Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Dating Game

Author : David Henke

Date : March 16, 2017

August, 1999

The Watchtower Society has for its entire history been preoccupied with prophecy and Armageddon. That is the result of the attraction to end time scenarios by the founder, Charles Taze Russell. Russell immersed himself in the prophetic teachings of that time, including the Second Advent movement, which is still being echoed by the Watchtower Society.

The chief manifestation of this preoccupation is their concept of salvation. To a Jehovah’s Witness salvation is survival of Armageddon into the New World

The format for this article will be based upon our witnessing manual ***Jehovah’s Witnesses and The Dating Game***. Each quote in the manual will be cited with comments about how to present the information.

This, and other witnessing manuals, are designed to provide photostatic documentation from the actual sources for the claims of false prophecies, doctrinal changes, scholastic dishonesty, etc.. To present anything to a Jehovah’s Witness out of any source other than the Society’s publications is to invite dismissal for being inaccurate, falsified, or misunderstood. Therefore, everything must be documentable from their publications, either by the actual publication, or a photocopy. You should obtain your own manual so you can write notes in the margins to make best use of it in a witnessing situation.

The ***Dating Game*** manual has several sections. The first section answers some anticipated objections. The second section defines a true, or false, prophecy and its discernment. Section three establishes the Watchtower’s claims to be a prophet of Jehovah. The fourth section documents the actual false prophecies including 1914, 1925, and 1975.

Section One: “But that is old light!”

The Society believes in what they call ‘new light’. In essence that means that what is taught and believed as true today can be declared false tomorrow. They quote Proverbs 4:18 as justification for the light of their understanding getting brighter.

“But the path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established.” (New World Translation)

At the end of this series of articles it is my hope that you will be able to demonstrate to a Jehovah's Witness that Proverbs 4:19 is more appropriate.

"The way of the wicked ones is like the gloom; they have not known at what they keep stumbling." (NWT)

A Jehovah's Witness may say that the documentation you show them is 'old light' and not relevant today. The answer to this objection is found in the first two pages of the Dating Game manual. The first quote says,

"But that does not relieve each individual Christian of the responsibility to dig deeper into God's Word, for the purpose of getting the full depth of the thoughts explained. This involves looking up the scriptures cited. It means reading the footnotes in Watchtower articles, some of which refer the reader to **an older publication that provides a fuller explanation of a certain passage or prophecy**. It requires digging deeper, putting forth effort to locate that older publication and then studying the pages referred to" (Watchtower, page 12, June 15, 1985).

Why would the Watchtower refer a Witness to an older publication if there is a risk of it being inaccurate, or false? They seem to be endorsing the value of older publications, especially those that offer a 'fuller explanation' of a prophecy.

The next quote is much more explicit.

"A new view of truth never can contradict a former truth. 'New light' never extinguishes older 'light,' but adds to it" (Zion's ***Watchtower***, page 155, February 1881).

If a 'new view of truth' extinguishes a former truth how are the humble Jehovah's Witnesses to know that the new light is true? Might it not also become untrue? Does this not place ones personal salvation in the hands of those who come up with this 'light'? If the Witness' understanding of truth is increased, and not contradicted, then Christians would have no objection. However, this has never been the case.

Section Two: Who Is A False Prophet?

The point to be made from the next quote is something that Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses agree upon. A prophet must be completely accurate.

"Since the Bible was completed, and 'inspiration' is no longer necessary, a true prophet is one who is faithfully proclaiming what is written in the Bible…. But it may be asked, How are we to know whether one is a true or a false prophet? There are at least three ways by which we can positively decide: (1) If he is a true prophet, his message will come to pass exactly as prophesied. If he is a false prophet, his prophesy will fail to come to pass…" (Watchtower, page 154, May 15, 1930).

