

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The latter half of 1914 marked the commencement of World War I to the vast majority of persons living at the time, but to the followers of Charles Taze Russell and to the Witnesses of today that year had far greater significance. "Beyond all doubt, the evidence points to 1914 as the year when the kingdom of God went into operation, and that event is causing things to happen here on earth."¹ "Both in Bible chronology and in the events that were foretold to take place from 1914 onward we find confirmed beyond doubt that 1914 was the beginning of the end for this present system."² The "end for this present system" is placed "within a few years at most" by a Witness writer who then warns: "Time is fast running out for it! It is much later for this world than you may think! Indeed, it has only a few more years of existence left."³ The specific year for the terminal point of the present order was given as 1975.⁴ The significance of 1975 was stressed in the following quotation:

... Six thousand years from man's creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years of human history will begin in the fall of 1975 C.E. . . . 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.⁵

¹ *The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1968), p. 93.

² *Awake!*, XLIX (October 8, 1968), p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵ *Life Everlasting—in Freedom of the Sons of God* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1966), pp. 29, 30. See the Appendix update, pp. 96f.

The crucial importance of 1914. As the quotations above indicate, the Witnesses believe that in 1914 God's heavenly kingdom was established and the "end of this present system" began. It is also explained that at that time a war was fought in heaven and Satan and his evil hosts were cast down to earth.⁶ The establishment of the kingdom in heaven and the enthronement of Christ as the king makes it necessary for those faithful to God to proclaim the "good news of the kingdom."⁷ Much additional understanding of their doctrine and prophecy relates to the 1914-established kingdom claim, such as: the resurrection of the dead in Christ in 1918, the laying of the foundation of the "new earth"⁸ and the fall of Great Babylon in 1919.⁹

The 1914 date has been one of the most emphasized doctrines advanced by the Witnesses. They take the position that the Watchtower Society must be God's visible organization because it alone through its publications first discerned and now stresses this year as specially marked by Jehovah. However, if the Witnesses are wrong concerning this date, not only would the claim that the Society represents God's visible organization and "channel" for the revelation of His truth for this age be invalidated, but the major teachings in a number of Witness books and magazines must, of necessity, be rejected (e.g., *Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God's Kingdom Rules!*—published in 1963; *The Watchtower*, "What Has God's Kingdom Been Doing Since 1914?"—October 15, 1968).

The importance of 1975. In 1966, Witness leadership not only stressed that the year 1975 was the end of 6,000 years of human history, but also speculated that Armageddon could occur the same year. Much speculation as to what would occur characterized the years before 1975 — speculation which was not realized in the events which transpired. It is the contention of this writer that the stress on the 1975 date was just another example of erroneous Watchtower speculation, a manufactured illusion of urgency, to gain converts, to restore the inactive, and

⁶ *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1958), pp. 175, 176.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 192, 214, 215.

⁹ *Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God's Kingdom Rules!* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1963), pp. 500, 504, 510.

For an extended list of important events and developments connected with 1914 see: *Then Is Finished the Mystery of God* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1969), p. 373 f.

to press Witness ministers to greater activity. As with the 1914 failure, and many others, this latest error seriously questions the claim that the Society is God's "channel" and clearly identifies it as a false prophet.

The organization of the study. Beyond this introduction, the study proceeds in the following fashion. Chapter 2 presents a survey of the Witnesses' position on the subjects under discussion. Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to an examination and refutation of the Witnesses' claims. Chapter 5 demonstrates by a chronological approach that since their beginning the Jehovah's Witnesses have stressed the soon outbreak (or actual beginning) of Armageddon and the "end of the world." It will be seen that in this way they have created an *illusion* of urgency which is not based upon the Bible but upon human speculation. Chapter 6 cites the statements of Witness publications and leaders which reveal that the Society is guilty of false advertising and false prophecy, causing this writer to conclude that this system presents a false Christianity. Chapter 7 reviews some of the conclusions reached and answers the question which relates to the author's experiences: "Why a Witness of Jesus Christ—Not a Jehovah's Witness?" Several Appendixes include material of importance, but not vital to the major developments presented in the body of the book.

It has not been the intention of this writer to examine or explore in depth every area of the Witnesses' eschatology; rather, it is his thesis that if the two key dates, 1914 and 1975 (especially 1914) can be shown to be in error, many other claims relative to their doctrine and prophetic interpretation are therefore without foundation. It is also this author's contention that the Witnesses' own materials demonstrate clearly that they have been untrustworthy interpreters of prophecy.

CHAPTER 2

THE WITNESSES' POSITION
ON THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST
AND THE "END OF THE WORLD"

This chapter presents a summary of the line of argument used in the publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the establishment of their prophetic program relative to Christ's second coming and to the "time of the end" and its termination.

The Witnesses predicted the significance of 1914 many years before:

In the "Watchtower" magazine of March, 1880, they said: "The Times of the Gentiles extend to 1914, and the heavenly kingdom will not have full sway till then." Of all people, only the witnesses pointed to 1914 as the year for God's kingdom to be fully set up in heaven.¹

How did the Witnesses arrive at that date? In Luke 21:24 it is recorded that "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the nations, until the appointed times of the nations are fulfilled" (NWT).² What is the significance of this statement?

The "appointed times of the nations" indicated a period in which there would be no representative government of Jehovah on earth, such as the kingdom of Israel was; but the Gentile nations would dominate the earth.³

When did God's earthly kingdom end and the "appointed times of the nations" begin?

¹ *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, p. 170.

² The expressions "times of the Gentiles" and the "appointed times of the nations" are synonymous.

³ *Let God Be True* (second ed., 1952; Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1946), p. 250.

God's earthly nation or kingdom ended when a pagan king destroyed Jerusalem. This pagan king was Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. . . . The king of Babylon took Zedekiah off "Jehovah's throne" in the year 607 B.C. and laid his city and territory desolate. So that year God's earthly kingdom ended. And that year, 607 B.C., the "appointed times of the nations" began.⁴

When did the "appointed times of the nations" end? The background for the answer is found in Daniel 4, in the prophetic dream of Nebuchadnezzar.

The prophetic dream disclosed a great tree which grew from the earth and reached to heaven and furnished food and shelter to all creatures. Suddenly a holy one from heaven commanded: "Hew down the tree, . . . nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, . . . and let seven times pass over him."⁵

What does this dream mean?

"Seven times" meant seven literal years in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, deprived of his throne. The seven years were equal to 84 months, or, Scripturally allowing 30 days for each month, 2,520 days. At Revelation 12:6, 14, there are 1,260 days mentioned and described as a "time, and times, and half a time," or 3 1/2 times. Seven times would be twice 1,260 days, or 2,520 days.⁶

The 2,520 days are to be understood as years. "By his faithful prophet Ezekiel Jehovah said: 'I have appointed thee each day for a year.' (Ezekiel 4:6) By applying this divine rule the 2,520 days mean 2,520 years."⁷

The Witnesses therefore arrived at the following conclusion:

. . . Since God's typical kingdom with its capital at Jerusalem ceased to exist in the autumn of 607 B.C., then, by counting the appointed times from that date, the 2,520 years extend to the autumn of A.D. 1914.⁸

They found further proof that 1914 "marked the beginning of the 'time of the end'" with the establishment of the kingdom in heaven in the fulfillment of prophecy.⁹

⁴ *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, pp. 171, 172.

⁵ *Let God Be True*, p. 251.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 251, 252.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 253 f.

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).¹⁰

A number of other indications of being in the "last days" are seen by the Watchtower writers, for example: pestilences (Luke 21:11), increasing lawlessness (Matt. 24:12), the preaching of the "gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 24:14), men seeking pleasure instead of God (II Tim. 3:4).¹¹

To them, all of the foregoing "allow for only one meaning: that we have been in the 'last days' since 1914."¹²

Thus, the 1914 date is established and verified in two ways: by Bible chronology and by the fulfillment of prophecy.

The Witnesses believe that the consummation of "the time of the end" is very near. How is this known? In two ways:

One way is by noting what Jesus said when he gave his great prophecy about the "last days." After he listed the many events that would mark this period, he also stated: "Truly I say to you that this generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur" (Matt. 24:34).

... Jesus was saying that some of those persons who were alive at the appearance of the "sign of the last days" would still be alive when God brought this system to its end.¹³

There is another way that helps confirm the fact that we are living in the final few years of this "time of the end." (Dan. 12:9) The Bible shows that we are nearing the end of a full 6,000 years of human history. What significance does this have?

... Revelation chapter 20, verse 6, shows that God's heavenly kingdom will rule over the earth for one thousand years after the end of this system of things. That millennium will bring a sabbathlike rest to the earth and all those then inhabiting it. Hence, the first six thousand years since man's creation could be likened to the first six days of the week in ancient Israel. The seventh one-thousand-year period could be likened to the seventh day, the sabbath of that week.—2 Peter 3:8.

¹⁰ *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, p. 86.

¹¹ *Awake!*, XLIX (October 8, 1968), pp. 9-12. See these pages for further evidences.

The book *Make Sure of All Things* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1953), pp. 337-344, presents some thirty-nine different signs, which to the Witnesses, taken together, comprise the "sign of the last days."

¹² *Awake!*, XLIX (October 8, 1968), p. 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*

How fitting it would be for God, following this pattern, to end man's misery after six thousand years of human rule and follow it with His glorious Kingdom rule for a thousand years!¹⁴

In addition, according to "reliable Bible chronology," the full 6,000 years of human existence "will evidently finish in the autumn of the year 1975."¹⁵ Witness vice-president F. W. Franz indicated that the 6,000 years ended at sundown, September 5, 1975, according to the lunar calendar.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* A detailed presentation of the 6,000-year chronology is found in *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1963), pp. 283-286.

CHAPTER 3

AN EXAMINATION AND REFUTATION
OF THE WITNESSES' POSITION
ON THE 1914 SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

It was this writer's contention that the Witnesses' prophetic views could not stand objective examination. This chapter reviews the position of the Witnesses on 1914 as it was presented in the preceding chapter, with some additional details, and then offers a refutation of each point.

