

the power of God for the salvation for everyone who believes" . Jeff provided the assembly with a three - page handout to underscore his arguments.

Sunday Morning: A Memorial of Christ's death was presided over by Joe Maes who made it clear that if there were those not comfortable in sharing in this that they should not feel obligated in any way. Brother Maes reviewed for us the original observance and how the focus was directly on the person of Jesus Christ - his flesh- his blood. The observing of the Lord's Supper or Evening Meal is a regular feature of B.R.C.I. conferences. The subject, "Resources, Options and Choices", stressed that our primary resources are spiritual. To have the "nature of God", means that we must think and act as Christ would think and act. Only in this way can we do the will of God.

The conference was brought to a conclusion by reminding the brothers that B.R.C.I. was formed to pro-

vide some sort of support network for those leaving the Watch Tower organization. The isolation that many of us felt initially when leaving the organization helps us realize the need for such support. These conferences are a product of trying to fill that need. Because we have shared a common experience we are able to better understand the unique spiritual difficulties facing those who find themselves outside a religious community they once called home. Additionally, and more painfully, many have lost entire families in the process. It was at this point that the installation of an 800 number came up as an additional effort to assist those being alienated by the Watch Tower Society. As a footnote to all of this it might be mentioned that at the annual business meeting it was decided that we should change our name to something that would more correctly convey the image of a supporting group (the bridge) we have developed. So, if you have any suggestions along this line please feel free to send them on to Tim Ervolina .•

Watchtower Commentary on Revelation: Part I

(Number 47. Originally published October 1988)

No book of the Bible has been subjected to the whims of would-be prophets than the book of Revelation. Its very makeup lends itself to fanciful exegesis. Moreover, it is difficult, if not impossible to submit these various interpretations to definitive tests. Even responsible scholars differ as to its meaning and application to the church of Jesus Christ. It is inhabited by strange and wonderful beasts and nightmarish phenomena. Cryptic numbers and time periods are threaded through the apocalyptic writing believed to have been recorded near the end of the first century of our common era. If this were not enough there is also the problem of time was it written just for the Christian community of believers undergoing persecution at the hands of the Roman state? Or does it represent an unfolding of events to take place throughout the gospel age? Or was it primarily written for a future end-time generation destined to witness the cataclysmic end of human history and the triumph of God's righteousness? These views and variations of them greatly influence how one approaches the series of messages Revelation contains. These problems prompted one commentary to say:

"The Revelation (or the Apocalypse as it is often called, from its opening word in the Greek) is by common consent of the most difficult of all the books of the Bible. It is full of strange symbolism. There are curious beasts with unusual numbers of heads and horns. There are extraordinary phenomena like the turning of one third

of the sea into blood (viii,8), which are impossible to envisage. Modern readers find it strange. They are moreover not usually attracted by the fantastic schemes of prophecy which some exegetes profess to find in it, and whose ingenuity is matched only by their improbability." -*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol.20 page 15

As a Jehovah's Witness I always felt a measure of pride and satisfaction in the knowledge that the Watch Tower Society had a comprehensive understanding of this book. In my mind it served to validate their role as Jehovah's modern-day prophet-his spokesman to the world. The very fact that it was an "open book" to them convinced me that they must have the truth and understood all of the divine secrets. What I wasn't aware of was that they had produced differing interpretations of this book in the past and would do so yet again. Their latest effort was published this year and titled: *Revelation Its Grand Climax At Hand!*. It is an attractive volume of over 300 pages and beautifully illustrated. The first edition in English is printed to the extent of 3,000,000 copies. After acknowledging that they have published several earlier interpretations of Revelation and Ezekiel they go on to explain why yet another commentary is needed. The final reason given is "the need to keep up-to-date with *present truth*." -page 8 (italics added) On the following page they say:

"It is not claimed that the explanations in this publi-

cation are infallible. Like Joseph of old, we say: 'Do not interpretations belong to God?' (Genesis 40:8) At the same time, however, we firmly believe that the explanations set forth herein harmonize with the Bible in its entirety, showing how remarkably divine prophecy has been fulfilled in the world events of our catastrophic times." -*Revelation Its Grand Climax At Hand!*-page 9

