

**An Open Letter to
Family and Friends**

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Glossary:

Dale references a number of different versions of the Bible in this document. These versions are denoted by an abbreviation after the quote or reference, as follows:

NW -- New World Edition

TEV -- Today's English Version, formerly the Good News Bible.

An Open Letter to Family and Friends

One of the hardest things for a Witness to understand is “why would anyone ever leave Jehovah’s organization.” I know, because when I was an active Witness, it was one thing I could never understand. When someone did, I just accepted the usual explanations without really investigating: “They lost their love for Jehovah,” “They were secretly carrying on practices condemned by the Bible,” “They loved pleasures more than they loved God,” “They fell victim to materialism,” etc. It never occurred to me that perhaps they left **because** they loved Jehovah, Christ Jesus, and the Bible.

Of course it is true that some do leave for the former reasons. People leave for many reasons, not all of them good. Some are expelled for gross immorality. But it is easier to believe that anyone who leaves must be either unworthy or wicked, than to consider the possibility that one left over matters of conscience and a desire to hold to one’s convictions based upon Scripture. For to entertain that possibility raises the question of the validity of one’s own commitment to the Watchtower Society and its teachings.

Compounding the problem is the matter of how the organization views those who leave. To communicate to others the real reason for leaving puts one at great risk of being cut off from those he loves. It is easier and safer to merely express disinterest in matters religious and simply “disappear” from sight rather than to let those in authority know the truth. At least in that way one can usually maintain normal relations with family and friends.

The problem with that is that “normal” relations do not really continue, because now there are certain subjects that are forbidden. There is no longer any real openness or intimacy. The relationship takes on a feeling of superficiality. We talk about the weather or job or relatives but not the central values around which life really revolves. One feels a certain sense of disapproval though not usually openly expressed lest the subject come out in the open and force confrontation. The result is an inner frustration and fear. You want to “level” with those you care about, but knowing the Witness “mindset” and the control over individual thinking that the organization exerts, you fear to be open about your feelings and concerns lest what you say triggers the harsh reaction mandated by the policies of the Watchtower Society. Yet eventually one’s own integrity forces the issue out regardless of the consequences. After all, you have to live with your conscience. That is why I have decided to put my feelings in writing. Perhaps it will be less threatening and more easily understood.

Please understand that I am not trying to get anyone to leave the Watchtower organization. It has, after

all, done a certain measure of good. Any organization which turns people toward God and Christ and the Bible is accomplishing some good, and the moral behavior of many witnesses is certainly commendable. The association and support system it can provide can be valuable, especially for young families. After all, Christianity is really a religion of community, thus we need the association of fellow Christians. That, probably, is the hardest thing about leaving; the fear of not being able to find uplifting Christian association. I know that there are many who are bothered by the conflicts they see in their religion, but the fear of being cut off and the uncertainty of replacing that "community need" in their lives leads them to conclude that for them the advantages of the organization outweigh its disadvantages. For us, however, it did not.

That is not to say that I think there is something "wrong" with those who choose to stay, or are not bothered by the things that bothered us. That is a matter of their own conscience, and they may see things differently than we do. Each person's crisis of conscience comes at a different time and may be over different matters for different individuals. I can still accept them as fellow Christians and would be pleased to continue fellowship with them as individuals. Of course the practical point of the matter is that they may not continue to accept me. If that should be the case, it would be a necessary, albeit painful loss, since I cannot but follow my own conscience as trained by God's inspired Word.

For us there was never one simple issue which caused us to have doubts and questions about the organization; rather, it was the organization's teachings and its claim of divine direction contrasted with what we observed and experienced over a period of years that first did that. This discrepancy threatened to drive us towards atheism, because anything that shattered faith in the organization affected faith in God, so closely are the two tied. Thus we were eventually forced to realize that the organization was actually coming between us and our relationship with God. Once we no longer felt that it was really what it claimed to be, God's exclusive channel of communication to mankind, we could no longer keep up the pretense that it was. I would like to try to explain how we came to this conclusion. I hope that you will be open-minded enough to read it.

My wife and I spent most of our lives in the Watchtower organization. My mother became a Witness when I was four years old; I have never known anything else. Likewise, my wife's family converted when she was a young teen. For us, leaving was difficult, since our whole world of friends and family was tied up with the Watchtower organization. Growing up as Witnesses, we did all the things that Witness youths are expected to do. After high school, rather than go on to college¹, I became a member of the "Bethel family," as members of the Watchtower headquarters staff are known. There I got to know the inner workings of the organization, and some of the individuals who are in positions of authority. I left Bethel in 1956, but continued as a full-time

“pioneer minister,” being joined in this activity by my wife after our marriage in 1958. We continued in this activity until we became parents. Throughout all my years as a Witness, I have served in some capacity in most of the local congregations I attended. It was during the years as an elder in a small midwestern town that the questions of conscience forced us to the confrontation that this letter documents.

Does Our Religion Have a Double Standard?

One early perception that led to disillusionment was the feeling that in some respects we had a double standard. One example that stands out in my mind illustrates this well. In the December 1, 1986 issue of the *Watchtower* magazine appeared an article “Religious Liberty Under Attack in Greece.” In it was a well documented account of outrageous religious intolerance in the “birthplace of democracy,” Greece. The article effectively refutes the accusations made against Jehovah’s Witnesses by the Greek Orthodox Church which resulted in the loss of religious freedom for all Jehovah’s Witnesses in Greece. The Church’s argument to the court (based on Jehovah’s Witnesses denial of the trinity doctrine) claimed: “Jehovah’s Witnesses not only cannot be rightfully called Christians, that is to say, disciples of Christ, but on the contrary, they are... the antichrists.” The *Watchtower* article takes issue with these accusations. Under the subheading “Who Are the Christians” it says:

“Nowhere did Jesus instruct Christians to persecute, imprison, assault, or take mob action against those who disagreed with them. Thus, in the first century the real Christians **were the persecuted, not the persecutors**. The persecutors were the clergy and those incited by them. It is the same in Greece today.”

The next subheading asks “Are They Antichrists?” It is clear that the Society is highly offended by this charge. They give the following refutation:

“What does the Bible say of “antichrist”? At 1 John 2:22 it states: ‘Who is the liar if it is not the one that **denies that Jesus is the Christ**? This is the antichrist, the one that denies the Father and the Son.’ Thus, the plain fact of God’s inspired Word is that an antichrist does not accept Jesus. But Jehovah’s Witnesses do! They most fervently believe in Jesus and follow his teachings! hi fact, no one

can become one of Jehovah's Witnesses without accepting Jesus as the divine Son of God, who came down from heaven, was impaled and resurrected, and who returned to heaven. So anyone who says that Jehovah's Witnesses are "antichrist" either is **badly misinformed, is blinded by prejudice, or has an evil motive.**"

Since one of the reasons the Greek Orthodox Church considered Jehovah's Witnesses to be antichrists was their denial of the Trinity doctrine, the article gives a refutation of the doctrine of the trinity. Then they go on to say:

"However, if the Orthodox Church wants to believe the Trinity, that is their right. But it has no right in a democratic land to persecute, incite mobs and arrests, and deny Jehovah's Witnesses their liberties because they do not believe the Trinity."

"...Jehovah's Witnesses, well known and granted legal recognition internationally, uphold those democratic principles. They want Greece to uphold them too, and not to let any church **impose its Inquisition mentality on others by persecuting those who do not agree with its views.**"

I fully agree with the sentiments expressed by this article as do Jehovah's Witnesses and other lovers of religious freedom throughout the world. In past incidents of governmental oppression, the Society has encouraged all who agree to express their outrage in letters to the government officials responsible and the press of the nations involved so that both sides may be heard. I believe this is a right and reasonable action to take.

How is it, though, that when the shoe is on the other foot, the Watchtower Society acts more like Greek Orthodox Clergy than the fair minded-lovers of religious freedom which they characterize themselves to be? Jehovah's Witnesses consider the charge of "antichrist" (or "apostate") to be false **because** they believe in Christ Jesus. But why is it that they mete out harsh treatment to any who may disagree with any teaching of the Watchtower Society and brand them as evil "apostates" with wicked motives **even though such ones believe deeply in Christ Jesus as their mediator and ransomer?** And why is it right for Jehovah's Witnesses to petition government officials and the press in order to have their side of the story told, but wrong for one banished by the organization for doctrinal disagreements to attempt to explain what he feels to be an unfair accusation either by word or letter? Anyone who disagrees with any teaching of the Society is treated

in a manner reminiscent of the Inquisition. Even though his good name is besmirched, his motives impugned, he is to remain silent. How does such conduct reflect the teaching of our Lord, "All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must likewise do to them?" The conduct of the Watchtower Society in this matter seems to me to be a double standard, which to me is repugnant.

I suppose I can say that I really left **because** of what the organization taught me about the Bible. I always felt that we had "the truth," and that the source of that truth was the Bible. That meant that what we believed was true, and that those beliefs could be proven by the Bible. When I studied the *Truth that Leads to Eternal Life* book with people of other religions and considered the chapter "Why it is wise to examine your religion," I really believed that one **should** question his religion. That chapter says:

"It is not any man, but God, who is the judge of what pleases him. To get God's viewpoint, we need to go to the Bible. There he plainly tells us the course to follow if we want to gain eternal life." -- Page 11 (A-1)

"We need to examine, not only what we personally believe, but also what is taught by any religious organization with which we may be associated. Are its teachings in full harmony with God's Word, or are they based on the traditions of men? If we are lovers of truth, there is **nothing to fear from such an examination**. It should be the sincere desire of every one of us to learn what God's will is for us and then do it." -- Page 13 (A-2)

"Follow the course of those ancient Bereans whom God's Word approves because they "received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, carefully examining the Scriptures daily as to whether these things were so (Acts 17:11). -- Pages 15,16 (A-3)

"As you examine God's Word, you will learn that your love for God will be put to the test. There may be individuals, perhaps even close friends or relatives, who will not approve of your examining the Scriptures. (1 Peter 4:4; Matthew 10:36,37) They may try to discourage you... If this should occur, remember, having God's approval is far more important than having the approval of men." -- Page 16 (A3)

Since 1982 the *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* book has replaced the *Truth* book and it, too, makes a similar appeal to the propriety of examining one's own religion:

“How should you feel if **proof is given that what you believe is wrong**? For example, say that you were in a car, traveling for the first time to a certain place. You have a road map, but you have not taken time to check it carefully. Someone has told you the road to take. You trust him, sincerely believing that the way he has directed you is correct. **But suppose it is not.** What if someone points out the error? What if he, be referring to your own map, shows that you are on the wrong road? Would pride or stubbornness prevent you from admitting that you are on the wrong road? Well, then, if you learn from an examination of your Bible that you are traveling a wrong religious road, be willing to change. Avoid the broad road to destruction; get on the narrow road to life!” — page 32, 33 (A3)

In a like vein, the November 22, 1984 *Awake!* published a series of articles stressing the importance of keeping an open mind, even in matters of religious faith. The first article “An Open or a Closed Mind - Which Do You Have” contrasted the closed and open mind and pointed out the advantages of having the latter:

“Having an open mind, on the other hand, means **being willing to examine and to evaluate information without a biased attitude.** By retaining what is worthwhile and rejecting what is worthless, we can reach definite conclusions on a solid basis and **still leave our minds open to further revision should additional information become available** at a future time. He who feels he has learned it all can be sure that this attitude will **prevent him from ever learning more.**” -- Page 3, 4 (A-4)

The third article, “An Open Mind Wins God’s Approval” said:

“The importance of having an open mind so as to win God’s approval is shown in the words recorded at Ephesians 5:10,17. There we read: “**Keep on making sure** of what is acceptable to the Lord. On this account cease becoming unreasonable, but **go on perceiving** what the will of Jehovah is.” -- Page 8 (A-5)

Subheading: “How to Find Religious Truth”:

“An open mind is willing to do what 1 John 4:1 recommends. It says: ‘Beloved ones, do not believe

every inspired expression, but **test the inspired expressions** to see whether they originate with God, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world.” -- Page 9 (A-5)

Here the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses recommends that their readers have an open mind and feel free to examine their religion. **After all, if we have the truth, then what is there to fear?** Truth will stand up to any investigation. Really, that is what makes it truth. I had always felt that was really the difference between our religion and all others: that we had the faith to examine our beliefs and to change them if they proved to be out of harmony with God’s Word the Bible. For that reason I never feared to discuss any subject or read material that examines other viewpoints.

The Scriptures remind us at Proverbs 18:13 that “When anyone is replying to a matter before he hears it, that is foolishness on his part and a humiliation.” One can hardly say he has “heard” a matter until he has given fair consideration to both sides. There is great benefit to us in our doing so. For if, after examining the evidence on both sides, we remain convinced that our view is correct, our faith in our convictions has been strengthened. If, on the other hand, we see some merit in the other viewpoint, we should be willing to adjust our thinking. In this way we can demonstrate whether we are really interested in the truth of matters, or in justifying our own views. When conflicting ideas clash in fair and open contest, it is truth that comes off the victor. The more it is tested, the more brilliantly it shines. It was Joseph Rutherford who said:

“Error always seeks the dark, while truth is always enhanced by the light. Error never desires to be investigated. Light always courts a thorough and complete investigation. “ -- *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, page 13

But now I read in the *Watchtower* that such an attitude is dangerous and wrong. The March 15, 1986 issue said of reading literature critical of the Watchtower Society:

“Will curiosity cause you to read it, just to see what he has to say? You may even reason: ‘It won’t affect me; I’m too strong in the truth. And besides, if we have the truth, we have nothing to fear. The truth will stand the test.’ In thinking this way, some have fed their minds upon apostate reasoning and have fallen prey to serious questioning and doubt.” -- Page 12

Then it went on to try to discourage and even intimidate anyone from making such an investigation, reviling such persons and impugning their motives. Compare, however, the statements made in the Truth book where they tell others: "if we are lovers of truth, there is nothing to fear from such an examination." Here Jehovah's Witnesses are encouraging people of other faiths to examine **their** religion in a critical way, using the publications of die Watchtower Society (an organization that **their** church would consider "apostate"), to lead them to "the truth." Then, once they become a Jehovah's Witness, they lose this right to be open-minded. If, as the Watchtower Society insists, they have the truth, what is it that they are afraid of? Is their position so shaky that the slightest amount of argument against it leads to questioning and doubt? Why is it wrong for a Witness to do what he recommends that others do?

Consider the matter from this viewpoint: suppose a Catholic family asks their priest if it's all right if they read the *Watchtower*, since it is critical of the Catholic religion. He could read them Romans 16:17,18:

"I implore you, brothers, be on your guard against who puts difficulties in the way of the doctrine you have been taught. Avoid them... [they are] confusing the simple-minded with their pious and persuasive arguments" (Jerusalem Bible).

Then when the Witness returned, the Catholic could say, "It wasn't the priest who told us not to read the *Watchtower*; it was God speaking through the scriptures." How would the Witness like being called "apostate" and a threat to genuine Christians? Wouldn't he try to convince the Catholic that he has nothing to fear from an examination of the evidence, and in fact God requires each individual to do that?

Are we not guilty of telling people of other religions to do what we are not willing to do ourselves? Isn't that a case of "having two sets of scales"? Do Jehovah's Witnesses in fact have a double standard? The Bible is very clear as to how Jehovah feels about double standards.

"Two sorts of weights are something detestable to Jehovah, and a cheating pair of scales is not good." -- Proverbs 20:23.

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are, if you judge; for in the thing in which you judge another, you condemn yourself, inasmuch as you that judge practice the same things." -- Romans 2:1

In the forty-five or more years that I was active as a Jehovah's Witness, I have talked to thousands

of people of other religions, many of whom challenged my beliefs as a Witness. Yet I was never afraid to listen to their views, or even to accept literature which criticized the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses. After all, if I were to be able to defend my faith and convince them that what I believed was the truth, I needed to understand their beliefs. However, it wasn't anything that the "apostates" said that caused me to begin questioning my belief system. It was what I read in the *Watchtower* itself that led me to have doubts and questions.

The same *Watchtower* of March 15, 1986 went on to say:

"If, out of curiosity, we were to read the literature of a known apostate would that not be the same as inviting this enemy of true worship right into our home to sit down with us and relate his apostate ideas?" -- Page 13

"Well, if we would act so decisively to protect our children from exposure to pornography, should we not expect that our loving heavenly Father would similarly warn us and protect us from spiritual fornication, including apostasy? He says, Keep away from it." -- Page 13

One familiar with mind control methods would readily recognize such rhetoric as a "thought-stopping" method². Such an analogy coming from a source that a Witness considers to be the equivalent of God himself is virtually guaranteed to stop all logical thought process in the Witness mind. Such statements effectively shut the Witness off from any information that would challenge the authority of the Watchtower Society or the correctness of their teaching. For anyone to disregard such "counsel" runs the risk of being himself declared an "apostate" for merely reading anything critical of The Watchtower Society. Thus the Watchtower Society inserts itself as a "filter" between the individual and the vast body of information which comes at us from all directions. Yet God gave each one of us our own "Alter" with which to sort through information. It is our mind, trained by his Word to distinguish right from wrong. We are admonished at 1 John 4:1:

"Beloved ones, do not believe every inspired expression, but **test** the inspired expressions **to see whether they originate with God**, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world."

How else can we do this and make accurate judgments except by making a personal examination? In this way each one of us is challenged to grow up spiritually by individually taking responsibility for our beliefs and

actions, and not abdicating this responsibility to others:

“For everyone that partakes of milk is unacquainted with the word of righteousness, for he is a babe, but solid food belongs to those who **through use** have their perceptive powers trained **to distinguish** both right and wrong.” -- Hebrews 5:13,14 NW

A trip to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* is enlightening with respect to the word “distinguish” in the above text. It is from the Greek word *diakrisis* and means “a distinguishing, a clear discrimination, discerning, judging... In Hebrews 5:14 the phrase consisting of pros, with this noun, lit.2, ‘towards a discerning.’ is translated ‘to discern,’ said of those who are **capable of discriminating between good and evil.**”

In the ensuing years I have become more convinced that everyone should feel free to re-examine his beliefs in the spirit of a fair, open-minded search for truth as advocated by the Watchtower Society in times past. The Scriptures indicate to me that this is an individual responsibility - not one that can be safely entrusted to others. I believe that such an attitude is appropriate for Jehovah's Witnesses as well as people of other faiths. It is part of our “load” of Christian responsibility to which Paul referred in his letter to the Galatians:

“But let each one prove what his own work is, and then he will have cause for exultation not in comparison with the other person. For each one will carry his own load.” — Galatians 6:4,5

This is not something that can be delegated to someone else. Sometimes other Christians can help us by providing insights and understanding. But as Paul implied, no man or organization can be the custodian of our faith, having the right or obligation to define our faith for us. That is our own personal responsibility before God; it is to him that we individually must eventually answer.

“Not that we are the masters over your faith, but we are fellow workers for your joy, for it is by your faith that you are standing.” -- 2 Corinthians 1:24 NW

“We are not trying to dictate to you what you must believe; because you stand firm in the faith. Instead, we are working with you for your own happiness.” -- 2 Corinthians 1:24 TEV

Early in the Society's history, in 1890, Pastor Russell commented on the prejudice he observed among members of religious organizations towards critically examining their own religious beliefs, and I think his comments are interesting in the light of the organization's current position on the subject:

“There are various degrees of bondage among the various sects of Babylon — “Christendom.” Some who would indignantly resent the utter and absolute slavery of individual conscience and judgment, required by Romanism, are quite willing to be bound themselves, and anxious to get others bound, by the creeds and dogmas of one or another of the Protestant sects. True, their chains are lighter and longer than those of Rome and the dark ages. So far as it goes, this is surely good, — reformation truly, — a step in the right direction, — toward full liberty, — toward the condition of the church in the apostolic times. But why wear human shackles at all? Why bind and limit our conscience at all?”

“Why not stand fast in the full liberty wherein Christ hath made us free? Why not reject all the efforts of fallible fellow-men to fetter conscience and hinder investigation? — not only the efforts of the remote past, of the dark ages, but the efforts of the various reformers of the more recent past? Why not conclude to be as the apostolic church was? — free to grow in knowledge as well as in grace and love, as the Lord's “due time” shall reveal his gracious plan more and more fully?”

“Surely all know that whenever they join any of these human organizations, accepting its Confession of Faith as theirs, they bind themselves to believe neither more or less than that creed expresses on the subjects. If, in spite of bondage thus voluntarily yielded to, they should think for themselves, and receive light from other sources, in advance of the light enjoyed by the sect they have joined, they must either prove untrue to the sect and to their covenant with it, to believe nothing contrary to its Confession, or else they must honestly cast aside and repudiate the Confession which they have outgrown, and come out of such a sect. To do this requires grace and costs some effort, disrupting, as it often does, pleasant associations, and exposing the honest truth-seeker to the silly charges of being a “traitor” to his sect, a “turncoat.” one “not established,” etc. When one joins a sect, his mind is supposed to be given up entirely to that sect, and henceforth not his own. The sect undertakes to decide for him what is truth and what is error: and he, to be a true, staunch, faithful member, must accept the decisions of his sect, future as well as past, on all religious matters, ignoring his own individual thought,

and avoiding personal investigation lest he grow in knowledge, and be lost as a member of such sect.

This slavery of conscience to a sect and creed is often stated in so many words, when such a one declares that he “belongs” to such a sect.”

“These shackles of sectarianism, so far from being esteemed rightly as shackles and bonds, are esteemed and worn as ornaments, as badges of respect and marks of character. So far has the delusion gone, that many of God’s children would be ashamed to be known to be without some such chains - light or heavy in weight, long or short in the personal liberty granted. They are ashamed to say that they are not in bondage to any sect or creed, but “belong” to Christ only.” *Studies in the Scriptures*, Volume 3, page 184,185

One might ponder how much progress the Watchtower Society has made in the nearly hundred years since those words were written. How much personal liberty and freedom of thought and conscience do individual Witnesses have now? Will they be thought of as a “turncoat” if their conscience compels them to make honest examination of their belief system and its religious values? But I am getting ahead of my story.

Some people have assumed that my wife and I withdrew because we were “stumbled” by the actions of certain elders and Circuit Overseers; that we allowed personalities to destroy our relationship with Jehovah and his organization. In reality, the things these people did and the harm it caused to others merely confronted us with the bad fruitages of their kind of religion. That is why we began to ask questions about what real Christianity involved in the way of our relationship with God and fellow Christians. Also it raised questions about an organization that by its very nature seemed to condone that sort of thing.

Has The Society Truly Represented Jehovah as His Prophet?

As a part of my heritage as a Jehovah’s witness, I accepted without question (or investigation) the belief that the Watchtower Society is the “faithful and discreet slave” that has been given spiritual authority over “God’s organization” in our time. I accepted that it was “Jehovah’s exclusive channel” of communication between God and man. I came to accept that the things said in the publications were the product of direction by God’s holy spirit. And since the “light was getting brighter and brighter,” I viewed the changes in doctrine as “refinements” in understanding and as a consequence of God being pleased to use imperfect men in his divine purpose. I have never expected perfection of God’s people. The Israelites were not perfect, the early

Christian congregation was not perfect, and neither are Jehovah's Witnesses. That fact I can live with. Even the events we experienced in our congregation can be excused in that light.

Whenever reference is made to what the *Watchtower* has published in the past, the objection is often raised, "Why keep bringing up the past? Sure, we've made mistakes, but we've corrected them. We don't teach those things now." The reason that it is appropriate to bring up past teachings of the Society is because of its claim to have predicted future events, such as the events surrounding 1914. To examine the accuracy of a prediction, one **must** review what was actually said prior to the predicted event.

It is interesting to me that when I bring up the matter of the Society's claim to be a prophet in the light of its many failed predictions, most Witnesses will claim that the Watchtower Society does not claim to be an inspired prophet. Yet when I ask them "Is the Watchtower Society a spokesman for God in the earth today?" they will invariably answer "Why, yes, of course." However, isn't that what a prophet is — one who speaks for God? I am reminded of an article that appeared in the *Watchtower* in 1972, during the time that excitement was building among Jehovah's Witnesses regarding the year 1975, entitled, "They shall know that A PROPHET WAS AMONG THEM." After answering their own question "So does Jehovah have a prophet to help them, to warn them of dangers and to declare things to come?" in the affirmative, they go on to identify that prophet:

"These questions can be answered in the affirmative. Who is this prophet?... This "prophet" was not one man, but was a body of men and women. It was the small group of footstep followers of Jesus Christ, known at that time as International Bible Students. Today they are known as Jehovah's Witnesses... Of course, it is easy to say that this group acts as a "prophet" of God. It is another thing to prove it. **The only way that this can be done is to review the record.**" -- *Watchtower*, April 1, 1972, page 197 (A-6)

It was precisely my reviewing the record of their claims as a "prophet" of God that destroyed my faith in them. For years I had been telling people that Jehovah's Witnesses had correctly foretold the outbreak of a time of trouble in 1914, many years before the fact, and that this knowledge established their "credentials" as spokesman for God in these "last days." For example, in 1973, this statement was made:

"Of all men used by God to prophesy Jesus is outstanding. Based on what he said along with the

words of Daniel and John, Jehovah's Witnesses pointed to year 1914 decades in advance as marking the start of the conclusion of the system of things. Within the period of one generation outstanding war, food shortages, pestilences, and other terrible conditions were predicted to strike before God destroyed this system and replaced it with a new order." — *Awake!* January 22, 1973 page 8 (A-6)

For most of my years as a Witness, this was what I believed that the Bible Students were preaching in the years prior to 1914. This is a blatant misrepresentation of matters and deceives the readers into thinking that the Bible Students knew that a generation would begin in 1914 that would apparently go on for many years, within which all of these predicted events would occur, when in reality what they believed and preached was quite different, as the following material will show.

For that reason I feel that I personally misled many people, even as I was misled, into placing unwarranted confidence in an organization that has not been very honest about its history. Now I feel obligated to set that matter straight.

The *Watchtower* of April 1, 1972 invited its readers to review the record of the Watchtower "prophecy." Unfortunately, the Society has not seen fit to provide information that would enable one to do so. Evidently individuals are expected to make such a review based only on the Watchtower's own account of its predictions. But would that constitute a "fair hearing" of the matter? Although many Kingdom Halls have libraries which do contain pre-1914 literature, I have been told by several Witnesses that in some congregations, older literature is kept inaccessible and that some elders even intimidate those who want to examine it. Thus the only source of older publications available to most Witnesses are from those outside the organization itself. Yet it is these very sources that the Watchtower itself has characterized as "apostate" and has equated as "pornography."

Consider: if someone claims to be able to predict the future, and then invites you to "examine the record" so as to be convinced of the reality of his claim, would you not become suspicious if he then discourages you from doing so? Suppose he demands that you examine only his own promotional materials and becomes very upset with you if you insist on researching for yourself the historical materials that would prove or disprove his claims? Would you not think that perhaps he had something to hide? Most rational persons would give no further consideration to such claims.

Paul did not become upset or angry with the Bereans for "checking up" on what he was teaching them. Rather, he commended them in Acts 17:11:

“Now the latter were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, carefully examining the Scriptures daily **as to whether these things were so.**”

In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 he advised: “Make sure of all things; hold fast to what is fine.”

In the latter part of the first century, when apostasy was already in evidence, John wrote:

“Beloved ones, do not believe every inspired expression, but test the inspired expressions to see whether they originate with God, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world.” -- 1

John 4:1 NW

If “**inspired** expressions” are to be tested by the individual Christian, are we not also commanded by Scripture to test the “expressions” of those who are merely “spirit directed?”³ Is it reasonable to think that God would become upset or angry with us for doing so? Thus if someone to whom we looked as a spiritual leader and “agent of God” became upset and angry with us for doing what God has invited us to do, should we not rightly become suspicious of his claims?

Accordingly I have provided many quotations of earlier Watchtower Society publications which show exactly what was said at various times in their history. Additionally, I have provided an extensive appendix which contains photo-copies of the original articles since these are no longer available to many of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

It is apparent when reading the Watchtower publications that the writers usually present their predictions in the most positive terms, implying the absolute backing of the scriptures and Jehovah himself for what they say. For example:

“Now, in view of recent labor troubles and threatened anarchy, our readers are writing to know if there may not be a mistake in the 1914 date. They say that they do not see how present conditions can hold out so long under the strain.

“We see no reason for changing the figures - nor could we change them if we would. They are, we believe, **God’s dates, not ours.** But bear in mind that the end of 1914 is not the date for the beginning.

but for the end of the time of trouble." -- *Watch Tower*, July, 1894 (A-14)

"As Jehovah revealed his truths by means of the first-century Christian congregation **so he does today** by means of the present-day Christian congregation. Through this agency he is having carried out **prophesying** on an intensified and unparalleled scale. All of this activity is not an accident.

