News-Updates

CAMPING FAILS AGAIN

May 21, 2011, began and ended as every other day in history: Jesus did not return. While most of the world's population was not expecting anything extraordinary, followers of Harold Camping and his Family Radio ministry were. Camping had forecast that on May 21 a massive earthquake would shake the world apart and the true believers of Jesus would "be carried into heaven, while the rest of humanity will endure 153 days of 'death and horror' before the world ends on October 21," according to a report in *Daily Mail*.

End-time prognostications are nothing new to Camping. Nearly two decades ago, the aberrant Bible teacher scheduled the return of Christ and the end of the world on Sept. 6, 1994.

For many months leading up to the May 21 date, Camping's devotees engaged in campaigns across the country warning that Judgment Day was approaching, boldly proclaiming, "The Bible Guarantees It." A group of 10 members from his Oakland, Calif., base gave up jobs, families, and possessions to embark on "Project Caravan," a convoy of RVs with their side panels completely painted with the doomsday message. Bill-boards in the United States and across the world proclaimed the impending end of the world.

Camping, as he did with every previous prediction, insisted on the accuracy of the 2011 date. "I know it's absolutely true, because the Bible is always true," he told CNN. Camping arrived at his predictions based on numerical codes he ascribes to Scripture and Bible events. He says his 1994 date failed because of a misreading of the Bible codes he used to interpret the date of the Rapture.

-MKG

HINN SUED BY PUBLISHER

The National Enquirer has the distinction of being dubious in its news stories. Yet despite its reputation, fallout from its reports seems to be incessant. Just ask healing evangelist Benny Hinn. Last August, the supermarket tabloid published an article linking Hinn with twice-divorced televangelist Paula White. The magazine featured photographs of the couple hand-in-hand emerging from a hotel in Rome, Italy. At the time the story hit the newsstands, Hinn himself was going through his own divorce.

Now, as a result of that initial report, Hinn is being sued by his longtime friend and colleague Stephen Strang. Strang's publishing company had signed a three-book deal with Hinn and is now suing him, saying Hinn's admitted relationship with White violated a morality clause in their contract. Strang Communications Company has filed a complaint in Seminole County, Fla., and is seeking \$250,000 from Hinn.

In 2009 Strang published Hinn's *Blood in the Sand*, subtitled as a guide to "Understanding the Middle East Conflict." Reports indicate that Hinn was paid a \$300,000 advance for the book.

The lawsuit also stated that Hinn further "violated the contract by failing to work hard enough to market *Blood in the Sand,*" according to a report in *The Orlando Sentinel*. The newspaper also said that Hinn "failed to make television appearances to promote it, including several on 700 Club."

Immediately following the *National Enquirer* feature, Hinn went on the offensive and while admitting that a friendship with White "did develop," stated that there was never any immorality. He told his television audience that his "friendship" with White is over.

Hinn maintained that he was in Rome because the Vatican had made him a Patron of the Arts, a person who solicits donors to sustain the Vatican's art collection. Hinn claimed that he invited White to come with him to Rome to enlist her as a donor. However, according to the International Coordinator of The Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums, Father Mark Haydu, "To my knowledge, Paula White or Benny Hinn were not invited to the Vatican Museums in any official context, nor did we find anyone on our donors database of Patrons under those names."

Hinn has a lengthy record of personal overstatements and untruths as documented in *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*.

-MKG

LEAD "ARTIFACT" OF DEEP SECRETS MET WITH SKEPTICISM

A "tempest in a teapot" boiled up in March 2011 as a Galilee Bedouin and others tried to put one over on the Israel Antiquities Authority.

(continues on page 22)

(continued from page 2)

when they are only hearing their own subjective imagination and thoughts as in contemplative meditation. Worse yet, they could be conjuring up demonic entities.

If divine revelation did not close in the era of Jesus and the apostles, then Hebrews 1:1 is wrong, Revelation 22:18-19 is wrong, and there is no fixed truth. With the deluge of false teachers, false prophets, and conflicting messages, it is anyone's guess as to who is right.

