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## ***Will The 20th Century See The End of The World? -An Adjusted View***

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"Shortly, within our twentieth century, the 'battle in the day of Jehovah' will begin against the modern antitype of Jerusalem, Christendom. "*~The Nations Shall Know That I am Jehovah-How?* page 216. The book from which the above quotation is taken was published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society in 1971. This was just a few years before the expected end of the world in 1975. Of course, the expected end did not materialize. It proved to be yet another miscalculation by the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society regarding twentieth century expectations. Before the arrival of the twentieth century the year 1914 was marked as the year that would see the final end:

"In view of the strong Bible evidence we consider it an established fact that the final end of the kingdoms of this world and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God will be accomplished by the end of A.D. 1914."*-Jehovah's Witnesses in The Divine Purpose*, page 55. The failure of 1914 to witness the final end did not prevent the Society from postulating two other dates which fell within the second decade of the 20th century, namely, 1918 and 1920: "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 'Christi-ty'" - *The Finished Mystery*, page 485, 1917 edition. "And every island fled away [Rev. 16:20] -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 Finished Mystery*, page 258, 1917 edition.

Again, the predicted events failed to materialize.

Regarding such prophetic failures the Society has said the following: "But it may be asked, How are we to know whether one is a true or false prophet? There are at least three ways by which we can positively decide: (1) If he is a true prophet his message will come to pass exactly as prophesied. If he is a false prophet, his prophesy will fail to come to pass. (Deut. 18:21,22) *The Watch Tower*, May 15,1930, pages 154,155

The third decade of the twentieth century was also targeted by the Society as the period that would see the end of the world as we know it. In February of 1918 Joseph F. Rutherford, second president of the Society, lectured in California on the theme "Millions

Now Living Will Never Die". Later, in 1920, this lecture was published in booklet form under the same title. In it further predictions regarding what was to transpire by 1925 were recorded. According to the new predictions, 1925 would see the resurrection of the "ancient worthies" (Hebrew men of note as recorded in the Bible) who would reign on earth as "princes" on the earth to administer the human phase of God's kingdom. Summing up the matter the booklet offered the following on page 97:

"Based upon the arguments 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 [in 1920] 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. (See also *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, page 98.

Recently this book (*Millions Now Living Will Never Die*) was alluded to in the *Awake!* in regard to the matter of life prospects for people now living. In a brief article titled "How Long Can We Live?" ,the following statement was made: "'Many people alive today will have the opportunity for a greatly prolonged life span. Even immortality now seems possible.' 'Millions Now Living May Never Die.' [Note: Ruth-erford first delivered this talk with the title men-tioned, February 24, 1918 in Los Angeles, Califor-nia. On March 31, 1918, in Boston, the title was changed to "Millions Now Living Will Never Die" .] What is the difference between these two statements? The first is a statement by Dr. Lawrence E. Lamb, medical columnist and professor, in his book *Get Ready for Immortality*, published in 1975. The second is the title of a public address and subsequent book by J. F. Rutherford, the second president of the Watch Tower Society ... The two apparently similar state-ments, however, differed widely in the reasoning and research that led up to them. Dr. Lamb's words are typical. of the many so-called immortalists ... J. F. Rutherford, on the other hand, was not making fore- casts based on science or medicine. His discussion was based on the Bible. He demonstrated by means of ful-filled Bible prophecies

that the world of mankind had entered into its 'time of the end.' (Daniel 12:4) He then pointed to the Bible-based hope that ... millions will survive the destruction of this world and live on into a righteous new world to enjoy everlasting life in a paradise earth." -*Awake!*, April 22, 1990, pages 6,7.

In making the above declaration the Watchtower is not being completely honest. In the first place the book was not titled as they say it was. The book's title was *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* not *Millions Now Living May Never Die*. There is a considerable difference in the two expressions. Furthermore, it is extremely misleading to imply that Mr. Rutherford's conclusion were "based on the Bible" and "fulfilled Bible prophecies." The fact of the matter is that Rutherford's conclusions were aU false. At the time of writing the "time of the end" was said to have com-menced in 1799-not 1914. and, as the earlier quota-tion from page 97 of the book demonstrates, the focal point was the year 1925 and what was prophesied about what would happen in that year.

