

# BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY

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## 1994? — Not!

(Part 3)

V:5-6. In his book 1994?, Harold Camping asserts that the life spans of the primeval patriarchs of Genesis 5 & 11 were actually epochs, one after another. This together with other mistakes in interpretation yields for him a creation date of 11013 B.C. From here, Camping tries to work out the date of the second coming. We are in the midst of analyzing his hypothesis.)

### Confusion About the Judges

We have seen Camping make two important errors in chronology thus far. First, he has assumed, without a shred of Biblical foundation, that the life spans of most of the patriarchs of Genesis 5 & 11 are to be regarded as successive epochs. Second, he has misinterpreted the data in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers to mean that the Hebrews lived in Goshen for 430 years, instead of the 215 years they actually lived there. Thus, while accurate Biblical chronology gives us 2513 years from creation to the exodus, Camping's scheme requires 9566 years.

Camping now moves to the period of the Judges, where he commits another classic mistake. 1 Kings 6:1 states that there were 480 years from the exodus to the beginning of the building of the Temple in the fourth year of Solomon's reign. Like a number of 19th century expositors, Camping tries to reconcile this figure with the years found in the book of Judges by saying that the number 480 only counts years when Israel was free and unoccupied, while the times when Israel was oppressed are not counted. In fact, a careful reading of the texts of Judges and Samuel shows that the stories of Jephthah, Samson, and Samuel happened at the same time. Moreover, the oppression of Jabin and the judgeship of Barak in the north are simultaneous with the peace of Ehud in the south. The bizarre notion that the chronology omits "carnal years of oppression" is wholly without any Biblical foundation, and contradicts the data that prove the simultaneity of Samson's, Samuel's, and Jephthah's histories. The reader is directed to *Biblical* 2:2,2:8, 3:8 for a full discussion of this period. At any rate, Camping winds up with 111 years too many for the period of the judges.

But then Camping subtracts four years by assuming that the fourth year of Solomon, when he began to build the temple, was the year David died. Thus, he asserts, there was

Temple. He bases his assertion solely on the fact that David got cedar and stones from Hiram of Tyre, and so did Solomon (1 Chronicles 22:2-4; 1 Kings 5).

Camping ignores two facts. First, David in 1 Chronicles 22:14 says to Solomon that he "may add to" the cedar and stone David has already collected. In other words, there is no reason to reject the notion that Solomon got more cedar and stone from Hiram after David's death.

Second, though David did crown Solomon before he died, it evidently was very shortly before his death. 1 Kings 2:12 says that Solomon was established king after David's death and proceeds to delineate a series of events after David's death that occupy at least three years (1 Kings 2:39). We know that David is dead during this time, because these events constitute Solomon's fulfillment of David's deathbed commands (1 Kings 2:5-9). Thus, it is clear that after David's death Solomon had to put down his enemies and organize the nation for three years before he could begin to build the Temple. There was no co-regency.

Moreover, it was fitting and necessary for Solomon to do this. The counterfeit king Adonijah had to be eliminated; the counterfeit High Priest Abiathar had to be eliminated; the counterfeit "helper meet" for the king—the commander Joab—had to be eliminated; and the leader of the Saulide opposition, Shimei, had to be eliminated. Now Solomon's reign could stand free and clear. Accordingly, Solomon married, received God's blessing, reorganized the kingdom, and began to develop the wisdom literature. This sequence of events corresponds to the exodus from Egypt that preceded the building of the Tabernacle:

### Exodus

defeat of Pharaoh  
mixed multitude

initial worship  
Jethro organizes nation

God gives law

Tabernacle built

### Solomon

defeat of enemies  
marriage to Pharaoh's  
daughter

worship at Sinai  
Solomon organizes  
kingdom

Spirit produces wisdom  
literature

Temple built

Having invented a co-regency of four years, Camping now

David -40 for Saul). He proceeds to try to make a big deal out of the supposed symbolic meaning of this on pages 171 f. He says that the "400-year period" from the exodus to Saul was a testing period, like the 40 days of Jesus in the wilderness, the 40 days of Jonah in Nineveh, the 40 years of Israel in the wilderness. But consider this: Camping has already subtracted 111 "carnal years" from the period. It seems that the very years that show Israel failing this supposed test are omitted from the scheme. Israel's 40 years in the wilderness were a punishment for sin; Camping's 400 years are all years of blessing, because the punishment-years have been subtracted. What kind of logic is this? Well, since the period actually lasted 404 years, the symbolism falls apart anyway.

