

False Prophecy in the Watchtower Society

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If the Watchtower Society is the sole channel for God on earth, then according to the Bible its prophecy must come true. How reliable have its prophecies been?

What does the Watchtower Society teach and claim about prophecy?

In *The Watchtower*, March 1, 1975, Jehovah's Witness leaders declared, "The Bible itself establishes the rules for testing a prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:20-23 and 13:1-8..." (p. 151). Its own rules, with which we agree, are biblical and are our standard; they demand 100 percent accuracy for any prophecy that is made. The Society's publication *Aid to Bible Understanding* teaches all Jehovah's Witnesses that prophecy includes "a declaration of something to come" and that "the source of all true prophecy is Jehovah God."¹ This publication further states that "correct understanding of prophecy would still be made available by God... particularly in the foretold 'time of the end'..." (p. 1346). (In context, "time of the end" here includes the emergence of the Watchtower Society.)

Aid to Bible Understanding further defines a "prophet" as "one through whom the divine will and purpose are made known" (p. 1347). (What's more, the Watchtower Society makes the astonishing claim that it is the true prophetic mouthpiece for God on earth at this time.)² Furthermore, the Watchtower tells all Jehovah's Witnesses that "the three essentials for establishing the credentials of the true prophet" are 1) speaking in Jehovah's name, 2) "the things foretold would come to pass," and 3) these prophecies would promote true worship by being in harmony with God's already-revealed Word. The Watchtower claims that the true prophet would "express... God's mind on *matters*... [and] every prediction [will be] related to God's will, purpose, standards or judgment."³

In light of these lofty claims, the Society has succinctly declared its position and authority. It claims to speak in the name of Jehovah, to be His prophet predicting future events, and to be in harmony with His Word. It confidently predicts that what it says must "come to pass." *The Watchtower*, September 1, 1979, declared, "For nearly 60 years now the Jeremiah class [the Jehovah's Witnesses] have faithfully spoken forth Jehovah's word" (p. 29).

It is clear from this that the Watchtower Society confidently claims to prophetically speak for God. We will now examine some of the implications of its own

claims to be speaking for God.

Has the Watchtower Society ever given false prophecies?

How have the predictions of the Watchtower Society stood the test of history? Let's look at a few. Frequently the Watchtower has attempted to predict the start of the Battle of Armageddon (the end of the world). (Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from *The Watchtower*, dates appear at left.)⁴ Let's look at a few predictions they have made in the name of God concerning the end of the world—what they often call Armageddon. (Because they believe Jesus has already returned invisibly, they look forward to the Battle of Armageddon, which they believe will usher in “paradise earth,” not the Second Coming of Christ.) As you examine these prophecies, see if you really think that God spoke through them and gave the world the truth. Here are just a few of the predictions they have made through the years:

- In 1877 they said, “THE END OF THIS WORLD... is nearer than most men suppose....”⁵
- In 1886 they said, “The time is come for Messiah to take the dominion of the earth....”⁶
- In 1889 they said, “... we present proofs that the setting up of the kingdom of God has already begun ... and that ‘the battle of the great day of God almighty’ (Revelation 16:14), which will end in AD 1914 with the complete overthrow of the earth’s present rulership, is already commenced.”⁷ (In their 1915 edition of this same book they changed “AD 1914” to “AD 1915.”)
- On July 15, 1894 they said, “We see no reason for changing the figures—nor could we change them if we would. *They are, we believe, God’s dates not ours* (emphasis added). But bear in mind that the end of 1914 is not the date for the *beginning*, but for the *end* of the time of trouble” (p. 1677 of *Reprints*, see note 4).
- In 1904 they said, “The stress of the great time of trouble will be on us soon, somewhere between 1910 and 1912 culminating with the end of the ‘times of the Gentiles,’ October 1914.”⁸
- On May 1, 1914 they said, “There is absolutely no ground for Bible students to question that the consummation of this gospel age is now even at the door.... The great crisis... that will consume the ecclesiastical heavens and the social earth, is very near.”⁹

But the year 1914 ended without a single one of these predictions coming true.¹⁰

In *Pastor Russell’s Sermons* (1917, p. 676), Charles Taze Russell, founder and first president of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, said of World War I, “The present great war in Europe is the beginning of the Armageddon of the Scriptures.”

