



Jehovah's Witnesses
- Reasons for Leaving
(and for not joining)

Russell Walker

I was raised as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and left the faith in 2010 at the age of 35. Several people have asked me my reasons. Some of those people did not really want to know, they just wanted to persuade me to return. Others genuinely wanted to understand why I left. I wrote this book for them, but having done so, decided to make it available to anyone who is interested. My purpose in doing so is not to cause offence, but to help people make an informed choice, and hopefully avoid making the same mistakes I did.

Included in this book are my thoughts on:

- Why I once believed JWs were right
- Why I left
- Why I would never go back
- What happened after I left
- Why it matters if JWs are wrong
- Logical fallacies and critical thinking
- JW handling of child abuse
- Dishonesty from the Governing Body
- Armageddon
- 1914
- The 144,000
- Blood transfusions
- Disfellowshipping
- Birthdays
- High control groups
- Evolution/Creation
- The Bible
- Appendix of quotes from Watchtower publications

Jehovah's Witnesses – Reasons for Leaving

(and for not Joining)

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Disclaimer: I have endeavoured to be as accurate as possible in everything I have written here, but of course it is possible that there might be mistakes. If so, these are unintentional. Where I use the term 'Watchtower Society', I am referring to the organization and leadership of Jehovah's Witnesses in all its guises (there are various legal entities used by the group, but for the purposes of this book, I refer to them all under the banner of the Watchtower). Please also bear in mind that this book is written in British English, so the spelling might be different to what you are used to!

Questions? Comments? Corrections? Hate Mail? Contact the author at leavingjws@gmail.com

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Preface

This book was originally written with certain individuals in mind, all of whom had some knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and organisational structure of Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs). Having now made the book available to a wider audience, who might not have such background knowledge, I will provide here a brief explanation of the history, beliefs, and workings of the religion. Feel free to skip this if you are already familiar with the JWs (although there is some information here that most JWs are unaware of).

History

Jehovah's Witnesses claim their origins back all the way to Abel in the Bible book of Genesis, but that is perhaps a bit of a stretch! The modern day organisation is credited with being started by Charles Taze Russell (CTR), with the publication of the first Watchtower magazine in Pennsylvania, USA, in 1879. The group founded by Russell referred to themselves simply as 'Bible Students', and in 1881, the Watchtower society was formed (the first president of the society was W H Conley – most JWs are unaware of that, and think that Charles Taze Russell was the first president – Russell took over as president in 1884 when the society was incorporated).

After the death of CTR in 1916, there was a power struggle, with Joseph "Judge" Rutherford controversially replacing those whom Russell had appointed to take over. This resulted in a schism, eventually leading to thousands defecting and forming their own groups. Some of those groups (and other later splinter groups) still exist today – such as the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement, Dawn Bible Students Association, Associated Bible Students, Bible Fellowship Union, and many others (again, most JWs are unaware of that).

It wasn't until 1931 that Rutherford decreed that the group should be known as "Jehovah's Witnesses", and this branch of the religion has become the most populous and the most well known.

The official line is that, disillusioned with mainstream Christianity, the early Bible Students sought to revert to a ‘pure’ form of Christianity, modelled on the first century. The teachings in the early days were very much centred around Armageddon and the second advent of Christ. From the 1920’s onwards, a strong focus has also been put on the preaching work, with every member of the religion being expected to preach from door to door and informally.

There were all sorts of weird and wonderful teachings and speculation during the first part of the twentieth century, with a rejection of vaccines and most of modern medicine (which was viewed as demonic), the expectation of rapture, Armageddon, and the imminent resurrection of Old Testament characters. There were lots of outrageous and dogmatic claims, but even so, people were not punished if they decided to leave the group – in fact, excommunication was initially seen as being unscriptural and pagan (more on that in the appendix).

As time went on though, those in charge felt an increased need for ‘unity’ of thought among members, and there was a corresponding increase in control over members’ lives. In the 1940’s blood transfusions were banned, and in the early 1950’s, the “disfellowshipping” arrangement was instituted – whereby members who were expelled for failing to follow the mandates of the religion were shunned by other JW’s. There was a slight relaxing of the shunning rules in the 1970’s, but it was short lived, and in the 1980’s, shunning was extended to those who have disassociated themselves from the religion (resigned), and anyone who associated with a disfellowshipped or disassociated person would themselves be disfellowshipped. To this day, those who resign from the religion or unrepentantly break the rules (eg. by smoking), are shunned completely by any JW who is not a relative living in the same house.

The society has at various times predicted the end of the world (not the planet itself, just the ‘system’) – based on Bible chronology, or in the early days, pyramidology. The year 1914 was originally calculated to be the year of Armageddon, and this was subsequently revised a few times. There were big expectations for 1925, then again for 1975. Since 1975, they have not explicitly stated any particular year, but they

did say that the end of the system was expected before the twentieth century ended, and they continue even now to declare that Armageddon is imminent.

The Watchtower society has always focussed heavily on printing magazines, books, and brochures (and sometimes Bibles). The main tool they use to publish interpretations of scripture and doctrinal matters, and to guide the members is the Watchtower magazine. In recent years, this has been split into two editions – a public edition, and a “study” edition (which is primarily designed for members). The Watchtower has long had a companion magazine, named Awake! (previously the Golden Age), which is lighter on Biblical references, often including articles about history and nature, with the intention of attracting the interest of those who are not so religiously inclined.

Organisation

Up until the early 1970’s, the president of the Watchtower society had the final say on all doctrinal matters and organisational policies, but since then a “Governing Body” has collectively led the religion (there are currently seven members of the Governing Body, but there have been more in the past). Most JWs are unaware of exactly how the Governing Body operates, but according to a former member of the Governing Body (Ray Franz), changes to doctrine are voted on, and require a two thirds majority to proceed (thus, there have been times when the majority of the Governing Body have believed that a teaching is wrong, but the teaching could not be changed, and even the leaders of the group have had to teach things that they believed to be untrue – more information about the inner workings of the Governing Body is available in the book *Crisis of Conscience* by Ray Franz).

Members of the Governing Body are at the head of the organisation, and are the ones who decide on policy matters and doctrine, and although they don’t take on titles like ‘Reverend’ or ‘Father’, they are still regarded with adulation by most of the members (all members refer to each other as ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’, regardless of rank). There are various ranks of ‘overseer’ (branch overseer, zone overseer, district overseer, circuit overseer), each of which has authority over a particular geographical area (many countries have a branch office

covering their country or several countries, that area is split into zones, zones are split into districts, districts into circuits, and circuits into congregations – at least, that was my understanding of it when I was a member).

Each branch office, as well as the main headquarters in New York, is known as a ‘bethel’ – Bethel being the name of a town in ancient Israel, which means ‘house of God’ (it was also a centre of false worship according to the Bible, so perhaps a slightly odd choice of name). Branch offices print and distribute literature to the congregations, translate literature, deal with legal matters, and answer questions from congregation members, among other things. People who work at bethel full time are known as ‘bethelites’, and they are volunteers who take a vow of poverty (so they are not allowed another job while they are at bethel). Accommodation, food, and a laundry service are all provided by bethelite volunteers, and bethelites receive a modest allowance for expenses, but they are not paid a salary (in fact, no JWs are paid a salary – there is no paid clergy). As far as I am aware, no individuals in the organisation are making themselves rich off donations – the organisation itself is very wealthy in that it owns a lot of high value real estate, but even the Governing Body members take a vow of poverty and are not materially wealthy (although they do wear expensive looking suits and jewellery).

A congregation has a ‘body of elders’, which can range from just two or three to a dozen or so men – women are not permitted to take on any position of oversight. Elders give talks and lead discussions based on Watchtower publications. Ministerial servants (also all men) are appointed to carry out most of the general administration tasks (such as minding the literature counter, controlling the microphones and sound system during meetings, and managing the congregation’s financial accounts).

A couple of times a year, the circuit overseer (CO) will visit each congregation, check up on how it is being run, give a few talks, and encourage everyone to do more ministry etc. The CO is treated as a VIP, and has the power to appoint or remove elders and ministerial servants from their positions. He can also arrange for congregations to

be split or merged, and is regarded as a direct representative of the society.

There used to be meetings three days a week, but this has now been reduced to two days, with members expected to hold a ‘family worship evening’ at home on another day. Meetings are usually held in purpose built ‘Kingdom Halls’. All congregations usually follow the same programme for all meetings. On Sundays there is a ‘public talk’ which is chosen from a set list of themes and is usually delivered by a visiting speaker from a neighbouring congregation. That is followed by the Watchtower study, which is a question and answer session based on an article in the study edition of the Watchtower. The ‘Theocratic Ministry School’ is a chance for those not in a position of responsibility to learn how to give talks, and practise different field ministry scenarios – even women are allowed to deliver assignments in the school, although they are not allowed to address the audience directly (they act out a scenario in pairs). Then there is the service meeting, which contains advice and instruction on carrying out the preaching work. There is also a ‘congregation Bible study’, which is a study of a Watchtower publication with a few scriptures thrown in.

Twice a year, all the congregations in a circuit will meet together for a circuit assembly (these gatherings usually number around 800 to 1,000 people). Prominent elders from the congregations in the circuit, as well as the circuit overseer and district overseer give talks, and individual members are invited to relate experiences they have had while preaching, or hardships they have faced and sacrifices they have made for the sake of the religion. These usually take place in purpose built assembly halls, but also sometimes in hired buildings, and last for one or two days.

Once a year there is a district convention, usually lasting three days (they used to be longer – four days when I was growing up, but before that they used to last a whole week or more). Most district conventions attract around eight to ten thousand delegates, but some are larger, with international conventions attracting an audience of a hundred thousand or more. These are usually held in hired sports stadia or exhibition centres.

When a person shows an interest in the Watchtower message, they are given a 'Bible study' – where a JW (male or female, usually to match the gender of the student) visits the person in their home each week and teaches them the basic doctrines using a Watchtower book designed for that purpose. There is a set procedure whereby a paragraph is read from a book out loud, then the study conductor asks the student a pre-printed question. The student is then expected to put the thoughts from the paragraph into their own words. One or two isolated Bible verses are then read to back up the point being made.

The student is encouraged to attend meetings, then to make comments in question and answer sessions at meetings (when meeting parts have audience participation, women are also allowed to make comments). Once a student has shown that they understand and believe the basic doctrines, they will typically join their Bible study conductor going door to door, just to observe. If the elders feel that the student qualifies, they can become an 'unbaptised publisher', meaning that they join in with the door to door ministry and turn in a report...

Every 'publisher', whether baptised or not, turns in a 'field service report' each month, indicating how many hours they have spent preaching, how many books and magazines they have distributed, and how many people they have made return visits to, or conducted Bible studies with. The report is used by the elders to monitor the 'spiritual health' of the flock, and the whole congregation's reports are combined to produce statistics that are sent to the branch office, and compiled into a yearly worldwide report. Turning in a report with less than the average number of hours on it, or few return visits or literature placements recorded is a source of embarrassment to some (individual reports are not made public, but the elders and some ministerial servants see them).

After some months as an unbaptised publisher, a person can ask to be baptised (children of JWs are expected to reach this stage during their mid teens, and there is often some pressure applied on them to do so). Baptism is ostensibly an outward representation of a person's personal dedication to God, however, they also have to publicly pledge allegiance to the JW organisation (more on that in the appendix). When a person wishes to get baptised, they meet with two or three

elders and go through a series of questions, over several sessions, which are designed to make sure the person understands the main doctrines and truly believes that JW's are God's chosen organisation. If the elders agree, the person can be baptised (fully immersed) at the next circuit or district assembly.

Baptism is the point of no return. Once a person is baptised, they cannot leave without running the risk of being shunned. A person who was never baptised cannot be disfellowshipped, and therefore will not usually be shunned if they leave. If a baptised person leaves quietly, and it does not become known to the elders that they have broken any Watchtower rules, they can 'fade', and become 'inactive'. They are regarded as being a lapsed member, and are not shunned. If the person manages to avoid being disfellowshipped for two or three years, they can usually then start to be more open about celebrating Christmas, voting, etc. and the elders will usually leave them alone then (not always though, and some have been disfellowshipped even after many years of having no contact with the religion). Fading is not easy though, as when elders suspect a person no longer believes, they will often try to find a pretext to have them disfellowshipped (ex-JW's are seen to pose an enormous risk to the flock).

There are various types of rules that govern the lives of JW's. Actions which are regarded by the faith as 'serious sins' will result in a judicial hearing and potentially disfellowshipping (more about that later). There are other 'sins' that are considered less serious, but can still result in sanctions – such as being demoted, or having 'privileges' removed (eg. not being allowed to comment in question and answer sessions at meetings). For example, I knew an elder who was demoted because he attended the wedding of his daughter to an unbeliever. A person can also be 'marked' – meaning that other JW's will avoid associating with that person socially, but will still talk to them at meetings and on the ministry (this might happen if you actually marry an unbeliever, or if you are male and grow your hair long, or it becomes known that you visit night clubs, etc.).

Some rules are not explicitly stated, but are culturally enforced, and these can vary from place to place. In the US and much of Europe for example, beards are not allowed. A JW who grows a beard is viewed

with suspicion, and is unlikely to be allowed to give talks or public prayers (but for some reason moustaches are OK!). In a few countries though, beards are acceptable. Sometimes these rules can vary by town or even by congregation – such as whether suit jackets must be worn when giving talks or performing any official task for the congregation.

Once a person is baptised, various ‘privileges of service’ become available to them. All members are encouraged to become ‘pioneers’ (only a minority if JW’s actually do though). A pioneer commits to spending a set number of hours preaching each month. An auxiliary pioneer just commits to one month at a time (typically people who work full time will take time off work to auxiliary pioneer during the summer, and baptised children are encouraged to auxiliary pioneer during school holidays). Regular pioneers commit to a year at a time, and usually work secularly part-time. “Special pioneers” commit to even more hours, and it is literally a full-time occupation for them (like bethelites, special pioneers receive a modest monetary allowance from the organisation) – some special pioneers attend a missionary training school known as ‘Gilead’, and are sent to different countries around the world. Pioneering is one of the few ‘privileges’ open to women, and is seen as indicating ‘spiritual strength’. Pioneers get a special book, and are invited to a meeting with the circuit overseer when he visits.

