

Cults - Family Radio

Harold Camping: The Audacity of Numerology?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

January 1st is the time of year when end-of-the-world predictions receive big publicity. This year it was the turn of certified false prophet Harold Camping.

Camping has obviously learned nothing from his past failed predictions. In a feature article in the January 1, 2010 *San Francisco Chronicle*,¹ the audacity of this certified false prophet is nothing short of astounding —

Harold Camping lets out a hearty chuckle when he considers the people who believe the world will end in 2012.

"That date has not one stitch of biblical authority," Camping says from the Oakland office where he runs Family Radio, an evangelical station that reaches listeners around the world. "It's like a fairy tale."

The real date for the end of times, he says, is in 2011.

The Mayans and the recent Hollywood movie "2012" have put the apocalypse in the popular mind this year, but Camping has been at this business for a long time. And while Armageddon is pop science or big-screen entertainment to many, Camping has followers from the Bay Area to China.

Camping, 88, has scrutinized the Bible for almost 70 years and says he has developed a mathematical system to interpret prophecies hidden within the Good Book. One night a few years ago, Camping, a civil engineer by trade, crunched the numbers and was stunned at what he'd found: The world will end May 21, 2011.

In 2005 Camping published his prediction as a book, *Time Has an End: A Biblical History of the World 11,013 B.C. - 2011 A.D.* (Vantage Press). But as the *Chronicle* reminds us, "This is not the first time Camping has made a bold prediction about Judgment Day" —

On Sept. 6, 1994, dozens of Camping's believers gathered inside Alameda's Veterans Memorial Building to await the return of Christ, an event Camping had promised for two years. Followers dressed children in their Sunday best and held Bibles open-faced toward heaven.

But the world did not end. Camping allowed that he may have made a mathematical error. He spent the next decade running new calculations, as well as overseeing a media company [Family Stations, Inc. aka Family Radio] that has grown significantly in size and reach.²

Family Radio is a huge enterprise. According to published financial records Camping's cult has net assets of over \$120 million. The market value of the licenses for its 109 radio stations and two television stations is estimated to be nearly \$1 billion.

Harold Camping believes he has discovered what no one else ever knew, and what Scripture says is un-knowable by man: the day of Christ's return. Camping's so-called seventy-year study of the Bible consisted mainly in the development of a numerological system through which all Scripture, he says, must be interpreted. The *Chronicle* article continues:

The number 5, Camping concluded, equals "atonement." Ten is "completeness." Seventeen means "heaven." Camping patiently explained how he reached his conclusion for May 21, 2011.

"Christ hung on the cross April 1, 33 A.D.," he began. "Now go to April 1 of 2011 A.D., and that's 1,978 years."

Camping then multiplied 1,978 by 365.2422 days - the number of days in each solar year, not to be confused with a calendar year.

Next, Camping noted that April 1 to May 21 encompasses 51 days. Add 51 to the sum of previous multiplication total, and it equals 722,500.

Camping realized that $(5 \times 10 \times 17) \times (5 \times 10 \times 17) = 722,500$.

Or put into words: (Atonement x Completeness x Heaven), squared.

"Five times 10 times 17 is telling you a story," Camping said. "It's the story from the time Christ made payment for your sins until you're completely saved.

"I tell ya, I just about fell off my chair when I realized that," Camping said.

We almost fall off our chair as we witness this false prophet's brazen disregard for God's Word — the audacity of numerology.

The article cites a critic who says that "Camping makes a classic beginner's mistake when he sets a date for Christ's return. Jesus himself said in Matthew 24:36, 'Of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only.' " But, the *Chronicle* notes, Camping's cult followers "will have none of it."

Rick LaCasse, who attended the September 1994 service in Alameda [where Camping was proven a false prophet], said that 15 years later, his faith in Camping has only strengthened.

"Evidently, he was wrong," LaCasse allowed, "but this time it is going to happen. There was some doubt last time, but we didn't have any proofs. This time we do."

Would his opinion of Camping change if May 21, 2011, ended without incident?

"I can't even think like that," LaCasse said. "Everything is too positive right now. There's too little time to think like that."

It is classic cult-follower thinking to say that the human leader can't possibly be wrong. "Folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment" (Proverbs 15:21). Let every true Christian heed the inspired words of the Apostle Paul:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:9-11).

References:

1. Justin Berton, "Biblical Scholar's Date for Rapture: May 21, 2011 in the *San Francisco Chronicle* for January 1, 2010. The article appeared in the print edition on page C-1. As viewed at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/01/BA8V1AV589.DTL&type=printable>.

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Family Radio's Harold Camping has predicted that Jesus Christ will return on 5/21/2011 and 10/20/2011.

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