readers of this newsletter live in that world, and so as a service to you I am going to take up this book in some detail.

Quackodoxy

Quackodoxy exists between orthodoxy and heterodoxy (heresy). Quackodox ideas are ideas that are wrong but are held by people who are orthodox Christians. If a quackodox idea is pushed far enough and hard enough, it becomes a destructive heresy. Generally speaking, though, quackodox ideas simply trouble the church and make headaches for pastors.

Let me illustrate with several examples. One of the most prominent forms of quackodoxy today is the "home everything" movement. It is fine if you want to practice home birth, for instance, but it becomes quackodox when you try to say that home birth is the best, most Biblical way to have a baby, and then try to pressure other people into it. It is fine if you choose not to circumcise your son, but if you start calling circumcision "mutilation" you are getting pretty close to heresy (calling God a mutilator), and if you start pressuring people about it you are definitely quackodox. You choose to home school? Fine, but don't say that the Bible teaches home schooling as the best way, because the Bible teaches no such thing. You choose not to use birth control and have twenty children? Fine, but don't say that the Bible teaches against birth control, because in fact the Bible teaches that family planning is an aspect of Christian maturity (as are all forms of planning).

The Rushdoony-wing of Christian Reconstructionism has a number of quackodox ideas running around in it. One is their belief that the Sinaitic dietary laws are

binding as laws of health for Christians If you choose not to eat shrimp, that's fine; but don't try to say the Bible teaches it, because the Bible clearly teaches that Christians are not under these laws. Another quackodox idea that runs through California Reconstructionism is "Biblical geocentricity." If you believe in a geocentric model of the cosmos, that's fine; but don't try to tell me that the Bible teaches it, because it clearly does not. California Reconstructionists also virtually despise the institutional Church, and in this regard they are close to moving out of quackodoxy into full-blown heterodox.

(Bibliographical note: Biblical Horizons ministries makes available balanced discussions of home schooling, birth control, and the dietary laws of Moses. For information write to Box 1096, Niceville, FL 32588.)

Now, trying to set the date for Christ's return is quackodox at best. Jesus Himself said that He did not "know" the day or the hour; only the Father knows (Matthew 24:36). Quackodox interpreters reply that Jesus "knew" the month and year (and so He has put them in the Bible), but just not the day and hour. This kind of interpretation beggars belief! Based on this kind of literalism, we should be chopping off our hands and ripping out our eyes when they offend us (Matthew 5:29-30). Moreover, Acts 1:7 settles the matter: It is not for us to know the *times* which the *Father* has determined. Thus, "day and hour" in Matthew 24:36 is equivalent to "times and epochs" in Acts 1:7—in both cases the Son does not "know" because they are determined by the Father. Those to try to date the second coming have committed the "sin of inadvertency" of claiming to know something Jesus Himself does not know!

(In contrast, the Son knows all about the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, and reveals a great deal of information about it. This is because it is the Son who, as part of the inauguration of His reign, destroys Jerusalem. The end of the Son's mediatorial reign will come when the Father decides, and this, in the economy of revelation, the Son does not "know.")

Camping's 1994? is definitely quackodox. Camping is not a heretic, but an orthodox Christian who has done much fine work in the area of radio over the years. He leaves open the question of the time of Christ's return by putting a question mark at the end of his title. At the same time, his book is filled with bad exegesis and unsubstantiated typology, and encourages the reader to look to 1994 as the time of Christ's return. This kind of material is borderline at best.

So why bother with it? In a little over a year from now, this book will be headed for the recycling bin, I see three reasons to take it up. First, this book will be a headache for many pastors for a year, and I'm in a good position to answer it and provide help to these pastors. Second, answering a book like this provides us an opportunity to review in greater detail certain aspects of the chronology of the Bible. And third, as I mentioned in the first series of newsletters, many

though Jesus has told us not to (Acts 1:7). Camping's work is a specimen of this, and thus useful to analyze from that standpoint. (E.W.Faulstich's weird work is another example. We dealt with Faulstich in the first series of newsletters.)

Genesis 5 & 11

Camping's view of Genesis 5 & 11 will be our first concern. He sets out his view in Chapters 3-5 of *Adam When?*, which are reprinted *in toto* with only minor expansions and deletions in Chapter 8 of 1994? For this reason, I shall refer only to the discussion printed in **1994?**

Camping's position is as follows: The life spans given to the various patriarchs in Genesis 5 and 11 are actually calendar periods. The next son in succession was born in the year that the preceding patriarch died, and a new calendar was begun with his birth. This enables him to come up with 6023 years between the creation and the flood, instead of the 1656 years reckoned on the usual and commonsensical method.

