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## ***The Watchtower and the Apocalypse-Continued Updating***

( Number 23. Originally published March 28, 1986 )

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*The Watchtower* of February 15, 1986 has two short articles on the subject of the apocalypse or re-vealing of the Son of God in judgment upon the world of mankind. The first one "Apocalypse-What Is It?" sets forth the gloomy projections of certain statesmen, historians and scientists who warn that annihilation of the human family via nuclear war is a present possibility-even a probability. They quote UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar's observation that "Apocalypse is today not merely a biblical depiction but it has become a very real possibility" and that "Never before in human experience have we been placed on the narrow edge between catastrophe and survival." (page 3) The Secretary-General's words and those of others are called upon by the publishers to demonstrate that knowledgeable men contemplate the threat of a man-made holocaust or apocalypse as being a very present reality. However, the article goes on to say that men are looking in the wrong direction for the real apocalypse which comes, not at the hand of man, but at the hand of God.

To present the Bible's viewpoint they quote the apostle Paul's words found in 2 Thessalonians

"This takes into account that it is righteous on God's part to repay tribulation to those who make tribulation for you, but, to you who suffer tribulation, relief along with us at the revelation (Gr. *apokalupsis*) of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels in a flaming fire, as he brings vengeance upon those who do not know God and those who do not obey the good news . about our Lord Jesus. These very ones will undergo the judicial punishment of everlasting destruction from before the Lord and from the glory of his strength, at the time he comes to be glorified in connection with his holy ones and to be regarded in that day with wonder in connection with all those who exercised faith, because the witness we gave met with faith among you. " -2 Thess. 1 : 6-10 *NW*.

The word apocalypse is an anglicized form of the Greek word *apokalupsis* which means an *uncovering* or *revealing* is used by the apostle Paul in the above text to denote the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ as he dispenses the final judgments of God. Paul's two letters to this congregation both address this doctrine of the Lord's return and were apparently intended to reassure and comfort those brothers who were experiencing tribulation because of their faith. His

letters served to reinforce the certainty of the Lord's return and the execution of judgment against those who persecuted them. The letters also served to clear up certain misunderstandings regarding what the apocalypse would mean for both the living and the dead. Especially do the fourth and fifth chapters of 1 Thessalonians address this matter.

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming (Gr. *parousia*) of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the lord in the air. And so we will be with the lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write you, for you know very well that the day of the lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. " -1 Thessalonians 4: 13-5: 10 *NIV*.

According to the apostle, the "coming (parousia) of the Lord" and the "day of the Lord" are one and the same. When this day arrived several events were to occur, namely, the resurrection of those dead in Christ, the living believers being "caught up together with them" and the destruction of the wicked. As to when

this coming (parousia) was to be Paul says they knew "very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." The safeguard for Christians, according to Paul, was not knowing the exact time but rather walking in the light. He uses the analogy of day and night to contrast the situation between believers and non-believers. The former are "sons of the light and sons of the day, " while the latter are those "who are asleep." Ordinarily nighttime is the time most people sleep and the time most people get intoxicated and is a fitting comparison to those who do not walk in the light of truth. The matter of being awake and alert in relation to the "day of the Lord," then, is to be living a life of Christian sanctification wherein faith, love and hope prompt personal holiness (self-regulation).

In this context being in darkness means to be living the unregenerated life while being in the light means to be walking by the spirit of God. As long as the disciples walked in the light they would not be overtaken "like a thief." While it is true that many have desired to decipher the "times and dates" in order to determine the precise time of the Lord's parousia all such efforts have failed and will continue to fail because such knowledge is placed beyond human ability to know. (Deut.29:29; Mark 13:32) This in no way disadvantages the faithful Christian whose salvation depends, not on the calculation of dates, but rather upon living the quiet day-to-day life of Christian sanctification. When Jesus spoke of his return he, too, stressed the need of remaining spiritually alert at all times because of the uncertainty of the time of his arrival in judgment:

"Concerning that day or the hour nobody knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father. Keep looking, keep awake, for you do not know when the appointed time is. It is like a man traveling abroad that left his house and gave authority to his slaves, to each one his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to keep on the watch. Therefore keep on the watch [why?], for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether late in the day or at midnight or at cock-crowing or early in the morning; in order when he arrives suddenly, he does not find you sleeping. But what I say to you I say to all, keep on the watch." -Mark 13:32-37 NW.

