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EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

The Jehovah's Witness Gospel An Unbiblical Message Well Past Its Expiration Date

by M. Kurt Goedelman

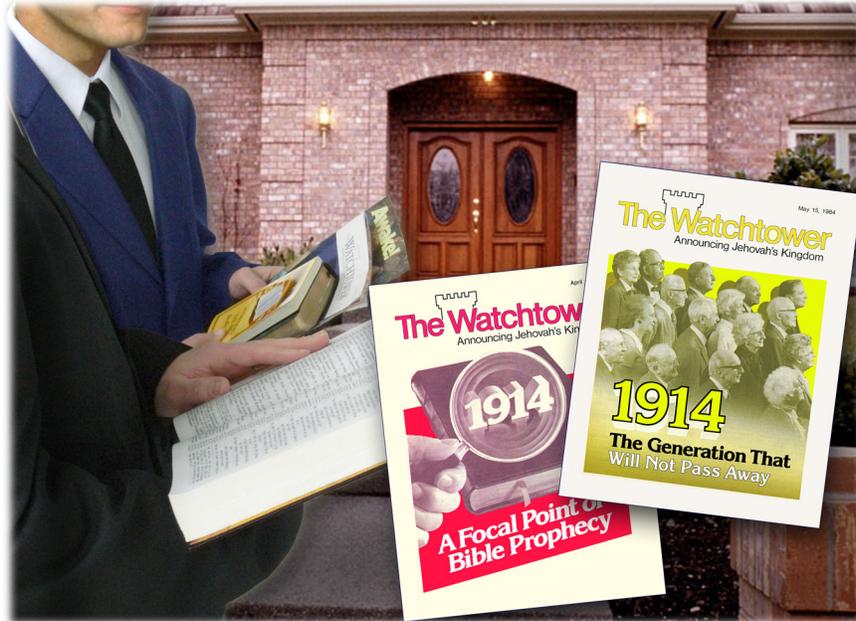
If there is a false doctrine that would establish that a religious group could demand unquestioned thinking from its followers, a leading candidate would surely be the Watchtower's gospel and specifically its teaching on 1914. That year, the Watchtower claims, is "A Focal Point of Bible Prophecy"¹ and is "A Marked Year."² Few doctrines have been so aggressively taught, yet so reworked and whitewashed over the decades. This demonstrates the depth and darkness of the spiritual blindness which is experienced by Jehovah's Witnesses. It is a belief that is complicated and confusing — not only to those who are being deceived into accepting it, but to those who embrace and teach it.

Jehovah's Witnesses maintain that the early followers of its group came

"to an understanding that the end of the Gentile Times would occur in the

autumn of 1914. As spiritual enlightenment progressed, they later understood that Jesus Christ was enthroned in heaven as King of the Kingdom in that same year, 1914."³ In its declaration, the Watchtower insists that this "Gentile Times" period was foretold by Christ (in Luke 21:24) and would occur between the end of the Davidic kingdom and the restoration of this kingdom under Christ.

The recent Watchtower book, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* says, "DECADES in advance, Bible students (continues on page 12)



Inside this Issue:

HOW WELL I REMEMBER.....	PAGE 2
BENNY HINN RECYCLES FALSE PROPHECY	PAGE 3
THE NEW CALVINISM	PAGE 4

Editorials

HOW WELL I REMEMBER

A good memory can help one avoid the errors and craziness of the past. So many of the errors and religious goofiness of days gone by are repeats — repackaged and recycled nonsense. So much junk food doctrine has already been tried and failed, but wolves in shepherd's clothing try new versions of old shenanigans. Charlatans with wild imaginations have long been conning churches for years.

In the late 1970s, long-forgotten Salem Kirban of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, warned of killer bees that he thought he saw in the book of Revelation. He scared many by pontificating that swarms of killer bees would be on us by the late 1980s. He sold a lot of books, frightened many of his followers, and died in 2010. The bees never came in numbers sufficient to merit such concern. Kirban was smart enough to tuck in fine print that these things might or might not happen. They were not real predictions after all, but cleverly imposed on the Bible and sold to gullible Christians. Kirban's apocalyptic novel 666 was at least sold as fiction.

Thomas S. McCall and Zola Levitt's book, *Satan in the Sanctuary*, looked at the almost imminent building of a Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The book was published by Moody Press in 1973. We are still waiting for the Temple to be built.

In the early 1980s, Benjamin Creme promised that a

Lord Maitreya would appear. He was supposed to be the Christ and who would lay all the confusion about the Second Coming fully to rest. We know it didn't happen. This New Age "lord" never showed up. All that was created was more confusion.

This launched numerous prognosticators who made date-setting and date-suggesting a cottage industry. Many religious "fortune tellers" became millionaires.

Date-setting is nothing new. It can be traced back to the early years of the Church and later to splits and splinters in the 16th-century Anabaptist movement, as well as to William Miller and the Seventh-day Adventists in the mid-1800s.

Jesus told the apostles that, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). He was saying no one can know and only God can set the time. Time and timing of events are in God's hands alone. Jesus, in Matthew 25:13, was very clear, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." (See also Matthew 24:4-5, 23-27, 36.)

Even the Scriptures could not deter Charles Taylor. Taylor predicted the Rapture in 1975, 1976, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, and 1989. As well, Taylor predicted that Egypt's Anwar Sadat would launch World War III. He missed Sadat's untimely assassination. Taylor is long gone, but not the ones who emulate him.

(continues on page 22)

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P.O. Box 26062 • Saint Louis, Missouri 63136-0062 • (314) 921-9800

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BENNY HINN RECYCLES HIS FALSE PROPHECY

In the wake of Billy Graham's death, controversial faith healer Benny Hinn took to Facebook to remind his followers of an alleged prophecy he received decades earlier. In the video post, Hinn recalled that in 1989, the Lord spoke to him "very clearly" that "when Oral Roberts and Billy Graham go home, that will be the beginning of the greatest revival in Church history." Roberts died in December 2009, Graham died on Feb. 21.

Hinn also used the video to express a confession of sorts, stating while the prosperity teaching is in the Bible, he says "some have gone to the extreme with it sadly, and it's not God's Word what is taught and I think I'm as guilty as others."

According to *The Christian Post*, Hinn "admitted that as he has grown older and come to understand the Bible more, he now realizes that some of the things he learned from preachers when he was growing up aren't biblical and the popular interpretation of the prosperity gospel ... is one of those things." Hinn has a history of making such renunciations, but contrasts that with ongoing aberrational teaching. At the same time Hinn was making his recent confession, he wrote on his ministry's website, "It's time for you to prosper. ... God wants to unlock your future, and it begins by giving in obedience."

In his 1989 "prophecy," Hinn claimed the Holy Spirit told him God would destroy the homosexual community in America, Fidel Castro would die, the Rapture of the Church would occur, and there would be a woman president. All of these things — including the death of two of God's "giants" (which he now says is Roberts and Graham) — would occur during the 1990s.

—MKG

CHURCHGOERS IGNORANT OF GREAT COMMISSION

A recent study conducted by the Barna Group asked churchgoers if they had previously "heard of the Great Commission." More than half of those responding to the poll said they were unfamiliar with the term. Barna's data indicated that 51 percent of respondents said that they had not heard of the Great Commission, 25 percent said that they had heard of it but couldn't recall its exact meaning, another 6 percent were not sure. Only 17 percent of those polled responded positively and could

identify its meaning and the Scriptures from which it is drawn.

In its report, Barna noted that, "Evangelicals are the most likely churchgoing group to state that they have heard of the Great Commission and remember what it is (60%), which generally aligns with their theological disposition and the criteria to be characterized as 'evangelical' in the first place."

The survey was conducted among adult and millennial churchgoers (those who have attended church within the past six months) in the United States, along with a large number of Protestant senior pastors also from the U.S.

The Great Commission is the personal directive from Jesus, drawn from Matthew 28:18-20, and is His command to make disciples and then to baptize and teach them.

—MKG

SCIENTOLOGY LAUNCHES ITS OWN TV NETWORK

After years of criticism from various television media outlets, Scientology is responding with its own "official" network that began airing in March on DirectTV, along with streaming devices such as Apple TV and Amazon's Fire TV. Initial programming included "interviews with current members, an introduction by Scientology head David Miscavige, and a special about the sect's history," *The Christian Post* reported.

The *Post* news article also noted, "Scientology TV could potentially be a platform where the organization could break the stigma and prejudice that have been surrounding them by shedding more light on their own beliefs and practices." But that may be easier said than done. Early reviews were not so kind, including a scathing review by Frank Scheck in *The Hollywood Reporter*, who labeled the first installment of programming as "the most elaborate — and tedious — infomercial ever." Scheck added, "I don't want to say that the shows were unrelievedly boring, but I sure was glad I didn't have to operate heavy machinery afterwards."

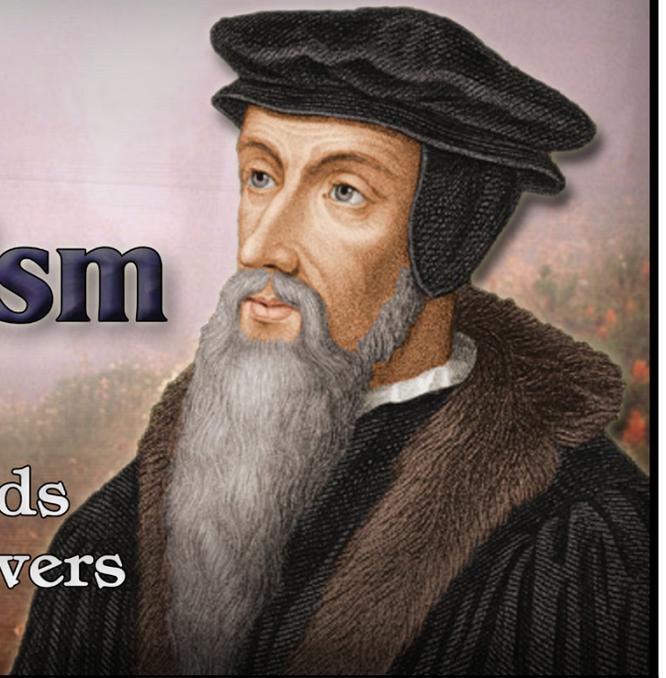
The entertainment trade magazine *Variety* observed, "Scientology Network appears to be another example of a well-heeled brand sidestepping traditional media and advertising platforms for a direct-to-consumer approach with a 24/7 TV channel to spread its message."

—MKG

The New Calvinism

Engaging the Hearts and Minds of Youthful Believers

by Gary E. Gilley



There is a great deal of interest and confusion about a movement within conservative evangelicalism sometimes called “New Calvinism” or Neo-Calvinism. It is not monolithic and describing its teachings is not always easy. Some have labeled virtually everyone who is a member of the Gospel Coalition or speaks at Together for the Gospel conferences as a Neo-Calvinist, but that is surely painting with too broad a brush. Some hail Neo-Calvinism as a breath of fresh air that has united the passionate ministry of the Holy Spirit with the solid doctrines of the Reformation. Others see it as a dangerous departure from the faith which opens the door to aberrant teachings of extreme Pentecostalism. While some fear the movement, others cheer it. Therefore, it is helpful to take a careful look at what New Calvinism is and what it is not.

If there is a New Calvinism, then by necessity there must be an “old” Calvinism. We need to start then with the teachings of classical Calvinism and see in what ways the new variety is similar and how it is different. Proponents of historical Calvinism would certainly trace its roots to Scripture. But the theological system known today as Calvinism finds its beginnings in the works of a number

of theologians, the first of which was Augustine. Nevertheless, it was the famous Reformer John Calvin who mapped out the essential doctrines of the theological structure that bears his name. Calvinism is often equated with what are called the “doctrines of grace” which distinguishes it from other theological approaches.

CALVINIST DISTINCTIVES

Calvinists strongly hold to the five “solas” which constituted the battle cries of the Reformation. These are: *sola scriptura*, the belief that Scripture alone is the authority for the Christian faith; *sola Deo gloria*, the view that all things are created for and should be done for the glory of God; *sola gratia*, the understanding that salvation from beginning to end is a gift from God which flows from His grace alone; *sola fide*, the conviction that God’s gift of grace is received by humans on the basis of faith alone apart from any works which they have done; and *sola Christus*, the belief that salvation has been made possible for sinful people on the basis of Christ and His finished work alone.

While not all Christians embrace the five *solas*, many, even among those who would abhor being termed Calvinists, do. Calvinists also place heavy

emphasis on the sovereignty of God. He is Lord over everything and nothing happens apart from His direct action or permission. He controls nature as well as nations; He controls demons as well as humans. No one and nothing can thwart His will.

While aspects of God’s sovereignty are beyond our comprehension (Romans 11:33-36), most Christians recognize that a God who is not sovereign is a God who cannot be trusted. If there is a single thing in the universe which can frustrate or obstruct the will of God, then our Lord is not all-powerful, and that would leave us with a God who is capable of losing control of His universe and/or those within it. Calvinists have championed the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and have provided us with powerful arguments supporting it. It is true that a few have gone too far and drifted into fatalism, but the majority have maintained a good balance and assured the evangelical community that we serve an omnipotent Lord.

