
Explaining Away Failed Expectations

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During the 100 year-plus history of the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society it has demonstrated the ability to convince some people that the time is at hand for the fulfillment of Christ's return and the executing of divine judgment. There has not been a time during the presidency of the four different men, to date, who have headed up this religious organization that some date or time feature was not being preached as pointing to the imminent end of the world. Charles T. Russell preached such dates as 1799, 1874, and 1914 in this connection. His successor, Joseph F. Rutherford, held to these dates for a time and added others such as 1918, 1920 and 1925. All of these dates were predicted to witness dramatic developments in connection with the end of the world. The third president, Nathan H. Knorr, clung to the 1914 date as marking the beginning of Christ's invisible return and marking the generation destined to see the destructive end of the world as we know it. This continues to be the position of the Watch Tower Society under its fourth president, Frederick W. Franz. In the decade prior to 1975 this year was postulated as the one that would probably see the fulfillment of these expectations.

This penchant for setting forth prophetic speculations and predictions has resulted in numerous failures and the need to rationalize these failures away without accepting full responsibility for the seriousness of such failures. In the process the Watch Tower Society has perfected the art of apologetics. An early example of this can be found in the writings of Russell who wrote the following in the year 1916-the year he died: "The work of Harvest has progressed and is still progressing even though at one time we supposed that the Harvest work would have been fully accomplished with the ending of the Times of the Gentiles. That was merely a supposition, which proved to be without warrant, for the thrusting in of the sickle of Truth and the gathering in of the ripe grain has been progressing since October, 1914 as never before." -*Thy Kingdom Come*, Author's Forward, 1917 ed. And how much longer (in 1916) did Russell expect this "gathering in of the ripe grain" to continue before the "Harvest" was completed? He continued: "Evidently the 'door' is not yet shut, although we anticipate that before a very long *time-perhaps a year or two or three-the full number of the Elect will be completed, and all will have gone beyond the Veil and the door will be shut.*" -*Ibid.*

(Italics added)

The book in which the above appeared set forth Russell's life-long contention that 1799 marked the beginning of the "Time of the End," a period of 115 years due to end in October, 1914. Within this 115-year period all end-time prophecies were to be fulfilled. Concerning this he wrote: "The careful student will have observed that the period designated 'The Time of the End' is very appropriately named, since not only does the Gospel age close in it, but in it, also, *all prophecies relating to the close of this age terminate, reaching their fulfillments.* The same class of readers will have noticed, too, the special importance of the last 40 of those 115 years (1874-1914), called 'The End' or 'Harvest.'" -*Thy Kingdom Come*, Study 5, page 121, 1891 ed. (Italics added)

So what had been preached for nearly 40 years as dogma was now considered-in the post-1914 period-as "merely a supposition." According to the dictionary a supposition is only something supposed; a mere theory. But Russell's "Time of the End" chronology in which "all prophecies relating to the close of this age terminate, reaching their fulfillments," was never set forth as mere theory. He spoke of this scheme as "present truth." For him to later write (in 1916) that it was "merely a supposition," demonstrates his reluctance, regardless of how painful, to simply acknowledge his errors. He even went further in this regard by sugar-coating these false predictions and date-setting by arguing that they had a wholesome effect on those who believed them and preached them: "The author [Russell] acknowledges that in this book he presents the thought that the Lord's saints might expect to be with Him in glory at the end of the Gentile Times. This was a natural mistake to fall into, but the Lord overruled it for the blessing of His people. The thought that the Church would all be gathered to glory before October, 1914, certainly did have a very stimulating and sanctifying effect upon thousands, all of whom accordingly can praise the Lord-even for the mistake." -*The Time Is At Hand*, Author's Forward, 1916 ed.

While the word "mistake" appears in the above statement it is presented as a "natural mistake to fall into." Such a mistake is sugar-coated and cushioned in such a way as to make it less reprehensible. To further assert that such miscalculations and failed expectations

were "stimulating and sanctifying" in their effect on people and that they could "praise the Lord-even for the mistake," demonstrates an incredible degree of denial and way of reasoning by a man viewed by his followers as the Lord's "faithful and wise servant." (Matt.24:45) It is nothing more than the spirit of self-justification and delusion which fails to demonstrate godly sadness and true repentance for such grievous sins. (Deut.18:20-22)