Jehovah is the one behind all of it." -- *Watchtower* June 15, 1964, page 365 (A-7)

Yet, when the failures of their predictions are brought to their attention or their detractors suggest that they are "false prophets," they react strongly, as in this Watchtower article:

"Yes, Jehovah's people have had to revise expectations from time to time. Because of our eagerness, we have hoped for the new system earlier than Jehovah's timetable has called for it. But we display our faith in God's Word and its sure promises by declaring its message to others. Moreover, the need to revise our understanding somewhat does not make us false prophets or change the fact that we are living in "the last days," soon to experience the "great tribulation" that will pave the way for the earthly Paradise. How foolish to take the view that expectations needing some adjustment should call into question the whole body of truth! The evidence is clear that Jehovah has used and is continuing to use his one organization, with the "faithful and discreet slave" taking the lead. Hence, we feel like Peter, who said: "Lord, whom shall we go away to? You have sayings of everlasting life." -- *Watchtower*, March 15, 1986, page 19

But is it accurate to say that they have merely "had to revise their understanding somewhat" with regard to their time calculations? If one considers the entire history of their prophesying, a different picture emerges. For example, Russell originally held that "the last days" began in 1799 and ran until 1914. He believed that Christ assumed Kingdom power in 1874 and that in 1878 he began his judgment at the house of God. He also taught that in 1881 the "door would close" upon the opportunity of becoming a member of the "bride of Christ." Note these statements from *The Time Is At Hand*, published 1889:

"Our Lord's presence as Bridegroom and Reaper was recognized during the first three and a half years, from A.D. 1874 to A.D. 1878. Since that time it has been emphatically manifest that the time had come in A.D. when kingly judgment should begin at the house of God... The year A.D. 1878, being

parallel of his assuming power and authority in the type, clearly marks the time for the actual assuming of power as King of kings by our present, spiritual invisible Lord - the time of his taking to himself his great power to reign, which in prophecy is closely associated with the resurrection of his faithful, and the beginning of the trouble and wrath upon the nations.” -- page 239 (A-7)

“True, it is expecting great things to claim, as we do, that within the coming twenty-six years all present governments will be overthrown and dissolved; but we are living in a special and peculiar time, the “Day of Jehovah,” in which matters culminate quickly; and it is written, “A short work will the Lord make upon the earth.” -- page 98 (A-8)

“In view of this strong Bible evidence concerning the Times of the Gentiles, we consider it an established truth that **the final end of the kingdoms of this world**, and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God, **will be accomplished by the end of A.D. 1914.**” -- page 99 (A-8)

Some may feel that the Society’s time prophecy regarding 1914 must be correct since World War I broke out in that year. It would seem remarkable if an event such as World War I could be accurately predicted 39 years in advance. To consider the validity of this conclusion, we need to examine just what the Bible Students were predicting prior to 1914. In the book *The Time Is At Hand*, 1909 edition, page 77, 78 (See A10) Russell predicted these events to occur **by or before** the year 1914:

1. Kingdom of God to have full universal control of the earth.
2. Christ Jesus will overthrow all earthly governments.
3. **Before** end of 1914, last member of Body of Christ glorified in heaven.
4. Jerusalem (literal) will no longer be trodden clown by gentiles.
5. Israel’s blindness turned away; Jews become converted to Christ
6. “Time of trouble” to reach climax in world reign of anarchy.
7. God’s Kingdom completely consumes power of worldly governments.

In the years preceding 1914, there was widespread fear of world war, which many felt was inevitable.⁴ Russell, however, did not expect war to break out in 1914. Note this comment made in a *Watchtower* article in 1893:

“A great storm is near at hand. Though one may not know exactly when it will break forth, it seems reasonable to suppose that it cannot be more than twelve or fourteen years yet future.”

Twelve or fourteen years from 1893 would be 1905 or 1907 -- not 1914. So actually Russell was preaching that if war did break out it would have to be some years **prior to 1914**, when he expected God’s kingdom to be fully established over earth. In actuality, **none of the events that Russell predicted to happen did**. And the one thing he did not expect to happen did. Does that “prove” the correctness of his prediction?

The year 1914 and the years immediately thereafter proved to be devastating to the Bible Students. They had expected to be in heaven ruling with Christ. Many of them left, their hopes dashed in bitter disappointment over the failure of their hopes to materialize. In the 1916 edition of the same book, Russell felt compelled to give the following explanation in the author’s foreword:

“The author acknowledges that in this book he presents the thought that the Lord’s saints might expect to be with Him in glory at the end of the Gentile Times. This was a natural mistake to fall into, but the Lord overruled it for the blessing of His people. The thought that the Church would all be gathered to glory before October, 1914, certainly did have a very stimulating and sanctifying effect upon thousands, all of whom accordingly can praise the Lord -- even for the Mistake.”

The confusion that they felt can be seen in a statement in the *Watch Tower* of September 1, 1916. After commenting on their disappointment that the harvest work was not over, but seemed to be continuing, he stated:

“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.” -- *Watch Tower*, September 1, 1916, page 265

But history was once again to prove them wrong and it was necessary to “adjust.” In this case “adjusting their understanding somewhat” meant transferring all the expectations for 1874 and 1878 to 1914 and 1919.

After Russell's death in 1916, Joseph F. Rutherford became president of the Society. In 1917 he published *The Finished Mystery*, in which he made some bold predictions of his own regarding the years 1918 and 1920. These predictions also failed to materialize. However when a new edition of the book was published in 1926, the offending statements were modified so as to cover up the false prediction:

The Finished Mystery 1917 Edition	The Finished Mystery 1926 Edition
<p>“Also in the year 1918, when God destroys the churches and the church members by millions it shall be that any that escape shall come to the works of Pastor Russell to learn the meaning of the downfall of “Christianity.”</p> <p>“16:20. And every island fled away. Even the republics will disappear in the fall of 1920.”</p> <p>“And the mountains were not found. Every kingdom of the earth will pass away, be swallowed up in anarchy.” -page 485 (A-11)</p> <p>“The three days in which Pharaoh’s host pursued the Israelites into the wilderness represent the three years from 1917 to 1920 at which time all of Pharaoh’s messengers will be swallowed up in the sea of angry humanity. The wheels will come off their chariots - organizations.” -page 258 (A-11)</p>	<p>“Also in the year 1918, when God begins to destroy the churches and the church members by millions it shall be that any that escape shall come to the works of Pastor Russell to learn the meaning of the downfall of “Christianity.”</p> <p>”16:20. And every island fled away. Even the republics will disappear in the time of anarchy.”</p> <p>“And the mountains were not found. Every kingdom of the earth will pass away, be swallowed up in anarchy.” -page 485 (A-11)</p> <p>“The three days in which Pharaoh’s host pursued the Israelites into the wilderness represent the three years preceding the time of anarchy at which time all of Pharaoh’s messengers will be swallowed up in the sea of angry humanity. The wheels will come off their chariots - organizations.” -page 258 (A-11)</p>

In 1920 Rutherford made a bold prediction in his booklet *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*. After setting forth an elaborate system of prophetic chronology, Rutherford asserted:

“Based upon the argument heretofore set forth, then, that the old order of things, the old world, is ending and is therefore passing away, and that the new order is coming in, and that 1925 shall mark the resurrection of the faithful worthies of old and the beginning of the reconstruction, it is reasonable

to conclude that millions of people now on the earth will be still on the earth in 1925. Then, based upon the promises set forth in the divine Word, we must reach the **positive and indisputable conclusion** that millions now living will never die.” -- page 97 (A-13)

In 1926, at an assembly of the International Bible Students in Basel, Switzerland, Rutherford was asked if the ancient worthies had returned. His response was:

“Certainly they have not returned. No one has seen them, and it would be foolish to make such an announcement. It was stated in the “Millions” that we might reasonably expect them to return shortly after 1925, but **this was merely an expressed opinion.**” — *1980 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses*, page 6

Unfortunately, the word “opinion” is not used in the Millions book with respect to this prediction. But the phrase “we can confidently expect” is. I believe it would have been helpful if such predictions had been presented as one man’s opinion rather than as “truth” from Jehovah’s organization. But one can understand his response to the failure of his expectations to materialize by considering his overall approach to the matter of date setting. The *Watch Tower* of May 15, 1922 under the subtitle “Stamped with God’s Approval,” said:

“It was on this line of reckoning that the dates 1874, 1914, and 1918 were located; and the Lord has placed the stamp of his seal upon 1914 and 1918 beyond any possibility of erasure. What further evidence do we need?”

“Using this same measuring line, beginning with the entry of the children of Israel into Canaan, and counting the full 70 cycles of 50 years each, as clearly indicated by Jehovah’s sending of the Jews into Babylon for the full 70 years, it is an easy matter to locate 1925, probably the fall, for the beginning of the antitypical jubilee. There can be no more question about 1925 than there was about 1914. The fact that **all the things that some looked for in 1914 did not materialize does not alter the chronology one whit.** Noting the date marked so prominently, it is very easy for the finite mind to conclude that all the work to be done must center about it, and thus many are inclined to anticipate more than has been really foretold. Thus it was in 1844, in 1874, in 1878 as well as in 1914 and 1918. Looking back we can now easily see that those dates were clearly indicated in Scripture and doubtless intended by the Lord

to encourage his people, as they did, as well as to be a means of testing and sifting when all that some expected did not come to pass. That all that some expect to see in 1925 may not transpire that year will not alter the date one whit more than in the other cases.” (A-15)

Rutherford neglected to mention that “the things that some looked for in 1914” were things the Watch Tower predicted to occur: not independently-arrived-at expectations of individual Bible Students. The June 15, 1922 *Watch Tower* elaborated further on the rightness of their chronology under the subtitle, “Further Proof of Present-Truth Chronology,” saying:

“There is a well known law of mathematics called “the law of probabilities.” Applications of this law are frequent in everyday life in settling matters of doubt. In a family of children, if a certain kind of mischief is committed, the probabilities — indeed, the certainty — are that it was done by a certain one, and that the others assuredly did not do it. If some peculiar damage is done by night to a single house, then by the law of probabilities it may have been a pure accident; if done to two houses in the same manner it probably was not accidental but by design of some person; but if done to three or more houses in the same manner it passes out of the possibility of accident into the **certainty** of design.

“The chronology of present truth might be a mere happening if it were not for the repetitions in the two great cycles of 1845 and 2520 years, which take it out of the realm of chance and into that of certainty. If there were only one or two corresponding dates in these cycles, they **might** possibly be mere coincidences, but where the agreements of dates and events come by the dozens, they cannot possibly be by chance, but must be by the design or plan of the only personal Being capable of such a plan - Jehovah himself; and the chronology itself must be right.

“In the passages of the Great Pyramid of Gizeh the agreement of one or two measurements with the present- truth chronology might be accidental, but the correspondency of dozens of measurements proves that the same God designed both pyramid and plan - and at the same time **proves the correctness of the chronology.**

“The agreement of the chronology with certain measurements of the Tabernacle and the Temple of Ezekiel further stamps the chronology as true.

“It is on the basis of such and so many correspondencies - in accordance with the soundest laws known to science - that we affirm that, **Scripturally, scientifically and historically, present-truth**

chronology is correct beyond a doubt. Its reliability has be abundantly confirmed by the dates and events of 1874. 1914. 1918. Present-truth chronology is a secure basis on which the consecrated child of God may endeavor to search out things to come.” (A-15,16) cg11

And if anyone missed the point, the *Watch Tower* of July 15, 1922 under the subheading, “The Strong Cable of Chronology,” said:

“There exist, however, well established relationships among the dates of present-truth chronology. These internal connections of the dates impart a much greater strength than can be found in other chronologies. Some of them are of so remarkable a character as clearly to indicate that this chronology is not of man, but of God. Being of divine origin and divinely corroborated, present-truth chronology stands in a class by itself, **absolutely and unqualifiedly correct.**”

There can be no question about what is being said here. These dates are presented as being **absolutely true**, and **without question as coming from God**. Furthermore, their accuracy does not depend upon the predicted events associated with them coming true. And for any who doubt, this was “God’s way of sifting out unworthy ones.” Mind control techniques were certainly not unknown to Joseph F. Rutherford!

These claims were made in 1922, three years before the predictions of 1925 were to occur. With these statements in mind, it boggles the mind to understand how, in the year 1926 after the failure of all he predicted, the individual responsible for such statements could stand up in public and pass them off as “merely an expressed opinion.” Such dishonesty does not reflect favorably upon the God he claims to represent. Neither does it inspire any confidence in the Watchtower Society’s claimed role as “God’s prophet.” If this is not prophesying falsely, what is?

Thus far, the Watchtower Society has published four successive interpretations of the book of Revelation. *The Finished Mystery* in 1917 was the first. Next came *Light* in 1930, published in two volumes. Yet to come were *Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God’s Kingdom Rules*, in 1963 and its companion *Then Is Finished the Mystery of God* in 1969, and finally in 1988 *Revelation, Its Grand Climax At Hand!* Each successive interpretation has had to revise and correct the errors in understanding of the previous offering, as the outworking of history demonstrated their predictions to be false. The prophecies in *The Finished Mystery* were described as “established truths,” and “God’s dates, not man’s.” But now in the *Light* book, these “truths” were

set aside with the following explanation:

“For many years those who have loved God have sought for an understanding of the prophecies, and particularly those written by Daniel and Ezekiel, and those in Revelation. God has never been displeased with this effort, as is indicated by the Scriptures; nor should it be expected that God will permit the true understanding of these prophecies to be had until his due time.” *Light* Vol. 2, page 295

While saying “God has never been displeased,” he never shares with us the Scriptures that would establish such a claim. It is hard to imagine that God would be pleased with a continual stream of misinformation, issued in his name and proclaimed to be “positive and indisputable,” “established truth,” and “God’s dates, not man’s.”

It would be one thing if they were to **present** such speculations as possibilities, interesting topics for discussion and the like, to be considered or accepted at the option of the individual. But when “God’s spirit directed organization” makes proclamations of “established truth” which he then “caused his angels to direct the preparation of exactly what was published,” and which individuals are required to accept and believe on pain of expulsion, that is quite another matter.

The comment in the March 15, 1986 *Watchtower* shows that the Society is very sensitive to the accusation of being a false prophet. Any historical review of their organization is always highly edited to make it appear that any “mistakes” they may have made were always minor in nature. The book *Reasoning From The Scriptures* defines “false prophets” as “Individuals and organizations proclaiming messages that they attribute to a superhuman source but do not originate with the true God and are not in harmony with his revealed will.” They then list the following six points: (page 132)

1. “True prophets make known their faith in Jesus, but more is required than claiming to speak in his name.”
2. “True prophets speak in the name of God, but merely claiming to represent him is not enough.” (Deut. 18:18-20) [It seems significant here that they stop their quote at verse 20: verses 21 and 22 are devastating to the Society’s position]:

18 “A prophet I shall raise up for them from the midst of their brothers, like you [Moses]; and I shall indeed put my words in his mouth, and he will certainly speak to them all that I shall

command him.

19 And it must occur that the man who will not listen to my words that he will speak in my name, I shall myself require an account from him.

20 However, the prophet who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die.

21 And in case you should say in your heart: "How shall we know the word that Jehovah has not spoken?"

22 When the prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and the **word does not occur or come true**, that is the word that Jehovah did not speak. With presumptuousness the prophet spoke it.

You must not get frightened at him." -- Deuteronomy 18:18-22 NIV

3. "Ability to perform 'great signs,' or 'miracles,' is not necessarily proof of a true prophet."
4. "What true prophets foretell comes to pass, but they may not understand just when or how it will be."

Prov. 4:18: "The path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established."

"Nathan the prophet encouraged King David to go ahead with what was in his heart regarding the building of a house for Jehovah's worship. But later Jehovah told Nathan to inform David that he was not the one who would build it. Jehovah did not reject Nathan for what he had said earlier but continued to use him because he humbly corrected the matter when Jehovah made it plain to him."

These statements require comment. Proverbs 4:18 is regularly used to create the perception that it is normal to be constantly having "new truths" revealed through God's organization. That in fact is taken by witnesses as "proof" of God's favor. But a look at the context makes it quickly apparent that what is being discussed here is not progressive revelation of truth, but the outcome of life courses; the wicked one who stumbles in the gloom of wicked practices contrasted with the righteous one whose life reflects the light of God's ways. Even in the case of progressive revelation by God as with the things revealed about the Messiah, never was there any misinformation revealed, or prophecies that did not come true.

When Nathan first talked to David, it is obvious from the context that he did not do so as a prophet speaking an inspired prophecy. He merely assented with David's expressed desire to build a temple to Jehovah, something Nathan also desired. That very night Nathan received a word from Jehovah, which, speaking as a prophet, he conveyed to David.

5. "The pronouncements of a true prophet promote true worship and are in harmony with God's revealed will."
5. "True prophets and the false can be recognized by the fruitage manifest in their lives and in the lives of those who follow them."

"Have not Jehovah's Witnesses made errors in their teachings?"

"Jehovah's Witnesses do not claim to be inspired prophets. They have made mistakes. Like the apostles of Jesus Christ, they have at times had some wrong expectations." -- Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6

"The Scriptures provide time elements related to Christ's presence, and Jehovah's Witnesses have studied these with keen interest. Jesus also described a many-featured sign that would tie in with the fulfillment of time prophecies to identify the generation that would live to see the end of Satan's wicked system of things. Jehovah's Witnesses have pointed to evidence in fulfillment of this sign..."

"Matters on which corrections of viewpoint have been needed have been relatively minor when compared with the vital Bible truths that they have discerned and publicized..."

I would like to comment on this last section. Jehovah's Witnesses do not claim to be inspired prophets such as Jeremiah or Daniel did. What they claim to be is "spirit directed" ones who by means of holy spirit give Jehovah's interpretation of prophecies already recorded in the Scriptures. But the "mistakes" they have made are not at all like the ones made by the disciples of Jesus. The apostles had misconceptions about various matters and had to be corrected by Jesus. Luke 19:11 says that the apostles "were imagining that the kingdom of God was going to display itself instantly." But Jesus, knowing what they were imagining, corrected them on the spot - **they didn't publish false prophecy for many years.**

Acts 1:6 says that they asked "Lord, are you restoring the Kingdom to Israel at this time?" Again Jesus corrected them on the spot, **not allowing them to preach it for 50 years**, and then went on to say: "It does not belong to you to get knowledge of the times or seasons which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction." In other words, he made it plain to them that it was **not their proper concern** to be trying to figure out **when** the Kingdom was going to be established.

The remainder of the chapter attempts to defend their time element prophecies related to predicting the generation in which Christ would return, something that our Lord has told us in effect is none of our business. It is therefore no wonder that their time prophecies have not worked out. Jesus plainly said that he would

return at a time which **“you do not know.”** And how true his words have proven to be.

What is deceiving about this whole presentation is that they ignore the plain Scriptural criteria for distinguishing between true and false prophets. The first and obvious test is, does the prophecy come true? If it does not, “that is not the word that Jehovah spoke;” he is a false prophet. If the prediction did come true, then one applies the additional tests mentioned. This would protect them against the false prophet who made a lucky guess.

What About Our Changing Doctrines?

Jehovah’s Witnesses are well conditioned to expect constantly changing teachings. Being told that “the light gets brighter and brighter,” they are always looking for “new light.” They expect it. Thus whenever a teaching changes, they take this to be proof that “Jehovah is leading them.” But what about when interpretations of scripture change radically back and forth? Does that support the contention that God is “refining” their teaching? Pastor Russell did not expect “new truths” revealed through his channel to contradict “truths” revealed yesterday. Note his comments to that effect:

“If we were following a man undoubtedly it would be different with us; undoubtedly one human idea would contradict another and that which was light one or two or six years ago would be regarded as darkness now; But with God there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, and so it is with truth; any knowledge or light coming from God must be like its author. A new view of truth never can contradict a former truth. “New light” never extinguishes older “light,” but adds to it...” -- *Zion’s Watch Tower*, February, 1881, pg 3 (A-19)

And yet, this is exactly what has happened; new “truths” have been introduced which contradicted what had been earlier proclaimed as “truth.” An outstanding example of this can be found in the teachings of the Society regarding the Great Pyramid of Giza.

For nearly fifty years, from 1879 through 1928, the Society taught that the Pyramid was “God’s stone Witness and Prophet,” inspired much like the Bible, and which should be studied by Christians in order to gain knowledge of future events. The book *Thy Kingdom. Come (Studies in the Scriptures, Vol 3)*, published by the Society in 1891, features numerous diagrams of pyramid chambers and passageways, along with their

measurements. Pyramid inches are translated into calendar years in a complex timetable of the “Divine plan.” Chapter 10 of this book, titled “The Testimony of God’s Stone Witness and Prophet, the Great Pyramid in Egypt,” edition of 1903 says:

“...the Great Pyramid... seems in a remarkable manner to teach, in harmony with all the prophets, an outline of the plan of God, past, present, and future...” -- *Thy Kingdom Come*, page 314 (A-29)

Some might want to pass off this fascination with the Pyramid of Giza as merely a quirk of the Society’s founder, Pastor Russell, but note that after Russell’s death in 1916, the Society continued to teach that God designed the Pyramid for prophetic purposes:

“In the passages of the Great Pyramid of Gizeh the agreement of one or two measurements with the present- truth chronology might seem accidental, but the correspondency of dozens of measurements proves that the same God designed both pyramid and plan...” -- *Watchtower*, June 5, 1922, page 187 (A-30)

“The great Pyramid of Egypt, standing as a silent and inanimate witness of the Lord, is a messenger; and its testimony speaks with great eloquence concerning the divine plan...” -- *Watchtower*, May 15, 1925, page 148 (A-30)

But then, in 1928, the Society completely reversed its teaching on the pyramid. Now it was called “Satan’s Bible” and declared that persons following pyramid teachings were “not following after Christ”:

“If the pyramid is not mentioned in the Bible, then following its teachings is being led by vain philosophy and false science and not following after Christ.” -- *Watchtower*, November 15, 1928, page 341 (A-31)

“It is more reasonable to conclude that the great pyramid of Gizeh as well as the other pyramids thereabout, also the sphinx, were built by the rulers of Egypt and under the direction of Satan the Devil... Then Satan put his knowledge in dead stone, which may be called Satan’s Bible, and not God’s stone witness...” -- *Watchtower*, November 15, 1928, page 344 (A-31)

One can find other examples. One of which I was acutely aware was the teaching regarding the “superior authorities” of Romans chapter 13. Back in Russell’s time, this was understood to refer to the civil rulers. During Rutherford’s tenure as president, the understanding was changed; holy spirit “refined” their understanding and they began teaching that the “superior authorities” were Jehovah God and Christ Jesus. This “truth” was taught until 1962 when holy spirit again “refined” their viewpoint and it was understood once again that the “superior authorities” were indeed the civil authorities and rulers of this system. (See A-26, A-27)

All of this presents a problem to the individual Witness who is concerned that his teaching be in accord with the Bible. Even if his study of the Bible convinces him that the position of the organization is in error, he is obligated to teach the organizational understanding.⁵ Note the comment to this effect in the *Watchtower* of Feb 1, 1952, pg 79, 80:

“If we do not see a point at first we should keep trying to grasp it, rather than opposing and rejecting it and presumptuously taking the position that we are more likely to be right than the discreet slave. We should meekly go along with the Lord’s theocratic organization and wait for further clarification, rather than balk at the first mention of a thought unpalatable to us and proceed to quibble and mouth our criticisms and opinions as though they were worth more than the slave’s provision and not be so foolish as to pit against Jehovah’s channel their own human reasoning and sentiment and personal feelings.”

A Muslim proverb puts the thought this way:

“The advantage a man retains from the error of the sheik, if he be wrong, is greater than the advantage he retains from his own righteousness, if he be right.”

But in all honesty, how could holy spirit “reveal” an incorrect understanding of scripture through his “channel,” only to change it back again a few years later and call it “new light?”

A similar circumstance can be found with regard to the question of whether the men of Sodom and Gomorrah will be resurrected. In the *Watchtower* of July 1879, page 8 it was “yes.” Then in the *Watchtower* of June 1, 1952, page 338 it became “no.” The answer again became “yes” on August 1, 1965, page 479. And currently, according to the June 1, 1988 *Watchtower*, the answer is once again “no.” (See A-21 to A-25)

Another interpretation which has changed several times involves the image Daniel 2. In Russell's day it was understood to be a succession of world powers beginning with Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold. But Rutherford, in his book *Light*, Vol 2, page 298, said that it pictures "Satan's organization, both visible and invisible." Rather than depicting four succeeding world powers, the head represents "Lucifer" (Satan), the breast and arms represents invisible demon princes, the belly and thighs represents evil angels. The legs of iron were all visible governments, and the feet were commercial, political, and religious elements. But that interpretation contradicts the plainly stated explanation in the scripture. Subsequent "adjustments" in understanding have returned to the previous understanding.

"You yourself are the head of gold, and after you there will rise another kingdom inferior to you; and another kingdom, a third one, of copper, that will rule over the whole earth. And as for the fourth kingdom, it will prove to be strong like iron." — Daniel 2:38-40 NW

And consider the Society's understanding of "fornication" and "adultery." Prior to 1972 they had understood this to be limited to illicit sexual relations between a man and woman. Homosexual acts or bestiality were not included and thus could not be grounds for divorce (this in spite of the teaching in Romans chapter 1). Because of this legalistic view of matters, many sisters who remarried after divorcing homosexual husbands were disfellowshipped.⁶

It is hard for me to understand how one can characterize such reversals of understanding as "minor" when they affect something as basic as how we view governmental rulers, or which can inflict as much emotional pain, guilt, and mental anguish as in the case of the aforementioned sister. Yet the *Watchtower* of December 1, 1981, page 81 describes such "adjustments" of understanding as "tacking" as when a sailboat tacks back and forth so as to make forward progress into the wind:

"At times explanations given by Jehovah's visible organization have shown adjustments, seemingly to previous points of view. But this has not actually been the case. This might be compared to what is known in navigational circles as "tacking." By maneuvering the sails the sailors can cause a ship to go from right to left, back and forth, but all the time making progress toward their destination in spite of contrary winds..." -- *Watchtower*, December 1, 1981, page 27 (A-33)

The same issue of the *Watchtower* elaborated on this process:

“Such adjustments might be said to follow a principle that has been said to govern the progress of scientific truth. In brief, it works something like this: at first there is a proposition made that is subject to argumentation. It holds out great possibilities for enlightenment or practical application. But then in time it is seen to have certain flaws or weaknesses. So the tendency is to go to a proposition at the opposite extreme. Later it is found that that position does not represent the whole truth either, and so there is a combining of the valid points in both positions.” — *Watchtower*, December 1, 1981, page 28 (A-34)

It is certainly true that scientific progress does often proceed in such a manner toward a greater understanding of truth. *But scientists do not claim to be “God’s channel of communication” to mankind for truth. The Watchtower Society does.* And if it stops short of claiming to be “inspired,” it has no such scruples against claiming to be “spirit directed” -- whatever the difference is. One wonders whether they are claiming that God’s spirit isn’t sure and has to experiment, or if they are actually admitting that these teaching decisions that they make are actually just the product of human thinking, just like the scientist who tries to learn from his experiments and observations about nature. But even with such “wavering” the article goes on to assert:

“But Jehovah God has also provided is visible organization, his “faithful and discreet slave,” made up of spirit- anointed ones, to help Christians in all nations to **understand and properly apply the Bible** in their lives. Unless we are in touch with this channel of communication that God is using, we will not progress along the road to life, **no matter how much Bible reading we do.**” -- *Watchtower*, December 1, 1981, page 27 (A-33)

“Of course, such development of understanding, involving “tacking” as it were, has often served as a test of loyalty for those associated with the “faithful and discreet slave.”” -- *Watchtower*, December 1, 1981, page 31

So no matter how much in error the “slave” may be it is of no consequence. No matter how much our lives may be damaged by their “tacking,” we are still obligated to accept them in their role as the dispenser of “truth” in the earth. Truth comes only through them; it does not have anything to do with how much Bible study

we do.

The first article in that Watchtower concerns the progressive revelations of God's purpose throughout the period of Bible writing and how God's purpose was unfolded over a period of time to mankind. They make a point of showing the misunderstandings that men had regarding God's purpose at various times in

history, and they try to put the ever changing doctrines of Jehovah's Witnesses in that context. However in doing so they overlook one important fact: at no time did God's holy spirit reveal wrong or incorrect information either to the Bible writers or to individual servants of God. When information was revealed, it was always correct. Furthermore, when Jesus' disciples misunderstood something, it was not because incorrect information had been previously "revealed;" it was just a human speculation which Jesus immediately corrected.