In the last few years (since I left), the society has undergone a rebranding exercise, launching a new website, and their own TV channel. There are copious amounts of merchandise featuring the JW.org logo, although this is not officially sanctioned – it is just made by JW entrepreneurs (they have not been told to stop doing it as yet though, so one can only assume that the Governing Body approves). Members of the Governing Body, who used to remain behind the scenes, are now making public appearances on the JW TV channel. There are CGI cartoons for kids, and even music videos. It all looks a lot different to the religion I left, but underneath all the marketing things don’t seem to have changed much.

Beliefs

Here is a summary of the main beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses – of course there are many more beliefs than these, which, taken together, constitute what JW's refer to as "the Truth", but a basic summary of the main tenets will suffice here.

There exists a supreme being, God, who had no beginning, but has existed for an infinite amount of time. God has a name: Jehovah. It is acknowledged that the name Jehovah is not an accurate representation of how the divine name would have been pronounced in Bible times, but use of the name is nevertheless regarded as being essential.

The first and only thing created directly by God was another spirit creature, who later became known as Jesus. Jesus and God are two separate and distinct individuals (JW's do not accept the doctrine of the Trinity). Holy spirit is an impersonal force used by God to carry out his will.

All of the rest of creation is said to have been 'by God' but 'through Jesus' – with God as the architect, and Jesus as the 'master worker' who did the actual creating (but Jesus is not usually credited directly, they just refer to God as the creator). God created the universe billions of years ago. He also created the earth (again, billions of years ago), and later created life – starting with plants, then animals and birds, and finally two humans: Adam and Eve (who were created a little over 6,000 years ago). The account of creation in the Bible book of Genesis is taken literally (including the garden of Eden, tree of knowledge, forbidden fruit, talking snake – all of that is completely literal, not allegorical to JW's). The fact that there is ample evidence that humans have existed for longer than 6,000 years is dismissed due to Noah's flood (taken as a literal, global event), which is said to have interfered with radiometric dating methods, rendering them inaccurate.

As well as the physical creation, God, through Jesus, created innumerable spirit creatures of different types (angels, cherubs, seraphim, and possibly others). One of those angels became jealous of the worship being given to God and turned against him, becoming Satan the devil. Satan is regarded as a real spirit person, who attempts

to stop people from worshipping God. He has hordes of other fallen angels on his side, known as demons. Satan and the demons are directly influencing matters on the earth, can possess people, animals, and objects, and are always trying to subvert the faith of JW's. Demons are used to explain why people see ghosts, why ouija boards work (no need for the ideomotor effect!), and it is believed that they can assist people to perform real magic, clairvoyance, etc. People who leave the JW's and criticise the religion are regarded as being controlled by Satan and the demons, as are the world's governments and all of 'false religion'.

Satan seduced Eve (via a snake) into eating the forbidden fruit. Eve then persuaded Adam to do the same, and this forbidden fruit eating was literally the first 'sin' (nothing to do with sex, it was just eating fruit). As Adam and Eve didn't have any children until after they sinned, the whole human race inherited imperfection and a tendency to sin (whether or not this tendency is literally inherited via the genes is not clear). Rather than forgive them (which would not be 'perfect justice'), or kill them and start over (which might have upset the angels watching), God condemned the entire human race to death (since that is 'perfect justice'). Each human's death pays for his or her own sins, thus nobody can pay for anyone else's sins, since nobody is perfect.

Being merciful, God decided to 'save' the human race from their inherited sin and death by sending Jesus to earth to become a perfect man, and to die. Jesus was turned into a literal human, and was killed, thereby being completely non-existent for parts of three days (Jehovah still existed though, as he is a separate person). In this way, Jesus paid the price of death so that humans wouldn't have to. Jesus was then resurrected by Jehovah as a spirit being. The 'value' of that sacrifice has not yet been applied to humans though – that happens later. In the meantime, we all suffer, grow old, and die because we are all sinners.

Old Testament narratives are taken literally, with the nation of Israel as God's chosen people, and their pillaging and plundering of surrounding nations being the divinely approved execution of God's judgement on wickedness until Jesus came to earth and replaced the Jewish system with the Christian one. The books containing

prophecies and visions are taken as symbolic in places, with the Watchtower's unique interpretations undergoing development over the years.

The Watchtower teaches that in 1914, Jesus' second presence began, invisibly, in heaven. In that year, Jesus became king of God's kingdom and threw Satan out of heaven (Satan and the demons now roam the earth). A few years later, Jesus inspected all the religions of the world, and chose the Bible Students to be the earthly representatives of God's kingdom, based on the fact that only that group were diligently and sincerely studying the Bible and ridding themselves of the 'false doctrines' of 'apostate' Christendom (such as the trinity, and immortality of the soul). Jehovah and Jesus have been guiding and directing the organisation since then, and gradually revealing 'new light' of understanding (this 'new light' doctrine is used to explain why they got so many things wrong in the past – a correct understanding is gradually revealed by God when he judges that they are ready for it).

The Bible's account of Job is used to explain why God has allowed humans to suffer for so long – Satan made a challenge that humans only serve God for selfish reasons and that if left to their own devices, humans could do fine without God. To prove Satan wrong, God had to allow humans to do their own thing without divine intervention (except for biblical miracles here and there when necessary), and reach the peak of their political and scientific achievements. That time period is nearly finished, and God is about to bring about a Great Tribulation, culminating in Armageddon.

There is an expected sequence of events leading up to Armageddon and beyond. First there will be a 'cry of peace and security' from the world's governments (they think maybe this has already happened), then the governments via the United Nations will turn on and destroy 'false religion' – with only Jehovah's Witnesses remaining. As the world turns its attention to destroying JW's, Jesus will come along and kill everyone except the faithful JW's, and will throw Satan and his demons into an abyss. JW's will survive into a new system and will gradually convert the whole earth into a paradise. They will also gradually be made perfect, never get sick, or grow old. Everyone who died before Armageddon will be resurrected, including those who were

never JWs (so if you die without becoming a JW before Armageddon, you get a resurrection, but if you are still around when it breaks out, and have rejected JW preaching, you get judged and killed immediately). After 1,000 years, everything will be perfect again, and Satan will be released from the abyss to give mankind a 'final test'. Any who follow Satan will then be killed, along with Satan and the demons, and perfect humans will then live forever in peace. Humans are not immortal though, even after the final test, and must remain obedient to God who sustains their life indefinitely as long as they are faithful.

Not all humans live forever on earth though. There are 144,000 chosen ones who go to heaven to rule over the earth with Jesus (these ones become higher in rank than the angels, and become immortal). This group is known as the 'anointed' or the 'little flock' (little compared to the 'great crowd' of 'other sheep' who will survive Armageddon). Anointed ones 'just know' they are anointed, and have the hope of living in heaven. The anointed comprise all 'true' Christians from the first century CE up until the early twentieth century, with just a few additional spaces being reserved until now – the end of the 'last days' (all other JWs from the 1930's onward belong to the 'other sheep' class – i.e. they have the hope of living forever on earth, not in heaven). In order to be a member of the Governing Body, a person must be one of the anointed. When an anointed person dies, they go straight to heaven (those who are not anointed stay dead and completely unconscious until after Armageddon, at which point they are resurrected into the paradise). Anointed ones are the only ones who partake of the bread and wine emblems at the annual memorial of Jesus' death (JW equivalent of the Eucharist). The number of people claiming to be anointed held steady at about 8,500 for quite a long time but around 2006 the numbers started growing – about 14,000 people currently claim to be anointed.

Terminology

JWs have their own special definition of certain words and phrases, and a sentence can sometimes mean something completely different to a JW than it would to anyone else. For example, if a JW said that they were “out in the field, looking for sheep”, there would not be any grass or ovine creatures involved! So here is a little glossary:

Anointed: The group of chosen ones who go to heaven when they die, limited in number to 144,000.

Apostate: A person who works directly against the organisation and tries to lure JWs away to become their followers or to follow Satan. Apostates are all liars, they want to deceive JWs, and harm God’s organisation. They don’t care about people. They are thoroughly wicked, guided by Satan, and fully deserving of death. JWs should never even look at anything produced by an apostate, never speak to them or listen to them – they must reject anything apostate immediately. Apostate teachings are like faith destroying gangrene. Technically, anyone who once believed that the Watchtower was God’s organisation but no longer does so, is classed as an apostate, although many JWs believe that the label only applies to those who speak out against the organisation. If an allegation of wrongdoing is made (for example, a child abuse scandal), JWs will immediately become suspicious that an apostate is making false allegations – if they become aware that a former JW is involved in the allegation (which they usually are, as faithful JWs are more likely to just keep quiet, and those that don’t often become ex-JWs when the way they are treated wakes them up to reality), the JW then feels justified in completely dismissing the allegation without considering any further evidence.

Bible Study: A question and answer review of a Watchtower publication with isolated scriptural references. Also used to describe a person who is having a study (e.g. “This is John, he is my Bible study.”), although they do use the word ‘student’ as well.

Faithful and Discreet Slave: This was once used to refer to the anointed as a whole, but now it refers exclusively to the Governing Body.

Field Service/The Field: The preaching ministry.

Goats: People who reject JW teachings and are judged by Jesus as deserving of death (the judging has not happened yet though, so nobody is explicitly identified as a goat).

Great Crowd: Members of the ‘other sheep’ class (see below) who are alive at the time Armageddon arrives and survive into the new system.

Little Flock: Another name for the anointed.

Other Sheep: All those faithful JWs who are not members of the anointed (whether living or dead). This includes the characters from the Old Testament who are regarded as faithful.

Placement: When JW literature is left with householders in the ministry, they refer to it as having been ‘placed’.

Publisher: A person who preaches to others and reports their activity to their local congregation. Permission is needed from the congregation elders to become a publisher. Becoming a publisher is a stepping stone to baptism (but a person is still known as a publisher after they are baptised). To be counted as a JW, a person must be a publisher (but they don’t have to be baptised to be counted).

Remnant: Those of the anointed who are still on earth (have not yet died and gone to heaven). A remnant are expected to still be around when Armageddon arrives.

Sheep: People who are receptive to JW preaching.

Spiritual/Spirituality: A measure of how well a person follows the religion. A person is regarded as ‘spiritual’ if they answer up a lot at meetings, spend a lot of time on the ministry, generally obsess about the religion, and especially if they underline and make marginal notes in their Watchtower magazine (although I understand this is now usually done on a tablet rather than a paper magazine).

Spiritual Food: Watchtower literature and talks.

Territory: A section of a map, usually a street or two, used to organise door-to-door preaching assignments. Can also refer to the boundaries of a geographical area covered by a congregation.

Theocratic: Anything directly related to the religion can be referred to as theocratic (as opposed to things that are secular or social). All Watchtower publications are theocratic, any activity that furthers the aims of the religion is theocratic, elders are appointed theocratically, etc.

The Truth: This is how JW's refer to their religion among themselves. It represents the whole body of teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, as expressed in Watchtower publications. Truth can change though – new doctrines are often referred to as 'new truths', and JW's would understand the phrase 'lying for the truth' without regarding it as an oxymoron (I'm not saying here that they openly advocate lying, just that the word truth holds a different meaning for them). If a person is a JW, they are said to be 'in the truth'. This terminology of course has a psychological effect on how the person views Watchtower teachings.

The World: Everyone who isn't a JW.

Worldly: Having characteristics that are not in harmony with JW standards, or things that relate to non-JW's.

Introduction

Key Facts:

- I did not write this book for my own benefit, but to answer other people's questions about why I left the Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs).
- I have nothing against individual JWs, but I do think the leaders of the religion are reprehensible and the religion contains dangers which are not immediately obvious.
- Well-known psychological factors often limit people's ability to evaluate the religion rationally. To do so requires making an effort to be intellectually honest – avoiding bias and examining the evidence logically, not emotionally.

Several people have asked me for more information on why I left Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) in 2010, or why I think they do not teach the truth. This is not something I can answer simply in a few sentences, since there are many factors involved. It generally takes at least several months (often more than a year) of weekly visits and personal reading before a person can be persuaded to join the religion – debunking one or two points would not be sufficient to persuade someone that those beliefs are wrong. So if someone really wants to understand why I reject Watchtower teachings, it will require some time and effort, and additional research of their own.

I must stress that seeking further information from reputable sources is essential to fairly evaluate the religion (I don't mean just ex-JW books, but also books by scholars and scientists – reputable, well-educated authors). One man's book is not going to cut it against the corporate might of a well-funded international religious organisation's literature!

I am not writing this account for my own benefit, and am making no profit from it – I would rather forget about the Watchtower and never have to think about it again! But when I see people I care about being persuaded and conned into believing things that I know to be untrue, and they even *ask* me for information, I feel an obligation to provide an explanation. It is my hope that writing down my explanation for why I left will satisfy those who are curious, and that by making it available as a book, it may also provide an alternative point of view for a wider audience.

At the time of writing, I have not been ‘disfellowshipped’ (more on that later), and it is possible that just by publishing my thoughts about the religion, I could be disfellowshipped for apostasy and shunned by some of my own family members. However, I feel a moral and ethical obligation to speak up, even in the face of what amounts to bullying.

It is not practical for me to go into great detail about every point I raise here, but I will try to provide evidence and references to the extent possible. I have repeated information in some places where I felt it was relevant to do so – this is to make it easier to follow what is being said when a passage is read in isolation.

I must also stress that I bear no ill feeling or grudges against any individual members of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Some of the people nearest and dearest to me are members of the religion. Having been a devout member myself for most of the first 35 years of my life, I am hardly in a position to criticise others for their beliefs. I do now criticise the beliefs themselves, but not the people who hold them.

However, as for the leadership, and in particular, the Governing Body (who have the final say on what is printed in Watchtower publications, including all doctrinal and procedural matters), I view them as being reprehensible (mainly due to the fact that I put my complete trust in them, and feel betrayed by their dishonesty, but for other reasons too).

Even so, I don’t think the leaders are motivated by malice – I think it is likely that for the most part they genuinely believe that what they are doing is right (or at least are able to convince themselves that what they are doing is right despite some rather obvious evidence to the

contrary). Being in a position of leadership does bring accountability though, and good intentions are not an adequate excuse for poor behaviour. After all, suicide bombers likely believe they are doing the right thing, but that does not excuse their actions!