Many groups teach salvation by grace. We resonate with that. But as we probe for definitions and elaboration we find out that they do not mean we are saved by grace alone, as indicated in Ephesians 2:8-9. What they really believe is what is called semi-pelagianism, an ancient error. It sees grace as a motivator or facilitator — a starting point. This initial enabling grace (whether given by sacrament or some other way) empowers or enlivens one to begin to live the Christian life so that ultimately we can perform enough works to be saved. So they say, one is saved by grace — sort of, but not really.

Grace is a part of the salvation, they maintain, and without it one could not get to heaven. So in a sense we are saved by grace, but not completely. It is grace plus works. In the end one could receive the grace sacramentally or in some other way, but never take advantage of it and be lost anyway. There is no assurance and 1 John 5:13 is dismissed. In this view, grace is only part of the salvation equation.

Sometimes it is not what is said, but what is not said. Insist on context because aberrational contexts sometimes negate every premise they are making. A good rule is assume absolutely nothing and ask for definitions. Our conversations and discussions may have to take place on a more basic, definitional level. Remember the cultist's ploy is to make you think that he is just like you.

Recall how Paul, in Acts 16, was being extolled by the demon-possessed servant girl. She even said that Paul and Silas were, "servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation" (v. 17). Paul assumed nothing and after a time cast out the demon. He would not link truth and biblical content to demonic confession, no matter how good it sounded.

We live in a "microwave" culture. We want things to happen quickly. We are in a hurry and that works against us. Patience is a virtue and longsuffering is still a fruit of the Spirit. To cut through and deal with the blight of assuming the content, remember the acrostic SAFE. We can stay "safe" in our encounters with cultists and confused people if we insist on the following.

S — Seek additional information. Inquire as to what a certain group believes and why. Inquire as to how the cultist believes one gets to heaven and what he believes about God and Jesus. Take some time to research the origins, history, and beliefs of various groups. This is

important because sometimes the cultist does not really know what his group actually teaches. There are excellent charts and graphs that summarize a cult's view of the big issues like God, Jesus, the Bible, salvation, and so forth.

- **A** *Ask for definitions.* Do not assume the cultist defines words as we do. Evangelicals have a biblical word book and try to define words in a totally biblical way, taking into account all that the Scriptures have to say on any given subject. Doctrine is cumulative and not based on one verse. Proper doctrine is based on an accumulation of Scriptures and not just one proof text.
- **F** Force definitions and explanations. Have the cultist explain in detail what he means by words and phrases. Often the definitions come out of a cult play book and not the Bible. Every cult has its talking points. This may be hard and tedious work, but it is the only way to get beyond assuming the content.
- E Examine all their information, explanations, and definitions in light of Scripture. If those you encounter do not want the Bible to be the total and final arbiter, it is a dead giveaway. Remind them of the authority of Jesus (Matthew 28:18). Remind them that both Peter and Paul spoke of their apostolic teaching as commands (1 Corinthians 14:37, 2 Peter 3:2). Be sure to affirm that Jesus alone saves (Acts 4:12, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Timothy 2:5) and share your salvation story.

Let's stop naively assuming the content and thereby assisting error and false teaching to flourish. Let's not get so hung up on togetherness that we forget that truth and good doctrine sometimes divide. Assume nothing and when in doubt, probe. This will keep you "safe" from the dangers of the assumption of content.

-GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

The story, as best as can be asssembled, began in Umm el Ghanim (meaning "Mother of Goats") in the lower Galilee south of Mount Tabor. For an untold number of years Umm el Ghanim was a Bedouin encampment. However, in the 1960s the inhabitants began building a permanent village. Today there are many villa-styled homes in the small town.

Hassan Saeda, a descendant of a Bedouin clan, makes his home in Umm el Ghanim and is currently the owner of a small fleet of trucks. Saeda is at the center of what has been claimed to be the most startling discovery since the Dead Sea Scrolls: a number of codices (small booklets) made up of lead plates bound together by lead straps. Yet the narrative abounds with inconsistency and uncertainty.