What we are seeing with regard to the Watchtower Society, are **changing doctrines**, which are claimed to be teachings from Jehovah through his appointed channel of communication; and which have to be changed again because they are demonstrated to be in error. This they call "tacking." However a more accurate description might be what is said in Ephesians 4:14, "*...tossed about as by waves and carried hither and thither by every wind of teaching by means of the trickery of men, by means of cunning in contriving error.*" Or as The Living Bible paraphrases it: "*...forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different, or has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth.*"

With regard to the matter of changing one's beliefs, the Watchtower in its May 15, 1976 issue said:

"It is a serious matter to represent God and Christ in one way, then find that our understanding of the major teachings and fundamental doctrines of the Scriptures was in error, and then after that, to go back to the very doctrines that, by years of study, we had thoroughly determined to be in error. Christians cannot be vacillating -- "wishy-washy" -- about such fundamental teachings. What confidence can one put in the sincerity or judgment of such persons?" — *Watchtower*, May 15, 1976, page 298 (A-34)

This is said in the context of the exodus of many Witnesses after the disappointment of 1975. The question these statements raise is what would they say about a person who was raised in a Witness household, who left the organization and became a member of some other religion, only to return to the Witnesses after a number of years? Would they then label him as "wishy-washy?" Or what if a person left the

Witnesses after 1976 as a result of a thorough re-examination of the “proofs” regarding the imminence of the end of the system which convinced him that date setting was not scripturally proper? Is that being “wishy-washy” or is it instead being “open minded to additional information?” Is it fair to question the sincerity of a person who is willing to change his belief if he feels proven wrong by Scripture?

The Disappointment of 1975

It was the events of the seventies that challenged my faith in the organization. I can still remember the talk at the assembly in Florida in 1966 which announced the end of six thousand years of human existence in the fall of 1975. Even as they said it, the words of Jesus flashed through my mind: “**no one knows the day or the hour**” and “**it does not belong to you to get knowledge of the times or the seasons** which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction.” I remember thinking “I sure hope the organization doesn’t get carried away with this.” But carried away they did get. What started out as a “possibility” soon became a matter of high “probability.” As the time approached, the organization geared up for the “last big push” in the preaching activity before Armageddon. Record numbers were being baptized. Excitement was building.

At assemblies and in the literature, the date 1975 was constantly highlighted. The Circuit and District Overseers were talking it up. For example, I remember our Circuit Overseer (who had close relations with brothers in high positions at Bethel) saying while in service, “We can’t say this from the platform, but Fred Franz thinks that the end will actually come in 1974!” (I wondered about that at the time and have since learned that it was true, but Brother Knorr didn’t want to change the date for fear of ‘upsetting the brothers.’”)

An instructor from the Kingdom Ministry School asked the elders in attendance: “How many of you really believe what the Society is saying about 1975? Then what are you doing in your comfortable jobs and in your comfortable homes? Why not get rid of all that stuff and get out into the pioneer work for the last few years of this old system.?” The *Kingdom Ministry* of May, 1974 echoed his words:

“Reports are heard of brothers selling their homes and property and planning to finish out the rest of their days in this old system in the pioneer service. Certainly this is a fine way to spend the short time remaining before the wicked world’s end --1 John 2:17 (A-36)

Many sold their homes, quit their jobs, cashed in their life insurance or other assets in order to do so. All

of this was seen by many as indisputable evidence of Jehovah's divine favor and leading. Eventually I found myself being swept along by the euphoria to some degree, although thank God I didn't give in to the pressure to quit my job as some did.

The failure of the "end" to arrive was a great disappointment to many people. Many left the organization. It became apparent by their conduct that many of those who had become Witnesses seemed to have done so for the wrong reasons. In our congregation we were kept so busy dealing with the many problems that some of these brought into the congregation that I really didn't have much time to consider the overall implications of 1975. But in the meantime, I was reassured by what seemed to me to be a return to the basic matters of Christianity. During the late 70's there were many fine articles about attending to family matters, personal spiritual growth, and our developing more fully the fruitages of the spirit in our lives. We were "not serving with a date in mind, but with eternity in view." I especially appreciated the articles on conscience and not being judgmental with regard to the faith of our Christian brothers. I thought we had finally learned our lesson about setting dates.

There was one disturbing thought, however, early in 1976. That was the Society's "apology" over the matter of 1975. The *Watchtower* of July 15, 1976 said by way of explanation of the failure of expectations:

"What, then does this mean? Simply this: That these factors, and the possibilities for which they allow, prevent us from saying with any positiveness how much time elapsed between Adam's creation and that of the first woman. We do not know whether it was a brief time such as a month, or a few months, a year or even more. But whatever time elapsed would have to be added to the time that was passed since Adam's creation in order for us to know how far along we are within God's seventh 'day,' his grand day of rest." -page 437 (A-35)

"We may be forgetting that, when the 'day' comes, it will not change the principle that Christians must at all times take care of all their responsibilities. If anyone has been disappointed **through not following this line of thought**, he should now concentrate on **adjusting his viewpoint**, seeing that it was not the word of God that failed or deceived him and brought disappointment, but that **his own understanding was based on wrong premises**." -- page 441 (A-35)

At first I tried to accept that explanation, that the Society had merely **suggested** that the end of the system **might** come as early as 1975. Their explanation also implied that the interval between 1975 when the

seventh millennium began and end would be equal to the time between Adam's creation and Eve's creation, which could be only a matter of a few years. Meanwhile, I was encouraged by the seeming return to a longer term viewpoint of our dedication to God. A fellow elder and I talked about the matter on several occasions. Once when I mentioned that the Society had not really said the end would come in 1975, he said: "That's not really true." Then he reminded me of a talk which Fred Franz had given at a Gilead graduation in which he made very positive statements regarding 1975. To refresh my memory I made a review of the many things published about 1975. I offer the following for your consideration:

Life Everlasting in freedom of the Sons of God, 1966 -- page 28, 29:

"Since the time of Ussher intensive study of Bible chronology has been carried on... According to this trustworthy Bible chronology six thousand years from man's creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years of human history will begin in the fall of 1975... So in not many years within our own generation we are reaching what Jehovah God could view as the seventh day of man's existence.

"How **appropriate** it would be for Jehovah God to make of this coming seventh period of a thousand years a sabbath period of rest and release, a great Jubilee sabbath for the proclaiming of liberty throughout the earth to all its inhabitants... **It would not be by mere chance or accident** but would be **according to the loving purpose** of Jehovah God for the reign of Jesus Christ, the "Lord of the sabbath," to **run parallel** with the seventh millennium, of man's existence." (A-37)

Awake!, October 8, 1966: "How Much Longer Will It Be?"

"Does God's rest day parallel the time man has been on earth since his creation? **Apparently so.** From the most reliable investigations of Bible chronology, harmonizing with many accepted dates of secular history, we find that Adam was created in the autumn of the year 4026 B.C.E. Sometime **in that same year** Eve could well have been created, directly after which God's rest day commenced. In what year, then would the first 6,000 years of man's existence and **also** the first 6,000 years of God's rest day come to an end? The year 1975. This is worthy of notice, particularly in view of the fact that the "last days" began in 1914, and that the physical facts of our day in fulfillment of prophecy mark this

as the last generation of this wicked world. **So we can expect the immediate future to be filled with thrilling events** for those who rest their faith in God and his promises. It means that within relatively few years we will witness the fulfillment of the remaining prophecies that have to do with the “time of the end.” (A-38)

Watchtower, May 1, 1968:

“**The immediate future is certain** to be filled with climactic events, for this old system is nearing its complete end. **Within a few years at most** the final parts of Bible prophecy relative to these “last days” will undergo fulfillment, resulting in the liberation of surviving mankind into Christ’s glorious 1,000 year reign. What difficult days, but, at the same time, what grand days are just ahead!” (A-39)

(Twenty-two years later one might ask what does “the immediate future” mean? How many years are “a few years at most?”)

Awake!, October 8, 1968: “What Will the 1970’s Bring?”

“The fact that fifty-four years of the period called the ‘last days’ have already gone by is highly significant. It means that **a few years, at most**, remain before the corrupt system of things dominating the earth is destroyed by God... There is another way that helps confirm the fact that we are living in the **final few years** of this ‘time of the end.’ (Dan. 12:9) The Bible shows that we are nearing the end of a full 6,000 years of human history.” (A- 38)

The Approaching Peace of a Thousand Years, 1969 by Fred Franz:

“More recently earnest researchers of the Holy Bible have made a recheck of its chronology. According to then- calculations the six millenniums of mankind’s life on earth would end in the mid-seventies. Thus the seventh millennium from man’s creation by Jehovah God would begin **within less than ten years.**” page 25

“In order for the Lord Jesus Christ to be “Lord even of the sabbath day,” his thousand-year reign would have to be the seventh in a series of thousand-year periods or millenniums. Thus it would be a

sabbatic reign.” page 26 (Note - this booklet no longer published.)

While it must be admitted that such statements were usually accompanied by cautionary phrases such as “we are not saying positively,” yet it is understandable why brothers were excited by such information. These statements were clearly designed to excite enthusiasm.

I find it hard to believe that the members of the Governing Body did not realize to what extent that the euphoria and excitement was building among the rank and file Witnesses. They are constantly in touch with the traveling representatives who report back to them on what is happening among the congregations. Actually they fed the excitement rather than cooling it down. It is obvious that most of them really believed, and were as excited as everybody else. They don't live in a vacuum. They have their friends and associates, and their private comments get repeated. And Bethel has its “Groupies.” They hang on every word of the members of the Governing Body and rush to the phone to spread the word of a new and exciting rumor. I know, I was there. In reality, it was really the Society itself that promoted the expectations about 1975. Consider this item:

Watchtower, August 15, 1968:

“One thing is **absolutely certain**, Bible chronology reinforced with fulfilled Bible prophecy shows that six thousand years of man's existence will soon be up, yes, within this generation! This is, therefore, no time to be indifferent and complacent. **This is not the time to be toying with the words of Jesus that “concerning that day and hour nobody knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father.”** To the contrary, it is a time when one should be keenly aware that the end of this system of things is rapidly coming to its violent end. Make no mistake, it is sufficient that the Father himself knows both the “day and hour”! -- Page 500 (A-42)

Commented former Governing Body member Raymond Franz:

“How could a “faithful and discreet slave” possibly say this — in effect, say that, “True, my master said thus and so, but don't make too much of that; to the contrary, realize that **what I am telling you should be the guiding force in your life?**” -- *Crisis of Conscience*, pg 205

So the question really becomes, was it really divine direction that led to the announcement in 1966 about the 1975 chronology? Was it divine direction that led them to fan the flames of excitement throughout the early seventies?

Does the Bible Teach That We Can Figure Out When the End will Come?

Is it Scripturally proper to be setting dates for the end of the system? Is it really just a matter of being a little “over anxious” to see the end of wickedness and the righteous new order established? That seems to be the Society’s thinking on the matter. Note what they say in the *Watchtower* of December 1, 1984:

“Christendom’s churches have abandoned the Christian watchfulness that Jesus ordered his disciples never to neglect. They are no longer on the alert for Christ’s presence and the coming of God’s Kingdom. They have **rationalized away expectation** of “the conclusion of the system of things” or the “end of the world.” -- Page 4

“In the 19th century, several such groups appeared... The mainstream churches, for whom any teaching on the “Last Things” had become meaningless, despisingly called such groups adventists or millennialists, because such groups were on the watch for Christ’s second advent and believed that Christ was due to reign for a thousand years.” -- Page 13, par. 16

“Naturally, the more established Christian churches rejoiced when these predictions turned out to be erroneous. To be sure, the Catholic, Orthodox and principal Protestant Churches made no such mistakes, for them, the teaching on the “Last Things” was “meaningless.” They had long since ceased to “keep on the watch.”” -- Page 13, par. 17

“From its first year of publication this magazine pointed forward, by sound Scriptural reckoning, to the date 1914 as an epoch-making date in Bible chronology. So when Christ’s invisible presence began in 1914, happy were those Christians to have been found watching.” -- Page 14

“True, the Bible students who wrote those articles did not, at that time, enjoy the precise **Biblical and historical understanding** of what the end of those “appointed times of the nations” would actually mean, **as we understand these things today**. But the important point is that they were “on the watch” and helped to keep fellow Christians spiritually alert.” -- Pages 16, 17

“It is easy for the established churches of Christendom and other people to criticize Jehovah’s

Witnesses because their publications have, at times, stated that **certain things could take place on certain dates**. But is not such line of action **in harmony with Christ's injunction** to "keep on the watch"? -- Page 18

It has to be acknowledged that often it has not been a matter of "could" take place, but, (as I was to learn later), **emphatically would take place**, especially with regard to 1914, 1918, 1920, and 1925. The above article expresses the opinion that having definite expectations as to when Christ will return and establish his Kingdom is the equivalent of "being on the watch"; conversely to not do that means that one has "rationalized away" expectation of the end of "the system of things." This absolutist way of viewing matters, I believe, puts one on the **horns of a false dilemma**. It is not an "either or" situation. One does not have to be at one extreme or else the other extreme. There exists a continuum of positions in between, and the task of die Christian who wants to please God is to see where the **Scriptures**, not the Watchtower Society, advise a Christian to be.

It should be obvious that Jesus did not approve of "rationalizing away" the expectation of his return, else why would he have advised his followers to "keep on the watch?" But where does it say in the Scriptures that you have to set dates, or have a firm idea as to when he will return? Why cannot a Christian be "on the watch," living each day of his life so as to be "ready" **regardless of when** the Lord should return, whether it be the next day or the next century? I believe the following Scriptures can give us a feel for whether or not we should allow ourselves to be convinced about knowing the timing of Jesus return, or how we should react to someone who says he has it all figured out.

"Concerning that day or the hour **nobody knows**, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father. Keep looking, keep awake, for **you do not know when the appointed time is**. It is like a man traveling abroad that left his house and gave authority to his slaves, to each one his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to keep on the watch. Therefore keep on the watch (why?), **for you do not know when the master of the house is coming**, whether late in the day or at midnight or at cockcrowing or early in the morning; in order **when he arrives suddenly**, he does not find you sleeping. But what **I say to you I say to all, keep on the watch.**" -- Mark 13:32-37 NW

"When, now they had assembled, they went asking him: "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" He said to them: "It does not belong to you to get knowledge of the times or

seasons (appointed times - Interlinear NW) which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction.”-- Acts 1:6,7 NW

“He said: “Look out that you are not misled; for many will come on the basis of my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘**The due time has approached.**’ **Do not go after them.**” — Luke 21:8 NW

The Watchtower Society seems to feel that they can figure out the timing of Christ’s return beforehand. In fact they have been saying for some years now that he has **already** returned. Recently they have had to admit error in their predictions for 1975. Their explanation for the failure of their 1975 expectations is that they cannot determine the time interval between Adam’s creation and that of Eve. However, their argument is flawed for the following reason: the Scripture says that neither Jesus nor the angels know the “day or hour.” If it were merely a matter adding 6000 years to the date of Eve’s creation, both Jesus and the angels would have known when the end would come, because they were witnesses of the creation. But the Scripture is clear that they did not know.

There are many areas in which the chronology can go wrong. Even the supposition of the 7,000 year periods is arrived at by deductive reasoning. There is no direct Scriptural support for that conclusion. However there is really no point in trying to figure it out at all, since it is clear from Jesus’ words **that the time is unknowable**. In fact that is the whole point of the parable of the virgins; that one must be ready throughout one’s entire lifetime because the time of the bridegrooms coming is unknown. Also Luke 21:8, (a Scripture that has not been quoted by Watchtower publications since 1964) warns against following those who announce, “**The due time has approached.**” That, I believe, is exactly what the Watchtower Society has been doing since the very beginning of its history.

There is another problem with claiming to be God’s channel and to know the appointed time. When one makes claims in God’s name, as his appointed representative, which go unfulfilled, does that honor God or dishonor him? When these unfulfilled promises are said to be guaranteed by God’s word, does that build faith in God’s Word? In reality, date setting can lead to disappointment, and in fact, can interfere with Christian growth.

The “apology” of 1976 was really no apology at all. It was a case of “blame the victim.” Rather than accept the responsibility, they blamed the individual Witnesses who believed them. This evidently was unacceptable to many Witnesses since many, many persons wrote the Society saying that it was the Society who really encouraged them to believe the end would come in or shortly after 1975. In the March 15, 1980 *Watchtower*

they were finally forced to admit:

“There were statements made then, and thereafter, stressing that this was only a possibility. Unfortunately, however, along with such cautionary information, there were other statements published that implied that such realization of hopes by that year was more of a probability than a mere possibility. It is to be regretted that these latter statements apparently overshadowed the cautionary ones and contributed to buildup of the expectation already initiated.”

“In its issue of July 15, 1976, *The Watchtower*, commenting on the inadvisability of setting our sights on a certain date, stated: ‘If anyone has been disappointed...’ In saying ‘anyone,’ *The Watchtower* included all disappointed ones of Jehovah’s Witnesses, hence including persons having to do with the publication of the information that contributed to the buildup of hopes centered on that date.”

The article then goes on to discuss the matter of serving God without a specific date in mind, but keeping close in mind the “presence of the day of Jehovah.” “It is not a certain date ahead; it is day-to-day living on the part of the Christian that is important.” It is commendable that some comment finally was finally made, although regrettable that it took five years to do it. Yet it was a classic case of “too little too late,” because in the interim, hundreds of thousands left the organization, disillusioned. Thousands of brothers were left to try to reconstruct their family and financial life, deep in debt after having given up their jobs and any hope of pension, many even losing their homes. Others delayed necessary medical treatment until too late.

Yet for awhile I felt encouraged, that we had “turned it around” and were back on track with a more Scriptural long-term viewpoint of our service to God. The new atmosphere of being more tolerant of the consciences of others and not being judgmental of our Christian brothers was a welcome relief. It was as if a window had been opened and fresh air rushed in. In such an atmosphere it was easier to bury the doubts and disappointments of the past and look ahead to the future.

Shepherds of the Flock

But in 1980 the window was slammed shut. At the Kingdom Ministry school that year for elders, we started hearing a new hard line. We began hearing the word “apostasy” and stern new instructions about disfellowshipping. It seemed to me that our instructor was pleased at the new tack the organization was

taking. I can remember an elder remarking to me during a break, "I hope we are not going back in that direction again." Little did we know. Coincidentally, about that time, Allen, an aggressive young elder, moved into our congregation, at the suggestion of the Circuit Overseer. I thought that Allen's viewpoints, which seemed extreme to me, were merely his personal ideas; but I soon began reading what he was promoting in the Watchtower. In retrospect, I now realize that through his close contacts with various Circuit Overseers he was getting "advance information" about the direction the organization was proceeding.

I soon found myself increasingly at odds with some elders over things we were required to do as elders. I was being pressured by the organization to do things that bothered my conscience. Particularly with regard to "marking" and disfellowshipping did I feel uncomfortable; it was not that I disagreed with the Scriptural in 1 Corinthians relative to unrepentant persons who practice gross immorality, rather it was the expanding of the practice to include matters for which there was no clear Scriptural precedent. To apply the sanction of disfellowshipping to an individual is not an action to be taken lightly. Such action can have profound implications for the lives of individuals and their families. *Watchtower* articles have often likened disfellowshipping to death by stoning in ancient Israel. Yet I noticed that some elders took a cavalier attitude, as though it were akin to hitting a mule over the head just "to get his attention." One elder even said, "What's the big deal, we can always reinstate him in a few months?" In order to make such decisions which had great impact on people's lives, I felt that I had to make sure of just what the Scriptures taught about such matters. After all, I had to take responsibility before Jehovah for my actions. I needed more than just an organizational directive. I needed to be convinced by the Scriptures that such action in a particular case was both Scriptural and justified.

The first conflict arose when a young woman who had moved into our congregation to attend the university became engaged to a young man of another religion. Several elders felt that because she was disregarding the counsel to marry "only in the Lord," she should be "marked"⁷ in accordance with 2 Thessalonians 3:14. While I could see a need to counsel her, I could not justify the action some brothers wanted to take towards her. It could only drive her away, not build her up spiritually. Several of us asked the District Overseer for guidance in the matter. He agreed that we should counsel her, but that was as far as we should go. He said that while such a course may impose its own penalties in her life, there was no Scriptural sanction that the Congregation could apply to her. I can appreciate that some families **on an individual basis** may see a need to restrict their teen-age daughters' association with someone in that situation because of the possibility of being influenced to do the same; but making it a **congregational matter** prevents those who

might be able to be a friend to her and provide good association with her from doing so.

But the District Overseer's counsel didn't seem to satisfy Allen. Some elders even implied that the District Overseer was not up to date on the Society's policy. They kept pursuing the matter, even making it a matter of "loyalty to the organization" until the other elders finally gave in. In retrospect, I sometimes wonder how much Allen really cared about helping the young woman. He seemed more interested in "winning" -- over the other elders and probably me in particular. I'm sure that if she had called off the engagement he probably would have dropped the matter. I didn't really care whether Allen "won" and I "lost." I didn't even care whether he managed to get me removed as an elder. But I did care what happened to the young woman. I liked her, and I wish we had been better able to help her. But I'm afraid we just didn't have the answer. I am just now beginning to understand why. Still, she deserved better than what she got.

I spent many hours studying the matter of marking. The Society used to recognize Paul's counsel in 2 Thessalonians 3:14 to be a personal taking note by individual Christians of persons walking disorderly. But in the February 1, 1982 Questions from Readers, we received a "refinement" on the matter. Now the elders would decide for the entire congregation when one was to be marked. They would then give a talk, not mentioning the person by name, but making it plain to the congregation what conduct was being referred to so that those in the congregation would know who was being marked.

Further comment on the matter was made in the April 15, 1985 Questions from Readers. The question considered was, "If a Christian feels that someone in the congregation is not the best of association because of that person's conduct or attitude, **should he personally 'mark' that individual** in accord with 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15?" The answer was that "marking" was a congregational matter to be initiated by the Elders. They went on to say:

"On occasion, however, someone may have an attitude or way of life of which we personally do not approve. The apostle Paul wrote about some in Corinth whose **personal views about the resurrection** were not right and who may have had an 'eat, drink, and be merry' attitude. Mature Christians in the congregation needed to be cautious about such ones, for Paul advised: 'Do not be misled. Bad associations spoil useful habits.'"

"Consequently, marking should not be confused with a personal or family application of God's advice to avoid bad association," making reference to 1 Cor. 15:33.

But this new understanding does not seem square with the Scriptures. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul was writing to the entire Congregation, telling individual members to take note of those who were walking disorderly. The example in question was the man who wouldn't work but would rather mooch off the rest. Nothing in what Paul says would suggest that the "marking" was a matter to be decided by the elders and then imposed upon all in the congregation to observe, rather than an individual "marking." The problem here is that if you hold "marking" to be a Congregational action to be initiated by the elders, then on what Scriptural basis can individual families handle problems such as undesirable playmates for their children within the congregation? That is what seems to have elicited the question being considered.

To allow for this, they resort to Paul's comment at 1 Corinthians 15:33, "bad associations spoil useful habits." However, this introduces a serious inconsistency in the Society's viewpoint of the relative seriousness of various transgressions, because their explanation really ignores the context of 1 Corinthians 15. The way the article is written, it sounds like having "personal views about the resurrection" that "were not right" is on a par with minor matters less serious than being lazy and unwilling to work. However, from the context of Paul's remarks, he is clearly talking about something far more serious than "youngsters, who may not take the truth seriously or may be worldly minded." Paul was addressing the subject of the resurrection. The purpose of the discussion was to warn Christians not to be misled by those who were saying that "there is no resurrection of the dead." He goes on to show that without a belief in a resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised up, and therefore "your faith is useless." What could be more central and important to our salvation than believing that Jesus has been raised up so that we can have faith in his ransom sacrifice?

I bring this up, not to be "nit-picky," but to illustrate how going beyond the simplest and most obvious reading of a text and adding human rules and constraints creates problems with the understanding of other Scriptures. Taking the comments in their Question from Readers of 4/15/85 and 4/1/86 in the framework of their general view of disfellowshipping and "marking" creates a curious inconsistency **if you consider the context** of the Scriptures they use as proof texts. Of their view of the relative seriousness of the transgressions discussed, one would have to conclude: that saying that "the resurrection has already occurred," (in other words to be wrong about the time of the resurrection) is a disfellowshipping offense; being too lazy to work and mooching off other members of the congregation will get you publicly "marked" by the congregation; but denying the resurrection and thus undermining the whole basis for the Christian faith merely makes one "bad association" within the congregation! They seem to have it backwards.

It seems clear to me that the Scriptures do not say what the Society is interpreting them to mean. I have

to conclude that the Society is clearly “going beyond what is written” in the Scriptures regarding “marking.” I find it hard to believe that Jehovah’s spirit directed the Society to make that “refinement” in understanding. It is just this sort of thing that makes one wonder about the validity of their claim of “spirit direction” in the matter of interpretation of Scripture.

It is a widely held perception by Jehovah’s Witnesses, that God directs the affairs of “his people.” The teaching that comes to them through the publications of the Watchtower Society are seen as spiritual “food at the proper time,” the real source of which is considered to be Jehovah God and Christ Jesus. The counsel that they receive through the teaching of the Society’s traveling representatives, as well as the elders in their local congregation is likewise seen as coming from God, the only caveat being to be sure such teaching is in accord with *The Watchtower*. I can remember many times at elders’ meetings, when a question would come up and some of us would be considering the Scriptures to try to determine the course to be taken; someone would invariably run to the library and pull out a *Watchtower* volume which “had the answer.” Once the answer was read, you could put away your Bible -- the matter had been decided. No elder would ever contradict the answer given in the *Watchtower* on the basis of anything he had read in the Bible.

I saw this happen very often, and I began to wonder about it. I had always believed that the ultimate authority was the Bible. Indeed, the Watchtower Society uses the Bible to convince people of their authority. Why, then, were people treating the Watchtower as a higher authority than the Bible? And where was the holy spirit in all of this? The Apostle John wrote:

“Yet I know that the touch of his Spirit never leaves you, and you don’t really need a human teacher. You know that his Spirit teaches you about all things, always telling you the truth and never telling you a lie. So, as he has taught you, live continually in him.” — 1 John 2:27 Phillips

I have recently learned that the organization used to believe that the holy Spirit directly taught individual Christians for nineteen centuries. However, since the time of Rutherford’s presidency, they have taught that the holy spirit no longer serves as a “paraclete,” or helper or teacher to the individual Christian as it has during the past 19 centuries. Note the comments in *Preservation*:

“During the absence of Jesus Christ in heaven those in line for membership in the bride were left as orphans, the holy spirit being sent to act as guardian and guide for such during that period.... Now

it was this “faithful servant” class, as the facts show, that the Lord used to minister to those coming to a knowledge of die truth from and after 1918 and who responded to the call for the kingdom.” —

Preservation, page 21

“The holy spirit was given to the church at Pentecost to perform die office of comforter, advocate and helper of and for the spirit-begotten ones during the absence of Jesus Christ...

“These texts show that the holy spirit would and did perform the office of helper, advocate and comforter of those who repsonded to die call to the kingdom, and until the coining of Christ Jesus and the gathering unto himself of his own...

“The Lord Jesus came to his temple in 1918, and that would mark the time of the cessation of the work of the holy spirit as an advocate, helper and comforter of the members of the church on earth.” --

Preservation, pages 201, 202

What Rutherford is actually saying here is that since 1918, when they suppose that Jesus Christ had “come to his temple,” the function of the holy spirit as a “paraclete” (helper, teacher) ceased to operate towards individual Christians. From that time forward, Christ Jesus himself assumes the role of teacher or helper, and that function proceeds through the “faithful class” (now called “faithftil and discreet slave”), which equates to the Watchtower Society itself. My experience as an elder convinces me diat this is what elders of Jehovah’s Witnesses actually believe. Why else would they place greater importance in a statement of policy in a Watchtower publication than in the Word of God itself?

Nowhere is this concept more evident than in the flow of organizational authority itself. The present elder arrangement dates from 1972, the result of a major change in the way of governing the local congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses. This was heralded as a move to get back to the way the early Christian organization was organized. A very strong Scriptural case was made that “older men” were to be appointed on the basis of their Scriptural qualification, and all were to be equal in authority. Since that was not the way it was being done among Jehovah’s Witnesses, it required some dramatic changes. A case was also made for there being no permanent “chairman” but instead a yearly rotation of the office of chairman. Other positions were to rotate as well thus assuring that no one individual would permanently exercise power (as had been the case in the past among Jehovah’s Witnesses), as a protection from some individuals who were prone to abuse power.

This arrangement lasted several years, and then it was decided (for reasons of expediency) that some positions should be permanent. It was amazing to me how certain elders campaigned bitterly to get those

positions that seemed to be the real seats of power in the congregation. Then one by one all the various positions in the congregation became permanent again.