The Watchtower society offers hope and a feeling of security to believers. It offers answers to the questions that people have struggled with for thousands of years. The hope is vain, the security false, and the answers just plain wrong, but if you don't think about it too deeply, and don't do any background fact checking, it is easy and attractive to accept the reasoning and explanations offered.

When you come across evidence that contradicts those teachings, it invokes a feeling of discomfort known as cognitive dissonance – disrupting a view of the world that your mind has come to accept. The natural response to such feelings is to either dismiss the evidence without giving it due consideration, or to rationalise it so that you can hold two conflicting opinions simultaneously. Only when a considerable number of these conflicts accumulate, will a person consider changing their view (and some can tolerate a higher level of cognitive dissonance than others). I will elaborate on that a little more later.

Confirmation bias also has a role to play – we tend to filter out information that doesn't fit with our view, and only take on board information that supports our existing position. When considering information that will have an enormous impact on our life, it is in our own best interests to put extra effort into really trying to understand both sides of the story (and I don't exclude myself from that).

Similarly, cognitive ease allows us to accept something as true simply because it seems to make sense and fit with what we already believe, or with the picture we are building up in our mind – even if there is little or no evidence to support it. Being brutally honest with ourselves about how much of what we believe is based on verifiable evidence can be uncomfortable, so there is a tendency to avoid it, especially when it comes to matters that have an emotional element – such as religion.

Nevertheless, I hope you can read the following with an open mind, and try to view the evidence as objectively as possible. If you were about to buy a car, you would carefully weigh up not only what the manufacturer says, but also what experts, critics, owners, and former owners say about it. Given the effect religious belief has on people's lives and behaviours, I believe that understanding things as they really are (or as close as we can get to that) is worth the temporary discomfort that being intellectually honest entails.

1. Does it matter if JW's are wrong?

Key Facts:

- JW teachings initially appear to be attractive and harmless.
- It matters whether or not JW's constitute the one true religion because of the demands made by the JW way of life.
- Higher education is discouraged, families can be torn apart by the shunning policy, lives are lost due to refusal of certain medical treatments, great opportunities in life are passed up, and adherents are expected to devote their life to the cause.

“Even if it’s not the truth, it’s still the best way of life” is a common motto among JW's. This is a thought stopper (a type of logical fallacy, which I will come to later), used to justify sticking with the faith despite the fact that it has some obvious flaws. But is it true?

On the surface, it appears as though most of the beliefs of JW's are harmless, and offer nothing but comfort and hope. Living forever in perfect health on a paradise earth, our dead loved ones being resurrected, everyone living in harmony and happiness – these are all very attractive teachings. Along with those attractive beliefs, you are treated to personal attention (at least while you are studying – after baptism, not so much), instant friends, and a feeling of belonging to a global brotherhood. On the other hand, lack of belief appears to offer no hope for the future, a short, often painful existence, followed by an eternity of nothingness. For many people, that is a very unattractive prospect! So if believing what you want to be true helps you to cope with life, does it really matter if turns out to be wrong? Is it better to risk living with a delusion than to live without the hope of something better after we die?

If the JW's are *not* God's chosen organisation, then the hope they offer (resurrection and everlasting life in paradise) will never be realised – which means inevitable disappointment. It also means your life choices are not necessarily the best ones you could make (especially if you are still relatively young). JW's are encouraged to devote nearly all of their available time and energy to the interests of the religion. They reason that in the 'new system', they will be able to pursue other interests, so are effectively encouraged to *put their life on hold* while serving the interests of the organisation.

Higher education and careers are dismissed as worthless¹. Family members who leave the faith are shunned, which often has lasting repercussions. The sincerely held, but flawed belief that any serious problems in the organisation will be revealed by Jehovah (God) allows serious wrongdoing to continue uncorrected for decades (such as domestic violence and paedophilia). Members give up having friends outside the organisation, they give up celebrations, turn down career opportunities, and devote inordinate amounts of time to the Watchtower organisation.

If JW's are wrong and you ever need a life-saving blood transfusion, you would happily give up your one fragile life (or worse, that of your child) for nothing. If you have kids, and one of them pursues normal social and sexual development, you may have to shun them forever. If JW's are wrong, these behaviours would not only be unnecessary, but immoral, and inexcusable.

Spending your life spreading untruth is not the best way of life.

In addition, the further into the religion you go, the harder it is to leave. If someone says they want to stop their studies, they are usually somewhat pressured to carry on. If they have been attending meetings, and then stop going, they will typically get a number of enquiries and be strongly encouraged to return. If they are baptised, there is literally no dignified way of leaving the faith, and there is a very high risk that

1 See Watchtower 2012 Jun 15 p.23; Watchtower 2011 Nov 15 pp.19,24; Kingdom Ministry 2011 Oct p.3; Watchtower 2011 Jun 15 p.6; Watchtower 2011 Jun 15 pp.30,31 – and there are many other examples of higher education being discouraged.

they will be shunned forever even by close friends and family if they stop practising the religion and resume a normal life (for example, they would be disfellowshipped if it became known to the elders that they had attended another church, or celebrated Christmas).²

Those (like me), who have made the transition from belief to non-belief, are often surprised that the adjustment to the prospect that they will not live forever is not as devastating as they thought it would be. In fact, many of us unbelievers feel we have gained far more than we have lost by letting go of supernatural beliefs. When I was a believer, my assumption, and firm conviction, was that non-belief would render my life completely meaningless. I now feel that the exact opposite is true.

In any case, rejecting beliefs that can be shown to be deeply flawed does not mean that one has to reject all religious belief. Many who leave the JW's continue to have a religious faith, and can still find comfort in the beliefs that they choose to hold. Turning your back on the man-made Watchtower organisation is not the same as turning your back on God, the Bible, or Christianity.

2 It is possible in some cases to 'fade' from the religion without being disfellowshipped, if you can keep off the Elders' "radar". I only just managed this myself – more details on that later.

2. *Logical Fallacies and Critical Thinking*

Key Facts:

- It is very easy to fall into the trap of using faulty logic.
- Many JW teachings rely on demonstrably faulty logic.
- JWs are explicitly taught not to think critically.
- Learning how to spot faulty logic can help a person evaluate how much of any particular claim or argument is actually supported by the evidence, and to avoid committing common mistakes when formulating their beliefs.

Before going any further, I think it is worth discussing critical thinking and logical fallacies. I already mentioned one logical fallacy (thought-stopping clichés), but there are many different ones, and they are very commonly used by Jehovah’s Witnesses. I was not really aware of them until after I left (and started trying to understand why and how I had missed some fairly obvious travesties of logic for so many years). I will try to keep it as simple as possible, but some of these might require a bit of thought. After a while, it becomes easier to recognise them, and you might even find that they jump out at you.

A logical fallacy (or ‘non-sequitur’) is an argument that may seem on the surface to support a certain view, but that does not actually support it. The Latin term, ‘non-sequitur’ means ‘it does not follow’ – the conclusion reached does not follow logically from the argument given (even though it might seem to). Using a logical fallacy does not *always* mean that the conclusion is wrong (although it often is), it just means that the argument, reasoning, or evidence used to reach the conclusion is not logically valid, and it is therefore impossible to have confidence in the conclusion (unless you can come up with a better argument to support it).

Critical thinking does not mean finding fault with everything. It means learning how to identify and avoid logical fallacies and evaluate the evidence for a claim objectively and rationally. There are lots of logical fallacies, and it is VERY easy to accidentally fall into the trap of using them to formulate or support our beliefs. If someone warns you *against* critical thinking, that should set off alarm bells! Here are some examples of common logical fallacies:

False Dichotomy

This is where someone makes an either/or statement despite the fact that there may be other options. If someone says “if you are not for us, you are against us”, that is a false dichotomy, since it is possible to be neither for nor against them.

Argument from Ignorance

Where a statement is asserted as true simply because it has not been proven false, or because the person making the assertion cannot think of any other explanation (a closely related one is the ‘argument from silence’ where the claim is asserted as true because nobody has offered any counter-argument).

Ad Hominem

This fallacy is very commonly used – where an argument is countered by attacking or questioning the person making a claim rather than addressing the argument itself.

Begging the Question, or Circular Reasoning

This is where a particular conclusion is assumed to be true when raising a question, or where the premises of an argument are dependent on the conclusion being true, and therefore, whilst possibly logical, do not actually support the conclusion. Here is a classic example of circular reasoning, from the Watchtower publication “The Bible – God’s Word or Man’s?” (chapter 6, page 86, paragraph 34):

Thus, the fact that the Bible tells of miracles is no reason to doubt its truthfulness. Rather, the fact that miracles did happen in Bible times is a powerful proof that the Bible really is the Word of God.

Here, the conclusion is that the Bible is trustworthy and authored by God. The evidence to support that conclusion is that it tells us that miracles happened, and miracles can only be performed by God. But this evidence is entirely dependent on the Bible having been written by God, and being trustworthy – which is the conclusion. Whilst perhaps internally logical, the argument is circular and therefore completely invalid.

Thought-stopping Clichés

These are little sayings that prevent you from having to think further about a problem or follow it to its obvious conclusion. Examples used by JWs include “Even if it isn’t the truth, it is still the best way of life” (as discussed earlier), “They’re just imperfect men” (when excusing the errors and injustices committed by those in charge), and “Wait on Jehovah” (when you can see something wrong and unscriptural is going on, but nobody is doing anything about it, or if a teaching is flawed or makes no sense – to stop you questioning further).

Shifting the Burden of Proof

Where a person says that they do not need to prove their claim is true, but that others should prove it is false. For example: “nobody can prove that fairies do not exist” is not a logical argument in favour of the existence of fairies, as the burden of proof rests with the one making the claim, not the one rejecting it.

Straw Man

Where a person misrepresents their opponent’s argument, then argues against their made-up, inaccurate version of it. Often this is done unintentionally – the perpetrator does not understand their opponent’s argument properly, so they argue against something that was not being claimed in the first place. Other times it is just easier to address a similar-sounding idea and hope that nobody notices, or that the listener

accepts the inaccurate representation (the ‘straw man’) as the genuine argument.

Appeal to Authority

When a claim is made based on the comments of an authority on the subject, but the source is not a legitimate expert on the topic at hand, or their conclusions are in direct opposition to other expert consensus. Here is an example from the *Awake!* magazine of 22nd May 1994, page 21:

Scientist Francis Hitching in his book The Neck of the Giraffe writes: “When you look for links between major groups of animals, they simply aren’t there.”

Francis Hitching is a British author, journalist and film-maker. He is also a parapsychologist and a dowser – not a scientist by any definition of the word, and his conclusions on the matter of evolution are certainly in direct opposition to other expert consensus.

Argumentum Verboisium

Also known as Proof by Intimidation, or Proof by Verbosity. It refers to an argument that is so complex, long-winded, full of jargon, or poorly presented that you are obliged to accept it, simply to avoid having to unravel the minute details. It is surprisingly easy to fall prey to this fallacy, especially if you trust the person who is making the argument (in many cases, the person making the verbose argument does not really understand the issue properly themselves).

Post hoc (ergo propter hoc)

Where one event follows from another event, and the assumption is made that the first event was the cause of the second simply because it preceded it. The Latin term literally means “after this, therefore because of this”. For example, if someone does a dance and then it rains, to assume that their dance caused the rain would be a post hoc fallacy. This fallacy is very commonly used in all manner of superstitions (including prayer).

Argument from Personal Incredulity

Where a person denies or rejects an argument simply because they cannot accept or understand how it could be true. For example, if someone claims that the ancient Egyptians must have had help from extra-terrestrials to build the pyramids simply because it seems too difficult for them to have done it themselves. Another example would be if a person leaves the JW's, and a JW then claims that the person "knows it's the truth", even if the person who leaves really does not believe it any more.

No true Scotsman

Where the definition of a word, phrase, or concept is made unreasonably narrow, in order to exclude evidence that contradicts the argument. The typical example of this is where a person makes the claim that "no Scotsman puts sugar on his porridge". When presented with evidence that some Scottish men do indeed put sugar on their porridge, the claim is adjusted to "no *true* Scotsman puts sugar on his porridge". The definition of a Scotsman is thereby illegitimately narrowed down so as to exclude all those Scotsmen who prove the claim wrong. JW's use this fallacy to support their doctrine of the 144,000, which we will look at later.

Special Pleading

Where a person claims, but does not adequately demonstrate, that their argument is a special case and does not need to comply with previously set criteria or rules of logic. For example, if someone claims that the Bible is the ultimate and only authority on morality, but does not agree that human slavery is morally acceptable, they are using special pleading to break their own rule.

3. Why I once believed that JW's were right

Key Facts:

- Despite a period of doubt and questioning, logical fallacies and confirmation bias eventually led me to accept the JW teachings I had been brought up with.
- I worked hard and became very involved in JW activities – I was a true believer.

Although I was raised as a JW, when I was about 16, I started to seriously question what I had been taught, and for a little while (probably only a few months) I became an atheist. Then my parents made me have a 'Bible study' (which didn't actually use the Bible much), with another JW.

The book that we studied was "Life – How did it get here? By Evolution or by Creation?" (the logical fallacies in the title will be dealt with later). I found the lines of reasoning in that book very convincing – but I did not know then what a logical fallacy was, nor did I even think to question whether the writers of the book were being honest (I just assumed that the Governing Body were always honest, since they tell us that we must be honest in everything).

Having been persuaded that God exists, I then studied the book "The Bible – God's word or man's?" on my own, and at that point I was a lot more receptive to the notion that it was true, and so the book basically just 'confirmed' that there were logical reasons for believing it was right (confirmation bias at work).

Following that, I watched (over and over again), the video "Jehovah's Witnesses – The Organization Behind the Name" – which touched me on some level and I became convinced that it was the one true religion. After all, JW's were the only ones following the Bible to the letter,

fulfilling the commission to preach, remaining separate from the world, using God's name, etc. It all seemed to make sense (thus giving me a feeling of cognitive ease). I got baptised when I was 18 (which was quite late by JW standards – I had been pressured to get baptised for the previous two years or so), auxiliary pioneered³ on and off for a couple of years, then became a ministerial servant⁴.

