

Camping Trembles As May 21 Judgment Day Looms

✖ Harold Camping is confident it's the end of the world as we know it. He's prophesying the rapture of the Church on May 21, 2011 at 6 p.m.

If Camping is right, that gives us less than two days to eat, drink and be merry—and, of course, preach the gospel to the lost. But few are buying into the “Judgment Day in May” hype as Camping has presented it—and some in the Body of Christ are vehemently calling him out as a false teacher.

Despite all of the criticism, Camping, who earned a B.S. degree in Civil Engineering from the University of California in 1942, isn't backing down from his fear-laden prophetic word. The founder of Family Radio is sticking by his dreadful prediction. The hype—which has spread via radio, billboards and websites like —has scared many, including Camping himself.

“Well, I am trembling. I have never been at this place before,” Camping told CNN. “When we are only a few days away from the last thing that has to happen—the whole world destroyed by God—I have never been here before.”

Ninety-eight percent of respondents to a Facebook poll sponsored by the King James Bible Online aren't bearing witness to the prophecy. Instead, they are sticking to the Word of God, which clearly states that no one knows the day or the hour of the Second Coming. Still, about two percent of survey-takers are standing with Camping in the unscientific poll.

“The Bible strictly states that no one knows, not even Jesus Christ himself, when the judgment is. Man always wants to think that they know as much as God, but that will never be,” says Sarah King, a King James Bible reader from Avondale,

Ariz. "You are supposed to live each day as if were your last. Tomorrow is not promised."

Few believe Camping's prediction is true. But is it actually dangerous?

Doug Batchelor, a pastor and the president of Amazing Facts, a Christian ministry known for its Bible prophecy presentations, thinks so. In fact, he challenged Camping with a \$100,000 prize to hand over the deed and rights to the Family Radio network following the May 21 deadline. So far, Camping has not taken Batchelor up on his offer.

"Christ also warned that in the last days, there would be many false teachers. It is worth asking then, does Camping's prediction match what the Bible really tells us about Christ's return? I don't believe it does," Batchelor says. "But if Camping is right, he deserves the money to spread the message; if he's wrong, he should not own a radio network."

As Batchelor sees it, reckless predictions of the second coming of Christ create an artificial excitement among believers followed by a corresponding depression. What's more, he says, it hardens skeptics in their unbelief and provides new fodder for cynics to mock the Christian faith.

Batchelor points to hundreds of Family Radio listeners across the country who are quitting their jobs and selling their possessions—and he believes these same believers are going to be red-faced on May 22 when they wake up to an altogether different reality than Camping predicted.

Of course, this isn't the first time Camping has pulled an end-of-the-world stunt. He did the same thing in 1994. And of course, he's not the first one to make such predictions of Jesus' other predictions turned out to be just as false.

With that in mind, Steve Wohlberg, director of White Horse Media, is making a bold statement about Camping: he is a false

teacher. "On May 22, both the old man and his devout followers will still be on earth," says Wohlberg. "Camping's ideas reflect poorly on Christianity itself. His views are pure nonsense."

Glenn Lee Hill, retired pastor from Rocky Mount, N.C., agrees that Camping's prediction is false. He calls it a misunderstanding of God's Word.

"This false prophecy is a sad development for all Christians. Why? Because when it fails, all of us who believe in Jesus will become fodder for the comics, the late-night talk show hosts, and others who are always looking for a new excuse to mock our faith," Hill says. "Christianity, the name of Jesus, and all of us who love Him will bear the embarrassment of this false prophecy."

So why do these false prophecies get so much airtime? According to Miguel De La Torre, professor of Social Ethics at Iliff School of Theology, the end of the world fascinates many people in today's culture.

"If you give enough leeway and imagination and you provide enough Scripture, you can predict almost anything," De La Torre says. "Whether or not it will happen on a particular day is a different story. No one knows when the world will end. It could end up May 21 this year, next year, or a hundred or a thousand years from now. We don't know. What we do know is that people who have taken predictions of the last day of the earth and did all matters of things that could not be undone, that their lives were destroyed. One needs to be careful not to fall into that trap."

Dr. Jim Dixon, senior pastor at Cherry Hills Community Church in Highlands Ranch, Colo., says it's ridiculous for anyone to set a date for the return of Christ. He says it's ridiculous now, it's been ridiculous in the past, and it will be ridiculous in the future.

“People continue to do this and I marvel at why they would do this. First of all, it’s suicidal for your career because the date comes and Jesus doesn’t and where do you go from there?” Dixon asks. “But I think whenever you see someone setting a date, one thing you know instantly is that it’s wrong—at least the overwhelming odds are that it’s wrong.”

Sue Thompson, author of *The Prodigal Brother*, is mystified by Camping’s prediction as she is mystified about anyone’s insistence on knowing specific dates. As she sees it, such predictions have to do with a desire for certainty, and perhaps that is fitting in a world which is so wildly uncertain.

“Mr. Camping asserts that the truly faithful ‘know the day and hour.’ What disturbs me about this assertion is that only those who purport to know the day and hour are the truly faithful! This, of course, effectively negates the entire message of the gospel of access to the Father through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus,” Thompson says.

“If only those who are believers and believe they know the day and time of judgment are going to heaven, then what Jesus did matters nothing. Eternal fellowship with God depends solely on whether one subscribes to Mr. Camping’s dates, because he says that those who do not agree with him on the day and hour are deluded and lost. I just can’t find that verse in the Bible that says, ‘Whosoever will may come, after they’ve accepted the true date and hour of my judgment.’ That’s just one condition I simply can’t fathom.”