

Man's Beliefs Have No Impact on Reality

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Shortly before His death, Jesus had a private talk with His disciples. They wanted to know about the end of the world and the establishment of the kingdom of God. This discussion is recorded in Matthew 24 and 25 (portions are also found in Mark 13 and Luke 21). Please examine four statements given by Jesus as He discussed this topic:

First: **"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."** (Matthew 24:44)

Second: **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."** (Matthew 24:36)

Third: **"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."** (Matthew 24:32-34)

Fourth: **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37-39)

When Matthew 24 and 25 are carefully examined as one presentation, Jesus *appears* to make conflicting statements. For example, in the third text, Jesus speaks about the lesson of the fig tree, indicating there will be signs revealing that His coming *is at the door*, but in the first text, Jesus says His coming will occur when it is not expected. How do these statements align?

Additionally, Jesus says in the second text that no one, including Himself, knows when He will return. Only the Father knows. Will the Father announce the timing of the Second Coming a few hours before it occurs? Why would the Father hide this information from Jesus?

The final text suggests that people will be attending weddings and going about the usual routines of life on the day that Jesus returns. Given that Jesus made these statements directly, we know they are true, but how do we reconcile them with all that is said in the Bible about the Second Coming?

For example, the Bible indicates in Revelation 16:12-21 that Armageddon will be underway (sixth bowl), a great earthquake will move the islands and mountains, and huge hailstones will fall at the Second Coming (seventh bowl). How can Jesus' appearing come as a surprise when Armageddon is occurring and when the islands and mountains are moving out of their places?

There is a solution to the apparent contradictions given in Matthew 24 and 25. Of course, every word Jesus spoke is true, but the truth may not be immediately obvious. I have found a solution that resolves these apparent conflicts for me and I hope you will consider the following explanation.

When Jesus spoke to His disciples, He did not speak on His own. The Father put words in His mouth in much the same way that God puts words in the mouths of prophets. (Compare John 14:10,24; 17:8 with Ezekiel 2 & 3, and Isaiah 6.) When Jesus lived on Earth, He lived within the parameters and limitations which the Father imposed on Him. (Hebrews 5:7-10, Psalm 2:7-12) Jesus laid aside His powers of divinity before He became a man.

When He walked on Earth, He could not use His powers of divinity and remain within the Father's will. This explains why His first temptation in the wilderness (turning stones into bread) was to use His powers of divinity. (Matthew 4:3) To redeem mankind, Jesus could not exercise His own will or His powers of divinity. **"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."** (John 6:38)

When Jesus spoke to the disciples in Matthew 24 and 25, the New Testament did not exist. Jesus had not died on the cross and the book of Revelation did not exist. This means that Jesus did not know many parts of the plan of redemption when He was on Earth. Later on, after He returned to Heaven, the Father revealed more about the plan of redemption to Jesus. (Revelation 1:1)

Today, human beings can read and understand concepts that Jesus could not see or understand when He was on Earth. The Father's plan to resolve the problem of sin has unfolded over time and it is not shallow, simple, or brief. It is intricate and completely perfect.

This also means that the return of Jesus is not a simple matter. The book of Daniel was sealed up (Daniel 12:4,9) and many of redemption's mysteries had not been made known when Jesus lived on Earth. (Romans 16:25-27) It is important to understand this perspective because words always live within a context. Therefore, truth and context cannot be separated from each other and remain true.

Man's knowledge of the plan of redemption has increased over the past 2,000 years, and consequently, many Bible mysteries have been resolved. We should study the Father's words, spoken through Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25 from this larger point of reference. Let us review the four statements mentioned above in light of what we understand today from the Bible:

First, **"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."** (Matthew 24:44) The Father is not speaking about the physical appearing of Jesus on the 1,335th day of the Great Tribulation, but instead, He is talking about the first day, Day One, when the Great Tribulation begins.

That day will come as an overwhelming surprise! Today people are confused about this because they do not know that the coming of Jesus consists of a series of events that will occur over 1,335 days, and that they will begin without any warning or announcement. Suddenly, the

censer used at the Altar of Incense in Heaven's temple will be cast down (Revelation 8:5) and the whole world's activities will literally come to a stop – "at an hour when you do not expect Him."