I. THE WITNESSES' 1914 PREDICTIONS

The Witnesses contend that they alone successfully predicted that the year 1914 was a pivotal year in Biblical prophecy. In considering this claim it is necessary to again refer to the statement previously cited in Chapter 2:

In the "Watchtower" magazine of March, 1880, they said: "The Times of the Gentiles extend to 1914, and the heavenly kingdom will not have full sway till then." Of all people, only the witnesses pointed to 1914 as the year for God's kingdom to be fully set up in heaven.¹

An examination of this citation shows that the comment following the quotation of the March, 1880 *Watch Tower* magazine is an excellent example of how present Watchtower Society authors misrepresent the sources they employ (even their own!). This comment indicates that the Witnesses alone pointed to 1914 "for God's kingdom to be fully set up in heaven." (This

¹ From *Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, p. 170.

is the Society's *present interpretation* on the kingdom of God.) A careful reading of the March, 1880 *Watch Tower* reveals two significant things: (1) The quotation as cited is not complete, but ellipses are not used. (2) When the entire statement is read in context the kingdom spoken of was to be established *on the earth* (not "set up in heaven") in 1914! The complete quotation reads:

"The Times of the Gentiles" extend to 1914, and the heavenly kingdom will not have full sway till then, but as a "Stone" the kingdom of God is set up "*in the days* of these (ten gentile) kings," and by consummating them it becomes a universal kingdom—a "great mountain and fills the whole Earth."²

To place the charge of misrepresentation beyond all doubt, one might read what Pastor Russell wrote in the third volume of *Studies in the Scriptures* (1891). In this book, he stated that the consummation of the "time of the end" would see "*the full establishment of the Kingdom of God in the earth at A.D. 1914, the terminus of the Times of the Gentiles*" (italics mine).³ A study of additional materials from the pre-1914 period makes it obvious that the present leadership has chosen to alter the facts.

The predictions for 1914 were a failure! Very few Jehovah's Witnesses have studied the predictions which Russell believed would be realized in 1914 or shortly before. When these are reviewed it is evident that his prognostications totally failed. A rash charge? A Satanic lie? Or, the truth? An examination of the predictions will yield the answer. Because of the importance of this point, the following is reproduced directly from Russell's *The Time Is at Hand*, published in 1889.

² *Watch Tower Reprints*, I (March, 1880), p. 82.

Just one paragraph above this quotation, the author, J. H. Paton stated: "The parallels of the Two Dispensations seem to indicate that Christ was *due as King*, or in the kingly office in the spring of 1878."

³ C. T. Russell, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Allegheny, Pa.: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1891), p. 126.

In this chapter we present the Bible evidence proving that the full end of the times of the Gentiles, *i. e.*, the full end of their lease of dominion, will be reached in A. D.

Times of the Gentiles.

1914; and that that date will be the farthest limit of the rule of imperfect men. And be it observed, that if this is shown to be a fact firmly established by the Scriptures, it will prove:—

Firstly, That at that date the Kingdom of God, for which our Lord taught us to pray, saying, "Thy Kingdom come," will obtain full, universal control, and that it will then be "set up," or firmly established, in the earth, on the ruins of present institutions.

Secondly, It will prove that he whose right it is thus to take the dominion will then be present as earth's new Ruler; and not only so, but it will also prove that he will be present for a considerable period before that date; because the overthrow of these Gentile governments is directly caused by his dashing them to pieces as a potter's vessel (Psa. 2:9; Rev. 2:27), and establishing in their stead his own righteous government.

Thirdly, It will prove that some time before the end of A. D. 1914 the last member of the divinely recognized Church of Christ, the "royal priesthood," "the body of Christ," will be glorified with the Head; because every member is to reign with Christ, being a joint-heir with him of the Kingdom, and it cannot be fully "set up" without every member.

Fourthly, It will prove that from that time forward Jerusalem shall no longer be trodden down of the Gentiles, but shall arise from the dust of divine disfavor, to honor; because the "Times of the Gentiles" will be fulfilled or completed.

Fifthly, It will prove that by that date, or sooner, Israel's blindness will begin to be turned away; because their "blindness in part" was to continue only "until the fulness

of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25), or, in other words, until the full number from among the Gentiles, who are to be members of the body or bride of Christ, would be fully selected.

Sixthly, It will prove that the great "time of trouble such

The Time is at Hand.

as never was since there was a nation," will reach its culmination in a world-wide reign of anarchy; and then men will learn to be still, and to know that Jehovah is God and that he will be exalted in the earth. (Psa. 46:10) The condition of things spoken of in symbolic language as raging waves of the sea, melting earth, falling mountains and burning heavens will then pass away, and the "new heavens and new earth" with their peaceful blessings will begin to be recognized by trouble-tossed humanity. But the Lord's Anointed and his rightful and righteous authority will first be recognized by a company of God's children while passing through the great tribulation—the class represented by *m* and *t* on the Chart of the Ages (see also pages 235 to 239, VOL. 1.); afterward, just at its close, by fleshly Israel; and ultimately by mankind in general.

Seventhly, It will prove that *before that date* God's Kingdom, organized in power, will be in the earth and then smite and crush the Gentile image (Dan. 2:34)—and fully consume the power of these kings. Its own power and dominion will be established as fast as by its varied influences and agencies it crushes and scatters the "powers that be"—civil and ecclesiastical—iron and clay.

* The Greek word here rendered "times" is *kairos*, which signifies a fixed time. It is the same word translated "times" in the following passages: Mark 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 12:14; Acts 3:19; 17:26. The word "seasons" in Acts 1:7 is from the same Greek word.⁴

⁴ C. T. Russell, *The Time Is at Hand* (Allegheny, Pa.: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1899), pp. 76-78. Changes have been made in later editions.

As 1914 came and passed, all Russell could salvage from his predictions was the date—all else had failed. Certainly God's kingdom had not been "established in the earth," nor had the kingdoms of the world been destroyed. There was no evidence that the last member of the church had been glorified. Neither natural Israel nor Jerusalem had been restored to favor. Universal anarchy did not characterize the period.

What was Russell's response? In spite of the 100 percent failure, 1914 was not rejected and in September, 1916, he wrote:

It still seems clear to us that the prophetic period known as the Times of the Gentiles ended chronologically in October, 1914. The fact that the great day of wrath upon the nations began there marks a good fulfillment of our expectations.

We see no reason for doubting, therefore, that the Times of the Gentiles ended in October, 1914; and that a few more years will witness their utter collapse and the full establishment of God's kingdom in the hands of Messiah.⁵

A reading of the article which sets forth the statements above reveals a total absence of Scriptural justification for the claims made. Actually, Russell's chronology had nothing more to offer beyond 1914.

Two additional observations are worthy of notice. (1) The First World War as "a good fulfillment of our expectations," should rather be viewed as an additional failure of Russell's claims for 1914 (a point which is explained below). (2) The "few years" before the consummation also failed.

Did Russell predict World War I? Although Jehovah's Witnesses at present claim that World War I was predicted by Russell,⁶ this contention is totally false.

Russell was definite as he wrote:

In view of this strong Bible evidence concerning the Times of the Gentiles, we consider it an established truth that the final end of the kingdoms of this world, and the full establishment of the Kingdom of

⁵ *Watch Tower Reprints*, VI (September 1, 1916), p. 5950.

⁶ *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1959), pp. 54, 55; *The Watchtower*, XC (February 1, 1969), pp. 71, 72.

God, will be accomplished at the end of A.D. 1914 [The 1915 edition reads: "Will be accomplished near the end of A.D. 1915."].⁷

In the light of this statement the coming of the First World War actually showed Russell's chronology to be wrong; for while he predicted the consummation of the age at the end of 1914, the war continued until 1918.

A long-time student of the movement (who had been a Witness for more than thirty-one years) also denied that Russell predicted World War I.

We challenge all Truth Movement leaders of every vintage to cite for us even ONE paragraph or many, from the Pastor's writings before 1914, in *Tower* or *Volumes*, where he predicted a World War in 1914. If he ever did predict a World War in 1914, then he predicted the "Irreparable WRECK" of all his predictions about the King and the Kingdom in 1914.⁸

Alan Rogerson agrees that Russell did not predict the European war in 1914 and sees the interpretation as a later addition.

The Witnesses today claim that in some way Russell predicted World War I, but as far as Russell was concerned the beginning of a war in far-off Europe was little consolation for heavenly glory. Pastor Russell, and his successor Rutherford, saw no great significance in World War I at the time and it was some years later that Jehovah's Witnesses attributed this "prophecy" to Russell.⁹

Russell admitted the vulnerability of his chronology. Very few Jehovah's Witnesses have ever read Russell's admission that his chronology was vulnerable and would be made an "irreparable wreck" if his predictions were not realized in 1914. The following statement was first published in the *Watch Tower* of October 1, 1907 and then reprinted in the December 15, 1913 issue.

... Suppose that A.D. 1915 should pass with the world's affairs all serene and with evidence that the "very elect" had not all been "changed" and without the restoration of natural Israel to favor under

⁷ *The Time Is at Hand*, p. 99.

⁸ *Back to the Bible Way*, XV (November-December, 1966), p. 485. Roy D. Goodrich, editor of the magazine, has rejected a number of the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but he is still basically unorthodox in theology.

⁹ *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1969), p. 30.

the New Covenant (Rom. 11:12, 15). What then? Would not that prove our chronology wrong? Yes, surely! Would not that prove a keen disappointment? Indeed it would! *It would work irreparable wreck* to the parallel dispensations and Israel's double, and to the Jubilee calculations, and to the prophecy of the 2300 days of Daniel, and to the epoch called "Gentile Times," and to the 1,260, 1,290 and 1,335 days . . . none of these would be available longer [italics mine].¹⁰

It does not make any difference if the present Watchtower leadership has discarded some of the views mentioned above. Russell's conclusion that if these predictions failed, the chronology was wrong, still stands.

What has been seen thus far? The present Witnesses have misrepresented Russell's prediction of a 1914 earthly kingdom. Russell's predictions for 1914 failed completely. Yet, instead of admitting failure, he continued the claim that 1914 was right after all, in spite of his admission that the chronology would be proven wrong by failure of fulfillment. It was also seen that Russell did not predict the coming of the World War. If Russell had proven anything, it was that he was a false prophet (Deut. 18:20-22).