In conclusion, we see again that Camping, doubtless a fine Christian man, is not a God-gifted exegete. Thus far he has fallen into virtually every error possible in the field of Biblical chronology, as well as inventing one brand new error of his own (to wit, his epoch-view of the primeval patriarchs).

#### Further Problems

Camping does not discuss the period of the kings, but his chronological summary gives 380 years from the foundation of the Temple to its destruction (pp. 309-1 O). We can only assume he is building on the eccentric and unreliable work of Edwin Thiele. The actual count of years is more like 432, I have discussed this at length throughout the first series of newsletters (2:9-1 O; 3:9-4:7), and so I won't rehearse it again here.

In Chapter 10 of 1994?, Camping discusses the period between Cyrus and Christ. Daniel 9:24-25 says that there would be 70 weeks of years to the Messiah, beginning with a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. The only decree that fits the bill is the decree of Cyrus, as we have seen previously (*Biblical* 2:12). Camping assumes that the Ptolemaic chronology of the ancient world is correct (which means that, whether he realizes it or not, he implicitly rejects the testimony of extra-Biblical Jewish sources), so that the decree of Cyrus came in 539 B.C. Thus, either the 70 weeks of years is symbolic (which Camping rejects) or else Cyrus cannot be the starting point. Camping does not entertain the notion, which we have advocated, that Cyrus is the starting point but the Ptolemaic chronology is erroneous.

Camping advocates a spiritual understanding of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. He identifies it with Artaxerxes' sending Ezra to restore the law in Jerusalem (Ezra 7:21-26). Camping here assumes that the Artaxerxes of Ezra is the Artaxerxes of Herodotus, a common assumption these days, but one without good Biblical foundation. As we have seen, everything in the Biblical account points to Artaxerxes' being another name for Darius, a viewpoint more common among earlier generations and one that is regaining ground today.

Thus, even if Camping's spiritual interpretation were correct, which it almost certainly is not, it still would not provide him with the date he requires.

Camping tries to substantiate his scheme by pointing to jubilee years. Because his chronology of the kings is off, his jubiliary count is also off. Additionally, Camping assumes that jubilees came every 50 years, whereas it is far more likely that the jubilee year was simultaneous with the first year of the new cycle; i.e., the 50th year is also the first year of the new cycle just as the 8th day is the first day of the new week. In that case, the jubilee came every 49 years. See

5:2-4.

Then Camping tries to substantiate his scheme by pointing to a supposed 1000-year distance between David and Christ.

But beyond this, Camping connects the death of David at age 70 with the year after Jesus's death (A.D. 34- Camping assumes the crucifixion happened in A.D. 33). Camping has already asserted that Solomon began the Temple the year David died, so he has another "amazing coincidence." But all of this is built on error. It is all fantasy. - There is no 1000-year period between David and Christ. The death of Christ was His ascension to the throne, which should correspond to David's accession, not to David's death at age 70. Also, the Temple was not begun the year David died.

Now Camping really gets wild. Based on his erroneous chronology, Abraham was circumcised in 2068 B. C., which is exactly (!!!) 2100 years before A.D. 33. Now, 2100 is  $3 \times 7 \times 1000$ , and thus surely significant! And, get this! Daniel prayed for 21 days while the prince of Persia stood against God's angel, but then Michael overcame the prince of Persia (Daniel 10:2-3, 13). So maybe the 21 days are 21 centuries. (There is absolutely no Biblical foundation for such a notion, but what if?) maybe the 21 centuries start with the circumcision of Abram, which begins the Jewish race, which is oppressed the whole time until Michael comes to save them in A.D. 33? Isaac was born the next year, a clear connection to the Messiah.

