

## ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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28-29 May 2011

### PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

#### *The Sad Teaching of Harold Camping*

It has been said that “the one thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.” This equally applies to those who should learn from church history. Throughout the history of the church, leaders have attempted to be specific about certain historical developments and relate those events to biblical prophecy, specifically the return of Christ. In 1843 and 1844, William Miller made specific predictions that Jesus would return in those years. In the late 1980s, a leader wrote a pamphlet, “88 Reasons why Jesus will return in 1988.” When Jesus did not return, those individuals were embarrassed and humiliated. Harold Camping today stands embarrassed and humiliated. He was wrong! How should we think about this?

- First, exactly what did Camping teach? He concluded from his study of Scripture that Jesus would return for His church about 6 pm on 21 May 2011 and take the righteous to heaven. That event would then be followed by five months of fire, brimstone and plagues, with millions of people dying each day. Finally on 21 October 2011, the world would end according to the details alluded to in the Book of Revelation—the lake of fire and the new heaven and the new earth. How did he arrive at these specific dates? In an interview with a *USA Today* reporter, he “opened his Bible to Genesis and said Noah loaded animals into the ark in 4990 BC, a number he said he arrived at years ago after looking at carbon dating, tree rings and other data. Paging forward to 2 Peter, he read aloud, ‘one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years is one day.’ Leafing back to Genesis, he said that the seven days Noah spent loading the ark was really 7,000 years. He then added 7,000 to 4990 BC to arrive at 2010. He added one more year, he said, because there is no year one in the Bible. As for the exact date of 21 May, he pointed again to Genesis, which says the flood began on the ‘17<sup>th</sup> day of the second month.’ According to the Jewish calendar, which he believes God uses, that is 21 May.” [In a book he published in the 1990s, he predicted Jesus would return in 1994. He made a mistake in his calculations.] Camping told *New York* magazine: “God has given ‘sooo’ much information in the Bible about this, and so many proofs, and so many signs, that we know it is absolutely going to happen without any question at all. There’s nothing in the Bible that God has ever prophesied—there’s many things that he prophesied would happen and they always happened—but there’s nothing in the Bible that holds a candle to the amount of information to this tremendous truth of the end of the world. I would be absolutely in rebellion against God if I thought anything other than it is absolutely going to happen without any question.” [Note the categorical terms!!]
- Second, how did Camping’s teaching become so widespread? Camping, who lives in Oakland, California, is the founder and leader of Family Radio. Family Radio has financed the nationwide campaign to promote 21 May 2011 as the date of Christ’s return. About

1,200 billboards across the nation have promoted this teaching and about 2,000 have done so across the world. Neither Family Radio nor CBS Outdoor, which sold a large number of the billboards, would comment on the total cost of the campaign, but it is reasonable to assume it is in the millions of dollars.

- Third, how should we think biblically about this prediction? It is imperative to remember the clear teaching of Jesus: “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” (Acts 1:7) “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” Therefore, it is clear-cut from these two verses alone that Christians are forbidden to set dates about the return of Jesus. There is simply no other conclusion to be reached. Quite frankly, it is the heights of arrogance and presumptuousness to try and set such a date. It is important, nonetheless, to remember that God did give prophetic Scripture. In fact, major portions of Scripture are prophetic. But God did not give us prophetic Scripture to set dates. He makes it crystal clear why He has done so: (1) To bring comfort and encouragement to those who are His children by faith in Jesus Christ (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Titus 2:13). The truth of Christ’s return gives us hope and confidence. (2) We are to be ready, because we do not know the hour of His return (see Matthew 24:32-44). And (3) we are to be faithful (see Matthew 24:45 through 25:30).

Harold Camping has made a significant error in propagating something that is false and which has no biblical authority. It is quite sad, for he is a man who has blessed countless Christians throughout his life through his radio stations. What a sad way to end one’s life of service to the Lord. Perhaps, God will use his false teaching to remind many that Jesus is returning, but that we are never to fall into the trap of pretending to know when that might be.

See Kimberly Winston in *USA Today* (23 March 2011); Heather Murphy in *Slate* (19 May 2011); and [www.AlbertMohler.com](http://www.AlbertMohler.com) (17 May 2011).

## **PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO**

### ***President Obama and Israel***

In an extraordinary speech last Thursday, President Obama endorsed using the 1967 boundaries as the baseline for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. He is the first American president to do so! [He also prodded Arab governments to carry out the democratic reforms their citizens have demanded in the so-called “Arab Spring.”] In the 1967 war, Israel’s victory over Egypt and other Arab neighbors expanded its control over territories in the West Bank and Gaza, over the Golan Heights and over East Jerusalem. [Since 1967, Israel has enjoyed stability in its north, where before 1967 Syria relentlessly shelled and bombed Israelis in Galilee. It has reunited Jerusalem and made it the nation’s capital. In doing so, Israel has made Jerusalem accessible to all peoples of all faiths, something that never occurred in Jerusalem when it was under Arab control.] In his speech, Obama noted that Israel and the Palestinians would need to swap territory on either side of the 1967 border to account for large settlements that have taken root in the West Bank. The timing of the President’s speech is also quite critical because the Palestinians are proposing that they will unilaterally declare their own state this coming