The foregoing represents a curious dichotomy. On one hand they offer the disclaimer that no claim of infallibility is being made but on the other hand they say it shows "how remarkably divine prophecy has been fulfilled in the world events of our catastrophic times." Either what is being presented as "*present truth*" is God's interpretation or it is not. It is true, of course, that God interprets his own prophecy and "Joseph of old" was given that infallible interpretation. After all, God knows what he has in mind when he says something through one of his prophets. However, it is easy for men to misinterpret God's prophecies and the Watch Tower Society has had considerable experience in this area. Their efforts to harmonize world events in relation to themselves and their brief history has been the prime factor in their ongoing misinterpretations of the book of Revelation as well as the rest of the Bible. It has been the determination to synthesize their experiences and activities with Bible prophecy that has led them into error. The ability or ingenuity to make something *fit* or harmonize with a particular prophecy or world view does not establish it as true. It only serves to demonstrate that a theory can be made to fit. But the outworking of history may demonstrate that the theory was wrong. And, as regards their view of the present commentary on Revelation, the three former commentaries on the same book were each viewed, in turn, as reflecting "present truth." Truth is viewed as a pliable putty that can be stretched out, molded and remolded again and again in the hands of inventive men. That is why they can speak of "present truth" as those there are different varieties of truth. It is this convoluted view of matters that has repeatedly gotten the Watch Tower Society into the deep mire of false prophecy. I believe the present work is a continuation of that process.

As previously stated, this latest volume is the *fourth* attempt to interpret the Apocalypse within a period of about 70 years! (1917-1988) It is apparent that their previous efforts-are presented as "present truth" - did not withstand the test of time. The first such book was *The Finished Mystery* (1917); the second was *Light* (1930) in 2 volumes; the third *Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God's Kingdom Rules* (1963) and *Then is Fin-*

ished the Mystery of God (1969). The former book (1963) was a commentary on chapters 14-22 of Revelation and the latter book (1969) covered chapters 1-13. In each case application of prophecy was keyed to their worldview and estimation of themselves as God's unique people.

In the initial effort (1917) everything revolved around Charles Taze Russell. Even though he had died the year previous to the printing of *The Finished Mystery* it was taught that he was alive in heaven -having experienced an immediate resurrection-and was continuing to direct the work of the church on earth. Their perception was that the history of the Christian church was divided into seven periods during the gospel age. Each of these periods, epochs or blocks of time were served by a special "messenger". According to their view the seven messengers or angels were; the apostle Paul, the apostle John, Arius, Waldo, Wycliffe, Luther and Russell. In the *Publisher's Preface* to the 1917 edition they made the following statements:

"Since the days of the Apostles, Christian people have been looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus in great power and glory; for he said that He would come again and receive His Church to himself. He further pointed out that for some time prior to the completion of the Church he would be present, gathering out from Babylon and from the world the truly consecrated, and that during His presence 'the mystery of God' would be finished. "

"Through St. John the Lord Jesus revealed the fact that the Church would be developed during seven distinct periods, or epochs; and that for each of these epochs He would have a special angel, or messenger, to serve the other members of the Body. It follows, then, that the messenger to the last, or Laodicean, epoch would declare the Presence of the Lord and the time of Harvest of the Gospel Age. The great Master laid special emphasis on the importance of the messenger to the seventh, or Laodicean, period of the Church, saying that such an one would be 'a faithful and wise servant', whom his Lord would make ruler over all His household, to give them meat in due season. "

"Those consecrated Christians who have read and fully appreciated the Truth as contained in the preceding six Volumes of *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES* readily agree that *Charles Taze Russell was the messenger of the Church of Laodicea*. In the mind of everyone who believes the Bible *the evidence set forth in this volume will establish the fact beyond the question of*

doubt." -*The Finished Mystery*, page 3 (1917 ed., italics added) That was "present truth" in 1917.

Taking this view provided no difficulty in harmonizing the prophetic book with either the man Russell or the many time feature calculations he postulated. The Watch Tower Society says there has been a remarkable fulfillment of Bible prophecy in our day. They said the same thing 70 years ago to another generation. They could fit the apocalyptic messages into 1917 as easily as they now set matters into the 1988 situation. Consider, for example, what is said at Revelation 11: 1-3 regarding the "two witnesses":

"Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: 'Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. ...' - Revelation 11:1-3 RSV

According to *The Finished Mystery* this time period ran from 539 A.D. to 1799 A.D. (the 1260 days were converted into years) This period, according to their reckoning, covered the time the Roman Papacy exercised temporal power. (see page 173) The "two witnesses" were said to represent the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Their prophesying "in sack-cloth" for 1260 days (converted to years) represented the time period that the Bible was "Kept covered in dead languages." (page 173) Later in this same chapter the two witnesses are slain and lie in the street for three and one-half days. Like the other measures of time

these days were converted according to the "year for a day" principle and was interpreted as follows:

"In 1793, a decree passed the French Assembly suppressing the Bible. Just three years later after, a resolution was introduced into the Assembly superseding the decree, and giving toleration to the Scriptures. That resolution lay on the table six months, when it was taken up, and passed without a dissenting vote. Thus, in just three years and a half, the Witnesses 'stood upon their feet' -Smith" -*The Finished Mystery*, page 176