II. THE "APPOINTED TIMES OF THE NATIONS"

Luke 21:24 speaks of Jerusalem being "trampled on by the nations, until the appointed times of the nations be fulfilled" (NWT). The term ("appointed times of the nations")¹¹ is found only here in the Bible. While accepting the literal fall of Jerusalem and the overthrow of Zedekiah as the beginning of this period, the current Witness interpretation no longer views its conclusion as relating to Jerusalem:

Since the days of Jesus Christ the earthly city of Jerusalem is not what counts. Rather, the thing that counts is what the Jewish city of Jerusalem symbolized at the time that it was destroyed. . . . It had symbolized God's kingdom by means of his anointed one of the royal house of David.

.....
 . . . The end of the Gentile Times in 1914 C.E. was to be marked by

¹⁰ *Watch Tower Reprints*, V (October 1, 1907), p. 4067; VI (December 15, 1913), p. 5368.

¹¹ The expressions "times of the Gentiles" and the "appointed times of the nations" are synonymous.

the revival, the rebirth, of God's kingdom in the hands of his anointed one or Messiah, Christ.¹²

It is clear that contrary to the present view, Russell held to a literal interpretation of the "times of the nations," for he said that from 1914 "forward Jerusalem shall no longer be trodden down of the Gentiles, but shall arise from the dust of divine disfavor, to honor . . ." ¹³ Russell's interpretation could not be maintained by the Society because of the failure of the 1914 predictions.

Luke 21:24 is a difficult passage and it has been subjected to many differing explanations. As John F. Walvoord comments: "If all varieties of interpretation be considered, at least half a dozen views could be itemized. In general, however, they can be classified as postmillennial, amillennial and premillennial."¹⁴ Walvoord goes on to explain the diversity of understanding on the subject:

Hence the expression "the times of the Gentiles" is regarded by some as a period in which Gentiles inherit Israel's blessings, and by others is taken as the season for executing divine judgments upon the Gentiles, especially at the end of the age.

. . . Premillenarians tend to take the expression "trodden down by the Gentiles" in a more literal way as referring to the physical possession of Jerusalem by the Gentiles. Normally, this is not related to inheritance of spiritual blessings, although premillenarians recognize that during the period of the times of the Gentiles there may be special blessings allotted to Gentile believers.¹⁵

It may be concluded, then, that the Witnesses' interpretation of the term is just one of many, and moreover, stands in opposition to that originally proposed by the founder of the Society, C. T. Russell.

III. THE BEGINNING OF THE "APPOINTED TIMES OF THE NATIONS"

The Witnesses claim that 607 B.C. was the year in which Jerusalem fell and in which Zedekiah the last king on "Jeho-

¹² *The Watchtower*, LXXXVII (October 15, 1966), p. 617.

¹³ *The Time Is at Hand*, p. 77.

¹⁴ "The Times of the Gentiles," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, CXXV (January, 1968), p. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.

vah's throne" was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar. They claim that the "times of the nations" began to count from this date. It is obvious that if these events did not take place in 607 B.C. the Witnesses' chronology cannot be correct, for any future date established on a wrong starting date would always be off the number of years in error.

It is an *established fact*, and it will be proved that the events which the Witnesses date 607 B.C. *did not* and *could not* occur then, but *must* be dated 587/6 B.C.

Correspondence with the Watchtower Society

In an effort to explore the sources available, this writer sent the following letter to the Society:

The reply to the author's letter from the Society is worthy of detailed analysis. To the average reader its contents seem impressive. Does the letter give any real support to the Witnesses' claims? Each paragraph will be examined in succession.

Paragraph 1. In response to the author's request for authorities that would support the Witnesses' chronology the Society writer admits that there is no such support. He makes an understatement when he writes: "... The chronology as accepted by Jehovah's Witnesses ... does not accord with the chronology commonly accepted by secular authorities. ..." It would have been more accurate to say that their chronology is not in accord with that accepted by *any authorities, religious or secular*. The searcher after truth would ask why there is no support for the Witnesses' position outside of their own movement?

Paragraph 2. Without dealing with all the references in this paragraph, it should be pointed out that Ptolemy's Canon and the references mentioned have been worked into a consistent and harmonious chronology by numerous Bible scholars. That the Witnesses' interpretation of the seventy years of captivity (mentioned in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3) is wrong will be seen in some of the points related later in this development.

It is surprising that anyone who professes to know something about Bible chronology would mention Usher and Hales as relevant. When it is realized that James Usher (or Ussher) lived from 1581-1656, and William Hales' four-volume work, *A New Analysis of Chronology and Geography*, was published in 1830,

Newhall, California
October 11, 1968

Watchtower
117 Adams Street
Brooklyn, New York

Dear Sir:

I read with interest the recent issue of *Awake!* (Oct. 8, 1968) and the more detailed explanation of chronology in *Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God's Kingdom Rules!* I was especially interested in the dates assigned to the fall of Jerusalem, the reign of Zedekiah, and the beginning of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Also, the statement in the text (p. 138, top) concerning Ptolemy's Canon was noted.

I would appreciate it very much if you would list and give me the names of texts or authorities, either religious or secular, which would support the following dates as set forth in *Awake!* and the above text.

Nebuchadnezzar begins his rule as king of Babylon
625 BC
The reign of Zedekiah 617-607 BC
The fall of Jerusalem 607 BC

I would also appreciate documentation that the astronomical canon (Ptolemy's Canon) has been proven false and untrustworthy as it relates to verification by modern astronomers and the rulers of Babylon from 747-539 BC.

Sincerely yours,

Edmond C. Gruss
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CABLE WATCHTOWER

EG:EI October 31, 1968

Mr. Edmond C. Gruss
21143 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, California 91321

Dear Mr. Gruss:

We are happy to know that you had opportunity to read some of our publications.

On page 138 of the Babylon book, to which you make reference, it was acknowledged that the chronology as accepted by Jehovah's witnesses and as there presented does not accord with the chronology commonly accepted by secular authorities, for Jehovah's witnesses accept the Bible and its statement about the seventy years of desolation, though secular authorities generally discount this. [1]

The things to be remembered in this connection are: (1) Ptolemy's Canon places the first year of Nebuchadnezzar in the year 604 B.C.E., (2) That the first year of Nebuchadnezzar was in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, according to Jeremiah 25:1, (3) Jerusalem was destroyed in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar according to 2 Kings 25:2, 8, (4) Jehoiakim and Zedekiah each reigned eleven years in Jerusalem according to 2 Chronicles 36:5, 11, (5) That the Jews returned to Jerusalem at the end of the seventy years in the first year of Cyrus, 537 B.C.E., which is the generally accepted date in harmony with 2 Chronicles 36:19-23. Any Bible students who try to harmonize satisfactorily the above chronological records of the Scriptures with the date in Ptolemy's Canon for the first year of Nebuchadnezzar will soon prove to himself the impossibility of the task. The difficulties of the problem are manifest by the fact that, whereas Usher gives the date 588 B.C.E. for the destruction of Jerusalem at the dethronement of Zedekiah, Dr. Hales, an equally celebrated chronologer, places this destruction in the year 586 B.C.E., or two years later than Usher. However, if we accept the united testimony of the sacred writers of the Bible that Jerusalem and the land of Judah lay desolate for seventy years, then the chronological data of the Bible are harmonious. At this chronological period the Holy Scriptures and Ptolemy's Canon cannot be harmonized, not even if it could be supposed that the desolation of seventy years began in the third year of King Jehoiakim as has been assumed by many chronologers to be the meaning of Daniel 1:1-4. It is because of deference to [2]

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October 31, 1968

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Ptolemy's Canon that Daniel 1:1-4 is supposed by some students to support the idea of the thought that the seventy years began in the third year of Jehoiakim, but this reading of Daniel 1:1-4 directly conflicts with all of the historical accounts of the captivities contained in the book of Kings, Chronicles and Jeremiah, which are comprehensively considered in the book "Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God's Kingdom Rules!"

We cannot admit that the seventy years of desolation of Jerusalem began in the third year of Jehoiakim, for according to the Scriptures the term desolation implies "without an inhabitant," and Jerusalem and the land of Judah were not without inhabitants until after the dethronement of Zedekiah as proved in the Babylon book. We cannot reject the combined prophetic and historical testimonies of Kings, Chronicles and Jeremiah simply on the strength of the aforementioned doubtful misreading of Daniel 1:1, more especially as Daniel 1:1 apparently conflicts with Daniel 2:1. However, the Babylon book shows that there is no real conflict between the two texts. [3]

On page 390 you will note in the last paragraph of the footnote an instance of where Ptolemy's Canon is evidently in error, as German Doctor William Hengstenberg shows. He gives as a possible reason for the mistake made by Ptolemy's Canon when assigning to Xerxes a reign of twenty-one years that when Ptolemy compiled his list of kings from the record of ancient chronologers he mistook the Greek letters "ia" for "ka," which letters respectively stood for the numerals 11 and 21. [4]

You might take note of page 655 of volume 5 of the Encyclopedia Britannica, 1959 edition. You would observe that, in regard to Babylonian chronology, the period between 648 B.C.E. and the beginning of the reign of Nabopolassar "is still very obscure; the statement of Ptolemy's Canon cannot exactly accord with the facts." If you personally want to pursue this matter, you can get a copy of Ptolemy's Canon, such as is presented in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society for 1861. Then you can compare that with the document known as "Babylonian King List A" and part of the "Babylonian Chronicle" as can be found in Ancient Near Eastern Texts, edited by James B. Pritchard, pages 272 and 301-303. You will see that there are a number of differences between Ptolemy's Canon and this other material. [5]

In The Watchtower of November 15, 1968, you will find an article on Egyptian chronology, and in the near future we hope to have an article on Babylonian history and chronology, so you can be reading The Watchtower in the near future and note that material when it is published. [6]

Sincerely,

Watchtower B. S. Society
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it is evident that these men have very little to contribute to the dating of events which are more precisely established by many finds since their time. There has been a steady progress toward the precise fixing of dates since the middle of the nineteenth century.

Paragraph 3. Here the point is made that the seventy years of desolation of Jerusalem could only be accomplished after Jerusalem was without an inhabitant ("the term desolation implies 'without an inhabitant'") and this did not happen until after Zedekiah was dethroned. (In *Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God's Kingdom Rules!* a number of typical references to prove the point are given; those listed at one point are: Jeremiah 9:11; 4:7; 6:8; 26:9; 32:43; 33:10, 12; Zechariah 7:5, 14.)¹⁶ A study of each reference listed in Jeremiah does not require a period of seventy years of desolation, "without an inhabitant," but rather the ultimate accomplishment of that condition. The Zechariah 7:5, 14 reference speaks of a seventy year period and desolation, but again does not demand a seventy year period of absolute desolation.