Second, **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."** (Matthew 24:36) When Jesus spoke these words, the date for Christ's return had not been revealed yet because Plan A was still in effect. However, Plan A was later abandoned, and as a result, the Father set fixed dates for several future events. (Acts 1:7)

For example, the day, hour, month, and year for the sixth trumpet has been set. (Revelation 9:15) Daniel reveals that the Great Tribulation is limited to 1,335 days; therefore, the date of the Second Coming will not be a secret to anyone living on Earth during the Great Tribulation!

Third, **"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."** (Matthew 24:32-34)

When the Father spoke these words through Jesus, the Father was talking to His future disciples, not the disciples sitting at Jesus' feet. The Father was speaking about those people who will see the series of events that will lead up to the Second Coming. There will be a definite sequence of events, and many survivors will live through the Great Tribulation and will be taken to Heaven without seeing death.

Fourth, **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37-39)

Through Noah, the antediluvians knew the year of the flood – long before it happened. (Genesis 6:3) There was no surprise in terms of timing. God has clearly demonstrated that giving people a date for the end of the world is meaningless. There are several reasons why the antediluvians did not listen and subsequently drowned: Some people did not believe that Noah had received a message from God. Others were procrastinators who simply put off preparation indefinitely.

Some did not want their dreams and plans crippled by predictions of doomsday. As so many people today, some did not want to be associated with crazy Noah. I am sure there are other reasons, but ultimately, the antediluvians were caught by complete surprise because they did not know what to watch for.

In fact, I believe that after 120 years, no one even traveled into the countryside to see Noah's folly anymore. When the time came, God told Noah and his family to enter the ark. The animals arrived and the great door of the ark was closed. Seven days later, the antediluvians drowned.

When Jesus' words are aligned with all that the Bible has to say about His return, they make perfect sense. When Jesus' words are taken out of context, a huge problem arises because words cannot be separated from their context and remain true!

Pastor Harold Camping

As you know, May 21, 2011 has come and gone without a rapture, and many people (including Christians) are ridiculing Pastor Harold Camping who boldly predicted and expected to be taken to Heaven on that day. It has been reported that Family Radio (Camping's media organization) spent about \$100 million notifying the world that a pre-tribulation rapture would occur on May 21.

Now that the predicted date has passed and the money has been spent, Camping and his followers have been widely ridiculed in the media. Because the passage of time has proven Camping wrong, he has attempted to deflect some of the criticism by saying that May 21 was "a spiritual date." Camping now says believers will be raptured on October 21, 2011. Skeptics, of course, view Camping's new date as a stall tactic – "kicking the can further down the road."

I feel sad for those who sold their homes, cars, and possessions in anticipation of a May 21 rapture. I also feel sad for Mr. Camping and those who put their faith in his prediction. Yet, at the same time, I have to admire the faith and courage of those people who sold their homes, cars, and possessions because they fully believed that life on Earth was over!

That's right, they firmly believed there would be a rapture and their actions confirm their belief. History proves over and over again that man's spiritual beliefs have no bearing on reality. God permits people to believe whatever they want to believe, but their beliefs may or may not align with reality.

When it came time to enter the ark, all but eight people believed Noah was wrong. What effect did their belief have on reality? About 100,000 people believed Jesus would return in 1844. What effect did their belief have on reality? Perhaps as many as 100,000,000 Christians believe there will be a pre-tribulation rapture. What effect will this have on reality?

Our beliefs, faith, hope, and sincerity have no effect on God's plans, and this can be a hard pill to swallow. God will do all that He has promised to do when the fullness of time is reached, but *only* when the fullness of time is reached. Therefore, sincerely believing that something will or will not happen (and setting a date for it) is a matter of intellectual assent and intellectual assent is not to be confused with faith.

