

many opportunities to be humbled by their rash presumptuousness. Instead they have chosen a course of denial and self-justification. That course does not bode well for the future of the Watchtower Society or

Jehovah's Witnesses no matter how large they may grow, how much property they may acquire or how sophisticated they may become. □

Are Jehovah's Witnesses Fulfilling Matthew 24:14?

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"AND THIS GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM WILL BE PREACHED IN ALL THE INHABITED EARTH FOR A WITNESS TO ALL THE NATIONS; AND THEN THE END WILL COME." Matt.24: 14, *NW*. Few scriptures of the Bible are more familiar to Jehovah's Witnesses than the one above. In their mind it conjures visions of apocalyptic notions in conflict with their worldwide proselytizing activity. They view their work as the fulfillment of Jesus' words and a part of the sign that proves Christ's invisible presence in kingdom power since October, 1914. The prophetic value they place on their preaching activity is illustrated in the following quotation: "Actually, the work of Jehovah's witnesses constitutes a further part of the sign that Jesus gave of the nearness of the end of this system of things. He said: 'And this good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come.'" -*The Watchtower*, January 1,1974, p.4

This claim by the Watchtower Society warrants consideration and examination. Do the historical facts substantiate their claim? To whom or what was Jesus addressing himself when he uttered those words? What was the good news of which he spoke? What was to come to an end? To find answers to these and other questions we need to give consideration to the surrounding verses and context in which we find those words. The context shows, beginning in chapter 23, that Jesus was addressing himself to the fate of the city of Jerusalem. He had pronounced a scathing, seven-fold denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees and had charged the city with blood guilt. This constituted God's official indictment against a city and people who stubbornly refused correction. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you refused! So be it! Your house will be left to you desolate, for, I promise, you shall not see me any more until you say: 'Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!'" -Matthew 23:37-39 *Jerusalem Bible*

It was following this declaration of judgment,

according to Matthew's account, that the disciples drew Jesus' attention to the buildings of the temple. In the parallel accounts of Mark and Luke Jesus had just offered an observation regarding those depositing gifts of money in the temple treasury chests and had pointed out that the needy widow had shown greater generosity in this than others because she had given out of her need-not her surplus. (Mark 13:41-44; Luke 21:14) The disciples drawing of Jesus' attention to the temple buildings may have been prompted by a measure of Jewish pride. About 16 years before the birth of the Lord, Herod the Great had begun a reconstruction and refurbishing of the temple that was still in progress but was sufficiently completed so as to be spoken of as having been completed. (John 2:20) It was an impressive sight. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote this descriptive account about the temple: "Now the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes; for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were coming to it at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceedingly white. On its top it had spikes with sharp points, to prevent any pollution of it by birds sitting upon it. Of its stones, some of them were forty-five cubits (672 feet) in length, five (7-1/2 feet) in height, and six (9 feet) in breadth." -Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 5, Chap.5, par.6

The situation that prevailed at the time the disciples conducted their tour of the temple area and drew Jesus' attention to the buildings and the stones gave no clue of things to come. Under the Roman Pax the Jews were free to practice their religion and enjoyed a measure of security and tranquility. It must have come as a shock to Jesus' disciples to hear his response: "Do you not behold all these things? Truly I say to you, By no means will a stone be left here upon a stone and not be thrown down." -Matthew 24:2 *NW*.

Commenting on this verse the expositor Albert Barnes wrote the following: "At the time this was spoken, no event was more improbable than this. The temple was vast, rich, splendid. It was the pride of the nation, and the nation was at peace. Yet in the short space of forty years all this was exactly accomplished. Jerusalem was taken by the Roman armies, under the command of Titus, A.D.70. The account of the siege and destruction of the city is left us by Josephus, a historian of undoubted veracity and singular fidelity." -Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, Vol.9, p. 250

Naturally, the disciples Peter, James, John and Andrew were anxious to learn when this was to happen. (Mark 13: 3) The Synoptics all give us a version of how their collective question was phrased: 'Tell us when all this will be,' they asked, 'and what will happen to show that it is the time for your coming and the end of the age.'" -Matthew 24:3 *Today's English Version*. "'Tell us when this will be,' they said, 'and tell us what will happen to show that the time has come for all these things to take place.'" -Mark 13:4, *Today's English Version*. "'Teacher,' they asked, 'when will this be? And what will happen in order to show that the time has come for it to take place.'" -Luke 21:7, *Today's English Version*.