That the land of Judah was *not* completely stripped of its population at the fall of Jerusalem, or even after Gedaliah's assassination (II Kings 25:25, 26; Jer. 41:1-3), when many Jews fled into Egypt shortly afterwards, is seen from Jeremiah 52:28-30.

These are the people whom Nebuchadrezzar took into exile: in the seventh year, three thousand and twenty-three Jews.

In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar, from Jerusalem there were eight hundred and thirty-two souls.

In the twenty-third year of Nebuchadrezzar, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguard took Jews into exile, seven hundred and forty-five souls.

All the souls were four thousand and six hundred. (NWT)

Reference is here made to three separate deportations, the last *five years after* the fall of Jerusalem. In an attempt to maintain the "without an inhabitant view" another Witness writer explains the Jeremiah 52:30 deportation:

These, however, were not taken off the land of Judah but were captured when Nebuchadnezzar, as Jehovah's symbolic cup, made na-

¹⁶ p. 161.

tions that bordered on the desolated land of Judah drink the bitter potion of being violently conquered.—Jeremiah 25:17-29.¹⁷

The Jeremiah passage does not justify this understanding. Verse 30 must refer to a deportation from Judah. Why? A reading of Chapter 52 stresses events in Jerusalem and the land of Judah. The three deportations are preceded by the statement: "Thus Judah went into exile from off its soil." (NWT) Verse 28 mentions "Jews," verse 29, "Jerusalem," and verse 30, "Jews." The captives of the three exiles are then totaled as a unit in verse 30. Nations or peoples other than from Judah are foreign to the chapter.

A check of a number of sources which deal with this portion of Old Testament history revealed that without exception, they applied Jeremiah 52:30 to another exile from Judah.¹⁸ Therefore, since there was a deportation *five years after* the fall of Jerusalem, the Witnesses' interpretation which demands seventy years "without an inhabitant," must be rejected.

Paragraphs 4, 5 and 6. Statements here deal with supposed "errors" in Ptolemy's Canon: (1) Ptolemy's Canon is evidently in error as it deals with the reign of Xerxes (following Hengstenberg). (2) The *Britannica* article dealing with chronology mentions that the Canon "cannot exactly accord with the facts" dealing with the period between 648-626 B.C. (3) A check of "Babylonian King List A" and part of the "Babylonian Chronicle" found in Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* shows there are a number of differences between the Canon and this material.

In answer to the foregoing: (1) A check of Hengstenberg's dating (486-474 B.C.) on the reign of Xerxes, that accepted by the Witnesses, does not commend itself to scholars today. For example, Parker and Dubberstein give Xerxes dates as 486-465.¹⁹ (Note that the reference to Xerxes' dates is outside of what this writer's letter asked for—i.e., the rulers of Babylon, 747-539.) Instead of error then, Ptolemy's Canon is again veri-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See for example: F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), p. 94; William F. Albright, "Babylonian Exile or Captivity," *Americana* (1957), III, p. 636; "Babylonian Captivity," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1964), II, pp. 979, 980.

¹⁹ Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 625 B.C.-A.D. 75* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1956), p. 17.

fied. In addition, an error at this point, even if proven, is not at all critical in reference to the 607 B.C. versus the accepted 587/6 B.C. date. (2) Reference to the *Britannica* article is an attempt of the Watchtower writer to make a show of scholarly support. The quotation which deals with Babylonian chronology (648-626 B.C.) and states that "Ptolemy's Canon cannot exactly accord with the facts" does not seriously question the accuracy of the Canon. First, if admitted, an error at this point is not critical concerning the dating of the fall of Jerusalem and related events. Second, the article found in the 1959 edition quoted is definitely out-of-date. When was the article written? In correspondence with the Britannica Library Research Service a reply dated November 15, 1968 was received. It stated in part: "The 1959 treatment is essentially the same as when first written for the 1929 edition; the present article was rewritten in 1963."

Why was the current treatment dealing with Babylonian chronology not used? Let the reader judge from the following quotation:

Proof of the fundamental correctness of Ptolemy's canon has come from the ancient cuneiform tablets excavated in Mesopotamia, including some that refer to astronomical events, chiefly eclipses of the moon.²⁰

(3) This writer did compare Ptolemy's Canon with the sources in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* and found the Canon in substantial agreement. On the surface there seem to be minor differences, but before a comparison is made it must be understood for what purpose the Canon was compiled. Edwin R. Thiele explains that

Ptolemy's canon was prepared primarily for astronomical, not historical, purposes. It did not pretend to give a complete list of all the rulers of either Babylon or Persia, nor the exact month or day of the beginning of their reigns, but it was a device which made possible the correct allocation into a broad chronological scheme of certain astronomical data which were then available. Kings whose reigns were less than a year and which did not embrace the New Year's day were not mentioned in the canon.²¹

²⁰ Michael B. Rowton, "Chronology" (Babylonian and Assyrian) *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1968), V, p. 724.

²¹ *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (revised ed.; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 216, 217.

Watchtower claims as to the inaccuracy of Ptolemy's Canon remain just that—claims.

Concluding remarks on Ptolemy's Canon. What is the importance of the Canon? Why have the Witnesses consistently been critical of it? Ptolemy's Canon is germane to the acceptance or rejection of the Witnesses' chronology because it gives a list of kings beginning with Nabonassar of Babylon (747 B.C.) and extending to the Graeco-Roman period. The length of reign of each king listed is given in the Canon. Simply stated, if the work of Ptolemy is correct, the Witnesses are wrong in their 607 B.C. fall of Jerusalem date.

In the *Britannica* article dealing with "Eclipse," and the use of eclipses for chronological purposes, it states:

The chronology of Ptolemy's canon of kings, which gives the Babylonian series from 747 to 539 B.C., the Persian series from 538 to 324 B.C., the Alexandrian series from 323 to 30 B.C. and the Roman series from 30 B.C. onward, is confirmed throughout by eclipses.²²

Dr. Edwin R. Thiele, in his masterly work, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, affirms:

The dates of the Nabonassar era have thus been fully established, and once the method of procedure involved in the reckoning of the years of the kings is understood, the canon of Ptolemy may be used as a historical guide with the fullest confidence.

What makes the canon of such great importance to modern historians is the large amount of astronomical material recorded by Ptolemy in his *Almagest*, making possible checks as to its accuracy at almost every step from beginning to end. Over eighty solar, lunar, and planetary positions, with their dates, are recorded in the *Almagest* which have been verified by modern astronomers. . . .

. . . Ptolemy's canon gives precise and absolutely dependable data concerning the chronology of a period beginning with 747 B.C. . . .²³

Dr. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., author of *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, confirms that the Canon has been verified: "Astronomical verification of an eclipse which Ptolemy dated as occurring in 522 B.C. has served as a valued reassurance of his accuracy."²⁴

²² J. K. Fotheringham and Bernard Pagel, "Eclipse," (Eclipses in History) *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1964), VII, p. 910.

²³ Pp. 4, 45.

²⁴ (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), p. 279.

O. A. Tofflein's *Ancient Chronology* makes the following reference to Ptolemy's Canon:

His catalogue, beginning with *Nabonassar* of Babylon and extending to Alexander the Great, gives the length of reign of each king of that period. It has been tested by scholars from every point of view, and has in every case stood the test. It is therefore regarded as one of the most accurate chronological works bequeathed to us by antiquity.²⁵

From the statements of the authorities cited it is clear that informed scholars accept the accuracy of the Canon.

It is interesting that in the 1877 publication of *Three Worlds, and the Harvest of this World* by N. H. Barbour and C. T. Russell, Ptolemy's Canon is also recognized as authoritative (at least for the establishment of Cyrus' first year):

The fact that the first year of Cyrus was B.C. 536 [sic], is based on Ptolemy's canon, supported by the eclipses by which the dates of the Grecian and Persian era have been regulated. And the accuracy of Ptolemy's canon is now accepted by all the scientific and literary world. Hence, from the days of Nebuchadnezzar to the Christian era, there is but one chronology.²⁶

Even recent *Watchtower* articles, while rejecting the full implications of the Canon's accuracy, state:

Even though the length of the reign of the kings of Babylon and Persia, as set forth in Ptolemy's canon, may be *basically* correct, there seems to be no reason for holding that the canon is necessarily accurate in every respect for all periods.²⁷

While many scholars have affirmed the accuracy of Ptolemy's Canon, the Witnesses continue to retreat behind vague references to its inaccuracy.

Other articles in the Watchtower. The letter from the Watchtower Society made reference to some articles which would appear in *Watchtower* issues on the subject of chronology. The one dealing with Babylonian chronology was published for February 1, 1969, under the title, "Babylonian Chronology—How Reliable?" Much of the article is a rehash of what has been published elsewhere by the Witnesses. On page 90 of the article the Witness writer began his attack on Ptolemy and in the

²⁵ (Part I) (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1907), p. 1.

²⁶ (Rochester: Barbour and Russell, 1877), p. 194.

²⁷ *The Watchtower*, XC (February 1, 1969), p. 90.

process quoted from Thiele's, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. This writer felt that the treatment on Ptolemy and the quotation would be of interest to Dr. Thiele. A letter was sent along with the article asking for his reaction to the discussion of the Canon and the use of the quotation from his book. His answer, in part, dated January 21, 1971, follows:

In regard to your request for my comment on the use of my quotation in the WATCHTOWER concerning Ptolemy's Canon, I will say that it is misleading and unscrupulous. It is misleading in that it would give an entirely different impression concerning this important canon of Ptolemy than I hold. It is unscrupulous, because a procedure of this type is not honest.

If the writer of this article had been honest—or informed—he would have known that I use Ptolemy's Canon in an entirely different way than he would have it used.

I have the utmost respect for the Canon, and find myself almost standing in awe of its detailed historical accuracy. The man who wrote it must have had at his finger tips an amazing amount of detail concerning early Near Eastern history, and an astonishing amount of astronomical information fitting in at point after point with specific years of the kings. It is accurate and reliable all along the line. Astronomy is one thing upon which we can depend with complete confidence. And when the eclipses of the Canon are so fully in harmony with the years of the kings, we can be certain that the chronology involved is sound. The Canon is right and Jehovah's Witnesses are wrong.