Now, folks, this is just bizarre. First of all, if the 21 days have any symbolic meaning, they would be 21 years, for in the Bible the only correlation we have to go on is day=year. Moreover, if the 21 days have any relation to prophecy, they would relate to the prophecy Daniel receives in Daniel 10-12, in the immediate context. In other words, the 21 days would relate to the period from Daniel to Jesus (if Michael's help is indeed a type of Jesus' work). Additionally, there is nothing to connect 21 days of oppression and fasting with Camping's entire 2100 years of Jewish history, much of which was free and full of festivity. On top of that, the connection between Daniel's 21 days of fasting and any kind of prophetic period is completely unfounded. Finally, the chronology is simply wrong because it is untrue to the text; there are not 2100 years between the circumcision of Abraham and the death of Jesus.

This is just the beginning, folks. Camping follows up his 2100-year fantasy with a phantasmagoric plethora of other completely unsubstantiated numerological associations. The 191 years between Abraham's circumcision and the descent into Egypt become 1910 years between the descent and A.D. 34. The 190 years between the birth of Isaac and the descent into Egypt become 1900 years between the descent and A.D. 24 (p.355). And on it goes.

The number 12 is important, isn't it? Now, guess what? There are 1200 years from the death of Gideon to the year 7 B. C., which Camping has already "shown" is a jubilee year (and which he will assert as the birth-year of Christ). Not only that, but guess what else? Deuteronomy 1:2 says that it took eleven days to journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea, there are 11 thousand years from the creation to 13 B. C., which is "surprisingly close to 7 B.C."!!! (p. 361). But there's more! There are 6023 years from creation to the flood, and if we add 5023 (yes, 5023, not 6023), we come up to A.D. 34!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Now, I'm going to stop here. Camping goes on in this vein for 20 more pages (pp. 361 -380), but at this point, simple human decency and Christian charity compel us to draw a veil over our neighbor's folly. Reading this material, I'm reminded of certain googly-eyed charismatic girls I knew in college who greeted every weird idea they encountered with a hyper-enthusiastic "Oh, wow!"

chronological fantasies is that Jesus was almost 40 when He died. He was born in 7 B.C. and died in A.D. 33. This odd notion does not square very well with Luke 3:23, which says Jesus was baptized when He was about 30 years of age. If Jesus' ministry lasted 3 years, Camping would have Him baptized at about age 36, which is not close enough to be "about 30 years of age." Camping, therefore, interprets Luke 3:23 symbolically (p. 484). Camping thus sets aside a very clear statement of historical fact in order to maintain his extremely speculative and fantastic scheme.

### The Nearness of the Second Coming

In Chapter 9 of his book Camping explicitly rejects our Lord's command not to try to set the date of His second coming. I discussed at the outset of this evaluation that this puts Camping into the borderland between Christianity and heresy, the realm of quackodoxy. But, having set aside the Biblical warnings in this area, Camping now sets about trying to come up with the forbidden date.

The first seven chapters of 1994? lay out Camping's prophetic prejudices. He makes it clear that the "rapture" will occur at the end of time, not at the beginning of a tribulation, but he then argues that there is some kind of tribulation period that is predicted to take place just before the second coming. He fails to see that there is no "rapture" but rather an ascension of the saints' physical bodies, analogous to Christ's ascension. Just as we rise with Him, so also we ascend with Him; spiritually now, physically at the last day. As regards the great tribulation, Camping ignores the rather clear evidence of the gospels that this was a period that would happen shortly after Jesus' ascension; it was the time just before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Camping also makes it clear that Satan has been bound from deceiving the nations by Christ's first coming; therefore, there is no future millennium. The millennium is the Church Age. Camping goes on to say that though Jesus established the institutional Church, that Church is going to apostatize and will have to be destroyed. He clearly believes that the bad estate of the institutional Church today is a pointer to the nearness of the tribulation and the end of history.

