

Harold Camping, *The Fig Tree: An Analysis of the Past, Present and Future of National Israel*, (Reprint ed., Oakland, California: Family Stations, Inc., 1998), paperback, 254 pages.

Harold Camping's earlier work, **The Fig Tree**, is reviewed here because of its recent reprinting (1998). It may be that many in our readership are not familiar with it. The book is a curious mixture of amillennialism and discussions of fulfilled prophecy for a restored national Israel in present times (an historicist approach to many prophecies). For Camping, there is no future, ethnic, political kingdom of Israel awaiting the Jewish people. While he sees fulfillment of prophecy in our day concerning the regathering of Israel to the land, he sees it as the last test for Israel, which Israel will fail. However, he sees the term *Israel* as encompassing, in many biblical passages, all those who are saved of all time. In fact a section heading in one chapter is entitled "All Who Believe in Christ are Israel." There will be a remnant of Jews who come to Christ out of the presently restored national Israel. But in the end national Israel will be destroyed and have no political future. There is, in essence, only a spiritual Israel that survives. The book outlines from many passages of prophecy Camping's scheme for how this should be understood.

In the introduction to the book, Camping clearly shows the bent of his book and why the premillennialist, especially dispensationalist, can never agree with him. Camping complains:

In fact, I believe one of the most serious failings existing today, as theologians pursue truth from the Bible, is a lack of thoroughness in Bible interpretation. Only too frequently a conclusion or doctrine derived in one part of the Bible is not carefully examined in the light of related information wherever it may be found in any other part of the Bible.

Thus, conclusions and doctrinal positions are frequently posited from Old Testament verses with no attempt to discover whether the New Testament has any bearing on these verses. Consequently, great error is part of many aspects of Bible teaching (page x).

Camping is right that much interpretation does not take into account all that the Scriptures teach. However, he is wrong in the way he suggests this is being done. His last paragraph above is an attack upon the dispensational approach to the Bible which lets the Old Testament speak for itself. The dispensationalist refuses to read back into the Old Testament, any New Testament teaching. It is not that the dispensationalist refrains from considering the New Testament. He simply refuses to let the New Testament determine the meaning of the Old Testament text. The most important element in understanding the Old Testament is the Old Testament text itself, not the New Testament interpretation of it. The New Testament may elaborate, enhance, or add to the Old Testament teaching but it never undoes, unravels, or replaces what the Old Testament text said to the readers of its own day.

In this matter, Camping is wrongly rejecting the idea of the progress of revelation. In particular, Camping's fault lies in his failure to see that concept as significant for Bible interpretation. Consequently, he violates the progress of revelation by his reading of the New back into the Old. This means that his position yields a systematic theology that is not grounded in genuine biblical theology. As a result, dispensational premillennialists reject Camping's position because it is methodologically unsound.