CALVINISM AND GRACE

Nevertheless, when we think of Calvinism it is the doctrines of grace that come to mind, and rightly so. When Calvinists refer to these doctrines, they are talking about five

interlocking soteriological terms best remembered by the acronym TULIP.

Total depravity: In a sense this is the heart of the system. How one defines total depravity will lead to how the other doctrines in the chain are understood. By total depravity Calvinists do not mean that people are as bad as they could be, nor that they are incapable of doing good things, as the world measures good. They mean instead that every aspect of our being has been affected and corrupted by sin. Biblical texts such as Romans 3:10-18 and Ephesians 2:1-3 inform us that the bent of all unregenerate people is toward sin and in fact there is nothing anyone can do that could ever please God or contribute to their salvation. Because our wills are as fallen and corrupt as our minds, we would never independently choose to place our faith in Christ for salvation.

The Calvinist, therefore, does not reject the free will of man that many other Christians like to talk about; they simply believe that people, left to their own devices, will “freely” choose to reject Christ. It is because of the depravity of our fallen nature that we are unwilling and unable to turn to Christ unaided. God must do something in us and for us or else we would never find Him, nor even seek Him. Total depravity is not spiritual weakness, it is spiritual deadness — even spiritual inability. Left to our own ability, unaided and undelighted by the Holy Spirit, humans would be unable to be regenerated. It is because of human depravity, defined in this way, that the rest of the links in the TULIP are necessary.

Unconditional election: If people are totally depraved, as defined above, then unconditional election becomes a necessity for, if man would never choose God left to their own volition, then God must choose man. Jesus said, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37). A few moments later Jesus takes this further, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (v. 44). Paul makes clear that the time in which God chose (*elected* in the Greek) His

people was before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). It is important to note that the New Testament is clear that the Lord did not choose us because He saw something good in us, but simply according to His sovereign purpose (Romans 9:11, 16-18; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

Limited atonement: Some, but not all Calvinists, accept limited atonement or, as it is often called, “particular redemption.” The idea is that Christ’s atoning blood, while sufficient for all sin, was efficacious only for the sins of the elect. Christ did not die merely to make salvation possible; He died in order to atone for the sins of those who God had specifically chosen for His own. Even among Calvinists this leaf of the TULIP is often hotly debated. This is because, while certain verses of Scripture seem to support this view, others point to Christ dying for all (e.g., 1 John 2:2; John 3:16). Everyone, except Universalists, believes in some form of limited atonement. Those embracing unlimited atonement (and that includes some Calvinists) believe that Christ’s death was sufficient for the sins of all, but that only those who turn to Christ by faith are actually redeemed. Those believing in limited atonement believe that Christ died only for the elect.

Irresistible grace: Because totally depraved individuals would always resist the call to the Gospel, it becomes necessary for the Lord to irresistibly draw sinners to Himself. John 6:44, quoted above, is a key verse supporting this doctrine. While in our natural, unregenerate state, we by nature resist the Lord and His grace due to our spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4, cf. Ephesians 2:1-3), when the Lord opens our eyes and draws us to Himself, we will come willingly (2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 2:4-9).

Perseverance of the saints: All those who have been irresistibly drawn to Christ and regenerated to newness of life will persevere in the faith until the end of their lives. Those whom the Lord saves will be kept saved by His power and love (Romans 8:28-39; 1 Peter 1:3-5). While all Calvinists recognize that believers sin, and sometimes grievously and for considerable time, still they believe that

none will totally reject the faith or fully apostatize. In the context of those who have been reconciled to God by the work of Christ, Colossians 1:23 reads, “If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel.” Verses like this are used to support perseverance.

The above, therefore, will provide a framework in which to understand the New Calvinists. As Calvinists they would embrace the five *solas* and at least four of the five doctrines of grace. In addition, most would also identify with covenantal theology.¹ However, there are many dispensationalists who are Calvinists as well, and accept all that has been outlined above. In that sense they would be considered Reformed Evangelicals. However, dispensational Calvinists and many Reformed Calvinists divide over the doctrine of covenantalism.

NEW CALVINISM

With this basic explanation of the key aspects of Calvinism we can now move forward to an understanding of New Calvinism. What makes New Calvinists new? And how do they differ from historic Calvinists?

New Calvinism is more easily identified and described than defined. Wikipedia says it is “a movement within conservative evangelicalism that embraces the fundamentals of 16th century Calvinism while seeking to engage these historical doctrines with present-day culture.”²

The current wave flowing through evangelical cutting-edge ministries of all stripes is that the Church is hopelessly out of step with the surrounding culture and that if it does not change, it will die.³ As Hugh Halter and Matt Smay state in their book *The Tangible Kingdom*, “when the culture is no longer looking for a church to go to ... the functions of the church must be adjusted.”⁴ Virtually all of those associated with New Calvinism would subscribe to a similar philosophy, but this is not uniquely defining of the movement. Neither is New Calvinism exclusively found in an official organization or denomination, as it transcends such structures and is more ecumenical in nature. Rather it is

better identified by personalities, conferences, blogs, and websites that are promoting Reformed-charismatic philosophies, doctrines, and various concepts of engaging culture, including social justice issues.

It seems to be a movement that is particularly attractive to younger Evangelicals, who have grown tired of watered-down, anemic, anti-intellectual forms of Christianity that no longer challenge them. Some of the personalities who will be listed below have offered meat-and-potatoes theology which engages the minds and hearts of youthful believers looking for something deeper and a more relevant faith. As a matter of fact, Colin Hansen entitled his book *Young, Restless and Reformed* to describe this very group. Yet, a number of the key leaders are hardly young.

Jeremy Walker, in his insightful book *The New Calvinism Considered*, goes so far as to say, “one could argue that the true father figure of the new Calvinism is probably more Jonathan Edwards than John Calvin, and even then it is Jonathan Edwards mediated through John Piper.”⁵ This is arguably true, for Piper’s emphasis on the doctrines of grace, sovereignty of God, passionate preaching, intellectual faith, Christian hedonism (the idea that we are all joy-seekers, but the Christian is to seek their joy in Christ), and openness to charismatic teachings concerning spiritual gifts are prevalent throughout the young, restless, and Reformed. Piper’s fingerprints are all over the movement, but he is hardly alone. Some other prominent names include:

Timothy Keller. Keller offers an apologetic methodology that has hit the right note with those who have grown up surrounded by a largely postmodern worldview. Keller seems to be an interesting mix between old school Reformed, with its emphasis on orthodox doctrine, and postmodern apologist, alternating between the two approaches depending upon which group he is addressing.⁶ Keller’s focus on social and mercy ministries also resonates well with young adults today, and is the heart of New Calvinism’s focus.

D.A. Carson. Carson is the co-founder with Keller of The Gospel Coalition, an extremely popular blog filled with articles promoting Reformed thinking and theology and with leanings toward New Calvinistic ideas. These ideas are promoted largely through the Coalition’s website, as well as through conferences and publications. While an excellent theologian and commentator with many good books to his credit, nevertheless Carson rejects cessationism.

Wayne Grudem. Grudem perhaps has done more theologically to pave the way for this movement than anyone else. This is due to his prolific writings that combine both excellent, readable, and solid Reformed theology with a defense of charismatic teaching on the spiritual gifts. Grudem’s teaching on this subject will be examined more closely below, but, in general, in his book *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, as well as in his *Systematic Theology*, Grudem champions a position that all the gifts, including the sign gifts, especially that of prophecy, are viable today.

C.J. Mahaney. Mahaney is the former president of Sovereign Grace Ministries (SGM) and former pastor of Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland. He resigned the presidency of SGM in 2013 in the midst of some strong accusations and resistance to his leadership. He now pastors the Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville, Kentucky. In 2006, he co-founded Together for the Gospel (T4G), a coalition of Christian leaders who have found common ground in the Gospel, but who differ on some other doctrinal issues such as charismatic gifts and cessationism. Mahaney and SGM have been at the center of the birth of Neo-Calvinism and its growth, clearly combining Reformed theology with charismatic practices and musical styles.

Mark Driscoll. Driscoll has been one of the strongest leaders within the young, restless, and Reformed. He was founder and pastor of Mars Hill, a megachurch in Seattle, Washington, which was spread out over 13 campuses. He also founded Acts 29, a church-planting network, now led by

Matt Chandler, which Driscoll used to start and promote Mars Hill clones. On the one hand, Driscoll’s Calvinistic beliefs are strong enough to receive the endorsement of the likes of John Piper; on the other hand, he has described himself as a Charismatic with a seat belt. However, reading some of his books would reveal that his seat belt has come unbuckled and, a few years ago, so has his life and church empire. Nevertheless, it was claimed that at the height of his popularity, Driscoll’s sermons were the most downloaded of any preacher in America and his influence hard to overestimate.⁷

In that New Calvinism is centered on personalities, conferences, blogs, and websites, the above offers some flavor of the movement. Let’s now move to some other identifiable marks.

EMBRACING OF CHARISMATIC GIFTS

If there is one distinguishing mark that separates the New Calvinist from traditional Calvinists, it would be the openness of the newer variety toward the charismatic gifts. While many, if not most, would not see themselves as Charismatics in the conventional sense, they believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are operational today, including the sign gifts such as miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healings, and prophecy. While most draw the line at apostleship, seeing it as an office reserved for a handful of appointed New Testament leaders who founded the Church (Ephesians 2:20), they still see the gift of prophecy as viable.

Following the leadership of Wayne Grudem, many have been convinced that New Testament era prophecy is not held to the same standards as Old Testament prophecies and prophets. Whereas Old Testament prophecy was to be without error, with the consequence of the execution of the prophet if one prophesied falsely (Deuteronomy 18:20-22), Church age prophecies can often be a mixture of truth and error. Grudem writes:

“... prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but was simply a very human —

and sometimes partially mistaken — report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's mind."⁸

This view of the sign gifts, including prophecy, is known as the continuationist position, as opposed to cessationism, held by those who believe the miraculous sign gifts are no longer operational.⁹ Grudem is not alone in his understanding of the continuation of prophecy. Other prominent evangelical leaders and organizations are also squarely in this camp including John Piper, whose acceptance of this view can be seen in articles and videos on his *Desiring God* website. In addition, Sovereign Grace Ministries' statement of faith affirms, "All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today, are vital for the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practiced."¹⁰ Included in "all the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today" is the gift of prophecy.

Grudem's views, while unconvincing in this writer's opinion, have captured the hearts and minds of an amazing number of conservative Evangelicals.¹¹ Strong and influential Calvinist leaders propagate his idea that fallible, errant prophecy is common in the Church today, despite the unreliability of such prophecies. A good example is John Piper, who is well respected, and rightfully so, for many of his theological views and overall contribution to the evangelical faith. He has, however, held to a continuationist view for much of his ministry.

Piper has been characterized by some as "open to the gifts but not advocating for them or encouraging others to pursue the gifts themselves." "This," Piper replies "is a misunderstanding."¹² Piper maintains that he advocates obedience to 1 Corinthians 12:31; 1 Corinthians 14:1; and 1 Corinthians 14:39. But this understanding of fallible prophecy can lead to sticky situations, as Piper admits from experience:

"A lawyer one time prophesied over me when my wife was pregnant and said: 'Your fourth

child is going to be a girl, and your wife is going to die in childbirth.' And that lawyer with tears told me that she was sorry she had to tell me that. So I went home and I got down on my knees and I said, 'Lord, I am trying to do what you said here in 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21. And frankly, I despise what that woman just said.' It proved out that my fourth child was a son, and I knew as soon as he came out that that prophecy was not true, and so I stopped having any misgivings about my wife's life. She is still with me now thirty years later. That's the sort of thing that makes you despise prophecy."¹³

Of what value, we would have to ask, are prophecies of this nature? When it is impossible to discern how much of a given prophecy is from the Lord and how much of it is from the imagination of the prophet, such prophecies are worse than useless. In the case of Piper, he spent months agonizing over the possibility that the prophecy concerning his wife was true, only to have the prophecy proven false in the end. This scenario is repeated countless times in the lives of lesser known Christians who suffer needlessly because they have accepted the continuationist teachings on New Testament prophecy.

It would appear that many of the Reformed Charismatics are simply afraid that the cessationist view of the gifts denies the power and working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. For example, Mark Driscoll claimed:

"Old Calvinism was cessationistic and fearful of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. New Calvinism is continuationist and joyful in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit."¹⁴

It is this very issue, more than anything else, that distinguishes traditional Calvinism from the New Calvinist. Both delight in Calvinistic theology, but historic Calvinists are normally cessationists, while the newer variety is desirous of the sign gifts that are associated with the Charismatic movement. It is my opinion that by doing so the New Calvinists are in

danger of departing ultimately from the evangelical faith. It is important to consider a warning from a well-known "old Calvinist," J.C. Ryle:

"Let us beware of the very small beginnings of false doctrine. Every heresy began at one time with some little departure from the truth. There is only a little seed of error needed to create a great tree ... It is the omission or addition of one little item in the doctor's prescription that spoils the whole medicine, and turns it into poison ... let us never allow a little false doctrine to ruin us, by thinking it is but a 'little one,' and can do no harm."¹⁵

SECONDARY ISSUES

There are other traits that are shared by many of those immersed in the system. To these we will now turn. It should be remembered that those promoting neo-Calvinism are not monolithic in every aspect, and some of the features mentioned below would be true of any number of Evangelicals who are neither Calvinistic nor Charismatic. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to find these identifying marks embraced by adherents of the movement.