September. His speech seems to give them even more credibility and support. Nonetheless, he did say that “Symbolic efforts to isolate Israel at the United Nations in September won’t create an independent state.” He also referred to a “non-militarized” Palestinian state in his speech but that seems totally unrealistic. Fatah and Hamas recently signed a unity agreement and there is simply no way that Hamas will agree to demilitarizing itself!!! Obama did recognize the extreme difficulty this unity agreement poses for Israel: “How can one negotiate with a party that has shown itself unwilling to recognize your right to exist?” How indeed!!!! The President’s strategy seems to be to segregate security and border issues from the more volatile issues of the status of Jerusalem and the fate of the Palestinian refugees, who are still claiming the “right of return” to their land in Israel. Officially, the government of Israel responded to President Obama’s speech by declaring that “while there were many points in the president’s speech that we appreciate and welcome, there were other aspects, like the return to the 1967 borders, which depart from longstanding American policy, as well as Israel policy, going back to 1967.” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu understandably argued that seeing 1967 borders as the starting point for negotiations would result in borders that are “indefensible,” suggesting that the plan would weaken Israeli security and put Jewish settlers at risk. In fact, Netanyahu gave a speech about two weeks ago in which he acknowledged that Israel is prepared to cede most of the West Bank to a Palestinian state—a major step forward in how he has been positioning Israel for negotiations. He is willing, up front, to commit to significant withdrawal.

But what about the unity agreement between Hamas and Fatah, the organization that Mahmoud Abbas leads? Will this not help facilitate Obama’s objectives? That is highly doubtful, for these reasons:

1. Mahmoud Abbas refuses to make any upfront concessions of his own but has actually “blown up” four years of US-sponsored initiatives and the relative prosperity that the West Bank has known the last few years. By signing the agreement with Hamas, Abbas will no doubt be obligated, in the words of Columnist Jackson Diehl “to fire his progressive prime minister, release scores of jailed Hamas militants and bond his security forces with Hamas’s Iranian-equipped army.”
2. Abbas is seeking a UN General Assembly vote on Palestinian statehood in September. In an op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, Abbas argued for a “declaration of war on the status quo,” by which, with the UN vote for Palestinian statehood, he will be able to “pursue claims against Israel at the United Nations, human rights bodies and the International Court of Justice.” Put another way, he will get the world community to impose sanctions on Israel. That is not a path to peace but to war!!!
3. With this unity agreement plus the UN recognition of Palestinian statehood, there will be a concomitant change in Palestinian doctrine. The goal is no longer a peace treaty followed by statehood but statehood followed by negotiations, “a key feature of which will be reaching a just solution for Palestinian refugees,” whose return to Israel would mean its demise. Abbas declared: “Palestine would be negotiating from the position of one United Nations member whose territory is militarily occupied by another.” As Diehl correctly claims, “This is a formula for war.”

4. What has been the principal reaction of the Obama administration to all of this? It seems as if the reaction is now we must put more pressure on Netanyahu!!!! Europe has been saying to the US and to Israel, “Unless you begin negotiating again with the Palestinians, we will vote with the Palestinians in September for statehood.”
5. Throughout the last few months, Obama has been saying that Abbas of Syria is a reformer, even as he is now gunning down his own people. Similarly, Obama has been saying that Abbas wants peace and Netanyahu is the problem. Listen to Diehl: “The record of the past several years suggests something very different. In 2008, Abbas refused to accept a far-reaching peace offer from Netanyahu’s predecessor, Ehud Olmert, even as a basis for discussion; nor would he make a counteroffer. ‘The gaps are wide,’ he later told me in an interview. For two years he has stoutly resisted peace talks with Netanyahu, even while conceding that the nominal reason for his intransigence—Israel’s refusal to freeze settlements—was forced on him by Obama. Now Abbas is trying to transform the Arab Spring into a mass movement against Israel. It is a maneuver that he knows will not bring peace. . . .”

I am appalled by the US government when it comes to this whole matter about Israel and the Palestinians. Mahmoud Abbas is not interested in peace with Israel. The above points show that. Our current president seems to believe that the primary barrier to peace is Israel. Israel is surrounded by enemies on practically all sides—and its southern border with Egypt is no longer as secure as it has been for the last 30 years. No other nation faces what Israel faces—people at every edge of its borders that want to extinguish it! Mahmoud Abbas is no moderate! Everything about his deal with Hamas and his refusal to make the hard decisions for genuine peace with Israel indicates that. May God give great wisdom to our leaders as they seek to underwrite and support the existence of Israel. Were it not for the US, Israel would have been obliterated many years ago. That the US has supported Israel since 1948 has been the bulwark of its survival. We have proudly championed the cause of the Jewish people and their homeland in Israel. For the first time since 1948, that bulwark is seemingly weakening. May God give President Obama the temerity to stand with Israel and against the UN, Fatah and Hamas. May he not give in, as he seems to be doing. May God give him the courage that he now seems to be lacking. If he does not have the courage, may key members of Congress take up the cause. The unwavering support of Israel must remain the bedrock of our Middle Eastern policy!

See Jackson Diehl in the *Washington Post* (18 May 2011); Joby Warrick and Joel Greenberg in the *Washington Post* (19 May 2011); and several stories in the *New York Times* on these various issues (20 May 2011).