This next set of quotes from the same article cited above should be pointed out as you go through the manual but then remember to come back to them at the end. When you have demonstrated the examples of false prophesying you should ask whether the Watchtower was speaking its own "dreams and guesses," or, "man-made theories." They say, "The difference between a true and a false prophet is that the one is speaking the word of the Lord and the other is speaking his own dreams and guesses..."

"The true prophet of God today will be telling forth what the Bible teaches, and those things that the Bible tells us are soon to come to pass. He will not be sounding forth man made theories or guesses, either his own or those of others."

Does a person have to claim to be a prophet in order to be tested by the biblical standard? No. He only needs to claim to speak God's truth, as a teacher would. Prophesying in the Bible involves both the foretelling of the future (prediction) and the telling forth (preaching) of God's truth. Here is what the next quote from the manual says.

"In the New Testament, and in our day, the word 'prophet' has a thought similar to that of our word 'teacher', in the sense of a public expounder. Hence when the term 'false prophet' is used, we shall get the correct thought if we think of a false teacher" (The Watch Tower, pages 154-155, May 15, 1930).

So, it is not necessarily important whether the Watchtower ever claimed to be a prophet. This is a common objection by the Witnesses to the charge of false prophesying. But, they did make the claim.

The Claim: "They Shall Know That A Prophet Was Among Them"

In the Awake magazine of October 8, 1968 the following statement is made about people other than Jehovah's Witnesses. However, this will turn out to be a case of "what is good for the goose is good for the gander."

"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! All the many, many parts of the great sign of the 'last days' are here, together with verifying Bible chronology" (***Awake***, page 23, October 8, 1968).

When you have taken a Witness through this manual to the end come back to this page and ask some questions like the following. Did the Watchtower predict and "end to the world?" Did they announce a "specific date?" Did the "end" come? Why? What was missing? Was it true that missing from the Watchtower Society were God's truths and the evidence that he was guiding and

using them?

The next quote from the April 1st, 1972 Watchtower (page 197) is the most explicit example of the Society's claim to prophetic office. In an article entitled ***"They Shall Know That A Prophet Was Among Them,"*** they said,

"So, does Jehovah have a prophet to help them, to warn them of dangers and to declare things to come? **These questions can be answered in the affirmative.** Who is this prophet?… This "prophet" was not one man, but was a body of men and women. It was the small group of footstep followers of Jesus Christ, known at that time as International Bible Students. Today they are known as Jehovah's Christian Witnesses…. Of course, it is easy to say that this group acts as a 'prophet' of God. ***It is another thing to prove it. The only way that this can be done is to review the record. What does it show?"***

When confronted with this quote the most frequent objection is that "prophet" is not meant literally but in a symbolic sense. Here is where you take them back to the earlier statement about a false prophet being understood as a false teacher.

In this same article (page 200) they say, "This would indicate that Jehovah's witnesses today make their declaration of the good news of the Kingdom **under angelic direction and support."**

When you have shown the false prophecies to a Witness come back to this quote and ask who dropped the ball? Was it Jehovah? Jesus? The Holy Spirit? The angels? The Governing Body? Or, maybe the Writing Department? The quote continues.

"Yes, the time must come shortly that the nations will have to know that really a 'prophet' of Jehovah was among them…. More than that, **Jehovah is interested** not only in vindication of his own name but also **in vindicating his 'prophet'."**

Did Jehovah vindicate his "prophet?"

The **Watchtower** of January 15, 1959 said, "Whom has God actually used as his prophet?… Jehovah's witnesses are deeply grateful today that the plain facts show that God has been pleased to use them."

The Society has for its entire history viewed itself as prophetic in stature. This is evident from **The Nations Shall Know That I Am Jehovah** book (page 58). It says,

"Who is Ezekiel's present-day counterpart, whose message and conduct correspond with that of that ancient prophet of Jehovah? Of whom today was he a 'sign' or 'portent'? Not of some individual man, but of a group of people…. So it is with the modern-day counterpart of Ezekiel: it is, not one person's body, but a composite body, made up of many members."

