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**Who Won the War of 1812?: A Short History of History**

By Tal Davis

*O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last  
gleaming,  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the  
perilous fight  
O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly  
streaming?  
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in  
air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still  
there,  
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave*

Francis Scott Key  
September 14, 1814

Have you ever thought about this question: Who won the war of 1812? Some of you are probably wondering, "Just what was the War of 1812? Who fought it and where was it fought?" I wonder if it is even mentioned much in American history classes in school today. In any case, the War of 1812 was the second war between the United States and the United Kingdom, fought from June 18, 1812 until February 15, 1815. The above words were written during one of its battles at Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor. The British Navy bombarded the American fort all night. But, when Francis Scott Key, a prisoner on board a British ship, saw the stars and stripes still flying at daybreak he was inspired to write that classic poem which is now our National Anthem. It may be the only thing most people know about that came out of that war, though they don't likely know that it did.

The hostilities started when the United States declared war over several issues. One was the British support of Native American resistance to U.S. expansion in the Northwest led by Tecumseh. Another was the British naval blockade of American shipping to and from France (who the British were fighting in Europe). The British were also forcing captured American citizen sailors born in Britain to serve in their navy. And finally were British accusations of American threats to annex parts of Canada, then still British colonial territory. The two most famous events of the war were the burning of Washington D.C., and the Battle of New Orleans. The war ended unofficially in December of 1814, but not officially until the signing of the Treaty of Ghent on February 15th, 1815.

So then, who won the War of 1812? If you are an American, you were probably taught that the United States won the war. America never lost a war, right? General Patton said so. Well, not until that Vietnam thing, anyway. Nonetheless, the sea lanes were opened up and the impressment of American sailors ceased. So, of course, we won. Well, not so fast, my friend. If you are Canadian, you were probably taught that the British won the War of 1812. After all, they did torch the American capital. Furthermore, and more importantly to Canadians, they repelled an American invasion, maintained their North American colonies' independence from the United States, and kept Canada as part of the British Empire. So, since 1867, Canada has been an independent and self-governing member of the British Commonwealth.

So who won the war? It depends on who you ask. Both sides claimed victory. Perhaps the one group of people who lost were the Native Americans and First

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Nation Canadians who eventually lost most of their land claims in both countries.

So by now you may be wondering what this has to do with worldview and religious issues, which is the focus of **MarketFaith** ministries. It helps, at this point, to make an important point about how history is understood. There is an old saying, "History is written by the victors" (origin unknown).

It could also be said that history is written by whoever has the power. If you have read George Orwell's classic novel 1984, you know what I mean. It's the story of a man named Winston Smith who lives in a one party totalitarian state ruled by a dictator called Big Brother. Smith's bureaucratic job is to write history books. Actually, he rewrites history books according to the party's latest version of what happened – which constantly changes in order to support its current policies. Whether or not it was true is irrelevant. What the party says happened is what happened.

Don't laugh, the Nazis and the Communists were (and still are) masters at doing just that sort of revising of history. During the Soviet era, the Communist Party of The USSR was notorious for changing history. Perhaps the most notable example was in years after the death of Joseph Stalin (1879-1953). He had ruled the Soviet Union as First Secretary of the Communist Party with an iron hand from 1924 (after the death of Vladimir Lenin), through the victory over Germany in World War II, and until his death in 1953. During his lifetime, he was officially hailed among communists in the USSR as the world's greatest leader. Pictures and statues of him were placed in every location through the country. He also spread communism to Chi-

na and eastern Europe fomenting the Cold War.

However, on February 26, 1956, Stalin's eventual successor, Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971), delivered a secret speech to the Communist Party Congress in which he denounced Stalin as a tyrant and murderer (Stalin's policies had caused the deaths of more than 30 million Soviet citizens). Khrushchev immediately ordered all monuments and statues to Stalin removed, and the nation's history revised to tell the "truth" about the crimes he had committed during his regime. Pictures in books were even changed to delete Stalin and certain other persons deemed unworthy to be remembered in Soviet history. Many names and events were scrubbed from history and covered from the outside world.

One man who exposed much of the USSR's dark history was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008) who wrote several books detailing his personal experience, and those of others in the infamous Siberian labor camps of the 1930s. His most famous work was *The Gulag Archipelago* (Published 1973), for which he won a Nobel Prize, and after which he was exiled from Russia.

So we see that some regimes have tried to distort history and hide embarrassing events from their people. The same could be said for religious history. When we study the backgrounds of various religious groups, we find that quite often the official historical record they publish does not correspond to what really happened. In many instances they tend to "forget" embarrassing or unethical occasions.

Perhaps the best example of this kind of a Orwellian disregard for truth is the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (the Jehovah's Witnesses). Its hard to catalogue how many times that organization has predicted the dates for Armageddon and the end of the world. Starting with their founder Charles

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Taze Russell, and right up until recent times, they pin pointed dates such as 1910, 1914, 1925, 1935, etc. for the end of the world or other miraculous occurrences to happen.

For instance, in the 1960s and early 70s, Watchtower literature stated that Armageddon and the end of this wicked system of the world was sure to come in 1975. This particular date was based on what they saw as a clear time table outlined in the Bible. The Watchtower maintained that Jehovah created the world in 4004 B.C. and that this system of things would last for exactly 6000 years. Therefore, they did the math: 4004 B.C. + 6000 years = A.D. 1974. But they also knew that you had to add one year to the calculation since the calendar had no year zero. So the end would actually be A.D. 1975. In the years leading up to 1975, many Jehovah's Witnesses made sacrifices to get ready for the end. Some sold their businesses, some put off having children, others went into full time door-to-door service. Well, obviously, 1975 came and went and nothing happened. Not unexpectedly, over the next couple of years, the Jehovah's Witnesses experienced its greatest loss of membership in its history.

So what did the Watchtower Society do? Frankly, nothing. They simply denied that they had ever made the predictions about 1975. That despite the fact that many people still had the magazines and

books they published saying so. The organization's headquarters ordered its members to destroy all publications that had those articles, which many still faithful Witnesses did. Eventually, as time passed, the group recovered, gained new converts, and began to grow again. Its fair to say that most Jehovah's Witnesses born since 1975 have no idea that the organization ever made that false predication, or the many others before it. And anyone who knows about it is not allowed to talk about it on threat of being disfellowshipped (excommunication). In their view, what is true is not what actually happened but what the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society says is true. No questions asked.

So what does this mean for us as believers? Two things. First, as Christians we should never be afraid

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of the truth. Jesus said He was the embodiment of the truth and that anyone saying or doing anything that changes or obscures the truth is not of God.

So next time someone comes to your door offering free literature, a Bible, or wanting to tell you about their church, make sure they are telling the real gospel of Jesus Christ. Believers need good discernment when encountering new ideas.

Second, we must be vigilant that we present our message with integrity. The biggest problems in evangelicalism today are the widespread scandals, commercialism, and outright frauds that are diminishing the effectiveness of our witness. People wonder why they should take the gospel seriously when they read about the ungodly lifestyles of those purporting to be Christian leaders.

Who won the War of 1812? It doesn't matter now. But it does matter who is winning the war for truth in 2024. Jesus said, "I am the Way, Truth, and the Life."

*O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand  
Between their lov'd home and the war's desolation!  
Blest with vict'ry and peace may the heav'n rescued land  
Praise the power that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!  
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto - "In God is our trust,"  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.*