From its inception, the elder arrangement was heralded as an arrangement directed by the holy spirit. Elders were said to be appointed by holy spirit. To question their position was to question Jehovah and his holy spirit. A Question from Readers, Watchtower August 1, 1985, page 31 stated that if qualified elders carefully considered the man to see that he fulfilled Scriptural qualifications, then his appointment could be said to be by holy spirit.

But that was not always what was happening in the organization. One hears too many accounts of elders who were not Scripturally qualified being appointed. Yet the perception persists among elders that when they make a recommendation and send it in to the Society, that **since it is also prayerfully considered by the Branch Committee who makes the appointment, that holy spirit somehow will oversee the whole procedure and see that only qualified men are appointed.** Yet I began to wonder if that was really true.

Two incidents well illustrate this point. At an assembly, we heard about a spy who was sent by the Communist party to infiltrate the organization in East Germany. He progressed upwards in the organization to the position of District Overseer, then turned in the names of all those in positions of responsibility in East Germany. Didn't the Holy Spirit who made those appointments know that he wasn't a real brother? In another incident, an elder left his wife and ran off with a young pioneer sister. They were disfellowshipped and moved to a distant part of the country. He was contacted by Witnesses in door to door work, accepted a Bible study, began attending meetings, and got baptized as a Jehovah's Witness - again (without disclosing his past). He was again serving as an elder when a Circuit Overseer who had been reassigned from another part of the country recognized him. According to Witness doctrine, he was appointed by Holy Spirit twice - once as a Ministerial Servant, and then again as an Elder. I have a hard time believing Holy Spirit had anything at all to do with that appointment. One cannot fool the holy spirit, yet Jehovah's Witnesses seem to do quite well at it if one accepts their claim of spirit direction⁸ in the matter of the Governing Body's appointment of elders.

My own personal experience while serving on the body of elders this out. I remember a an elders' meeting where we were considering a brother for appointment as elder. I was aware of problems that might

reflect adversely on his meeting the Scriptural qualifications and expressed my concerns to the other elders. One of the elders said, "But look at his service record!" Since the Society seemed to be emphasizing service activity at that time, the elders seemed determined to make the recommendation. Since I was trying to be conciliatory, I told them that I would not make an issue of it if they were really determined to recommend

him. He was recommended and soon afterward his appointment came through from the Society. It was but a matter of weeks before his marriage broke up and the body felt obliged to remove him as an elder. Where, one wonders, was the holy spirit when that appointment was made? How can it be said that holy spirit directed that decision?

Another case in point involved a pioneer brother who had moved into our congregation. During the Circuit Overseers' visit, his name was brought up for consideration to be appointed as an elder. Three of the four elders on the body felt that this young man lacked the Scriptural qualifications to be appointed to such responsibility.

However the Circuit Overseer was in favor of appointing this brother, (for reasons which I believe were more "political" than spiritual). I was beginning to get the feeling that we were not going to get to go home that night until we agreed to recommend appointment. The Circuit Overseer finally said, "Will you brothers agree to sending it in as a recommendation if I include a statement about your reservations?" Since none of us felt that the Society would appoint someone under their recommended minimum age with 75% of the body holding reservations about his Scriptural qualifications, and since it seemed obvious that Circuit Overseer was determined to recommend him anyway, we reluctantly agreed. When the Circuit Overseer left the congregation, he hadn't finished filling out all the forms, so he asked us to sign the blank Circuit Overseer's Visit Report form, and he would type in his comments later. He told us what he was going to write down from a handwritten sheet he had. As trusting elders, we did so. When the appointment came through, I put the matter aside and tried to work with the brother as I would any elder.

Later on, just before I was removed as an elder, I got curious as to what the Circuit Overseer had actually put in his recommendation to the Society. So while I still had access to the files, I looked into the matter. I remembered that he had specifically assured us that he would state our reservations about the young brother's age and experience to the Society. I was dumbfounded to see that his actual written comment was simply, "Although only 27 years of age, he acts and conducts himself as a true older man." Not a word was said about any of the elders having any reservations! I don't see how the Society, reading this report, would understand that any of the elders had any reservations about this appointment. It seemed to me that he told us he was going to write one thing, got us to sign a blank form, and then he did something else.

I related this incident to an elder in a neighboring congregation and he told me a similar tale of being asked to sign a blank piece of paper by this same circuit overseer. He said that he would never do that again because of a result similar to what I experienced.

What I wonder is whether these brothers really believe that holy spirit is directing the activities of the organization. Do they suspect that it does not and so they have to use “political” means to accomplish their objectives? Or do they know that nothing will happen to them no matter what they do? (One wonders if they have ever read the account of Ananias and Sapphira.) I often wonder, but at any rate it casts doubt on whether holy spirit performs any special function with respect to the appointments and directives of the Governing Body.

Eventually, as a result of the continuous efforts of Allen and his Circuit Overseer friend, I was removed as an elder. The District Overseer, after reviewing the case and severely chastising the Circuit Overseer, suggested that since there was really no reason I should have been removed, that I could be reappointed after a ‘decent interval.’ Although several elders urged me to ‘play the game,’ and get reappointed, I knew I could never do that. I was already having serious doubts about some of the teachings of the organization. I knew I could never do all the things that would be required of me as an elder.

I was by that time seriously committed to a complete re-evaluation of my religion. I had some real soul-searching to do.

There were a number of serious questions bothering me that called into question my faith in the Society as “God’s exclusive channel of communication” with mankind. The matter of date setting was uppermost in my mind, especially after the 1975 fiasco. Date setting has always been a fundamental feature of our religion, since it grew out of the Second Adventist movement of the early 19th century. The 1914 date for example came from second adventist Barbour, not Russell. My earliest memories as a Witness in the early 1940’s were of the expectation of the end coming very shortly. During the war years Witnesses were being arrested, mobbed, and imprisoned. The September 15, 1941 *Watchtower* said of the release of the *Children* book:

“Receiving the gift, the marching children clasped it to them, not a toy or plaything for idle pleasure, but Lord’s provided instrument for most effective work in the **remaining months** before Armageddon.”

At the St. Louis, Missouri assembly in 1941, Rutherford had made the claim ‘that soon all Jehovah’s Witnesses would be locked up and then they could intone “peace and safety” and then the end would come.’ (*New World*, pg 104). Most of the young people were putting marriage off until “after Armageddon.” The “AAA club” (Available After Armageddon) was fashionable among young Witness sisters. Of course the end didn’t come, but the perception that it would happen very soon was always prevalent.

At every assembly the closing talk was always an emotionally charged occasion, much more so than assemblies now. It was always phrased, "We don't know what the immediate future will bring, but if there are assemblies next year..." Our horizon of life was always just a few short years down the road, during which all were expected to keep up and if possible increase the pace of activity until the end of the system. There was renewed expectation during the late 1950's. In fact looking back, it seems that almost any noteworthy event in world affairs was enough to trigger excited expectation in the minds of many Witnesses.

It was just before 1975 that I was forced to look more closely at the matter of date setting. It was about that time that my wife and I were asked to study with a young man whose father had been a Witness. This young man had come to a point in his life where he felt the need of religion. But he was afraid of accepting the faith based only on the fact that his father had been a Witness, and wanted to make a thorough examination on his own. What seemed important to him was the teaching on the "last days" and the fulfillment of Matthew 24. What he focused on eventually was the Society's interpretation of wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes. He did a lot of historical research to see if there really was any correlation. It was at this time that I first realized how weak the Society's arguments really were. (I didn't realize at that time how manipulative the statistics were or how misleading the quotations from various scientists and historians were. That would come later.) It soon became evident that people in practically any century could make just as convincing a case. (In fact many groups throughout history have done just that.) But what was still convincing to me was the chronology of 1914 which served as an anchor point in time from which to apply the "signs." It seemed to me that this was really the crucial point of evidence. Ultimately he concluded that no one point proved the matter, but decided on the basis of "preponderance of evidence." I guess we both wanted to believe.

I know now that these and other questions were occurring to many Witnesses throughout the world; they came about as individuals began to question what they were seeing in the organization in the light of what they were reading in the Bible. Many were independently coming to the same conclusions. It would have been helpful to me and many others had the Society openly addressed some of these questions.

When some in the Corinthian congregation questioned the doctrine of the resurrection, rather than just throw them out in order to shut them up, Paul gave convincing Scriptural argumentation to show the correctness of belief in a resurrection. It would have been helpful had the Society done that. Instead they conducted a witch hunt, first at Bethel, and then later throughout the organization. Rather than answer questions honestly raised or present sound Scriptural arguments to refute ideas they felt to be in error,

they chose to question the morals and integrity of those raising questions, even when their questions were discussed with only one or two other persons. These were vilified as “apostates” and deceitful persons wanting to subvert the faith of others for dishonest gain. A *Watchtower* article on the abuses of power by Religious Councils says of their use of the charge of heresy:

“Charges of heresy proved to be a ruthless scheme to eliminate opponents who dared to defy Christendom’s church councils. Any who expressed differing opinions or even attempted to present Scriptural proof refuting the dogmas and canons (church laws) of the councils were branded as heretics.” *Watchtower* May 15, 1986 page 25

Is that what is happening in the Watchtower organization today? I remember an article in the Watchtower back in the 1950’s which took religious organizations to task for saying that Jehovah’s Witnesses were bad people and making slanderous accusations against them, rather than addressing the issues they raised. The churches were compared to the Pharisees who vilified Jesus for associating with sinners and the like, rather than answer the questions raised. Is the Society now acting just like the Pharisees?

This was entirely unsatisfactory to me. Here I found myself a member of a religion that advocated to others that if they were lovers of truth they should be willing to examine their own religion and yet the leaders of my religion were unwilling to make such an examination themselves. The time had come for me to do what I had been exhorting others to do. Otherwise I would have been guilty of doing what Paul said in Romans 2:21: “Do you, however, the one teaching someone else, not teach yourself?”

Oftentimes when someone questions the Society’s teaching or actions in a matter, they are advised, “Be patient. Wait upon Jehovah to correct matters. Do not ‘run ahead’ of Jehovah’s organization.” But what do they tell Lutherans or members of other religious organizations who are upset with what their church teaches or does -- “Wait for God to change it?” Notice what the *Awake!* article “Future Prospects for Protestantism - And You” advised, under the subheading “If Your Church Fails to Act, Will You?”:

“If, after making an honest investigation, you are less than pleased with what you see, do more than just complain. A journalist, while commenting on Karl Barth’s statement that a church is its members, logically concluded: “Church members... are responsible for what the church says and does.” So ask yourself: Am I willing to **share responsibility for everything my church says and does?** Can I really

be proud of having all its members as spiritual brothers?" -Awake!, September 8, 1987 page 10

I had already done much research in the Society's publications and in the Scriptures themselves and this only served to raise more questions. My personal copies of the *Watchtower* by the mid-1980's contained copious notes in the margins of Scriptures misapplied or used out of context to attain some desired result in manipulating people. About this time I was distressed by the realization that if the Watchtower's time prophecies did not have a sound Scriptural foundation, neither did their claim of being God's "exclusive channel of communication." This clearly would be an important matter to research. Unfortunately the historical data about the early history of the organization is not available to contemporary Witnesses except in the Society's version of its own history (which proved to be neither accurate nor objective). It was becoming obvious that I was only going to hear one side from the Society's literature. So I was going to have to search elsewhere.

The obvious place to start was Ray Franz's book *Crisis of Conscience*. This is an excellent account of his life-long experiences in the organization and later on the governing body. It gives an interesting insight as to what happened between 1971 and 1980 within the Governing Body and provides a detailed account of the history of the organization and its doctrinal development, particularly in regard to time calculation features. It also documents the development of his own personal crisis with respect to the conflict between the teachings of the organization and the Scriptures themselves which eventually led to his personal "crisis of conscience." It fairly presents information which I feel is the right of every Witness to know about his religion.

With the failure of the expectations of 1975 and the growing awareness of the untenability of the teaching about "the generation of 1914," which has all but disappeared, a number of Witnesses have independently done a great deal of research into the matter of chronology and the time prophecies of Jehovah's Witnesses. Much controversy has surfaced regarding the 607 B.C.E. date for the fall of Jerusalem and the related time calculation of the length of the "Appointed Times of the Nations" which the organization holds to have ended in 1914.

Much of Ray Franz's problems with Watchtower teaching came as a direct result of his research for the book *Aid To Bible Understanding*. This was particularly the case with respect to chronology. Brother Knorr's intentions regarding the *Aid* book project were that it should be completed quickly. But his instructions were stated in such a way that the brothers assigned to the project thought it was to be a new independent study -- not a compilation of previous *Watchtower* articles. This misunderstanding had profound consequences for the

quality and direction of the research that went into the work.

Is the Chronology of 1914 Accurate?

The Society's accepted chronology has for years been at odds with secular history on its dating of Bible events prior to 539 B.C.E. (I had been aware of the difference, but I accepted the Society's assertion that the dating system of secular history for that era is sketchy, uncertain, and without real substantiation.) Ray Franz and Charles Ploeger spent several months searching the libraries in the New York area in an effort to find any historical evidence to support the 607 date, without success. Their search led them to Brown University where they talked to Dr. Abraham Sachs, a specialist in cuneiform texts. It became evident that there was in fact overwhelming, solid evidence that Jerusalem fell in 587, not 607 as Russell and Barbour supposed. Since the Governing Body was unwilling to even consider that their supposition might be wrong, Ray Franz was forced to merely suggest possible weakness in archaeological evidence in general and hold to the Society's traditional position. Of the article on chronology that appeared in the *Aid* book he later says: "The arguments I presented were honest ones, but I know that their intent was to uphold a date for which there was no historical support."

Rather than honestly re-evaluate their teaching, the governing body asked Ray to participate in what amounts to dishonest scholarship. This contributed to Ray's personal "crisis of conscience" and his eventual separation from the Society. Even then, it was not his choice to leave. He was thrown out in the most unjust manner I can imagine.

It is no wonder that the Society will not re-evaluate the 607 date: it is the foundation of not only the 1914 date for the "end of the gentile times" and the establishment of Christ's kingdom, but also of **their own appointment as "faithful and discreet slave."** It is the whole foundation for their spiritual authority over the four million Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide. It is an essential doctrine that has validated their world view. It is the fundamental basis for the existence of the Watchtower Society. It would be a very difficult thing for them to admit that over a hundred years of "prophesying" have been in error.

Even within the governing body there has been much discussion regarding the viability of the 1914 teaching. In *Crisis of Conscience*, Ray Franz reports how at one session, in 1975, three members of the Governing Body wanted to move the "generation" ahead to 1957, the time of the first Sputnik, but the majority wouldn't agree. During a Governing Body discussion of the reliability of time prophecies, Brother Knorr

expressed himself on the matter in these words:

“There are some things I know - I know that Jehovah is God, that Christ Jesus is his Son, that he gave his life as a ransom for us, that there is a resurrection. Other things I’m not so certain about. 1914 - I don’t know. We have talked about 1914 for a long time. We may be right and I hope we are.”

Lyman Swingle commented about continuing to emphasize 1914: “All right, if that is what you want to do. But at least you know that as far as 1914 is concerned, Jehovah’s Witnesses got the whole thing -- lock, stock and barrel -- from the Second Adventists.” *Crisis of Conscience*, pg 216, 217

Then, in 1977, Carl Olof Jonsson, a Witness for twenty years and an Elder in Sweden, sent a massive amount of research he had done on Biblically related chronology and chronological speculation. The information only confirmed the research done seven years before by Ray Franz.

Jonsson’s research came about as a result of a Bible study he was having with a man who had a background in history. He was challenged to prove that 607 and not 587 was the correct date for the fall of Jerusalem. Since none of the published “evidence” in any of the Society’s literature was convincing to this man, Brother Jonsson undertook a personal research program into archaeology and history to prove the matter himself. What he found eventually convinced him that the Society was in error in this matter. Being an honest person and a “lover of truth,” he prepared all the information he had unearthed in the form of a treatise and sent it to Brooklyn for the Governing Body’s evaluation, in the belief that they would welcome such information. They wrote him a letter telling him that they were very busy but would get to it when they could; meanwhile he was not to talk about his “chronology” for fear that it might “upset the brothers.” After a year and no reply, he made further inquiry. He received a reply that contained objections which were already answered by his original material. Sometime after that, a delegation of brothers was sent to talk to him. He was basically asked, “Do you agree with the Society’s chronology?” No discussion, no convincing argument, just “do you agree or don’t you!” When he in all good conscience could not agree without convincing evidence, he was summarily disfellowshipped. He has since published his findings in the form of two very fine books: *Gentile Times Reconsidered*, and *The Sign - What Is It?*

The information which follows is a summary of the arguments in *Gentile Times Reconsidered*. Jonsson begins with a history of Second Adventist eschatology. Numerous “scholars” from the 14th century on have advanced various dating schemes using both the 1260 and 2520 days converted to years to arrive at various

dates, including many dates in the 1800's and 1914, 1915, 1917, 1918, 1923 1926, and 1934. It traces the history of the 1914 chronology and shows how it became a central doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses. (See chart, A-43)

The Watchtower Society goes to great lengths to try to discredit the extant historical records of the Neo-Babylonian period. They also discredit the canons of Ptolemy as well as Berossus, The December 15, 1977 Watchtower commented favorably on a recent book by Physicist R. R. Newton⁹ *The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy*, who charged that Ptolemy "fudged" some of his astronomical observations. However, follow-up articles in Scientific American show that while a few astronomers agree with Newton, the majority of scholars disagree. Dr. Newton's case against Ptolemy is based on a series of statistical calculations which indicate a degree of improbability that Ptolemy could have made the observations he claimed with the instruments he describes. Most scholars, however, take issue with Newton's methodology and his disregard of the methods of early astronomy. But even if some of Ptolemy's astronomical observations were unreliable, Newton admits that "the latter part of his king list has independent verification."

Actually, Ptolemy's canon agrees exactly with that of Berossus who lived 400 years before him. In any case, the editors of the Watchtower should take no comfort, since none of our current understanding of Neo-Babylonian chronology depends on either Ptolemy or Berossus.

During the last hundred years modern archaeology has unearthed a wealth of contemporary records, official governmental inscriptions, astronomical observations, and business records. Ptolemy and Berossus have been shown to be in complete agreement with all newly discovered information. Are the Babylonian Official records trustworthy? Dr. A. K. Grayson, noted authority on Assyrian and Babylonian chronicles, concludes:

"Unlike the Assyrian scribes the Babylonians neither fail to mention Babylonian defeats nor do they attempt to change them into victories. The chronicles contain a reasonably reliable and representative record of important events in the period with which they are concerned."

The historical dating information provided by Brother Jonsson is voluminous and exhaustive, but it proves conclusively that the date of Jerusalem's destruction can be historically placed at 587 B.C.E. with an error factor of less than a year. In all, 7 lines of evidence are presented, 4 of them completely independent of each other.

The first group of three are listed together because it cannot be proved that they are truly independent. They consist of the Neo-Babylonian chronicles from which Ptolemy and Berossus got their information. From this information, Nebuchadnezzar's first year can be dated 604/03 which would make 587/86 his eighteenth year, when he desolated Jerusalem. The royal inscription Nabon. No.8 (Hillah stele) and the chronicle B.M. 21901 allow us to fix Nabonidus' first year to 555/54. This information allows dating Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year as 587/86. The royal inscription Nabon. HI.B (the Adda-Gupi' stele) gives the length of the reigns of all the Neo-Babylonian kings up to the ninth year of Nabonidus. It too agrees with 587/86 for the fall of Jerusalem.

Business and Administrative Documents: Literally thousands of these have been found. The records of a banking house, "the Sons of Egibi," span the entire era of the Babylonian kings. There are many tablets from each year of the period. Since most are dated with the year of the ruling king, the lengths of all the kings of the period can be thus confirmed. These records extend for nearly a hundred years until the first year of Darius Hystaspis in 521 B.C.E.

Astronomical diaries: The astronomical diary VAT 4956 contains about thirty completely verified observations from Nebuchadnezzar's 37th regnal year. The combination of these astronomical positions is not duplicated for thousands of years. Only one year fits these observations; 568/67 B.C.E. Again Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year would then be 587/86. The oldest preserved diary, B.M.32312 also enables dating Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year at 587/86.

Synchronisms with Contemporary Egyptian Chronology: These are important since Egyptian chronology has been established independently of other dating systems of the period. There are at least four synchronisms that are of interest. Three are in the Bible: 2 Kings 23:29, Jeremiah 46:2, and Jeremiah 44:30. The fourth is a cuneiform text B.M.33041 which links Amasis with Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year. All dates derived from Egyptian history are in perfect agreement with the dates given by Babylonian history. To use the Watchtower's dating negates the synchronisms between the Bible and Egyptian and Babylonian history.

An interesting point here regarding the Watchtower's chronology: In order to have Jerusalem's fall occur in 607, they are forced to insert 20 years into Babylonian history. The *Aid* book attempts to make the history between Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus seem hazy and incomplete to allow for this "gap." However as demonstrated by Carl Jonsson, the historical record is actually complete. If there were an additional 20 years in the Neo-Babylonian era, then where are all the missing business records for that period? And why are the same 20 years missing from all of the other sources? From time to time, new artifacts are unearthed from

various Babylonian periods, but the 20 missing years never turn up.

The above represents an abbreviated summary of the historical and archaeological information presented in *Gentile Times Reconsidered*. For a complete investigation of the matter, I would highly recommend a thorough consideration of the book.

Jonsson continues with a discussion of the texts relating to the seventy years. The prophecy regarding the seventy years are recorded in Jeremiah. The first text to consider is Jeremiah 25:10-12:

“I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and **these nations** will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,” declares the LORD, “and will make it desolate forever.”

Not only Judah was included in this proclamation, but “**these nations**” would serve the King of Babylon. Jeremiah 25:15-26 goes on to list them. All these nations came under Babylonian rule. It is important here to note several things that this prophecy predicts: (1) Judah will become a “devastated place” (Heb. “Chorbah)-NW, and (2): “these nations will serve the king of Babylon for **seventy years**.” Servitude does not mean the same thing as captivity, or desolation, although it can mean such as well. For Judah, servitude meant vassalage. But as time went on and the Jews revolted time and again, they experienced wave after wave of military devastations until at last the land was a ruin without inhabitant.

But Israel did not have to go into captivity. Such a fate was predicted for any nation that **refused to serve Babylon**. This was clearly stated by Jeremiah in chapter 27:11-14:

“But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation **remain in its own land** to till it and **to live there**, declares the LORD.” “I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, “Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; **serve him and his people, and you will live**. Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the LORD has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon,’ for they are prophesying lies to you. — NIV

Jeremiah 27:17: "...Serve the king of Babylon and keep on living. Why should this city become a **devastated place?**"— NW

It would be inconsistent with Jehovah's principles to offer a hope that he had no intention of fulfilling. (In fact, that is the argument the Society uses to show that Adam and Eve actually had a choice of whether to be faithful or to disobey.) It is clear that servitude was decreed; whether to live in their own land or become captives in Babylon was their choice. The seventy years are referred to again in Jeremiah 29:10:

"This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place." — NIV

Here the New World Translation is at odds with most modern translations¹⁰ in that the Hebrew preposition "le," which generally means "for, to, in regard to, with reference to," is translated "at." The sense here is that the seventy years refer to a period of **Babylonian supremacy** during which, not only Judah, but **all nations of the region** became vassals and paid tribute to Babylon. Some, like Judah and also Ashkelon, rebelled and suffered the consequences of having their city destroyed and their citizens taken to Babylon as captives. This captivity, however, did not last for seventy years as the Watchtower insists. One would hope that the New World Translation committee was not swayed to use "at" by their doctrinal conviction.

It is important to realize that the **prophecy** concerning the seventy years is **contained in Jeremiah**. The next two texts, Daniel 9:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:20,21 must be seen as brief references to Jeremiah's prophecy. Neither accounts give a thorough discussion of the prophecy. So every attempt to find an application of the seventy year period must proceed **from the prophecy itself** and not from brief references to it.

Daniel 9:1,2: "It was the first year of Darius son of Artaxerxes, a Mede by race who assumed the throne of Chaldaeia. In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, was studying, counting over the number of years -- as revealed by Yahweh to the prophet Jeremiah -- that were to pass before the desolation of Jerusalem would come to an end, namely seventy years." -- Jerusalem Bible

Daniel's interest in Jeremiah's prophecy was aroused by the fact that Babylonian supremacy had ended.

Daniel knew from Jeremiah's prophecy that the end of the seventy years "for Babylon" meant that the devastations of Jerusalem could come to an end.

2 Chronicles 36:20,21: "And those who had escaped the sword he deported to Babylon, where they were enslaved by him and his descendants until the rise of the kingdom of Persia -- to fulfil Yahweh's prophecy through Jeremiah: Until the country has paid off its Sabbaths, it will lie fallow for all the days of its desolation -- until the seventy years are complete." -- Jerusalem Bible

One might conclude from this text, (especially in NW) that Ezra states that the land enjoyed a sabbath rest of seventy years. But nowhere does Jeremiah speak of a sabbath rest. Therefore Ezra's words "until the land paid off its sabbaths; all the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath," (NW) could not be a fulfillment of "Jehovah's word by the **mouth of Jeremiah.**" The two clauses about the sabbath rest, as has been observed by most commentators, are a reference to Leviticus 26:34,35:

"Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it." -- NIV

Like Daniel, Ezra understood the desolation of Judah to be a fulfillment of this curse predicted by the law of Moses. But since neither Moses nor Jeremiah predicted a seventy year sabbath rest, we should not understand Ezra to be making such a connection. Such an understanding would be in conflict with Jeremiah's words, since it clearly shows the seventy years to be a period of servitude for many nations, which both Bible and secular history show began many years before the desolation of Jerusalem.

There is no evidence to warrant applying the last two texts, Zechariah 1:7,12 and 7:1-5 to Jeremiah's prophecy about the seventy years. Neither makes any reference to Jeremiah, and the context shows that they must be applied to a different time period. Zechariah 1:7,12 states:

"On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo.... Then the angel of the LORD said, "LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from

the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?”

This text can be dated to February, 519 B.C., the second year of Darius. If, in 519 B.C., Jerusalem had been suffering God’s anger for seventy years, then it would have to have been in 589 B.C. that Jehovah’s anger was expressed when the armies of Babylon laid seige to the temple, not 607 B.C., which would be 90 years. (If this seventy year period had already ended in 537 as the Society contends, then there would have been no reason for the angel to ask such a question.) This fact is also confirmed by Zechariah 7:1-5:

“In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev. The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, together with their men, to entreat the LORD by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, “Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?” Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: “Ask all the people of the land and the priests, “When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?” — Zechariah 7:1-5 (NIV)

This text is dated to November, 518/517 B.C.E. In 517 B.C. the Jews had for seventy years been commemorating the burning of Jerusalem in the fifth month and the assassination of governor Gedaliah in the seventh month. Counting back seventy years brings us once again to 587 B.C. So once again, the internal testimony of the Bible corroborates the historical date of 587 for the destruction of Jerusalem.

When do the seventy years begin to apply? There is some difference of application among various Bible scholars¹¹. However if the seventy years are counted from the time when Babylonian king Nabopolassar with the help of the Medes captured Harran, thus ending the Assyrian world empire in the year 609 B.C.E., then the period of Babylonian supremacy is exactly seventy years.

In 1981 the Society published what seems to be a refutation of the historical arguments in Jonsson’s book. This was contained in the appendix of Let Your Kingdom Come. They object to several alternative suggestions, but ignore the most convincing arguments, leaving the impression that convincing evidence does not exist. On one hand they admitted that the historical evidence seemed to support the 587 date, but then they say that “We prefer to follow the Bible” rather than secular history.

However, the whole point of Jonsson’s book is to demonstrate conclusively that there is no disagreement

between the Bible and secular history regarding the 587 date. The disagreement is between the Watchtower's preferred chronology, and that of history and the Bible. So to say "We prefer to accept the Bible" over secular history really means "we prefer to accept our **interpretation** of the Bible over secular history"¹².

The next question to be answered concerns "the gentile times." Jesus makes at least two references to the book of Daniel. When he mentioned "the disgusting thing..." and "the great tribulation..." he makes clear reference to the book of Daniel, quoting it. But no such reference is made at Luke 21:24 where Jesus first uses this term, "the appointed times of the nations" with reference to the trampling of the city of Jerusalem. Thus there seems to be no connection between that term and the "seven times" of Nebuchadnezzar's madness in Daniel chapter 4.

When considering Daniel chapter 4 and the dream of the tree, it is interesting to note that the prophecy is not dated. We don't know when it was given, nor when Nebuchadnezzar's madness began and ended. We can deduce from other known facts that it must have been near the end of his 43 year reign, consequently after the destruction of Jerusalem. This is in contrast with other prophecies of Daniel in which the time was important and so was stated. **It seems mighty odd that the "second fulfillment" would begin before its "first" fulfillment, in fact, even before the prophecy was given!**

The dream that was given to Nebuchadnezzar and the interpretation of it given by inspiration through Daniel, was fulfilled entirely upon Nebuchadnezzar himself when he lost his sanity for a period of "seven times"¹³, after which he was restored to his kingdom and forced to acknowledge the power and sovereignty of the "King of the Heavens."