The Holy Spirit knows each of our hearts. He is pleased when we love God and one another and live up to all that we know to be right and true. God always rewards those who live by faith. (Hebrews 11:6) The Bible speaks clearly: "**The righteous shall live by faith!**" (Romans 1:17)

Therefore, we should not ridicule those who were deeply disappointed on May 21. We should pray that they will NOT abandon their faith in God, but instead that they will abandon their

prophetic paradigm – their intellectual assent to a pre-tribulation rapture. Camping's prediction was built on faulty rules of interpretation (hermeneutics) and instead of letting go of God, he and his followers need to let go of faulty rules and conclusions.

Whenever faith brings us to a dead end street, there is a painful, but wonderful opportunity to spiritually mature. This process enables growth in grace and faith. When it becomes clear that faith and reality do not align, it is time to restudy and rethink God's Word.

Human beings cannot and do not know the future. Only God knows with certainty how the future will unfold. He has given us certain clues in the books of Daniel and Revelation, but prophetic faith (events awaiting fulfillment) is not to be confused with prophetic fact (events that have taken place).

After many years, Abraham and Sarah grew tired of waiting on the Lord for the promised son. When the reality of what God promised did not appear, their faith in God faded. Rather than restudy and rethink God's Word, Sarah set out to fulfill the Lord's promise herself and Abraham agreed.

You know the dismal result. There is a significant difference between faith and presumption. Faith waits on God, believing that when the fullness of time is right, God Himself will produce the evidence – faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.

On the other hand, impatience leads to presumption. Millions of Christians have become impatient. We want to see our prophetic faith fulfilled "right now." There is a ground swell of desire among Christians for a pre-tribulation rapture or the return of Jesus; however, no matter how sincere the desire, man cannot produce either event.

Mr. Camping became a victim of his own creation. He produced a time line from Bible texts that made perfect sense to him and then he convinced others that his paradigm (actually, a private interpretation) was valid. Today, everyone knows that Camping's paradigm and God's Word d/o not align.

Could Mr. Camping and his followers have been dissuaded from their conviction prior to May 21? Probably not. When intellectual assent and faith are mixed together, nothing but bitter disappointment can force a person into another way of thinking. So, is it better to mix faith and intellectual assent and risk disappointment, or should we take the safe road and avoid the risk of having our faith tested?

Based on what I have observed, Mr. Camping is a man of considerable faith (as was Abraham). Camping and many of his followers acted according to their faith. I have read how one follower cashed out his retirement savings to buy \$140,000 in newspaper ads.

What faith! Perhaps a good summary for these actions would be, "Right heart – wrong head." I have heard it said that "genuine Christians" would never do such a foolish thing – sell their possessions or give everything they have to help others hear about the return of Jesus.

What nonsense. Christians who are unwilling to live by faith are worse off in many ways than those who are willing to live by faith and fail. It is far better to exercise faith and fail, than to walk by sight and do nothing for God. God knows that the human race is full of people having right hearts and wrong heads and He also knows that millions of people would be happy to do His will if only they actually knew His will! When our beliefs are shattered, two options usually surface: We can either abandon the Lord as Peter did in Pilate's judgment hall, or we can get out the Word of God to see where we went wrong.

God's Word is truth, but our understanding of God's Word is always incomplete. Harold Camping's public failure and humiliation should be a present reminder of this fact. Instead of condemning Mr. Camping and his followers, we need to encourage them to restudy and rethink the elements of their faith.

We should commend them for their faith. Their failure may be fodder for skeptics and critical Christians, but Camping and his followers have given us a prophetic sample of what faith in God actually does. Think about this: Where there is no possibility for failure, faith is impossible. Faith involves risk, otherwise there is no need for faith.

Standing Principles

God's Word is true and it can be trusted, but there are three standing principles which Christians cannot ignore at this late hour:

1. True Bible study will never put the Bible in a state of internal conflict. Contrary to public opinion, the Bible does not teach conflicting concepts. This is a matter which most Christians do not fully appreciate. In other words, until we understand everything said in the Bible about a topic, we cannot be sure of anything said about the topic.

There are many "apparent conflicts" in the Bible and resolving them is not easy, but necessary. Camping's prophetic views are obviously flawed. He put the Bible in a state of internal conflict. He has misinterpreted many Bible concepts and the passage of time has proven twice (1994 and 2011) that his rules of interpretation are not valid and his prophetic schematic is wrong.