This seeming inability to come to grips with reality was also manifested by Rutherford in connection with his erroneous predictions. For example, the large booklet, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, published in 1920 set forth strong predictions regarding what was to happen in 1925. After setting forth an elaborate system of prophetic chronology Rutherford asserted: "Based upon the argument heretofore set forth, then, that the old order of things, the old world, is ending and is therefore passing away, and that the new order is coming in, and that 1925 shall mark the resurrection of the faithful worthies of old and the beginning of reconstruction, it is reasonable to conclude that millions of people now on the earth will be still on the earth in 1925. Then, based upon the promises set forth in the divine Word, we must reach *the positive and indisputable conclusion* that millions now living will never die." -*Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, page 97 (Italics added)

In 1926, at an assembly of International Bible Students in Basel, Switzerland, Rutherford was asked if the ancient worthies had returned? This was his response: "Certainly they have not returned. No one has seen them, and it would be foolish to make such an announcement. It was stated in the 'Millions' that we might reasonably expect them to return shortly after 1925, but *this was merely an expressed opinion.*" -*1980 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*, page 62 (Italics added) Rutherford's testy retort does not square with reality. It is a dishonest presentation of what the 'Millions' booklet really said. When something is set forth as "positive and indisputable" it is much more than "merely an expressed opinion." The Bible was extensively used in this booklet to build a chronological case for its conclusions. In other words it was presented as God's truth as revealed to the Watch Tower Society and preached worldwide as such. The current Directors of the Watch Tower Society are in possession of the facts in this matter yet they are willing to perpetuate these distortions in their literature and even persecute those who draw attention to these

things.

Another distressing practice of the Society is to "blame the victim. " Those who have the greatest trust in the Society and take them the most seriously stand to be hurt the most. A few years ago many Jehovah's Witnesses were disappointed that 1975 did not produce some dramatic development in connection with the Kingdom of God. For nearly a decade prior to that year numerous articles in both *The Watchtower* and the *Awake!* magazines focused on that date and implied that it was truly significant. To appreciate why they drew attention to this year one must bear in mind that the Watch Tower Society teaches that each of the Creative Days were 7000 years long. The Seventh Day has been understood to run concurrently with man's time on earth. Inasmuch as 6000 years of human history was due to end in 1975- according to Watchtower calculations-this would also mean the end of 6000 years of God's 7000-year Rest Day. It has long been argued that the last 1000 years of God's Rest Day would run concurrently with Christ's 1000-year reign. So the end of the sixth millennium in 1975 and the start of the 7th millennium raised great expectations among Jehovah's Witnesses. About this matter the Society said: "According to this trustworthy Bible chronology six thousand years from man's creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years will begin in the fall of 1975 C.E." -*Life Everlasting-In Freedom of the Sons of God*, 1966, page 29. On the following page they added:

"How appropriate it would be for Jehovah God to make this coming seventh period of a thousand years a Sabbath period of rest and release, a great Jubilee Sabbath for the proclaiming of liberty throughout the earth to all its inhabitants!"

Subsequent publications reinforced the notion that man's time on earth ran concurrently with God's seven thousand-year-long Rest Day. The last thousand years of which was to see the earth ruled over by Christ's Kingdom and transformed into a paradise: "The Bible shows that when God began to shape the earth for human habitation, he worked six 'days' or time periods. From the indications in God's Word, each was apparently 7,000 years in length ... This seventh day, God's rest day, has progressed nearly 6,000 years, and there is still the 1,000-year reign of Christ to go before its end. (Rev.20:3,7) This seventh 1,000-year period of human existence could well be likened to a great Sabbath day, pictured by the Sabbath day God

commanded ancient Israel to keep after working for six days. (Ex.20:8-10; 2 Pet.3:8) After six thousand years of toil and bondage to sin, sickness, death and Satan, mankind is due to enjoy a rest and is in dire need of a rest. (Heb.4: 1-11) Hence, the fact that we are nearing the end of the first 6,000 years of man's existence is of great importance. *Does God's rest day parallel the time man has been on earth since his creation? Apparently so.* From the most reliable investigations of Bible chronology, harmonizing with many accepted dates of secular history, we find that Adam was created in the autumn of the year 4026 B.C.E. Sometime in that same year Eve could well have been created, directly after which God's rest day commenced. In what year, then, would the first 6,000 years of man's existence and also the first 6,000 years of God's rest day come to an end? *The year 1975.* This is worthy of notice, particularly in view of the fact that the 'last days' began in 1914, and that the physical facts of our day in fulfillment of prophecy mark this as the last generation of this wicked world." -*Awake!*, October 8, 1966, page 19

(Italics added)

