
Misuse of Statistics and Quotations by the Watchtower Society

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The April 8, 1988 *Awake!* magazine addresses itself to the question: "Are We in the Last Days?" Not surprisingly, it concludes that we are. It is a familiar theme. The basic premise is always the same: 1914 marked Christ's invisible return and the beginning of the "generation" that will see the end of the world. Each issue of the magazine contains its reason for being published. In part, this declaration says: "Most importantly, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away." -page 4. The magazine acknowledges that "Virtually every generation has produced its predictions of the imminence of the world's end." -page 2, but goes on to argue that things are different now. In answer to the question: "How can anyone be sure that Jehovah's Witnesses are right in announcing the imminent end of the present world system and the extension of God's Kingdom rule over the earth?" they answer: "Only by investigating their claims and comparing them with the Bible's predictions." -page 3. Good advice!

Investigating their claims, however, is not an easy matter. Why? Because they keep changing the claims. What was set forth a decade or two ago is not necessarily set forth today. In this way they keep changing the rules as they go along. Take, for example, their claim regarding the generation of 1914 that must live to see the end of the world. What they are presently saying about this is not what they were saying ten years ago. In 1978 they were comparing the generation that ran from 33 C.E. to 70 C.E. with the 1914 generation and pointing out that the term "generation" found at Matthew 24:34 could not have applied to children born in 33 C.E. Take note of the following: "Also, it is evident that by the word 'generation' Jesus did *not mean just the Jewish children born in 33 C.E.* Luke relates that after being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom was coming, Jesus told his disciples: "The Son of man must undergo many sufferings and be rejected by this generation." ----Luke 17:20-25. That rejection certainly was not by newborn babies. Likewise, the way things worked out shows that the 'generation' he spoke of in Matthew 24:34 included his listeners and others who could discern the fulfillment of his words from 33 C.E. onward until Jerusalem's destruction. Thus, when it comes to the application in our time, the 'generation' logically *would not apply to babies born during World War 1.* It applies

to Christ's followers and others who were able to observe that war and the other things that have occurred in fulfillment of Jesus' composite 'sign.' *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1978, page 31 (italics added).

The above seems a fair assumption. Jesus was addressing adults-people old enough to understand what he was talking about and able to take responsibility for their actions. From the time of his uttering these words until the predicted destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. was about 37 years-well within the life expectancy of many adults to whom Jesus was speaking. A person 30 years old hearing Jesus speak (in 33 C.E.) would only have been 67 years old when the fulfillment occurred (in 70 C.E.). But, today, *twice that amount of time has already elapsed since 1914!* As a result, the Society feels obliged to stretch-out the 1914 generation. The reason is obvious. Someone 30 years of age in 1914 would now be 104 years old and, according to Watchtower predictions, there is much that must yet happen to the 1914 generation before it is concluded. The Society is aware that their claim of 1978 no longer fits reality. So what do they now do? They simply change the claim! They now claim that even *those born in 1914* can be viewed as a Part of the generation destined to see the end of this system of things .. Here is how they put it in the *Awake!*:

"However, there are still millions on earth who *were born in that year [1914]* or prior to it. And although their numbers are dwindling, Jesus' words will come true, 'this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.' "*Awake* April 8, 1988, page 14. What happened to the argument that only those old enough to discern the events of 1914 can be included in that generation? It is simply forgotten.

Another claim that used to be made about world events since 1914 was that what made these events different from the past was their greatness. In the book, *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, published in 1958 they said this about wars fought before 1914: .. "These wars [Matthew 24:6] are ordinary wars; they are not truly different. They don't count as part of the sign. Jesus showed that the war to mark the "time of the end," would be a 'war different from all others. How would this war be different? By being a world war." -page 179. Regarding food shortages this same book said: "Never before the year

1914 was the whole earth short of food. page 181. The same argument was used regarding the occurrence of earthquakes: "since 1914 earthquakes have occurred more often than everbefore." -page 183.