How is it possible for the Society to be so bold as to misrepresent matters in such a cavalier fashion? Primarily, it is possible because most Jehovah's Witnesses have never read the book in question so as to know what was really predicted and those few elderly ones who know better remain silent. Furthermore, They are so certain that the Society would never misrepresent matters that they would never allow themselves to question the veracity of such statements. The catch-phrase "millions now living will never die," continues to be used by the Society in its publications as though the original statement continues to hold true. But as regards the "*Now Living*" aspect of the state-ment it must be remembered that the "Now" was in 1918-1920. To be true, then, millions of people living in 1918-1920 would have had to never die due to the restoring of God's kingdom rule over the earth. There are very few Witnesses alive from that period.

One would think that such prophetic failures would bring an end to such speculations but it has not. While specific dates, for the most part, have been avoided during much of the twentieth century the terminology used by the Society in its myriad publications always stresses the shortness of time. Terms like "very soon now" or "any day now" have been used to convey the sense of utgency. Using the generation living in 1914 as the one that cannot pass away before the end comes the Society is able to keep anxiety and expectation high. The linkage between the shortness of

time and personal salvation (made dependent upon loyalty to the Watchtower Society) locks the Witnesses into a mind-set that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reason clearly. It seems certain that many must wonder just how much longer they must wait for the promised de-liverance .. If, as the Society insists, the generation living and witnessing the events of 1914 cannot pass away until the final end comes why hasn't the end come by now? We are already 76 years removed from 1914-a lifetime, on average, for most people. How can it be argued that the generation of 1914 hasn't already passed away? Keep in mind that those who "saw the events of 1914" are considered that genera-tion. A baby or small child could hardly be said to have seen or witnessed certain historical events. Common sense tells you that the generation of 1914 was made up of young adults and older-nearly all of whom are now deceased.

By the end of the twentieth century-just ten years from now-even the generation that saw the events of World War II (1939-1945) will be passing away. A person 18 years old in 1939 will be 79 years old when the twenty-first century commences. What does that say about the generation of World War I? To continue to argue that the 1914 generation will not pass away takes on a considerable degree of absurdity. There was an interesting comment made by the Society in *The Watchtower* (10/1/89) as regards the expectations of first-century Christians regarding the return of Jesus Christ and the end of the world. Regarding those expectations the magazine said:

"Unquestionably, a Christian back then was not being unreasonable to feel that the end could come in his lifetime. And if through accident or natural processes, he should die before the end, he would have lived with the valid sense of urgency that Jesus and the inspired Scriptures generated. "-*The Watchtower*, October 1, 1989, pages 30, 31. The writer then proceeds to bring matters up to the present time and offers the following as regards the current expectations of Jehovah's Witnesses: "All of this is even more applicable to us, at the late hour in which we live

. We have ample reasons to expect that the preaching will be completed in our time. Does that mean before the turn of a new month, a new year, a new decade, a new century? No human knows, for Jesus said that 'even the angels of the heavens' did not know that." - *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1989, page 31.

It is quite remarkable that the Society could suggest, as they do above, that no one knows whether the end will come before the turn of a new century. Of course, that statement is true when you think about it in a Scriptural way but it cannot be true when you anchor everything to the generation of 1914 which the Society does. Why would they publish such a statement? What must Jehovah's Witnesses think when they read such a thing? It is my conviction that by saying such things the Society is laying the groundwork for dealing with the failure of the 1914 generation to see the end of the world. The credibility of their time feature regarding 1914 has worn thin. While they still make bold statements regarding the 1914 generation not "passing away" before the end comes it must be remembered that dogmatism has always attended their prophetic failures.

