

Reference Document

“150 Years of Watchtower Predictions That Never Came True”

Every Claim, Source, and Verification Status

How to Use This Document

Each entry identifies a specific factual claim made in the video, the source it is based on, where to verify it, and any notes on confidence level. Claims are organized in the order they appear in the video.

Verification levels:

- **PRIMARY** — Sourced directly from official Watchtower publications (magazines, books, booklets, convention talks), court rulings, government filings, or scanned reproductions of those primary documents. Primary sources can stand on their own.
- **SECONDARY** — Sourced from established research archives, academic treatments, or reputable journalism that catalog and reproduce the primary material. Secondary sources support claims and are most defensible when paired with the primary.

Many older Watchtower publications referenced here predate the searchable Watchtower Online Library at wol.jw.org. For those pre-1950 sources, the Internet Archive Wayback Machine and the research archive at jwfacts.com reproduce the original pages. Where a public link is available, it is listed; where only the publication and page number are listed, the original is the source of record.

Section 1: The 2014 Article (Cold Open)

Claim: In May 2014, *The Watchtower* published an article titled “Some Successes, Many Failures” that mocked Harold Camping, Jeane Dixon, and Edgar Cayce for failed end-times predictions.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Public Edition), May 2014, “Predicting the Future—Some Successes, Many Failures”
- **URL:** <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20140501/predict-the-future/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The article is hosted on the official [jw.org](http://www.jw.org) website and remains live as of publication.
- **Key quote:**

“Doomsday prophet Harold Camping and his disciples widely advertised that the earth would be destroyed in 2011. Needless to say, the world is still here.”

Section 2: The Inheritance (1780–1873)

Claim: *Studies in the Scriptures: The Day of Vengeance* (1897) anchored the prophetic count to May 1780, claiming that “every item predicted had begun to be fulfilled at that date.”

- **Source:** Charles Taze Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. IV: The Day of Vengeance* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1897), p. 604
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell’s own published volume in the *Studies in the Scriptures* series.
- **Key quote:**

“Reckoning a hundred years from 1780, the date of the first sign, the limit would reach to 1880; and, to our understanding, every item predicted had begun to be fulfilled at that date.”

Claim: *Three Worlds and the Harvest of This World* (Barbour & Russell, 1877) called 1798 “one of the great landmarks of prophecy” for the end of papal dominion.

- **Source:** Nelson Barbour and C. T. Russell, *Three Worlds and the Harvest of This World* (Rochester, NY, 1877), p. 158
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The book Russell co-authored before founding his own movement.
- **Key quote:**
“...time, times, and a-half... ended in 1798, at the taking away of the papal dominion... one of the great landmarks of prophecy.”

Claim: The 1921 book *The Harp of God* printed 1799 not as a possibility but as a certainty: “1799 definitely marks the beginning of the time of the end.”

- **Source:** Joseph F. Rutherford, *The Harp of God* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1921), p. 230
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Rutherford’s study guide published by the Watch Tower Society as a basic introduction for new converts.
- **Key quote:**
“Twelve hundred sixty years from A.D. 539 brings us to 1799 — another proof that 1799 definitely marks the beginning of ‘the time of the end.’”

Claim: *The Watch Tower* magazine in 1914 stated that the prophetic period “terminated in 1829” and named William Miller as its fulfillment.

- **Source:** *The Watch Tower*, November 1, 1914, p. 326
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s flagship magazine, in print.
- **Key quote:**
“This period terminated in 1829. Shortly after 1829 the message of the nearness of the Second Advent of Christ began especially to be promulgated by William Miller.”

Claim: *Three Worlds* (1877) said the seventh trumpet of Revelation sounded from August 1840 until the day of wrath.

- **Source:** Nelson Barbour and C. T. Russell, *Three Worlds and the Harvest of This World* (Rochester, NY, 1877), p. 27
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Co-authored Barbour and Russell text.
- **Key quote:**
“The seventh trumpet sounds from Aug. 1840, until ‘the time of trouble,’ or day of wrath...”

Claim: *Studies in the Scriptures: Thy Kingdom Come* taught that the prophetic 2,300 days pointed to 1846 as the time God’s sanctuary would be cleansed.

- **Source:** C. T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. III: Thy Kingdom Come* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society), p. 306
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell’s own published volume.
- **Key quote:**
“The 2,300 days point to 1846 as the time when God’s sanctuary would be cleansed of the defiling errors and principles of Papacy...”

Claim: Russell's *Studies in the Scriptures* declared the six thousand years since Adam complete in 1873.