Was Ezekiel a prophet in a sense? Was he a prophet who predicted the future? So then, according to the Watchtower, Jehovah is saying through the pages of the Watchtower publications that the entire organization is a prophet in whatever sense you want to consider. The biblical test of a prophet then must be applied. That test, found in Deuteronomy 18:22, says, ***"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."***

The Watchtower Society clearly claimed the office of a prophet in their April 1, 1972 Watchtower. The claim had been made many times before as was demonstrated in the previous article. They have also clearly defined the test of a prophet as requiring 100% accuracy. Therefore, the ground having been prepared, let us look at the actual prophecies beginning with the earliest.

1914: The End of the Times of the Gentiles

The original teaching of the Watchtower Society was that Christ returned invisibly in 1874, began the establishment of the His kingdom and was enthroned in 1878, and would culminate the victory of His kingdom in 1914 with the Battle of Armageddom. However, when 1914 came and Armageddon did not they had to make an adjustment. So much emphasis had been given to 1914, and a World War did begin then, that they decided to retain the date and spiritualize its meaning. The adjustment was to move the Second Coming (Presence) forward forty years from 1874. This was the same solution taken by the Seventh-day Adventists to the failure of William Miller's prediction of Christ's return in 1844. The date was retained but the event that was predicted was "spiritualized" i.e., Christ "returned" by ascending His throne in heaven.

Today Jehovah's Witnesses are generally unaware of the 1874 and 1878 dates. They understand that some expected, even predicted, Armageddon in 1914. The following quotes will evidence a certainty about the predictions. They will also attribute this certainty to God and deny their own hand in it.

Charles Taze Russell said in his book **The Time Is At Hand**, pages 76-77, "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. 1914; and that that date will be the farthest limit of the rule of imperfect men."

Notice that this is "Bible evidence proving" the 1914 date. It is also "the farthest limit" of man's rule. Not the beginning of the "time of the end" but the end itself.

Another interesting point to make about this and other quotes from Russell's book **The Time Is At Hand** is that we are warned in Luke 21:8 that many will come saying, "I am Christ and the time is at hand," the very title of Russell's book. Russell made the claim that the "Church" corporately, which would include Christ and the "anointed" 144,000, comprise the "Christ class". Today Jehovah's Witnesses of the Great Crowd class don't have Christ as their mediator. That role is

filled by the “Christ class” embodied in the Governing Body. Russell stated this position in **The Time Is At Hand** on pages 252, and 255. It is almost tempting to think Christ was warning us specifically about the Watchtower in His choice of words at Luke 21:8.

Again, in the Time book, page 99, Russell says, “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 God, will be accomplished by the end of A. D. 1914.

Again we have “strong Bible evidence” and an “established truth” for 1914 as the time of the end. Jehovah’s Witnesses are not free to disagree with the Watchtower on such things. Individual conviction and personal opinion must be silent if they disagree. To disagree, even privately, is to risk disfellowshipping, which is tantamount to losing one’s salvation in their eyes.

Russell again says on page 101, “Be not surprised, then, when in subsequent chapters we present proofs that the setting up of the Kingdom of God is already begun, that it is pointed out in prophecy as due to begin the exercise of power in A. D. 1878, and that the ‘battle of the great day of God Almighty’ (Rev. 16:14), which will end in A. D. 1914 with the complete overthrow of earth’s present rulership, is already commenced. The gathering of the armies is plainly visible from the standpoint of God’s Word.”

The buildup to 1914 had been going on for many years. The Watchtower magazine (July 15, 1894, page 226) said, “Now, in view of recent labor troubles and threatened anarchy our readers are writing to know if there may not be a mistake in the 1914 date…. 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. 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.”

God’s dates, not ours? Couldn’t change them even if they would? Well, two decades later they changed the date because it turned out not to be God’s date after all. As the April 1, 1972 Watchtower said (page 197), “They shall know that a prophet was among them.” And, the only way to prove this is to “review the record. What does it show?”