My wife and I joined the Portuguese group in 2001⁵, and I gave public talks⁶ in Portuguese and English. I'm sure I would have been made an elder if it wasn't for the depression that resulted from my doubts...

3 Auxiliary pioneering is where a person commits to spending a prescribed number of hours each month in preaching activity. At the time I did it, the requirement was at least 60 hours per month.

4 A ministerial servant is the JW equivalent of a Deacon – dealing with administrative tasks and limited teaching roles in preparation for becoming an elder.

5 A group of JWs who volunteered to learn Portuguese so as to preach to the increasing local Portuguese community.

6 Public talks are sermons to which the general public are invited. They are usually delivered by elders, but occasionally experienced ministerial servants are allowed to give a public talk, as part of their preparation to become an elder. At the time I was giving them, they were 45 minutes long – they were later reduced to 30 minutes.

4. Why I left the JW's

Key Facts:

- When doubts arose, I kept them suppressed for many years by keeping busy.
- The constant predictions of an imminent Armageddon began to ring hollow and I finally decided to be honest with myself and admit that I did not believe the world was about to end.

To start with, I was totally convinced that JW's were right. Around 1999 though, I started having doubts, as it seemed to me that my prayers were not being answered, and that even though I was trying my best to do things "Jehovah's way", it was not turning out very well. That was one of the reasons I wanted to join the Portuguese group – it gave me something to focus on and get busy with, which helped me suppress my doubts. Keeping busy is a very effective way of suppressing doubts, since you don't have time to address them, or even think about them too deeply.

By 2004, the doubts were still hovering, and I decided to write a document to lay out in full all of the things I believed and why I believed them. This project lasted several years, as I kept coming back to try and bolster my ever-fading faith. I worked very hard to overcome the doubts, studied hard, worked hard at assignments, prayed a lot, attended all the meetings, etc.

After a while the doubts were becoming a serious problem – I was depressed a lot of the time, and couldn't find enough evidence to conclusively prove that I was in the right religion, or that the Bible was true, or that God even exists. Unwilling to give up my faith without a fight, and believing that perhaps Satan was trying to pull me away from "the truth", I asked the elders for help. They told me to

keep praying, keep studying, keep going to meetings, and keep going on the ministry. So I did.

After a couple of years of this, I was on the ministry with an elder, and he went up to a man who was working on his car and said “the world is going to end you know!” – at that moment I almost wished it would end right there and then, I was so embarrassed and felt like a complete fool. I never went on the ministry again after that.

As soon as I admitted to myself that I no longer believed, my depression lifted, and I started being able to think more clearly. At that point, I was not in any way ‘opposed’ to the JW’s, I thought they were sincere, kind, and well-meaning (as I still do), and I respected their beliefs (which I no longer do), but just could not muster up enough conviction to actually believe that their eschatology (prediction that the world as we know it is about to end) was correct. I was still unsure on the existence of God, and still thought that the theory of evolution was an inadequate explanation for life.

5. *Why I would never go back*

Key Facts:

- There are many reasons why the Watchtower Society's claim to be God's chosen organisation does not stack up.
- Despite claiming to be candid, the Watchtower Society goes to some lengths to prevent members from finding out about issues that could undermine its authority and power.
- The Watchtower Society has proven itself to be dishonest, hubristic, controlling, deluded, hypocritical, and harmful to its members.

The last meeting I attended was on 18th April 2010 (the 'special talk' of that year). After I stopped going to meetings, I was no longer afraid of "apostates", so I started checking what they had to say. I had been led to believe that they were disgruntled former members who had an axe to grind against the organisation because they were not allowed to get away with wrongdoing, or because they were haughty and wanted followers for themselves. I had been told that they would seize on small issues and blow them out of proportion, twisting the facts, lying, complaining, and attempting to deceive people⁷.

7 Watchtower 2011 Jul 15, p.11: "*Apostates use "counterfeit words." This means that they say things that make their false ideas sound true... They try to get as many people as possible to believe their "deceptive teachings." ... They explain Bible verses in the wrong way to make others believe their ideas. (2 Peter 2:1, 3, 13; 3:16) Apostates do not care about us. If we follow them, we will leave the road to everlasting life. ... The Bible says that apostates are mentally diseased and that they use their teachings to make others think like them. (1 Timothy 6:3, 4) Jehovah is like that good doctor. He clearly tells us to stay away from false teachers. ... We do not speak to them or invite them into our houses. We also do not read their books, watch them on television, read what they write on the Internet, or add our own comments about what they write on the Internet.*"

I discovered this was not true. Apostates are simply people who have left the organisation. Aside from the occasional conspiracy theorist or religious enthusiast, they are just normal people. They don't need to blow issues out of proportion because there are already plenty of serious issues that the majority of members know nothing about. They don't need to twist the facts, lie, or deceive, because you can do independent research to verify what they say. The reason they expose the faults of the organisation has nothing to do with drawing followers after themselves – it is about rescuing people (including their relatives) from the clutches of what they see as a high control group. As a naturally sceptical person, I would not believe what an 'apostate' said without some kind of evidence to back it up.

If you want to know whether something is right or wrong, you will have to do the research yourself (it's the only way you can have confidence in your conclusions). Even so, I will enumerate some of the issues that lead me to believe that the Governing Body are biased and dishonest, and that the organisation is dangerous, and indicate some of the places you can find more information.

What makes these issues disturbing is not so much their existence, but the fact that the Watchtower society claims to have 'special insight' and to be 'guided by holy spirit' and 'God's channel of communication' – anyone doubting this, or indeed, any of the current teachings of JWs, is subject to shunning (often involving losing all family members and friends). Paradoxically, they also excuse the failings of the organisation by saying they are 'just imperfect men' (a thought-stopping cliché). Even if some failings can be excused in this way, an examination of the history and teachings of the religion, and how these have changed over the years, makes it obvious that they do not have any supernatural guidance.

So here are some of the issues that disturbed me – most rank and file members of JWs are completely unaware of most of these issues. Those who are aware of some of them have found ways to rationalise them (often involving thought-stopping clichés!), and it might be that some of them genuinely can be excused or at least minimised – it is up to you to determine whether that is the case.

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- There are many examples of dishonesty in the society's publications – for example, dishonesty in presenting their history (e.g. omitting many high profile scandals but still claiming to be candid, or publishing books that appear to be by 'worldly' people but were actually written by JW's, such as Marley Cole, posing as neutral observers), taking quotes out of context and grossly distorting their meaning. There are many examples of dishonesty, some of which I will mention later, and some of which appear in the quotes in the appendix.
 - Many false prophecies with inadequate excuses (including outright lying about what they said or claiming that they were not really prophesying even though they had clearly and directly attributed their statements to God) – even shifting the blame onto the rank and file – and never apologising (whilst simultaneously encouraging members to be humble). Again, there are some examples in the appendix.
 - Flip-flopping of teachings, sometimes resulting in the unnecessary death of members. For example, from the 1960's to the 1980's, anyone having an organ transplant would be disfellowshipped. Prior to that, in the first half of the 20th century, vaccinations were not allowed – the 'Golden Age' magazine contained lots of acrimonious (not to mention completely inaccurate) propaganda against vaccinations. Even though these policies have now changed, the leaders have never apologised, and those who have been disfellowshipped for failing to adhere to rules that have now been recognised as wrong have not been reinstated. Of course the blood issue still remains – more on that later.
 - Very controlling over members' lives – rather than allowing for individual conscience, there are blanket rules in place for things that are not directly mentioned or condemned in the Bible (eg. smoking, Christmas, birthdays, giving blood, lotteries and raffles, wind chimes, bungee jumping, voting, even beards!). This is very reminiscent of the attitude of the Pharisees in the Bible. One of the first things many men do after leaving the JW's is grow a beard! (Rulings on beards vary

somewhat from congregation to congregation, with no written prohibition, but they are strongly frowned on in most congregations.)

- Despite the fact that individual JW's took a firm stand against Nazism, often paying with their lives, the Society wrote an obsequious (anti-Semitic and pro-socialist) letter to Hitler (reproduced in the 1934 yearbook).
- Beth Sarim / Beth Shahn. Beth Sarim was a luxury mansion where the Watchtower society president (Rutherford) lived while the rank and file lived in poverty during the great depression – it was designed to house the ‘men of old’ who Rutherford believed would be resurrected to the earth imminently, but in the meantime, he used it himself (See also Time magazine of March 31st 1930). Beth Shahn was a nearby property with a mysterious underground bunker.
- Bribing officials in Mexico, and allowing members to nominally join the army reserves for convenience whilst simultaneously requiring members in Malawi to suffer horrendous persecution rather than purchase a party card *in a one-party state*. Purchasing a party card would not have violated political neutrality as there was only one party anyway. So much suffering for no reason. See Chapter 6 of ‘Crisis of Conscience’ by Ray Franz for more information on this issue.
- Refusing to register as a religion in Mexico for purely financial reasons (property ownership), thus preventing Mexican members from using the Bible at meetings (only registering when the restriction on property ownership was lifted and making it sound like the restriction was involuntary when it wasn't). More information also in Crisis of Conscience.
- Requiring members (even young school children) to refuse to pledge allegiance to the US flag, sometimes on pain of expulsion from school, whilst high ranking members of the

society including several Watchtower presidents themselves signed the pledge of allegiance so as to get a US passport⁸.

- Registered with the United Nations (regarded by JW's as the 'wild beast' ridden by the 'harlot' of Revelation) as a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO), publishing pro UN articles in Awake! (see September 8th 1991 issue, which is very unusual in that it contains no scripture references at all and avoids any mention of their usual condemnation of the UN) to comply with the membership requirement (that NGOs should promote the values of the UN charter). They relinquished membership immediately after the issue was exposed in The Guardian newspaper.
- The Watchtower Society is a beneficiary of the Henrietta Riley trust which invests in the Philip Morris Tobacco company, even though smoking is a disfellowshipping offence.
- Watchtower also holds stock in Rand Cam Engineering, which makes engines specifically for military applications – their only clients being the US military (as of 2011, details of this appeared on the US Securities and Exchange Commission website, although it has now either been moved or removed) – this would likely be a disfellowshipping offence for any rank and file member.
- Taking an unnecessary, unreasonable, and unscripturally extreme position with regard to anyone who dares to question whether the organisation is really being guided by God. Not only by coercing members (including close family members) into shunning those who disassociate (by mis-applying scriptures which recommend avoiding close association with 'the antichrist'), but even slandering them by calling them 'mentally diseased' and worthy of death (plenty of ad hominem attacks go on here). Any who flout the shunning law

8 Watchtower 1964, Sep 15, p.551 says: "*Because Christians can be loyal both to God and to earthly governments they can take oaths of allegiance to defend the Constitution, as is required of citizens in some countries in order to get a passport.*"

(by still associating with disfellowshipped people) are themselves subject to disfellowshipping.

- Constant use of logical fallacies (straw man, no true Scotsman, arguments from ignorance, false dichotomies, special pleading, thought stopping clichés, etc.), weasel words, threats, guilt, and fear to keep members in line and suppress questioning – often at a subconscious level so members are not even aware that they are being manipulated.
- Protection of paedophiles. Rather than “bring reproach” on the organisation, victims have been silenced and allegations have gone unreported due to there not being ‘two witnesses’ to the abuse. Victims have also been routinely required to state their allegations in the presence of their abuser. Due to high profile scandals (not the direction of holy spirit!), there has been some improvement in policies, but there is still a huge problem with paedophiles being harboured in congregations. More on this in the next chapter.

6. *Sexual Abuse of Children*

Key Facts:

- Although paedophilia is condemned by JW's, the Watchtower has a proven track record of covering up abuse in a misguided effort to maintain the reputation of the organisation.
- The biblical 'two witness rule' has prevented many cases of abuse from being taken seriously – since there are almost never two witnesses to child abuse.
- The Watchtower Society has had to pay many millions of dollars in out of court settlements and in court appointed damages, having been found guilty of routinely covering up abuse.

In recent years, scandals involving the rape and sexual abuse of children have rocked a number of organisations, Jehovah's Witnesses among them. Of course, in any large group of people, there are likely to be some 'bad apples', and most JW's would concede that they are not exempt from this. In some cases, these issues are handled well, with the authorities being notified, and abusers being barred from holding positions of responsibility in the congregation, or even disfellowshipped. However, there are far too many cases that are not handled well – where known abusers have been allowed to continue operating in a position of responsibility, and with high ranking individuals knowingly putting children at risk.

Despite most JW's, and the Governing Body itself, being in a state of denial over the problem, the Watchtower society is just beginning to be punished for these failings in court (examples are given below). The harsh punitive damages being handed down by the courts, as well as the way Watchtower representatives have behaved *on the record* in relation to those court cases (destroying evidence, refusing to respect

subpoenas, and being generally obstructive) prove that this is a real problem, not just “apostate-driven lies” (as Governing Body member Stephen Lett claims).

This begs the question: Why? Why would an organisation that cherishes high morals, that hands out some of the harshest discipline for wrongdoing, that is made up mostly of good, kind, well-meaning people, who abhor child abuse, allow such a situation to develop? The answer lies mainly in the policies and beliefs held by members of the religion.

The beliefs I am referring to are these:

1. That there must be at least two witnesses to any wrongdoing before any congregational action can be taken⁹ (the elder’s manual: “Shepherd the Flock of God”¹⁰ states that this would preferably be two witnesses to the same incident).
2. Where no judicial action is taken, if the victim, or an advocate of the victim, does not remain silent, they may be viewed as guilty of gossip, slander, or causing divisions, which may result in the *victim* being disfellowshipped, or at least threatened with disfellowshipping.
3. That God will bring to light any wrongdoing in his own time, and that if spiritual shepherds are unable to determine guilt, the matter can safely be left “in Jehovah’s hands”.

9 This is based on a literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 19:15, and the principle is also alluded to in some New Testament texts. Whilst this rule is ostensibly only meant to be used with reference to congregational discipline, and as a way of protecting people from false allegations, it is applied across the board – even when it is inappropriate to do so – and has resulted in many allegations of child abuse not being taken seriously (and sometimes not being reported to the authorities).