It is quite ridiculous to conclude that what Jesus had in mind was only the precise moment of his return-the specific 24-hour day and the hour of that day. If what is known only to the Father is reduced to this tiny

unit of time the whole matter becomes an absurdity. It is this absurdity that the Watchtower Society argues for. In effect, they are negating all that Jesus and the apostles had to say on the matter. They teach that they *do know* the appointed time. This is repeatedly documented in the tons of literature they regularly produce and distribute to the public worldwide. The current magazine under consideration is no exception in this regard. In the second article, "Apocalypse When?" they reiterate their doctrinal position in this matter. The discussion under this title depicts a clock with its minute-hand just a couple of minutes from 12 O'clock. As might be expected they assert their traditional doctrine that the year 1914 marked the start of the "last days" and that the generation then living would not pass away until the Apocalypse occurred. They acknowledge in this presentation that only the youth of that generation are still alive and even their "number is diminishing quite rapidly." (page 5) They go on to say that this fact draws "our attention to the final hours of the 1914 generation." After establishing that we are in the *final hours* of that generation they go on to set forth additional "signs" that must yet appear during these final hours that will enable us to know for a certainty that the Apocalypse is right at the door.

First, they say the nations must make some pronouncement regarding "peace and security" to fulfill Paul's words at 1 Thessalonians 5:3 and about which they say: "So as we progress toward the finale of these 'last days,' we can expect some outstanding attention to be given to 'Peace and security!' in fulfillment of Paul's words." (page 6) In the previous article, "Apocalypse What Is It, ..," they established that men are not optimistic about world peace and security. To the contrary, the world situation is such that few, if any people, share any confidence that 'peace and security' will become a reality. It would be more accurate to say that the nations of the world are filled more with foreboding and pessimism than they are with expectations of 'peace and security.'

The new book *True Peace and Security How Can You Find It?* (1986) sets forth the following on this matter on page 85: "The world's leaders know that a nuclear war means virtual extinction. Also, critical problems such as pollution, the population explosion, and domestic problems demand attention and money. So they want to relax the strained international relations. An evidence of this is the proclamation by the United Nations of 1986 as the 'international year of peace and security.' This, no doubt, is a step toward the

fulfillment of Paul's above-quoted words. of course, political negotiations and treaties are not making any real changes in people to cause them to love one another. They are not putting a stop to crime, nor are they eliminating disease and death! Yet the prophecy shows that the time will come when the nations will declare that they have achieved a measure of 'peace and security.' When that happens, then 'sudden destruction' will come 'instantly' upon those misleaders of mankind, along with all who put their trust in them."

It is by such pronouncements as the foregoing that keeps Jehovah's Witnesses in a constant state of anxious expectation over the proximity of the battle of Armageddon or "the Great Tribulation." Few Witnesses come to realize how diametrically opposed all of this is to Jesus' teaching that his return was not going occur amidst some kind of fanfare or dramatic sign to herald his return. It was to arrive quite unexpectedly and uncertain as to time. (Matt. 24:44)

During the last 100 years the Society has postulated many such prognostications and buttressed these with references and quotations from notable sources to add credibility to their conclusions and predictions. Any evidence or 'hook' that could be used in this regard has been seized upon and published as supporting proof that they are correct. As these 'hooks' outlive their usefulness they are discarded and replaced with fresh 'hooks.' For example, for many years the Society taught that each of the creative days mentioned in Genesis was 7000 years long. They also have taught that the seventh day-Jehovah God's rest day-is also 7000 years long. The last 1000 years of this rest day or Sabbath was to run parallel with the WOO-year Kingdom reign of Jesus Christ. They have argued that man's time on earth has run parallel to the seventh day so that when 6000 years of man's history was completed this would mean that 6000 years of God's great rest day had also been completed. So when the book *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God* was published in 1966 and announced that 6000 years of human history would end in 1975 expectations were heightened with the prospect of Christ's Kingdom reign also beginning that year. The same book presented, on pages 31-35, a chart of significant dates in human history. The next-to-last entry was 1975 which was noted as the "End of 6th 1000-year day of man's existence (in early autumn)." The last entry was the year 2975 about which it was said: "End of 7th 1000-year day of man's existence (in early autumn)." (see page 35) And in case someone

missed the significance of all of this the publishers preceded the chart with the following on page 30:

"How appropriate it would be for Jehovah God to make of this coming seventh period of a thousand years,(1975-2975) a Sabbath period of rest and release, a great Jubilee Sabbath for the proclaiming of liberty throughout the earth to all its inhabitants! This would be most timely for mankind. It would also be most fitting on God's part, for, remember, mankind has yet ahead of it what the last book of the Holy Bible speaks of as the reign of Jesus Christ over earth for a thousand years, the millennial reign of Christ. Prophetically, Jesus Christ, when on earth nineteen centuries ago, said concerning himself: 'For Lord of the Sabbath is what the Son of man is.' (Matthew 12:8) It would not be by mere chance or accident but would be according to the loving purpose of Jehovah God for the reign of Jesus Christ, the 'Lord of the Sabbath,' to run parallel with the seventh millennium of man's existence." How tantalizing these teasing expressions were in the near-decade preceding 1975. What delicious expectations it fed!