Clearly, the Watch Tower Society laid the foundation for speculation and nurtured the belief that 1975 would mark not only the end of 6,000 years of human history but, more importantly, would end 6,000 years of God's 7,000 year Rest Day. The next, and last, 1,000 year period of this Rest Day was to see the earth cleansed of all human imperfection, sin and death by the reign of Christ in his Kingdom. When 1975 failed to bring the start of Christ's millennial reign many Jehovah's Witnesses were understandably disillusioned. Many had set their sight on that date and planned their lives accordingly. Some came into rather serious financial straits from having used up savings and other resources. In the summer of 1976 the Watch Tower Society 'counseled' the Witnesses as follows:

"But it is not advisable for us to set our sights on a certain date, neglecting everyday things we would ordinarily care for as Christians, such as things that we and our families really need ... If anyone has been disappointed through not following this line of thought, he should now concentrate on adjusting his viewpoint, seeing that it was not the word of God that failed or deceived him and brought disappointment, but that his own understanding was based on wrong premises." - *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1976, page 441 The magazine quoted above considered the whole matter of

looking to dates in two feature articles: "Keeping a Balanced View of Time, " and" A Solid Basis for Confidence." It is from the latter article that the quotation is taken. Interestingly, not once did the publishers mention 1975. Neither did they acknowledge that it was they who misled the Witnesses with their speculative arguments and "deceived" them! The Society chose to deny responsibility and blame the victims. This pattern or modus-operandi has evolved over the years but has remained basically the same. This same magazine that cautioned against looking to certain dates strongly reaffirmed the prediction that the generation of 1914 would not pass away until the end came. They have not learned from past failures and persist in their attempts to 'reveal' what God alone knows. (Deut.29:29) It is appropriate to consider what Jesus Christ said in warning about those who would claim special knowledge about the time of his return:

"He said: 'Look out that you are not misled; for many will come on the basis of my name, saying 'I am he,' and the due time has approached.' Do not go after them." -Luke 21:8 NW

Another point established by the Christ was the danger of some awaiting the return of the master to misconstrue matters and conclude that the master was delaying his return: "But if ever that evil slave should say in his heart, 'My master is delaying,' and start to beat his fellow slaves and should eat and drink with the confirmed drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day that he does not expect and in an hour that he does not know, and will punish him with the greatest severity." -Matt. 24: 48-51 NW

It would be difficult to find a religious group that more perfectly fits those depicted above. Teaching "the due time has arrived," has been a constant with this organization. When predicted events fail to materialize those misled by these false alarms become disappointed, confused and disillusioned as to why the master has delayed. The Watch Tower Society must realize that their credibility is wearing thin among many Jehovah's Witnesses. This appears to be the basis for current articles on: "Is God Delaying His Judgment?" and "Why God Has Not Yet Executed His Judgment," appearing in the May 1, 1985 issue of *The Watchtower*. In the first article the matter of delaying divine judgment is introduced by applying Habakkuk's prophesy to this final execution of judgment: "And Jehovah proceeded to answer me and to say: 'Write down the vision, and set it out plainly upon tablets, in

order that the one reading aloud from it may do so fluently. For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it keeps panting to the end, and it will not tell a lie. Even if it should delay, keep in expectation of it; for it will without fail come true. It will not be late. ", - Habakkuk 2:2,3 NW

This prophesy was given to God's people regarding a coming judgment by means of the Babylonians. If we make an application of it to Christ's return in judgment we can appreciate that in the eyes of men that judgment may appear to "delay" due to the human perspective. But its application by the Watchtower Society is not addressing the ordinary human perspective. They are dealing with the apparent delay in God's execution of judgment according to *their timing of matters!* They go on to quote Joshua 23: 14 regarding the fact that "Not one word out of all the good words that Jehovah your God has spoken to you has failed," to give assurance in the present situation that 'that word will not fail.' But it is not *God's Word* that is in question here! It is the *Watchtower's* word that is in question! And the current 'word' from the Watchtower Society is that the generation of 1914 must live to see the execution of God's judgment. (*WT* 5/1/85,p.4) It is this 'word' that is causing some to doubt-not the Word of God!

The article: "Is God Delaying His Judgment?," is headed by the same picture which adorns the cover of the magazine, namely, a hand holding back the minute hand of a clock that reads 11 :57. The idea conveyed is that God is holding back the time for executing his judgments-apparently due at 12 O'clock. According to Watchtower reckoning the world is just a couple of minutes removed from this judgment. It is simply just another way of saying "the time is at hand." (Luke 21: 8 RSV) The Society is forced to arouse expectations at the same time it is compelled to explain why God is delaying. But, again, this is not consistent with what the Lord said about his return taking place at a time his disciples would not be in expectation of! (Matt.24:44) Concerning that time Jesus said: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." (Matt.24:36 RSV) Commenting on this text the article argues that while Jesus did not know the exact time he did know the time period. (see p.3, par.7) If this were the case then Jesus would have known everything except the exact day and the exact hour which would mean it wasn't much of a secret. However, this is but another of the endless speculations postulated by the Society without

Scriptural support.