10 ‘Pay Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock’ (which has now been replaced by ‘Shepherd the Flock of God’) is a secret manual used by elders – female JWs are never allowed to see the book, and male JWs can only see it if they are elders. Of course, copies have been leaked, so facsimile copies are available online. The book mostly deals with handling judicial hearings and grounds for disfellowshipping.

4. That God is guiding and directing the organisation, and that the people that comprise the organisation are morally superior to the world at large, more trustworthy, and more righteous.
5. That a person who is experiencing success in the congregation, or in the ministry is being blessed by God, and therefore is unlikely to be guilty of any serious wrongdoing.
6. That members of the religion should not take one another to court – grievances should be handled internally (based on 1 Cor 6:1-7 – see also Watchtower 1973 November 15 p.704).

The problems are further compounded by procedural issues such as:

1. That a victim of sexual abuse should make his or her accusation in the presence of the accused.
2. That elders (who have absolutely no training in counselling or handling abuse cases) have a right and responsibility to ask detailed and personal questions about the attack, so as to determine the level of ‘sin’ involved, and whether the victim was complicit in any way.
3. Any action taken must not bring reproach on “God’s organisation” (the reputation of the organisation is seen as more important than an individual’s rights).
4. That the secular authorities do not need to be informed of abuse unless there is an explicit legal requirement to do so (it has been stated by the Watchtower that individuals are free to report matters to the authorities if they wish, but elders are strictly told to report the matter to the branch office first, not the police, and if someone reports the matter to the authorities after a person has been cleared by a judicial committee, that person is at risk of being labelled a gossip with the potential of judicial action against them).

5. That the Watchtower society has the final say on whether an individual should be regarded as a 'sexual predator' or not (this was explicitly stated in a letter to elders).
6. That although a person who abuses a child is guilty of a sin, if it occurred more than three years ago, and they have shown repentance, they can hold a position of responsibility in the congregation, even involving direct contact with children, without parents necessarily knowing about the individual's past proclivities.
7. The refusal to admit that the organisation has a serious problem with paedophilia.

Whilst it is true that false allegations are sometimes made, and that a person accused of being an abuser should have the opportunity to defend themselves, child abuse is not just a 'sin', it is a crime, and it should be handled by the proper, well-trained authorities, not 'in-house' by untrained elders. Nevertheless, JW elders and others in a position of responsibility in the congregation have a responsibility to ensure that allegations of abuse are taken seriously and passed on to the proper authorities, and that children are not put at unnecessary risk. The beliefs and procedures outlined above make a dangerous combination which has contributed greatly to the distress and suffering of abuse victims within the organisation, has led to gross miscarriages of justice, and has put the children of believers in unnecessary danger.

Watchtower 1995 Nov 1 pp. 28,29, says regarding accusations of child abuse:

"If the accusation is denied, the elders should explain to the accuser that nothing more can be done in a judicial way. And the congregation will continue to view the one accused as an innocent person. The Bible says that there must be two or three witnesses before judicial action can be taken. (2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19) Even if more than one person remembers abuse by the same individual, the nature of these recalls is just too uncertain to base judicial decisions on them without

other supporting evidence. This does not mean that such memories are viewed as false (or that they are viewed as true). But Bible principles must be followed in establishing a matter judicially.

*What if the one accused though denying the wrong doing is really guilty? Does he get away with it, as it were? Certainly not! **The question of his guilt or innocence can be safely left in Jehovah's hands** The sins of some men are publicly manifest, leading directly to judgment, but as for other men their sins also become manifest later. (1 Timothy 5:24; Romans 12:19; 14:12)"*
 – *Bold typeface added.*

In the interests of keeping the above quote in context, the article is talking about accusers who have experienced “repressed memories”, which have often proven to be very unreliable. I am not arguing here that a person should be viewed as guilty of abuse just because they have been accused, but that the secular judicial authorities should have the burden of deciding on guilt or innocence when it comes to criminal matters, regardless of the provenance of the accusation. The spirit of “leaving things in Jehovah’s hands” is a very common response among JW’s, and especially elders, to any situation that would be awkward or difficult to deal with and that has the potential to “bring reproach on Jehovah” (a euphemism for something that is embarrassing to the organisation), and this has manifestly exacerbated the problem with paedophilia within the religion.

Further examples of the above problems are evident in the following report from The New York Times, 11th August 2002:

Heidi Meyer, a third-generation Jehovah's Witness in Annandale, Minn., said she went to her elders in 1994, when she was 15, to say that from the ages of 10 to 13 she had been repeatedly molested by a fellow Witness eight years her senior, the older brother of a friend. The only eyewitness was her brother, who had once seen the man grab her buttocks as she got out of a car.

The elders asked explicit questions that made her uncomfortable, she said. According to an internal Witness document "Pay Attention to Yourself and to All the Flock," the elders must determine in which category the accusation fits: if it was "uncleanness," a one-time touching above the waist; "loose conduct," touching below the waist or more than once above; or the most severe, "porneia," direct sexual stimulation or activity resulting in orgasm. Each offense carries different penalties, with the most severe for porneia.

The man she was accusing insisted that Ms. Meyer had misinterpreted what happened. The elders agreed.

"I was expecting spiritual guidance," Ms. Meyer said. "I was expecting them to genuinely, sincerely attempt to find justice and protect the rest of the congregation from this same thing happening. And none of that happened."

She, like several other alleged victims and their relatives, said in interviews that the elders warned her against reporting the abuse or talking about it with other members.

"They told me if I spoke about it with anybody, I needed to be careful because I could face a judicial committee for gossip or slander," she said. "If they felt I had committed that sin, I would be disfellowshipped."

Ms. Meyer says she learned only years later that Amber Long, another young woman in the congregation, had at age 12 gone to the elders with her parents to report that she had been molested by the same man. Ms. Long, who is now 23, said she and her parents received a letter from the Witnesses advising her to "leave it in Jehovah's hands."

...

Carl A. Raschke, a professor of religious studies at the University of Denver who has written about the

Jehovah's Witnesses, said the group was no different from many other insular religions that aspire to theological and moral purity.

"Groups that tend to be very tight-knit and in-grown historically have a higher incidence of sexual abuse and incest," Dr. Raschke said. "That's an ethnological fact. When a religion tries to be thoroughly holy or godly, it's not going to acknowledge that people aren't living up to the ideals of the faith.

These are not isolated cases – there are literally thousands of similar cases around the world where allegations of abuse have been handled badly as a direct result of the flawed belief that the Watchtower is “God’s organisation”. It is not just a case of a failure to report abuse to the authorities, but actually *covering up* abuse – destroying documents, and refusing to cooperate with police and prosecutor investigations (for example, in the case of Mark Sewell in Wales – see <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/jehovahs-witnesses-destroyed-documents-showing-7340603>).

There have been numerous out of court settlements, but not every victim has been willing to settle, and some cases in recent years have made it to trial, with the Watchtower society being found complicit in covering up abuse as a matter of policy.

In 2012, the Watchtower lost a landmark court case in the US (the plaintiff in that case was Candace Conti) due to their failure to protect a congregation from a known child abuser (Jonathan Kendrick). Damages were initially set by a jury at \$21 million, in addition to \$7 million in compensation awarded to the plaintiff, 40% of which was due to be paid by the Watchtower society and the local congregation. Court documents show that Candace Conti only sued the congregation for \$1,440 (144,000 pennies – a symbolic amount), and was therefore only interested in forcing the organisation to improve its safeguarding policies, not in making money.

This award was the largest of its kind, indicating how the jury felt about the actions (or inaction) of the Watchtower, but the amount was

reduced by a judge, and later the punitive damages were reversed on appeal because the congregation did not have a legal duty to inform anyone about the known abuser (and that was the only basis on which punitive damages were claimed). However, the judgement following the appeal was that *Watchtower was negligent* in not carrying out its duty of care to its members, and the compensation claim was upheld (at the time of writing, both parties still have the option of appealing to the Supreme Court, but neither has yet confirmed whether they will do so). The perpetrator in that case is currently an active member of the congregation, while the victim is viewed as a ‘mentally diseased’ apostate.

The Watchtower lost another similar case involving a paedophile cover-up reaching to the highest echelons of the Watchtower Society in 2014 (the victim in that case was Jose Lopez), where Gerrit Lösch, a member of the Governing Body of JWs *refused to attend a court-ordered deposition* (thus not “paying Caesar’s things to Caesar”!), and the society refused to hand over information requested by the court. As a result, the judge denied the Watchtower’s defence – with the Watchtower later complaining that it was ‘barred from participating’ in the trial. In that case, punitive damages were set at \$10.5 million, in addition to \$3 million to the plaintiff.

In case I haven’t stressed it enough, this is not just a case of failing to report abuse, nor is it a case of occasional rogue elements, nor simple mistakes of ‘just imperfect men’ – this is deliberate, institutionalised *covering up* of child abuse – the very thing for which the Watchtower society has hypocritically criticised the Catholic church.

The San Diego Superior Court Judge, Joan Lewis, who dealt with the above mentioned Jose Lopez case, said regarding the Watchtower society, and the Governing Body in particular:

“The award of punitive damages against them will hopefully send a message to Watchtower and its managing agents, the governing body of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, that their handling of sex abuse cases within their congregation was absolutely reckless.”

Covering up child abuse is not a criminal offence in the US, nor in the UK, so the individuals responsible are not really brought to justice. Instead, the organisation is required to pay damages in civil cases – meaning that the very parents whose children are being put at risk are the ones who are paying for it with their donations (and most are unaware that a sizeable portion of their contributions to “the Worldwide Work” is going towards out of court settlements and compensation to victims).

The UK Charities Commission is currently (as of 2015) investigating the organisation because of doubts about its safeguarding policies (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-commission-investigates-jehovahs-witnesses-charities>). At the time of writing, a high profile court case in the UK is also pending, and could lead to further court action.

For more information on the issues involved, and further evidence of how Watchtower policies have sought to protect the reputation of the religion at the expense of child safety, please refer to <http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/paedophilia.php>.

7. Dishonesty and Bias

Key Facts:

- There are many examples of authorities being quoted out of context in a deliberate effort to distort their meaning in a way that supports JW doctrine.
- The Watchtower continually makes false claims about their history, and about their predictions for 1914 in particular.
- Statistics are routinely abused to give a false impression of JW superiority or to support their interpretation of Bible prophecy.
- Information presented to the public purposely distorts the true nature of the religion, to obscure unpalatable facts (such as the true extent of the shunning policy).

Watchtower publications often stress the need to have complete trust and confidence¹¹ in “the faithful and discreet slave”¹². Members of the religion are discouraged from doing their own independent research – they are expected to obtain all of their religious information from

11 For example, see Yearbook 2011, p.13; Watchtower 2009 Feb 15, p.27 – there are lots of other examples of course.

12 For many years, “the faithful and discreet slave” was reckoned to comprise all those JWs who profess a heavenly hope (limited to 144,000 in number), but with the caveat that they were represented by the Governing Body (and therefore that everything coming from the Governing Body was coming from the “slave” as a whole). Other members of the “slave class” were not authorised to speak on behalf of the “slave” as a whole. Within the last couple of years though, this teaching has been refined, and now the “slave” is regarded as being the Governing Body itself – other JWs who claim to belong to the 144,000 “chosen ones” are no longer included at all. In any case, when Watchtower publications refer to “the faithful and discreet slave”, it is safe to regard that as being the same as the Governing Body.

Watchtower publications. For example, The September 2007 Kingdom Ministry¹³ says:

“Thus “the Faithful and discreet slave” does not endorse any literature, meetings or websites that are not produced or organized under its oversight. ... For those that wish to do extra Bible study and research, we recommend that they explore Insight on the Scriptures...”

“Insight on the Scriptures” being the Bible encyclopaedia produced by the Watchtower¹⁴.

I know when I was a JW, I completely trusted that the Watchtower literature was well researched, unbiased, and authoritative, and I was sure that even if there was an odd mistake here and there, it would be unintentional. Not only do the Governing Body constantly remind people of the need to be “honest in all things” (see Chapter 14 of the book Keep Yourselves in God’s Love), they also claim to be representing God himself, and to be guided by holy spirit.

I was genuinely shocked and dismayed when, after leaving the religion, I discovered many cases of deceit, intellectual dishonesty, bias, and even outright lying in the Society’s publications. Most JWs are unaware of the dishonesty, largely because it doesn’t cross their minds to do any fact checking – and doing so is discouraged anyway, as the above Kingdom Ministry quote shows.

I will mention a few examples of dishonesty here, but there are many more, some of which appear in the accompanying quotes in the appendix.

13 “Our Kingdom Ministry” is a monthly newsletter (of sorts), intended for active JWs only (but is also publicly available on the jw.org website).

14 Interestingly, some of the writers of the first edition of that work (which was named ‘Aid to Bible Understanding’) later became apostates – because the things that they discovered while researching for it led them to the conclusion that Watchtower doctrines were wrong. Ray Franz was among them (more information in Crisis of Conscience).

Quoting out of context

The book “Life – How did it get here? By Evolution or by Creation?”, published in 1985, contains many dishonest and misleading passages, often taking quotes out of context to imply something very different from the point the source material was making. Here are a couple of examples¹⁵:

Quote in the Creation Book, Page 18:

“Darwin acknowledged this as a problem. For example, he wrote: “To suppose that the eye ... could have been formed by [evolution], seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree.”

Source material from The Origin of Species by Charles Darwin, 1859, p. 133:

“To suppose that the eye with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree. When it was first said that the sun stood still and the world turned round, the common sense of mankind declared the doctrine false; but the old saying of Vox populi, vox Dei, as every philosopher knows, cannot be trusted in science. Reason tells me, that if numerous gradations from a simple and imperfect eye to one complex and perfect can be shown to exist, each grade being useful to its possessor, as is certainly the case; if further, the eye ever varies and the variations be inherited, as is likewise certainly the case; and if such variations should be useful to any animal under changing conditions of life, then the difficulty of believing that a perfect and complex eye could be formed by natural selection, though insuperable by our

15 There are plenty more examples from that ‘Creation’ book here:
<http://bit.ly/XZ5Oxw>.

imagination, should not be considered as subversive of the theory.”

The point Darwin was making was the exact opposite of the one made in the Creation book – namely, that although it *seems* absurd on the surface, in reality it is not. To imply that Darwin had grave misgivings about the theory of evolution is misleading and dishonest.