No one can say that the above interpretation did not fit into the prophecy. It fits quite well. It serves to demonstrate that a concept can be woven into the fabric of Scripture. That is the situation today. But, as stated earlier, it is difficult to subject these views to definitive tests-especially when they are dealing with *past events*. The surest way of testing an interpretation as correct lies in the ability to *predict the future*. We are told in the Bible that if a prophet predicts something that does not come true that one is speaking according to his own authority-not God! (Deut.18:20, 21) Through *The Finished Mystery* the Watch Tower Society attempted to predict future events. One such prediction had to do with the fate of the "Wheat and the Tares" spoken of by Jesus at Matthew chapter 13. According to *The Finished Mystery* the time had arrived for the final execution of judgment. To understand their prediction one must understand Russell's system of Jewish and Christian "Parallels". In this system of time -fixing the time element in regard to the judgment of the Jewish church is paralleled with the time element of the Christian church and it's judgment period. Those comparisons or *parallels* were as follows:

JEWISH-NOMINAL CHURCH

A.D. 29-33

This 3 1/2 year period of Jesus' earthly ministry constituted the final judgment of natural Israel.

AD.33-36

A period of 3# years of favor to natural Israel to complete the 70 weeks [of years] of favor to the nation. Their rejection deferred.

A.D. 36-73

The final years of Israel and Temple worship ending in the complete destruction of this system.

CHRISTIAN-NOMINAL CHURCH

A.D. 1874-1878

Christ returned invisibly [1874] and conducts 3# year judgment on his church-spiritual Israel.

A.D. 1878-1881

A period of 3#2 years of favor extended to the nominal church which afforded opportunity to repent and be restored to favor.

A.D. 1881-1918

The final period of spiritual Israel. To be climaxed by the "utter destruction" of this nominal religious system.

The reader will note that the year 1918 was to be the time of the "utter destruction" of this nominal religious system (Christendom). *The Finished Mystery* goes on to explain that all of Russell's chronology was corroborated by the Great Pyramid of Egypt. Reference is made to the book *Pyramid Passages* by Morton Edgar and *Pyramid Passages*, Vol. II, by Dr. John Edgar. These books presented "Abundant evidence of the accuracy of the Bible Chronology of Pastor Russell." (page 60) Fortified with this chronological schema the book proceeds to weave its predictions into the account. Keep in mind that it is the year 1917. The Bible Students had been delivered a severe blow when 1914 failed to bring an end to the world. Furthermore, their beloved Pastor Russell had died the year previous (1916). Now, in 1917, the second president of the Watch Tower Society had authorized the creating of *The Finished Mystery*. While presented as the posthumous work of Russell it was met with fierce opposition within the Society. Rutherford had not consulted the elected board of directors in this matter and they were understandably chagrined. As the publication was extremely condemnatory of the churches and predicted their immediate demise it can be appreciated that it drew the ire of those inside as well as outside of the organization. Not only were the churches to be destroyed wholesale in 1918 but this would be followed shortly by the destruction of human governments in worldwide anarchy. Here is how *The Finished Mystery* put it:

"Forty days after Christ's resurrection His ascension occurred. This confirms the hope of the Church's glorification forty years (a year for a day) after the awakening of the sleeping saints in the Spring of 1878. ... The awakening of the sleeping saints, A.D.1878, was just half way (three and one-half years each way) between the beginning of the Times of Restitution in 1874 and the close of the High Calling [144,000] in 1881. Our proposition is that the glorification of the Little Flock in the Spring of 1918 A.D. will be half way (three and one-half years each way) between the close of the Gentile Times and the close of the Heavenly Way, A.D.1921." -*The Finished Mystery*, page 64.

"Also, in the year 1918, when God destroys the churches wholesale and the church members by millions, it shall be that any that escape shall come to the works of Pastor Russell to learn the meaning of the downfall of 'Christianity'." -*The Finished Mystery*, page 485.

"[Rev.16:20] 'And every island fled away'-Even the

republics will disappear in the fall of 1920. 'And the mountains were not found' -Every kingdom of earth will pass away, be swallowed up in anarchy ...

The three days in which Pharaoh's host pursued the Israelites into the wilderness represents the three years from 1917 to 1920 at which time all of Pharaoh's messengers will be swallowed up in the sea of anarchy. The wheels will come off their chariots-organizations." -*The Finished Mystery*, page 258.

[Note: The foregoing quotations are all from the original 1917 edition of *The Finished Mystery*. In later editions the Watch Tower Society expunged or modified these statements to cover up their errors.