The Watchtower Society used the year 1975 as a "hook" for with good effect. The period between 1966 and 1975 was marked by unusual growth in numbers and activity. When the year 1975 came and went without anything happening they simply stopped using it. Keep in mind that until 1975 the year was regarded as a significant date and listed with other dates such as the Flood, the birth of Moses, construction of Solomon's Temple and the birth of Christ. At the time, in 1966, it fit in nicely with the doctrine regarding the generation of 1914 seeing the end of the world. By that time the generation of 1914 was considered nearly over and so to have something happen then would have been most *appropriate and timely* from the Society's point of view! At the same time they liked to use quotations from other sources that pointed to that year to reinforce its significance. An example of this can be found in the book *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, published in 1968. In chapter 1 of this book titled: "Grand Blessings from God Near at Hand," they offered the following on page 9:

"Many men who study world events are convinced that a great change is definitely in the making ... as reported back in 1960, a former United States Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, declared that our time is 'a period of unequaled instability, unequaled violence.' And he warned: 'I know enough of what is going on to assure you that, in *fifteen years from*

today, this world is going to be too dangerous to live in" - Page 9, par.9 (Italics added)

The Secretary's observations in 1960 regarding what would happen by 1975 (fifteen years from 1960) that the world was going to be "too dangerous to live in," fit nicely with the Society's 1975 speculation. So did the book *Famine-1975!* which they quoted in the *Truth* book on pages 88, 89. On top of page 89 their quotation reads: "By 1975 civil disorder, anarchy, military dictatorships, runaway inflation, transportation breakdowns and chaotic unrest will be the order of the day in many of the hungry nations."

How sweetly perfect this quotation was! It even used the target year 1975 as the one to watch! Like the statement by Secretary Acheson this, too, fit nicely into the current speculation. *But because something can be made to fit doesn't mean it is true.* The 100-year prophetic history of the Watchtower Society is replete with such data that *fit* the speculation of the day but eventually became valueless and had to be discarded and replaced by new speculations.

One of the arguments advanced by Charles T.

Russell and his many time features was that they had to be correct because they all fit together so nicely, each one supporting the other. However, expectations based on faulty evidence necessitates constant revision and updating of Watchtower Society literature. For example, *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life* book was reprinted in 1981 and in this later edition the quotation from Dean Acheson was *edited* to omit his words: "in fifteen years from today." In this way they avoided alluding to the year 1975 which by then was passed. Also, in this later edition, the quotations from *Famine-1975!* found on pages 88 & 89 in the 1968 edition were now completely expurgated in the 1981 edition! In their place is to be found a quotation from the *London Times*. So the 'hooks' that fit so nicely in 1968 were now adroitly modified or removed to make room for more suitable ones.

Up to the year 1975 the Society argued that man's history ran *concurrently* with God's 7000-year Sabbath day so that 6000 years of human history expended 6000 years of God's rest day. As Eve's creation was considered to have taken place in the same year as Adam's they argued that the sixth creative day ended with her creation. After 1975 they explained away the failure of 1975 to produce anything by saying that we couldn't know for sure just how much time elapsed

between Adam's creation and Eve's. The July 15, 1976 *Watchtower* dealt with this matter in an article titled "Keeping a Balanced View of Time," wherein they advanced certain arguments which they said prohibited us from knowing the exact time that would mark the beginning of the last 1000 year period of God's 7000-year Sabbath Day and then offered the following as a summary thought:

"What, then, does this mean? Simply this: That these factors, and the possibilities for which they allow, prevent us from saying with any positiveness how much time elapsed between Adam's creation and that of the first woman. We do not know whether it was a brief time such as a month or a few months, a year or even more. But whatever time elapsed would have to be added to the time that has passed since Adam's creation in order for us to know how far along we are within God's seventh 'day,' his grand day of rest." - Page 437

In this way the Watchtower Society was able to buy itself a little more time and still salvage their teaching regarding the seventh day. They continued to argue for the belief that the last thousand years of God's seven thousand-year rest day would run concurrently with the millennial reign of Jesus Christ:

"Genesis chapter two, verse three, says that Jehovah blessed and made sacred that 'day,' and it therefore seems reasonable that it will see within its bounds the removal of the wicked old order and the establishment of God's righteous new order by means of the thousand-year reign of God's Son. Thus there is reason for believing that thousand-year period will form the closing part of that great rest day and will restore the earth and its inhabitants to a perfect state. That would enable God to say of that seventh day and its results-as he did of other creative days that 'it was very good.'" - *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1976, page 436, paL17

The above magazine argues for the position that has been taught for decades, namely, that the creative days were each 7000 years long and that the last 1000-year-period of the seventh day would run concurrently with Christ's millennial kingdom. They argue that the only reason that we cannot know for a certainty the *exact date* for the commencement of the millennial reign is because we cannot know exactly when the sixth creative day ended and the seventh began. If we had that information, according to this theory, we would have the *key* to making that

determination.