What would I say about the article in general? I would say that such a writer and reader has no business writing about such a subject. He does not know the facts, or if he does, he does not use them in an honest manner. It reminds me of the way an unscrupulous lawyer would deal with facts in order to support a case he knows not to be sound.

Let us be charitable with the man and say that in his reading he does not read as an informed scholar should. In other words, let us accuse him rather of ignorance than dishonesty.

The letter speaks for itself, and seriously questions the motives and qualifications of the writer of the *Watchtower* article.

The article on Egyptian chronology mentioned in the Watchtower letter was published in the November 15, 1968 *Watchtower*, but it does not apply to the subject at hand. A number of additional articles on chronology and related themes have also appeared in *The Watchtower*.²⁸

²⁸ August 15, 1968; December 15, 1968; April 1, 1969; May 15, 1971.

Summary on the Watchtower letter. (1) It was admitted that there are no secular (we add religious) authorities who accepted or supported their position on chronology. (2) Ptolemy's Canon and the Bible have been worked into a harmonious and consistent chronology by Bible scholars, contrary to the Witnesses' claims. (3) The issue was confused with the mention of chronologers such as Usher and Hales who are not relevant to the matter. (4) The "seventy years" of the desolation of Jerusalem need not be years of absolute desolation as the Witnesses claim, for, among other things, a correct understanding of Jeremiah 52:30 proves that there was a deportation five years after the fall of Jerusalem. (5) The supposed untrustworthiness of Ptolemy's Canon was not sustained by the sources the Witness writer cited; in addition, numerous scholars supported the extreme accuracy of the canon for the fixing of Bible and secular chronology. (6) Even Russell and Barbour, as well as the Watchtower writers of the present, have made statements which lend support to the acceptance of the Canon as accurate. (7) Witness articles were examined, especially those dealing with Babylonian Chronology, and these would cause one to question whether the writers were actually equipped or objective enough to deal with the subject. This point is clear from the reaction of E. R. Thiele, who is a *recognized* authority on the subject.

Establishing the Date for the Fall of Jerusalem

Thus far, all that has been written requires the acceptance of the 587/6 date for the fall of Jerusalem, and the rejection of the Witnesses' 607 B.C. date. At this point, the evidence of the "Babylonian Chronicle" is considered. The nature of the evidence and its significance are explained by Jack Finegan:

A number of cuneiform texts from Babylon in the British Museum, some only recently published, make available portions of a Babylonian chronicle with annals covering much of what was the closing period of the kingdom of Judah. By the correlation of such extra-biblical evidence with biblical data it is possible to state dates in this period with relatively great precision and assurance.²⁹

²⁹ *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Problems of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 199.

Of particular importance is British Museum tablet 21946 published in *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings* (1956)³⁰ which establishes the date of the first fall of Jerusalem (with the captivity of Jehoiachin and the accession of Zedekiah) as an *absolute date*.³¹ When did this occur according to the information on the tablet? "The date of this conquest of Jerusalem is now known precisely for the first time, namely, the second of Adar (15/16th March 597 B.C.)."³² With the first fall of Jerusalem established precisely in 597, the terminal point *must* be 587/6, with Zedekiah's defeat after an eleven year reign (II Kings 25:2). The reason for the variable is because

some uncertainty reigns over the precise mode of reckoning of the Hebrew civil year and of the various regnal years of Zedekiah and Nebuchadrezzar in 2 Kings and Jeremiah. Consequently two different dates are current for the fall of Jerusalem: 587 and 586 B.C. The date 587 is here preferred, with Wiseman and Albright (against Thiele).³³

A number of articles and books by leading Old Testament and Near Eastern scholars which explain the significance of the newly published portions of the Babylonian chronicles appeared in 1956.³⁴ These prove beyond a doubt that the Witnesses' 607 B.C. date for the fall of Jerusalem is untenable.

³⁰ D. J. Wiseman, (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1956), pp. 67-74. See also pp. 23-37 for the historical survey and pp. 46-48 for a summary of events.

³¹ The Watchtower writer in *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*, comments on Bible chronology and defines "absolute dates": "Reliable Bible chronology is based on certain *absolute dates*. An *absolute date* is a calendar date that is proved by secular history to be the actual date of an event recorded in the Bible" (p. 281). By the evidence, and by the foregoing definition, the first fall of Jerusalem (597) the death of Nabopolassar and the accession of Nebuchadnezzar (605) are *absolute dates*.

³² Wiseman, p. 33.

³³ K. A. Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell, "Chronology of the Old Testament," *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1962), p. 217.

³⁴ Some selected examples not cited before are:
W. F. Albright, "The Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar Chronicles," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (October, 1956), pp. 28-33.
Noel D. Freedman, "The Babylonian Chronicle," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XIX (September, 1956), pp. 50-60.
Philip J. Hyatt, "New Light on Nebuchadnezzar and Judean History," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXV (December, 1956), pp. 277-284.
Hayim Tadmor, "Chronology of the Last Kings of Judah," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XV (October, 1956), pp. 226-230.
Edwin R. Thiele, "New Evidence on the Chronology of the Last Kings of Judah," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (October, 1956), pp. 22-27.

In the article, "The Book of Truthful Historical Dates," in the August 15, 1968 *Watchtower*, the writer marshalls the evidence for the Witnesses' absolute date of 539 B.C. from which all their chronology is calculated. This key date is established in several ways according to the article: (1) by the Nabonidus Chronicle which dates the fall of Babylon (p. 490), (2) by astronomy (p. 490), (3) by recognized authorities, such as Jack Finegan, and Parker and Dubberstein (p. 491), (4) by documentation from history books and the weight of historical scholarship ("so many scholars") (pp. 491, 492), and (5) by the Bible. Although it is not mentioned in this article, *The Watchtower* of May 15, 1971, states that 539 B.C. is also proven by Ptolemy's Canon (p. 316).

The present writer can just as legitimately establish 605 B.C. as an absolute date and from this point determine the fall of Jerusalem was 587/6 B.C. That 605 B.C. is an absolute date is based on exactly the same type of evidence that the Witnesses cite. (1) The Babylonian Chronicle (BM 21946) records the death of Nabopolassar, the accession of Nebuchadnezzar and the Battle of Carchemish as occurring in 605 B.C. (2) The *same* astrological tables quoted by Witnesses to establish the fall of Babylon in 539 (October 12) and the date of Cyrus' decree to permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to offer up sacrifices there (October 1, 537), designated "the best astronomical tables available" (p. 493), date the accession of Nebuchadnezzar on September 7, 605 (by dating BM 21946).³⁵ (3) Recognized authorities accept 605 B.C. as the accession date for Nebuchadnezzar, in fact, the *very authorities* appealed to in *The Watchtower* article! (4) The weight of historical scholarship is universally behind the 605 date. In a letter to Dr. Thiele it was asked:

How strong is the evidence for the 605 B.C. date for the death of Nabopolassar and the accession of Nebuchadnezzar, as compared with the evidence for the end of Nabunaid's reign and the fall of Babylon?

In his reply dated March 4, 1971, in reference to the 605 date and events, Thiele wrote: "I know of no ancient date with any stronger evidence." He then gave the reasons for his statement.

First there is the eclipse of 621 in the fifth year of Nabopolassar. Nabopolassar reigned 21 years which would make 605 the year of his

³⁵ Parker and Dubberstein, p. 12.

death and the accession of Nebuchadnezzar. For contemporary evidence on that year see D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, p. 69.

Second, there is the calculated eclipse of 568 in the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar. Working backwards, that would again take you to 605 as the year of Nebuchadnezzar's accession. Both of these eclipses are listed in my *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, p. 218.

Now having the year 605 for the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar firmly established, all you need is to go forward from there for the rest of the Babylonian kings. The evidence for these you have in Parker and Dubberstein . . . *Babylonian Chronology*, with which you are acquainted.

You have nothing to fear in 605. Working backwards from there you have the eclipse of 621, and working forwards from there you have the eclipse of 568. How easy ancient chronology would be if we could only do that in a few other places!

(5) The 605 date reconciles perfectly with the Bible. (6) Ptolemy's Canon which establishes the 539 B.C. date the Witnesses need for their chronology, also verifies the 605 date.

With Nebuchadnezzar's accession in 605 B.C., the siege and fall of Jerusalem can be calculated on the basis of what year in Nebuchadnezzar's reign these things took place. The following quotation presents the details:

The last event in the checkered history of the Southern Kingdom was the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. This siege began on the tenth day of the month of Zedekiah's ninth year (II Kings 25:1; Jer. 39:1; 52:4. Cf. Ezek. 24:1, 2), January 15, 588 [Parker and Dubberstein, p. 26. "All Julian dates given hereafter are based on the tables of Parker and Dubberstein."] The next year, in the midst of the siege, Jeremiah was imprisoned, this being the tenth year of Zedekiah and synchronizing with the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 32:1), 587. Famine prevailed, the city was broken, and the king fled the following year—on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year (II Kings 25:2, 3; Jer. 39:2; 52:5-7), July 18, 586. On the seventh day of the fifth month the final destruction of the city began (II Kings 25:8-10), August 14, 586. This was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 25:8; Jer. 52:12), which was from Nisan, 586 to Nisan 585, Babylonian reckoning, or Tishri, 587, to Tishri, 586, Judean years.³⁶

If one takes the *evidence* which is abundantly available, it is inescapable that Jerusalem fell in 587/6.

³⁶ Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 168, 169.

Summary. The Witnesses require a 607 B.C. date for the fall of Jerusalem for their 1914 chronology to be substantiated. It has been established in this section that the historical date must be 587/6 B.C. Scholars agree on this date and archaeological evidence places it beyond debate. Claims and objections made by the Society in correspondence and in their publications cannot stand investigation and often reveal a real bias or ignorance. The identical materials and types of evidence which establish the crucial date of 539 B.C. for the Witnesses also establish the 605 B.C. date, rendering the Witnesses' 607 B.C. date for the fall of Jerusalem impossible. On this point alone, the 1914 date for the end of "the times of the Gentiles" is relegated to the scrap heap of exploded theories.