It will be interesting to see just how the Society's arguments regarding the "time of the end" will evolve in the next few years. 1994 should prove to be of some interest as it will mark a full 80 years since the starting point of 1914-keeping in mind the biblical measure of man's life-span being 60-80 years. Regarding the expectations of first-century Christians who thought the end of the world could come in their day due to the "urgency Jesus and the inspired Scriptures generated", it needs to be pointed out that there is considerable difference between thinking that the end *could come* in your lifetime and teaching that it *must come* within your lifetime. The uncertainty of the time of the Lord's return allows for hopeful expectation and spiritual alertness. The desire for the Lord's return in the heart of a believer is sufficient to produce a life course consistent with that desire. Such tension comes from within the disciple. It is not an anxiety or urgency created by some date-setting false prophet.

Given the record produced by the Watchtower Society it is not likely that they will discard the "generation of 1914" predictions until it becomes impossible to argue for it further. What then? How will they save face and minimize the significance of yet another prophetic failure? Many feel that it will mark the end of Watchtower credibility as a modern-day prophet and that many Jehovah's Witnesses will abandon the movement. It seems likely that a significant number of Witnesses-especially the older ones who have lived through previous failures -may leave the movement or will simply lose their zeal and carry on in a mere perfunctory manner. The fear of losing family and friends may prevent many from acting decisively on their true feelings. As time passes on I

believe that there will be more and more "nominal" Jehovah's Witnesses-those who are just active enough to be considered Witnesses. As far as the Society's loss of prophetic credibility it must be remembered that the Witnesses want to believe the Society is God's exclusive channel of communication. This means that they are willing to accept the most transparent of excuses to gloss over prophetic failures.

Secondly, it must be remembered that Witnesses are bound together in a very tight-knit community that dictates social as well as religious life. Acceptance in this community is predicated on the condition that one demonstrates conviction that the Watch Tower Society represents the "faithful and discreet slave" of Matthew 24:45. Sharing in this exclusive community usually involves a personal commitment and investment that would be extremely difficult to break. Separation from the community, for any reason, would devastate family and social ties. Fear of being an outcast with the loss of religious/social support is frightening. Underlying all of these things is the conviction that one "has the truth" or "is in the truth". These factors taken singularly are strong enough to cause a person to think twice before withdrawing from the system and when taken collectively it becomes almost impossible.

In many ways it reminds us of the Jewish system that existed in Jesus' day. To be a Jew involved one's total life-not just his or her religious convictions. Many who witnessed the ministry of Jesus and his apostles became believers but were hindered from following him due to fear. To profess faith in Christ meant to subject oneself to expulsion from the synagogue (the center of Jewish life) and to become a social outcast. One could expect rejection even from their immediate family. Most were not willing to expose themselves to these unacceptable realities.

For the above reasons I feel confident that the Society will survive the failure of the generation of 1914 to see the end of the world. Whatever explanation is given for the failure will serve as "new light". I am inclined to believe that the year 1914 will continue to be retained as the start of the "last days" but not limited to the generation that witnessed the events of that year. Just how the Society will do this remains to be seen. In the meantime it is possible that they could hold to the present doctrine well into the 21st century. It must be remembered that the Watch Tower system serves as a refuge from the world to the Witnesses. Their mindset and community support tends to insulate them from unpleasant realities. And while the end of

the world hasn't come as expected this merely serves to convince them that it must be 'very near.'

Over the last four decades of the 20th century the organization has grown and prospered despite the defection of a million or more Witnesses. New Kingdom Halls and Convention Halls are being built daily around the world. Such growth and material prosperity is viewed as evidence of divine favor. Being a Witness does not expose one to public disfavor as it once did because of the decline of other authoritarian religions such as the Roman Catholic Church which is presently fighting for its life. The decline of the influence of mainline protestant churches also serves to open the door for the Witnesses and other exclusive groups such as the Mormons and the Worldwide Church of God. The breakdown of the family and moral values in the western world creates a need for stability that such exclusive and morally stringent religions offer. So, there is an appeal represented in this type of legalistic --dictatorial religious community that transcends an objective search for biblical truth. Human nature being what it is, it is possible to entertain two conflicting viewpoints at one time. When this is the case the conflict is compartmentalized so that the two conflicting views are never brought together and analytically appraised.