Camping is quite open about his motivations. On page i of he states that "written history goes without pause back to about 3000 B.C. and, therefore, the flood must have been earlier than that." In other words, traditional Biblical chronology (which would put the flood c. 2275 B. C.) must be in error because ancient history professors have disproved it. To rescue the Bible, Camping has come up with a new scheme that gets him many more years. What he should have done is call into question today's scholarly myths about the chronology of the ancient near east.

How does Camping come up with his new interpretation? First, he notes that in Genesis 5:3 we are told that Adam begat a son and called his name Seth. Again in 5:28-29 we are told that Lamech begat a son and called his name Noah. Only in these two cases is the phrase "called his name" used. In the other cases in Genesis 5, the text simply says that X begat Y. Second, Camping asserts plausibly that when the phrase "called his name" is used, a literal son is in view. Direct sonship must be the case if the father actually names the next person in the list. Third, in the other cases, however, Camping asserts that an immediate son is not in view. "Mahalalel begat Jared" (v. 15) may only mean that Mahalalel is the ancestor of Jared.

Now, in terms of how the Hebrew language uses the term "beget," Camping is right: Mahalalel might have been Jared's grandfather, or even great-grandfather. But Camping makes another leap, and asserts that Jared was born the year Mahalalel died. Here is a paraphrase of Genesis 5:15-17 according to Camping's assertion: "And Mahalalel lived 65 years and begat the ancestor of Jared. And Mahalalel lived 830 years after he begat the ancestor of Jared, and he had sons and daughters. So the epoch of Mahalalel lasted 895 years, and he died."

At the outset we must issue two criticisms of

evidence to back up Camping's assertion that when "called his name" is absent from the text, some kind of epoch of years is in view. He provides what he regards as corroborative evidence later on, and we will look at it, but all of it is sheer supposition. There are other, far more plausible reasons why the text does not include the phrase "called his name" in every case. Nothing that a calendar of epochs is in view.

Second, on Camping's view there is nothing in the text to indicate that each of these epochs follows the preceding one. In other words, Camping asserts that the epoch of Jared begins in the year after the death of Mahalalel. Jared, he asserts, was born in the year Mahalalel died. When Mahalalel was 65, he asserts, Mahalalel begat the ancestor of Jared. But what in the text indicates this? Those who disbelieve in Biblical chronology, such as W. H. Green and B. B. Warfield, make basically the same argument as Camping—that "begat" simply means "is an ancestor of"—but they put gaps between each patriarch (cf. *Biblical* II:1 & 2). What in the text indicates that these epochs follow one another without a break? Camping's only argument for believing this is that there have been such a chronology in the ancient world, which is a circular argument (pp. 292ff.).

Let me remind you, now, of the simple, traditional view: Mahalalel begat Jared, his real son, at the age of 65. Based on this interpretation, which is actually the literal statement of the text, we can indeed add up the years between creation and the flood. In fact, we cannot avoid doing so, and putting gaps into the chronology is an impossibility. On Camping's view, however, we have no reason to believe that the Epoch of Jared began the year after the Epoch of Mahalalel ended. On Camping's view, then, there is no foundation for a chronology of this era, which is sad because a chronology is precisely what he wants to create!

Camping never seems to recognize this problem, but there are a couple of problems with his position that he does recognize. First of all, Genesis 4:26 says that a son was born to Seth and he called his name Enosh. The phrase "called his name" is used for Enosh, so that Enosh was the immediate son of Seth. Accordingly, Camping does not have an Epoch of Seth lasting 912 years. The Epoch of Enosh began when Seth was 105, and was the first of these epochs.

Now this is all well and good, but Camping does not see that Genesis 4:26 hurts his overall interpretive assertion. After all, Genesis 5:6 only says that Seth begat Enosh, with nothing said about naming him. It is only when we bring Genesis 4:26 into the picture that we realized that Seth named Enosh, and thus Enosh is his immediate son. But what if that is the case all the way through? The fact that Seth named Enosh, even though Genesis 5 does not state it that way, would seem to indicate that the rest of the patriarchs of Genesis 5 named their heirs also.

Bear in mind that Genesis 4:26 and 5:6 are in two

runs from 5:1 to 6:8. If we just look at the chronological section itself, we would naturally think (on Camping's assumptions) that there was an Epoch of Seth. In other words, on Camping's assumptions, the chronology of Genesis 5 is by itself misleading. We have to run over to Genesis 4 to correct it. If Genesis 5 intended to provide the kind of epoch-chronology Camping favors, then we would rightly expect Genesis 5 to tell us that Seth named Enosh, thereby eliminating an Epoch of Seth and providing us the correct chronological data. The fact that Genesis 5 does not include this all-important bit of information shows that Genesis 5 is not setting out the kind of epoch-chronology Camping has hypothesized. Rather, Genesis 5 is to be read in the traditional way, and only the traditional way of reading it makes sense of the entire chapter.