2. Before Noah and his family entered the ark, God gave a sign to the antediluvians, but they did not see it. God confirmed the end of the world had come by sending the animals into the ark. Unclean animals arrived in pairs and clean animals arrived in groups of seven.

Think about this: Noah's ark was not proof that a flood was coming. The orderly arrival of the animals was THE divine sign that should have attracted the attention of the antediluvians. God's humble creatures entered the ark when the time arrived, but who was paying attention? Who was watching and waiting?

The books of Daniel and Revelation outline a clear sequence of prophetic events that will transpire prior to the Second Coming. When we see this sequence begin, we will know that the end has come. *Until the sequence begins, the end is not here.* Do not sell your home, assets, or

quit your job until you see the sequence begin. The only exception to this counsel is a divine revelation. If God personally leads you or instructs you to do something, then do so by all means – but do not ask or expect others to do the same.

When God has something to say, He speaks for Himself. We must not put words in God's mouth. If God calls you to be a prophet and requires you to say something to others as His spokesperson, then speak up. If the Bible and the Holy Spirit validate your testimony, your calling will prove true. If the Bible and the Holy Spirit do not validate your testimony, your calling is imaginary and God will deal with you accordingly. (See Ezekiel 13:1-16.)

3. Anxiety is increasing. The world is economically distressed. The world is ecologically distressed. The world is geophysically distressed. The world is politically distressed. The population is relentlessly increasing each day. Resources are dwindling. It is obvious we are in a pressure cooker that has no vent.

The flame underneath the cooker is getting hotter and a great explosion is inevitable. When will the final 1,335 days begin? *I don't know.* I don't know. **I don't know. - I do believe that we are living on the doorstep. I do not know when we will enter the 1,335 day countdown to Christ's appearing. Therefore, I am laying plans for next year. Even though I am watching and waiting for a nuclear exchange and the casting down of the censer, life goes on and my endeavor for the Lord must continue.**

Even though next month (August 2011) contains a date of interest,* I continue to make plans for next year because a date of interest IS NOT a date of importance. When the censer comes down and the global earthquake occurs, my plans for the future will be terminated and God's plan for the future will unfold. Until that happens, God requires His children to faithfully keep about their work and endeavors. Tragedies and calamities are everywhere and they are increasing. People need help. People need encouragement and consolation.

Currently, there is no evidence (corporately speaking) that God wants His people to sell their possessions and quit their jobs. However, there are many places where we can financially help those who have lost everything. We have a tremendous opportunity to help those who are questioning God's love.

We have an opportunity to explain what faith in God really means. We have an opportunity to increase Bible literacy. People need to understand that faith in God begins with surrender to God's will – to go, to be, and to do as He directs. Faith is refined through trials and tribulation, all the while patiently trusting in God with steadfast determination. You will know that your faith in God is viable when the Comforter puts a peace within your soul that passes understanding. It is described as being joyful without knowing why you are happy!

If you happen to know any of Camping's followers, reach out and comfort them. Strengthen their faith and if possible, invite them to restudy and rethink their understanding of the Bible. The end is close, but not here. Until the end arrives, keep about the King's business. Use your talents for the Lord!

Larry Wilson

* **Note:** A person cannot study the seventeen apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel and Revelation and ignore the eighteen prophetic time periods found in them. God has defined eighteen prophetic time periods and each one has to be properly located or positioned.

Because the Great Tribulation will be 1,335 days in length, because the eighteen prophetic time periods in Daniel and Revelation intricately align with each other, and because "with God, timing is everything," I have freely speculated on the timing of the 1,335 days with the declaration that I do not know when the 1,335 days will begin. Be assured, everyone on Earth will be alerted when they begin. Many Christians scoff at the study of prophecy and "time study" as though it might be evil.

How sad. The first time Jesus was on Earth, He came unexpectedly and was ultimately rejected. For many people, His Second Coming will have the same results. Notice Peter's words: "**Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out *the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing* when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.**"

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things." (1 Peter 1:10-12, italics mine)