The Watch Tower Society is now laying the groundwork for the eventual need to 'modify' the 'generation of 1914' doctrine. They have already cautiously suggested that no one can say that the end of the world must come within a given century. This rescinds their long-held teaching that the world, as we know it, will not survive the present century. In *The Watchtower* of January 1, 1989 on page 12 at the end of paragraph 8 the claim was made that the missionary work of the apostle Paul laid the "foundation for a work *that would be completed in our 20th century.*" (italics added) However, in the bound volume of *The Watchtower* for 1989 that sentence was altered to read:

"He was also laying a foundation for *a work that would be completed in our day.*" (italics added) There were more than 13 million copies of the original magazine distributed around the world in 104 languages. this means that millions of Jehovah's Witnesses had the thought reinforced that the end must come by the end of the 20th century. By modifying the original statement the Society skillfully covers over their prediction that the 20th century must see the end of the world. Such 'modifying' of statements is not new

but rather reflects an organizational practice. Second-edition publications have often been edited to remove specific date-setting predictions that fell to the ground unfulfilled. (see *The Christian Respondent*, No.23 for examples of this)

It is clear that the chronological cornerstone (1914) of Watch Tower theology is crumbling and along with it all of the corollary doctrines that rest squarely upon it. But those who have hoped that this failure would mark the end of the Watch Tower's growing religious influence, in my opinion, are greatly mistaken. History demonstrates that the Society can take heavy casualties and still survive. There were casualties suffered during the lifetime of Charles T. Russell when 1914 failed to see the Bible Students glorified and the end of the world. There were casualties during the harsh administration of Rutherford which saw the end of Christian freedom and individual conscience as well as a number of failed prophecies. But the Society survived. More recently, there was the failure of 1975 to see the onset of the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. Again, there were many casualties but the organization survived. The pattern is quite clear. The Society skillfully explains away failures and those who take issue with the contradictions and blatant errors are dismissed as wicked malcontents. In effect, failed predictions "purge" the fellowship of Bible-based thinkers who pose a threat to the organizational mindset. The end result is an organization of people increasingly incapable of individual thought and conscience. Such "purg-es" actually makes the organization stronger while it grows progressively weaker spiritually.

The Gospel Age has witnessed many movements that represented a departure from original Christianity both in doctrine and practice. Some of these have survived many hundreds of years and have had considerable influence over untold millions of people. The Lord Jesus forewarned us that this would be the case. (Matt. 13 :24-30 ) The apostle Paul spoke of the "Man of lawlessness" who would make his appearance following the death of the apostles and exist until the climactic return of the glorified Lord. (2 Thess. 2:1-8) Presently, a number of radical movements are in a growth stage while others are declining. While being concerned about the harmful effect such groups have we need to balance our thinking with the realization that some form of organized heresy will always be with us until the Gospel Age ends with the return of Christ Jesus. Until such time our focus ought to be on our individual commitment to Christ and how our life

reflects that commitment; knowing that we will be judged individually-not collectively. (Matt. 7,21-23) When that judgment takes place organizational numbers and materialistic prosperity will be meaningless. Resting

**The Watchtower, 1/1/89,  
page 12,  
Initial Printed Edition**

spirit. indicated a decisive move for the expansion of the missionary work. The record at Acts 13:2-4 tells us: "The holy spirit said: 'Of all persons set Barnabas and Saul apart for me for the work to which I have called them.' ... Accordingly these men, sent out by the holy spirit, went down to Seleucia [the seaport of Syrian Antioch], and from there they sailed away to Cyprus." How thrilling that must have been for Paul and Barnabas-sailing to their first foreign assignment! The apostle Paul was spearheading the Christian missionary activity. He was also laying a foundation for a work that would be completed in our 20th century.

confidence in the use of the divine name Jehovah, when the use of that name lends credence to human interpretations and prophecies will only lead to heavier judgment. □

**The Watchtower, 1/1/89,  
page 12,  
Bound Volume Edition**

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