This has been a recurring claim, namely, that 1914 ushered in a period or generation of unprecedented trouble. Now they are saying that this isn't necessarily the case: "Let us remember that while Jesus' prophecy [Matthew 24:7,8] indicates a climax in man's history as all these events come together in the same generation, they do not require that they be greater in number or magnitude than in any previous generation, even though that might be the case." -*Awake!*, April 8, 1988, page 4. (italics added)

In saying that the events i.e., wars, famines and earthquakes, "do not require that they be greater in number .. or magnitude than in any previous generation," is to contradict their previous claim. For example, *The Watchtower* of February 1, 1969 said: "Exactly what did Jesus point to as marking his second presence and the 'conclusion of the system of things?' He said: 'Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be food shortages and earthquakes in one place after another.' Matt.24:7. Here Jesus tells us to look for a new kind of warfare total war! The war that began in 1914 fits this description. "----page 69. (italics added)

Why the recent change in the claim? It appears to be an oblique response to the book *The Sign of the Last Days-When?* by Carl Olaf Jonsson & Wolfgang Herbst. This book skillfully demonstrates that the Watchtower Society has misused statistical data to the point of misrepresenting the facts of history and the events since the year 1914. To illustrate: The Society has continually referred to the war that began in 1914 as the first "total war" in history. By *total war* they mean that national economies together with the civilian population were mobilized for war along with the military. But authors Jonsson & Herbst take issue with this claim and produce evidence to show that the war of 1914 was not the first of so-called total wars. They point out that historians speak of the Napoleonic Wars as the beginning of total warfare. They quote historian E.J. Hobsbawm who wrote:

"In the course of its crisis the young French Republic discovered or invented total war; the total mobilization of a nation's resources through conscription, rationing and rigidly controlled economy and virtually abolition, at home or abroad; of the distinction

between soldiers and civilians." -*The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848*, published 1962,

page 67.

Another myth that is challenged by Jonsson & Herbst is the claim made by the Watchtower Society that the war which began in 1914 was the first *world war*. While it is true that it is now referred to as World War I, it was originally called "The Great War." It did not take on its later name until after World War II. On page 139 of their book they quote English General Montgomery (a contemporary of both wars) who wrote: "The 1914/18 war was essentially a European war. It came later to be called a 'world war' because contingents from many parts of the British empire served in Europe, and because the United States joined the Entente Powers in 1917. But in reality, since the role of sea power was mostly passive, this was less a 'world war' than some of the previous conflicts such as the Seven Years' War." -*Montgomery*, page 470.

Yet, another fallacy that the Watchtower Society has perpetuated is that World War I was "seven times greater than all the 901 major wars of the previous 2,400 years." -*The Watchtower*, October 15, 1975, page 633. The casualties of World War 1 are put at 10,000,000 by the Watchtower Society. (see *WT*. July 1, 1979) Does this mean that only about 1.5 million persons were killed as a result of war prior to 1914? To demonstrate how absurd such a notion is Jonsson & Herbst discuss just seven wars fought between the 17th & 19th centuries which produced casualties that far exceed the casualties of World War I! One of these conflicts, the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), reportedly took the lives of as many as 40 million people! Interestingly, the *Awake!* magazine cited this conflict and the 40 million casualties figure in its issue of March 22, 1982, page 7.

Another device used by the Society to buttress its claims regarding 1914 is to use *partial* quotations. For example they quote author Barbara W. Tuchman as saying: "The First World War was one of the great convulsions of history." -*Let Your Kingdom Come*, 1981, page 115. But Jonsson and Herbst point out on page 129 of their book that her complete statement was that, "like the French Revolution, The First World War was one of the great convulsions of history." -*The Guns of August-August 1914*, the Four Square Ed., 1964 & 1965. The quotation is found under "sources" at the end of the book. To have included the first clause regarding the French Revolution would have

obviously weakened their intent of magnifying the 1914-1918 war. And, one might add, it represents a deliberate shading of her thoughts -something that could not have been done unintentionally. It is quite evident that extreme efforts have been put forth by the Watch Tower Society to over-dramatize the 1914-1918 war in an effort to substantiate their doctrinal position. The same misuse of statistics can be found in their claims regarding the dramatic increase in the size and numbers of earth-quakes since 1914:

"Since 1914 the yearly average of reported earthquakes has soared. There are 11 times the number that there were on an average annually during the 1,000 years before that date. And 20 times the annual average for the 2,000 years preceding 1914. Is an even greater increase needed to fulfill the prophecy?" - *Awake!*, October 22, 1984 page 6. You will note that the quotation above speaks of "reported earthquakes" having dramatically increased since 1914. A little reflection on this fact enables us to realize that the science of seismology is relatively new. How could "reported earthquakes" that takes in thousands of years of time have any degree of scientific measurement and reporting so as to make a fair comparison? Addressing this obvious flaw in the Watch Tower claim Jonsson and Herbst write:

"By extending the pre-1914 period of comparison thousands of years back in time to include the long ages of poor reporting of earthquakes, the Watch Tower Society naturally gets a very low overall annual average, even for later centuries when reporting actually increased. This conceals the large number of severe earthquakes known from the past centuries, leveling them out with the aid of earlier centuries when reporting was poor. It is further concealed that this method does not point to 1914 any more than to any other date within the last 200-300 years. The choice of 1914 as the seismic 'turning point' is thus wholly arbitrary. It would be equally possible to use the identical method to choose, for example, 1789, when the French Revolution started, or 1939, when World War II began and obtain similar results. Whatever date during the 200-300 years picked as a watershed would get the full advantage of modern reporting following it, giving an apparent great increase in the annual average. . . -*The Sign of the Last Days- When?*, page 59.

If the Watch Tower Society is responding to the book by Jonsson and Herbst, and I believe that they

are, it would explain their current changes in argument. The changes however, do not save their faulty premise. What they are focusing on now is that what we are to look for is not necessarily the magnitude of wars, famines, false prophets, lawlessness, etc., but, rather, that these things coming together in the same generation, as though this is the unique feature of the world since 1914. But is it unique?

Have there not been scores of generations that have witnessed these very things? Really, there is nothing unusual about these events. They have been common factors in the life of man for thousands of years. Increased population, scientific advancement, improved reporting and data-keeping may make twentieth century events appear more significant but these factors do not alter the fact that we are witnessing a recurring human experience. That's why, as the Watch Tower Society acknowledges, "Virtually every generation has produced its predictions of the imminence of the world's end." Why? Because nearly every generation could make the so-called "sign." fit their generation.

The Society is not the only religious entity that uses the "signs of the times" approach to interpreting matters and making predictions based on those interpretations. This is acknowledged in the book, *The Sign of the Last Days—When?* But the Society seems to be foremost among this group due to the fact that they have several million adherents selling tens of millions of pieces of literature which constantly focus on these things. The 1914 date is an article of faith with them. The Watch Tower Society and others are doing the very thing Jesus told his disciples not to do, namely, try to figure out when the end time will be by analyzing world conditions and events. If we carefully read his words free of the mindset imposed by the Watch Tower organization and others we will see that that is the case. The context in which Jesus' words are to be found at Matthew 24, Mark 13 & Luke 21 involves the disciples' questions in response to Jesus' prediction that the Temple of Jehovah was to be destroyed and that "not one stone here will be left on another, every one will be thrown down." -Matthew 24:2. In response the disciples asked: "'Tell us' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?'" -Matthew 24:3 NIV.

In asking these questions the disciples reflected their limited understanding of matters. They linked the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple with Christ's

return and the end of the age. In his reply Jesus separated the two events. As regards the destruction of the city and the temple he assured them that it would occur within their generation. (verse 34) He premised this assurance by saying: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." (verses 4,5) It was after this warning that he proceeded to discuss the matter of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, false prophets, increase in wickedness and preaching of the gospel in all the world before the end would come. (verses 6-14) The disciples were not to get excited or discouraged over these events nor were they to be viewed as a 'composite sign' that could be read so as to predict when Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed. He did tell them, however, what to look for in this regard. (verses 15-25) The record of Jesus' words as found in Luke fill out the true sign of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. (Luke 21:20-24) From what Jesus had to say the disciples knew that the destruction of the city and temple would come within their generation. They were to watch for the "abomination that causes desolation" and the encroachment of armies surrounding Jerusalem. (Matt.24: 15; Luke 21 :20)

Armed with this foreknowledge the disciples could spare themselves the horror of what was to befall the sacred city. When Jesus addressed himself to the matter of his return he made it clear that no 'composite sign' of any kind was to be given. His return in judgment was to be sudden and unannounced. The only safeguard the disciples would have was to keep busy at their commission as his disciples. It would be by remaining spiritually awake and active that they would safeguard themselves and avoid the disaster that would befall the world of mankind. He said: "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back-whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" -Mark 13:35 NIV.