We can sum up the foregoing scenario as follows: The remaining members of the "Little Flock" (144,000) were to be taken to heaven (glorified) in the Spring of 1918 prior to the destruction of "Christendom". Then, in 1920, the nations would annihilate one another in global anarchy bringing an end to human government. In 1921 the "Heavenly Way" was to be closed which meant that "the Great Multitude" of Revelation 7 would be completed as a secondary heavenly class with no further opportunity for anyone to be of this class. These predictions, of course, failed to come true. And just as the failure of 1914 to bring an end to the world needed to be explained away so did the predictions made in 1917. *The Finished Mystery* contains many ludicrous interpretations too numerous to go into here. It is little wonder that the Society no longer makes it available as a historical piece and has removed it from Kingdom Hall libraries. Jehovah's Witnesses simply have no idea of its contents. This ignorance makes it possible for the Society to boast about it in their current effort:

"In 1917 the Bible Students published *The Finished Mystery*, a powerful commentary on Revelation and Ezekiel. This was followed by the distribution of 10,000,000 copies of the four-page tract *The Bible Students Monthly* with the feature article entitled 'The Fall of Babylon-Why Christendom Must Now Suffer-The Final Outcome.'" -*Revelation Its Grand Climax At Hand!*, page 165. That the Watch Tower Society, now, in 1988, can "speak so glowingly of this failed mockery of biblical exposition tells you a great deal about their basic integrity and devotion to truth. The entire pre-1914 period and post-1914 period was completely miscalculated. Nothing they said regarding what Jehovah God was doing in relation to the Bible

Students, Christendom, or the world was true. Yet, despite this total misrepresentation of God and the Bible they make the following incredible statement:

"The fact that they [Bible Students] were symbolized by two witnesses *confirms to us that their message was accurate and well founded.*" -*Revelation Its Grand Climax At Hand!*, page 164. (italics added). For the Watch Tower Society to misrepresent *The Finished Mystery* as it does above demonstrates that they have little regard for truth. It seems that whatever serves to perpetuate the organizational myth is acceptable with them. When loyal Jehovah's Witnesses read such things as the above they do so with explicit trust in the Society's truthfulness. They, in turn, repeat these misrepresentation in good conscience thus spreading these errors to others. When it comes to the Society the Witnesses are truly credulous-and taught to be so! The pattern of covering up past errors by inventing new ones is obvious. It represents what we might call the *evolution of error*. If one premise or conclusion is proved false they create a new one to take its place (the "present truth" syndrome). The *Kingdom Ministry*, November 1988 mentions that throughout 1989 the *Awake!* magazine will publish a series of articles titled:

"Religion's Future in View of its Past". According to the announcement, "these articles will examine the future of religion by looking back at religion's history and applying the principle of cause and effect." If we apply that principle (cause and effect) to the Society's religion what must we conclude? What does their history show? If the past is a guide to the future what can we expect from them? Does it not indicate that we will witness more of the same-error preached as "present truth" only to be later discarded and replaced with yet another "present truth"?

By 1930, when the second interpretive effort appeared, the Watch Tower Society had abandoned its view of Russell as that "faithful and wise servant". The time application of much of the prophecy was now moved forward into the post-1917 era. In offering this new commentary the publishers wrote: "Prior to 1930 there never was a satisfactory explanation of the Revelation published, the manifest reason being that *it was not God's due time* for his servants to have an understanding thereof ... The Scriptural and supporting evidence *is now clear* to his people that Jesus Christ came to his temple in 1918 and began to take account with his servants, and that those whom he found faithful he approved and made a part of 'The

Servant'. These are designated the remnant, to whom has been committed the testimony of Jesus Christ. Since that time *the Lord has given to his people the key to the understanding of Revelation ...* No credit is due and none should be given to any man for what appears herein." -*Light*, Vol. 1, Preface, pages 5,6 (italics added)

So, with the wave of an editorial hand all the errors of *The Finished Mystery* disappear. Now that which had been presented as truth beyond a shadow of a doubt is discarded-like it never really existed. Keep in mind, however, that 850,000 copies of the first edition of *The Finished Mystery* was published and distributed by thousands of Bible Students. This was in addition to the 10,000,000 copies of *The Bible Students Monthly* that contained excerpts from *The Finished Mystery*. So, for a number of years, the Watch Tower Society published and sold this book. Which, as matters turned out, wasn't truth at all.