In post 1914 editions of The Time Is At Hand the 1914 date is changed to 1915. They were grasping for straws hoping that their prediction would be fulfilled.

1925: The Earthly Phase Begins? Or Not?

Even though Russell proved to be a false prophet, and date setting to be a risky proposition, Judge Rutherford, Russell’s self appointed successor, didn’t learn the lesson.

Rutherford’s prediction was that the Old Testament Jewish Jubilee cycle would have an ultimate

prophetic fulfillment in 1925 with the return of the Old Testament saints named in chapter eleven of Hebrews. At this time Armageddon would also take place to usher in the beginning of the earthly phase of Christ's kingdom.

In his book **Millions Now Living Will Never Die** (pages 89, 90) Rutherford said, "As we have heretofore stated, the great jubilee cycle is due to begin in 1925. At that time the earthly phase of the kingdom shall be recognized…. Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the Apostle in Hebrews chapter eleven, to the condition of human perfection."

The "earthly phase" of the kingdom follows Armageddon in Watchtower chronology. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses, "confidently" expected Armageddon. However, as 1925 approached there was apparently some questioning of the date. This was reflected in articles that discussed the trustworthiness of the predicted event. One such article was published in the September 1, 1922 Watchtower (page 262), which said, "The date 1925 is even more distinctly indicated by the Scriptures because it is fixed by the law God gave to Israel. Viewing the present situation in Europe, one wonders how it will be possible to hold back the explosion much longer; and that even before 1925 the great crisis will be reached and probably passed."

And again, in the April 1, 1923 Watchtower (page 106) they respond to the question of a reader. "Question…Have we more reason, or as much, to believe the kingdom will be established in 1925 than Noah had to believe that there would be a flood?… Answer: Our thought is, that 1925 is definitely settled by the Scriptures,… but we expect such a climax in the affairs of the world that the people will begin to realize the presence of the Lord and his kingdom power…. As to Noah, the Christian now has much more upon which to base his faith than Noah had (so far as the Scriptures reveal) upon which to base his faith in a coming deluge."

With less than six months remaining before 1925 the certainty was increased. The Society said in the July 15, 1924 Watchtower (page 211), "The year 1925 is a date definitely and clearly marked in the Scriptures, even more clearly than that of 1914." Of course, one could ask how clearly marked was the 1914 date? But that would have been a cynics question.

The Watchtower has, however, given plenty of reason for cynicism. The lead time for an article in the Watchtower during that era is unknown but one could give an educated guess of at least a month, or two. So the next quote from the January 1, 1925 Watchtower (page3) was probably written sometime in November or December at the latest. The editorial decision to say what they did may have come even earlier.

They said, "The year 1925 is here. With great expectation Christians have looked forward to this year. Many have confidently expected that all members of the body of Christ will be changed to heavenly glory during this year. This may be accomplished. It may not be. In his own due time God will accomplish his purposes concerning his own people. Christians should not be so deeply

concerned about what may transpire during this year that they would fail to joyfully do what the Lord would have them to do."

The Watchtower Society leadership KNEW before 1925 arrived that the hopes they had built up among the Witnesses would be dashed. By saying their members should not be so concerned about what would, or would not, happen they were practicing the age old dodge of false prophets, blaming the victims.

The Society kept the prophetic carrot dangling in front of their members however. The return of the Old Testament saints, and the earthly phase of the kingdom, was held out for several years to come. This will be discussed in the third article in this series when we look at the building of Beth Sarim, the House of the Princes, in San Diego, California.

When the 1925 date failed the Watchtower actually blamed the Witnesses for putting too much faith in their expectation of Armageddon, an expectation authored and promoted by the Society itself. However, for years afterward the Watchtower kept up the prophetic fervor by promoting the "soon" expectation of an earthly kingdom wherein the Old Testament saints named in Hebrews chapter eleven would rule in the affairs of men. This time they put their prediction in brick and mortar, or rather stone and stucco.

