

## ARTICLE 1

Why is date setting “a thing” for the Watchtower?

Looking for a date when Jesus would return was somewhat common in the 1800s. In the same way a stopped watch is right twice a day, some of the interpretive schemes developed seemed to favor a date in the late 1800s or early 1900s. Those faithful to such groups believed the numerical schemes showed that they were living right at the end of history.

In regard to valuing date setting, it is significant that Charles Taze Russell began his ministry studying with the Second Adventist. The Second Adventists had followed or studied the ministry of William Miller and his failed prophecy. Miller had erroneously taught that the end of the world was to occur in 1844. Some who would become Seventh Day Adventist accepted the 1844 date and believed that Jesus had returned invisibly at that time.<sup>1</sup> However, the Second Day Adventist, rejected 1844 as an error and developed alternative dates. None of those alternative dates came to pass either. During this time, a number of impressive prophetic schemes developed, and many people believed it would be possible to pinpoint the time of Christ’s return. Ultimately, all these schemes were demonstrated to be wrong. Russell, who had no theological training prior to his contact with the Second Adventist, adopted part of the faulty prophetic system of the Second Adventist as well as a number of their doctrines. Those that followed Russell kept some, but not all of his teaching. They also made multiple failed predictions concerning Christ’s return.

If date setting was demonstrated to be consistently wrong, would it make sense to follow a ministry that made false statements about what God was going to do or what God had done? And why would Christ’s return be invisible? Wouldn’t believing that be the height of gullibility?

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Wills, *A People for His Name: A History of Jehovah’s Witnesses and an Evaluation*, 2nd ed. (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Enterprises, 2006), 4. “. . . the largest group, branching off under Ellen White into the modern day Seventh Day Adventist. These still accepted the 1844 date but said that what had taken place then was in heaven, invisible to human eyes.”

## ARTICLE 2

### **Date Setters**

Posted by [Mark Mayberry July 18, 2012](#)

By Mark Mayberry

The coming of Christ is a central theme of the Bible. The Old Testament anticipated the coming of Christ; the Gospels bear witness to the fact that he did come; and the Epistles emphasize that he is coming again. Frequently the question arises, "When will Christ return?" The Bible says "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:1). In this regard, Jesus said, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matt. 24:36). Attempting to reveal the time of Christ's second coming becomes an obsession with some men. Predictions have been made countless times in the last 2,000 years, but none has come to pass. You would think that folks would learn after a while, but the prognostication continues. Consider some members of "The Date Setter's Hall of Fame."

#### **William Miller**

William Miller (1782-1849) was one of the founders of the Seventh Day Adventist movement. On the basis of a detailed examination of the Bible, especially the books of Daniel and Revelation, Miller predicted first that March 21, 1844 and later that October 22, 1844 would be the date when Christ would return in glory and the Earth would be cleansed by fire, ushering in the millennium. When the time passed without event, many of his followers drifted away.

At this point Ellen G. White (1827-1915) entered the picture. She claimed a vision in which she saw the followers of the Adventist faith being ushered into heaven. This gave the movement a much needed boost of morale. Then she reinterpreted Miller's predictions by saying that he was right on the date but wrong on the event. According to Mrs. White, on October 22, 1844 the Lord went into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. There he began to judge and investigate the lives of the believers. She taught that when Jesus finished this "investigative judgment," he would return to the earth and the millennium would begin. Thus by putting a new spin on Miller's prophecies, this young woman saved his movement and became the leader of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

#### **Charles T. Russell**

Charles T. Russell, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, was also a famous date setter. Down through the years either he or his organization has said the Lord would return in 1874, 1914, 1975, etc. They have been disappointed repeatedly. The Watchtower Society tried to save face by redefining predictions that did not come to pass. For example, after nothing happened in 1914, they said that the Lord did indeed return to earth, but in an invisible state. Nice try, but the Bible says, "behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him" (Rev. 1:7).

#### **Herbert W. Armstrong**

In 1956, Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God published a booklet called 1975 in Prophecy. He predicted that Christ would return in 1975. Furthermore, he claimed the

Bible prophesied that one-third of the population of America, the British nations, and the democracies of northwest Europe would die of famine and disease by the middle of 1970s. Another third of the population would die in World War III at the hands of a German-dominated European dictatorship. The remaining third of the population would be transported like cattle as slaves to Europe and South America. Needless to say, none of this ever came to pass.

### **Hal Lindsey**

Hal Lindsey, a graduate of the Dallas Theological Seminary, made himself a wealthy man by popularizing the doctrine of premillennialism. in a series of best selling books in the late 1970s. His most prominent book was *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which sold an estimated 14 million copies. His book and the subsequent movie applied various Bible prophecies to current events in an attempt to offer a blueprint for the Apocalypse. By playing very loose with the facts and with a number of fantastic leaps in reasoning, Lindsey argued that current events signaled the end of the world. The pollution problem, the world food shortage crisis, and the current Middle East conflicts all were foretold in the Bible. Mr. Lindsey was more cautious than some in setting dates for the second coming of Christ, but he dropped broad hints that 1988 would be a very interesting year (Tampa Tribune, 2-19-79, p. 31); Houston Post, 6-14-81, p. 7A). All I can say is, "Don't hold your breath."