Ron Frye, a former Circuit Overseer, in a lecture concerning the Watchtower's "gentile times" interpretation comments:

"To fashion a symbolic interpretation from the elements contained in this account from Daniel chapter 4 is an example of extreme scriptural exegesis which is fraught with enormous possibilities for error and miscalculation. To take "seven times" which in Nebuchadnezzar's case was seven literal years, and convert them into a period of 2520 years requires using the "year for a day principle" of Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6. The Watchtower's *Aid to Bible Understanding* under "The Appointed Times of the Nations" on page 96 says:

"Seven times," according to this count, would equal 2,520 days. That a specific number of days may be used in the Bible record to represent prophetically an equivalent number of years can be seen by

reading the accounts at Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6. Only by applying the formula there expressed of “a day for a year” to the “seven times” of this prophecy can the vision of Daniel chapter four have significant fulfillment beyond the now extinct Nebuchadnezzar’s day, as the evidence thus far presented gives reason to expect. They therefore represent 2,520 years.”

However this is merely an assumption. There is no scriptural warrant for making a general principle out of two specific references to a “year for a day.” Certainly there is nothing in Daniel that would suggest that it should be done. Even the interpretation that “seven times” equals seven years of 360 days is an assumption.

Ron Frye continues:

“Still another assumption that must be made to get a protracted doctrine of time out of this is to assume that the “gentile times” in Jesus words at Luke 21 begin by applying to Jerusalem, but in the end apply to something that Jerusalem only symbolizes. Again in the *Aid* book on pages 94 and 95 concerning that very thing, it says:

“While the literal city of Jerusalem is obviously referred to in Jesus’ description of the destruction that was to come and did come upon that city in the year 70 C.E. when the Romans demolished Jerusalem, yet the statement concerning “the appointed times of the nations” carries the prophecy far beyond that point, as many commentators have noted.

“The article goes on to identify Jerusalem with God’s heavenly kingdom, and thus they make a connection between earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly kingdom that they say was enthroned in 1914. But again, this is without scriptural warrant. Jesus in his discussion did not go back in time to establish when Jerusalem first began to be trampled on. But the Society does; they take the reader way back to 607 B.C. But Jesus in Luke 21 is merely talking about what was to happen to Jerusalem in the near future and what would follow that in the centuries that would follow the destruction, until the times of the nations’ domination of the earth came to their end. There is no need nor any warrant to convert Jerusalem into a symbolism to make the prophecy coherent or relevant. It was nothing more than a statement of fact, namely that Jerusalem was to be destroyed and not only that, but there would be an ongoing domination by the nations as long as the nations existed.”

According to Russell’s original interpretation, the trampling of Jerusalem was supposed to end in 1914

when the Jews were to be restored to Palestine. Prior to 1914 that seemed a possibility. But the outworking of history proved Russell's speculation false and it eventually had to be abandoned by the Watchtower Society. Since 1931 such prophecies have been applied to spiritual Israel.

The Watchtower publications regularly refer to 1914 as the year when Jesus became "enthroned" and his kingdom "established." However there are several Bible texts that show clearly that Jesus has been enthroned since his resurrection in 33 C.E.

Revelation 3:21: "To the one that conquers, I will grant to sit down with me on my throne, even as I **conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.**"

Ephesians 1:20-23: "...he [Jehovah] raised him up from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above every government and authority and power and lordship, not only in this system of things, but also in that to come. He also subjected all things under his feet, and made him head over all things to the congregation which is his body, the fullness of him who fills up all things in all."

Matthew 28:18: "**All** authority has been given me in heaven and on the earth."

Furthermore, Hebrews 10:12,13 shows that Psalm 110:1 began to be fulfilled since Jesus resurrection. Consequently, from 33 C.E. and thereafter, Jesus has been sitting on Jehovah's throne, ruling as the legal heir of David.

However, if one accepts the Watchtower Society's interpretation that "Jerusalem" now represents Christ's heavenly rulership since 1914, several serious problems arise. For example, how can it be held that "Jerusalem," understood as being the Kingdom of God in heaven, was trodden clown by the Gentiles on earth right up to 1914?¹⁴ Also, how can it be said that the "kingdom of the world" became the kingdom of Christ in 1914, since no observable change took place in this regard in 1914. The nations are just as much in control of earth as they ever were.

Does the Outbreak of War in 1914 Prove the Accuracy of the Gentile Times Chronology?

Most Witnesses I talk to believe that because World War I broke out in 1914, the Society's chronology is validated. They feel that all questions about dates, prophetic applications can be swept aside; the

methodology is validated by the results. However, that is like telling the math student that it doesn't matter how many arithmetic errors he makes in the process if he ends up with the "right" answer. What is at question here is whether the methodology used to arrive at any of these dates is Scripturally valid; if not, any "fulfillment" would have to be considered as mere coincidence. It is appropriate to examine the Barbour-Russell method in this respect. It was originally held in their book *Three Worlds*, that the 2520 years began to count in 606 B.C., (rather than the Watchtower's currently accepted 607 B.C.) It is evident that Barbour based his entire system on the chronology developed by Archbishop James Ussher in the 16th century, which has been demonstrated to be inaccurate. However in computing the end point of the 2520 years, Barbour made a mathematical error by including a "0" year. Although Russell eventually became aware of this, it was not until 1949 that "adjustments" were made in order to respond to their critics. In that adjustment, it was also "discovered" that the 606 B.C. starting point was also in error. But rather than change the ending date (which had already been "validated" by the outbreak of World War I), they "corrected" the starting date back to 607 B.C., thus salvaging their 1914 chronology and all the important doctrinal positions that it implies.

What must be remembered here is that this chronology made a **prediction** for the end of "the gentile times." This prediction is **based upon the accuracy of the beginning point**. If you find an error in the methodology, it changes the predicted end-point date -- not the starting point. Thus their changing the beginning date to agree with the conclusion is analogous to the student in a science class who, after his experiment is completed, finds an error in his arithmetic. Since he already has what he thinks is the "correct" answer, rather than change his answer, he goes back and "fudges" the data. Any professor would give that student a "0"! In attempting to salvage their "gentile times" chronology, the Watchtower Society has done something similar. Karl Burganger, in a research work which traces the details of these maneuverings over the years by the Society in an effort to preserve their 1914 termination date, makes this observation:

"Hence, three errors canceled each other out and the upshot was the same! In all of this some Jehovah's Witnesses saw another evidence of God's finger having guided the Pastor, C.T. Russell, in his calculations." -- *The Watch Tower Society and Absolute Chronology*¹⁵, pg 10.

In other words one might say that not only is God unsure of history, but neither can he add! In the final analysis, the propriety of trying to construct Bible time prophecies¹⁶ in order to predict events in the future is open to serious question.

The current doctrine held by Jehovah's Witnesses is that the outbreak of World War I corroborated Russell's predictions and that the "fulfillment" of Jesus' sign regarding wars, famines, earthquakes, and pestilence confirms their identification of the generation alive in 1914 as the one that will see the end of the system. But is that view justified? Did Jesus indeed say that "wars, famines, earthquakes, and pestilence" were the signs that would mark his "presence in Kingdom Power" as Jehovah's Witnesses hold? The fact that the generation alive in 1914 has continued over twice as long as the generation of Jesus' day, who witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, would seem to raise serious concern regarding the validity of that viewpoint.

Did the "Last Days" Begin in 1914?

This concern was addressed in Carl Jonsson's second book, *The Sign of the Last Days - When?* The consequences of this work are indeed far reaching with respect to the fundamental doctrines of the Watchtower Society. It demonstrates that there is no way to apply a chronological identification to any particular generation or period of time in which Christ's return can be expected. It brings us back to Jesus' words, "For you **do not know** when the appointed time is." It also negates the attempt to use time prophecies to establish a particular organization as a "channel" or "authority" being used by God. I am sure that such information will be unwelcome to a great many of Jehovah's Witnesses who prefer the comfort of an authoritarian organization to tell them what to do and what to believe. To many, however, it frees them to continue their search for truth. I am deeply indebted to Brother Jonsson for his extensive research into this subject and much of what follows is a summary of his book. I would hope that every Witness would read it thoroughly.

In my discussions years ago with the young man mentioned previously concerning the question of the "signs of the last days," we concentrated on earthquakes since he felt that one could be more objective on that subject, since it was less dependant on human factors than some of the other subjects. However a problem does come up here. First of all, the Bible uses the term "great earthquakes." What constitutes a "great earthquake?"

One problem faced in determining this is the fact that the seismograph was not invented until 1880 by John Milne, called "the father of seismology." But it was not until about 1960 that an earthwide system of very sensitive seismographs was in place that had the capability of recording virtually every earthquake earthwide.

(These were funded and placed, in part by the Defense Department, to monitor Soviet underground nuclear testing.) Therefore accurate measurements of the intensity of earthquakes are just not available for pre-twentieth century earthquakes. Also earthquake records prior to eighteenth century are for the most part limited to China, Japan, and Southern Europe.

Prior to 1984 the Watchtower Society preferred to define “great earthquakes” in terms of fatalities, ignoring the intensity on the Richter scale. However the October 22, 1984 *Awake!* defines “great earthquakes” as one which meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Magnitude 7.5 or more on the Richter scale
- Deaths 100 or more
- Damage \$5 million or more in property damage

While quite a number of pre-1900 earthquakes have had estimated Richter scale magnitudes assigned to them, the bulk of them have not. Also early records seldom have fatality figures unless many hundreds were killed. So it is easy to see that most pre-1900 earthquakes would be excluded from any list for lack of data. This fact of course would make modern earthquakes seem much more numerous than they really are. The *Awake!* article of October 22, 1984 quoted above concluded:

“Since 1914 the yearly average of reported earthquakes has soared. There are 11 times the number that there were, on an average, annually during the 1,000 years before that date. And 20 times the annual average for the 2,000 years preceding 1914.”

But the extreme lack of data for the distant past and reporting differences between the 20th century and previous centuries does not allow for a realistic statistical analysis of earthquakes over that range of time. What the Society does is to lump all earthquakes from 1913 back through 2,000 years into one statistical “pool”, thus obtaining an extremely low overall average, even for the latest centuries when reporting actually increased. By comparing this average with post-1914 statistics, it makes it appear that a dramatic jump in earthquakes occurred in 1914. However a comparison of earthquake statistics century by century shows that 1914 does not stand out any more than any other date within the last 200-300 years. The 1914 date as the “seismic turning point” is completely arbitrary.

In the *Awake!* of February 22, 1977, page 11, in connection with a list of 43 earthquakes from 1915-1976, the following statistics appeared:

“Interestingly, for a period of 1059 years (856-1914 C.E.), reliable sources list only 24 major earthquakes, with 1,972,952 fatalities. But compare that with the accompanying partial list citing 43 instances of earthquakes, in which 1,579,209 persons died during just the 62 years from 1915 to 1976 C.E.... The dramatic upsurge in earthquake activity since 1914 helps to prove that we are now living in the time of Jesus’ presence.”

In the *Watchtower* of May 15, 1983, the following article comment appeared on page 6:

“In the Italian journal *Il Piccolo* of October 8, 1978, a writer Geo Malagoli presented the following views: “Our generation lives in a dangerous period of high seismic activity, as statistics show. In fact, during a period of 1059 years (from 856-1914) reliable sources list only 24 major earthquakes, with 1,973,000 deaths. However, if we compare this figure to the partially complete list of recent disasters, we find that 1,600,000 persons have died in only 63 years, as a result of 43 earthquakes which occurred from 1915 to 1978. The dramatic increase goes to further emphasize another accepted fact - our generation is an unfortunate one in many ways.”

It is obvious that Mr. Malagoli is no seismologist. But the odds that he is a reader of the *Awake!* magazine are astronomical! If you will compare the *Il Piccolo* article with the above *Awake!* article, you will find that the numbers have been rounded off, the intervening year has been added to 62 to make 63, and some of the words have been changed. But obviously the source of his article is the *Awake!* magazine. This quotation appeared in the following *Watchtower* publications: *Watchtower* June 15, 1979 page 11; “Happiness How to Find It,” page 148; *Awake!* October 8, 1980; “Let Your Kingdom Come,” 1981 page 113; *Awake!* April 8, 1981 page 13; *Watchtower* April 15, 1981 page 9; *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* 1981, page 151. **In each case, no mention is made of the fact that in effect the Watchtower Society is really quoting itself.** It is made to appear that an independent source is confirming the Society’s claim regarding earthquakes. In the special discussion of earthquake activity in the *Watchtower* of May 15, 1983, Malagoli was finally brought up again as the leading “outside” witness to the claimed increase in earthquake activity since 1914. In September 1950 the *Scientific American* magazine published a brief news item on earthquake activity. The Society has quoted several sentences from this article to “prove” their earthquake theory:

“Major quakes used to occur in clusters, each period of activity being followed by a rest period... But the

periods of activity became progressively shorter and closer together. Since 1948 the pattern has entered a new phase with approximately one great quake a year.” This “quote” may be found in *Awake!*, March 8, 1956, December 22, 1960, October 8, 1965, the *Watchtower* 1961, page 628, and *Aid*, page 478. Taken out of their context, these sentences seem to say that there has been a substantial **increase in the number of major earthquakes** in our century, especially since 1948. An examination of the entire news item, however, gives quite another impression. Note the complete article, “Earthquake Patterns”:

“Will seismologists someday be able to predict earthquakes? Workers at the California Institute of Technology seem to have taken a step in that direction. They have found evidence that earthquakes throughout the world follow a rough pattern of recurrence and are related to a world-wide stress system.

“Investigators at the Institute’s Seismological Laboratory studied the 48 great earthquakes that have occurred all over the world since 1904, when reliable instrumental observations began. The study was limited to the highly destructive shallow quakes, which take place less than 45 miles below the earth’s surface. All these quakes fell into a pattern “as orderly and regular as the cutting edge of a saw.

“Major quakes used to occur in clusters, each period of activity being followed by a rest period. Thus there was violent activity between 1904 and 1907 and then quiescence for 10 years, except for two quakes in 1911 and 1912. Four more active periods, separated by quiet intervals, occurred between 1917 and 1948. But the periods of activity became progressively shorter and closer together. Since 1948 the pattern has entered a new phase, with approximately one great quake a year. Instead of accumulating over a period of years, strain in the earth’s crust now seems to find release as fast as it is generated.

“The nature of the “global force” that controls this orderly pattern is unknown. One speculation is that periodic increases in the earth’s rate of spin due to slight changes in the tidal forces of the sun and moon may enlarge the earth, opening its seams sufficiently to release the accumulated tensions.”

This study was concerned with only one type of quake -- shallow destructive quakes. It does not say that the number or intensity has increased; only that while they used to occur in clusters, they now occur yearly, the average being the same. The Scientific American news item itself shows that **no increase in either the total number or size of earthquakes had occurred.** Only by quoting two or three sentences out of context was it possible to create the opposite impression. Is this honest scholarship?

They do the same with a quotation from seismologist John Milne, in which they try to discredit the earthquake catalogs:

“Nor do all historical records about ‘great’ earthquakes of the past inspire confidence in their reliability. That was the view of noted cataloger John Milne. ‘In these catalogues,’ we read in the 1939 edition of his book Earthquakes and Other Earth Movements, ‘there are uncertainties in the dates, or even the years, for many of the ancient earthquakes. There are numerous inaccurate or obscure references in the original writings.’ — *Awake!* of May 8, 1974 (page 18)

The **entire** context of Milne’s “quotation” gives a different picture:

“The information available for examination of the distribution of earthquakes in different parts of the world throughout historic times has been collected in many catalogs. The **older catalogues**, which were prepared from reports found in the histories of various countries, are necessarily incomplete, and do not give a fair representation of the distribution of seismic phenomena over the entire globe. In these catalogues there are uncertainties in the dates, or even the years, for many of the ancient earthquakes. There are numerous inaccurate or obscure references in the older writings, and the dates are frequently given according to some little known system of reckoning. The entries for these ancient shocks refer, for the most part to widespread disasters.”

Thus with the quotation shown in its proper context, Milnes’ estimation of the catalogs gives the opposite impression; that since the older catalogs are incomplete, the real number of ancient earthquakes was actually larger. Once again we have manipulation of information to achieve a desired result.

But what does the historical record show? Seismologists have spent much time in trying to catalog and evaluate the record of earthquakes of the distant past in order to study the phenomena. Literally hundreds of thousands of earthquakes have been cataloged. While it is true that the older catalogs are incomplete, yet it does allow for an educated evaluation as to seismic activity of the past. The *Awake!* magazine of February 22, 1977 printed a “partial” list of 43 major earthquakes from 1915-1983. This chart was compared with the above quotation about the 24 major earthquakes previous to 1914 creating the impression of a dramatic increase in earthquakes since 1914. I have included that chart with a comparison chart of earthquakes of a

comparable portion of the 18th century, 1715-1783. Note that the total and annual average is actually greater. So once again, the *Watchtower* is unable to substantiate its claims.

Carl Jonsson corresponded with a number of leading seismologists at a number of universities to get their opinions as to whether or not seismic activity has actually increased since 1914, and whether earthquake statistics had been used in a responsible way by the writers of the Watchtower. Since their comments are very interesting I have included their letters of reply with the supplemental information. One thing can be said: seismologists generally agree that earthquake activity has been fairly constant for many thousands of years. Seismologist Wilbur Rinehart of the N.O. A. National Geophysical Data Center concluded his letter with the following (See A-51 through A-54):

“I know of no competent seismologists or statisticians who would use the numbers quoted in the way the Watch- tower Society used them. I would agree with both Professors Bath and Richter in their assessment that there has been **no significant increase** in the numbers of earthquakes during this or any other century. And I would conclude with Mark Twain’s famous quote: ‘The are three kinds of lies -- lies, damned lies, and statistics.’” (A-46 through A-50)

Making an authority appear to support to your position when in actuality he has the opposite opinion is not honest scholarship. The fact of the matter is that professional seismologists believe that seismic activity has been largely constant throughout all known history. Author Carl Jonsson’s conclusion regarding the data presented by the Society in support of their contention on earthquakes:

“Consequently, there is no evidence whatsoever in support of the claim made by various religious sources, including the Worldwide Church of God, a Seventh Day Adventist author, and notably by the Watch Tower Society, that earthquake activity is markedly different in our century compared with earlier centuries. All information available points to the contrary. The shifting, twisting, uncoordinated claims of the Watch Tower Society and their juggling of facts and figures in an effort to prove that an increase has occurred have been revealed above as fraudulent — hopefully not deliberately so, but as a result of remarkably poor research, superficial analysis and wishful thinking.” — *Sign of Last Days - When?* pg

These are but a few of the inconsistencies in the Society's evidence for increased earthquakes since 1914. Similar information is presented with regard to the Society's statistics on wars, famine, and pestilence. One quickly comes to the conclusion that the twentieth century is truly a benign time to be living. For a quick look at the evidence, one only has to consider the fourteenth century, where the black death killed a third of the population of Europe and probably the whole world. This was followed by famine. Whole towns were wiped out, and regions decimated. Much of the century was plagued by war. If one really believes that the twentieth century is being visited by far worse calamity than previous eras, I would suggest he study history, then ask himself in which century would he rather live!

I have mentioned the matter of earthquakes because it illustrates the methods used to try to prove that our generation is unique with respect to wars, famines, pestilence and earthquakes. The same type of situation can be shown with respect to the other calamities. The April 15, 1984 *Watchtower* admits that these things are not unique to our generation. Then it goes on to describe what it refers to as a "composite sign." How could these things be used to identify the time of the end as beginning in 1914? The article went on to say that they would have to differ from like conditions in previous generations in the following ways:

"First, every feature of the sign would have to be **observed by one generation...**

"Second, the effects of the sign would have to be **felt worldwide...**

"Third, the combined conditions or symptoms would have to **grow progressively worse** during this period.

"Fourth, the occurrence of all these things would be accompanied by a **change in people's attitudes and actions**. Jesus warned: 'the love of the greater number will cool off.'" -- *Watchtower*

4/15/84 pg 5

But even if we accept these standards, can we truly say that this generation meets the test? Earthquakes cannot be shown to be increasing over previous centuries. In fact only by questionable manipulation of the statistics can any argument be made at all.

What about wars? The Watchtower Society has stated many times that World War I was "seven times greater than all the 901 major wars of the previous 2,400 years." (See *Watchtower*, 10/15/75, pg 633). It is true that with the industrial revolution, the invention of gunpowder, and the rapid development of technology, man's capability to kill one another has dramatically increased. But in actuality, the number of persons killed

in wars since the end of World War II is considerably less than those killed during the period of 1914-1945. In the book *Let Your Kingdom Come*, 1981, page 115, historian Barbara Tuchman is quoted as saying: "The First World War was one of the great convulsions of history."

On examining her statement, however, the Society chose not to include an important part of her statement. Her full statement was: "Like the French Revolution, the First World War was one of the great convulsions of history."

In fact, many historians consider the French Revolution to be a more significant "turning point" in history than either World War I or II. Nor can WWI be considered the first "world war". Historians point out that both the War of the Spanish Succession (1702- 1713) and the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) were the first "world wars" since they involved all four continents of the world and greatly shaped the course of human history, while World War I was largely limited to Europe.

World War I is estimated to have killed **10-12 million people**. If it was "seven times greater" than all the previous major wars in 2,400 years of history combined, then that would mean only about 1.5 million had died in those wars. To realize the absurdity of such a claim one has only to examine several wars from the centuries that immediately preceded 1914:

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648), an international conflict with about 10 nations involved, estimated to have killed 2-3 million soldiers. Civilian fatalities were much higher. Most experts believe that 30-40 % of the total German population, or 7-8 million civilians died due to the war. Historian R. R. Palmer observes that "even the Second World War, in sheer depopulation, was not as devastating for Germany as was the Thirty Years War. It is quite possible for human beings to die like flies without benefit of scientific destruction. The horrors of modern war are not wholly different from horrors that men and women have experienced in the past."

The Manchu-Chinese War. In 1644 China was invaded by the Manchus from Manchuria in a lengthy war that is estimated to have claimed 25 million lives, about twice as many as were killed militarily in World War I.

The Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815) involved the same number of nations as World War I. France lost 2 million. The total death figure for the period 1792-1815 is set at 5- 6 million.

The Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), "perhaps the most destructive war of the entire 19th century," (Dupuy & Dupuy, page 864). This was a civil war in China that usually is stated to have claimed 20-30

million lives. The *Awake!* in March 22, 1982 apparently overlooked its previous claim about World War I being seven times worse than previous wars. In an article highlighting the involvement of religion in war, stated that the number of victims in the Taiping Rebellion was “possibly as many as 40 million.”

Genghis Kahn's conquests in the 13th century probably surpassed World War I also. His conquest of Northern China in 1211-1218, for instance, is said to have cost 18 million Chinese lives.

These are just a few examples from *Sign of the Last Days - When?* that show that the Society's claims about World War I cannot be substantiated. The same case could as easily be made for famine and pestilence. The history of mankind is largely a history of crises and catastrophes. Although the Watchtower Society admits this, it tries to belittle the calamities of the past, claiming that our century has seen them on a much larger scale. For example:

“Certainly it is true that previous generations have experienced calamity. The 14th century was the time of the Black Plague when people across Europe lived in dread of pestilence, famines and wars. But just compare the scale of things in our century.” -- *Watchtower*, July 15, 1983 page 7.

According to this, the Watchtower Society feels that the 14th century was not nearly as bad as the present! Is that really true? Given a choice, would we prefer conditions then -- as regards wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes -- as preferable to those in this century? Historian Barbara Tuchman likened the 14th century to a “distant mirror” of our own. A closer look at that century's experience will help us to assess the accuracy of the Watchtower's claim.

War was a constant feature of the 14th century. In Asia and Eastern Europe, the Mongols were conquering nation after nation in bloody warfare. In Western Europe the “Hundred Years War” was raging - for 116 years. Then about 1370, Tamerlane, the “Führer” of the 14th century, appeared on the scene and conquered almost all of Asia. Whole cities were slaughtered by his ruthless hordes.

Even earthquakes were significant during the 14th century. In the mountains of Ki-Ming-Chan an earthquake formed a huge lake. In Tche the dead were believed to number more than five million. “In 1348 came an earthquake of such frightful violence that many men deemed the end of the world to be presaged. Its devastations were widely spread. Cyprus, Greece, and Italy were terribly visited, and [the seismic tremor] extended through the Alpine valleys.” -- Morris, *Historical tales: Romance of Reality*

Famine was also present. The 14th century opened with a change in climate, causing cold weather -- and crop failures -- for a number of years. Famine was widespread, with poor people eating anything they could get their hands on, including their own children. Men died of starvation while digging up graveyards for food. Condemned criminals were snatched from the gallows for food. The area of famine stretched from the Pyrenees to the plains of Russia and from Scotland to Italy.

In 1331 the "Black Death" appeared in the province of Hopei, China, where it killed 9 out of every 10 persons. In 1353 it raged in eight scattered areas of China where it killed two thirds of the population. By 1347 it had spread all across Asia and into Europe. In some areas, whole regions were depopulated. Before it was over, from one quarter to one half of the population of Europe had died. During the rest of the century and for several centuries afterward, plague revisited Europe every 6-10 years with similar results. Although plague had largely disappeared from Europe by 1720, it continued to rage in other parts of the world. Climatologist H. H. Lamb says that the Chinese famine caused by the extraordinarily great rains and river floods in 1332 is "alleged to have cost 7 million lives." -- *Climate, Present, Past and Future*, p456.

With regard to pestilence the Watchtower Society makes the claim that the Spanish Influenza of 1918-1919 was "The Deadliest Killer of All Time", the title of an article in the March 8, 1971 *Awake!*. It made the statement:

"Had the epidemic continued its mathematical rate of acceleration, civilization would easily have disappeared from the earth within a matter of a few more weeks."

One has but to consider the numbers to realize how totally absurd this claim is. It is generally estimated that about 525 million -- over a quarter of mankind -- fell ill with the influenza. Of these 15-25 million died and about 500 million recovered. The average mortality was about 4%. That means that if 100 persons came down with the disease, 96 would recover. If every single person in the world had caught the disease, 96% would have recovered. Civilization was in no danger of disappearing.

When one considers the mortality rates of the pestilences of the past, the reality is sobering. Typhoid fever and dysentery, both of which used to be constant followers of wars of the past, sometimes killed as many as 20 to 50% of those infected, respectively. Yellow fever had a mortality rate of 60% or more. Cholera killed from 50-80%. Mortality due to the bubonic plague varied between 30-90%, while pneumonic plague, the other type of infection during the Black Death of the 14th century, had a mortality rate of 100% with no known

survivors.

Summing up the tragedies of the 14th century, historian Barbara Tuchman in her book *A Distant Mirror* describes the period as:

“a violent, tormented, bewildered, suffering and disintegrating age, as time, as many thought, of Satan triumphant, “ and adds: If our last decade or two of collapsing assumptions has been a period of unusual discomfort, it is reassuring to know that **the human species has lived through worse before.**”

It is hard to imagine that anyone in the 20th century would prefer go back and live in the 14th century (were that possible) so as to live in less “critical times” -- unless he were totally unacquainted with the facts of history and accepted at face value the claims and “proofs” of the Watchtower Society.

In comparing the past with the present, one other factor needs to be considered: population. “End-times” proclaimers, (of which, incidentally, the Watchtower Society is not the only one), often rely on the “Population Bomb” concept to explain why we have seen a tremendous upsurge in population growth. For example, the *Awake!* commented:

“The root of the problem lies in the way the population expands. It does not increase by simple consecutive addition (1,2,3,4,5,etc.) but by exponential growth or multiplication (1,2,4,8,16,32,etc.)”

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But does this explain population growth from the distant past to the present? Much is made of the fact that population is currently doubling every 35 years. This corresponds to an annual rate of 2%, which, if it had been constant throughout past millenniums, would have resulted in a population of many, many more billions more than it is today. Professor Alfred Sauvy, Europe’s great demographer explains:

“If for example the population of China, the size of which is estimated to have been 70,000,000 at the time of Christ, since then had increased by 1 % per year, it would today have reached, not the recently estimated 680,000,000 [over one billion in 1984], but **21 million billions!** Spread out all over the globe this population would give about 120 Chinese per square meter.”

Exponential growth cannot be the correct explanation of the pattern of shrinking intervals of doubling of earth's population. As the graphs on page A-53 clearly show, there has been a dramatic acceleration of population growth beginning approximately around the 17th century. Stated another way, something must have been **preventing** exponential growth, something that has been **gradually removed** over the past several hundred years. What factors limited population growth in the past? The answer is completely devastating to the theory of the "composite sign" since 1914 and to any claims that our century is experiencing worse calamity than those of the past.