Serious about theology and Christian living — This is the most commendable aspect of the majority of the "young, restless, and Reformed" crowd. All of the leadership, and most of the enthusiasts, are serious students of Scripture and substantial theological works that are concerned with truth. They seek preachers and teachers who deliver solid and thoughtful exegesis. They have little tolerance for sloppy thinking, weak answers, and careless preaching. They want to be challenged and they want to be part of the debate, not merely passive consumers. This is a clear improvement over many in the recent past who were content with superficial teaching as long as their "needs" were being met and going to church was light and fun.

Many of these young people are reading Charles Spurgeon, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, J.C. Ryle, and the Puritans, as well as contemporary authors such as D.A. Carson,

John Piper, Michael Horton, John MacArthur, and Albert Mohler. Even if we disagree with some of the teachings of such men, this is an important upgrade over those who haven't read anything deeper than Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer in their entire lives.

The New Calvinists are also active in church planting and other means of spreading the Gospel and making disciples. The Acts 29 Network is devoted to planting like-minded churches. According to its website, the stated mission of Acts 29 is to band together churches which plant new churches and revitalize dead and dying churches around the world. The network publishes the following five core values, which demonstrates not only solid theology, but the centrality of the local church:

"Gospel centrality in all of life. The sovereignty of God in saving sinners. The work of the Holy Spirit for life and ministry. The equality of male and female and the principle of male servant leadership. The local church as God's primary mission strategy."¹⁶

Happily, but surprisingly, the New Calvinists reject equalitarianism and embrace complementarianism, as point four above demonstrates. This is in clear contrast to the seeker-sensitive movement which often sees no difference between the leadership roles of men and women in the home and in the church. Perhaps this is due to leading theologians in the movement such as Wayne Grudem and John Piper, who have written extensively defending the traditional biblical understanding of the role of men and women. Nevertheless, this is a welcomed emphasis demonstrating both the desire to be scripturally sound and a willingness to resist the political correctness of the culture when convinced of the truthfulness of their position.

In *The New Calvinism Considered*, Jeremy Walker observes that, "at its best, the new Calvinism is a God-centered movement. Insofar as this is so, we should both recognize it and rejoice because of it."¹⁷ Unfortunately, as we will see below, we cannot rejoice unreservedly on all fronts.

Pragmatism — Like many others in evangelicalism, there is a definite undercurrent within the movement that implies that bigger is better. If a church is successful numerically then it must be doing something right. If a man is well-known, popular with the masses, a great communicator, and has built a megachurch, he apparently should be followed, even if his doctrines or conduct are questionable. The unspoken — and sometimes spoken — idea is that what works trumps what is true. This is certainly not an exclusive problem with the New Calvinists, but examples within this circle abound.

Take the conduct of Mark Driscoll. From his earliest days of prominence, his bullying, anger, abuse of those under his leadership, and his coarse, offensive language, not to mention his explicit, virtually pornographic discussion of sex, has been evident. James 3:13-18 makes it clear that such a man is exhibiting a worldly wisdom which is the opposite of godly wisdom described as "first pure, then peaceable" (v. 17). Nevertheless, until recently he has been all but idolized by tens of thousands of admirers and officially endorsed by the likes of John Piper and Paul Tripp. Why? It would appear that the reason is his success. He had built an empire of sorts: he had a church with numerous campuses spread out over several states, he founded a church-planting ministry (Acts 29) which has started over 500 churches, and he is an engaging speaker. In other words he has been successful.

When he imploded in 2014, was booted from Acts 29, resigned his pastorate, and watched his empire unravel and collapse, those who had been his allies pointed to the fact that he had been a loose cannon since the beginning of his ministry. Driscoll did not hide who he was, but those who should be guarding the sheep looked the other way because his methods, as ungodly as some of them were, seemed to work.

Another example is when James MacDonald decided to legitimize Oneness Pentecostal preacher T.D. Jakes and his non-Trinitarian theology. At the now infamous Elephant

Room 2 interview, MacDonald and Driscoll lobbed softball questions to Jakes so that he would appear to be in agreement with Trinitarian doctrine while maintaining his Oneness views. Those with doctrinal knowledge concerning this debate saw through Jakes, but MacDonald in effect gave him a pass, virtually declaring Jakes "one of us." In addition, not one word was mentioned concerning Jakes' prosperity gospel heresy, which has led perhaps millions around the globe toward an unbiblical lifestyle. Why was Jakes afforded such charity? His ministry is among the biggest in the world, so it appears that he is "too big to fail."

And then we could cite Piper's endorsement of Rick Warren; MacDonald's public discipline of elders who dared challenge his leadership style (followed by a public apology some years later for his slanderous actions); Steve Furtick's mass baptism antics; and the Sovereign Grace's (and Mahaney's) cover-up of a child abuse scandal. The common denominator seems to be that despite shameful behavior and bad theology, these men and ministries are still being touted as examples to follow because they are successful — what they do seems to work and that is enough for many.

Relevance and missional living — One of the key buzzwords used by a large number of young Evangelicals is "relevant." By this is meant that our Christian lives and our churches need to reveal an "authentic" (another buzzword) faith. We need to scratch where people itch. We need to show people that Christ and the Gospel are germane to real life. More than that, we need to demonstrate that Christians are real people, with real hurts, pains, and problems just like the unsaved. A Christian is not someone who is so different that he cannot relate to unbelievers. The difference Christ has made in our lives is not that we have become perfect or so "holy" that we are weird and unapproachable by the unsaved. In fact, we are like them except that Christ has forgiven us our sins and has become the central focus of our lives.

Much of this philosophy is good, and should be considered seriously.

The next step is to learn to relate to unbelievers rather than isolating ourselves from them. The neo-Calvinist believes that we live out this kind of relevancy primarily by being “missional” (yet another buzzword). This word has been so overused and abused that even those who love it sometimes are not sure what it means. Missional usually implies living out a life of love and care for others, serving and ministering in such a way that Christ is glorified in us and people are therefore drawn to Him and His saving grace.

There is much positive to say about living relevant, missional lives. The missional approach places Christians in the lives of those who need Christ. The idea is that the unsaved will see the transformation that Christ has brought about in our lives and will be drawn to it. Missional living is involvement with others in order to bless them, whether they come to Christ for salvation or not.

Again, there is a great deal that could be learned from this emphasis on missional and authentic living, but before we move on, some cautions are in order. Missional living, in which believers are seeking the good of others, has a history of becoming an end in itself. This will be discussed further below when we look closer at social concerns and the Gospel. Just as we can go too far by viewing the unsaved as mere targets or prospects for evangelism, we can go too far and see our temporary blessing of their lives as enough. Blessing the lives of people, bringing happiness, comfort, and meeting their physical or emotional needs are wonderful things, but they are not a fulfillment of the Great Commission which calls for us to make disciples, not just bless people (Matthew 28:19-20).

Culturally engaged/worldliness — The idea of being culturally engaged has been around evangelicalism for decades. It was perhaps the defining issue that ultimately separated the Fundamentalists and the (called at the time) Neo-evangelicals (now Evangelicals) in the 1950s. The question on the table was how much accommodation to the culture was necessary to engage it.

Evidence of compromise within the movement is readily available, although that evidence can be interpreted a number of ways. What the neo-Calvinists call engaging culture is often termed worldliness by its critics. Here we must define worldliness as the Bible does, not as many conservative Christians do today. Worldliness is not primarily a matter of dos and don'ts, of entertainment preferences or convictions, but a mindset of one who James would say desires to be a friend of the world and its corrupt system of life. In James 4:4 we read, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” While James is addressing a different context, we see that coziness with the world system is spiritual adultery. In the context of engaging the culture, and in order for ourselves and our message not to appear foolish to the unregenerate, what are we willing to compromise in doctrine and in practice? Here are a few concerns that are troubling:

- Openness to evolution: Many believe it is hard to be accepted seriously in our modern era and yet subscribe to some form of a young-earth creation account. If we are to engage culture it seems paramount that we accept evolution, but how do we do so and stay faithful to Scripture? Timothy Keller believes he has found the formula. He is representative of many who acknowledge some form of theistic evolution (in his case, progressive evolution). In his highly-regarded apologetic volume, *The Reason for God*, he writes:

“I think Genesis 1 has the earmarks of poetry and is therefore a ‘song’ about the wonder and meaning of God’s creation. Genesis 2 is an account of how it happened. ... For the record I think God guided some kind of process of natural selection, and yet I reject the concept of evolution as All-encompassing Theory ... [quoting David Atkinson] ‘if “evolution” remains at the level of scientific biological hypothesis, it would seem that there is little

reason for conflict between the implications of Christian belief in the Creator and the scientific explorations of the way which — at the level of biology — God has gone about his creating process.”¹⁸

- Music: When Mark Driscoll started his church, Mars Hill in Seattle, he wanted to be relevant and he wanted his church to grow numerically. In order to do both he recognized the power of music to draw the masses. He said, “I envisioned a large church that hosted concerts for non-Christian bands and fans on a phat sound system, embraced the arts.”¹⁹ Virtually any form of music, performed by excellent musicians, regardless of whether they knew Christ, was used to grow the church.

At one point the church began to host concerts in its auditorium which “only rarely [were] Christian bands since [their] main goal was getting non-Christian kids to come to the concerts.”²⁰ Driscoll is not alone in advocating the use of secular and often ungodly music and musicians in order to draw a crowd. Keller has the same philosophy concerning using unbelievers to minister at church services because of their expertise:

“First, we use only professional and/or trained musicians for our corporate worship services, and we pay them all. ... Second, we often include non-Christian musicians in our services who have wonderful gifts and talent. ... When we invite non-Christians to use their talents in corporate worship, we are simply calling them, along with every creature, to bring their ‘peculiar honors’ and gifts to praise their Creator.”²¹

Many rightly challenge this use of either secular music or unsaved musicians as ministers within the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul speaks of the Lord giving to the child of God spiritual gifts to minister within the local church, and the Spirit placing each of us within the body of Christ just as He desires (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, 18, 24, 28) for the edification of the Church. There is no biblical warrant for using unbelievers, or their godless

worldview, via music, simply because it professionalizes the presentation or draws a crowd. The ends don't justify the means.

- **Crudeness and drinking:** To the extent that Mark Driscoll has influenced the New Calvinism movement, it would appear crudeness and profanity are acceptable to many, apparently as a means of relating to unbelievers and being authentic. In his *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, we find Driscoll comfortable with barnyard words,²² gross descriptions of the effects of the stomach flu,²³ sexual innuendos,²⁴ and even crude depictions of God such as repeatedly referring to "God the Ghost."²⁵ Driscoll's language is often shocking and he has influenced a horde of followers. It would seem the idea is that cleaner language apparently puts unbelievers off and they feel more comfortable with those who talk like them. Driscoll is an admitted curser.²⁶ Donald Miller even labels him as "Mark the Cussing Pastor"²⁷ and there is no indication that Driscoll has reformed his foul language.

Separation from worldly activities does not fit Driscoll's missional strategy either. He speaks often of drinking and frequenting bars,²⁸ buying lottery tickets,²⁹ admiring and learning from foul-mouthed entertainers such as Chris Rock,³⁰ stealing a sound system,³¹ and setting himself up for sexual temptation (which he claims to have resisted).³²

It would be wrong to say that all New Calvinists buy into Driscoll's speech and actions, but Driscoll (until his antics eventually led to his being removed from Acts 29's board and resigning from Mars Hill) had been highly regarded within these circles. Yet we should take long-time pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle in London Peter Masters' critique seriously:

"You cannot have Puritan soteriology without Puritan sanctification. You should not entice people to calvinistic (or any) preaching by using worldly bait. We hope that young people in this movement will grasp the implications of the doctrines better than their teachers, and come

away from the compromises. But there is a looming disaster in promoting this new form of Calvinism."³³

- **Theological compromise:** Many of the New Calvinistic guides follow the fads of the moment and quote Christian leaders that are popular in the culture, despite errant teachings from these fads and leaders. Timothy Keller likes to quote Flannery O'Connor, Malcolm Muggeridge, and G.K. Chesterton, all of whom were Roman Catholics with heretical understanding concerning many doctrines, including the Gospel.³⁴ When someone espouses that salvation is obtained by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, then turns around and quotes favorably from those who deny these very teachings, what are we to make of such things?

- **Social concerns:** The New Calvinists are quite concerned about social justice, and rightly so. As citizens of this planet we have an obligation to care for the world and the people in it, not only spiritually, but physically as well. But many make the mistake of not distinguishing between the mission of individual Christians, as dual citizens of both heaven and earth, and the mandate given to the Church as the corporate people of God, which is outlined in the Great Commission. As a result not only can the Church lose its unique place in the world as the one institution ordained by God to preach the Word, function as Christ's body, and make disciples, but the Gospel itself can be mutated.