One account states the codices were discovered in Jordan five years ago and then secreted into Israel. But the original news release reported their discovery in an elusive cave in Jordan by Saeda's great-grandfather a century ago. The plates, it was said, have been passed down through the family. Saeda is said to have received them from his grandfather.

Some reports place the number of codices discovered as high as 70, while other accounts place the figure at 20. There are 14 or 15 "pages" in each "book" (some say 8 or 9) which are the size of a credit card and contain cryptic sayings in Hebrew and Greek, and one report noted a Phoenician script. The codices also contain various Jewish and Christian symbols that have yet to be deciphered. A British reporter has speculated that one plate has the face of Jesus.

Last March, the online edition of the *Jewish Chronicle* divulged that Robert Feather, a metallurgist, believed that the lead codices may be Kabbalah-related and contain Jewish magic incantations. Feather, a renowned expert on ancient inscriptions, speculates that the plates have some connection with Jewish rebel Bar Kochba and the Jewish revolt against Rome approximately 132-136 A.D. The link, Feather claims, is via Shimon Bar Yochai because his writings are foundational to the Kabbalah and Shimon was connected to Bar Kochba.

Andre Lemaire, a professor and expert in ancient inscriptions, has lumped the find with "sophisticated fakes." In an Op-Ed blog by April DeConick, she said, "This is feeling more and more like popular fiction (or forgery?)." *Christianity Today* magazine also added

healthy skepticism by quoting a number of scholars including Larry Hurtado, a professor of New Testament Language, Literature, and Theology, and director of the Centre for the Study of Christian Origins at the University of Edinburgh. Hurtado observed that "dangling such discoveries in front of the media, before making them available to scholars; is becoming a tired game. 'I'm impatient with people who go to the press and claim they have something of enormous scholarly value and do not provide the materials for independent scholarly analysis. Controlling access to information is not how we do business in scholarship."'

Another telling revelation is from Oxford University's Peter Thonemann, who identifies "one page of a codex as a crude reproduction of an inscription from an ancient tombstone that has been on display in an Amman museum for the past half century. 'The only possible explanation is that the text on the bronze tablet was copied directly from the inscription in the museum.'"

Another key player is David Elkington. Elkington, according to a biography advertising one of his books, "has been led on a revelatory trail through world mythology, linguistics and philology into geophysics, architecture, acoustics, music, neuro-physiology, theology and still further into the all-encompassing, resonant atmosphere of the planet." Elkington believes that what exists does so because of vibration and appears to be drawn by the esoteric. Elkington has a literary agent and in 2010 published a book called *The Lead Codices*. He has another book about the lead tablets in production.

-GRF

Personal Freedom Outreach — Statement of Belief

- I. The Bible as the divinely inspired, inerrant Word of God: It is in its entirety the sole authority for all matters of Christian belief and practice.
- II. The one true God. In the one true God there exist three persons, being: The Father, The Son Jesus Christ, and The Holy Spirit.
- III. Jesus Christ: His deity, humanity, virgin birth, sinlessness, death and bodily resurrection; who will personally and visibly return again to earth.
- IV. The personality and deity of the Holy Spirit.
- V. The existence and personality of Satan, his total opposition to God, and his power over the unregenerate.
- VI. The complete and total depravity of all men which makes them hopelessly lost without the new birth obtainable through faith in Jesus Christ.
- VII. The final estate of man: for the saved, everlasting life in the presence of God and for the unsaved, everlasting punishment because of their unbelief.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. The Church being the Body of Christ, united in the Holy Spirit, consisting of those who have received Jesus Christ as Savior. A local church is an organized assembly of believers united for the purpose of carrying out the Great Commission of Christ.
- X. The Great Commission of Christ being to preach the Gospei to all men, baptizing and discipling those who have believed.