The reason for the very slow population increase in past ages is precisely **because mankind then suffered much more than today from wars, famines and pestilences**. These factors caused such high mortality that population growth was effectively checked. In fact the very same factors that have controlled the population increase of the world's animals were at work among men until comparatively recent times.

The industrial revolution, the rapid advances of scientific knowledge both in the field of medicine as well as agriculture, and the development of effective transportation systems have eliminated or reduced to a large degree the scourges of the past. Please note the chart included in the supplemental material, which depicts the population fluctuations of Egypt from 664 B.C. to the present. Note the dramatic effect of pestilence and war on population.

To make their figures appear more convincing, the Watchtower Society seldom takes population into account when comparing disasters of the past with those of the present. This gives a very misleading picture. To illustrate, suppose that you live in a village of 100 persons and a plague or an army comes along and the result is that 50 people die. That is half of your village. This represents a terrible catastrophe to the village from which it may never recover. On the other hand, suppose you lived in a town of 10,000 and 500 people died. Although 500 is 10 times as many as 50, yet the total impact on your town is much less. While the tragedy is personal for a significant number of people, yet the viability of the town is not threatened. So to say that the "500" is 10 times worse than the "50" is simply not being realistic or honest. Yet that is essentially what the Watchtower Society often does in their statistical comparisons with the past.

The conclusion that I have to come to is that the events since 1914 are in no way remarkable when compared to the last two thousand years of human history. In Matthew 24:1-6 that seems to be what Jesus is saying; that human history **would** be characterized by such events, but that those events would not signal anything about the imminence of his arrival. In fact he warns that some people might make such a

connection, but that his followers should not be misled by such “proclamations.” In fact that is the way Pastor Russell understood Matthew 24:1-6 in *Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. 4, 1916 edition:

“Thus briefly did our Lord summarize secular history and teach the disciples not to expect very soon his second coming and glorious kingdom. And how aptly: surely the world’s history is just this, an account of wars, intrigues, famines and pestilences -- little else.”

Russell was not looking for a time of trouble to begin in 1914 that would “prove” Jesus’ invisible presence. He already believed that Jesus had been present since 1874. Even in 1916 he was still looking for Christ’s kingdom to take over complete control of earth and bring an end to all human rule. It was not until some years after his death that the Society reinterpreted its previous understanding regarding 1874 and Christ’s invisible presence and applied it instead to 1914. The interpretation of scripture that made this seem plausible has to do with the understanding of the Greek word *parousia*. It was after Jesus’ statement regarding the destruction of the temple that the disciples asked “When will these things be and what will be the sign of your presence [*parousia*] and of the conclusion of the system of things?” The Society understands *parousia* to refer to Jesus’ “invisible” presence which precedes his “revelation” in which he manifests himself to the world in general and brings about its destruction.

This understanding is not original with Russell or the Watchtower Society. It actually was first suggested by the London banker Henry Drummond. The history of this interpretation is interesting and is covered quite well in *Sign of the Last Days - When?*. Note the history contained in Appendix B:

“This idea did not originate with the Watch Tower Society. It can be traced back to the 1820’s, when it was first suggested by the well-known London banker and Bible expositor Henry Drummond, who was later to become one of the founders of Edward Living’s Catholic Apostolic Church. The “invisible presence” or “two-stage coming” theory, better known today as the “secret rapture” theory, was quickly picked up by other expositors of the prophecies. It was adopted not only by the Irvingites but also by the followers of John Nelson Darby, the Plymouth Brethren, through whom it was widely spread in England, the U.S.A. and other countries. It became very popular especially among the millennialists, Christians who believe in a literal, future millennium on earth.

“For many of the defenders of the “two-stage coming” idea the Greek word *parousia* became a

crucial point in the discussion. It was commonly held that this word referred to the first stage of Christ's coming, his invisible presence "in the air." The Greek words *epiphania*, "appearing," and *apokalypsis*, "revelation," on the other hand were usually said to apply to the second stage of the coming, Christ's intervention in world events at the battle of Armageddon. Changing the translation of *parousia* from "coming" to "presence" radically alters the sense, not only of the question of the disciples, but also of Jesus' answer. This is illustrated by the arguments put forth in 1866 by Reverend Robert Govett, the most prominent British champion of the secret rapture idea in the last century:

"If we say, 'What is the sign of Thy coming?' then,... we are enquiring for a sign of the Savior's future movement from the highest heaven. If we say, 'What is the sign of thy presence?' we are inquiring for a proof of Jesus' existence in secret in the air, after his motion towards earth is for a while arrested. The disciples inquire, 'What shall be the sign of thy Presence?' This, then, assures us that they imagined that Jesus would be present in secret. We need no sign of that which is openly exhibited."

"These arguments made in 1866 were picked up by many other expositors, among them Charles Taze Russell. In 1876, under the influence of the Adventist Nelson H. Barbour and his associates, Russell had adopted "presence" as the only acceptable meaning of *parousia* to explain how Christ could have come in 1874 (as had been predicted by Barbour) without being noticed by anyone. The adoption of this view, then, was due to a failed prediction and it was used as a means of explaining away their 1874 failure. This explanation was retained by Russell's followers on up into the early 1930's, when it was suddenly "discovered" that Christ's "invisible presence" had begun in 1914 instead of 1874!"

The Watchtower Society's New World translation translates the word *parousia* as "presence", along with a small minority of other Bible Translators. Some such as Dr. Robert Young did so out of his attempt to present the strictly literal meanings of the Greek words. Benjamin Wilson's Diaglott also uses "presence." Rotherham in his third edition of his Emphasized New Testament changed from "arrival" to "presence" because, as he explains, he at least partially had come to accept the "two-stage" coming idea. Five or six other little-known translators also use "presence."

The treatment of the word by very early translators of the Scriptures into Latin is interesting. In almost every case, they prefer to translate *parousia* "adventus," literally "a coming to." This is significant, because their translations were made while Koine Greek was still a living language.

During the last century, modern archaeology has discovered a great many documents and inscriptions written in the Koine Greek, the language of the Greek Scriptures. As a result, since the early 1900's we have a much clearer understanding of the language itself. One of the words whose meaning was illuminated by the new texts, was the word *parousia*. Professor Deissmann summarized these new insights in his now classic work *Light from the East*.

“Yet another of the central ideas of the oldest Christian worship receives light from the new texts, viz. [*parousia*], “advent, coming,” a word expressive of the most ardent hopes of a St. Paul. We now may say that the best interpretation of the Primitive Christian hope of the *Parousia* is the old Advent text, ‘Behold thy King cometh unto thee.’ From the Ptolemaic period down to the 2nd cent. A.D. we are able to trace the word in the east as a technical expression for the arrival or the visit of the king or the emperor.”

The Watchtower Society claims scholarly support for their use of *parousia* in the New World translation. The discussion in the 1984 edition appendix cites three translations which use *parousia* besides their own. However all of the three were translated before the discovery of Deissmann and his colleagues. Then they quote from *The Parousia* by Dr. Israel Warren who argues “presence” as the only correct translation of *parousia*. However, Dr. Warren’s work dates from 1879, and is thus seriously out of date.

The article also refers to Liddell and Scott’s *Lexicon* and Kittel & Friedrich’s *Theological Dictionary* (TDNT), both of which give “presence” as the meaning of *parousia*. However, one wonders why they do not mention that both Lexicons go on to a detailed discussion of *parousia* in its technical sense with particular reference to the *parousia* of Jesus Christ. The TDNT in particular spends 14 pages in that discussion. The only reference that clearly supports the Watchtower position is Vine’s *Expository Dictionary*. However since Vine was a strong advocate of the “secret rapture” theory, it is not surprising that he defines *parousia* in a way that supports his own beliefs. However, this brings him into conflict with modern scholarship.

The Watchtower leans heavily on the claim that the context supports their use of “presence.” However, they admit in the Watchtower of January 15, 1974, on page 50: “When they asked Jesus, ‘What will be the sign of your presence?’ they did not know that his future presence would be invisible.” However, this refutes their argument since if they did not know his presence would be invisible, how could they have asked for such a sign for such a presence? Evidently they asked for a sign that would show that his presence was **imminent**,

not of something that had already occurred.

This view is corroborated by the version in Mark's account wherein the question for a "sign" refers to the **destruction of the temple** only. Obviously in this case they wanted some indication **in advance** of that event. The way Jesus answered their question confirms this. After describing the "sign" that would accompany his future coming "on the clouds" he goes on to give the illustration of the fig tree. The phrases "summer is **near**" and "he is **near at the doors**" indicates that the sign would show he was near, not here, already invisibly present.

This is emphasized further in Matthew's comparison of Jesus coming with the Flood of Noah's day which took them suddenly unawares. Luke adds the example of Sodom in the days of Lot and says "after the same manner shall it be in the day the Son of man is revealed." In Matthew's account the word *parousia* is used. In Luke's parallel account he refers to the day in which the "Son of man is **revealed**." So the two terms refer to the same event, the sudden unexpected arrival of Christ Jesus. In fact, in Luke's account the question is asked, "**What shall be the sign of your coming**" [*e/euseos*], which is the common word for "coming." The evidence seems clear that the use of *parousia* cannot refer to the invisible "presence" of a "two-stage" coming, but does refer to Christ's future arrival and appearing for judgement as King.

In trying to understand the 24th and 25th chapters of Matthew and the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke, many questions arise. And while some interpretations may answer some questions, they raise many others. This is certainly true of the Watchtower Society's understanding. For example, on the basis of their understanding that Christ's *parousia* began in 1914, the Society holds that Christ came to his "temple" invisibly in 1918 and that his inspection of the professing Christians at that time found only the anointed members of the Bible Students (Russell's group) to be "faithful and discreet" in doing the will of the master. Thus they hold that in 1919 he appointed them over "all his belongings." It is on this basis that the Governing Body of the Watchtower Society holds spiritual authority over all of Jehovah's Witnesses. This interpretation causes a problem when you consider the chronological order of events in the Gospel accounts. Although they hold that the "coming on the clouds" of Matthew 24:30 is a future event, yet they say that the gathering of his "chosen ones" of verse 31 has been going on since 1919 by the preaching activity of Jehovah's Witnesses. However this reversal of events is shown to be impossible by the parallel account in Mark 13:26,27 where it says:

"And **then** they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he

will send forth the angels and will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from the earth's extremity to heaven's extremity." — Mark 13:26,27 NW

This order of events also shows that the Society's teaching that its preaching work is the "harvest" mentioned in the parable of the wheat and weeds in Matthew 13 as well as the separating of the fish in the parable of the dragnet cannot be correct. Both of these separations are shown to be done by angels and are associated with the judgment that will take place at his future "coming on the clouds" accompanied by his angels. In the parable of the dragnet, the preaching performed by Christ's nominal followers is represented by the net lying in the sea collecting "all sorts" of fish. The point is that the separation of the good from the bad **cannot** take place while the net is still in the sea gathering fish. This is also true in the case of the wheat and the weeds; they cannot be separated while they are still growing in the field, but only after they are harvested. Furthermore, the parable presents this separation as being done "by the angels," not by humans. Logically the ones being separated could not be doing the separating. The Society tries to get around this problem by saying that "angels are directing" their preaching work. But in any case, the order of events in Mark proves this false.

It seems to be an inescapable conclusion that the "sign" that Jesus gave was not earthquakes, wars, famines, and pestilence — events that have characterized every century from Jesus day to the present -- but rather the event referred to in Matthew 24:29, 30 and Luke 21:25-27:

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." -- Luke 21:25-27 NIV

It is not necessary to assume a strictly literal interpretation of the heavenly phenomena if one considers that these words display a poetic quality that is common in prophetic pronouncements. For example consider the pronouncement regarding the destruction of the city of Babylon recorded in Isaiah 13:10:

"...the stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light." -- Isaiah 13:10 NIV

The destruction of Idumea and Egypt was foretold in similar language. So while one should be cautious about making dogmatic statements as to just what this sign might entail, yet of several things one can be sure. Whatever form this sign might take, it will be readily apparent to **all humanity wherever they might be on earth**, that God, by means of his son Jesus Christ has intervened in the affairs of mankind. They would not need someone to knock on their door and tell them that the sign was now visible; it would be obvious to everyone, even as the flash of lightning is instantly visible everywhere in the vicinity of a gathering storm. Also obvious from these accounts is the fact that when this sign in is evidence, events will rapidly progress to their conclusion. From the parables in Matthew chapter 25 we further learn that once that event occurs, mankind will shortly face judgment at the hands of Christ Jesus; if one is not prepared it will be too late. Hence the anguish of nations alienated from God.

At this point a word needs to be said about the Society's interpretation of the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46). They see themselves as participating in the separating work -- even as they do in the parables of the dragnet and the wheat and the tares. They argue that the judgment is rendered on the basis of individual's **knowingly** supporting their message and becoming part of their organization, or **knowingly** ignoring it. Note these comments in the book *Our Incoming World Government - God's Kingdom*:

"They knowingly give aid for the furtherance of the Kingdom proclamation, because they pray for that world government and are in favor of it. That is why their aid to his spiritual "brothers" counts with the King Jesus Christ." -- Page 165

"If we say that the symbolic 'goats' were 'cursed' and condemned to destruction with the Devil and his angels merely for ignorantly neglecting Christ's 'brothers,' then, logically, we must argue that the symbolic 'sheep' were blessed and rewarded with a place in the Kingdom realm merely for ignorantly doing good to Christ's brothers. What real merit would there be, then, in the 'good' that the 'sheep' did to Christ's 'brothers?' Or what demerit in the neglect that the 'goats' did not realize that they were committing? Where, then, is the justice in rewarding the one ignorant class and punishing the other ignorant class? Justice is apparently nowhere in such treatment." -- Page 168

Yet the parable is clear that both classes **did act ignorantly** in their treatment of Christ's brothers. Can you imagine a Witness saying to Jesus "I had no idea I was helping your brothers?" Every Witness "knows"

that he will be judged on the basis of whether or not he accepts the spiritual authority of the Watchtower Society, “Christ’s brothers” in the Society’s view of matters. It is because of the way that they “write themselves into the script” that the Society finds it necessary to contradict the clear statement of Jesus. Thus they resort to the argument that no justice is demonstrated if judgment is rendered in the way that the parable describes, in order to justify re-writing the script in a way that suits them.

This seems highly presumptuous to me, and it suggests that their scenario of the “last days” and of “Christ’s return” is in error. There certainly is justice in judging people in the way the parable describes, namely, that we are judged on the basis of what kind of persons we are in terms of Christian qualities, generosity and compassion. In this way Christ chooses those who truly love righteousness and are compassionate because of their Christ-like personality rather than those who merely put on a “show” when someone is watching. That is something to think about when we are confronted with people who are truly in need. In fact, that is what the parable of the Good Samaritan is all about.

With respect to the generation of 1914, however, the Society seems to be running out of time. For the past hundred years they have been arguing that there are only a few more years left. Just prior to 1975, they were emphasizing that most of those who could remember the events of 1914 were gone -- that the generation of 1914 had nearly passed away. This was in keeping with their view that the end would come by 1975. With the failure of the expectations of 1975 to materialize, however, now they find themselves forced to take a different tack -- namely that there are many people who were alive in 1914 who could live on for quite a number of years. For example in the book *Your Kingdom Come*, published in 1981, on page 40 it says:

“In Jesus’ day, some of the disciples who heard his words and others of his contemporaries survived to live through the final tribulation on the Jewish system of things. They were the generation of Jesus’ time. At this writing in the United States alone there are more than ten million persons still living who are old enough to observe a beginning of pangs of distress in 1914-1918. Some of these might still survive quite a number of years.”

At this point one might ask how old a person must be to be considered as having been able to observe and understand the significance of historic events. An article in the *U.S. News & World Report* of January 14, 1980 considered this matter of how many people alive today were able to remember the events of 1914. It concluded that those ten years or older would have been able to do so and that only 6% of all living

Americans would be in that group.

Former elder Ron Frye in a lecture dealing with “the last days” made reference to that article and commented:

“Of course this is a very unscientific assumption to make, but the Society has seized upon things like this to build up their sagging argument. First they argue that there is a parallel between the generation of Jesus’ day and our present “generation of 1914.” But is there? Or is that just an assumption too? Be that as it may, the generation to which Jesus addressed himself was called a “wicked and adulterous generation,” a “faithless and twisted generation.” Clearly these epithets do not seem to describe little children 10 years of age. Furthermore, if there is a parallel, then the end of the present world should have happened over thirty years ago, since it was only 37 years after Jesus uttered his warning that Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. So where is the parallel in time, if there is a parallel?

“Consider another question: because someone is old enough to observe something, say a ten year old - does that make him a part of that particular generation? It is interesting to consider the generation of Israelites that wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. They were called a “faithless generation” too. And concerning that generation, Numbers 32:13 says:

“So Jehovah’s anger blazed against Israel and he made them wander about in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that was doing evil in the eyes of Jehovah came to their end.” — Numbers 31:13 NW

“So there a whole generation of people passed away in forty years. Who were included in that generation? Numbers 14:29,31 reads:

“In this wilderness your carcasses will fall, yes all your registered ones of all your number from **twenty years old upward**, you who have murmured against me... And your little ones who you said would become plunder, these also I shall certainly bring in, and they will indeed know the land that you have rejected.” — NW

“So here, everyone who was under twenty was exempted from being a part of that wicked generation. Of course we wouldn’t want to impose some firm dogmatism here, and fall into the trap that the Society has fallen into, but it can be used to illustrate that the assumption that one as youthful as 10 years old ought to be included in a particular generation is not something that cannot be challenged. The point I wish to make here is that they base many conclusions on mere assumptions, assumptions

that can be challenged, and perhaps ought to be challenged. Certainly those young Israelites who stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai with their parents and heard and saw and felt the divine power there - the flashing lightening and booming thunder, the smoke and fire and the trembling of the earth - all of these things terrified even grown men. Surely those little Israelites, even those younger than 10, never forgot that fear inspiring event. But that in itself did not make them a part of the wicked, faithless generation that received Jehovah's adverse judgment."

It seems obvious that the Watchtower Society has painted itself into a theological corner regarding the generation of 1914 not passing away before the complete end of this system of things. And as the years go by, that corner gets smaller and smaller. Consider: someone born in 1914 would be 78 years old today (1992); a ten year old in 1914 would be 88; a relatively youthful person of 20 years old would be 98! That the governing body is clearly worried about this problem was evidenced by the fact that several of their number favored changing the beginning of the "generation" to 1957, as reported by Ray Franz in *Crisis of Conscience*. If the past is any indication of the future, the Society will continue to affirm its "generation of 1914" assertion until history absolutely forces them to make another re-examination of the scriptures, and then "new light" will result in another interpretation that will preserve their position of authority and postpone the ultimate crisis yet further into the future. Unless, of course Christ Jesus' real return occurs before that time.

What Is the Role of Bible Prophecy in Our Understanding of the Future?

All of this raises the question, what should we be able to figure out from Bible prophecy regarding the events of the near future? Is it reasonable to expect that we should be able to accurately predict future events relating to the return of Christ? It should be instructive to us to realize that every generation of believers earnestly expected the return of Jesus Christ in their lifetime, and if they looked hard enough, they could find "evidence" in the prophecies of the Bible and the events of their day to convince them that such was the case. Yet all of them have thus far been disappointed.

I believe that we can learn a lesson from all of this if we consider the events of the first century and the first appearance of Jesus, the Messiah. We are told in Luke 3:15, that "Now as the people were in expectation and all were reasoning in their hearts about John: 'may he perhaps be the Christ?'" Now, we know that many, many prophecies were recorded about what the Messiah would, do, what would happen to him, and so forth,

and those who were attracted to him were Jews who knew those prophecies.

Yet the interesting thing about all of this is that the disciples neither understood nor anticipated these things as they were happening. When Jesus was explaining how it would be necessary to go to Jerusalem, to be arrested and put to death, Peter couldn't believe it! "Heaven preserve you, Lord;" he said, "this must not happen to you." These things had been foretold to happen. Yet the disciples were baffled; they were confused; nothing was taking place in the way they had expected. It was only **after the fact**, after his death and resurrection that it all came into focus. Yet in the years afterward, they could look back and realize that all the prophecies came true, but not in a way that they figure out ahead of time.

I believe it will be that way for us who are eagerly awaiting his return at the "end of the age." Today much attention is focused on the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and other prophetic passages in the inspired Word, as have Christians of all past ages. We can learn a lot from it. We can be encouraged. We can be reassured that God will triumph over Satan, and that we as faithful believers can share in that triumph. And some day we, like the early Christians, will be able to look back and say, "yes, it happened just as it was written." But only "after the fact." But I don't think it will turn out the way we may think or speculate. I believe that we will be just as baffled as were the disciples of the first century.

The important thing to remember is that the disciples weren't disapproved because they hadn't figured everything out ahead of time, and neither will we be. It can be stimulating and interesting to consider the prophetic word, but we also need to guard against putting too much confidence in speculative reasoning, and then spending a lot of energy trying to convince others that we have it all figured out. Jesus showed us what our attitude should be when he likened his leaving to a master who left his household in the charge of his servants and told them:

"Therefore keep on the watch, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether late in the day or at midnight or at cockcrowing or early in the morning; in order that when he arrives suddenly, he does not find you sleeping. But what I say to you I say to all, Keep on the watch." — Mark 13:35-37 NW

We do not know when the master will return. But we do know that we must "keep on the watch." We must stay awake spiritually, and not be found sleeping when he arrives.

The 144,000

I have always wondered about the Society's teaching about the 144,000. Such a small number brings up many questions. For example, we know that there were at least 5000 disciples in 36 A.D. Of course we cannot know what the actual percentage of increase was throughout the first and second centuries. But if you apply the current average rate of increase of Jehovah's Witnesses (which the Society feels is an evidence of Jehovah's approval and blessing) to that group in 36 A.D., they could easily have reached 144,000 by the end of the first century. Even taking a conservative viewpoint and cutting that growth rate in half, 144,000 could still have been reached by A.D. 140. It is known that many, many thousands of Christians were executed during the persecutions during the reigns of Nero and Domitian. (Some historians say over a million.) It is also known that many, many thousands were executed during the reformation when many "back to the Bible" movements began and were persecuted viciously. Huguenots, Anabaptists, Socinians, Waldenses, followers of John Huss, Martin Luther, and William Tyndale; all these have been commended in Watchtower publications as sincere truth-seekers. In view of all of this, a *Watchtower* reader questioned how it was possible that during all those centuries the number of 144,000 had not yet been filled by the twentieth century. This was addressed in the Question from Readers in July 1, 1972 *Watchtower* in this manner:

"A person's claiming to be a Christian and even dying for his belief does not in itself mean that he is an approved servant of Jehovah God . . . It is not death, but faithfulness to the very death that determines whether an individual will receive "the crown of life." Thus the **fact that today there is still a remnant of the 144,000 on earth** would show that down to this twentieth century fewer than 144,000 finished their earthly course in faithfulness. "

The article goes on to minimize the number of these early Christians since the history of the period is sketchy, or discredit them because of some belief differing from current Watchtower teaching. Yet at the same time the Society asserts that the "Faithful and Discreet Slave" which they say that Christ Jesus appointed to administer his affairs here on earth has faithfully functioned during all the centuries down to the present. For example:

"Jesus Christ is the Head of the congregation, his slave, and his words show that he would

strengthen them to feed his “domestics” **right down through the centuries. Apparently one generation of the “slave” class fed the succeeding generation thereof**, as well as feeding themselves.” -- *Watchtower*, January 15, 1975, page 46

“Down through the years the slave-like congregation has been feeding its true members faithfully and discreetly. **From Pentecost, A.D. 33, up to this present hour** this has been lovingly and carefully performed. Yes, and these “domestics” have been fed on **progressive spiritual food** that keeps them abreast of the “bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established.” -- *Watchtower*, July 15, 1960, page 435

So one has to wonder who are all these ones who have been faithfully fed with revealed truth down through the last nineteen centuries? They seem to be able to find something doctrinally wrong with all of the known Christian movements of history from the second century onward. Of course they can excuse their own obvious errors in understanding in times past as being “present truth” for that time. Yet they are not as charitable regarding Christians of past eras.

In their answer to the reader’s question in the July 1, 1972 *Watchtower*, they based their conclusion on the “fact” that there were still some 9,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses alive today who professed to be of the 144,000. One could just as logically argue that since history records so many more than 144,000 Christian martyrs in the early centuries that the Watchtower’s belief must be in error. It seems inconceivable to me that there were not more than 144,000 faithful Christians during 1,900 years, given the history we know about.

In his letter to the Galatians, after contrasting natural Jerusalem which was in “slavery with her children” under the Law Covenant, with heavenly Jerusalem, Paul says:

“But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: ‘Be glad, you barren woman who does not give birth; break out and cry aloud, you woman who does not have childbirth pains; **for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous than [those] who has the husband.**’” -- Galatians 4:26,27 NW

Since natural Israel, which was represented in this text by Hagar and the Law Covenant given at Mount Sinai, numbered literally into the millions, how can it be held by the Watchtower Society that the 144,000 members of Spiritual Israel are **more numerous** than that nation of Israel? For this scripture to be true, then

Spiritual Israel must indeed be far greater than 144,000.

Are There Really Two Classes of Christians With Different Hopes?

Since 1935, Jehovah's Witnesses have been unique in their teaching regarding two classes of Christians with different hopes. This seems to be an outgrowth of their teaching about the 144,000, which they take to be a literal number. However, there are many unanswered questions regarding this teaching. The first mention of the 144,000 is in Revelation 7:4-8:

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel: Out of the tribal of Judah twelve thousand sealed; out of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand;....”

The Watchtower states that the tribes here listed are not literal, but “figurative,” that is they apply to Spiritual Israel. So then, logically, the 12,000 “sealed” ones out of each tribe must also be “figurative.” So how can one add up 12 “figurative” 12,000s and come up with a literal 144,000?

The Watchtower asserts that it must be a literal number because of the appearance of the “great crowd” in verses 9, 11, and 15:

“After these things I saw, and look! a great crowd, which no man was able to number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing **before** the throne and before the Lamb, dressed in white robes; and there were palm branches in their hands... 11 And all the angels were standing **around** the throne and the older persons and the four living creatures, and they fell upon their faces **before** the throne and worshiped God... 15 That is why they are **before** the throne of God; and they are rendering him sacred service day and night in his temple [naos]; and the one seated on the throne will spread his tent over them. “

On the other hand, they say that the “24 older persons around the throne” seen throughout the Revelation (Revelation 4:4,10, 5:8, 11:16, and 19:4) also represent “Spiritual Israel,” but from the standpoint of the 24

courses of the Levitical Priesthood. So the obvious question becomes, if “Spiritual Israel” can be depicted as being 24 in number from one standpoint, and 144,000 from another, why is it not just as logical to say that they are represented by an “innumerable crowd” from yet another perspective? The propriety of such an arbitrary application is certainly debatable.

Much is made over the fact that the great crowd is seen to be before [enopion] the throne rather than around the throne, this being interpreted to mean that the great crowd is actually on the earth. Yet in verse 11 the angels and the older persons (who are said to be around the throne) “fell upon their faces before the throne of God.” Angels stand before [enopion] the throne in Revelation 8:2,3, the 144,000 stand on Mount Zion as well as before [enopion] the throne in Revelation 14:3,5. By what rule of logic, then, can it be argued that “before the throne” places the great crowd on earth whereas “before the throne” also places the 144,000 and the angels in heaven?

Far more serious is their argument that the great crowd serves God in the **earthly courtyards** of the temple. The word here is *naos*, and it means “the divine habitation” [NW INT] or “sanctuary.” In all its uses, *naos* refers to the holy and most holy, or sanctuary of the temple. *Hieron* is used to refer to the temple complex and all its courtyards. The New World Translation uses *naos* 16 times in the book of Revelation. Four times it is translated “temple,” five times “temple [sanctuary],” and “sanctuary” in its other occurrences. In the Interlinear it is consistently translated “divine habitation.”

In the *Watchtower* of August 15, 1980, the article “The “Great Crowd” Renders Sacred Service Where?” admits that “the Greek word *naos* refers often to the inner sanctuary representing heaven itself,” and then adds:

- BUT it was the entire temple (*naos*) that had been 46 years in the building
- It was the entire temple (*naos*) that was destroyed as a judgment from God
- It was from the courts of the outer temple (*naos*) that Jesus drove the money changers
- It was in the outer temple (*naos*) that Judas threw back the 30 pieces of silver
- HENCE it is consistent that the “great crowd” serve God in the earthly court of the spiritual temple

With regard to the first two points, John makes it clear in John 2:19-21 that Jesus was talking about the “divine habitation” of his body. It was the Jews who twisted his words and applied them to the literal temple in order to support their false charge of blasphemy against him. One has to remember that they are quoting Jesus, and therefore one can hardly use that sort of evidence to establish the true meaning of the word *naos*. So these texts do not in themselves prove that the term *naos* included the entire temple complex.