### **Willie Day Smith**

Willie Day Smith of Irving, TX announced that the Lord would rapture His saints on April 1, 1980. A Texas Tech graduate with a chemical engineering degree, Smith based his calculations on a study of Bible prophecy and what he called "Hebrew numerics." Shortly before the target date, he said, "It's interesting that April 1 is April Fools' Day, and the Bible talks about being fools for Christ." When the date passed without event, newsmen visiting his home found the doors locked, shades drawn and two cars in the driveway. One wag wrote that it could not be determined if the latter-day prophet had indeed been raptured, but it appeared that he was simply ignoring visitors. It is obvious that Willie Day was the one who was fooled (Houston Post, 4-2-80, Sec. 1, p. 3).

### **Ted Kresge**

In St. Petersburg, Florida, a 41 year-old karate instructor named Ted Kresge kicked off a massive advertising campaign in 1981 declaring that the end was near. He took out full-page ads in more than 40 newspapers across the country claiming that he had "absolute proof" that all born-again Christians would be "raptured" to heaven on Saturday, June 20, 1981. This would trigger a seven-year period of tribulation, including global famine, natural disaster, economic collapse, world war, and the emergence of the Anti-Christ. Near the close of that epoch, Christ would return to Earth and defeat the evil-doers in the climactic Battle of Armageddon. Afterwards the earth would enjoy a millennium of peace and prosperity (Houston Post, 6-14-81, p. 7A). This man wasted a lot of good money on newspaper ads, didn't he?

### **Bill Maupin**

Bill Maupin of Tucson, Arizona, leader of the Lighthouse Gospel Tract Foundation, predicted that the rapture would occur on Sunday, June 28th, 1981. Maupin, who claims that God first began speaking to him in 1965, predicted that a seven year tribulation period would follow. The “Anti-christ” would appear in 1984 and rule the earth until the Battle of Armageddon on May 14, 1988. At this point, Maupin believed, the Lord and his followers would return to Earth to establish his kingdom, bringing about 1,000 years of peace. Some of his 40 to 50 disciples quit their jobs, sold their homes and cars, or declined to renew their apartment leases. On the appointed day, Maupin went to the desert and waited for Jesus to appear and take him to heaven. He didn’t (Houston Post, 6-29-81, p. 5A).

### **Edgar Whisenant**

Most recently, a 56 year old former NASA Rocket Engineer named Edgar Whisenant proclaimed the Lord would return on Tuesday, September 13th, 1988. In his book, 88 Reasons Why The Rapture Will Be In 1988, Whisenant affirmed that the saints would be raptured during the 48 hours of this Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah, Sept. 11-13). This date is considered important because it falls 40 years and 120 days after Israel became a nation on May 14, 1948. He also forecast various other events: Israel will sign a peace treaty with an unnamed Anti-Christ on September 21, 1988. World War III will start on October 4, 1988 and the climatic Battle of Armageddon will be fought exactly 7 years later in 1995. The final battle with Satan will occur on March 17, 2999 A.D., and eternity will commence January 1, 3000 A.D.

The World Bible Society of Nashville, TN printed over 2,000,000 copies of this book. They sold many booklets, but gave away over 700,000 free copies. Reaction varied around the country. Multitudes responded with skepticism, but great excitement was generated in certain quarters of the religious community. “Rapture parties” were held where people gathered for prayer, Bible reading and discussion about the Lord’s second coming. Costly efforts were made by various individuals to inform the public of the Lord’s impending return. A retired Ohio fire-fighter named Ed Koval paid \$3,700 to purchase a full page advertisement in a Toledo newspaper to inform people that the day of reckoning was at hand. A couple in Pensacola, FL paid \$5,000 to put up a dozen billboards announcing the Lord’s arrival in September (Dallas Morning News, 9-3-88, 45A; The Paris News, 9-12-88 3A; Various UPI News Stories). Once again, these self-appointed harbingers have been revealed to be false prophets.

Having considered these examples, I am reminded of the words of Moses when he pointed out the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet: “When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:21-22).

### **Conclusion**

Why are people so quick to believe such predictions? Many who feel anxious and vulnerable by the precipitous state of world affairs find comfort in the premillennial faith. They believe that every crisis reported on the evening news is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. This notion gives order and meaning to the turbulence facing mankind. It gives people a sense of security.

Why are religious leaders so quick to jump on the bandwagon? Many seek to capitalize on the excitement and interest generated by such predictions. Their prime objective is evangelism. They seek converts at any cost, and the end justifies the means. Such an approach is flagrantly manipulative.

The Staunton Street Apostolic Church in Huntington, WV, ran a full-page newspaper ad announcing that Jesus would return on September 13th, 1988. After the ad ran, 165 people showed up at the church to be baptized. "We're not trying to be alarmist, but if it does happen, it would be crazy not to prepare your heart," said Edwin Harper, minister of the church (June Preston, UPI Wire Story, September 14, 1988).

Billie Friel, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Mount Juliet, TN, said, "This has become something of a spiritual phenomenon. . . . I think this book has caused people to go back to the Bible." Friel said that nearly 400 people gathered at his church one Sunday afternoon for a two hour discussion of Edgar Whisenant's predictions. "About 70 people gave testimonies of how this has changed their lives," he said. "A deadline is a great motivator, and this deadline has people studying the Bible," Friel said, "It shakes people up when a deadline is put on something like this" (Frances Meeker, "Christians Prepare To Meet Jesus," The Nashville Banner, 9/88, P. A-8).

There is a down side, however, that cannot be ignored. The use of such predictions to gain converts is crass and exploitative. In the long run it creates skepticism and disbelief. Many who are unlearned will put their faith in these predictions rather than in the Bible. When such prophecies inevitably fail, the faith of many will be destroyed. They become permanently "turned off" to religion. I am reminded of the words of Jeremiah:

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! " says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the Lord (Jer. 23:1-2, NKIV).

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