A second problem with Camping's interpretative hypothesis is found in Genesis 5:32, which says that Noah began Shem, Ham, and Japheth, but says nothing about Noah's naming them. Yet, as Camping agrees, these clearly were the immediate sons of Noah. Similarly, Genesis 11:26-28 say that Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran, but does not say he named them; yet the text makes it clear that they really were his sons.

Here again, Camping admits that these are exceptions to his rule, but he does not see that these exceptions strongly argue against his rule altogether. In fact, every time the Bible says anything additional about one of these patriarchs, it becomes necessary for Camping to set aside his rule. On Camping's rule, there should have been an Epoch of Seth before Enosh, an Epoch of Noah before Shem, and an Epoch of Terah before Abram, but the Bible makes it clear that there were no such epochs. On what basis does Camping assert that the other patriarchal life spans were epochs?

(By the way, Camping is almost certainly wrong on p. 271 in saying that Ham was the oldest. Genesis 9:24 says that Ham was the youngest, and Genesis 10:21 does not speak of "Shem the older brother of Japheth," but of "Shem, brother of Japheth the eldest.")

The Meaning of Naming

Now at this point, I need to point out the real meaning of the phrase "he named him" in these chapters. The contrast between "he named him" and those cases that do not mention naming is established by the Bible itself in Genesis 4:1.

To begin with, it is clear that Eve named Cain. The next verse mentions the birth of Abel, but does not say who named him. Genesis 4:25 says that Eve named Seth, and verse 26 says that Seth named Enosh. Genesis 5:3 says that Adam named Seth. The contrast is between whether the mother or the father names the child. What normally happens is that the mother names the child, and the father confirms the name. Thus, Eve named Seth, and then Adam confirmed the name. Since the woman is the mother of the seed the child's

consider these passages: In Genesis 16:11, God tells Hagar to name her son **Ishmael**, and in v. 15 Abram confirmed that name. In Genesis 25:25-26 we read that "they" named Esau, and that Jacob "was named," without saying who did the naming. It would seem that Isaac and Rebekah made the decision together. Rachel and Leah named all their own sons and the sons of their respective maids (Gen. 29:31-35; 30:5-13, 18-24). Rachel named her second son **Benoni**, but Jacob altered his name to Benjamin (Gen. 35:18).

At what point did the father either confirm or alter the name of his son? I suggest that it was at the weaning of the son, a ceremony mentioned in Genesis 21:8-9. On that occasion, Sarah observed **Ishmael** "isaacing" as the Hebrew literally has it. The question then arose: Who is to be the true Isaac, God's true laughter? This question of names was settled on that day by Abraham's driving Ishmael out. By doing so, Abraham confirmed the name at the weaning ceremony. (From a Biblical theological standpoint, this suggestion sheds light on what is happening when God changes a person's name, as Abram to Abraham and Jacob to Israel. Weaning of some sort seems definitely to be in view in Genesis 32:24-32.)

So then, what is going on in Genesis 5 & 11? Are we to assume that when it says "he named him" that in these cases the father directly named the son, or that he changed the name the mother originally gave him? In all other cases, the mother's name was confirmed by the father? Not quite. We don't have enough information to assert such an interpretation.

I believe the reason is this: When attention is

called to the father's naming the child, it is because the name had special significance. "**Seth**" means "the appointed replacement," pointing to the second Adam to come (Gen. 4:25, and notice the wording of 5:3, which points to the same thing). "**Enosh**" means "weak man," and this name was Seth's confession of human frailty, against Adam's sin. From this time, men began to confess their weakness and worship God instead of defying Him (Gen. 4:26). **Lamech** named Noah, explaining the name in terms of sabbath comfort and rest, a prophecy of the flood and the new creation (Gen. 5:29).

These are the only three places in the primeval genealogies where naming is made explicit, and in each case it has to do with theology and prophecy. There is absolutely no reason to tie it to a chronological consideration. The other sons were just as immediate, and were named by their mothers and fathers, but their names are not explained as having special significance. As is usually the case, their names do have some significance, but not the special significance attached to Seth, Enosh, and Noah.

As a preliminary conclusion we have to say the following about Camping's hypothesis. (1) There is absolutely nothing in the text to support his view that these life spans are epochs. Camping has pulled this notion out of thin air. (2) There is plenty of evidence in the text that each of the patriarchs was the son of the preceding patriarch. (3) There are good theological reasons why the naming of some patriarchs is given special notice; Camping's hypothesis is not needed to explain why the naming is mentioned in some cases and not in others.

(to be continued)