Keller perhaps is the most influential representative of the social agenda approach to ministry within the New Calvinists ranks. The official vision statement for the church he pastors, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, in New York City, reads:

"OUR VISION The Redeemer family of churches and ministries exist to help build a great city for all people through a movement of the gospel that brings personal conversion, community formation, social justice, and cultural renewal to New York City and, through it, the world."³⁵

Keller and Redeemer clearly see the mission of the Church as having a social dimension in which the Church helps to bring about cultural renewal, social justice, elimination of poverty, and more. And while this has the appearance of benevolence and love, it is lacking any New Testament mandate or warrant for the Church. Historically when the Church has added solving the world's social problems to its mandate it has eventually lost its way and the social agenda became its primary ministry.

And there is a further concern — confusing the Gospel. Drawing from N.T. Wright and the "missional" understanding of Christianity, Keller infuses a social dimension into his Gospel definition. Keller's gospel is more than the good news that Christ has come to reconcile us to God; it is also the call to solve the world's problems of injustice, poverty, and ecological concerns. He quotes Wright, not Scripture, to support his view:

"The message of the resurrection is that this world matters! That the injustices and pains of this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won ... If Easter means Jesus Christ is only raised in a spiritual sense — [then] it is only about me, and finding a new dimension in my personal spiritual life. But if Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes good news for the whole world — news which warms our hearts precisely because it isn't just about warming hearts. Easter means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate such things — and that we will work and plan, with all the energy of God, to implement victory of Jesus over them all."³⁶

Later, Keller makes clear what he means:

"The purpose of Jesus's coming is to put the whole world right, to renew and restore the creation, not to escape it. It is not just to bring personal forgiveness and peace, but also justice and *shalom*

to the world. ... The work of the Spirit of God is not only to save souls but also to care and cultivate the face of the earth, the material world."³⁷

Scripture knows nothing of this type of Gospel message. Nowhere in the New Testament will you find such a commission given to the people of God. And as E.S. Williams points out, "Of the many works of the Holy Spirit revealed in Scripture, caring for and cultivating the material world for its restoration and purity is not one."³⁸ You will, however, find a similar message in the emergent church, N.T. Wright's "New Perspective on Paul," and those reviving the old "Social Gospel" agenda.

CONCLUSION

In 2009, *Time* magazine published a list of 10 ideas changing the world today. Number three on that list was New Calvinism.³⁹ *Time* points out it is not traditional Calvinism that is changing the world, but rather the New Calvinism variety, saying:

"If you really want to follow the development of conservative Christianity, track its musical hits. In the early 1900s you might have heard 'The Old Rugged Cross,' a celebration of the atonement. By the 1980s you could have shared the Jesus-is-my-buddy intimacy of 'Shine, Jesus, Shine.' And today, more and more top songs feature a God who is very big, while we are ... well, hark the David Crowder Band: 'I am full of earth/ You are heaven's worth/ I am stained with dirt/ Prone to depravity.' Calvinism is back, and not just musically."⁴⁰

Some of the things detailed in this article have been positive. But much is challenging the very definitions of the Church, as well as having powerful theological ramifications. We dare not ignore New Calvinism, but as always it is to be examined in the light of Scripture.

Endnotes:

1. Covenantal Theology often confuses people because it does not directly reference the biblical covenants. Rather it is a system that unites all the dispensations

and biblical covenants as phases under the Covenant of Grace. It is the idea that all of human history is covered by one to three covenants. The three covenants are as follows: 1) The Covenant of Works which was between God and Adam. 2) The Covenant of Grace between God and sinful mankind. And 3) The Covenant of Redemption which was an agreement between the Father and Son is held by some, but not all covenantalists. Additionally, the covenantal system has many implications, not the least of which is that it recognizes a continuity between Israel and the Church. That is, the promises to the nation of Israel, found especially in the Old Testament, are now being fulfilled in spiritual form in the Church which is spiritual Israel.

2. "New Calvinism," Wikipedia. Document accessed at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Calvinism.

3. See Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008, esp. pp. 59, 94.

4. *Ibid.*, pg. 108.

5. Jeremy Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered*. Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2013, pg. 22.

6. For documentation and discussion concerning this feature of Keller's ministry, see Iain D. Campbell and William M. Schweitzer, editors, *Engaging Keller, Thinking Through the Theology of an Influential Evangelical*. Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2013, esp. pg. 21.

7. E.S. Williams, *The New Calvinists, Changing the Gospel*. London, England: The Wakeman Trust, 2014, pg. 39.

8. Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1988, pg. 14.

9. I defend cessationism in my article, "Revelation and the Believer," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2014, pp. 17-19.

10. "What We Believe, A Statement of Faith," Sovereign Grace Ministries webpage. Document accessed at: www.sovereigngrace.com/statement-of-faith#empowered-by-the-spirit.

11. In response to Grudem, several excellent works refuting his understanding of New Testament prophecy are available, including: F. David Farnell, "Fallible New Testament Prophecy/Prophets? A Critique of Wayne Grudem's Hypothesis," *Master's Seminary Journal*, Fall 1991; Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1996; and Michael John Beasley, *The Fallible Prophets of New Calvinism*. Pfafftown, N.C.: The Armoury Ministries, Inc., 2014.

12. Tony Reinke, "Piper Addresses Strange Fire and Charismatic Chaos," *Desiring God* website. Document accessed at: www.desiringgod.org/articles/piper-addresses-strange-fire-and-charismatic-chaos.

13. *Ibid.* Also Piper admits in a video posted on his website that he has been persuaded by Grudem's understanding of New Testament prophecy. "What is the gift of prophecy in the New Covenant?" video accessed at: www.desiringgod.org/articles/piper-on-prophecy-and-tongues.

14. Driscoll cited by Eugene Cho, "'new calvinism' as 3rd most powerful idea - according to time magazine," on Cho's website. Document accessed at: <http://eugenecho.com/2009/03/12/new-calvinism-as-3rd-post-powerful-idea/>.

15. Ryle cited in *The Fallible Prophets of New Calvinism*, op. cit., pg. 168, ellipsis in original.

16. "About" page on the Acts 29 website. Accessed at: www.acts29.com/about/ (pop-up window under: "What We Believe" tab).

17. *The New Calvinism Considered*, op. cit., pg. 57, italics in original.

18. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2008, pp. 97, 98.

19. Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006, pg. 40.

20. *Ibid.*, pg. 126, cf. pp. 68, 93, 100, 158.

21. Timothy Keller, "Reformed Worship in the Global City," in D.A. Carson, editor, *Worship by the Book*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002, pp. 238-239.

22. *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, op. cit., pp. 67, 94, 128, 129, 134.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60, 94-96, 128.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 26, 34, 47, 74.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 50, 97, 99, 128, 130.

27. Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003, pg. 134.

28. *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, op. cit., pp. 51, 131, 146.

29. *Ibid.*, pg. 58.

30. *Ibid.*, pg. 70.

31. *Ibid.*, pg. 62.

32. *Ibid.*, pg. 128.

33. Masters cited in *The New Calvinists*, op. cit., pg. 11.

34. *The Reason for God*, op. cit., pp. 38, 183, 193, 205, 237, 240-241, 248-251.

35. Homepage, Redeemer Church & Ministries website. Document accessed at: www.redeemer.com/.

36. Wright cited in *The Reason for God*, op. cit., pg. 221, citation rendered in italics, and ellipsis and brackets in original.

37. *Ibid.*, pg. 233, italic in original.

38. *The New Calvinists*, op. cit., pg. 20.

39. David Van Biema, "The New Calvinism" in "10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now," *Time* magazine, March 12, 2009. Article accessed at: http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html.

40. *Ibid.*, ellipsis in original.

proclaimed that there would be significant developments in 1914.⁴ It further explains the Watchtower's meaning and significance for 1914 and its fulfillment of the "Gentile Times" (which is also called "the appointed times of the nations") as:

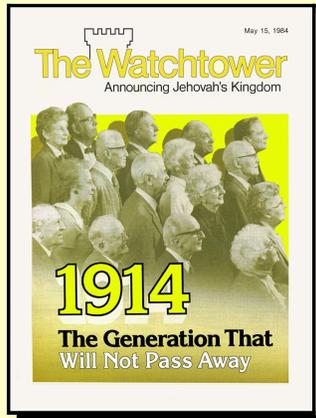
"The 2,520 years began in October 607 B.C.E.,⁵ when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and the Davidic king was taken off his throne. The period ended in October 1914. At that time, 'the appointed times of the nations' ended, and Jesus Christ was installed as God's heavenly King."⁶

Raymond Franz, a former member of the Watchtower's hierarchical "Governing Body" and nephew of the organization's fourth president Frederick Franz, addresses how this 1914 teaching is the linchpin for Jehovah's Witnesses:

"1914 is a pivotal date on which a major portion of the doctrinal and authority structure of Jehovah's Witnesses rests. ... To weaken belief in the significance of the foundation date of 1914 would weaken the whole doctrinal superstructure ... that rests on it. It would also weaken the claim of special authority for those acting as the official spokesman group for the 'faithful and discreet slave'⁷ class. To *remove* that date as having such significance could mean the virtual collapse of all the doctrinal and authority structure founded on it. That is how crucial it is."⁸

A DIFFERENT GOSPEL

Thus, the heart of the Watchtower's gospel is that the end of the Gentile Times occurred in the autumn of 1914, the Kingdom of God was ushered in at the return, or second presence, of Jesus Christ, and the time of the end began. The Watchtower's introductory pamphlet, *Jehovah's Witnesses In The Twentieth Century*, summarizes its message under the subtitle, "The 'Good News' They Want You To Hear," saying



Six Degrees of Generation

by M. Kurt Goedelman

An expiration date is a previously determined date after which something should no longer be used. In creating its own gospel — that Jehovah's Kingdom is imminent, happening within one generation of 1914 — the Watchtower has set for itself an expiration date for that message. But rather than admitting the expiry date for the heart of their "good news" message is past, Watchtower leaders simply repackage the meaning of "generation." Since its inception, the Watchtower has defined (or redefined) "generation" no less than six times. Former Jehovah's Witness Paul Grundy, on his JWfacts.com website, notes that the "Watchtower has promoted six different and contradictory explanations of 'this generation.'"

As the Watchtower's ticking time bomb to Armageddon worked its way through the twentieth century, the organization devoted more and more attention to addressing the decreasing generation of 1914. Here is a brief sampling of remarks (often confusing and conflicting) about the "generation" of 1914 that have appeared in Watchtower publications over the past few decades.

1968 — "Jesus was obviously speaking about those who were old enough to witness *with understanding* what took place when the 'last days' began. 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" (*Awake!*, Oct. 8, 1968, pg. 13, italics in original).

1973 — "For these things to take place within a generation would mean that persons who were on hand to observe what happened in 1914 C.E., at the beginning of the 'conclusion of the system of things,' would still have to be alive at the end of this period, when the 'great tribulation' strikes. Those who remember the events of 1914 are getting up in years now. Many of their number have already died. But, Jesus assures us, within 'this generation,' before they have all died, destruction of this wicked system of things will come" (*True Peace and Security — From What Source?* pg. 88).

1978 — "Thus, when it comes to the application in our time, the 'generation' logically would not apply to babies born during World War I. It applies to Christ's followers and others who were able to observe that war and the other things that have occurred in fulfillment of Jesus' composite 'sign'" (*The Watchtower*, Oct. 1, 1978, pg. 31).

1980 — "What, then, is the 'generation' that 'will by no means pass away until all these things occur'?

It does not refer to a period of time, which some have tried to interpret as 30, 40, 70 or even 120 years, but, rather, it refers to people, the people living at the 'beginning of pangs of distress' for this condemned world system. It is the generation of people who saw the catastrophic events that broke forth in connection with World War I from 1914 onward" (*The Watchtower*, Oct. 15, 1980, pg. 31).

1984 — "However, a generation is really related to people and events, rather than to a fixed number of years. ... If Jesus used 'generation' in that sense and we apply it to 1914, then the babies of that generation are now 70 years old or older. And others alive in 1914 are in their 80's or 90's, a few even having reached a hundred. There are still many millions of that generation alive. Some of them 'will by no means pass away until all things occur'" (*The Watchtower*, May 15, 1984, pg. 5).

1984 — "The countdown that has proceeded for some six millenniums now nears its zero hour. So close is it that people who were alive in 1914, and who are now well along in years, will not all pass off the scene before the thrilling events marking the vindication of Jehovah's sovereignty come to pass" (*Survival Into a New Earth*, pg. 184).

1988 — "Likewise today, most of the generation of 1914 has passed away. However, there are still millions on earth who were born in that year or prior to it. And although their numbers are dwindling, Jesus' words will come true, 'this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened'" (*Awake!*, April 8, 1988, pg. 14).

1995 — "In line with the above, professor of history Robert Wohl wrote in his book *The Generation of 1914: 'A historical generation is*

not defined by its chronological limits ... It is not a zone of dates'" (*The Watchtower*, Nov. 1, 1995, pg. 18, ellipsis in original).

1997 — "So the recent information in *The Watchtower* about 'this generation' did not change our understanding of what occurred in 1914. But it did give us a clearer grasp of Jesus' use of the term 'generation,' helping us to see that his usage was no basis for calculating — counting from 1914 — how close to the end we are" (*The Watchtower*, June 1, 1997, pg. 28).

2010 — "We do not know the exact length of 'this generation,' but it includes these two groups whose lives overlap. Even though the anointed vary in age, those in the two groups constituting the generation are contemporaries during part of the last days. How comforting it is to know that the younger anointed *contemporaries* of those older anointed ones who discerned the sign when it became evident beginning in 1914 will not die off before the great tribulation starts!" (*The Watchtower*, Study Edition, June 15, 2010, pg. 5, italic in original).