How sound is this argument? In the first place it is impossible to determine the length of the creative days because the Bible is silent on the matter. The theory that each creative day was exactly 7000 years long can be traced back to Jewish rabbinical thought and is thorough-going tradition. Charles T. Russell accepted this tradition and incorporated it in his calculations. The current teaching is his legacy to the Watchtower Society but it is unworthy for structuring a biblical doctrine. We must also bear in mind that the exact time of the conclusion of things was unknown to Jesus Christ who said that neither he nor the angels knew "the day or Lord" ( Mark 13:32 ) If knowing the exact time for the beginning of the millennium was just a matter of knowing when the sixth day ended and the seventh day began then Christ and the angels would have had that information. Surely, the Son of God by whom "all things were created, " knew *exactly* when these things happened because he was there! (Col. 1: 16 )

It seems quite incredible to conclude that the Son of God could not have figured this out for himself if there was any merit to the 7000-Creative Day theory. The more plausible conclusion seems to suggest that

we are dealing with just another example of human wisdom at work attempting to uncover what cannot be ( Deut. 29:29 ) Mister Russell concluded that the sixth 1000-year period of God's rest day ended in 1873. This tied in nicely with his other calculations and the belief that 1874 marked the beginning of the millennial reign of Jesus Christ and the start of the "harvest" of 40 years due to end in October 1914. But, as history demonstrated, because something can be made to fit doesn't make it true.

In his second letter to the brothers in Thessalonica Paul cautioned against being "quickly shaken from your reason," by the very methods now being employed by the Watchtower organization. Paul wrote:

"Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. "-2 Thess. 2: 1-3 NIV. This apostolic advice is as timely today as it was when it was first written about 52 A.D. □

### ***The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life***

1968 EDITION, PAGE 9

9 Many men who study world events are convinced that a great change is definitely in the making. The famous writer Walter Lippmann said:

"For us all the world is disorderly and dangerous, ungoverned and apparently ungovernable. Everywhere there is great anxiety and bewilderment." He added that all this "marks, I believe, the historic fact that we are living through the closing chapters of the established and traditional way of life."\* Also, as reported back in 1960, a former United States Secretary of State, .Dean Acheson, declared that our time is "a period of unequalled instability, unequalled violence." And he warned "I know enough of what is going on to assure you that, in fifteen years from today, this world is going to be too dangerous to live in

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**1968 EDITION, PAGES 88,89**

11 During and after World War II widespread food shortages added to the distress. Shortly after the war *Look* magazine observed:

"A fourth of the world is starving today. Tomorrow will even be worse. Famine over most of the world now is more terrible than most of us can imagine... There are now more people hunting desperately for food than at any other time in history."

More recently, the book entitled "Famine--1975!" said concerning today's food shortages:

"Hunger is rampant throughout country after country, continent after continent around the un. developed belt of the tropics and subtropics. Today's crisis can move in only one direction -toward catastrophe. Today hungry nations; tomorrow starving nations.

\* *Look*, June 11. 1946.

11. (a) To what extent have food shortages added to the distress, as Jesus foretold? (b) What does the book: entitled "Famine--1975!" say about the future?

**GOD'S KINGDOM COMES TO POWER! 89**

"By 1975 civil disorder, anarchy, military dictatorships, runaway inflation, transportation break-downs and chaotic unrest will be the order of the day in many of the hungry nations.""

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More recent reports have shown that a constant lack of adequate food, resulting in chronic malnutrition, has become the "major world hunger problem today." The London *Times* reported:

"There have always been famines, but the scale and ubiquity [presence everywhere] of hunger today is on a totally new scale .... Today mal-

\* *Look*, June 11, 1946,

% U.S.A. Presidential Commission on World Hunger (1980).

11. (a) To what extent have food shortages added to the distress, as Jesus foretold? (b) How do food shortages of our day differ from those previous?

**GOD'S KINGDOM COMES TO POWER 89**

nutrition is said to affect more than a thousand million people; perhaps as many as 400 million live constantly on the brink of starvation." -June 3, 1980.

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