After Russell’s death, “Judge” Rutherford continued the tradition of false prophecies given in the name and authority of God. He believed and stated that 1925 would mark the year of Christ’s kingdom. He was wrong.¹¹ In *The Watch-*

tower magazine, September 1, 1922, we find stated, "The date 1925 is even more distinctly indicated by the Scriptures because it is fixed by the law of God to Israel.... [One can see how] even before 1925 the great crisis will be reached and probably passed" (p. 262).

In *The Watchtower* magazine, April 1, 1923, it stated, "Our thought is that 1925 is definitely settled by the Scriptures" (p. 106). But these and all other predictions proved false.

After utterly failing in the 1914 and 1925 predictions, finding many people leaving the Society, the leaders of the Watchtower became more cautious in setting dates. Nevertheless, they continued to hold out the promise of the imminence of Armageddon and the subsequent millennial kingdom. From 1930 to 1939 there were numerous declarations made about the future. For example:

- In 1930 they said, "The great climax is at hand."¹²
- In 1931 they said, 'Armageddon is at hand...'¹³
- In 1933 they said, "The incontrovertible proof that the time of deliverance is at hand."¹⁴
- In 1933 they said, "That [Jehovah] has now opened these prophecies to the understanding of His anointed is evidence that the time of the battle is near; hence the prophecy is of profound interest to the anointed."¹⁵
- In 1939 they said, "The battle of the great day of God Almighty is very near."¹⁶

In fact, from May, 1940, to April 15, 1943, just three short years, the Society made at least 44 predictions of the imminence of Armageddon.¹⁷ Here are a few examples from this period and later:

- In September 1940, they said, "The kingdom is here, the king is enthroned. Armageddon is just ahead.... The great climax has been reached" (*The Messenger*, Sept. 1940, p. 6).
- In *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1941 they said, "The FINAL END IS VERY NEAR" (p. 276). "The remaining months before Armageddon..." (p. 288).
- On January 15, 1942 they said, "The time is at hand for Jesus Christ to take possession of all things" (p. 28).
- On May 1, 1942 they said, "Now, with Armageddon immediately before us..." (p. 139).
- On May 1, 1943 they said, "The final end of all things... is at hand" (p. 139).
- On September 1, 1944 they said, "Armageddon is near at hand" (p. 264).
- In 1946, "The disaster of Armageddon... is at the door."¹⁸
- In 1950 they said, "The March is on! Where? To the field of Armageddon for the 'war of the great day of God the Almighty.'"¹⁹
- In 1953 they said, "Armageddon is so near at hand it will strike the generation now living."²⁰
- In 1955 they said, "It is becoming clear that the war of Armageddon is near its breaking out point."²¹

- In 1958 they said, “When will Armageddon be fought?... It will be very soon.”²²

These are just a few of the many false prophecies *The Watchtower* has made over the years. Is there any wonder the Jehovah’s Witness leaders in their *Awake!* magazine, October 8, 1968, page 23, were forced to admit that “certain persons” had previously falsely predicted the end of the world? In this article Jehovah’s Witness leaders asked why these false prophecies were given. Every Jehovah’s Witness should take note of what they said. They said it was because they lacked God’s guidance.

In this article in *Awake!* magazine the Watchtower leadership admitted:

True, there have been those in times past who predicted an “end to the world,” even announcing a specific date. The “end” did not come. They were guilty of false prophesying. Why? What was missing?... Missing from such people were God’s truths and the evidence that He was guiding and using them. But what about today? Today we have the evidence required, all of it, and it is overwhelming!²³

Notice that the Watchtower leaders have condemned themselves as false prophets. They admit that all through the years they were speaking in the name and authority of God, they were really lying and giving false prophecies.