2014 — "How, then, may we understand Jesus' words about 'this generation'? The generation consists of two overlapping groups of anointed ones — the first is made up of anointed ones who saw the beginning of the fulfillment of the sign in 1914 and the second, anointed ones who for a time were contemporaries of the first group. At least some of those in the second group will live to see the beginning of the coming tribulation. The two groups form one generation because their lives as anointed Christians overlapped for a time. ... Therefore, we can conclude that very soon indeed God's Kingdom will come and exercise its rule over the earth!" (*God's Kingdom Rules!*, pp. 11-12).

when "wars involving many nations, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, an increasing of lawlessness, false religious teachers misleading many, his [Christ's] true followers being hated and persecuted, and the love of righteousness would cool off in many persons ... start to happen, it would indicate Christ's invisible presence and that the heavenly kingdom would be at hand. This would be news, good news! ... These things started to occur in that widely heralded year, 1914!"⁹

Many other Watchtower publications such as *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, *Insight on the Scriptures*, *The New Millennium - What Does the Future Hold for You?* echo the Society's message of a restored kingdom established with the second "presence" of Jesus Christ in 1914. Additionally, the earthly phase of the two-fold kingdom is imminent, happening within one generation of 1914 — a generation that now has had to undergo a redefinition of its previous literal understanding.

Tragically, Christ's atoning death and glorious resurrection play no part in the Watchtower's gospel. They have ignored the King in their quest for the Kingdom. In the 1965 Watchtower book, *Make Sure of All Things Hold Fast to What Is Fine*, a chapter called "Preaching the Good News" contained a section titled "Message That Is to Be Preached." In this section, six Bible passages were given. However, none of the six proclaimed the Gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as is presented by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. It has long been said that these four verses offer the clearest definition of the Gospel and, perhaps, constitute the most important passage of the entire Bible.

The 1985 Watchtower publication, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, is no better. Page after page of doorstep "Introductions" for Watchtower missionaries contain not a word about the Gospel being found in the person and work of Christ. In fact, the Watchtower admits that during the past 87 years it has cited 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (in whole or in part) only seven times.¹⁰ Thus it is clear that in publication after publication, the Watchtower presents a

gospel vastly different from the one received and delivered by the apostles.

The Watchtower has even stated that the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ preached by Christians is foreign to their gospel. The Watchtower announced, "Let the honest-hearted person compare the kind of preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom done by the religious systems of Christendom during all the centuries with that done by Jehovah's Witnesses since the end of World War I in 1918. *They are not one and the same kind.* That of Jehovah's Witnesses is really 'gospel,' or 'good news,' as of God's heavenly kingdom that was established by the enthronement of his Son Jesus Christ at the end of the Gentile Times in 1914."¹¹

IT WASN'T ALWAYS 1914

In its early years, the Watchtower said that it was in 1799 (not 1914) that "the time of the end" commenced and that the invisible second presence of Christ took place in 1874 (not 1914). In his 1927 publication, *Creation*, J.F. Rutherford, the organization's second president, wrote:

"There are two important dates here that we must not confuse, but clearly differentiate; namely, the beginning of 'the time of the end' and the beginning of the presence of the Lord. 'The time of the end' embraces a period from 1799 A.D. to the time of the complete overthrow of Satan's empire and the establishment of the kingdom of Messiah. The time of the Lord's second presence dates from 1874 and is during the latter part of the period known as 'the time of the end.'"¹²

Former Jehovah's Witness David Reed notes this disparity:

"Jehovah's Witnesses today are shocked to discover that several pages of *Creation* are devoted to the prophetic significance of the year 1799, offering 'proof that 1799 definitely marks the beginning of "the time of the end"' (p. 315, early editions; p. 294, later

editions). The sect nowadays attaches no significance whatsoever to the year 1799."¹³

THE CONVOLUTED PATH TO 1914

Notwithstanding the discord of the earlier dates, the Watchtower takes a curious and cumbersome path to arrive at its present date of 1914. This is done by developing a prophetic scenario drawn from the prophet Daniel's interpretation of the dream by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, which is described in Daniel 4. Then, from verse 25, the Watchtower takes hold of the prophet's words, "and seven times themselves will pass over you" (NWT). By connecting it with other prophetic statements from Scripture, it presents a fanciful interpretation leading them to 1914. The Watchtower publication, *Pay Attention to Daniel's Prophecy!* demonstrates the awkwardness of its interpretative process:

"Evidently, Nebuchadnezzar's 'seven times' involved seven years. In prophecy, a year averages 360 days, or 12 months of 30 days each. (Compare Revelation 12:6, 14.) So the king's 'seven times,' or seven years, were 360 days multiplied by 7, or 2,520 days. ... If we were to count 2,520 literal days from Jerusalem's destruction in 607 B.C.E., that would bring us only to 600 B.C.E., a year having no Scriptural significance. ... Since the 'seven times' are prophetic, we must apply to the 2,520 days the Scriptural rule: 'A day for a year.' This rule is set out in a prophecy regarding the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. (Ezekiel 4:6, 7; compare Numbers 14:34.) The 'seven times' of earth's domination by Gentile powers without interference by God's Kingdom therefore spanned 2,520 years. They began with the desolation of Judah and Jerusalem in the seventh lunar month (Tishri 15) of 607 B.C.E. (2 Kings 25:8, 9, 25, 26) From that point to 1 B.C.E. is 606 years. The remaining 1,914 years stretch from then

to 1914 C.E. Thus, the 'seven times,' or 2,520 years, ended by Tishri 15, or October 4/5, 1914 C.E."¹⁴

From the above prophetic meandering, several points need to be emphasized. First, no biblical or archaeological scholar holds to the date 607 B.C. as the year when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Reputable Bible students all support a date between 587 and 586 B.C.¹⁵ Second, apart from Watchtower publications and resources it is safe to say that no one could establish such a complex and tortuous understanding of Scripture by reading the Bible alone. And third, Jehovah's Witnesses have allowed those who formulate the theological structure of the organization, along with the writers of their publications, to connect prophetic dots that are artificial.

A review of those prophetic dots is helpful. It all starts with the belief that the "seven times" of Daniel 4:25 is representative of a period of 2,520 years. That interval is derived from Revelation 12:14 (which speaks of "a time and times and half a time") which is connected back to the "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" of Revelation 12:6. Thus, if the "time and times and half a time" (meaning three and a half years) equals 1,260 days, then it is determined that the "seven times" of Daniel means seven years or 2,520 days. The interpretation next connects to Ezekiel 4:6 ("a day for a year") in order to move beyond 2,520 literal days, and by which it expands to years. All of this is then connected to the erroneous date of 607 B.C. — which the Watchtower claims is the year when "Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and the Davidic king was taken off his throne."¹⁶

Evangelist Ralph Woodrow knocks down this prophetic house of cards:

"A major problem with the 1914 teaching is that it requires many *assumptions*. It must be *assumed* that the seven periods of time that Nebuchadnezzar was insane, were *years* — seven years *exactly*. Otherwise the counting will not work. It must be *assumed* that the

days in seven years are to be stretched out on a year-for-a-day scale spanning centuries. It must be *assumed* that a year should be figured as 360 days — in order to obtain the number 2,520 — but then a *different* calendar, a *solar* calendar with 365 days, is used to measure to 1914! It must be *assumed* that the *secular* date of B.C. 536 that [Watchtower founder Charles Taze] Russell used (to which the 70 years of captivity are added), is precisely correct, despite considerable present-day scholarship to the contrary. It must be *assumed* that when Jesus spoke of the ‘times of the Gentiles’ he was referring to 2,520 years of *Gentile rule*. The entire 1914 teaching hinges on the ‘seven times’ of Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity lasting seven YEARS. If those ‘seven times’ were *not* seven YEARS — and seven years *exactly* — the whole teaching crumbles.”¹⁷

EVEN JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES ARE NOT SO SURE

Beyond all the assumptions cited by Woodrow, the major defect in the Watchtower’s premise is, as earlier noted, the erroneous date of 607 B.C. established as the year in which Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Both Jehovah’s Witnesses and critics have waded through the invalid components of the Watchtower’s argument. And, it appears that those Jehovah’s Witnesses who have made a serious and honest investigation into the matter didn’t remain Jehovah’s Witnesses very long.

One such former Jehovah’s Witness was Carl Olof Jonsson. In 1977, Jonsson began a three-year endeavor of corresponding with the Watchtower’s headquarters (from May 1977 until May 1980) in regard to the flawed 607 B.C. date. Jonsson says:

“I finally realized that the leaders were not prepared to let any facts disturb the claim that the Watchtower organization is ‘God’s sole channel on earth’, a claim based upon the calculation that ‘the times of the Gentiles’ is

a period of 2520 years that started in 607 BCE and ended in 1914.”¹⁸

The result of his conversations with the organization was his book, *The Gentile Times Reconsidered*. That volume is regarded as the most thorough study of Babylonian inscriptions, astronomical information, and other chronological records that shows the error of the Watchtower’s eschatology.¹⁹ Jonsson further relates that:

“During the past decades an increasing number of Jehovah’s Witnesses have become aware of the Biblical and historical problems with the 607 BCE date. As a consequence many (not just ‘some’) of them have sent their questions to the Watchtower headquarters. Until now, writers at the headquarters have tried to answer their questions *in private letters*. But many of the questioners did not find the ‘answers’ satisfying.”²⁰

The 607 B.C. date was not only being debunked by low-level leaders and rank-and-file members, but by those higher up in the organization. Raymond Franz, immediately prior to his becoming a Governing Body member, was one of five persons who was key to the production of the Society’s massive encyclopedic volume, *Aid to Bible Understanding*, which was first published in 1971.²¹ Franz explains some of his involvement:

“When the subject ‘Chronology’ was assigned to me this similarly led to serious questions. A major teaching of Jehovah’s Witnesses is that Bible prophecy had pointed to the year 1914 as the end of the ‘Gentile Times’ of Luke chapter twenty-one, verse 24, and that in that year Christ Jesus actively took up his Kingdom power and began to rule invisibly to human eyes. In Daniel chapter four, references to a period of ‘seven times’ were the foundation for the calculations leading to that date and, by use of other texts, these ‘seven times’ were translated into a period of 2,520 years beginning

in 607 B.C.E. and ending in 1914 C.E. The starting date, 607 B.C.E., was held to be the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylonian conqueror Nebuchadnezzar. I knew that the 607 B.C.E. date seemed to be peculiar to our publications but did not really know why.”²²

It was from that task that Franz was faced with the problematic data and the complexity of the assignment. He relates:

“Months of research were spent on this one subject of ‘Chronology’ and it resulted in the longest article in the *Aid* publication. Much of the time was spent endeavoring to find some proof, some backing in history, for the 607 B.C.E. date so crucial to our calculations for 1914. Charles Ploeger, a member of the headquarters staff, was at that time serving as a secretary for me and he searched through the libraries of the New York city area for anything that might substantiate that date historically.”²³

Then Franz admits:

“We found absolutely nothing in support of 607 B.C.E. All historians pointed to a date twenty years later. Before preparing the *Aid* material on ‘Archaeology’ I had not realized that the number of baked-clay cuneiform tablets found in the Mesopotamian area and dating back to the time of ancient Babylon numbered into the tens of thousands. In all of these there was nothing to indicate that the period of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (in which period Nebuchadnezzar’s reign figured) was of necessary length to fit our 607 B.C.E. date for the destruction of Jerusalem. Everything pointed to a period twenty years shorter than our published chronology claimed. Though I found this disquieting, I wanted to believe that our chronology was right in spite of all the contrary evidence. Thus, in preparing the material for the *Aid* book, much of the time and

space was spent in trying to weaken the credibility of the archaeological and historical evidence that would make erroneous our 607 B.C.E. date and give a different starting point for our calculations and therefore an ending date different from 1914."²⁴

Finally, Franz confesses:

"So, despite our heightened appreciation of certain principles, the *Aid* book nonetheless contained many examples of our efforts to be loyal to the Society's teachings."²⁵

Franz's experience spotlights the deceit often employed by the Watchtower to protect its version of the "truth." And, with so much at stake, it's not surprising that the Watchtower continues to slant, stretch, and distort the facts and is unwilling to admit that its dates are fallacious. Such action is in direct conflict with Scripture, which counsels, "Good people are guided by their honesty; treacherous people are destroyed by their dishonesty" (Proverbs 11:3, NLT) and "An honest witness tells the truth; a false witness tells lies" (Proverbs 12:17, NLT).