The focus of the disciples was on the temple and when the calamity described by their master would take place. While they had been instructed by Jesus and accepted him as the messiah, still they were very much Jewish in their temperament and perspective. During their association with Christ they displayed a consistent inability to grasp the sense of Jesus' words period: 'For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be food shortages and earthquakes in one place after another. All these things are a beginning of pangs of distress.' These things would be unmistakable indications to Christians that the end was getting near. Also, specific things would come upon is disciples because they announced the true Messiah and followed his example. Jesus continued: 'Then people will deliver you up to tribulation and will kill you, and you will be objects of hatred by *all the nations* on account of my name ... And this good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come.' ~Matt 24:9-14. *This was fulfilled* as the general lawlessness and lack of love for God increased. The Jews, wherever they had been scattered, claimed to serve God when they persecuted Christ's disciples. Nevertheless, the *Christians preached the good news of the kingdom in all the inhabited*

earth, particularly in the nations to which the Jews had been dispersed." -Col 1 :6,23. -*The Watchtower*, November 15, 1974, page 682 (Italics added)

From the above quotation it can be appreciated that the Watchtower Society views Matthew 24: 14 as having been fulfilled, along with all the other prophecies up to verse 22, on Jewry and Jerusalem prior to 70 A.D. How is it then that they insist that it is *now* being fulfilled by Jehovah's Witnesses and "'constitutes a further part of the sign that Jesus gave of the nearness of the end of this system of things?" The answer lies in their teachings regarding *parallelisms*. In substance they argue that the events on earth from A.D. 1914 until the end of the present political-religious system of things *parallel* that of the events Israel and Jerusalem experienced from A.D.33 to A.D.70. They argue that what happened in the first century was only the minor fulfillment of Jesus' words and the major fulfillment would occur when he returned. This, however, is only a speculation on their part.

The notion of time-sequence parallels is behind their dating the resurrection of those "'dead in Christ" as taking place in the spring of 1918 A.D. Because Jesus' ministry lasted for three and one half years from his anointing as the messiah until his resurrection. The parallel to this, they say, is that from his taking kingdom power in October,1914 until the spring of 1918 A.D. is three and one half years, therefore, his deceased disciples experienced their resurrection at that time. (1 Thess. 4: 16, 17) Charles T. Russell, from whom Jehovah's Witnesses inherited their views of parallelisms, taught that the "'dead in Christ" were resurrected in the spring of 1878 three and a half years following Christ's invisible return in October, 1874. This mirrored, in his mind, the events of Christ's ministry, death and resurrection.

Incidentally, teaching led to the first of many disappointments experienced by Russell and his followers. They expected their own glorification or "'change" in 1878 This expectation was based on what is stated at 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-52 which indicates that when Christ returned the living Christians would be changed immediately after the resurrection of the dead Christians. Understandably, Russell and his followers fully expected their "' change" in the spring of 1878, three and one half years after October 1874. When that didn't happen Russell restructured his teaching on the matter to salvage his erroneous time calculations.

Using 1 Corinthians 15:51,52 he argued that it was a mistake to expect the living saints to be immediately taken to heaven in 1878 when the sleeping saints were resurrected. What Paul meant was that the living saints who continued to live and eventually died a natural death would then be instantly resurrected so as not to sleep in death. This novel interpretation explained away why the Bible Students were not "changed" and taken to heaven in 1878. (see *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, pages 19,20) Later, the resurrection of those "sleeping in Christ" was moved up to 1918-three and a half years following the new date for the beginning of Christ's invisible presence-October 1914.

It is to be acknowledged that there are different views as to how the prophecy of Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, are to be partitioned in their application toward Jewry and the world at large. But regardless of how they are viewed they cannot be rightly interpreted to contradict Jesus plain and emphatic declaration that he would return in judgment at a time the disciples were not in acute expectation. (Matt.24:36,42-44; Mark 13:32-37) Jesus reinforced this still further following his resurrection: "It is not for you to know the times or the dates the Father has set by his own authority." -Acts 1:7, *NIV* Not so! Says the Watchtower Society who claims to know both the times and the date. The "time" is from 1914 and the "date" is within that generation. Are Jehovah's Witnesses in expectation? Do they view the end to be at hand? Of course they do. Theirs, however, is not an expectation born of spiritual wakefulness but rather one excited by the reading of the signs of the times in relation to their speculative dating calculations. They an expectation

born of spiritual wakefulness but (another one excited by the reading of the signs of the times in relation to their speculative dating calculations. They have become captive of the very thing Jesus' words were intended to prevent, namely, people saying, "the time is near." (Luke 21: 8 *NIV*) The Watchtower Society boasts that its "good news" is different from the one that has been historically preached:

"Let the honest-hearted person compare the kind of preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom done by the religious systems of Christendom during all the centuries with that done by Jehovah's Witnesses since the end of World War I in 1918. *They are not one and the same kind.* That of Jehovah's Witnesses is really 'gospel' or 'good news,' as of God's heavenly kingdom that was established by the enthronement of his Son Jesus Christ at the end of the Gentile Times in 1914." *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1981, page 17 (Italics added)

To be sure, it is a different "good news" -something the apostle Paul strongly warned against at Galatians 1:6-9. Since 1935 this different good news has offered a different relationship with God through Jesus Christ than the one preached by the disciples of the first century. It has offered a different hope than the one taught by the apostles of Christ. It has offered a different relationship with God than the one preached in the first century-one that revolves around accepting an organization of men as essential to salvation. It has denied that Jesus Christ acts as mediator between God and all men to millions of Jehovah's Witnesses. No, indeed, the preaching of Jehovah's Witnesses is *not* fulfilling Matthew 24: 14.11. □