Here is another example of outrageously dishonest mis-quoting.

Quote in the Creation book, p.143 (redacted in later editions after Richard Lewontin complained):

Zoologist Richard Lewontin said that organisms “appear to have been carefully and artfully designed.” He views them as “the chief evidence of a Supreme Designer.” It will be useful to consider some of this evidence.

“Adaptation” by Richard Lewontin, Scientific American, vol 239, September 1978, p.213:

“The manifest fit between organisms and their environment is a major outcome of evolution.... Life forms are more than simply multiple and diverse, however. Organisms fit remarkably well into the external world in which they live. They have morphologies, physiologies and behaviors that appear to have been carefully and artfully designed to enable each organism to appropriate the world around it for its own life. It was the marvelous fit of organisms to the environment, much more than the great diversity of forms, that was the chief evidence of a Supreme Designer. Darwin realized that if a naturalistic theory of evolution was to be successful, it would have to explain the apparent perfection of organisms and not simply their variation.”

Readers of the Creation book would be left thinking that this respected zoologist believes that organisms were designed by a Supreme Designer, when in fact the exact opposite is true. Whether you accept evolution or not, such shamelessly dishonest mis-quoting is highly deceitful. How would you feel if a religion or other group that holds very different views to you, used quotes from you personally to give the misleading impression that you back up their agenda? This was not an isolated incident, as the following examples bear out.

Another example:

Quote in the Creation book, pp. 15, 16:

“Paleontologist Niles Eldredge, a prominent evolutionist, said: ‘The doubt that has infiltrated the previous, smugly confident certitude of evolutionary biology’s last twenty years has inflamed passions.’ He spoke of the ‘lack of total agreement even within the warring camps,’ and added, ‘things really are in an uproar these days . . . Sometimes it seems as though there are as many variations on each [evolutionary] theme as there are individual biologists.’”

“Evolutionary Housecleaning”, Niles Eldredge, Natural History magazine, February 1982, p.81:

I mention this only to illustrate the lack of total agreement even within the warring camps: things really are in an uproar these days, and each of the “basic” ways of looking at evolution has its minor variants. Sometimes it seems as though there are as many variations on each theme as there are individual biologists. But that’s as it should be; this is how science is supposed to operate. Creationists say the ferment reveals evolution’s weakness: even the professionals cannot agree on how evolution works! But this is a canard that illustrates the very real threat creationists pose. When they misrepresent the exuberant, creative doubt and controversy permeating evolutionary biology

these days, they are actively promoting scientific illiteracy. If we are to integrate science and its satellite technologies more effectively with society as a whole, we need less, not more, of such illiteracy.

Clearly, Eldredge's words were twisted to make it appear as though he was saying the exact opposite of his actual point.

There are various quotes from the literature of Young Earth Creationists (YECs – fundamentalists who believe God created the Earth and everything on it in six literal days, within the last 10,000 years), which are portrayed as being secular and scientific (Francis Hitching, the parapsychologist I mentioned earlier, is quoted extensively as is Harold Coffin, a YEC who, whilst credited as a zoologist, admits that his “data is religious and not really scientific” and that his beliefs about fossils are based “mostly on scripture”¹⁶).

Quotes being taken out of context are not limited to that book – they are so common in JW literature that it is virtually impossible to have confidence in any quotation they use, especially when ellipses are employed to signify that the quote has been abbreviated. In many instances, rather than simply abbreviating the quote, the text that is omitted has a critical effect on the meaning. Other times, they don't even provide a reference, (it is very common for a quote to simply be attributed to “one scholar”) making it impossible to verify the quote (personally, I suspect many such quotes come from JW “scholars”).

Here is an example involving the JW doctrine that Jesus was not crucified, but impaled on an upright stake:

The Imperial Bible-Dictionary acknowledges this, saying: “The Greek word for cross, [stau-ros'], properly signified a stake, an upright pole, or piece of paling, on which anything might be hung, or which might be used in impaling [fencing in] a piece of ground. ... Even amongst the Romans the crux (from which our cross is

16 Lodi News Sentinel, 1981 Dec 16, p. 13

derived) appears to have been originally an upright pole.”-Edited by P. Fairbairn (London, 1874), Vol. I, p. 376.” – Reasoning from the Scriptures p.89

The actual quote in context carries a completely different meaning:

“The Greek word for cross, (stauros), properly signified a stake, an upright pole, or piece of paling, on which anything might be hung, or which might be used in impaling (fencing in) a piece of ground. But a modification was introduced as the dominion and usages of Rome extended themselves through Greek-speaking countries. Even amongst the Romans, the crux (from which the word cross is derived) appears to have been originally an upright pole, and always remained the more prominent part. But from the time that it began to be used as an instrument of punishment, a traverse piece of wood was commonly added: not however always then.

... There can be no doubt, however, that the later sort was the more common, and that about the period of the Gospel Age, crucifixion was usually accomplished by suspending the criminal on a cross piece of wood.

... But the commonest form, it is understood, was that in which the upright piece of wood was crossed by another near the top, but not precisely at it, the upright pole running above the other, thus “a cross” and so making four, not merely two right angles. It was on a cross of this form, according to the general voice of tradition, that our Lord suffered.

... It may be added that crucifixion was abolished around the time of Constantine, in consequence of the sacred associations which the cross had now gathered around it.” – The Imperial Dictionary p. 376

Further examples of dishonest quoting appear in the brochure *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*

At first the Christian faith was not Trinitarian ... It was not so in the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages, as reflected in the N[ew] T[estament] and other early Christian writings.” – Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics. – Should You Believe in the Trinity? pp. 6, 7.

Those ellipses are not there to abbreviate the quote, but to hide its meaning:

At first the Christian faith was not Trinitarian in the strictly ontological reference. It was not so in the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages, as reflected in the NT and other early Christian writings. – Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics, p.461

There are quite a few others, which you can look up yourself, but here’s one more:

“Yale University professor E. Washburn Hopkins affirmed: “To Jesus and Paul the doctrine of the trinity was apparently unknown; ... they say nothing about it.” – Origin and Evolution of Religion.” – Should You Believe in the Trinity? p. 6

In context, the quote carries a very different meaning:

“The beginning of the doctrine of the Trinity appears already in John (c.100 AD.) To Jesus and Paul the doctrine of the trinity was apparently unknown; at any rate they say nothing about it. ... But the first Christian theology was given in the words ‘I and my father are one’ and the plain faith of the early church members who were not doctrinaires was just this and nothing more. Jesus is God.” – Origin and Evolution of Religion, pp. 336, 338

A recent Awake! magazine about creationism misquoted a biologist (as is their custom), and the biologist in question responded by writing an open letter to the editor. The first part of that letter is reproduced below:

*Evolution, Religion, Reason – An open letter to
Jehovah’s Witnesses*

Editor of Awake (Magazine)

Jehovah’s Witnesses

Dear Editor,

I am writing to protest your Awake Magazine article, “The origin of life – five questions worth asking”, dated January, 2015, in which you have misquoted me by taking half a sentence out of context from my article on evolution. Contrary to what you imply, I do not support a creationist view, nor do I suggest that even a minority of scientists support such a view. Anyone who reads my article can see that I fully support the theory of evolution (Singh 2011).

In my article, I follow the paragraph from which you have misquoted me with material showing why the facts of evolution are hard to comprehend for many people. My article is meant for people who want to understand evolution but who do not have the expertise to do so, not for creationists like you who oppose evolution on religious grounds.

Your misquotation amounts to intellectual dishonesty and reflects on your character and dignity as editor as well as a man of God. I can understand that you do not accept evolution as an explanation for the biodiversity on this planet, but I cannot understand why you would knowingly misuse a scientist’s work to make him appear supporting the creationist point of view.

I have received inquiries from many evolutionists, atheists and former members of your organization (ex-JW) who brought the above misquotation to my attention. I agree with them that your misquotation of my work is deliberate and meant to convince your followers in the truth of creationism by perpetuating false support from scientists.

So I am asking you first to remove the misquotation from your article immediately and second print an unconditional apology for what I consider is a deliberate damaging action on your part to my reputation.

... [the letter continues with remarks about science and religion needing each other]

Rama Singh

*Department of Biology
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada*

Naturally, the chances of them publishing an apology are pretty slim.

That same issue of Awake! included a quote from a professor of entomology, with the implication that this was a secular source – a small detail that was not mentioned is that the professor in question is a JW (Gerard Hertel).

Dishonesty about beliefs

On the jw.org website (the official website of Jehovah's Witnesses), there are further examples of dishonesty – attempts to tone down some of the JW beliefs that most people would find difficult to swallow. For example, in the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section, are these:

Do Jehovah's Witnesses Feel That They Are the Only People Who Will Be Saved?

No. Many millions who lived in centuries past and who weren't Jehovah's Witnesses will have an opportunity for salvation. The Bible explains that in God's promised new world, "there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous." (Acts 24:15) Additionally, many now living may yet begin to serve God, and they too will gain salvation. In any case, it's not our job to judge who will or won't be saved. That assignment rests squarely in Jesus' hands.—John 5:22, 27.

This gives the impression that JWs are quite reasonable on the subject, that they don't think they are the only ones that will be saved. In fact, such is explicitly stated in the initial one-word answer: "No." As all JWs know, this is a highly misleading answer. Whilst technically accurate (JWs do believe that some who died before their religion existed will be resurrected and given another chance), they have also stated categorically, many times, that dedication to and association with the Watchtower organisation is essential for salvation:

"Only Jehovah's Witnesses, those of the anointed remnant and the "great crowd," as a united organization under the protection of the Supreme Organizer, have any Scriptural hope of surviving the impending end of this doomed system dominated by Satan the Devil." – Watchtower 1989 Sep 1 p.19

"Just as Noah and his God-fearing family were preserved in the ark, survival of individuals today depends on their faith and their loyal association with the earthly part of Jehovah's universal organization." – Watchtower 2006 May 15 p.22

Again, there are countless other references to show that this is the case. A similarly misleading entry in the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of the jw.org website is the one about shunning:

Do Jehovah's Witnesses Shun Former Members of Their Religion?

Those who were baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses but no longer preach to others, perhaps even drifting away from association with fellow believers, are not shunned. In fact, we reach out to them and try to rekindle their spiritual interest.

We do not automatically disfellowship someone who commits a serious sin. If, however, a baptized Witness makes a practice of breaking the Bible's moral code and does not repent, he or she will be shunned or disfellowshipped. The Bible clearly states: "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."—1 Corinthians 5:13.

What of a man who is disfellowshipped but whose wife and children are still Jehovah's Witnesses? The religious ties he had with his family change, but blood ties remain. The marriage relationship and normal family affections and dealings continue.

Disfellowshipped individuals may attend our religious services. If they wish, they may also receive spiritual counsel from congregation elders. The goal is to help each individual once more to qualify to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Disfellowshipped people who reject improper conduct and demonstrate a sincere desire to live by the Bible's standards are always welcome to become members of the congregation again.

This answer couches the harsh reality of shunning in soft language, again, giving an unrealistic impression. In reality, "breaking the Bible's moral code" means breaking whatever rules the Watchtower society imposes. Many disfellowshipping and disassociation offences (such as voting) are not even mentioned in the Bible, and are purely Watchtower inventions (I will come onto that later). The justification given here for shunning is that the person is 'wicked', which is hardly

a term that should apply to a person who accepts a blood transfusion, for example.

In addition, close family members, including sons, daughters, parents, grandparents, and siblings who do not live under the same roof are expected to shun their relatives if they are disassociated or disfellowshipped. The statement that “blood ties remain” applies *only to those living in the same house*. Again, it is dishonest and misleading not to make this clear, but to imply that shunning does not apply within the family – it does. Compare the above quote from the website with what is printed in the study edition¹⁷ of the Watchtower:

“What if we have a relative or a close friend who is disfellowshipped? Now our loyalty is on the line, not to that person, but to God. Jehovah is watching us to see whether we will abide by his command not to have contact with anyone who is disfellowshipped.—Read 1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

Consider just one example of the good that can come when a family loyally upholds Jehovah’s decree not to associate with disfellowshipped relatives. A young man had been disfellowshipped for over ten years, during which time his father, mother, and four brothers “quit mixing in company” with him. At times, he tried to involve himself in their activities, but to their credit, each member of the family was steadfast in not having any contact with him.” – Watchtower 2012 Apr 15 p.12

There is also absolutely no provision for the shunning to be lifted except by re-instatement as a JW – a long and humiliating process.

The next example is regarding claims made about the year 1914. A number of other doctrines hang off the 1914 doctrine, so it is quite an important one for JWs. I will talk about why the 1914 doctrine is

¹⁷ The study edition is intended for the use of JWs only, and is not routinely distributed to the public, although it is available to the public at JW meetings and is published on the jw.org website.

wrong later, but for now, we will focus on the dishonesty surrounding the claims made by the Watchtower about that year.

Dishonest claims about 1914

One of the most troubling examples of dishonesty is the way the Society claims that the early Bible Students¹⁸ pinpointed the year 1914 as being the start of the last days and the beginning of Jesus' second "presence". The fact that World War One broke out in that year is touted as strong evidence that the organisation was being directed by God, since the war is seen as marking the start of the 'last days'.

Many individuals, myself included, were convinced by this spectacular prediction that the Watchtower society had special insight into Bible prophecy.

For example, a member of the Governing Body, Anthony Morris III (a somewhat pretentious name!), stated in the DVD 'Faith in Action' (a subjective history of the JW's):

"The fact that they [the Bible Students] were able to pinpoint that year [1914] is just phenomenal."

The same DVD twice makes the claim that the group had predicted Jesus' return in 1914 decades in advance. This claim is often quoted in Watchtower publications. Here are a few more examples:

...God's people who had been anxiously awaiting his second presence toward the end of the nineteenth century – Watchtower 1965 Jul 15 p.428

Jehovah's witnesses pointed to the year 1914, decades in advance as marking the start of "the conclusion of the system of things." – Awake! 1973 Jan 22 p.8

18 Before the early 1930's, the group that became Jehovah's Witnesses were known simply as 'Bible Students'. The modern organization is actually just a splinter group of the original Bible Students (who are still around, but not as numerous as the JW's).