If Matthew had used the word *naos* in his account about Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple, that would support the Society's point. However an examination of the Kingdom Interlinear shows clearly that the word *hieron*, not *naos*, is used in this text. Thus the **Society is clearly in error on this point**. The word *hieron*, used in Matthew 21:12 as well as all the other gospel accounts, refers to the entire temple complex including its various courtyards and walls.

The last point regarding where Judas threw the 30 pieces of silver is certainly inconclusive. In the first place, Judas made his deal with chief priests in secret, very likely deep within the temple complex, probably near the temple itself with its sanctuary. Likewise Matthew 27:3-5 makes it clear that he returned his ill-gotten loot to those same chief priests in an effort to absolve himself of guilt. Certainly to find those priests Judas would not be looking in the outer courtyards. Note what the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* by Colin and Brown, page 793 says, associating his action with the sanctuary itself, quoting Bible Scholar G. Schrenk:

“The fact that Judas casts the rejected pieces of silver into the temple (Mt. 27:5) indicates the permanent defilement of the sanctuary by the death of Jesus.”

So Matthew may have used the term *naos* here in order to further underscore the significance of Jesus' death. In any case, this text is hardly conclusive evidence that *naos* refers to the “court of the gentiles” as well as the sanctuary in view of the way *naos* and *hieron* are used throughout the rest of the Bible.

Note also in Revelation 11:1,2:

“And a reed like a rod was given me as he said: ‘Get up and measure the temple [sanctuary] of God and the altar and those worshiping in it. But as for the courtyard that is outside the temple [sanctuary], cast it clear out and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations...”

It becomes obvious that the Society's contention that the great crowd serves in the earthly courtyards of Jehovah's spiritual temple in the new order is without foundation. They serve in the sanctuary, or the “divine habitation” of God. This certainly casts serious doubt on the Society's view of the future for those represented by “the great crowd.”

The real question here is whether or not there are actually two classes. The Watchtower Society used to say that both the 144,000 and the great crowd were heavenly, the great crowd being those who did not

qualify to be of the 144,000 “high calling.” Russell believed that the opportunity to be of the 144,000 ended in 1881. The failure of his time prophecies necessitated the extending of that “opportunity” until 1931. Then in 1935 it was “discovered” that the great crowd was actually an earthly class represented by the “other sheep” of John 10:16. But is it reasonable to suppose that Jesus was talking to his disciples about another flock of “sheep” with a different hope that he would choose nineteen centuries later? Consider the context of Jesus’ discussion. Here Jesus discusses his role as the “fine shepherd” beginning with vs 1:

“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen (*aule*) by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice...”

“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen (*aule*). I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” — John 10:1-4,16 NIV

The disciples that Jesus was talking to here were all members of the Jewish nation. The sheep pen (*aule*) represented the entire Jewish nation. Notice that he calls his sheep out. He does not establish another “sheep pen,” so when he says in verse 10 that he has “other sheep which are not of this *aule*, he can only mean of the Jewish nation. Gentiles had not yet been invited to become his followers, but would be some years later when Peter preached to Cornelius. So it seems more reasonable to conclude that he was preparing them for the time when Gentile believers would be invited into the Christian congregation. That would have had some meaning to those to whom Jesus was speaking, because when that occurred, they would remember his words, and understand the significance of them.

The Society connects two phrases, “other sheep” and “little flock,” from two widely separated scriptures to create an artificial contrast. Jesus’ words in Luke 12:32 were appropriate, since they were just a little flock, few in number at that early phase of his ministry. However, nothing in Jesus’ words indicates that his disciples were to remain a “little flock.” This argument is more of a play on words than sound scriptural exegesis.

The gospel or “good news” that Jehovah’s witnesses preach today, which they feel is a fulfillment of Matthew 24:14, “And this good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth..,” is different

from the gospel which was preached in the first century with respect to the hope for the future that is offered. The message preached in the first century centered around Christ Jesus and his redemptive work. It was a message of reconciliation to God through the ransom of Jesus Christ; it involved the offer of “son-ship” for all those who accepted. That was the message to which Christ Jesus referred in Matthew 24:14 when he addressed his disciples about “this good news of the kingdom.” By contrast, the “good news” that Jehovah’s Witnesses preach today is in reality a “different gospel” by virtue of its separating its members into two different classes with two different hopes. In Romans 5:18-21 Paul sums up the way in which we are saved:

“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” -- Romans 5:18-21 NIV

We cannot help notice the all-inclusiveness of the above text; Paul contrasts the effects of Adams sin on all men with the effects, (or the opportunity) of Christ’s ransom on all men. In Paul’s day there were those who tried to tamper with the good news by making certain other restrictions necessary to salvation. Another way to pervert the gospel is by limiting it to a select few, such as only 144,000. However, the seriousness of such tampering is shown by Paul’s words:

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than **the one we preached to you**, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” — Galatians 1:6-9 NIV

The gospel that Paul here referred to was the one preached by Paul in the first century and which is

recorded in the Christian Greek scriptures. When Jesus said “**This** good news of the kingdom would be preached,” by “this” he meant that which was at close at hand. Any deviation or change from that message would be a “different gospel.” The Watchtower Society recognizes that the gospel it preaches is different from that which has been preached from the first century on. Note how the *Watchtower* boasts about its version of the good news:

“Let honest-hearted persons compare the kind of preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom by the religious systems of Christendom during all the centuries with that done by Jehovah’s Witnesses since the end of World War 1 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.” — *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1981, page 17

The “different gospel” that Rutherford evolved in 1935 seems to have stemmed from a misunderstanding of what was meant by the term “Abraham’s seed.” Abraham, due to his faith in Jehovah’s promise was given a blessing that was to encompass all humanity. In Genesis 22:15-18 this promise is recorded:

“And Jehovah’s angel proceeded to call to Abraham the second time out of the heavens and to say: “By myself I do swear,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘that by reason of the fact that you have done this thing and you have not withheld your son, your only one, I shall surely bless you and I shall surely multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens and like the grains of sand that are on the seashore; and your seed will take possession of the gate of his enemies. And by means of your seed all nations of the earth will certainly bless themselves due to the fact that you have listened to my voice.’” — Genesis 22:15-18 NW

In explaining matters as they do, they seem to mix up what might be termed the “seed of promise,” the seed of Abraham who will be the means of blessing all mankind, and the rest of Abraham’s “seed” or descendants who would become as numerous as the sands of the seashore. They hold that this term, “sands of the seashore,” merely indicates that to Abraham it was an unknown number, which later was revealed to be limited to 144,000. But that is not the way the matter is put in the scriptures. There is only **one seed of**

Abraham through whom the blessings come:

“Surely you know that those who adhere to faith are the ones who are sons of Abraham. Now the Scripture, seeing in advance that God would declare people of the nations righteous due to faith, declared the good news beforehand to Abraham, namely: “By means of you all the nations will be blessed.” Consequently those who adhere to faith **are being blessed together** with faithful Abraham.”

— Galatians 3:7-9 NW

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” **meaning one person**, who is Christ.” — Galatians 3:16

NIV

“You are all, in fact, sons of God through you faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. . . Moreover, if you belong to Christ, you are really Abraham’s seed, heirs with reference to a promise.” — Galatians 3:26,27,29 NW

It is not too difficult to put these texts in their proper perspective with relation to the promise to Abraham. He was told that he would have a “seed” through which the blessings would come. This proved to be Christ himself. Abraham was also told that he would become father to many nations. These, too, are the natural descendants, or “seed” of Abraham. But those of Abraham’s descendants who put faith in Christ, were, as Paul put it, “**really Abraham’s seed**, heirs with reference to a promise.” These heirs of Abraham “were being blessed” by Christ, the sole seed of Abraham, according to Paul. But their being sons of Abraham did not make them a part of the “seed” of promise (singular) which is Christ Jesus alone.

Because they misunderstand this aspect of Paul’s discussion, the governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses today **include themselves** -- the Governing Body as well as the thousands who claim to be the anointed remnant of the 144,000 on earth today -- as part of the seed through which blessings are to flow. Note this statement in a recent publication:

“Those brought into this new sheepfold under the Fine Shepherd become the spirit-begotten sons of the Greater Abraham and thus part of His “seed.” True to this fact, during these last days a remnant of the spiritual “seed” has been **servng as a blessing** to increasing millions of people in more than 200 lands.” — *Worldwide Security Under the Prince of Peace*, pages 80, 81

Note here that they don't speak of themselves as receiving a blessing, but as serving as a blessing. In this way they place themselves as sharing the role of Christ Jesus as the seed through whom the blessing would come.

And consider another teaching in regard to all of this: that those who entertain the earthly hope, the ones being blessed by Abraham's seed, do not have Christ as their mediator. (This seems to have escaped the notice of most Witnesses that I have talked to.) The same publication says this:

"It is as Paul wrote to his Christian fellow worker: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5) Was Moses the mediator between Jehovah God and mankind in general? No, he was the mediator between the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the nation of the fleshly descendants. Likewise, the Greater Moses, Jesus Christ, is not the Mediator between Jehovah God and all mankind. He is the Mediator between his heavenly Father, Jehovah God, and the nation of spiritual Israel, which is limited to only 144,000 members. This spiritual nation is like a little flock of Jehovah's sheep-like ones." — *Worldwide Security Under the Prince of Peace*, 1986, pages 10,11

Since Jehovah's Witnesses are taught that Christ Jesus is the mediator for only that small percentage who aspire to the heavenly calling, this leaves the vast majority without a mediator. Thus it is only by association with the Watchtower Society, who represent the governing body of the remnant of the 144,000, that they can receive God's approval and blessing. Thus the Watchtower Society has **made itself indispensable** to their salvation; it is no wonder that the organization has such a hold on its members.

The effect of such a teaching is to distance the individual from Christ Jesus and Jehovah God by making the organization necessary in his approach to God. Thus the relationship with God really becomes the relationship with the organization. For many of Jehovah's Witnesses, the organization has almost become God. It has at least come to serve as an intermediary between those of the "other sheep" and Christ. But nowhere do the scriptures speak of such a thing. To the contrary, I believe Paul's words to Timothy refute this idea:

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for **all**

men, for kings and **all** who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and **there is one mediator between God and men**, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a **ransom for all**, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time.” — 1 Timothy 2:1-6 Revised Standard Version

The propriety of praying for “all men” including those in high political office is validated by the fact that it is God’s will that all men be saved. It seems obvious that the “all men” in verses 1 and 4 would be included in the “men” in verse 5. The ransom that Jesus Christ paid was for all men, not just a few. Thus it seems reasonable that what we read in verses 1 through 6 ought to be understood as it reads and we should not apply limitations to parts of it. If his ransom was given for **all men**, then he is logically **mediator for all men**. This is not an argument for “universal salvation,” rather it shows that the opportunity for salvation through Jesus Christ is universal.

The majority of Jehovah’s Witnesses are taught that the Greek Scriptures were written to those in the New Covenant, Spiritual Israel. Not considering themselves to be a part of Spiritual Israel, they feel that those scriptures do not really speak to them. And so they feel that when the scriptures speak of “God’s spirit dwelling in you,” it is not really talking to them. However the scriptures show that it is either one way or the other; we either have God’s spirit dwelling in us and we are God’s sons, or we are walking in harmony with the flesh:

“For the minding of the flesh means death, but the minding of the spirit means life and peace; because the minding of the flesh means enmity with God, for it is not under subjection to the law of God, nor, in fact, can it be. So those who are in harmony with the flesh cannot please God. However, you are in harmony, not with the flesh, but with the spirit, if God’s spirit truly dwells in you. But if anyone does not have Christ’s spirit, **this one does not belong to him.**” — Romans 8:6-9 NW

“So, then, brothers, we are under obligation, not to the flesh to live in accord with the flesh; for if you live in accord with the flesh you are sure to die; but if you put the practices of the body to death by the spirit, you will live. **For all who are led by God’s spirit, these are God’s sons.** For you did not receive a spirit of slavery causing fear again, but you received a spirit of adoption as sons, by which spirit we cry out: “Abba, Father!” The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are God’s children. If then

we are children, we are also heirs: heirs indeed of God, but joint heirs with Christ, provided we suffer together that we may also be glorified together.” -- Romans 8:12-17 NW

According to these Scriptures, we are either sons of God, or we are “walking according to the flesh.” This is the only relationship offered to us as Christians. If we deny being a son of God, then in effect, we deny being a Christian in the sense that it is used in the Scriptures.

“Everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God, and everyone who loves the one that caused to be born loves him who has been born from that one. By this we gain the knowledge that we are loving the children of God, when we are loving God and doing his commandments.” — 1 John 5:1,2 NW

So it seems very clear what our relationship to God must be. If we really believe that Jehovah is our Father, then it logically follows that we must, therefore, be his sons. To believe otherwise, one would have to accept the Watchtower’s teaching that those Scriptures weren’t written to us.

An even more serious consequence of the Watchtower’s assertion is that if we are not included in the New Covenant, then by what means can we expect to have our sins forgiven? Note Jeremiah 31:31,33,34:

“‘Look! There are days coming,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘and I will conclude with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant;... For this is the covenant that I shall conclude with the house of Israel after those days,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘I will put my law within them, and in their heart I shall write it. And I will become their God, and they themselves will become my people. And they will no more teach each one his companion and each one his brother, saying “Know Jehovah!” for they will all of them know me, from the least one of them even to the greatest one of them,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. **‘For I shall forgive their error, and their sin I shall remember no more.’**” -- NW

Later in the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul discusses the matter of being “declared righteous.”

“Moreover, those whom he foreordained are the ones he also called; and those whom he called are

also the ones he declared to be righteous. Finally, those whom he declared righteous are the ones he also glorified.” -- Romans 8:30 NW

It is obvious from reading Romans and Hebrews that those having faith in Christ Jesus are declared righteous. However the Bible also says that those faithful pre-Christian worshipers of Jehovah were declared righteous. James speaks of Abraham’s being declared righteous in James 2:21-23:

“Was not Abraham our father declared righteous by works after he had offered up Isaac his son upon the alter? You behold that his faith worked along with his works and by his works his faith was perfected, and the scripture was fulfilled which says: “Abraham put faith in Jehovah, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” and he came to be called “Jehovah’s friend.” — James 2:21-23 NW

Ron Frye, writing in *The Christian Respondent*, makes some interesting observations regarding the Watchtower Society’s explanation of this passage:

“Of course if one accepts the Watchtower teaching, then Abraham cannot be declared righteous in the same sense that first century Christians were, and so the Watchtower has to apply some creative interpretation to this passage. In the *Watchtower* of December 1, 1985 they try to argue that “Yes, Abraham was declared righteous as a friend of Jehovah, not as a son with the right to perfect human life or to kingship with Christ.” Then they appeal to *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, by Robert Girdlestone, quoting him as saying, “This righteousness was not absolute, i.e. such as would commend Abraham to God as a rightful claimant of the inheritance of sonship.” However this is a highly selective quote and amounts to another example of dishonest scholarship. Girdlestone is here commenting on Genesis 18:19, not Genesis 15:6. He is discussing Abraham’s personal quality of righteousness which, of course, was not sufficient to discharge him from sin in the absolute sense. On the previous page he does comment on Genesis 15:6 and says that “owing to the fact that he had faith in the promises, God accepted him, acquitted him from the charge of sin, pronounced him righteous, and conferred on him an inheritance.” (See appendix A-27 for the full text of Girdlestone’s commentary wherein the Society’s misrepresentation of Girdlestone’s comments should be obvious.)

The words of James are interpolated by the Watchtower Society to say something they do not say.

He does not say that “Abraham put faith in God and it was counted to him as righteousness as a friend of God.” James says that because of his faith “it was counted to him as righteousness.” Then he goes on to say “and he came to be called Jehovah’s friend.” James here draws upon two widely separated Hebrew texts; one from Genesis 15:6, and the other Isaiah 41:8. In his letter to all Christians James encourages them to have an active faith like Abraham’s. Abraham was reconciled to God and came to be called Jehovah’s friend. Being acquitted of his sin there was no longer any barrier between Abraham and Jehovah, thus making intimacy possible. Abraham’s righteousness due to faith is presented by the apostle Paul as the foundation of the very same righteousness enjoyed by Christians due to faith in Jesus Christ.

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead — since he was about a hundred years old — and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness — for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” — Romans 4:18-5:1 NIV

“What the Society tries to do here is to make Abraham a special case: he is “declared righteous,” but in a different sense than those Christians in the first century; “declared righteous as a friend of God.” They say that this “token” righteousness was necessary in order for Jehovah to make the covenant that he did with Abraham. However in so doing they deny the clear teaching of the Scriptures in the matter. They also overlook James’ statement in the 25th verse regarding Rahab:

“In the same manner was not also Rahab the harlot declared righteous by works after she had received the messengers hospitably and sent them out by another way?” - James 2:25 NW

This matter of being declared righteous brings up a curious circumstance about the Watchtower Society’s two-class teaching. Those who profess to be of the 144,000 are declared righteous while still in the flesh, and, if they remain faithful until death, have their salvation assured. No so for those of the “great crowd.” If they

make it through Armageddon, or are judged worthy to be resurrected afterward, then they have one thousand years under a new code of laws to prove their integrity. If they make it through the thousand years, then they face another test of faithfulness when Satan is loosed. So it will take over ten lifetimes to gain an earthly reward, but only one to gain immortality in heaven as a member of the 144,000!

The Scriptures, however, present a different hope for Abraham, and other pre-Christian worshipers of God. Note what the writer of Hebrews says of such ones in chapter eleven:

“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man... By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” -- Hebrews 11:4,7,8,10 NIV

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth... Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” -- Hebrews 11:13,16 NIV

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” -- Hebrews 11:39,40 NIV

To force this text into their theological view, the Watchtower interprets the phrase “something better for us” to mean immortality. In other words the reward that those men of faith would receive was not the same as what Paul hoped for. But that is not what this scripture is saying. These men and women received the promise of deliverance from sin and death, but until Christ came, there could be no fulfillment. But with the coming of Christ, the promise could be fulfilled. As Jesus told the crowds:

“For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.” — Matthew 13:17 NIV

So it appears that the “something better for us” was the privilege of living in the times when those promises could become realities. But there is not the slightest suggestion that the Christian reward was going to be superior to that of these faithful servants of God. Now all of them would realize their fulfillment together. One Bible commentary puts it this way:

“There is here the answer to an implied objection, that the faith of these suffering heroes was all in vain, seeing they did not receive the fulfillment of the promises. But, the writer says, this is a wrong inference, the truth being that God has merely deferred their reward in order that they may enter along with us of a later age upon the realization of the promised inheritance. They are waiting for us so that the whole number of the faithful may be perfected together.” — *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* by J. R. Dummelow

This explanation squares with what Jesus had said regarding the place of those pre-Christian men of faith in relation to the kingdom of heaven while talking to the religious leaders of his day:

“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of God.” — Luke 13:28, 29 NIV

The Watchtower attempts to fit this scripture into their theological system by allegorizing it. They would have Abraham represent Jehovah, Isaac represent Jesus, and Jacob represent the 144,000 of spiritual Israel, and “many from east and west” represent gentile believers. It is noteworthy that the Society nearly always quotes Matthew’s version of Jesus’ words, possibly because Luke’s account adds “and all the prophets,” an element that does not fit into their allegory. However Luke makes it clear that “all the prophets” will “take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of God.” It takes creative interpretation to make it say something else.

While the scriptures speak of a “new heavens” and a “new earth,” nowhere do they partition them into different hopes for different people:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,

and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God...” **He who overcomes will inherit all this**, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” — Revelation 21:1-4,7 NIV

This scripture is quite regularly used by Witnesses to prove the concept of earthly blessings for the “great crowd” in contrast to the heavenly hope for the 144,000. Yet nowhere is the Bible specific in partitioning the kingdom in this way. So I believe we should focus not on **where**, but on **how** we get eternal life. Does it come through belonging to a particular organization, or from having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

Another serious consequence of the Watchtower’s “different gospel” is related to a command Jesus gave and which Paul discusses with the congregation in Corinth:

“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” -- 1 Corinthians 10:16,17 NIV

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” -- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NIV

The Watchtower Society says that only those of the 144,000 are permitted to partake in this celebration which the Lord commanded all of his followers to observe. However, Jesus also told the crowds which included the Scribes and Pharisees that it was necessary to have a sharing in his blood and flesh in order to have life:

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. . . . Jesus said to them, “**I tell you the**

truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.” — John 6:51, 53, 54, 56 NIV

I know for a fact that many of Jehovah’s Witnesses who have been taught that they are of the “other sheep” are deeply concerned about this. I have been told by several longtime Witnesses that they have never felt as close a relationship with Jesus as when they were taking communion in their previous religions. Many have written the Society about this matter, expressing a deep-felt conviction that, in view of the clear Scriptural testimony in John, all who hope in Christ should partake. In some congregations, individuals who did not profess to be of the anointed, but who expressed their conviction that they should partake, were disfellowshipped, even though they had not partaken. Such are the consequences of following human organizations that presume to speak for God and to be his exclusive representative in the earth.

But Hasn’t God Always Dealt with Mankind Through an Organization?

Whenever one questions whether the scriptures teach that God deals with mankind only through an organization, the assertion is usually made that God has always dealt with mankind through an organization. The nation of Israel is usually given as a prime example as well as the first century Christian arrangement. But is it true that God has **always dealt through an organization**?

According to Watchtower chronology, in the year 1942 B.C. Jehovah concluded a covenant with Abraham which would eventually bring blessings to all mankind. It also established that those blessings would come through the lineage of Abraham. But did that mean that from that time onward, anyone wanting to have God’s favor would have to go live under the “authority” of Abraham? Certainly we know from the Scriptures that that was not the case. It was not until 1513 B.C. that the Law Covenant was established with its priesthood and sacrifices, and certainly anyone wishing to please God from that time onward would need to recognize that arrangement and its prophetic significance. But that was more than 2500 years after man’s creation, during which time there was no organization representing God on earth.

The Watchtower Society always presents Israel as God’s exclusive people, strongly implying that he had no dealings with other peoples. However, Amos 9:7 shows that this was not the case:

“The Lord says, ‘People of Israel, I think as much of the people of Sudan as I do of you. I brought the Philistines from Crete and the Syrians from Kir, just as I brought you from Egypt.’ — Amos 9:7 TEV

There is no question that the nation of Israel was used by God to accomplish a special purpose towards mankind, and that Israelites who wanted to please God would have to keep the Law to the best of their ability. This would include having an appreciation for the temple and the worship carried on there. But would that mean that a person’s relationship could only come through the Jewish “organization?” If that were so, what would individuals do when their spiritual leaders and the nation as a whole went into apostasy? After all, the scriptural record is clear that during most of their history they were involved in gross idolatry and rebellion against their God, for which they were eventually cast off as a nation.

It is no doubt true that there were always a few individuals who were faithful to Jehovah and the Law. But were they gathered together in some sort of “underground” association with one of the few remaining faithful priests? Certainly that was not the case during the time of Elijah. Elijah thought he was the only faithful one left in Israel, but Jehovah informed him that there were seven thousand who had not worshiped Baal.

When Jesus appeared as the Messiah and began his ministry, it signaled a fundamental change in God’s way of dealing with mankind. From now on it would be on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice that men could approach God. The Jewish age was coming to a close; the Christian era was beginning. Whereas the law of Moses consisted of decrees written on stone, the new covenant was written on hearts. Whereas the old covenant was centered about the temple at Jerusalem, and its ceremonies, the new covenant was associated with heavenly Jerusalem. Paul makes this contrast in Galatians 4:25, 26:

“Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.” -- NIV

Peter echoes this thought when he describes the individual Christian:

“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” -- 1 Peter 2:5 NIV

Perhaps no scripture illustrates the close, personal relationship between Christ and individual members of his “body” better than Paul’s words to the Ephesians:

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” -- Ephesians 3:16-18 NIV

None of these texts indicate that the relationship between Christ and the individual members of his “body” is anything but a direct, intimate, personal relationship. When Paul was discussing the matter of headship, note how Paul put matters in 1 Corinthians 11:3:

“Now I want you to realize that the head of **every man** is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” -- NIV

Note that Paul does not insert any human “channel” or visible organization between “every man” and Christ. That is something that humans have done.

But how are we to understand the references to the apostles and elders who had oversight in the first century congregation? It is true that the “visible church,” which is made up of all who claim to be Christians, needs some sort of order and assignment of responsibility. But this visible “church” or congregation must be distinguished from the “congregation” in the spiritual sense; the “body of Christ,” the “spiritual temple” that is made of “living stones” which includes all who accept Christ as their Savior and who walk by the Spirit. To the fledgling Christian congregation in Ephesus, Paul wrote:

“This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, it was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful

scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” -- Ephesians 4:11-15 NIV

The apostles that Jesus chose served an important and unique function in the early Christian congregation; they served as a source of direction and instruction after his leaving them, and much of this has been preserved for us in the Christian Greek Scriptures. Other spiritually qualified men were also appointed as elders and teachers. Those “gifts,” including the Apostles who had been with Christ during his earthly ministry, were no doubt a wonderful blessing in helping those newly converted ones to grow to maturity as Christians, as the collective body of Christians itself matured under the leadership of those men.

When Jesus founded the Christian arrangement, did he intend for his followers to be ruled throughout the centuries until his return by the sort of authoritarian organizations we see throughout Christendom, Jehovah’s Witnesses included? That could hardly be the case since Jesus said to his disciples when he was yet with them:

“Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” — Matthew 20:25-28 NIV

Paul, Peter and John all warned that in time, some from among the overseers would abuse their power and draw disciples off after themselves. Paul warned the Thessalonians that there would be an apostasy and said, “the mystery of this lawlessness is already at work.” Note Paul’s warning to the overseers at Ephesus:

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.” -- Acts 20:28-31

Already in John's day, men such as Diotrophes were abusing their authority and expelling from the congregation those who resisted.

Also, in his parable of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus indicated that "the wicked one" would over-sow the field that Jesus had planted with imitation Christians, and that this situation would continue down through the centuries until his return. Would it make sense, then, for Jesus to place his followers under the absolute authority of a "hierarchical" system, knowing it would become corrupt? If Christians were enjoined by divine instruction to "obey the bishop," and "to look upon the bishop even as we would look upon the Lord Himself," as Ignatius of the early second century put it, then at what point would individual Christians feel justified in saying "these men are definitely deviating from the Scriptures, and I shouldn't follow them?" Suppose they were told to "Wait upon Jehovah, he will straighten things out in due time?" If they passively submitted, they would all have wound up under the authority of the Bishop of Rome and later the Catholic church, and would have been required to submit to beliefs that are at odds with the Scriptures. It could be said that Catholics are the descendants of those who "stuck with the organization."

But How Would the Preaching Work Get Done Without an Organization?

Most Witnesses cannot conceive of how Jesus' words in Matthew 24:14, (NIV) "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come," could possibly be accomplished without a world wide publishing and preaching organization such as the Watchtower Society of today. And yet it is said of the first century Christians that they preached the gospel throughout the whole world of their time, carrying the message throughout the entire Roman Empire — even though they had no printing presses, no radios, no television networks, not even public address systems. During the intervening centuries the message of Christianity has been spread to nearly all parts of the globe.

In order to see themselves as uniquely fulfilling Jesus' words, Jehovah's Witnesses have to attach specialized meanings or interpretations to Jesus' words. For example, they differentiate between the message that has been preached by Christians throughout the centuries and the message that they preach. We should note, however, that when Jesus said "**This** gospel of the kingdom would be preached," by "this" he meant that which was at close at hand, that which was being preached in his time. That gospel centered around Jesus and the redemption he provided for mankind. Any deviation or change from that message would be a "different gospel," in the sense that Paul used the term in Galatians 1:6-9. But note how the Watchtower

boasts about its version of the good news:

“Let honest-hearted persons compare the kind of preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom by the religious systems of Christendom during all the centuries with that done by Jehovah’s Witnesses since the end of World War 1 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.” — *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1981, page 17

But is this really the “this good news” that Jesus said would be preached, or is it a “different gospel,” a perversion of which Paul warned in Galatians 1:6-9? It has been demonstrated earlier in this letter quite conclusively, I believe, that the Watchtower Society’s doctrine about Christ’s return and their own “appointment” as God’s exclusive representative on earth is without Scriptural foundation. Hence, the “good news” that they preach is a “different gospel,” and cannot be in fulfillment of Jesus words.