And the dishonesty and lies continue. More than three decades after Carl Olof Jonsson began his campaign, he said that the Watchtower finally attempted to answer his research and concerns. He writes:

"In the two-part series entitled 'When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed?' and published in the public editions of The Watchtower magazine of October 1 and November 1, 2011, the [Watchtower] authors try to undermine the enormous burden of evidence against 607 BCE as the date for Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem. The articles are claimed to present 'thoroughly researched and Bible-based answers to questions that have puzzled some readers.'"²⁶

But no matter how hard they try, the researchers for and writers of the Watchtower's resources are doomed

to more deception and failure. A Christian writer who presents a biblical refutation of the Watchtower's faulty chronology observes:

"Secular historians date the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 587 BC, twenty years later. It is of course true that secular historians frequently make mistakes and that we should depend upon God's word and the clues that it gives us for dating certain things. So let us then consider what the Bible has to say about this. The question is whether the Scripture does indicate that Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 BC and this began the period of exile which ended in 537 BC. ... Indeed, all the Biblical evidence points to the fact that the exile began considerably earlier than Jerusalem's destruction. ... The Scriptures teach that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in his 19th year. (2 Kings 25:8) If the year he destroyed Jerusalem was 607 BC then this means that Nebuchadnezzar's reign began in the year 626 BC. (The Columbia Encyclopedia dates his reign 605-562 B.C. Columbia University Press, New York, London, p. 1471) This would mean that Daniel and his friends were taken into captivity some time before this, probably in 628 B.C. There are obvious difficulties with this date, since this would mean that Daniel was in captivity from 628 right up to 538 B.C., when Cyrus passed his edict allowing the Jews to return, this means that Daniel spent 80 years in exile. Now, it seems that you Jehovah's Witnesses are very mixed up with your dating, because in your Publication 'From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained' (1958, p. 106) you state that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were taken into captivity in the year 618 B.C. If that is correct then that would mean that the temple would have been destroyed about 598/7 B.C. since the temple was destroyed in Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year of reign."²⁷

THE EVER-CHANGING 1914

If there is one thing that has been consistent about the Watchtower's teaching concerning 1914, it is its inconsistency about what is taught concerning 1914.

As earlier noted, the Watchtower first taught that it was in a period from 1799 to 1874, not 1914, that marked "the time of the end." It was also 1874, not 1914, which was stated to be the date of Christ's invisible "second presence." Oddly, those teachings continued into the late 1920s. In 1929, J.F. Rutherford released his book, *Prophecy*, in which he asserted, "The Scriptural proof is that the second presence of the Lord Jesus Christ began in 1874 A.D."²⁸

This, of course, raises the questions that if Christ's "second presence" and "the time of the end" really did occur in 1914, then why didn't Watchtower leaders, such as Charles Taze Russell, Rutherford, and others announce it at that time, admitting that their earlier dates were mistaken? Why was it not until almost 1930 when Rutherford exchanged 1799 and 1874 for 1914?

Russell also taught that 1914 would mark the end of Armageddon. In *The Time is at Hand*, written in 1889 and which was the second volume of his "Studies in the Scriptures" series, Russell announced, "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."²⁹ In connection to this, writing in 1908 Russell further asserted:

"That the deliverance of the saints must take place some time before 1914 is manifest ... Just how long before 1914 the last living members of the body of Christ will be glorified, we are not directly informed."³⁰

When a subsequent printing of the book was published in 1920 — six years after "the deliverance of the saints" was supposed to have taken place — those same lines were changed to read:

1914 AND THE LAST GENERATION

“That the deliverance of the saints must take place *very soon after 1914* is manifest ... Just how long *after 1914* the last living members of the body of Christ will be glorified, we are not directly informed.”³¹

When 1914 passed and a new year arrived — bringing with it prophetic failure — the date for Armageddon’s end had to be altered. Instead of Messiah’s kingdom being ushered in, World War I broke out. So in April 1915, World War I was set forth as Armageddon and the readers of *The Watch Tower* magazine were told:

“The Battle of Armageddon, to which this war is leading, will be a great contest between right and wrong, and will signify the complete and everlasting overthrow of the wrong, and the permanent establishment of Messiah’s righteous kingdom for the blessing of the world.”³²

And then, the following year, readers were reminded:

“In the meantime, our eyes of understanding should discern clearly the Battle of the Great Day of God Almighty now in progress; and our faith, guiding our eyes of understanding through the Word, should enable us to see the glorious outcome — Messiah’s kingdom.”³³

World War I did not end with that glorious outcome, however, and the prophecy again failed. But those who continued to believe that the Watchtower was God’s representative were soon provided with yet another promise of the arrival of Messiah’s kingdom:

“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.”³⁴

Weathering the storm of its prophetic failures for Armageddon in 1914, 1918, 1925, and again in the 1940s,³⁵ the Watchtower apparently began weighing its options. In the 1960s, the leaders moved forward with “new light.” This time, drawing from Matthew 24:34, they reasoned that the generation of people who were living in 1914 constituted “the generation that will not pass away” and who “will be on earth at the time of Armageddon.” It was a message that would be repeated over and over again during the next quarter century. In *Awake!* the companion magazine to *The Watchtower*, readers were instructed:

“Bible prophecies indicate that Christ was installed as the King of God’s heavenly kingdom in 1914. Without delay, the newly enthroned Potentate waged war against the Devil and his demons, resulting in their ouster from the heavens. (Rev. 12:7-9) The ‘generation’ of Matthew 24:34 includes persons alive at the time that the war in heaven began in 1914. All who were living or who came on the scene around that time are part of that generation. Members of that generation will see the end of this world.”³⁶

And in a subsequent issue of the *Awake!* magazine, it was announced:

“Not only was the date of the world’s turning point foretold but the conditions that would follow were also foretold, and it was revealed just where mankind’s present course is leading, what its final result will be. And, very important for us, it was foretold that such final result would take place *within the lifetime of just one generation*, the generation that was alive in 1914. ... We can be equally sure that, of the generation alive in 1914, some will see the major fulfillment of Christ Jesus’ prophecy and the destruction with which it

culminates. This means that mankind is now in the most crucial time of its history, when the rule of this earth and of all human affairs will pass from the hands of imperfect political rulers and come to rest with a righteous government of God’s own making.”³⁷

In line with this new reasoning, David Reed notes:

“From the 1960s through late 1995, Jehovah’s Witnesses had been taught ‘the Creator’s promise of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away’ ... During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Witnesses connected this with other predictions in their publications to the effect that the end would occur in the autumn of 1975, when the generation who were teenagers in 1914 would be in their mid-70s and close to passing away.”³⁸

But as with the numerous other false predictions for the end, 1975 came and went without Armageddon. According to Raymond Franz, in March 1980 the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Governing Body discussed moving the date of Christ’s return up to 1957, the year the Soviet Union launched its Sputnik satellite, saying the launching would “fulfill” the prophecy in Matthew 24:29. However, not even the Governing Body could swallow that one and eventually it rejected the idea.³⁹ Of course, this raises the question that if 1914 — and all that comes with it — is biblically based, why was there any discussion at all about changing it? It appears that even the Governing Body knows they had a ticking time bomb on their hands.

In writing his memoirs, Franz observed:

“I have no idea what the future may bring as to the Governing Body’s position on this matter. By their emphasizing 1914 with renewed vigor they have, in effect, ‘made their bed’ and seem to feel compelled to lie in it. But

the span of the 1914 generation is proving like a couch that is too short for comfort, and the reasonings used to cover that doctrinal ‘couch’ are like a woven sheet that is too narrow, not able to shut out, in this case, the cold facts of reality.”⁴⁰

Nevertheless, in the 1980s that generation grew older and older. It was first claimed that those of that “generation” were at least adolescents in 1914, but that was later changed — or expanded — to include those who were infants in 1914. Truth is, among those who were infants in 1914, very few centenarians are still alive today. And those who were adolescents in 1914 have all died.

One of the most graphic illustrations of the Watchtower’s dismal failure in its prophetic speculations is the cover of the May 15, 1984, *Watchtower* magazine. Continuing to advance its teaching about the generation of 1914, the front page of that magazine featured a photograph of a group of 16 elderly Jehovah’s Witnesses who worked at the organization’s Bethel headquarters in Brooklyn. Below the photo, the headline boldly declared: “1914 The Generation That Will Not Pass Away.” Now, more than a quarter century since the magazine was published, that “generation that will not pass away” *has all passed away*.

A former Jehovah’s Witness, who served at the Bethel headquarters in the 1970s, has provided on his website the names, along with birth and death years, of each of the 16 individuals shown on the cover of *The Watchtower* magazine. He explains how his post came about:

“With the help of a few friends who also served at Bethel during the 70s and 80s we have now identified all of these 16 who were featured on that Watchtower magazine cover. ... 14 were longtime workers at Brooklyn Bethel headquarters. 2 were temporary workers who left shortly after the picture was published. Biographical detail from the Social Security Death Index (a public record) has been added when

available but all 16 have passed away.”⁴¹

In surveying the list of names and their years of death, it is interesting to note that one of the sixteen died the very year the magazine was published (1984) and the longest survivor among the group died at age 102 in 2008 — a decade ago.⁴²

Another stark example of a change made by Jehovah’s Witnesses, due to the aging and dying generation of 1914, was the altering of the masthead of its *Awake!* magazine. From March 8, 1988, through Oct. 22, 1995, it offered several reasons why *Awake!* was published. Of those reasons, it claimed:

“Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator’s promise of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away.”⁴³

However, beginning on Nov. 8, 1995, that apparently was no longer the case. That sentence in the masthead was revised to read:

“Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator’s promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things.”⁴⁴

Even more adjustments to the Watchtower’s prophetic scheme had to occur. In an article titled, “A Time to Keep Awake,” Jehovah’s Witnesses were given a new understanding of the generation of 1914:

“However, we ‘bring a heart of wisdom in,’ not by speculating about how many years or days make up a generation, but by thinking about how we ‘count our days’ in bringing joyful praise to Jehovah. ... Rather than provide a rule for measuring time, the term ‘generation’ as used by Jesus refers principally to contemporary people of a certain historical period, with their identifying characteristics.”⁴⁵

Then, to lend authority to this idea, the magazine cited professor of his-

tory Robert Wohl in his publication, *The Generation of 1914*: “A historical generation is not defined by its chronological limits. ... It is not a zone of dates.”⁴⁶

The Watchtower also issued a scolding to those who tried to nail down the definition of the generation of 1914: “Is anything to be gained, then, by looking for dates or by speculating about the literal lifetime of a ‘generation’?”⁴⁷

Evidently the prophetic conjecture of thinking that “generation” could have meant a specific number of years is not the fault of the leadership but of the rank-and-file. The magazine further said, “Eager to see the end of this evil system, Jehovah’s people have at times speculated about the time when the ‘great tribulation’ would break out, even tying this to calculations of what is the lifetime of a generation since 1914.”⁴⁸

Thus, the magazine hints, it was presumptuous Jehovah’s Witnesses who were responsible for placing too much emphasis upon what the word “generation” might signify. A novel approach to an embarrassing problem? Not at all. Watchtower leaders have done the same thing repeatedly over the years.

For example, after repeated declarations suggesting 1925 as the year the earthly phase of the kingdom would be recognized, the Society sidestepped blame and implicated the readers themselves for the blunder: “It is expected that Satan will try to inject into the minds of the consecrated the thought that 1925 should see an end of the work, and that therefore it would be needless for them to do more.”⁴⁹ The Watchtower used the same technique to explain away the speculation surrounding its 1975 prophetic failure.

However, it is the Watchtower leadership, not the faithful membership of its ranks, that is the source of such confusion. Consider these two examples of Watchtower conjecture:

“Which generation did Jesus mean [Matthew 24:34]? He meant the generation of people who

were living in 1914. Those persons yet remaining of that generation are now very old. However, some of them will still be alive to see the end of this wicked system. So of this we can be certain: Shortly now there will be a sudden end to all wickedness and wicked people at Armageddon."⁵⁰

And:

"Yes, you may live to see this promised New Order, along with survivors of the generation of 1914 — the generation that will not pass away."⁵¹

Yet, even after dodging the blame and then reprimanding Jehovah's Witnesses for such presumptuousness, the Society's leadership continued to dangle the "Armageddon carrot on a stick" before its fold. "Does our more precise viewpoint on 'this generation' mean that Armageddon is further away than we had thought? Not at all!"⁵² Watchtower writers boasted. Moreover, to even a casual observer, the organization is rigid in its refusal to let members deviate from the party line.

Former head legal counselor for the Watchtower, H.C. Covington, accentuated the Society's tyrannical standard during testimony in a 1954 court trial in Scotland. He stated under oath:

"[I]f the whole organisation believes one thing, even though it be erroneous, and somebody else starts on his own trying to put his ideas across then there is disunity and trouble, there cannot be harmony, there cannot be marching. When a change comes it should come from the proper source, the head of the organisation, the governing body, not from the bottom upwards, because everybody would have ideas, and the organisation would disintegrate and go in a thousand different directions. Our purpose is to have unity."⁵³

This was a unity, Covington admitted, that would mean a dissenter would be "worthy of death."⁵⁴ There

are no Bereans (Acts 17:11) allowed in this sect. Carl Olof Jonsson and thousands of other former Jehovah's Witnesses all authenticate that fact.

It is the leaders and writers of the Watchtower organization who are responsible for the many alterations in theology forced upon Jehovah's Witnesses. They are also accountable for the many revisions of history that find their way into the pages of the Society's publications.

NOT THE LAST, BUT NEXT TO LAST?

Perhaps the leadership of the Watchtower drew a measure of inspiration from Gene Roddenberry and his *Star Trek* franchise. In 1987, Roddenberry launched the second of his science fiction television series, titling that one: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. It was that last part of the series title to which the Watchtower has seemed to recently adopt.