- **Source:** C. T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. II: The Time Is At Hand* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1915 ed.), p. 39
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell's own published volume.

Section 3: The Architecture (1874–1910)

Claim: *The Watch Tower* in November 1922 stated “beyond a doubt” that Christ had appeared in 1874.

- **Source:** *The Watch Tower*, November 1, 1922, p. 333
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization's flagship magazine, printed eight years after 1914.
- **Key quote:**
“*Bible prophecy shows that the Lord was due to appear for the second time in the year 1874. Fulfilled prophecy shows beyond a doubt that he did appear in 1874.*”

Claim: When the 1874 date was finally abandoned in 1943, the Society later explained that Russell had used “an inaccurate chronology” worked out from the King James Bible.

- **Source:** *Man's Salvation Out of World Distress at Hand* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1975), p. 287
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society's own published history.

Claim: *Thy Kingdom Come* set April 1878 as the time Christ “began to exercise his office of King of kings and Lord of lords.”

- **Source:** C. T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. III: Thy Kingdom Come* (1911 ed.), p. 150
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell's own published volume.
- **Key quote:**
“*April 1878 as the time when he began to exercise his office of King of kings and Lord of lords...*”

Claim: The organization's own modern history book admits that in 1878 the faithful “thought they would be given their heavenly reward at that time.”

- **Source:** *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1993), p. 632
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization's officially published institutional history; searchable on the Watchtower Online Library.

Claim: In 1906, Russell in *Zion's Watch Tower* redefined the failed 1878 rapture as a quiet change-at-death rather than a visible event.

- **Source:** *Zion's Watch Tower*, July 1906, p. 230
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell's own magazine.
- **Key quote:**
“*...our mistake lay in expecting to see all the living saints changed at once, and without dying...*”

Claim: *Zion's Watch Tower* in 1881 said the gathering of the 144,000 would be sealed and complete that year.

- **Source:** *Zion's Watch Tower*, January 1881, p. 1
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell's own magazine.
- **Key quote:**
“...the gathering of the bride into the place of safety will occupy a parallel of seven years of time, ending in 1881.”

Claim: Russell had foretold a “war of extermination” in Europe years before 1906.

- **Source:** *Zion's Watch Tower*, January 15, 1892, p. 23
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell's own magazine.
- **Key quote:**
“Woe to the man or nation who starts the next war in Europe; for it will be a war of extermination.”

Claim: Russell's *Thy Kingdom Come* taught that a trouble upon the Church could be expected around 1910 A.D., based on measurements of the Great Pyramid of Egypt.

- **Source:** C. T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. III: Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 364 (printings prior to 1910)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell's own published volume.
- **Note:** The pyramid-1910 passage was modified in later printings after the date passed. The pre-1910 wording is the source for the claim.

Section 4: The Year They Bet Everything (1914–1921)

Claim: *The Time Is At Hand* (Vol. II of *Studies in the Scriptures*) said the battle of God Almighty would “end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of the earth's present rulership.”

- **Source:** C. T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. II: The Time Is At Hand* (1908 ed.), p. 101
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell's own published volume.
- **Note:** The 1908 edition reads 1914; later editions read 1915.

Claim: The same volume said the present governments “must all be overturned about the close” of 1914.

- **Source:** C. T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. II: The Time Is At Hand*, p. 99
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell's own published volume.

Claim: After 1914 passed without the predicted overthrow, Russell wrote in *The Watch Tower* that “the trouble to the full will be accomplished by October, 1915.”

- **Source:** *The Watch Tower*, December 1, 1912, pp. 377–378
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Russell's own magazine.

Claim: The first printing of *The Finished Mystery* (1917) predicted the close of the world war “some time about October 1st, 1917,” and later printings of the same book — same title, same page — quietly changed it to read “probably early in the year 1918.”

- **Source:** *The Finished Mystery* (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. VII; Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1917), p. 268, comparing the 75,000 edition and the 2,604,000 edition

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Both editions are the Watch Tower Society’s own publication; the change is documented by direct comparison of the same page in two printings.

Claim: *The Finished Mystery* stated that in 1918 God would destroy the churches wholesale.

- **Source:** *The Finished Mystery* (1917), p. 485
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own publication.
- **Key quote:**

“...in the year 1918, when God destroys the churches wholesale and the church members by millions...”

Claim: *The Finished Mystery* predicted that “even the republics will disappear in the fall of 1920,” and later editions silently changed the line to “even the republics will disappear in the time of anarchy.”