If we accept that they gave false prophecies, God in Deuteronomy 18:20-22 says in the *New World Translation*:

However, the prophet who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die. And in case you should say in your heart: “How shall we know the word that Jehovah has not spoken?” When the prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and the word does not occur or come true, that is the word that Jehovah did not speak. With presumptuousness the prophet spoke it. You must not get frightened at him.

But in spite of their tragic record of predictions that did not come to pass, they disregarded the Word of God in Deuteronomy 18 and as the above quote from *Awake!* magazine shows, they confidently asked the people to believe that now they would speak for God in predicting the future. They now began to strongly imply it would be the year 1975 in which Armageddon would occur.²⁴

- In 1973 they said, “The ‘Great Tribulation’ is very near.”²⁵
- In 1973 they said, “According to the Bible’s timetable, the beginning of the seventh millennium of mankind’s existence on earth is near at hand, within this generation.”²⁶
- In *Kingdom Ministry*, May, 1974, the world’s end was said to be “so very near that Jehovah’s Witnesses were commended who sold “their homes and property” to devote themselves to full-time service in “the short time remaining before the wicked world’s end” (p. 3).
- In 1975 they said, “The fulfillment... is immediately ahead of us.”²⁷
- In 1975 they said, “Very short must be the time that remains....”²⁸

Many Jehovah’s Witnesses living today can remember when the year 1975

came and went, bringing great discouragement to the faithful and providing further embarrassment to the Watchtower Society.

But the charade still continued. From 1976 to 1981 the Society repeatedly said that Armageddon was “very near,” “at hand,” etc. And from 1981 to the present the Society still claims that the world is near its end.

It is said that Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Watchtower’s authoritative statements are true and genuinely reflect God’s guidance. But if the Society has been indisputably wrong in every period, how can modern Witnesses trust it? Would any employer rehire a thief for the tenth time after nine offenses? The answer is no. Thousands of Jehovah’s Witnesses have left the Watchtower after having lived through the high expectations and heartbreaking disappointments of these false prophecies. Thousands more have left who investigated these false prophecies in the Watchtower literature.

Still, the Watchtower Society claims that Jehovah’s Witnesses’ “unswerving attention to such inspired prophecy has held them true to the right course till now.”²⁹ After reading its false prophecies through the years and its own admission that it lied, what do you think?

The Society still claims of Armageddon, “Jehovah has His own fixed date for its arrival.”³⁰ The Watchtower has missed that date every time it has predicted it.

Does the Watchtower Society admit to false prophecy?

Jehovah’s Witnesses have admitted serious errors. In their official Watchtower publication, *Man’s Salvation* (1975), they now admit that Charles Taze Russell was wrong in his 1874 prediction of Christ’s second coming.³¹ They admit that they were wrong in their 1914 prediction.³² They admit that they were wrong in their prediction of 1925.³³ They admit that they were wrong about their prediction in 1975.³⁴

Yet in that same year in their *1975 Yearbook* they claim that for over a century “Jehovah’s servants” have “enjoyed spiritual enlightenment and direction.”³⁵ What do you think? Does the evidence show they have passed the second test they themselves laid down, namely that any prophecy given in the name of God must come true? Have their prophecies come true 100 percent of the time?³⁶ If not, can the Watchtower Society claim it is God’s sole channel of communication to men on earth today?

Notes

¹ *Aid to Bible Understanding* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971), p. 1344.

[Note: Most Jehovah’s Witnesses’ materials are published anonymously by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society [WBTS], Brooklyn, NY. Few are listed with a specific author.]

² *The Watchtower*, July 1, 1943, p. 203; Mar. 15, 1971, p. 189, Apr. 1, 1972, p. 197, Jan. 15, 1959, pp. 40-41; *The Nations Shall Know That I Am Jehovah—How?* (Brooklyn, NY: WBTS, 1971), pp. 58, 70-71.