In April 2010, the Watchtower began a new course for yet another alternative understanding of the organization's teaching about 1914. The end would not come during the generation of 1914 (because they are all but dead), but during *the next generation* — an overlapping generation, if you will:

"Although we cannot measure the exact length of 'this generation,' we do well to keep in mind several things about the word 'generation': It usually refers to people of varying ages whose lives overlap during a particular time period; it is not excessively long; and it has an end. (Ex. 1:6) How, then, are we to understand Jesus' words about 'this generation'? He evidently meant that the lives of the anointed who were on hand when the sign began to become evident in 1914 would overlap with the lives of other anointed ones who would see the start of the great tribulation. That generation had a beginning, and it surely will have an end."⁵⁵

And then two months later in June, the Watchtower reported on its "125th

annual meeting" held some eight months earlier, on Oct. 9, 2009. It was at that meeting that Governing Body member John E. Barr delivered a talk which reiterated the alternative understanding of the 1914 generation. In the Watchtower's report we learn:

"John Barr gave the third and final talk, which explained Jesus' illustration of the wheat and the weeds. (Matt. 13:24-30, 38, 43) That illustration refers to a 'harvest' during which 'the sons of the kingdom' are gathered and the weeds are separated to be burned up. Brother Barr made clear that the gathering would not continue indefinitely. He referred to Matthew 24:34, which says: 'This generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur.' He twice read the comment: 'Jesus evidently meant that the lives of the anointed ones who were on hand when the sign began to be evident in 1914 would overlap with the lives of other anointed ones who would see the start of the great tribulation.' We do not know the exact length of 'this generation,' but it includes these two groups whose lives overlap. Even though the anointed vary in age, those in the two groups constituting the generation are contemporaries during part of the last days. How comforting it is to know that the younger anointed *contemporaries* of those older anointed ones who discern the sign when it became evident beginning in 1914 will not die off before the great tribulation starts!"⁵⁶

While Barr was born in 1913 and by one of the Watchtower's later definitions would be considered of the generation of 1914, he died Dec. 4, 2010 (less than six months after the published report of his talk at the annual meeting). His passing is yet another confirmation of how desperate and urgent the need was for some type of revised doctrinal understanding. And so it is, the two (overlapping) generations would become one.⁵⁷

In 2014, the Watchtower Society released its book *God's Kingdom Rules!* which further promulgated this new teaching. Commenting upon Jesus' words found in Matthew 24:34 ("This generation will by no means pass away until all these things happen"), readers are questioned and answered:

"How will those words prove true? To answer that, we need to know two things: the meaning both of 'generation' and of 'all these things.' The term 'generation' often refers to people of varying ages whose lives overlap during a particular period of time. A generation is not overly long, and it comes to an end. (Ex. 1:6) The expression 'all these things' includes all the foretold events during Jesus' presence, from its beginning in 1914 until its culmination at the 'great tribulation.' — Matt. 24:21."⁵⁸

The Watchtower writers further continue to describe their novel interpretation:

"How, then, may we understand Jesus' words about 'this generation'? The generation consists of two overlapping groups of anointed ones — the first is made up of anointed ones who saw the beginning of the fulfillment of the sign in 1914 and the second, anointed ones who for a time were contemporaries of the first group. At least some of those in the second group will live to see the beginning of the coming tribulation. The two groups form one generation because their lives as anointed Christians overlapped for a time."⁵⁹

And finally, readers are once again presented with this new "Armageddon carrot on a stick":

"What may we conclude? Well, we know that the sign of Jesus' presence in Kingdom power is clearly evident around the globe. We also see that the anointed ones who are still alive and part of 'this generation' are getting on in years; yet, they will not all die off before the great tribulation

begins. Therefore, we can conclude that very soon indeed God's Kingdom will come and exercise its rule over the earth! How thrilling it will be to witness the fulfillment of the prayer that Jesus taught us: 'Let your Kingdom come!'"⁶⁰

The page on which the above quotation appears also includes a graphic depicting a "GENERATION" and showing as its starting point "1914" and its end, "Destruction of Babylon the Great." Between the two points a subheading states, "This Generation," and encompasses "GROUP 1: Anointed ones who saw the beginning of the fulfillment of the sign in 1914. GROUP 2: Anointed ones who were contemporaries of the first group; some of these will live to see the great tribulation."⁶¹

This new understanding, then, may buy the Watchtower another 75 years or so. But it is still false and will eventually bring, as it has numerous times before, despair and devastated lives. One former Jehovah's Witness, who also served at its Bethel headquarters in the 1990s, wrote:

"A generation is generally regarded to be a group of people that live together at the same time, or about 30 years — the average period between the birth of parents and the birth of their offspring. When Jesus made his statement regarding the generation, he meant the group that saw the signs would see the destruction of Jerusalem. The Governing Body has misapplied this statement, setting false expectations for many generations of Watchtower followers. ... Witnesses are encouraged to keep a short term focus and for over 100 years Witnesses have been discouraged from having children, getting married and going to University. ... This shortsightedness has been encouraged by changing the generation and end teachings in the late 1800's, the early 1900's, the 1920's, the 1940's, the 1950's, the 1960's, the 1970's and the 1980's."⁶²

In his thorough online review of the "Changes to the Generation Teaching," this former Jehovah's Witness concludes:

"By any logical definition, the 1914 generation is all but gone. This means either the generation teaching does not have a secondary fulfillment [sic] for our day, the Watchtower doctrine about 1914 is wrong, or they are wrong on both counts. As 1914 is the fundamental doctrine of the Watchtower, it does not bode well for the Watchtower's future interpretations. The Governing Body has alleviated proof its generation doctrine is wrong by removing any fixed time frame, but with the year 1914 quickly fading into obscure irrelevance, one must wonder when this core doctrine too will be discarded."⁶³

NOT JUST EXPIRED, BUT FALSE

In the 1985 movie, *Back to the Future* and its subsequent two sequels, the lead characters, Marty McFly and Doc Brown, go back and forth across "the space-time continuum" in Doc's 1982 DeLorean, an automobile-turned-time-travel-machine. The iconic vehicle bore the license plate: OUTA-TIME. That eight-letter vanity plate is truly the byword for the Watchtower and its 8.5 million members-missionaries who continue to herald their false gospel which has long surpassed its expiration date. Without a doubt, there are some Jehovah's Witnesses who don't know that they are presenting a gospel that is well past its anticipated shelf life. Others are probably aware that their leaders are consistently changing the expiration date of their gospel and don't seem to care.

The tragedy in this is that Jehovah's Witnesses do not understand that their sin has separated them from a holy God and that they can be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

The Bible is straightforward in its message and the Gospel it presents is clear and simple. Jesus came into the

world and accepted the punishment for our sins so that God might, in justice, accept us not through our own works or righteousness, but solely by faith upon the merits of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Eternal life is a gift from God, not a reward, as the Watchtower tells its followers.⁶⁴

Jesus Christ, who is the perfect and eternal Son of God, became man, lived a sinless life, and shed His blood upon the cross, dying in our place and rising again on the third day so that we may have forgiveness and the fellowship with His Father that our sin prohibited (1 Peter 3:18; Titus 3:5; Isaiah 53:5). Our response to this is to repent and believe. When we repent, we are turning from our rebellion and sin to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, with a desire to live God’s way. When we believe, we are trusting alone in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus; we trust in nothing of our own (works included), but only in the complete and finished work of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:16, 36; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

The sacrifice that Jesus made is available to all — including Jehovah’s Witnesses — with the added security that those who believe have eternal life (John 5:24; John 10:27-28). While the opportunity to repent ends at death (Hebrews 9:27), the biblical Gospel according to the Scriptures does not come with an expiration date. It is a Gospel that has and will remain the same throughout all generations, never needing revision or reinterpretation.

Endnotes:

1. Cover of *The Watchtower*, April 15, 1984.
2. Cover of *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1984.
3. “Shedding Light on Christ’s Presence,” *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1993, pg. 11.
4. *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2005, pg. 215, capitalization in original.
5. In more recent times, Jehovah’s Witnesses use the expression B.C.E. (“Before

- the Common Era”) in place of B.C. (“Before Christ”) and C.E. (“Common Era”) in place of A.D. (“Anno Domini” meaning “in the year of our Lord”).
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 217.
7. The “faithful and discreet slave” is a small number of “anointed” Jehovah’s Witnesses who are said to be God’s channel of communication to rank-and-file members. The Watchtower bases this class upon Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:45-47.
8. Raymond Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*. Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1983, pp. 138-139, italic in original. The first ellipsis in the quotation eliminates an overview by Franz of seven Watchtower beliefs tied to the 1914 date; the second ellipsis eliminates his parenthetical referencing to this overview.
9. *Jehovah’s Witnesses in The Twentieth Century*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1979, pp. 14, 15. Also see the court transcript (“Pursuer’s Proof”) of Douglas Walsh vs. The Right Honorable James Latham Clyde, Court of Session, Scotland, November 1954, pp. 14-15; testimony given by Frederick Franz, who was vice-president of the organization at that time.
10. *The Watchtower Publications Index 1930-1985* (pg. 1097) indicates that in that 55-year period 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (in part or in whole) was cited only five times. The online Watchtower Index for 1986-2017 indicates those verses (in part or in whole) have been cited only twice (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200270046>). Additionally, the printed *Watchtower Publications Index 2001-2015* shows no reference to those verses in any Watchtower publication during those years.
11. “If God Has an Organization, What Is It?,” *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1981, pg. 17, emphasis added.
12. J.F. Rutherford, *Creation*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: International Bible Students Association, Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1927, pg. 319.
13. David A. Reed, *Jehovah’s Witness Literature*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993, pg. 64.
14. *Pay Attention to Daniel’s Prophecy!* Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1999, pp. 95-97.
15. See, for example, *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1999, pg. 103 (“587 BC Jerusalem and Temple destroyed by Babylonians”) and pg. 307 (“587 Nebuchadnezzar II destroys Jerusalem and Temple — most Judeans taken into exile”). Also, James I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, and William White, Jr., editors, *The Bible Almanac*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980, pg. 127 (“Nebuchadnezzar succeeded in capturing Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and carried its

- people into exile”).
16. *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, op. cit., pg. 217.
17. Ralph Woodrow, *1914 and the Gentile Times*. Palm Springs, Calif.: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Inc., 2017, pg. 5, italics and capitalization in original.
18. Carl Olof Jonsson, “When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed?” posted on the [JWfacts.com](http://www.jwfacts.com) website. Document accessed at: www.jwfacts.com/pdf/carl-olof-jonsson-when-jerusalem-destroyed.pdf.
19. Carl Olof Jonsson, *The Gentile Times Reconsidered*. La Jolla, Calif.: Good News Defenders, 1983. In the 20 years since it was first published, this volume has had several revisions and expansions. The fourth edition (Atlanta: Commentary Press, 2004) is available online at several websites, including: www.watchtowerlies.com/linked/the-gentile-times-reconsidered.pdf. A brief, but also thorough, 24-page refutation of the Watchtower’s erroneous dates is “Why 1914 and 607 are False,” posted on the [4jehovah.org](http://www.4jehovah.org) website. Document accessed at: www.4jehovah.org/why-1914-ad-and-607-bc-are-false/.
20. “When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed?,” op. cit., italics in original.
21. In 1988, the Watchtower replaced its single volume, *Aid to Bible Understanding*, with a two-volume *Insight on the Scriptures*. In this latter work, the section on “Chronology” (which is being addressed in this article) experienced only slight modification, remains virtually intact from its original, and still presents “607 B.C.E.” as the date for “the desolation of Judah.”
22. *Crisis of Conscience*, op. cit., pg. 25.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 26.
26. “When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed?,” op. cit.
27. Paul Seiler, “Jehovah’s Witnesses view of 1914 - A Refutation,” from the Christian Library Australia website. Document accessed at: <http://christianlibrary.org.au/cel/documents/cults/jw1914.html>.
28. J.F. Rutherford, *Prophecy*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: International Bible Students Association, Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1929, pg. 65.
29. Charles T. Russell, *The Time Is At Hand*. Allegheny, Pa.: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1889, pg. 101.
30. Charles T. Russell, *Thy Kingdom Come*. Allegheny, Pa.: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1908, pg. 228.
31. Charles T. Russell, *Thy Kingdom Come*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: International Bible Students Association, 1920, pg. 228, emphasis added.
32. *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*, April 1, 1915, Reprints edition, pg. 5659.

33. *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, Sept. 1, 1916, Reprints edition, pg. 5951.

34. J.F. Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: International Bible Students Association, 1920, pp. 89-90.

35. In the 1940s there was no specific season or exact year predicted. The Watchtower merely let its followers know that Armageddon was coming very soon. For example, in the May 1940 issue of its inside publication *The Informant*, it stated, "The year 1940 is certain to be the most important year yet, because Armageddon is very near." It behooves all who love righteousness to put forth every effort to advertise THE THEOCRACY while the privileges are still open" (pg. 1). See also J.F. Rutherford, *Children*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1941, pg. 366.

36. "This Generation Will Not Pass," *Awake!*, Sept. 22, 1962, pg. 27.

37. "Mankind at the Crossroads by 1914 - Why?" *Awake!*, Oct. 8, 1973, pg. 19, italics in original.