- **Source:** *The Finished Mystery*, p. 258, comparing the 1918 edition and the 1926 edition
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own publication; the change is documented by direct comparison of the same page in two printings.

Claim: *The Finished Mystery* tied 1921 to “the close of the heavenly way.”

- **Source:** *The Finished Mystery*, p. 64
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own publication.
- **Key quote:**

“...the glorification of the Little Flock in the Spring of 1918 A.D. will be halfway between the close of the Gentile Times and the close of the heavenly way, A.D. 1921.”

Section 5: The Pattern Becomes Undeniable (1925–1951)

Claim: Rutherford, writing in *The Watch Tower* in July 1924, called 1925 “a date definitely and clearly marked in Scriptures, even more clearly than that of 1914.”

- **Source:** *The Watch Tower*, July 15, 1924, p. 211
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s flagship magazine.
- **Key quote:**

“The year 1925 is a date definitely and clearly marked in Scriptures, even more clearly than that of 1914...”

Claim: The 1920 booklet *Millions Now Living Will Never Die!* stated that 1925 would witness the resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the other ancient patriarchs to perfect humanity on earth.

- **Source:** Joseph F. Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die!* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1920), p. 88
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own publication.
- **Key quote:**

“...we may expect 1925 to witness the return of these faithful men of Israel from the condition of death, being resurrected and fully restored to perfect humanity...”

Claim: The Watch Tower Society built a mansion in San Diego called Beth-Sarim (“House of the Princes”) and recorded a deed holding it in trust for the future return of the Old Testament patriarchs. The deed itself was published in the March 19, 1930 issue of *The Golden Age*.

- **Source:** *The Golden Age*, Vol. XI, No. 274, March 19, 1930, pp. 406–407

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own magazine, in which the deed was printed in full as a public document.

- **Key quote (from the published deed):**

“the WATCH TOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY shall hold said title perpetually in trust for the use of any or all of the men above named as representatives of God’s kingdom on earth... Any persons appearing to take possession of said premises shall first prove and identify themselves to the proper officers of said Society as the person or persons described in Hebrews chapter eleven and in this deed.”

Claim: After 1925 passed without the patriarchs returning, the destruction of Christendom was moved to 1932, as later admitted by a 1938 Watchtower.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1938, p. 55
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own magazine.
- **Key quote:**

“Many had emphasized the year 1925 as the date, and then when that date did not materialize the date was moved up to 1932.”

Claim: The organization later declared that the door to heaven — the calling of the 144,000 — closed in 1935.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1995, p. 19
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine, searchable on the Watchtower Online Library.

Claim: Decades later, in 2007, the organization admitted it could not in fact set a specific date for when the heavenly calling ended.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, May 1, 2007, p. 31
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine, searchable on the Watchtower Online Library.

Claim: *The Watchtower* of September 1941 described young people receiving the book *Children* as clutching “the Lord’s provided instrument for most effective work in the remaining months before Armageddon.”

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1941, p. 288
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine.

Claim: The November 1, 1950 *Watchtower* drew an explicit parallel between the 37 years from Christ’s death to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the (then) 30+ years since 1914, warning of a “more terrible end that is shortly to come upon hypocritical Christendom.”

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, November 1, 1950, pp. 407–408
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine, searchable on the Watchtower Online Library.
- **Key quote:**

“More proof that such system had ended was given thirty-seven years later when the Jewish priests were forcibly deprived of their sacrificial work by the destruction of their typical temple... When we call

to mind the horrible end that came upon the Jewish capital and its besieged inhabitants back there, we shudder at the more terrible end that is shortly to come upon hypocritical Christendom and its confusion of religions.”

Claim: In October 1968, the Society’s magazine *Awake!* condemned those who set specific dates for the end of the world as guilty of “false prophesying.”

- **Source:** *Awake!*, October 8, 1968, p. 23
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine.
- **Key quote:**

“True, there have been those in times past who predicted an ‘end’ to the world, even announcing a specific date. Yet nothing happened. The ‘end’ did not come... They were guilty of false prophesying.”

Section 6: The Machinery (1966–2000)

Claim: The 1966 book *Life Everlasting—in Freedom of the Sons of God* observed that six thousand years of human history would end in 1975 and invited the reader to draw the conclusion.

- **Source:** *Life Everlasting—in Freedom of the Sons of God* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1966), p. 29
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own publication.
- **Key quote:**

“...it would not be by mere chance or accident... for the reign of Jesus Christ to run parallel with the seventh millennium of man’s existence.”