In Chapter 6, Camping argues from a series of extremely bizarre numerological fantasies, which I will not bother to take up, that the last tribulation will endure for about 6 years. If Jesus is to return in 1994, that tribulation began in 1988; but where is it? If worldwide Christianity is going through the great tribulation right now, then the great tribulation does not amount to much compared with what we have usually been led to expect. (Remember, Camping published this book in 1992, which is well into the great tribulation, on his reckoning.)

Camping provides a couple of truly quackodox evidences that we are living in an age of apostasy. One is that divorce is now permitted in the Church, whereas the Bible clearly teaches (according to him) that all divorce is forbidden, and that if the sin of divorce has been committed, remarriage is forbidden (p. 145). This is idiocy, and has never been the teaching of the Christian Church at all. The Church has always recognized legitimate divorce for adultery, and usually for other gross kinds of sins and oppressions as well, grouping them as desertions. And remarriage has been recognized as legitimate as well. One of the great gains of the Reformation was that the Reformers recognized that the Bible allows divorce and remarriage. Where Camping gets the lunatic idea that the Bible forbids divorce I do not know.

Another piece of lunacy is on p. 146, where Camping says

permitted in the Church. Well, the fact is that the Bible does not prohibit birth control and family planning, and indeed encourages us to live responsibly and take dominion over such matters. To be sure, birth control can be abused, but so can everything else in the world. Camping's idea that everyone must have as large a family as possible is completely unBiblical and is a piece of liberal, modernistic rationalism.

Well, then, since we are in the great tribulation, what does this tribulation consist of? Camping's answer is that it consists of spiritual distress, which is symbolically presented in the Bible as external pain, suffering, and martyrdom. Filling out his model, he points to the modern tongues and signs & wonders movements. These are, he argues, Satanic counterfeits of true Christianity, and the Church is flocking to them err

This is the great apostasy, which brings tribulation to the souls of those faithful who resist these movements.

Now, I agree that tongues ceased in the first century; the Bible is pretty clear about this. Modern tongues are simply glossolalia, not foreign languages. Modern tongue speaking is not the same as what was going on in the New Testament. But what that means is that that modern glossolalia can be quite harmless. In fact, if we can whistle and hum to God's glory, we can also babble to His glory, provided we don't try to say that this babbling is a second blessing or in some other way misinterpret it.

Moreover, I agree that the signs & wonders movement is a great evil. It does come very close to being a counterfeit gospel, replacing truth and obedience with a new kind of shamanism not far removed from the religions of primitive tribes. But at the same time, I don't see huge masses of orthodox Christians going for this idiocy and garbage.

Stupid emotionalistic cults have hung around the fringes of Christianity for 2000 years. The Church of the Middle Ages had far more of this kind of stuff than we see today. Camping is historically naive if he thinks the modern charismatic movements are very important. There was much more "apostasy and tribulation" in the Church 1000 years ago than today.

Similarly, Camping says that the outbreak of homosexuality in our day, and the plague of AIDS, is a sign of the end. But historically there have been periods of greater and more open homosexuality, and certainly there have been greater plagues. It is easier to see AIDS as God's gracious destruction of the wicked in order to make more room for His people.

### Calculating the Second Coming

Camping's date for the second coming builds on the strange brew he has concocted regarding the first coming of Christ. So caught up is Camping in his scheme that he actually writes on page 423 that we are greatly helped in our study of the second coming by what we have learned about the date of the first coming.

(emphasis mine). By rights, I should stop this review right now. The numerological principles Camping has been using are totally unBiblical (day = century; day = millennium; year = decade; completely arbitrary associations between Old Testament events and the death of Christ; etc.); and his chronological framework is completely wrong in every epoch: wrong about creation to Abraham, wrong about Abraham to the exodus, wrong about the period of the judges, wrong about the period of the kings, and wrong about Daniel's 70 weeks. If Camping is going to continue to engage in this kind of quackodoxy, we don't need to read any further. The fact is that virtually everything Camping writes in this book is an abuse of the