On arriving to inspect his slaves in 1918, therefore, whom did the Master, Jesus Christ, find giving to his body of attendants their measure of food supplies at the proper time? Well, by then, who had given truth seekers the correct understanding of the ransom sacrifice, the divine name, the invisibility of Christ's presence, and the significance of 1914?.... The facts show that it was a group of anointed Christians associated with the publishers of Zion's Watch Tower – Watchtower 1990 Mar 15 p.13, 14

The Watchtower applies a number of obscure Bible prophecies to the time period from 1914 onward, and their whole eschatology is based on that year being the start of the end times and of Jesus' second presence. Almost all JWs truly believe that the group had grasped the significance of the year 1914 and predicted the start of the last days many years before 1914, in the late 19th century, and that their insight and watchfulness was instrumental in their being 'chosen' by Jesus on his return to become God's earthly organization. It is therefore very significant to learn that the claim is completely false¹⁹.

It was not until the 1920's that the Watchtower society first started referring to 1914 as the beginning of the last days and it wasn't until 1930 that 1914 was pegged as the start of Christ's second presence.

19 In some places, Watchtower publications have phrased things more carefully so as to be technically accurate, whilst still misleading – for example, by saying that the early Bible Students identified 1914 as a 'marked year' (but not being clear on the fact that what they had marked it for was not what happened), or by making it ambiguous as to what was actually predicted, but still implying that their insight was remarkable and proved they had God's backing. The level of dishonesty employed seems to vary depending on the individual writer.

On one occasion (in the 'Proclaimers' book) they even acknowledged the year 1874 was used for Christ's second presence, even though this contradicts the claims made in other publications (probably in an effort to reduce the effects of 'apostates' pointing out their dishonesty). Still, the consistent message remains that the 1914 prediction is strong evidence of divine guidance.

They did make some predictions about the year 1914²⁰, *none of which came to pass*, but even then, the chronology did not originate with the Bible Students.

The chronology that led to 1914 was first popularised by John Aquila Brown in 1823. He substituted days for years and turned the “seven times” of Daniel 4 into 2,520 years (which is still the basis of the JW calculations). His start date was 604 BCE, which led him to 1917 rather than 1914.

William Miller also taught that Daniel 4 represented 2,520 years, and borrowed the same principle of substituting days for years, applying it to Daniel 8 (which talks about 2,300 days), but his start date for that was 457 BCE, with a fulfilment date between 1843 and 1844. When the second advent failed to materialise in 1844, it became known as ‘The Great Disappointment’, and several adventist movements sprang up to take its place and tweak the chronology.

One of these ‘tweakers’ was Nelson Barbour, who moved the start date of the Daniel 4 chronology to 606 BCE (based on an incorrect date for the destruction of Jerusalem), which led to an end date of 1914 (Barbour mistakenly included a year zero). Barbour also tied this in with alleged measurements of the great pyramid of Giza (pyramidology was quite popular at the time). This greatly influenced Charles Taze Russell (CTR), who founded the Watchtower (for a time, Barbour and Russell worked together as editors of another journal

20 These predictions centred around Armageddon breaking out in that year, not that it would be the start of the last days nor the start of Christ’s second presence – in fact, they were very explicit that this was not the case – they stated that the last days began in 1799 and the second presence began in 1874:

“Twelve hundred and sixty years from A.D. 539 brings us to 1799, which is another proof that 1799 definitely marks the beginning of “the time of the end”. ... “The time of the end” embraces the period from 1799 A.D to the time of complete overthrow of Satan’s empire and the establishment of the kingdom of messiah. The time of the Lord’s second presence dates from 1874 and is during the latter part of the period known as “the time of the end”.” – Creation (1927) p.315, 319

“Bear in mind that the end of 1914 is not the date for the beginning, but for the end of the time of trouble.” – Watchtower 1894 July p.1677

before a doctrinal disagreement led them in separate directions). CTR borrowed heavily from Brown, Miller, and Barbour in formulating the early doctrine of the Bible Students, and he continued to use pyramidology to support his predictions up until his death.

It is relevant to note too that the Bible Students made statements and predictions about lots of ‘significant’ years, including: 1780, 1798, 1799, 1829, 1840, 1846, 1873, 1874, 1878, 1880, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1915, 1918, 1920, 1921, and 1925 – it should not be a surprise that one of them happened to be a year in which a historically significant event took place. All of the predictions for all of those years failed to materialise of course – most of them have now been completely forgotten by JWs, but they hang on to 1914 purely because something significant did occur that year (albeit, not what they had said would happen).

According to CTR, 1914 would see the *end* of Armageddon²¹, the *end* of Christendom²², the *end* of the world’s governments²³, Jesus to start ruling over the Earth (having previously become King in heaven 40 years earlier), and the resurrection to occur²⁴.

Today, 1914 is seen as being the *start* of the last days, and the *beginning* of Christ’s second presence – the first of which is difficult to verify (and more dishonesty is used to try and do so, which we will come to in a minute), and the second claim is impossible to verify

21 “The date of the close of that “battle” [that is, the battle of the Great Day of God Almighty, or Armageddon] is definitely marked in Scripture as October 1914.” – *Zion’s Watch Tower* 1892 Jan 15 p.23

22 “And, with the end of A.D. 1914, what God calls Babylon, and what men call Christendom, will have passed away, as already shown in prophecy.” – *Studies In the Scriptures – Thy Kingdom Come* (1891) p.153

23 “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 at the end of A. D. 1914” – *Studies In the Scriptures Series II – The Time Is At Hand* (1889) pp.99, 101

24 “The beginning of the earthly phase of the Kingdom in the end of A.D. 1914 will, we understand, consist wholly of the resurrected holy ones of olden time – from John the Baptizer back to Abel – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the holy prophets.” – *Studies In the Scriptures Series IV – The Day of Vengeance* p.625

since it conveniently happened ‘invisibly’. These interpretations were made after the event, and do not involve any impressive evidence of divine guidance whatsoever. The false claims made about that date do demonstrate though, that the Watchtower is quite happy to rewrite and misrepresent its own history with the deliberate intention to deceive.

Dishonest use of ‘factoids’ and statistics

In order to shore up the claim that we have been living in the ‘last days’ since 1914, Watchtower publications have often used dishonest tactics to imply that world conditions have been worse since that year than they were before it, and in particular, that the elements mentioned in Bible prophecies about the ‘last days’ have been fulfilled during the last 100 years.

For example, on the subject of ‘pestilence’ (the Greek word used in the Bible and translated as ‘pestilence’ refers specifically to infectious disease), they had this to say:

“Right after World War I more people died of the Spanish flu than had died of any disease epidemic in the history of mankind. The death toll was some 21 million people!” – You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth, p.151

Whilst the Spanish flu was unusually deadly, there had been worse epidemics in prior centuries. The plague of Justinian in the 6th century took an estimated 25 million lives (some estimates even go as high as 100 million), and the black death another 75 to 200 million – these representing a far greater proportion of the population than was the case with the Spanish flu (the black death is thought to have killed between 30 and 60 percent of the population of Europe).

The same ‘Live Forever’ book claims that heart disease and cancer also fulfil the ‘sign’ of pestilence – despite the fact that those are not infectious diseases and are implicitly excluded from the prophecy. The truth is that life expectancy has increased tremendously during the last 100 years, largely as a result of medical advances which have greatly mitigated the effects of infectious disease.

Similarly, despite Watchtower claims that famine has increased since 1914²⁵, there were many more devastating famines in the 18th and 19th centuries than there were in the 20th. Improvements in agriculture and technology, as well as the work of international aid organisations, have dramatically decreased famine in the last 100 years.

Crime, violence, and war are all seen as evidence that we are living in ‘critical times’. In reality, even with the two world wars²⁶, the last 100 years have overall seen a dramatic decline in violent deaths:

“Violence has been in decline over long stretches of history, and today we are probably living in the most peaceful moment of our species’ time on earth. According to anthropologists like Lawrence Keeley, Stephen LeBlanc, Phillip Walker, and Bruce Knauft, these factors combine to yield population-wide rates of death in tribal warfare that dwarf those of modern times. If the wars of the twentieth century had killed the same proportion of the population that die in the wars of a typical tribal society, there would have been two billion deaths, not 100 million. According to the Human Security Brief 2006, the number of battle deaths in interstate wars has declined from more than 65,000 per year in the 1950s to less than 2,000 per year in this decade.” – A History of Violence, by Steven Pinker

The Watchtower plays on our impression that the world is getting more violent, but violence is not in fact increasing – despite pockets of trouble, we are now living through the most peaceful time in history.

Another common falsehood found in Watchtower literature, is the claim that the frequency, intensity, and/or deadliness of earthquakes

25 One example: “*And in the wake of World War I came the greatest famine of all history.*” – Let Your Kingdom Come, p.122

26 There were actually world wars before 1914, some involving more countries and more deaths than WWI – for example, the war of Spanish succession, the seven years war, and the Napoleonic wars.

has risen dramatically since 1914 (another ‘sign’ of the last days)²⁷. This is simply not true, as the US Geological Survey makes clear:

“We continue to be asked by many people throughout the world if earthquakes are on the increase. Although it may seem that we are having more earthquakes, earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 or greater have remained fairly constant. ... According to long-term records (since about 1900), we expect about 17 major earthquakes (7.0 – 7.9) and one great earthquake (8.0 or above) in any given year.” – earthquake.usgs.gov 27 Oct 2009

Despite the increase in population density, even the number of deaths caused by earthquakes was lower in the 20th century than in many previous centuries (the Syrian earthquake of 1201 resulted in over a million deaths, and there have been extremely destructive earthquakes in India and China with more deaths than any 20th century earthquake).

A particularly interesting case of dishonesty regarding earthquake statistics is found on the jwfacts.com website (that website goes into quite some detail on most of the issues discussed here). Here is a quote from that website

(<http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/earthquakes.php>):

In 1977 the following spurious statement was made, one which has appeared in numerous Watchtower publications since.

“Interestingly, for a period of 1,059 years (856 to 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.” Awake! 1977 Feb 22 p.11

²⁷ “Significantly, since 1914 there have been more major earthquakes than in any previous period of similar length in recorded history.” – Watchtower 1961 Oct 15 p.628

It is misleading to say there were only 24 earthquakes prior to 1914, especially when going on to say the 43 since 1914 is only a partial list; obviously the pre 1914 list is the more understated figure. It is quite simple for any person to locate a significant quantity of data to show there were far more than 24 major earthquakes between 856 and 1914. Yet this inaccurate information was included a decade later in the main study publication distributed to millions of followers and Bible studies.

“From 1914 until now, there have been many more major earthquakes than in any other like period in recorded history. For over 1,000 years, from the year 856 C.E. to 1914, there were only 24 major earthquakes, causing some 1,973,000 deaths. But in the 63 years from 1915 to 1978, a total of some 1,600,000 persons died in 43 great earthquakes.” You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth p.151

In 1983 the Watchtower had an interesting quote to prove that there has been a rise in earthquakes.

“In the Italian journal Il Piccolo, of October 8, 1978, Geo Malagoli observed: “Our generation lives in a dangerous period of high seismic activity, as statistics show. In fact, during a period of 1,059 years (from 856 to 1914) reliable sources list only 24 major earthquakes causing 1,973,000 deaths. However, [in] 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. This dramatic increase further goes to emphasize another accepted fact—our generation is an unfortunate one in many ways.””
Watchtower 1983 May 15 p.6 Earthquakes – A Sign of the End?

You will recognise that *Il Piccolo* has actually taken its information from the *Awake*. Since 1983 the Watchtower has used Geo Malagoli's quote to prove an increase in earthquakes. For instance:

"The Italian journal Il Piccolo reported: Our generation lives in a dangerous period of high seismic activity, as statistics show. On the average, about ten times as many have died each year from earthquakes since 1914 as in previous centuries." Life How did it get here? By Evolution or by Creation? p. 225

What these quotes do not state is that the source of Malagoli's figures was the Society's own invented ones. Why do this? This was a way to give credibility to its own misleading information.

I am willing to concede that the statistics used here by the Watchtower society might not have been 'invented' by them (there is no way to tell, as they do not provide any references), but they were at best cherry-picked, and were without doubt presented in a deliberately dishonest way.

Another example of statistics being abused in a misleading way is this quote from the *Awake!* magazine of September 8th 1997, p.11:

"In some countries one marriage out of every two or three ends in divorce. But the above-mentioned survey indicated that presently only 4.9 percent of the Witnesses are divorced or separated from their mates."

The number of marriages that end in divorce is a completely different measurement to the number of people who *are* divorced or separated. There are only two ways a marriage can end: death or divorce. Each year, a certain number of marriages will end – about half will be due to divorce, and half due to death. The number of people who *are divorced* will always be a much lower percentage of the population, as it is a proportion of a larger data set – including those who have never been married, and those who have been married more than once (and

just because someone is not *currently* divorced, does not mean that they have never been divorced). To compare the two in this way misleads the reader into thinking that the divorce rate among JW's is far lower than average, which is not true. In reality, the divorce rate among JW's is around the same as the average for the general population.

A Pew survey in 2008 found that 14% of JW's were divorced, compared with an average of 12%. Other surveys have also shown the divorce rate of JW's to fluctuate around the average. A study about marital fidelity also found that JW's are just as likely to cheat on their mates as atheists, and more likely to do so than members of other conservative religious groups²⁸. None of that is a big deal, nor is it particularly surprising, but the way the Watchtower abuses statistics to make it look as though JW's are morally superior is another example of how readily they resort to dishonesty.

The above points are just a small sampling of many examples of dishonesty on the part of the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses. It is natural to want to brush these incidents of dishonesty off as insignificant if you are a committed member of the religion, but if another religion behaved that way would you be so quick to make excuses for them? As the Watchtower publication "Is This Life All There Is?" (1974) p. 46 says:

"...really, would you want to be associated with a religion that has not been honest with you?"

No, I would not.

28 Are There Religious Variations in Marital Infidelity? Journal of Family Issues December 2007 vol. 28 no. 12 1553-1581, by Amy Burdette (Carolina Population Center, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Christopher G. Ellison (The University of Texas at Austin), Darren E. Sherkat (Southern Illinois University, Carbondale), and Kurt A. Gore (The University of Texas at Austin).