Now, in 1930, was "God's due time" for Revelation to be understood.(?) The Society had the "key to the understanding of Revelation" . The focus, however, remained on an individual-Rutherford. While the *Preface to Light* says "no credit is due ... any man," the title page prominently featured Rutherford's name along with a list of his previous books. In this new book Rutherford could not resist defaming those Bible Students who had resisted his authoritarian methods and callous attitude. He speaks of them as follows:

"The Lukewarm ones who claim to have received all the truth prior to 1917 fail to discern the two great organizations of Satan on one side and Jehovah on the other. They have followed the course of speaking easy concerning the clergy and other portions of the Devil' s organization. They especially avoid saying anything against oppressive big Business and militarism and other parts of the Devil' s organization that oppress the people. They prefer to take the course of least resistance, that they may not receive any reproach but rather have the approval of the peoples of the world. .. Those who refuse or fail to heed the warning given to them must of necessity be cast away or spewed out, and then they become members of the 'evil servant' class." -*Light*, Vol. I, pages 50,51.

This pattern of defaming, berating and judging those who could not sanction everything the Watch Tower Society said or did continues with us until now. Just as Rutherford used the "'Letters to the Churches" to reproach certain Bible Students so the Society does

today in the latest volume. Addressing such ones they say: "During the Lord's day, too, there have appeared 'false apostles' who 'speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves." (2 Corinthians 11: 13; Acts 20:20; Revelation 1: 10) They see good in all the conflicting sectarian religious, claim that God does not have an organization, and deny that Jesus received Kingdom power in 1914. They fulfill the prophecy at 2 Peter 3:3,4: 'In the last days there will come ridiculers with their ridicule, proceeding according to their own desires and saying: 'Where is this promised presence of his? Why, from the day our forefathers fell asleep in death, all things are continuing exactly as from creation's beginning.'"

"These ridiculers rebel at the thought of making public declaration of their faith. (Romans 10: 1 0) They have enlisted the support of Christendom's clergy and the aid of news journals and TV stations to spread lying reports about their former associates. Faithful ones soon find that the speech and conduct of these deceivers do not ring true. Like the Ephesians, Christians today 'cannot bear bad men,' so they disfellowship them from their congregations." -*Revelation Its Grand Climax. At Hand!*, pages 33,34 (Commentary on Rev. 2:2,3)

"How does sectarianism get started? Perhaps a self-styled teacher sows doubts, disputing some Bible truth (such as our being in the last days), so a splinter group breaks off and follows him. (2 Timothy 3: 1; 2 Peter 3:3,4) Or someone criticizes the way Jehovah is having his work done and appeals to a self-sparing spirit by claiming that it is neither Scriptural nor necessary to go from house to house with the Kingdom message. Sharing in such service would keep such ones humble; yet they prefer to split off and take it easy, perhaps only reading the Bible occasionally as a private group. (Matthew 10:7,11-13; Acts 5:42; 20:20,21) Such ones concoct their own ideas about the Memorial of Jesus' death, the Scriptural command to abstain from blood, celebration of holidays, and the use of tobacco. Moreover, they downgrade Jehovah's name; very soon they fall back into the permissive ways of Babylon the Great. Even worse, some are moved by Satan to turn upon and 'beat their fellow slaves,' their onetime brothers. "-*Revelation Its Grand Climax. At Hand!*, page 45 (commentary on Rev. 2: 16)

Needless to say, such statements poison the minds of Jehovah's Witnesses against family members and friends who were once active Witnesses but have left

or been disfellowshipped over issues of conscience. Convinced that the Society would not misrepresent matters they seem willing, for the most part, to accept these judgments without personally investigating matters. Perhaps many wish to believe these things. In that way they do not have to take personal responsibility for their actions. Fear also plays its part. Those who try to find answers within the organization quickly find their efforts thwarted. They may even be reproved. If they persist they will be expelled from the congregation. This may mean the total destruction of family life. Those who have been victims of such action can take comfort from what our Lord had to say when men adversely judge us: "No pupil is greater than his teacher; no slave is greater than his master. So a pupil should be satisfied to become like his teacher, and a slave like his master. If the head of the family is called Beelzebul, the members of the family will be called even worse names." - Matthew 10:24,25 *Good News Bible* "Happy are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, since the kingdom of the heavens belongs to them. Happy are you when people reproach you and persecute you and lyingly say every sort of wicked thing against you for my sake. Rejoice and leap for joy, since your reward is great in the heavens; for in that way they persecuted the prophets prior to you." -Matthew 5: 10-12, *New World Translation* □

Because there are other facets to the latest commentary on Revelation to consider, they will be discussed in the next issue of *The Christian Respondent*.

“Needless to say, such statements poison the minds of Jehovah's Witnesses against family members and friends who were once active Witnesses but have left or been disfellowshipped over issues of conscience.”