But curiosity has moved me on. Without going into detail: Camping routinely misapplies to the second coming texts of the New Testament that deal with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. As a result, his understanding of New Testament eschatology is badly confused, which simply compounds the confusion already existing in his chronology and his numerology. On p. 435 Camping presents the standard dispensational quackodox goofball interpretation of Matthew 24:32-33, and says that the budding of the fig tree refers to the movement of the Jews to Palestine in 1948. Please! Gimmeabreak! Matthew 24:34 states that this event happened in Jesus' own day. The budding of the fig tree refers to the beginning of the Church out of the Old Covenant Israel. The book of Acts is about the budding of the fig tree

Now here we go again. See if you can follow this, from Chapter 13 of 1994? Deuteronomy 32:8 says that God has set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. Job 14:5 says that God has determined days, months, and boundaries. Now, from these two verses, Camping reasons: (1) that the bounds of the people in Deuteronomy 32:8 is a temporal, not just a geographical, boundary; (2) that the number of the children of Israel does not mean a census or the nation as a whole, but refers to the tribes, which were literally 13 in number; (3) the linking of the bounds of the nations with the number of Israel means there is a connection between the number 13 and the length of world history; and (4) that the 13 tribes must refer to 13,000 years of human history from creation to consummation.

Now, on Camping's bizarre chronological scheme, 13,000 years takes us to 1988. But that won't work. We have to add some more years. Here's how Camping does it on p. 443. He assumes Christ was born in 7 B.C. From creation in 11,013 B.C. to the birth of Christ is 11,006 years ( $11,000 + 6$ ). Just look at those sneaky extra 6 years that have crept in here! Well, if they can creep into the time before Christ, we can let them creep in again ( $13,000 + 6$ ).  $1988 + 6 = 1994$ . There you have it.

Want proof? Well, after all there are 2000 years from the birth of Jacob (2007 B. C., Camping's Wrong Chronology) to the birth of Jesus (7 B. C., CWC). And so, 2000 more years brings us to 1996. (GET THIS!), *there are 2000 cubits mentioned in Joshua 3:3-4, AND THERE ARE 2000 PIGS IN MARK 5:1-17!!!* Hey, what more evidence do we need?

Well, as you can imagine, Camping provides many more lines of "evidence," each weirder than the one before it, but I won't be able to resist becoming savagely humorous if I continue to rehearse these. (If you think I've been too rough

heretofore, remember that this ignorant man has had the arrogant gall to invade my profession, despise it, and tell me how to do it. I don't tell him how to run radio stations, so just how tolerant am I supposed to be with his telling me how to do theology?)

A final note on Deuteronomy 32:8. All this verse evidently means is that God setup the geographical bounds to provide enough space for Israel, in terms of the population of Israel. That's pretty simple isn't it?

### Conclusion

Camping does an absolutely horrible job of Biblical chronology, symbolism, and numerology. Many readers, when they see someone like Camping going ape over symbolism and numerology, tend to reject and despise Biblical symbolism and numerology. This kind of reaction is foolish. It is like saying that because Jehovah's Witnesses do bad systematic theology, therefore we will not do systematic theology at all. The fact is that the Bible abounds in symbolism and also contains a good deal of numerology (The numbers 4, 7, 10, and 12; the 3rd day, 3rd hour, 3rd week, 3rd month, 3rd year; the 7th of each; the 8th of each; etc.). But just as the "systematically theological" letters of Paul have to be read carefully and accurately, so also the symbolism of the tabernacle, the chronology of the Bible, and the numerical allusions of the Bible have to read carefully and accurately. Camping's problem is not that he tries to deal with chronology and numerology; his problem is that he is completely ungifted and unskilled at doing so, and he does a horrible job of it.

I'm sorry to be so blunt about it, but what can I say? I'm a practicing, professional Biblical theologian. Camping clearly isn't. I have the gifts, training, skills, and experience to work in this area. Camping clearly does not. I wish him well at his — calling. I would not presume to tell him how to run a radio station. Ah, but Mr. Camping wants to do theology—indeed, theology of the most sensitive sort, dealing with symbols and numbers. Mr. Camping thinks he can be a theologian because in America everybody thinks he is entitled to be a theologian. Biblical Christianity rejects such a silly notion.

Mr. Camping, please call back all copies of this awful book and sell them for recycling.

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