Beth Sarim: The Testimony

In the Salvation book (copyright 1939, page 311), the Society said, "At San Diego, California, there is a small piece of land, on which, in the year 1929, there was built a house, which is called and known as Beth-Sarim. The Hebrew words Beth Sarim mean 'House of the Princes'; and the purpose of acquiring that property and building the house was that there might be some tangible proof that there are those on earth today who fully believe God and Christ Jesus and in His kingdom, and who believe that the faithful men of old will soon be resurrected by the Lord, be back on earth, and take charge of the visible affairs on earth."

The **Salvation** book goes on to explain that upon their return the Old Testament saints will take up residence in Beth Sarim. The building of the house was to be "a testimony" to the world of the Witnesses faith in Jehovah's "announced purposes" regarding the coming kingdom. In the meantime the title will be held by the Watchtower Society and the home will be available for the use of Watchtower President Judge Rutherford.

Years later, in 1942, the Society continued the expectation associated with Beth Sarim when they said in the book **New World**, "…hence those faithful men of old may be expected back from the dead any day now…. In this expectation the house at San Diego, California, which house has been much publicized with malicious intent by the religious enemy, was built, in 1930, and named 'Beth Sarim', meaning 'House of the Princes'. It is now held in trust for the occupancy of those princes on their return."

They go on to say that “religionists of this doomed world are gnashing their teeth because of the testimony which that ‘House of the Princes’ bears to the new world.” It is more likely that people of that time were somewhere between curious and amused about this ‘testimony’.

A history of the Society was printed in the **1975 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses**. On page 194 they discuss the Beth Sarim property. They say, “In time, a direct contribution was made for the purpose of constructing a house in San Diego for Brother Rutherford’s use. It was not built at the expense of the Watch Tower Society. Concerning this property, the 1939 book Salvation stated: ‘At San Diego, California, there is a small piece of land, on which, in the year 1929, there was built a house, which is called and known as Beth Sarim.’”

When a Christian comes to the above quote while witnessing to a Jehovah’s Witness it is effective to ask the following questions.

According to the 1975 Yearbook what was the purpose of building Beth Sarim? The answer is “for Brother Rutherford’s use.”

According to the **Salvation** book (first quote above) what was the purpose of building Beth Sarim? The answer is that is was to be the residence of the Old Testament saints named in Hebrews chapter eleven, and a “testimony” to the world of this expectation by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The final question is which publication is true? If it is the **Salvation** book, which it is because the official deed says so, then why would the Watchtower say otherwise in the 1975 Yearbook? Could it be that the Society did not want Witnesses to know about a failed prophecy?

The story of Beth Sarim, and another house in San Diego recently revealed by Professor Edmond Gruss, is that Judge Rutherford was becoming a problem drinker at the Brooklyn headquarters. While drunk he would curse and conduct himself irrationally. This created a problem because this conduct was being observed by Bethelites (volunteer workers at Watchtower headquarters) who would talk about it outside Brooklyn. The solution was to get the Judge out of Brooklyn. This was done by inviting the Judge to move to sunny California where he could write his books.

Beth Sarim (4440 Braeburn Dr., San Diego, CA) had a two car garage. In that garage was a new yellow 16 cylinder Cadillac coupe. Why the Judge thought the Old Testament saints would prefer a Cadillac over a chariot would make an interesting discussion. Imagine being their Drivers Ed teacher. In the meantime, until they returned, the Judge would use the car. That car cost between $5400 and $9200 while a new Ford would cost about $600. This was how the Judge lived during the height of the Depression. In 1948 the Watchtower sold its “testimony”.

1975: Time’s Up!

Prophetic speculation seemed to be in the blood of Watchtower leaders from the time of Russell.

Though every previous attempt had failed utterly the lessons were not learned. When the Society's growth statistics began to slow in the mid-sixties their reversal came via a new prophecy.