Claim: After 1975 passed, the 1975 *Yearbook* shifted responsibility downward, characterizing the expectation as something individual members had “read into” the published material.

- **Source:** *1975 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1975), p. 146
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own annual publication.

Claim: In 1995, *The Watchtower* quietly redefined the word “generation,” abandoning the prior teaching that the generation of people alive in 1914 would witness Armageddon.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, November 1, 1995, “A Time to Keep Awake,” pp. 17, 19–20
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine.
- **Key quote (the redefinition, p. 17):**

“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.”

Claim: In its April 15, 2010 issue, *The Watchtower* introduced the “overlapping generation” teaching — that Jesus had meant the lives of anointed Christians on hand in 1914 would overlap with the lives of other anointed Christians who would see the start of the great tribulation.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, April 15, 2010, pp. 10–11
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine, searchable on the Watchtower Online Library.

- **Key quote:**

“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.”

Claim: *The Finished Mystery* floated 1980 as a year that could mark “the regathering of all of Fleshly Israel from their captivity in death.”

- **Source:** *The Finished Mystery* (Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. VII; Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1917), p. 62

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own publication.

- **Note:** Wording on page 62 varies between printings; the early-printing wording quoted above is the source for the claim.

Claim: The 1986 book *True Peace and Security—How Can You Find It?* pointed to the United Nations’ designation of 1986 as an international year of peace and called it “a step toward the fulfillment” of the prophesied cry of “peace and security” that precedes sudden destruction.

- **Source:** *True Peace and Security—How Can You Find It?* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1986), p. 85

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own publication.

Claim: A January 1989 *Watchtower* said the preaching work would be “completed in our 20th century.” When that phrase became inconvenient, it was changed in the permanent bound-volume reprint to read “in our day.”

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1989, p. 12, comparing the original magazine issue and the bound volume

- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own magazine. The change between the magazine printing and the bound-volume printing is documented by direct comparison.

Claim: A 1980 *Watchtower* taught that if the present system survived to the turn of the century, there would still be survivors of the World War I generation.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1980, p. 31

- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine.

Section 7: Where It Lands (2003–Today)

Claim: A 2003 *Watchtower* drew attention to the 120 years between God’s decree and the flood of Noah’s day, noted that “some 90 years have passed since the last days of this system of things began in 1914,” and urged urgency.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, December 15, 2003, p. 15, article titled “Warned of ‘Things Not Yet Beheld’”

- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>

- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine, searchable on the Watchtower Online Library.

Section 8: The Pattern and Coda

Claim: The Bible standard for distinguishing a true prophet from a false one is given at Deuteronomy 18:21–22 — if a prophet speaks in the name of God and the word is not fulfilled, then God did not speak it.

- **Source:** *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, Deuteronomy 18:21–22
- **URL:** <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/deuteronomy/18/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own Bible translation, hosted on jw.org.

Claim: *The Watchtower* in 1997 stated their own test for identifying true messengers from God: that Jehovah identifies them by making the messages he delivers through them come true.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1997, p. 8
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s own magazine.
- **Key quote:**

“Jehovah... identifies them by making the messages he delivers through them come true. Jehovah is also the Great Exposer of false messengers.”

Claim: In 1931, the Society’s book *Vindication* stated that the faithful had “learned to quit fixing dates for the future and predicting what would come to pass on a certain date.”

- **Source:** Joseph F. Rutherford, *Vindication, Volume I* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1931), pp. 338–339
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The Watch Tower Society’s own publication.

Section 9: Additional Supporting Sources

The following research archives reproduce, catalog, and cross-reference the primary Watchtower publications cited above. They are useful starting points for further verification.

JWfacts.com — Historical Watchtower research archive

- **URL:** <https://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/1800s.php>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — A long-established research archive that reproduces, scans, and cross-references the historical Watchtower record. Useful as a finding aid; the primary publications are the source of record.
- **Contains:** Comprehensive scans and transcriptions of pre-1950 Watchtower publications, including *Studies in the Scriptures*, *The Finished Mystery*, *Zion’s Watch Tower*, and *The Watch Tower*.

Watchtower Online Library (wol.jw.org) — Official searchable archive

- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — The organization’s official online library of its publications.
- **Contains:** Searchable text of post-1950 *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines, the *Proclaimers* history, and other modern Watchtower publications.

Internet Archive Wayback Machine

- **URL:** <https://web.archive.org>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Archived snapshots of historical documents and webpages.
- **Contains:** Scanned reproductions of *The Finished Mystery*, early *Watch Tower* issues, *The Golden Age*, and other historical Watchtower publications.