In order to emphasize their concept of Christ’s “Messianic Kingdom,” they often play down the fact that Jesus has been ruling as king ever since the 33 A.D., saying that he merely has a “spiritual kingdom” over his followers. However, Ephesians 1:20-23 indicates that he is more than just a “king elect”:

“...he [Jehovah] raised him up from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above every government and authority and power and lordship, not only in this system of things, but also in that to come. He also subjected all things under his feet, and made him head over all things to the congregation which is his body, the fullness of him who fills up all things in all.” -- NW

Likewise, his followers are included in that functioning kingdom, as Ephesians 2:6 says:

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” -- NIV

The Watchtower publications often speak disparagingly of the work of missionaries of other Christian

organizations, oftentimes referring to their converts as “rice Christians.” Yet it must be admitted, that the success of Jehovah’s Witnesses in many parts of the world such as Africa has been built largely upon the foundation of Christians who came before them. Christian missionaries have spent years living in jungles, deserts, and remote areas of the world, first learning, in many cases unwritten, languages, and then translating parts or all of the Bible into those languages. They have established hospitals, schools, churches, community services, as well as teaching people the Word of God. And while the Watchtower may criticize other missionary’s humanitarian efforts, didn’t Jesus indicate by his parable of the Good Samaritan, that such kinds of efforts were a part of Christianity? Yet it is on that scene, Watchtower missionaries arrive to begin making converts.

When one looks at the world, it is evident that there are vast areas that have not yet been reached with the message of Christ, by Jehovah’s Witnesses or anyone else. Yet how does this fit in with the Watchtower’s concept of the urgency of the times? How do they expect to reach all the people of Asia or the Middle East in the “few short months or years” before the “end of this system of things?”

The Watchtower Society insists that “house to house” preaching was the method that the Apostles used, and the fact that Jehovah’s Witnesses preach from “house to house” identifies them as the ones doing the preaching work that Jesus foretold. But is that really the sense of the Greek words *kat’oikous* in Acts 20:20, translated “house to house” in the New World Translation? Notice how the Jerusalem Bible translates Acts 20:20:

“I have preached to you, and instructed you both in public and in your homes.”

The same Greek words *kat’oikous* (also used in the distributive, not consecutive sense) are also used in Acts 2:46. But here the New World Translation says:

“And day after day they were in constant attendance at the temple with one accord, and they took their meals in private homes and partook of food with great rejoicing and sincerity of heart...”

To be consistent, the New World Translation would have to say “they took their meals from house to house.” It is evident that the Society has distorted the meaning of this phrase in Acts 20:20 to fit it into their theological system. There is nothing wrong with calling “from house to house” if it effectively reaches people.

But to make it the “trademark” of true Christians goes beyond what the Scriptures teach.

The “Faithful and Discreet Slave”

But what about “the faithful and discreet slave” class which Jesus appointed over his congregation to govern and lead it down through the centuries? This is a primary teaching of the Watchtower Society used to establish its authority over God’s interests on earth. Note a recent statement of this belief:

“Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that this parable (Matt 24:45-47) pertains to the one true congregation of Jesus Christ’s anointed followers. Beginning with Pentecost, 33 C.E., **and continuing the 19 centuries since then**, this slave-like congregation has been feeding its members spiritually, doing so faithfully and discreetly.” -- *Watchtower*, March 1, 1986, page 24

But is that the way the apostles understood Jesus’ illustration? It is helpful to take a careful look at the context of Jesus illustration as recorded in Luke chapter 12. Jesus was emphasizing to his disciples that they would not blow when the Master would arrive. After hearing Jesus illustration about the householder who was surprised by the visit of a thief, Peter asked, in verse 41, “Lord, are you saying this illustration to us or also to all?” It is helpful to compare other translations of this text. For example, the Living Bible renders Jesus’ answer:

“And the Lord replied, “I’m talking to **any faithful, sensible man** whose master gives him the responsibility of feeding the other servants.” -- Luke 12:42, 43 LIV

Did Peter understand this to have a personal application to each individual Christian? Apparently so, since he says in his first letter:

“Above all things, have intense love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. In proportion as each one has received a gift, **use it in ministering to one another as fine stewards*** of God’s undeserved kindness expressed in various ways.” 1 Peter 4:8-10 NW

Note the footnote in the NW reference Bible, “*Or, **house managers.**” Literally “**house administrators.**” Yet this is obviously addressed to individual Christians. Surely Peter wouldn’t make a misapplication after having asked Jesus directly about the matter. Thus it seems more reasonable to apply the illustration of the “faithful and discreet slave” to how individual Christians should conduct themselves while they await the return of their master rather than to try to make a prophecy out of it. A careful consideration of Jesus parable bears this out. The New World Translation renders Jesus answer at Luke 12:42-46:

“And the Lord said: ‘Who really is the faithful steward, the discreet one, whom his master will appoint over his body of attendants to keep giving them their measure of food supplies at the proper time? Happy is that (*ekeinos*) slave, if his master on arriving finds him doing so! I tell you truthfully, He will appoint him over all his belongings. But if ever that (*ekeinos*) slave should say in his heart, “My master delays coming,” and should start to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that (*ekeinos*) slave will come on a day that he is not expecting [him] and in an hour that he does not know, and he will punish him with the greatest severity and assign him a part with the unfaithful ones.’”

Watchtower doctrine would have it that there are two slaves spoken of here; a “faithful and discreet” slave, which they apply to themselves, and an “evil slave,” which are any who disagree with their supposed appointment to authority over the Master’s household. But by no stretch of logic or the rules of grammar can such an understanding be defended. The word “that” (*ekeinos*) is a demonstrative adjective and must relate to its antecedent, the “faithful and discreet slave” of verse 45.¹⁷ Hence it is obvious that Jesus is talking about one slave for which there are two eventualities; he can be a “faithful slave,” or he can become an “evil slave.”

Another point that can be noted is that it is the “evil” slave who seems to have an opinion about when the Master should return. He is the one who has decided that his Master “delays” and proceeds chastise or “beat” his fellow slaves.¹⁸ The “faithful slave” merely continues to do what his Master has assigned, waiting patiently for his Master’s return. Also, the fact that the “evil” slave takes it upon himself to chastise his fellow slaves indicates that he feels qualified to judge them. However, Paul said at Romans 14:4: “Who are you to judge the house servant of another?” It is the Master, Jesus Christ, who will judge his slaves. The course of faithfulness and discretion is to leave the judging to the Master.

Did the Apostles and “older men” of Jerusalem serve as a “governing body,” administering the affairs of the Master’s household, setting a precedent for Christians in the centuries to follow? Sometimes the incident recorded in Acts chapter 15 is cited as evidence that such was the case. However, Scholars recognize that the Jerusalem meeting to settle the controversy over circumcision was a one time emergency council, precipitated by problems caused by “Jews from Jerusalem.”¹⁹ There is no evidence that the Apostles acted as a “governing body” over the first century church. There are no records of any similar “councils” in the entire New Testament.

Sometimes an appeal is made to the position of the Apostles in the first century as evidence for a “governing body.” But the fact is that there is no evidence to support such a claim. Paul, the most visible and prolific contributor to the Christian writings, did not travel to Jerusalem regularly for meetings with a “governing body.” By his own statements, he visited only James and Peter three years after his conversion, and did not return to Jerusalem for 14 years. None of his epistles were written from Jerusalem. There is no record that he submitted his letters for “committee approval” to his peers before publishing them.

The apostles were unique in the history of Christianity, as were the miraculous gifts of the holy spirit. They were Jesus’ direct representatives on earth during their lifetime for the teaching and establishment of the Christian faith. They had no successors, as the testimony of the second and third century Christian writers adequately confirms. The simple fact of the matter is that Paul and the others were directed by Holy Spirit, individually. Christ Jesus, through the Holy Spirit could direct the apostles, and all Christians for that matter, without the aid of a human organization. The phenomenal spread of Christianity through the entire empire in just a few decades is testimony the effectiveness of Christ’s direction of his followers, and that despite persecution by both Jews and Romans, false brothers, and heretics of all descriptions. I believe that Jesus has continued to direct his “church” right down to the present day, and that the attempt any group of men to robe themselves with the authority of Apostles and presume to speak for God does not square with scriptural teaching.

With regard to their own divine appointment as the “faithful and discreet slave,” a recent Watchtower article claimed:

“In 1918, when Jesus Christ inspected those claiming to be his slaves, he found an international group of Christians publishing Bible truths for use both inside the congregation and outside in the preaching work. In 1919 it truly turned out to be as Christ had foretold: “Happy is that slave if his master

on arriving finds him doing so. Truly I say to you, He will appoint him over all his belongings. “ These true Christians entered into the joy of their Master.” — *Watchtower* March 15, 1990, page 14

Of course, the governing body of the Watchtower Society is here identifying itself as “that slave.” In this they seem to be in conflict with their own teaching on this point. On the one hand, they claim that the “faithful slave” has always existed down through the centuries until the present, faithfully caring for the Master’s household. On the other hand they claim that when Jesus returned in 1914, he surveyed all those who claimed to be his slaves, and in 1919 he found only Charles Taze Russell and his group worthy of being entrusted with all of his earthly interests.

This raises some interesting questions when one considers that Russell himself was something of a religious maverick; he left the Presbyterian denomination and formed his own group. He formed no associations with other religious groups, being, in fact, quite critical of them all. If that “faithful slave” of nineteen centuries was still serving faithfully in the 1870s, how did Russell come to be associated with it and represent it? Apparently Russell did not find it, nor did it find him. Or did “that faithful slave” suddenly become unfaithful and have to be replaced in 1919 by Russell and his group? If so, then how can the “faithful slave” be said to have been faithfully serving throughout the previous 19 centuries?²⁰

It is not necessary to go to such “creative explanations” to understand Jesus’ illustration about the faithful slave. Each and every one of has the opportunity to be either a faithful slave or an unfaithful slave. It should be our desire as individual Christians to found doing the Master’s will when he unexpectedly returns.

Probably you are wondering by now, well, what are you going to do now? Where do you go from here? Some have in mind Peter’s words to Jesus, “*Lord, whom shall we go away to? You have sayings of everlasting life.*” I have heard many Witnesses when despairing over problems within the organization express that thought in terms of “What organization would be any better?” But that is not what Peter said. He said “**whom** shall we go away to? You have the saying of everlasting life.” So it is really the person of Christ Jesus that we should go to. His “sayings of everlasting life” are recorded in the Scriptures, and that is where we should turn.

I do not believe that any organization or church can claim to be the exclusive “channel” or “appointed authority” representing God in the earth today. Yet he can use groups of men in accomplishing his purpose. But that use has to be contingent on to what extent they use or are guided by the counsel and instructions in his Word. It would seem that Russell’s group originally sought to be guided by the Bible, but what

started out as an idealistic movement has become increasingly more authoritarian, more oppressive, and more intrusive into the precious individual relationship that every Christian should have with God. Its claims of exclusive authority and superiority are both immodest and unfounded. It has shown itself to be afraid to expose its history and teaching to the light of open examination.

In Romans 9:2 Paul says:

“Before Christ and my own conscience in the Holy Spirit I assure you that I am speaking the plain truth when I say that there is something that makes me feel very depressed, like a pain that never leaves me. It is the condition of my brothers...” -- Phillips

I feel the same way about “my people,” Jehovah’s Witnesses. Like Paul, I still want to help “my people.” I still consider them my friends and want the best for them.

I value my Christian freedom now. I have no desire to become enslaved to men again. Rather than view the world as divided into two camps, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Satan’s organization, I can now view people as individuals and not have to look for a “label” to know how to view them. It is a good feeling to be able to do what is just and fair by assessing each person in an unbiased way for what he is as a person.

I believe that the apostolic church is alive and well, even in this twentieth century. It does not need elaborate man-made organization. Just before leaving his disciples, Jesus assured them, “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” (Matt 28:20 NIV). I believe that he has been. He has been directing his congregation ever since the first century. It is not associated with any particular human organization. But rest assured, Jesus knows who his sheep are, and he looks after them, and sustains them and will continue doing so until his return. To be sure, the “weeds” are certainly in evidence wherever one looks, and often it seems that they outnumber the wheat. Though claiming to be Christians, their course of life and unrighteous conduct belies that claim and brings reproach upon God. It is a condition that Jesus has permitted during these many centuries and it will continue until the harvest time. At that time, the parable continues:

“The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who

has ears, let him hear.” -- Matthew 13:41-43 NIV

It is my prayer that we may all attain to life in that kingdom together.

NOTES

1. My father, who at that time was not a Witness, wanted very much for me to continue my education, an opportunity he had never enjoyed. Although I was always a good student and enjoyed learning, Witness teaching had convinced me that the “end” was too close to waste four years pursuing “higher education.” The Watchtower bias against “higher education” and “high paying jobs” and “career” is obvious to the regular reader of the Watchtower. For example, the August 15, 1985 Watchtower says: “Many today worship sex, pleasure, riches, and higher education with the same intensity that the ancient egyptians did Artemis.” These phrases take on a decidedly negative connotation and are usually contrasted with the organizationally approved goal of becoming a full time “Pioneer” publisher, missionary, or member of the Watchtower headquarters staff. These goals are regularly encouraged at congregation meetings and assemblies. On the other hand, youths who choose to attend a university are considered “spiritually weak.” Within the congregation exists a system of “perks” and rewards for youths following the approved course. My son, who was highly regarded by most in the congregation, was removed from his “privilege” of carrying the microphones during the meetings because several elders felt he was not active enough in congregation activities and was also a student at the university and therefore was no longer considered “exemplary.” For this reason, I also came under a great deal of criticism for not setting a good example as an elder and a father in instructing my family. This bias against education even extends to those who become Witnesses after having completed a university education. Nearly every elder I know who has a degree has told me privately that he feels a certain amount of subtle discrimination and even distrust on account of his education with the result that they tend to hide their education from other Witnesses.
2. For a complete discussion of thought stopping techniques, I refer the reader to Steven Hassan’s book *Combating Cult Mind Control*, pages 62, 63. Thought stopping methods among Witnesses often involve the use of a scripture. For example, Watchtower doctrine has for years insisted that the end is “just around the corner,” a “few short months, or years” away. The Watchtower has often answered those who question this interpretation by quoting 2 Peter 3:13, “...in the last days there will come ridiculers with their ridicule... and saying, ‘Where is this promised presence of his? Why, from the day our forefathers fell asleep in death, all things are continuing exactly as from creation’s beginning.’” Of course no Christian who anxiously awaits his Lord’s return wants to be cast in the role of a “ridiculer.”

Now, there is nothing wrong with questioning human interpretation of scripture, examining the scriptural evidence to see if such interpretation can be supported. It is quite another thing to ridicule the scriptural teaching that Christ will return. By characterizing honest questioning of interpretation as “ridiculing the teaching that Christ will return,” the Watchtower Society effectively stops any further thought on the matter in the Witness mind, and thus protects its doctrine from careful scrutiny.

3. The Watchtower Society does not claim to be “inspired” in the sense that the Bible writers were. In fact, up until 1972, the masthead message contained the following disclaimer: “Ever since “The Watchtower” began to be published in July of 1879 it has looked ahead into the future... No, “The Watchtower” is no inspired prophet, but it follows and explains a book of prophecy the predictions in which have proved to be unerring and unfailing until now. “The Watchtower” is therefore under safe guidance. It may be read with confidence, for its statements may be checked against that prophetic Book.” Yet while disclaiming to be “inspired,” they claim to be “spirit directed,” and have strongly implied that what they write is directed by God. For example, Rutherford wrote: “A few excerpts are taken from that article to show its tenor and to show the real attitude of the Elijah-John-the-Baptist class. These quotations are not for criticism, of course, but to show how the Lord foreknew and foretold what was to come to pass, and how he doubtless caused his angels to direct the preparation of exactly what was published.” -Light Volume 1. 1930 page 195. Furthermore, Qualified To Be Ministers, 1967 edition, page 156 said: “If we have love for Jehovah and for the organization of his people we shall not be suspicious, but shall, as the Bible says, ‘believe all things,’ all the things that The Watchtower brings out...” Rutherford was even more to the point in the May 1, 1922 Watchtower, when he said: “To abandon or repudiate the Lord’s chosen instrument means to abandon or repudiate the Lord himself, upon the principle that he who rejects the servant sent by the Master thereby rejects the Master...” Thus it is clear that the Society insists that although not “inspired,” all Witnesses are required to accept that which is taught by the “spirit directed” organization be considered as coming from God himself. Thus I will leave the reader to ponder the difference between “inspired” and “spirit directed” in Watchtower jargon.
4. The Society tries to create the impression that World War I was an unexpected event, one which took the world by complete surprise, to support their contention that its origins were supernatural. For example, the 1/22/73 Awake! quotes Joachim Remak: “Nowhere, even in the summer of 1914, was a calculated, advance decision made for global war.” The 9/8/83 Awake! quotes Henry Kissinger

as saying that World War 1 “was a war no one wanted and a catastrophe that no one could have imagined.” While such statements may reflect the personal opinions of the individuals quoted, yet historians give a completely different picture. For example, Barbara Tuchman, in *The Guns of August*, traces the historical origins of the war from the standpoint of the actions taken by the governments involved. It is clear that the Germans began working on the battle plans for a war against France shortly after the Franco-Prussian war. The French became aware of such plans in 1904 when an officer of the German General Staff defected and gave the battle plan to the French authorities.

5. I can remember the futility of trying to defend the Society’s teaching to someone who knew his Bible. I learned to quickly change the subject whenever Romans 13 came up in conversation in service. One brother was asked to debate that subject with a Baptist minister. He refused, saying “they have the better of the argument, and I don’t want to make a fool of myself.” Years later, he asked an elder, “Was I wrong for believing what the Society later admitted was in fact true?” He was told “Yes you were wrong, because that was “the truth” for that time and you were obligated to support it.”
6. In one case that I know of, the husband had an extramarital relationship with another woman, but because it involved an “unnatural” sex act, the elders said his wife did not have Scriptural grounds for divorce. She was disfellowshipped because she remarried. A lot of elders would say that it made little difference that the Society later changed its position, the fact that she went ahead and remarried proved her wrong. She should have “waited on Jehovah” (decades later) to correct matters instead of “running ahead of the Society.”
7. Witnesses used to consider this an action individuals might take with respect to someone who was walking disorderly, and whom they might consider spiritually dangerous to associate with. But a recent change made it a congregational action, obligating every member of the congregation to cut off all social contacts with the person so “marked,” associating with them only at congregational meetings. If the elders decided to “mark” an individual, a talk would be given at the meeting, and without naming the person, discuss the “disorderly conduct” in such a manner that all in the congregation would know who was being thus “marked.”
8. My wife and I talked a circuit overseer whom I have known for many years, and he told us about a circuit overseer who although married, committed fornication with a sister in a congregation he was visiting and got her pregnant. She confessed the matter to the elders and named him as the father. He denied the matter and she was disfellowshipped, as much for “false accusation” as for her own sin (for

which she showed repentance.) He continued to serve and in time was appointed District Overseer. Years later at a district assembly, he saw the sister, now reinstated, with her son on a program at the assembly. Conscience stricken, he confessed his sin and resigned.

9. This incident illustrates an important question. I can accept that a circuit overseer might go “bad” and even be able to fool his fellow elders, even as Judas went bad. But to say that Holy Spirit appointed him to a more responsible position while he was “living a lie” is something that I cannot accept.
10. However Dr. Newton goes on to suggest that Ptolemy may also have “invented” the length of the reigns of the Babylonian kings in his “Insight on the News” in the December 15, 1977 Watchtower picked up the Scientific American article which reported on Newton’s book: “...According to Newton, ‘all relevant chronology must now be reviewed and all dependence upon Ptolemy’s [king] list must be removed.’ -October 1977. What the Watchtower failed to mention was that Dr. Newton attributed his information about Ptolemy’s chronology to a Mr. Couture of Santee, California. Mr. Couture, who is one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, got his information from the Aid to Bible Understanding, a publication of the Watchtower Society, and used this to convince Dr. Newton, who is not a historian. Other information on Assyrian chronology was also provided by Mr. Couture which, according to Dr. Newton, “I did not verify independently.” So here we have the Watchtower indirectly quoting the Watchtower as an outside “expert” witness in defense of their own chronology!
11. The Revised Version, American Standard Version, New American Standard Version, Rotherham’s, all use “for Babylon.” The Jerusalem Bible says: “Only when the seventy years granted to Babylon are over.” Goodspeed’s: “As soon as Babylon has finished seventy years.” New English Bible: When a full seventy years has passed over Babylon.” Byington’s: “As soon as Babylon has had a full seventy years.” The Anchor Bible: “Only when Babylon’s seventy years have been completed.”
12. Some commentators point out that since the number “70” is sometimes used in the Bible as an approximate number, that the seventy years should begin in 605 B.C.E. when the Babylonians decisively defeated Egypt at Carchemish. However this would make the period of Babylonian supremacy run only 66 rather than 70 years. Also to be considered is the fact that some of the nations in the area became vassals to Babylon before the battle of Carchemish (and some considerably afterward.) In fact, from the time that they were granted “supremacy,” they continued to subjugate nations throughout the period until their empire suddenly fell to the Persians. See Gentile Times Reconsidered, page 117.

13. Of course the Society is not the only one to do this. George Storrs, an early associate of Russell, tried to cut nearly 100 years off the list of Persian kings in order to have the counting of the 70 weeks begin during the reign of Cyrus, claiming one would have to do that to be true to the Bible. Also fundamentalists who insist on literal 24 hour creative days deny overwhelming scientific evidence from many lines of evidence, thinking they have to deny the secular evidence in order to hold true to the Bible.
14. The Watchtower Society, along with others, interprets the “seven times” to be seven years. However, there is a problem here in that the activities of Nebuchadnezzar are well documented by cuneiform texts throughout his reign. In fact, there is no seven year period that is unaccounted for during which his “madness” could have occurred. However, the Aramaic word iddan used here commonly means “time, period, season,” and thus it is not necessary to insist upon “years” as the only correct translation. Thus many scholars believe that the “seven times” probably referred to a much shorter period of time, perhaps “seasons.” If this is the case, then the Watchtower Society’s transformation of “seven times” or “years” into 2520 years has even less Scriptural basis. If Nebuchadnezzar’s madness was actually seven literal years, they would certainly not have been “prophetic years” of 360 days as the Society’s mathematical procedure assumes. Using the actual length of a solar year would then give us nearly 2557 years - not 2520. Adding to the confusion is the fact that the calendar used by the Jews and the Babylonians was a solar-lunar system which required the periodic use of intercalary months. Thus we would have to know the exact date when Nebuchadnezzar’s madness began to know exactly how many days to convert into years. If the Author of the Bible intended for us to use the account for the purposes of date fixing, it is indeed strange that the information contained therein is so vague.
15. To say that the trampling clown of “Jerusalem” refers to the persecution of the remnant of Christ’s followers yet on earth doesn’t help, since that persecution did not stop in 1914, but continues to this day. Neither does the explanation that casting down Satan from heaven constitutes an end to the “trampling” of heavenly Jerusalem help, since it is the gentiles who are said to do the trampling, not Satan. The word “gentile” is used everywhere in the Bible to distinguish people of all other nations from Jews, and never refers to Satan. So the question of how Gentile trampling of Jerusalem stopped in 1914 remains unanswered. For a complete discussion, see *Gentile Times Reconsidered*, by Carl Jonsson, page 134.

16. Karl Burganger, in *The Watch Tower Society And Absolute Chronology*, published by Christian Koinonia International, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. One quickly becomes dismayed at the lengths that Russell, and later Rutherford and the Watchtower leadership went in trying to preserve their 1914 chronology. Originally Russell relied on Ptolemy's Canon as evidence for what he thought was the "absolute" date to which to anchor his chronology. When he learned that Ptolemy did not support his 536 B.C. date for Cyrus' first year, he began attacking Ptolemy as unreliable. Instead, Russell claimed support from his "parallel cycles" of the "Jewish Age." Also he claimed that measurements taken within the Great Pyramid of Egypt confirmed all of his dates. Both of these "proofs" were in time discarded as well. Next, it was supposed that the Greek Olympiad system could be relied upon, but scholars recognize that it is of no use for any date earlier than the third century B.C. For a number of years, the year 539 B.C. was called an "absolute" date on which to anchor their chronology. While scholars generally accept 539 B.C. as the date of Babylon's fall, the Watchtower Society has had to admit that it is no more "absolute" than any other date in Neo-Babylonian history. Recent scholarship has established absolute dates based on three astronomical diaries; Strm. Kambys.400 which fixes 523 B.C. as the seventh year of Cambyses, VAT 4956 which fixes 568 B.C. as Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year, and B.M.31312 which fixes events in the year 652 B.C. Rather than use VAT 4956, which makes it an easy matter to date Nebuchadnezzar's 17th year to 587 B.C., they prefer Strm.400 which, with much greater difficulty, allows them to work back to 539 B.C., which date they must have. They then proceed to try to undermine the validity of the other two diaries, in effect saying that no date earlier than 539 can be relied upon. However, what they should realize is that any argument leveled against the astronomical diaries falls with equal force upon all of them. So they are actually undermining the historical underpinnings of their own chronology. They have thus placed themselves in the curious position of "shelling their own ship."
17. What seemed to have spurred all of this interest in trying to predict things by Bible time prophecies was the prediction made by Robert Fleming that the power of the papacy would be broken by 1889-1898. The French Revolution in 1898 seemed to many to be a remarkable fulfillment of his prediction, made nearly a hundred years before and published by Fleming in his book written in 1701, *The Rise and Fall of Papacy*. Shortly after the outbreak of the French Revolution, many recalled Fleming's book, and it was reprinted and widely distributed. The book created a sensation and seemingly validated the idea that the Bible could be used in such a way. It did much to stimulate study of Bible prophecy after

the French Revolution. As a result the date 1798 was accepted by most Second Adventist groups as marking the beginning of the "time of the end." This date was adopted by Russell's group and later changed to 1799. This date was held as valid by the Watchtower Society until at least 1922.

18. The Watchtower Society seems to prefer Matthew's account of this parable, perhaps because the possibility of two outcomes is less apparent. However the grammatical construction of Matthew's account and the use of "that slave" is exactly the same as in Luke's.
19. Jim Penton, in an editorial in *The Bible Examiner*, August 1981 says: "But the popes of Rome have not been the only ones to proclaim themselves our Lord's especial slave... So in our own day there are those who have gone so far as to claim that they are that 'faithful and discreet slave,' but, curiously, beat any of their spiritual brothers who do not recognize them as such. Too often men have looked for Christ's revelation from heaven on a specific date, and when he did not come as they expected, they have used their spiritual authority as supposed members of the 'faithful and discreet slave class' to strike out at others who have questioned both their misguided faith and their lack of discretion. Thus they have not really given their fellow slaves true spiritual food at the proper time; rather they have fed them the spiritual "junk food" of false prophecy. Equally significantly, when the master has delayed according to their speculations, like the "evil slave" of Matthew 24:48-51, they have become beaters of their fellow slaves."
20. The noted scholar Albert Barnes, on page 473 of Barnes' Notes on New Testament comments regarding the Jerusalem council: "This council has been usually appealed to as the authority for councils in the church, as a permanent arrangement; and especially as an authority for courts of appeal and control. But it establishes neither, and should be brought as an authority for neither... (3). There is not the slightest intimation that anything like permanency was to be attached to this council; or that it would be periodically or regularly repeated. It will prove, indeed, that when cases of difficulty occur... or when contentions arise, it will be proper to refer to Christian men for advice and direction. Such was the case here; and such a course is obviously proper... But the example of the apostles and elders should not be pleaded as making such assemblies of Divine right and authority, or as being essential to the existence of the church of God... Besides, it should never be forgotten - what, alas, it seems to have been the pleasure and the interests of ecclesiastics to forget - that neither the apostles nor elders asserted any jurisdiction over the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia; that they did not claim a right to have these cases referred to them; that they did not attempt to 'lord it' over their faithli

or their consciences. The case was a single, specific, definite question, referred to them; and they decided it as such.”

21. I believe that this question has some very serious implications for the Society and puts them in a theological dilemma. If the “faithful slave” did become unfaithful and have to be replaced, then it calls into question whether there ever was such a “faithful slave” down through all those centuries. (After all, the Society cannot seem to pinpoint any groups that they would characterize as being faithful enough to be worthy of that distinction.) If the faithful slave did not exist during these centuries, then it calls into question their interpretation of Jesus’ parable as applying to a “class” rather than an individual. If, on the other hand, they now teach that the slave did become unfaithful and had to be replaced, they will have to make a major change in their theology. It seems interesting that the Watchtower Society has the same problem with establishing the historical roots of its authority as does the Catholic Church. Just as the Catholic Church is unable to show a historical line of succession of its Popes back to Peter, so the Watchtower Society is unable to show a transition from the “faithful slave” of nineteen centuries to itself as the current representative of that “slave.”