Later Jesus was to add to this warning by saying: "It does not belong to you to get knowledge of the times or seasons ["appointed times"] which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction." - Acts 1:7 *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*. When the final judgment arrives upon the world of mankind they will be caught unaware. It will be like the days of Noah when sudden destruction overtook that world of mankind. (Luke 17:26,27) This

'thief-like' return, however, would pose no threat to faithful disciples of the Lord because as Paul said: "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." -1 Thessalonians 5 :4-6 *my*.

In summary of the two events we see that the generation to whom Jesus was speaking was the generation of his contemporaries. They were guaranteed that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple would happen in their lifetime-their generation. It did happen and those who gave heed to Jesus' words were spared that terrible fate. But there were many who were misled by false messiah's and fared badly. The same is true today. Those who listen to the Lord avoid trying to decipher the "signs of the times" in an effort to pinpoint a particular time or date. Others, like the Watch Tower Society, ignore the Lord and presumptuously push ahead in this matter trying to uncover what only the Father knows. It bothers the Watch Tower Society not at all that they have prophesied falsely many times. They do not consider themselves false prophets despite the fact that they preached for nearly 40 years that 1914 would see the complete end of the world. Their prediction about how the churches of "Christendom" would all be destroyed in 1918 is ignored. So, too, is their prediction that the nations would all be destroyed in 1920 and that in 1925 all the "ancient worthies" would be resurrected to direct the worldwide restitution work.

More recently they argued that man's time on earth ran concurrently with God's great Rest Day and because 6000 year's of man's time on earth would end in 1975 this meant that 6000 years of God's great Sabbath would also end. As the Rest Day of God' according to their interpretation, is 7000 years long this meant that the next 1000 years would run concurrently with the 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ destined to climax the 7,000 year rest day! This was the foundation for all of the speculation that the Society encouraged in the decade before 1975. Now they act as though they never said anything seriously about the year. The Watch Tower Society is quick to condemn others when they judge them to be in error.

Recently a reader of *Awake!* took issue with the Society's "constant criticism of other religions." In reply the publishers of the magazine said: "We have a loving interest in people of all religions, but when their

religious beliefs and practices are false and merit God's disapproval, it is showing love to bring this to their attention by exposing falsehood." -*Awake!*, July 8, 1988, page 28.

Most people would agree with that statement by the *Awake!* magazine. That is why there is justification in speaking out against the errors of the Watch Tower Society and exposing its falsehoods. When the Society speaks out it is viewed by them as an act of love. But when others point out that they are guilty of the very things they condemn in others they cry: "persecution!" and assign hateful motives to their critics. But their history demonstrates clearly that they have been in error many times and have prophesied presumptuously. It appears to be happening again in relation to the 1914 generation prediction. And what does the Bible say about pushing ahead presumptuously?: "To obey is better than a sacrifice, to pay attention than the fat of rams; For rebelliousness is the same as the sin of divination, and pushing ahead presumptuously the same as [using] uncanny power and teraphim."-1

Samuel 15:22,23 *NW*.

This does not put into question the sincerity of the millions of Jehovah's Witnesses who loyally preach these predictions received from the Society. They believe them to be true and build their lives and stake their futures on them. How they will react to the failure of the generation of 1914 to bring the end of the world and the start of a paradise earth remains to be seen. If history is any measure of the future then we can expect that some will be stumbled and fall away while others will take it in stride and accept whatever rationalization the Society offers. As time wears on even the most loyal Witness must realize that time is running out for the 1914 generation even with the new point of view in place. But allowing the thought that the Society could be wrong once more is most uncomfortable. If confidence in the organization is shaken then the whole religious house is shaken. This becomes the sad situation with those who put their trust in men. (Ps.146:3,4) .□