³ *Aid to Bible Understanding*, op. cit., p. 1348.

⁴ Reprints of early editions of *The Watchtower* are available in *Reprints of the Original Watchtower and Herald of Christ’s Presence, 1879-1916* (Vols. 1-12), from Chicago Bible Students, Box

- 6016, Chicago, IL 60680.
- ⁵ N. H. Barbour and C. T. Russell, *Three Worlds and the Harvest of This World* (Rochester: Barbour and Russell, 1877), p.17; cited in Edmund Gruss, *The Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Speculation* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 82.
 - ⁶ *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, January, 1886, p. 1 (Reprints, Vol. 2, p. 817. Available from Chicago Bible Students.)
 - ⁷ C. T. Russell, *The Time Is at Hand* (Allegheny, PA: WBTS, 1889), p. 101; cited in Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Speculation*, op. cit., p. 83.
 - ⁸ C. T. Russell, *The New Creation* (WBTS, 1904), p. 579; cited in Gruss, *ibid.*, p. 84.
 - ⁹ *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1914, p. 134 (Reprints p. 5450).
 - ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-26.
 - ¹¹ J. F. Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* (WBTS, 1920), pp. 97, 105, 140; Gruss, *ibid.*, p. 87.
 - ¹² J. F. Rutherford, *Light* (WBTS, 1930), Vol. 2, p. 327; cited in Gruss, *ibid.*, p. 89.
 - ¹³ J. F. Rutherford, *Vindication* (WBTS, 1931), Vol. 1, p. 147.
 - ¹⁴ J. F. Rutherford, *Preparation*, op. cit., p. 11.
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.
 - ¹⁶ J. F. Rutherford, *Salvation* (WBTS, 1939), p. 310; cited in Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Speculation*, op. cit., p. 89.
 - ¹⁷ Copies on file. Thanks to Professor Edmond C. Gruss for supplying them.
 - ¹⁸ *Let God Be True* (WBTS, 1946), p. 194.
 - ¹⁹ *This Means Everlasting Life* (WBTS, 1950), p. 311; cited in Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Speculation*, op. cit., p. 93.
 - ²⁰ *You May Survive Armageddon Into God's New World*, op. cit., p. 11, cf. p. 362. This statement is from a speech given in 1953.
 - ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 331.
 - ²² *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* (WBTS, 1958), p. 205.
 - ²³ *Awake!* October 8, 1968, p. 23.
 - ²⁴ See the discussion with photo documentation in Duane Magnani, *The Watchtower Files: Dialogue With a Jehovah's Witness* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1985), Vol. 2, pp. 53-55; and Gruss, *The Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Speculation*, op. cit., pp. 13-15; *Then is Finished the Mystery of God* (WBTS, 1969), pp. 364-371.
 - ²⁵ *True Peace and Security—From What Source?* (WBTS, 1973), p. 83.
 - ²⁶ *God's Kingdom of a Thousand Years Has Approached*, (WBTS, 1973), p. 44.
 - ²⁷ *Man's Salvation Out of World Distress at Hand*, op. cit., p. 312.
 - ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 349.
 - ²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.
 - ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 309.
 - ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 287. Under oath, legal counsel for the Society, Hayden C. Covington also admitted the prophecy was false, and that it nevertheless had to be accepted by Witnesses to preserve "unity at all costs." See transcript in Gruss, *The Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Speculation*, op. cit., pp. 99-101.
 - ³² *1975 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (WBTS, 1974), p. 76.
 - ³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.
 - ³⁴ *1980 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (WBTS, 1979), pp. 30-31.
 - ³⁵ *1975 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*, op. cit., p. 245.
 - ³⁶ Additional documentation of false prophecies and the Watchtower Society's suppression of vital information can be found in Gruss, *The Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Speculation*, op. cit., and in former 25-year member Carl Olof Jonsson's *The Gentile Times Reconsidered* (La Jolla, CA: Good News Defenders, 1983).

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