IV. THE END OF THE "APPOINTED TIMES OF THE NATIONS"

Daniel 4:4-27 gives the account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation. According to the Witnesses, Nebuchadnezzar's period of madness (vv. 25, 33) symbolized the Gentile nations who would have dominion during the "appointed times of the nations." The Witnesses claim that the "seven times" (vv. 16, 23, 25, 32) were literal in Nebuchadnezzar's case and that by comparison with Revelation 12:6, 14 the "seven times" of Daniel are to be understood as 2,520 days.³⁷ These are next converted into years which run out in 1914.

In answer, this writer would deny that there is any good reason for acceptance of such an interpretation. But beyond this, there are some pertinent questions and observations which should be stated. (1) Where in the Bible does one find that Nebuchadnezzar's dream has any connection with the "times of the nations"? (2) How can Nebuchadnezzar, during his seven years of madness, *when he was not ruling*, picture Gentile domination or rule? Daniel's interpretation of the dream is clear on this point:

And you will be driving away from mankind, and with the beasts of the field your dwelling is to become, and the vegetation is what they will give even to you to eat just like bulls; and with the dew of the heavens you yourself will be getting wet . . . (v. 25, NWT)

³⁷ A complete treatment of the Nebuchadnezzar type is set forth in *Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God's Kingdom Rules!*, pp. 174-181.

The fulfillment which began twelve months later is given in verse 33:

At that moment the word itself was fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar, and from mankind he was being driven away, and grass he began to eat just like bulls, and with the dew of the heavens his own body got to be wet, until his very hair grew big just like eagles' [feathers] and his nails like birds' [claws]. (NWT)

The emphasis of this passage again separates Nebuchadnezzar from his ruling function. (3) There is no need to find any significance beyond the fulfillment of the dream in the life of Nebuchadnezzar. The dream, its interpretation, its fulfillment and the restoration sequence are all that are required for an understanding of the chapter. Thus, any attempt to give a prophetic meaning to this portion of Scripture is nothing more than an assumption.³⁸ (4) There is no objective evidence that the "times of the nations" have been terminated. (5) The entire interpretation of the "tree vision" and the "seven times" being 2,520 years, is invalid, since a 1914 terminus for the "times of the nations" has been shown to be wrong. Thus, any method used to arrive at such a date does not demonstrate its validity.

V. THE YEAR-DAY THEORY

In the Witnesses' interpretation, the 2,520 days (based on Daniel's "seven times" and Revelation's 3 1/2 times or "time, and times and half a time") were converted into years and the extent of the "times of the nations" was calculated (607 B.C. +

³⁸ The treatment in the Witnesses own *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial* (pp. 140, 142) illustrates the point that the "tree vision" requires no additional fulfillment and is included for our instruction. That Daniel 4 is of prophetic significance and Nebuchadnezzar's "seven times" prefigures the duration of years (2,520) of the "times of the nations" is found in several writers of the nineteenth century and was not unique when Russell accepted the theory. While there may be some, this writer did not find any among twentieth century writers who either held or mentioned the interpretation. In addition, those who held the view terminated the "times of the nations" by the visible, personal return of Christ.

Writers in support of the position include: H. Grattan Guinness, *The Approaching End of the Age* (new ed., revised by E. H. Horne; London: Morgan and Scott, Ltd., 1919), pp. 246, 247. (First published 1878.) R. C. Shimeall, *The Second Coming of Christ* (New York: Henry Goodspeed and Company, Publishers, 1873), pp. 170, 171. E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ* (fourth ed.; London: Seeleys, 1851), III, pp. 247, 248.

2,520 years = A.D. 1914). The mathematics are simple, but is the year-day theory valid?

The year-day principle was not known to the early Church. What then is its history?

It was not until medieval times that Jewish and Christian teachers actually advanced year-dayism . . . It was first set forth by the former group in the ninth century, and by the latter three centuries later. Joachim of Floris, in Italy, at the close of the twelfth century, applied it to the 1260 days of Rev. 12. . . The writers who immediately followed him were defenders of extreme authority for the Pope.

These historical facts are very damaging to this system of interpretation. Sober men are not likely to favor a principle that "was altogether unknown by the Jewish Church before the Christian era, by the Apostles of our Lord, by the primitive Church, by the Fathers—in short, that no one ever thought of . . . during . . . the first twelve centuries of Christianity" (S. R. Maitland in *Second Enquirey respecting the prophetic period of Daniel and St. John*, p. 77). Moreover, such men will not have their reservations removed by observing that it originated in apostate Judaism and was developed by the Church of Rome. These considerations give strong reasons for suspecting the validity of the theory.

It is true that most, though not all, of the Reformers, from Wycliffe down, applied the year-day principle to the interpretation of prophecy, but it is plain that they derived it from Rome.³⁹

After a two-year study of the Bible, in 1818 William Miller (1782-1849), a New England Baptist farmer, applied the year-day principle and established a date for the return of Christ and the end of the world. This would take place "sometime between Mar. 21, 1843 and Mar. 21, 1844; he finally fixed the date at Apr. 17 or 18, 1844."⁴⁰ When the latter date failed, an associate of Miller, Samuel S. Snow set the date of October 22, 1844.⁴¹ From the Millerite movement came the Seventh-day Adventists, who still follow the year-day theory as a keystone for prophetic interpretation.⁴²

³⁹ Norman F. Douty, *Another Look at Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), p. 95.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 105.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴² LeRoy Edwin Fromm, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1954), IV, pp. 871, 872.

It was from the Second Adventists who had predicted that the world would end in 1873 that Russell adopted the year-day principle⁴³ and it is still followed as essential to prophetic understanding.

The theory was decisively refuted by Samuel P. Tregelles in his book *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel*, first published in 1852.⁴⁴

The year-day theory must establish its validity on a Scriptural foundation to be true. Several lines of argument may be urged against the view to demonstrate that it does not pass the test.

1. Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6 are interpreted to mean that "with God each day counts for a year."⁴⁵ Numbers 14:33, 34 simply states that because of sin Israel was to suffer "by the number of the days that YOU spied out the land, forty days, a day for a year, a day for a year, YOU will answer for YOUR errors forty years. . . ." (NWT) On this passage, Milton S. Terry concludes:

Here then is certainly no ground on which to base the universal proposition that, in prophetic designations of time, a day means a year. The passage is exceptional and explicit, and the words are used in a strictly literal sense; the days evidently mean days, and the years mean years.⁴⁶

The same is true of Ezekiel 4:5, 6:

The days of his prostration were literal days, and they were typical of years, as is explicitly stated. But to derive from this symbolico-typical action of Ezekiel a hermeneutical principle or law of universal application, namely, that days in prophecy mean years, would be a most unwarrantable procedure.⁴⁷

⁴³ *Watch Tower Reprints*, IV, July 15, 1906, pp. 3821, 3822. Some of the Second Adventists were Jonas Wendell, N. H. Barbour, and J. H. Paton.

⁴⁴ (Sixth ed.; London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1883), pp. 112-127. The section is titled "Note on the 'Year-Day System.'"

A short article by Roy L. Aldrich, "Can the End of the Age be Computed by the Year-Day Theory?" appeared in the April 15, 1958 issue of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, pp. 159-165. Aldrich concludes his article with the statement: "It is time that the year-day theory was recognized for what it is—a principle of error, the use of which contradicts the clear teaching of Christ that the time of His coming is secret" (p. 165).

⁴⁵ *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, p. 173.

⁴⁶ *Biblical Hermeneutics* (second ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, [n. d.]), p. 387.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

2. If the two passages mentioned did in fact represent a universal law of prophetic interpretation, it is only reasonable that this law could be easily verified by fulfilled prophecy. Terry cites a number of examples in Scripture which overwhelmingly are against the year-day view. Genesis 7:4 records God telling Noah that "in just seven days more I am making it rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights. . . ." (NWT) Would it be proper to understand these days as years? In Genesis 15:13 God told Abraham that his seed was to be resident in a foreign land and would be afflicted for four hundred years. Are these years to be multiplied by 360 to get the proper understanding? The same point can be made on the sixty-five years of Isaiah; the three years of Isaiah 16:14, and the seventy years of Jeremiah 25:12 (cf. Dan. 9:2). Should Jonah's prophecy which announced the judgment of Nineveh be interpreted as symbolizing forty years? The year-day theory cannot be supported by the only possible understanding of other prophecies, that which Terry calls, "the analogy of prophetic scriptures."⁴⁸

3. One of the strongest arguments against the year-day theory is that all who have utilized the theory and predicted the coming of Christ, the end of the world, or other events have failed in their predictions—in Russell's case a 100 percent failure. Terry expands the point:

We have lived to see his [William Miller's] theories thoroughly exploded, and yet there have not been wanting others who have adopted his hermeneutical principles, and named A.D. 1866 and A.D. 1870 [and it can be added 1873, 74, and 1914] as "the time of the end." A theory which is so destitute of scriptural analogy and support . . . and presumes to rest on such a slender showing of divine authority, is on those grounds alone to be suspected; but when it has again and again proved to be false and misleading in its application, we may safely reject it, as furnishing no valid principle or rule in a true science of hermeneutics.⁴⁹

VI. THE "TIME OF THE END"

It is obvious that the year 1914 cannot be sustained as the end of the "appointed times of the nations," and therefore it

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 387, 388.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 389, 390.

also cannot mark the definite beginning of the "time of the end." A study of Watchtower interpretation on this subject reveals a change in understanding.

In reference to the period, C. T. Russell stated: "The 'Time of the End,' a period of one hundred and fifteen (115) years, from A.D. 1799 to 1914, is particularly marked in the Scriptures."⁵⁰ (Figure 1) J. F. Rutherford, Russell's successor to the presidency and to doctrinal leadership, published his view in 1921 that the evidence was "sufficient to convince any reasonable mind that we have been in the 'time of the end' since 1799."⁵¹ Rutherford later abandoned this date as having any prophetic significance.⁵² The present understanding is that "the 'time of the end' began in 1914; it ends when the Devil's world is destroyed at the 'accomplished end.'"⁵³ (Figure 2)

The foregoing quotations illustrate how flexible God's claimed direction of the Society has been. The 1799-1914 original setting of the "time of the end" reminds the reader that for Russell 1914 was terminal. The period was also identified as "particularly marked in the Scriptures," and evidence was "sufficient to convince any reasonable mind." Yet, in spite of those recommendations, the period was dropped in favor of the new period, currently 1914-1975(?).