38. David A. Reed, *Jehovah-Talk*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997, pg. 75.

39. *Crisis of Conscience*, op. cit., pp. 218-220.

40. *Ibid.*, pg. 221.

41. "A Memorial to a False Prophecy," Orthocath website. Document accessed at: <https://orthocath.wordpress.com/2011/01/27/a-memorial-to-a-false-prophecy/>. The individual responsible for this website became a Jehovah's Witness in the mid-1960s and began serving at the Bethel

headquarters in 1973. He has since left the Watchtower and now identifies himself as "a 're-vert' to the Orthodox Catholic Church and a member of a parish of the Orthodox Church of America." On his website he also has articles describing his conversion into the Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as details and observations about the years he spent working at the Bethel headquarters.

42. The complete lists of names and years provided are: 1. Clarence Ulrich, 1908-1989; 2. Arthur Worsley, 1907-1996; 3. George Gangas, 1896-1994; 4. John Errichetti, 1912-1997; 5. Louise Stemen, 1903-2002; 6. Dickran Derderian, 1892-1984; 7. Ann Rose, 1910-2000; 8. Aquilla Zook, 1898-1993; 9. Sophie Yuchniewicz, 1906-2008; 10. Dr. Willis Stemen, 1907-1987; 11. Bernice (Bun) Henschel, 1909-2001; 12. Mary Hannan, 1898-1995; 13. Martin Poetzinger, 1904-1988; 14. George Hannan, 1899-1992; 15. Robert Hatzfeld, 1903-2001; and 16. Babette Herrlinger, 1894-1995. (On the website reproduction of the magazine cover, the individuals in the photograph are numbered to corresponded to the list of names and years.)

43. Example: masthead in *Awake!*, Oct. 22, 1995, pg. 4.

44. Example: masthead in *Awake!*, Nov. 8, 1995, pg. 4.

45. "A Time to Keep Awake," *The Watchtower*, Nov. 1, 1995, pg. 17.

46. *Ibid.*, pg. 18, ellipsis in original.

47. *Ibid.*, pg. 19.

48. *Ibid.*, pg. 17.

49. "Diligence and Fervency," *The Watchtower*, Sept. 1, 1925, pg. 262.

50. *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1982, pg. 154.

51. "-1914- The Generation That Will Not Pass Away," *The Watchtower*, May 15, 1984, pg. 7.

52. "A Time to Keep Awake," op. cit., pg. 20.

53. Douglas Walsh vs. The Right Honorable James Latham Clyde, op. cit., pg. 347.

54. *Ibid.*, pg. 348.

55. "Holy Spirit's Role in the Outworking of Jehovah's Purpose," *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), April 15, 2010, pg. 10.

56. "United in Love — Annual Meeting Report," *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), June 15, 2010, pg. 5, italic in original.

57. Taken to its extreme, this could encompass three or more generations. For example, there could be two generations in between a youth and a 95-year-old person.

58. *God's Kingdom Rules!* Wallkill, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014, pg. 11.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

60. *Ibid.*, pg. 12.

61. *Ibid.*, capitalization in original.

62. Paul Grundy, "Changes to the Generation Teaching," Facts About Jehovah's Witnesses ([JWfacts.com](http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/generation.php)) website. Document accessed at: www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/generation.php.

63. *Ibid.*

64. See, for example, "Working Hard for the Reward of Eternal Life," *The Watchtower*, Aug. 15, 1972, pg. 491.



EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

How soon we forgot the embarrassing tale of Edgar Whisenant who called his little booklet, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be In 1988*. Of course, Whisenant got even more specific and super-glued his utter nonsense to Sept. 11-13, 1988. He left no wiggle room and could not walk back his specific prediction. But then the date had to be recalibrated to 1989 because 1988 passed without a whimper — as did 1989. And after 1989 we all were still here! How well I remember. Sad to say the tribe of Whisenant did not vanish but continued to multiply. It is baffling to me that the newspaper exegetes and tabloid interpreters continue with us and never fess up or repent of their evil lies. They just keep spinning new scenarios, new excuses, and new dates. The more frightening, the better. Believers often forget that Satan is called the father of lies (John 8:44).

Then there is the guessing game of naming the Antichrist. Various Roman emperors have been named.

Many popes and politicians have been branded. In the 1930s and 1940s, Hitler and Mussolini were suggested. In more recent times, Henry Kissinger was identified to be the Antichrist. And even more recently, Barack Obama was named.

Notorious for this practice was the Southwest Radio Church led by David Webber and Noah Hutchings. It seems like anything goes if it excites the followers. Anything but truth, that is. Or maybe it is because anything — true or not — will sell a book or gain attention.

Webber and Hutchings insisted that the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem was the Tribulation Temple. The Great Synagogue at 56 King George Street in Jerusalem was built and opened in 1982. The Great Synagogue is just a synagogue and only a synagogue! No wonder Jewish people reject Christianity when its most visible spokesmen spread such nonsense.

Mary Stewart Relfe claimed to have a direct line to God. Relfe was a prepper who in the early 1980s advised stocking water and food. Horrible things (that never

happened) were about to befall us. Relfe created shivers for many.

Deuteronomy chapters 13 and 18 are less forgiving of false prophets. There the death penalty is commanded. When pushed to the wall, the breed of new prophets back away and call for fallible prophecies or claim to be only discerners of trends. Chuck Smith, the late leader of Calvary Chapel churches, at least repented of date setting after Jesus failed to return in 1981.

Another exciting tale that recycles every few years is the report that vultures are multiplying in the Valley of Armageddon. This God-sent multiplication is supposed to be setting the stage for the invading Russian army and the end. Thousands of Russians will be food for the growing vulture population, or so we are told. The vulture population ebbs and flows in Israel. There are fewer vultures there now than in 1948.

The “Belgium Beast” was said to be a giant computer in Belgium that had all the personal information of everyone on the planet. Our every move was being tracked and monitored. It was a mechanical Antichrist ready for world domination. Some Christian ministries were frothing with excitement. The “Beast” never existed except in a 1970 novel called *Behold a Pale Horse* and in a screenplay for David Wilkerson’s film *The Rapture*.

Worse yet was the late Harold Camping, who derived his conclusions from subjective numerology.

One of the most dishonest con men in the 1970s was a total misfit named John Todd. Tract and comic book publisher Jack Chick helped bring Todd to the fore. Claiming to have been a high-ranking Satanist and a leading member in the hierarchy of the Illuminati, he named Jimmy Carter as the Antichrist and identified many well-known Christian leaders as Satanists who were under the Illuminati’s control. He told many wild stories that were eventually debunked, but failed to tell how he was dishonorably booted from the military.

Many churches opened their pulpits to Todd. Some split because of his influence. Claiming there were threats against his life, he carried a gun and was accompanied by bodyguards. Todd was convicted of rape and sent to prison. (He was also charged with molesting two children.) He was so out-of-control that he was placed in a behavioral disorder unit where he died in 2007. His lies died with him. Many of us remember that whole sordid and ugly ordeal when discernment was put on hold.

Back in the day there was also a list of demon busters who claimed all kinds of insights into the demonic realm. There was Mike Warnke, Rebecca Brown, and Lauren Stratford, to name just a few. It turns out that their background stories and hokum fell apart under scrutiny. Brown’s drug use was apparent and Warnke’s multiple marriages were another giveaway.

There seems to be certain professing Christians who crave sensationalist fiction to keep them going. They

crave a spiritual diet that produces fantasies and quivers. Some people just thrive on lies and hype that ultimately fail and the letdown only drives them to a quest for even more extremes.

In their book, *The Unreality Industry*, Ian I. Mitroff and Warren Bennis write:

“Unreality is big business. It is manufactured and sold on a gigantic scale. It has intruded itself into every aspect of our lives. For example, by some estimates, public relations, i.e., the deliberate manufacturing of slanted information, accounts for up to 70 percent of what passes for news and information in our society. The end consequence is a society less and less able to face its true problems directly, honestly, and intelligently” (cited in *Fakes, Frauds & Other Malarkey* by Kathryn Lindskoog, pg. 191).

Some may think that the recent surge of books by individuals who claim to have visited heaven is new. How soon we forget. Occultist Emanuel Swedenborg made such claims in the 1700s. Many copycats have jumped aboard the Swedenborg bandwagon. Many of the astral travelers have contradictory and competing stories. Some report Jesus’ eye color as brown, others as blue, still others as green or gray, and even one as rainbow!

Some of the better-known heaven hoppers and celestial travelers were trumpeted by the late Paul Crouch on his TBN television. That made them instant celebrities. Pat Robertson (*The 700 Club*, CBN) also gave some of them undeserved attention. Still today, Sid Roth and his *It’s Supernatural* program will air just about any heaven trek story; the more outrageous the better.

Remembering back to the 1970s through the early 1990s, the names of visitors to heaven that stand out are Richard Eby, Betty Malz, Betty Eadie, Roberts Liardon, Kenneth Hagin, Morris Cerullo, Jesse Duplantis, Mary K. Baxter, and Gwen Shaw. There were more, but these seemed the most promoted.

If there is one thing we can be certain of, it is that the antics will continue. We will continue to see sensationalist claims based on emotions and imagination. We will hear dramatic — but bogus — tales of sensational blood moons, revealed harbingers, unveiled mysteries, and discovered paradigms, all which come with a healthy dose of twisted Scriptures. The gullible will continue to turn from truth and be turned to fables (2 Timothy 4:4).

It is good to recall the adage: *extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof*. We need to scrutinize what we are told. It is also good to remind ourselves that every claim must be put under the scrutiny of the Scriptures. True believers are under attack and can be vulnerable simply because they are too trusting and too naïve. There are “savage wolves” out there — both from outside and inside the flock — who prey on the gullible and uninformed (Acts 20:29-30). Don’t forget to remember.

—GRF



Books in Review

GOD'S NOT DEAD

by Rice Brooks

W Publishing Group, 279 pages, \$15.99

A successful movie will often spawn a corresponding publication that can generate substantial revenue for both author and publisher. And so, most people who recognize the title of this book will think that this volume was inspired by and written following the success of the movie by the same title. But not so with *God's Not Dead*. While writing the book, a conversation by the author with a friend led to discussions with a faith-based movie company, which led to the film that was a phenomenal box-office draw. However, the author tells his readers, the book "is not a novelization of the screenplay but an overview of the evidence for God's existence" (pg. x).

As one begins the book, immediately the reader is confronted with a testimony involving a mystical "inner voice" experience (pg. xii). But it would be a mistake to give up on it so early on. Redact the testimonial and move forward — there's too much good information to bail out so soon.

The major portion of the book — chapters 2 through 10 — offers nine key proofs "that present a solid foundation for believers of all ages and educational backgrounds." The first few chapters explore the overwhelming proof of the existence of God by reviewing such specific evidences as time and space having a beginning, a fine-tuned universe, the complexity of life, and the reality of moral laws and ethics. Then, the remaining chapters turn personal, speaking to such concerns as the purpose of life, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the witness of Scripture, the effect of grace in a person's life, and the personal testimonies of former atheists who have come to faith in Jesus Christ.

In drawing from the Apostle Paul's sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17), the closing chapter is a challenge to believers to take what is presented and make an impact in the lives of those around them.

The book mentions the names and ideas of many atheists prominent in our day. Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris all receive a fair share of coverage. However, Dawkins appears to be Brooks' poster boy with repeated illustra-

tions of the evolutionary biologist's crass and illogical attacks on theism and faith. Yet it's not just the critics who are spotlighted. The reader is introduced to key apologists and theologians and their defenses of the Christian faith, including William Lane Craig, John Lennox, Dan Wallace, Lee Strobel, and Gary Habermas.

Throughout the volume, Brooks provides numerous helpful lists that draw together the key aspects of the subject matter he is presenting. In his section on evolution, he outlines 10 differences between humans and animals; in his chapter on Jesus he uses Strobel's "Five Es" of the resurrection; in his discourse on Scripture he employs the acronym SHARPER to establish the trustworthiness of the Bible; and in his discussion of grace he provides 10 important effects that grace has had upon our society.

Brooks maintains that Christianity is not in decline, as some would suppose. He writes that, "The Christian faith is surging globally" (pg. 210); that, "there has been phenomenal growth of Christianity in every city that is described as a truly secular city" including New York City (ibid.); and that, "The church in America is still strong and vibrant" (pg. 218). Yet the optimism he expresses in his latter chapter varies a bit from the statistics he presents in the Introduction where he said that more millennials now doubt the existence of God and more than half the young people who attend church will drop out once they enter college (pg. xv).

In his discussion of evolution, Brooks does not specifically reveal whether he holds to an old earth or young earth position. However, he may be tipping his hand in his citing of men like Hugh Ross and J.P. Moreland (both old earthers), while overlooking the research and writings of such young earth creationists as Ken Ham and Henry and John Morris.

In addition to the mystical experience found in the Introduction, the discerning reader will probably also want to make a few other (slight) redactions. Brooks cites James Tabor without any qualification (pg. 154), gives a nod to Nicky Gumbel and his Alpha Course (pg. 216), and offers another (borderline) mystical experience along with what could be seen as a charismatic form of healing (pp. 223-224).

Despite the caveats mentioned above, this volume is an easy-to-read and helpful resource to combat the "backlash of the meaninglessness of atheism and unbelief."

—MKG

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