That prophecy was that 1975 would be the end of 6000 years of human existence from the time of Adam's creation. That 6000 year span of time is believed by Jehovah's Witnesses to be the time of man's self-rule. At the end of 6000 years God will end man's self-rule at the battle of Armageddon and then establish His millennial kingdom for a 1000 years. That equates in Witness chronological belief to 1000 years for each 'day' of Creation, and a thousand year "sabbath" day of rest.

The beginning of the six thousand years was set by the Society as 4026 B.C.E. (Before Common Era). In that year God supposedly created Adam. Counting forward 6000 years from there brings you to 1975, bearing in mind that there is no year zero. The book Life Everlasting – In Freedom of the Sons of God sets forth a chronology of human history as does the book All Scripture Is Inspired of God And Beneficial (page 292-296).

With this chronology in place the Society then said in the Life Everlasting book (page 29), "According to this trustworthy Bible chronology 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."

This statement does not predict Armageddon. It merely says six thousand years of human history will end in 1975. When 1975 did not result in Armageddon Witnesses pointed to this as evidence that they were not guilty of false prophecy. However, all one needs to do is ask any Witness what is supposed to happen when six thousand years of human history has elapsed and you will be told that Armageddon will occur and the Millennial Kingdom will begin. It would be like saying to someone 2 + 2 =, and the person will certainly think 4.

On page 30 of the Life Everlasting book the Society said, "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."

Again, building on the expectation, the Society said in the Watchtower (May 1, 1966, page 271), "According to reliable Bible chronology Adam was created in the year 4026 B.C.E." Then, a caveat is offered, the six thousand years begins after the creation of Eve, i.e., the creation of the complete human species. They say, "Thus, Adam's naming of the animals and his realizing that he needed a counterpart would have occupied only a brief time after his creation. Since it was also Jehovah's purpose for man to multiply and fill the earth, it is logical that he would create Eve soon after Adam, perhaps just a few weeks or months later in the same year, 4026 B.C.E. After her creation, God's rest day, the seventh period, immediately followed…. To calculate where man is in the stream of time relative to God's'seventh day of 7,000 years, we need to determine how long a time elapsed from the year of Adam and Eve's creation in 4026 B.C.E."

Finally, on the same page as above they say, “Hence, when Christians note from God’s timetable the approaching end of 6,000 years of human history, it fills them with anticipation.” Anticipation of what? Could it be a 2 + 2 = kind of thing?

Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide responded with such a zeal and excitement that the Society’s growth statistics went through the roof. Growth in 1974 was at 13.5%. The Society went from just over one million Witnesses reported in the 1966 Yearbook to 2.1 million in the 1976 Yearbook. The failure of the 1975 expectation lead to great disillusionment by many Witnesses. Over a period of several years after 1975 the Society lost over 1 million Witnesses to inactivity, apostasy, and conversion to biblical Christianity. With that loss however, they had still doubled their numbers over 1966. It seems like false prophecy can be a good business decision.

The 1975 prophecy became another in the long list of failed prophecies. When most Witnesses were expectantly looking for Armageddon the Watchtower (May 1, 1975, page 285) cited a speech by Fred W. Franz to the graduating missionaries at the Gilead School. The article said, “Does this mean that we know exactly when God will destroy this old system and establish a new one? Franz showed that we do not, for we do not know how short was the time interval between Adam’s creation and the creation of Eve, at which point God’s rest day of seven thousand years began.”

So how long did it take for Adam to name the animals and discover that he was lonely? Twenty-five years and still counting?

So, we have “reviewed the record” as the Society urged us to do in the April 1, 1972 Watchtower. What did our review show? Did it show us that we have had a prophet among us? Yes! But, a consistently false prophet!

Deuteronomy 18:22 tells us “do not be afraid of him” if a “prophet” turns out to be false. Their words carry no weight, they are not to be “feared,” i.e., respected.

By David Henke