VII. THE SIGN OF "THE LAST DAYS"

The second area of proof that 1914 marks the beginning of the "last days" is found by the Witnesses in the fulfillment of prophecy since that year. This writer has demonstrated in previous sections that the 1914 date could not find support in Bible chronology—so it naturally follows that the signs could not prove what chronology failed to demonstrate. But the signs will be examined anyway to make the refutation of the Witnesses' position complete.

The Witnesses claim that there are thirty-nine signs which mark the second presence of Christ since 1914 and which are a

⁵⁰ *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 23.

⁵¹ *The Harp of God* (revised ed.; Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1921), p. 239.

⁵² *Watch Tower Publications Index 1930-1960* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1961), pp. 77, 78.

⁵³ *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, p. 178.

sign of "the last days" which will end in this generation. It is explained that:

Occurance of one or even several happenings together is not sufficient to constitute evidence; all must occur concurrently upon one generation in the foretold series or sequences to make up the one composite sign. At least 39 happenings comprise the sign.⁵⁴

The following are given by the Witnesses as comprising the sign of the "last days."

1. Many False Christian Religions
2. World Wars
3. Widespread Famines
4. Unusual Number of Earthquakes
5. Persecution of Christians
6. Christians Betrayed by Relatives and Friends
7. Christians Hated World-wide over Kingdom Issue and for Upholding Christ's Exalted Office
8. Organized Opposition to Kingdom Work by World Leaders
9. Increased Lawlessness
10. Many Forsaking Christianity
11. Worldwide Preaching of the Established Kingdom as Good News
12. Formation of the League of Nations and the United Nations to Stand in Place of Established Kingdom of God
13. Earth-wide Tribulation on Satan's Organization
14. Lying Signs and Great Wonders Performed in God's Name
15. Presence of Christ and Impending Doom of Satan Discernible Universally
16. "Sun" of Man's Prosperity Darkened by Economic Distress
17. "Moon" of Enlightened Man-Rule becomes Dictatorial, Oppressive Rule of Men
18. Wisdom of World's Starlike Wise Ones Perishes
19. Nations Confused and Perplexed as to Course
20. Men becoming Faint Out of World-wide Fear
21. Restoration of True Worshipers
22. Rapid Culmination of All Events on the One Evil Generation
23. People Overly Concerned with Everyday Affairs of Life
24. God's Choosing of Christians Not Dependent on Family or Friendship Ties
25. Indifferent, Sleepy Condition of World but Wakeful, Studious Attitude of Christians
26. One Organization Selected by God as His Faithful Representative
27. Unfaithful Ones Exposed, Separated and Punished as a Class
28. Separating the People of the Nations into "Sheep" and "Goats"
29. World-wide Expansion of Clean Worship
30. Sore Pestilences and Diseases
31. Moral Degeneracy in Public and Private Life
32. Widespread Juvenile Delinquency
33. Instability and Insecurity World-wide Despite Claims of Leaders
34. Men Seek Relief in Make-shift Organizations, Clubs, Institutions
35. Organized Clergy of Christendom and Evil Slave Manifested in Open Diso-

⁵⁴ *Make Sure of All Things* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1953), p. 337.

bedience 36. Improper Restrictions Placed on Marriage and Eating of Food 37. Work of Jehovah's Witnesses Stopped in 1918 38. Many will Ridicule Sign Though Evidence Conclusive 39. World Powers Say "Peace and Safety" as Final Event.⁵⁵

After a review of a number of the signs, a former Witness, William C. Stevenson, commented:

Having reviewed some of the evidence brought forward by the Witnesses which confirms them in their belief that this is "the time of the end," the reader may register surprise that such flimsy tenuous evidence could convince an intelligent person.⁵⁶

Upon examination, it is possible to categorize the "signs" into two broad categories: those which relate to the Witness movement since 1914, and those which relate to the conditions in the world which are viewed as peculiarly characteristic of this generation. The latter category is usually featured in the literature for public consumption. It would include such signs as: world wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and increasing lawlessness. Many of these signs are found in Jesus' words as recorded in Matthew 24 and Luke 21.

In the illustration from the October 8, 1968 *Awake!* (Figure 3) several key features of the "last days" are given. Notice the first four: "World Wars," "Pestilences," "Earthquakes," "Food Shortages"—all are familiar to the reader. Jehovah's Witnesses accept these as sure indicators of the "last days." Yet, it is interesting to find that C. T. Russell, the founder of the movement and advocator of the 1914 chronology, *did not view these very happenings* as signs of the "last days"! Also, articles were published in the *Watch Tower* by other writers who just as strongly took the same position.

As an example of the first point, a *Watch Tower* reader's question and Russell's answer are cited:

Does Matt. 24:6 teach that "Wars and rumors of wars" are a sign of the end of the Gospel Age?

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 337-344. The signs above are listed as found, but the Scripture citations have been omitted.

⁵⁶ *The Inside Story of Jehovah's Witnesses* (New York: Hart Publishing Company, Inc., 1967), p. 79.

STUDY II

**"THE TIME OF THE END,"
OR "DAY OF HIS PREPARATION."**

— DANIEL XI.—

THE TIME OF THE END.—ITS COMMENCEMENT, A. D. 1799.—ITS CLOSS, A. D. 1914.—WHAT IS TO BE PREPARED, AND THE OBJECT.—THE WORLD'S HISTORY PROPHETICALLY TRACED THROUGH ITS CHIEF RULERS.—FROM B. C. 405 TO THIS DAY OF PREPARATION.—THE BEGINNING OF THE TIME OF THE END DEFINITELY MARKED, YET WITHOUT NAMES OR DATES.

THE "Time of the End," a period of one hundred and fifteen (115) years, from A. D. 1799 to A. D. 1914, is particularly marked in the Scriptures. "The Day of His Preparation" is another name given to the same period, because in it a general increase of knowledge, resulting in discoveries, inventions, etc., paves the way to the coming Millennium of favor, making ready the mechanical devices which will economize labor, and provide the world in general with time and conveniences, which under Christ's reign of righteousness will be a blessing to all and aid in filling the earth with the knowledge of the Lord. And it is a day or period of preparation in another sense also; for by the increase of knowledge among the masses, giving to all a taste of liberty and luxury, before Christ's rule is established to rightly regulate the world, these blessings will gradually become agencies of class-power and will result in the uprising of the masses and the overthrow of corporative Trusts, etc., with which will fall also all the present dominions of earth, civil and ecclesiastical. And thus the pre-

Figure 1. The "Time of the End" seen as a period from 1799-1914*

* *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 23

WHY A "TIME OF THE END"

Although the Kingdom came to power in 1914, Jehovah did not immediately destroy those who were not serving him. How glad we can be of that! For God's long-suffering has afforded us the

4. (a) Why can we be glad that God did not immediately destroy those who were not serving him when his kingdom came to power in 1914? (b) How does the Bible, at 2 Peter 3:9, help us to view this matter properly?

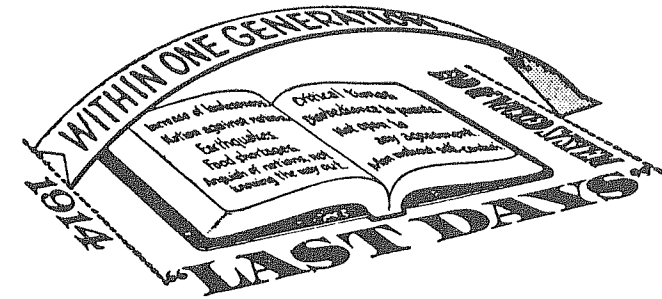


Figure 2. The "Time of the End" seen as beginning in 1914†

**THE SIGN
OF THE
"LAST DAYS"**

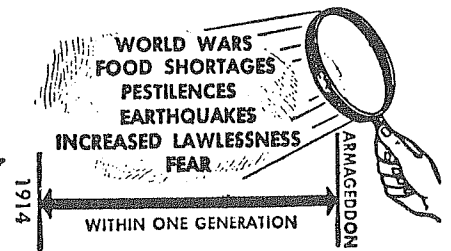


Figure 3. Some important signs of the "last days"‡

† *The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life*, p. 95

‡ *Awake!*, XLIX (October 8, 1968), p. 8

A. No; we think not. Wars and rumors of wars have characterized earth's history, with varying frequency and cruelty, ever since the fall of man. But the Scriptures assure us that the time of the end of the Gospel Age, or end of the dominion of the "prince of this world," will witness a more general and widespread warfare than was ever known before, involving all the powers of earth.

So also famines and pestilences and earthquakes are not to be regarded specially as signs of the end. Though they will doubtless be frequent, and perhaps more so in the time of the end, like wars have been a part of Satan's policy from the first.⁵⁷

Note again what Russell *denied* as signs of the "time of the end": "wars and rumors of wars," "famines and pestilences and earthquakes"! But the reader may observe, Russell did emphasize warfare "involving all the powers of earth" and an acceleration of the other factors. This is correct, but as the *ending* features of the Gospel Age in 1914—not the *beginning* of "the time of the end"! The following quotation from a sermon Russell preached during the war further proves the point:

The *present great war* in Europe is the *beginning of the Armageddon* of the Scriptures (Rev. 16:16-20). It will eventuate in the complete overthrow of all the systems of error which have so long oppressed the people of God and deluded the world . . . We believe the present war cannot last much longer until revolution shall break out [italics mine].⁵⁸

An example of an article in the *Watch Tower* which reflects a rejection of some of the key signs of the "time of the end" currently accepted by the Jehovah's Witnesses, is that by H. Grattan Guinness. It appeared in the September, 1884 issue:

Now consider the subject of the signs of the times. Remarks on this subject are too often made which betray a want of intelligent comprehension of the nature of the signs that are according to Scripture to indicate the "time of the end." A careless reading of our Lord's

⁵⁷ *Watch Tower Reprints*, I, (March, 1884), p. 605. Compare with C. T. Russell, *The Battle of Armageddon* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1897), pp. 563f.