The next article: "Why God Has Not Yet Executed His Judgment," attempts to put their radical history of failed predictions into some kind of redeeming perspective. Regarding the expectations of 1914 they say: "Thus, even though some were hopeful that it might, God's execution of judgment could not come at that time. The January 1, 1914, issue of *The Watchtower* left room for this development, stating that although 'the year 1914 is the last one of what the Bible terms "Gentile Times" ... we are by no means confident that this year, 1914, will witness as radical and swift changes of dispensation as we may have expected.'" -*The Watchtower*, May 1, 1985, pages 5,6

this appears to be a moderating statement keep in mind that Russell had taught that *all* of the prophecies regarding the "Last Days" were to be completely fulfilled within the "Time of the End," which was to conclude in October, 1914. By January of 1914 *none* of these things had occurred! The churches were still standing, the nations were intact and the Bible Students had not been taken to heaven. It is little wonder that they were beginning to 'hedge their bet,' as it were. As we have already considered as late as 1916 Russell was saying it would only be "a year of two or three." It was becoming clear to many, and apparently to Russell as well, that they were heading for a major disappointment. The outworking of history was giving the lie to these presumptuous prophecies.

It is typical of the Watch Tower Society to use brief, out of context, quotations from past publications to make it appear that Russell and the Bible Students were much more astute and visionary than they really were. Few, if any, Jehovah's Witnesses are knowledgeable of the context in which such statements are extracted. The writings of Russell are not made available to the Witnesses nor are the early issues of *The Watchtower* journal which gives one an idea of how completely the Society has covered up its tracks. The pattern remains the same. Past time features and predictions were stated in the strongest terms possible and all were expected to believe these things as coming by means of God's spirit and preached as truth. Later, when these strong predictions fell to the ground unfulfilled, it was said that such expectations were "merely supposition," "merely an expressed opinion," "a natural mistake to fall into." These are dishonest excuses given to people who, by their own experience, know better but accept it anyway.

Why do people allow themselves to accept these rationalizations? What allows men to brazenly set forth these dishonest expressions all the while they present themselves as lovers of truth and servants of God and Christ? Do they think God is blind? Do they think he is deaf? The Watch Tower Society has a history of exposing the religious errors of others. It has, in effect, built itself up by tearing others down. But it glosses over its own errors and even sanctifies them. Whatever spirit this represents it is not the spirit of God which is the spirit of truth. (John 15:26)

Radical movements have an appeal to some people.

Human nature being what it is it is easy to arouse expectations and offer deliverance from an otherwise meaningless life. There is always enough terror and uncertainty in the world from which one wishes to flee. The Watch Tower Society purports to have all the answers and offers the promise of immediate *deliverance-without even having to die-into* a cleansed new world. Who would not want to believe such a promise? The Society paints a glowing picture of paradise which is always just ahead-tantalizingly close. So close you can nearly touch it but not quite. This has been the fuel that has nourished the flame of hope in the breasts of Jehovah's Witnesses from the days of Russell until now. That the promises never materialize seems to matter little. The myth, or belief in the myth, is almost as good as the real thing. The Society's rhetoric has not been moderated even though it has been stripped of all its time features but one. They

continue to speak in the same dogmatic, arrogant manner that has characterized their literature for over a hundred years. Typical of this is the following: "We also know that the 1914 generation is well into the evening of its existence, thus allowing only little time for this prophecy yet to be fulfilled. But we also know for this we have Jesus' own promise-that 'this generation will by no means pass away until all these things happen.'" -*The Watchtower*, May 1, 1985, page 7. Does that sound like mere supposition-simply an opinion, or is it a positive statement of belief supposedly backed up by Jesus himself?

It is not "Jesus' own promise" that the generation of 1914 "will by no means pass away until all these things happen." It is the word of the Watch Tower Society that is making that promise. It is their speculative interpretation of Jesus' words that forms the real basis for this dogmatic prediction. It is their time schedule-Not the Lord's. The one whom they claim to serve and speak for has told them: "It does not belong to you to get knowledge of the times or seasons ["times or appointed times," *NW Interlinear*] which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction. "

(Acts 1:7) In time, unless the Lord's real return has taken place, the Society will be forced to explain-away yet another failed prophecy. Based on past performances they will probably say something like this: "it was a natural mistake to fall into, but it certainly did have a stimulating and sanctifying effect upon millions who can praise the Lord even for the mistake." Some things never change. □