⁵⁸ *Pastor Russell's Sermons* (Brooklyn: People's Pulpit Association, 1917), p. 676.

prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives seems to be the cause of much of this misapprehension. His predictions of wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, are quoted as if they and such like things were to be the signs of the end of the age. A little accurate attention to the order of his statements would at once show that, so far from this being the case, he mentions these as the characteristic and common events of the entire interval prior to his coming. Wars and calamities, persecution and apostasy, martyrdom, treachery, abounding iniquity, Gospel preaching, the fall of Jerusalem, the great tribulation of Israel, which has, as we know, extended over 1,800 years; all these things were to fill the interval, not to be signs of the immediate proximity of the second advent. How could things of common, constant occurrence be in themselves signs of any uncommon and unique crisis? What commoner all through the ages than wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes? These, as marking the course of the age, can never indicate its close.

... No, there was nothing special to alarm the antediluvians before the day that Noah entered into the ark; nothing special to startle the men of Sodom ere the fire from heaven fell; and like as it was in those days, so will it be in these. All going on just as usual, no single sign to attract the world's attention. "None of the wicked shall understand" the true state of affairs, only the "wise" enlightened by the word of prophecy.⁵⁹

The reader is reminded that this article appeared in *Zion's Watch Tower* and obviously was approved. Acceptance of the position set forth would eliminate most of the thirty-nine signs listed by the present Witnesses as indicators of the "time of the end" beginning in 1914.

In preparation for the treatment at this point, a study was made to determine how the thirty-nine sign happenings of the present Witness position were viewed by Russell and other Society writers in publications before 1914. In *every case*, it was found that the same or parallel passages and the features of the age used by the present Witness writers to prove that the "time of the end" began in 1914, were explained by Russell and others in the Society to characterize: (1) the entire Gospel Age, (2) the "time of the end" as viewed at that time—1799-1914, or (3) the Harvest period, 1874-1914.

⁵⁹ *Watch Tower Reprints*, I (September, 1884), p. 661.

If presently accepted signs of the "last days" are capable of such flexible interpretation and application, certainly they cannot be used to *prove* that Christ has been invisibly present *since* 1914 and that the "time of the end" began at that time!

Of the many signs stated by the Witnesses in support of their views that the "time of the end" began in 1914, the following were selected as examples of why these and other such signs, cannot be used in support of that date.

1. *Earthquakes.* The *Awake!*, October 8, 1968 issue, quotes *Changing Times*: "In this century earthquakes have killed more than 900,000 people."⁶⁰ The May 1, 1970 *Watchtower* cites the same figure and the significance of earthquakes:

It has been reported that the severity and deadliness of earthquakes have increased markedly since the "time of the end" commenced for this old system in 1914. In fact, over 900,000 persons have died from earthquakes in this century, including close to 1,250 in the United States.⁶¹

Such statements and statistics appear convincing to the unquestioning reader; but that such actually refute the Witnesses' claims concerning 1914 is not difficult to establish.

In the article on "Disasters" in *Collier's Encyclopedia*, there is a selection of some of the world's major disasters, including earthquakes. In this article, it is found that just two earthquakes which occurred early in the twentieth century, *before* 1914, caused the deaths of 520,000. This is *more than half* of the 900,000 which were used as "evidence" that the "time of the end" *began* in 1914!

1905. April 4. Four villages were razed and 370,000 persons killed in an earthquake felt over an area of 1,000,000 square miles in central India. . . .

1908. December 28. The great Messina earthquake killed 150,000 persons in southern Italy and Sicily, including 85,000 in the city of Messina alone, which was totally destroyed. This was one of the most disastrous of recorded earthquakes.⁶²

⁶⁰ XLIX, p. 9.

⁶¹ XCI, p. 270.

⁶² Eileen Teclaff, (1964), VIII, p. 254.

It may interest the reader that earthquakes have been studied instrumentally only since early in the twentieth century, and "if all earthquakes down to zero magnitude could be detected, the number would be between one and ten million each year." John H. Hodgson, *Earthquakes and Earth Structure* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 109, 110.

Following the Witnesses' reasoning to a logical conclusion, the above facts would argue that the "time of the end" began *before* 1914!

2. "*Disobedient to parents,*" "*Lovers of money,*" "*Lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God,*" "*Having a form of godly devotion but proving false to its power.*" The *Awake!* issue of October 8, 1968 (pp. 10, 11) presents the foregoing under four points as signs of the "last days." The reference from which these are drawn is II Timothy 3:2-5. In an article of some length in the May 1, 1899 *Watch Tower*, this passage, including verse 1 is quoted and explained. The discussion is introduced with the statement:

Claiming, as we do, that we are now living in the closing days of the Gospel age, it is quite proper that we should look about us to see whether or not present conditions correspond to the Apostle's inspired descriptions of what must be expected in the last days of this age.⁶³

Each portion of the passage is examined and viewed as being fulfilled at that time:

Having satisfied ourselves respecting the fulfilment of the Apostle's charges against "Christendom" and having found his predictions fully corroborated by facts well witnessed to, the question arises, Can the Lord's truly consecrated people learn any further valuable lessons and what are they?⁶⁴

Corroboration of the fulfillment of this prophecy is drawn from contemporary sources: the Governor of the State of New Hampshire and the Methodist *Epworth Herald*. If this Timothy passage seemed to apply so well in the 1890's, it is difficult to see how the same passage can be used to prove that this world has been in the "last days" only since 1914.

3. "*Men Becoming Faint Out of World-wide Fear.*" This sign is based on Luke 21:26. That this verse had fulfillment before 1914 to Russell and Society writers is clear. It is applied by Russell to that which he observed in 1879:

. . . Today every civilized nation is in dread, and Nihilism, Communism and Socialism, are household words, and we see "men's hearts failing for fear and for looking after those things *coming* on the earth,

⁶³ *Watch Tower Reprints*, III, p. 2459.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2463.

for the powers of heaven (governments) shall be shaken." Luke xxi. 26.⁶⁵

In 1882, J. C. Sunderlin also saw fulfillment of Luke 21:26:

It is a *fact*, not an *assumption*, but a solemn fact, that we are *now* living in a time when crime and *corruption* have assumed prodigious proportions Even all the machinery of church and state seems to be so rotten that many are exclaiming, without knowledge that their utterances are the fulfillment of the spirit of prophecy: "I don't know what we are coming to!" Thus already their hearts are beginning to "fail them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." (Luke 21:26)⁶⁶

4. "*Increased Lawlessness.*" In the May, 1882 *Watch Tower* it is reported that "a late secular paper of some note said that crimes were *becoming* so frequent that they, in their weekly issue, could only make a *statement* of them, not having room for particulars."⁶⁷

5. "*This Good News of the Kingdom Will Be Preached. . . .*" (NWT) Based on Matthew 24:14, the sign as stated in *Make Sure of All Things* adds to the Scripture: "World-wide Preaching of the Established Kingdom as Good News" (p. 338). The Witnesses currently quote their own works and other publications to indicate that they have covered the earth with their witnessing and thereby fulfilled Matthew 24:14. Russell proclaimed that the fulfillment had already been realized in the nineteenth century:

The text says nothing about how the testimony will be received. This witness has already been given. In 1861 the reports of the Bible Societies showed that the Gospel had been published in every language of earth, though not all of earth's millions had received it. No, not one half of the fourteen hundred millions living have ever heard the name of Jesus. Yet the condition of the text is fulfilled: the gospel has been preached in all the world for a *witness*—to every *nation*.⁶⁸

Eleven years later Russell again confirmed the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14:

⁶⁵ *Watch Tower Reprints*, I (September, 1879), p. 26.

⁶⁶ *Watch Tower Reprints*, I (May, 1882), p. 353.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

⁶⁸ *The Divine Plan of the Ages* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1886), pp. 91, 92.

This *witness* has already been given: the word of the Lord, the gospel of the Kingdom, has been published to every nation of earth. Each individual has not heard it; but that is not the statement of the prophecy. It was to be, and has been, a national proclamation. And *the end has come!*⁶⁹

6. "*Nations Confused and Perplexed as to Course.*" This sign is based upon Luke 21:25. In May, 1882, one is told:

No sane man today, unless he is trying to sustain a creed, fails to see (recognize) that thrones stand unsteady, and that throughout the world there is a feeling of *distrust* among all classes; there is "*perplexity.*" Luke 21:25. Verily, the foundations of the earth *do shake.*⁷⁰

7. "*Separating the People of the Nations into 'Sheep' and 'Goats.'*" In an article entitled "The Presence of the Son of Man," published in 1910, the reader is informed that

some very earnest Bible students believe that we are in this harvest period now; that the Son of Man, the glorious Messiah, invisible to men, is even now present doing a searching and separating work in his church⁷¹

8. "*Instability and Insecurity World-wide Despite Claims of Leaders.*" References quoted in connection with this sign are Jeremiah 6:14 and Ezekiel 13:10, 11. Both passages emphasize the saying of peace when there is no peace. Six pages of the book *The Battle Armageddon* (1897) are given to the development of this very theme, "The Cry of 'Peace! Peace! When There Is No Peace'" (pp. 150-156). "Such a proclamation, participated in by all the nations of Christendom was that which was issued from the great naval display on the occasion of the opening of the Baltic canal."⁷²

9. "*Many Will Ridicule Sign Though Evidence Conclusive.*" While applied by the present Witnesses to the 1914 "time of the end," it was applied by Russell to those who would scoff during the presence of Christ, according to his view 1874-1914.⁷³

10. "*Men Seek Relief in Makeshift Organizations, Clubs, Institutions.*" This sign is based on Revelation 6:15-17. Russell

⁶⁹ *The Battle of Armageddon*, p. 568.

⁷⁰ *Watch Tower Reprints*, I, p. 353.

⁷¹ *Watch Tower Reprints*, V (November 1, 1910), p. 4706.

⁷² *The Battle of Armageddon*, p. 151.

⁷³ *The Time Is at Hand*, pp. 167, 170.

explains this passage as realizing fulfillment in the late nineteenth century (1889):

The real fulfilment is already beginning: the great, the rich, and no less the poor, are seeking to the mountains and rocks and caves for shelter from the darkening storm of troubles which all see is gathering.⁷⁴

If space permitted, each of the thirty-nine signs could be dealt with as has been done with the above ten. Several conclusions may be stated at this point: (1) None of these signs permit an establishing of a particular date for the beginning of the "time of the end." (2) The signs seem so general that they can be applied just as well to the nineteenth century as to the twentieth. (3) Would it not be just as logical to date the beginning of the "time of the end" in the 1940's after the conflict of World War II? Or one could select some other date, such as 1967 when the city of Jerusalem was liberated from foreign control by the six-day war (June 5-10).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.