8. Doctrinal Issues

Key Facts:

- The organisation claims to be ‘The Truth’, and the only source of ‘spiritual food’ being used by God.
- There are many aspects of JW doctrine that are illogical and do not stand up to scrutiny.
- Every JW who has ever lived has believed that Armageddon is nigh. It has been ‘nigh’ for nearly 140 years now.
- Bungled doctrines that vacillate from one incoherent explanation to another, or fail the most fundamental rules of logic show up the organisation as being entirely human, with no divine guidance or direction whatsoever.

In some ways, the fact that JW doctrine is flawed is of lesser importance than the dishonesty already discussed. Every religion has flawed doctrines after all. However, members of the religion are required to accept Watchtower doctrine as “the truth”, and are not permitted to question it (any with doubts are told to use that old thought-stopping cliché: “wait on Jehovah”).

Harbouring personal opinions that certain doctrines are not entirely correct is regarded as presumptuous, and “running ahead of Jehovah”, even if the official doctrine is later amended. Anyone who tries to discuss alternative viewpoints with others will quickly find themselves on the sharp end of a judicial hearing, and unless they quickly conform, will be disfellowshipped for ‘apostasy’.

In addition, some of the flawed doctrines have life-changing or even life-threatening consequences (more on those in the following chapters).

Armageddon

JWs are taught to be in keen expectation of the end of the world as we know it. This has been a constant feature of the religion since its inception – every JW since the religion started in the 19th century has been expecting Armageddon to occur within a few years. Every JW has been surprised and disappointed to find that it hasn't arrived yet – but they go on believing it is just around the corner all the same. As elderly JWs die off, the next generation carries on believing we are on the brink of Armageddon.

My parents were convinced that my older brother and I would not start school before the outbreak of Armageddon (I was born in 1974). Then they were convinced that we would not leave school before Armageddon. Then I, along with them, expected Armageddon to arrive before the end of the 20th century. It was around the turn of the millennium that I started thinking that I should lower my expectations – even though at that point I was still a very active JW.

As a JW, when I looked at the stereotypical doomsday prophet saying 'the end of the world is nigh', I felt embarrassed for them – even when I personally believed the same thing myself! I have heard JWs mock Harold Camping for his bold proclamations about the end of the world, and their inevitable failure. Yet somehow we can look rationally at other people's delusions without seeing our own, even when they are almost identical.

When religious prophecies fail, history has shown time and time again that only a minority of believers actually admit they were wrong and change their thinking. The vast majority will pick themselves up, dust themselves down, and maybe adjust their beliefs slightly, but go on believing that the prophecy will be fulfilled. When Armageddon didn't arrive in 1914 on the timetable of the Watchtower, it was decided instead that Jesus' second presence began in that year, but it was invisible, as it took place in heaven and was yet to take effect on earth. Just a minor adjustment like that and they could claim they were right all along. It is much easier for a believer to accept a small change in belief than to admit defeat, especially when they already moulded their whole way of life to fit their beliefs. I don't think it is about 'saving face' or being too proud to admit they were wrong – though that might

play a part – I think it is more due to the way we formulate beliefs as coherent stories that we use to try to make sense of the world (rather than using actual evidence and rational thought).

Every few years, something happens to give a renewed ‘sense of urgency’ to the JWs. A terrorist atrocity, a natural disaster, a new interpretation of a Bible prophecy, or even just an organisational adjustment is seen as evidence that the end is close. That exciting feeling of anticipation that something momentous is about to happen is infectious. A delusion shared is a delusion strengthened. As the months and years pass, and nothing happens, the feeling fades, only to be stoked up again by another world event or religious initiative. It is all too easy to forget that we’ve been here before, and so have our parents, and their parents, and their parents before them.

When questioned about why God is taking so long to bring Armageddon, the typical JW response is to quote 2 Peter 3:9, and say that he is being patient and allowing more people to learn “the truth” so they don’t have to die. This is not a very robust argument, because with each passing year the world’s population increases far faster than the JW membership does – meaning that God has even more people to kill. In the last couple of decades, JW membership has increased by about three million, but the world’s population has grown by about 1.6 billion – meaning that well over 1,500,000,000 more people would have to be slaughtered by God at Armageddon now than if he’d brought it about twenty years ago.

Here is a quote from journalist Joan Smith which appeared in the Independent newspaper:

“What is wrong with these people? The answer, I’m afraid, is that we are dealing with an eschatological movement of a type that became common in the Middle Ages. You and I may be looking forward to a long and peaceful existence, but these guys are eagerly anticipating the apocalypse.”

You would think that enough people have built arks or retreated to mountainsides, only to emerge with egg on their faces, for this end-of-days nonsense to be treated with the contempt it deserves. ... Not a bit of it."

She could well have been talking about JW's – she wasn't. She was referring to the Islamic State (ISIS). The mentality behind their actions is frighteningly similar to that endorsed by JW's (but whereas JW's expect God to kill everyone who disagrees with them, ISIS feel that they should be directly involved in the killing themselves). Aside from the fact that there really isn't any evidence that Armageddon is nigh (all the things that convince JW's of that are based on flawed chronology, cherry picked evidence, or their own interpretation of 'signs' in the Bible), the fact that so many JW's are gleefully awaiting the slaughter of everyone in the world who does not share their beliefs is in itself somewhat disturbing.

1914

We have already looked at some of the dishonest statements the Watchtower publications have made regarding the year 1914, but it is worth having a closer look at the doctrine itself. As stated previously, the year 1914 has had special significance for JW's for a long time (although the reason for this has not always remained consistent). A lot of the core doctrines hang off that date.

Originally, that year was pegged as being the year of Armageddon, but when that failed to happen it was retrospectively changed to become the year that Jesus' "invisible presence" began, and the start of the 'time of the end'. It is claimed that three and a half years later, Jesus inspected the world's religions and chose the Watchtower society to be God's earthly representative based on the 'spiritual food' they were dispensing at the time. A lot of the JW interpretation of some of the more vague and obscure prophecies in the Bible relates to the years surrounding 1914.

The importance of that year in the formation of JW doctrine has become a bit of a liability now, as the failure of Armageddon to materialise within 'a generation' of that year (by any definition of the word – and there have been quite a few!) has knock on effects on other

doctrines. Still, rather than admit any error (which would involve dismantling and rebuilding a lot of doctrine, *including the claim that they were chosen as God's mouthpiece*), they have adapted the affected doctrines to try and keep the significance of 1914 intact (almost comically at times).

So how did they arrive at the year 1914, and were their calculations accurate?

Numerology was very popular among the adventist movement in the 19th century, and Charles Taze Russell (founder of the movement from which the JWs splintered off after his death) was obsessed with pyramidology – in particular, he thought that by taking measurements of passageways in the great pyramid of Giza, one could calculate the years during which Bible prophecies would be fulfilled, and this was a significant factor in his promotion of the year 1914 for the date of the end of the world. Interestingly, CTR's gravestone is in the shape of a pyramid, in deference to his obsession (you can still visit the pyramid monument at his grave site today).

These days, the pyramidology aspect is largely forgotten, and the organisation attempts to arrive at 1914 using a complicated interpretation (borrowed from other adventist movements, as discussed earlier) of several Bible passages, in particular, Daniel chapter four. They claim that the seven times mentioned there refer to seven biblical years of 360 days each (=2,520 days), and that these days should then themselves be converted to years (to make 2,520 years). They claim that Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 607 BCE, and if you count 2,520 years from that year, you arrive at 1914. The outbreak of World War One in that year is cited as spectacular evidence that Satan had indeed been thrown down to earth in that year, and the last days began.

There are several things wrong here. One is that there is no indication that Daniel chapter four was intended to have any fulfilment other than the lycanthropy of Nebuchadnezzar. JWs usually refer to Daniel chapter twelve to claim that the entire contents of the book would have a later fulfilment. But that chapter was written many years later (and very likely not even by Daniel), and there is no indication that it was

meant to apply to earlier chapters. Still, let's assume it was meant to have a greater fulfilment.

Initially, the destruction of Jerusalem was reckoned as occurring in 606 BCE, but because CTR (and his friend Barbour) forgot to account for the fact that there was no year zero, he ended up at 1914. When the mistake was realised, rather than move the end date to 1915, the start date was moved back to 607 BCE. As far as I have been able to tell, no official explanation has ever been given for that (most JWs are unaware that the start date was changed, so I guess the leadership don't want to draw attention to it anyway).

In any case, there is ample evidence that Jerusalem was destroyed in 586/587 BCE, twenty years later than the JWs claim. All archaeologists and historians are in agreement on this – JWs are the only ones who give the date as 607 BCE. When trying to defend this position, they cherry pick a few of the many lines of evidence that point to 586/7 BCE and attempt to discredit them, claiming that 607 BCE is the only date that fits in with scripture (due to the 'pivotal' year of 539 BCE, which they do accept [even though it is based on the same type of evidence as the 586/7 BCE date], and the Bible's reference to a 70 year desolation period). Naturally the defence of 607 BCE is undertaken in a very biased way, with the most serious flaws in that reckoning not even addressed. Please don't take their word for it that the year is accurate, despite the scholarly sounding articles they have published – check the evidence for yourself.

You can of course do further research on this, and if you are in any doubt, I would encourage you to do so, but it is vitally important to JW doctrine to insist that Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 BCE. Archaeologists and historians have no vested interest in making sure the evidence fits a particular predetermined year – they just go by what the evidence shows. There are ways of allowing for a seventy year desolation without moving the destruction of Jerusalem back in time, thus allowing the Bible to be viewed as accurate date-wise (as other religions do), but the JWs do not acknowledge this (since to do so would undermine their 1914 prophecy).

In addition, the calculation itself (aside from being revised retrospectively) is inaccurate because *it mixes lunar and solar years* – which are each a different length.

To calculate the length of ‘seven times’, lunar years are used (360 days each), but when converting from a day to a year, solar years are used (365.25 days each). This is nonsensical – if you change the unit of measurement, you are not going to get an accurate result. If you stick to lunar years, you would end up somewhere around 1878 (since 2,520 lunar years are each only 360 days long – you lose 5.25 days per solar year). If you measure the length of the seven times in solar years, you end up somewhere in the middle of the 20th century.

When I mentioned this lunar/solar years problem to one Jehovah’s Witness, it was suggested that maybe Jehovah deliberately put an error in the calculations so that CTR would get the right year. This is an example of rationalisation being used to alleviate cognitive dissonance (the uncomfortable feeling you get when trying to hold two conflicting beliefs simultaneously).

Another problem with the calculations is that the 2,520 year period was supposed to end on 1st October 1914. However, the first world war started two months earlier at the end of July. So Satan must have gone back in time after being thrown down to the earth so he could start the war early!

Whichever way you look at it, the 1914 prophecy is wrong. As such, the JW claim that Jesus chose them in 1918 is also wrong, as are all the other doctrines that hang off that date.

God’s Chosen Organisation?

Even if the 1914 date could be supported, the claim that Jesus chose the Bible Students (as they were known then) based on the ‘spiritual food’ they were publishing at the time requires some examination. To verify this claim, we would need to look at what exactly the organisation was teaching around 1918. Most modern JW’s claim that mistakes in older literature are not relevant, since God has progressively enlightened them. But if Jesus chose them based on their

teachings back then, it is directly relevant to the claim that he chose them.

When you examine the Watchtower teachings around that time, you find that virtually everything they taught is incorrect (and is even considered so by modern JW's). In fact, other groups of the time had doctrines that were more similar to modern day JW doctrines than the early Bible students (so if what JW's now teach is indeed "the truth", it would have made more sense for Jesus to choose, say, the Seventh-day Adventists – as they would not have needed so much 'new light').

For examples of some of the things the organisation was teaching around 1918, please see the appendix (and of course, it would be good to do your own research into the teachings of JW's around that time).

The Governing Body

After I left the JW's, I was very surprised to find that the term 'Governing Body' does not appear in the Bible – I honestly thought the Bible talked about a Governing Body in the first century, since the Watchtower publications often mentioned it. There was no such concept. In fact, according to both the Bible and secular historical sources, the early Christians were not tightly organised at all. In most cases, questions and disputes were handled locally as the local congregation saw fit – there was only one occasion recorded when a matter was referred to 'the apostles and older men in Jerusalem', and that was relating to whether circumcision was still necessary. The letter that was circulated in response left a lot of latitude – there were no central formal procedures and laws²⁹.

The 144,000

At the time of writing, JW's take the number 144,000 mentioned in Revelation literally. They say that there are literally 144,000 people who will go to heaven, and that Jesus is a mediator for them only (thus, only those who belong to this group partake of the bread and wine emblems at the annual memorial of Christ's death). Up until the mid 1930's, every JW is supposed to have been a part of that group, as were all the "true" Christians in the first century CE, and all "true"

29 Acts chapter 15.

Christians throughout the whole of the following 1,900 years (note that there is a ‘no true Scotsman’ fallacy in that, as the definition of a Christian is narrowed down to only those who would fit within the numerical restriction of the doctrine). Initially, it was said that no new anointed would be chosen after the mid 1930’s except for the odd one here or there to replace someone who becomes ‘unfaithful’.

Since the 1930’s, the number of ‘anointed’ who belong to that group is supposed to have dwindled as they gradually died out, but Armageddon was supposed to come before the remnant completely disappeared.

It is difficult to know how many Christians there were in the first century, but it seems likely it was more than 144,000 (hence the need to introduce the no true Scotsman fallacy). Even the most conservative estimate of the number of genuine Christians during the first 1,900 years leads to problems in that the number of allocated spaces is clearly over subscribed. Still, any JW’s who refuse to believe and teach others that the number 144,000 is literal are threatened with being disfellowshipped for apostasy (and therefore condemned to death at Armageddon).

A further problem arose around the turn of the 21st century, in that the ones who claimed to be anointed, and who were suitable and available for leadership roles were getting too old to become members of the Governing Body. With candidates dwindling, they changed the doctrine that the number was filled in the 1930’s, and said that God evidently reserved some places to be filled during the last days (this is an example of ‘begging the question’ – another logical fallacy). While this allowed them to recruit some younger members to the Governing Body, it also opened the floodgates for others to claim they were part of the anointed, and the number of memorial partakers began to rise!

Of course this made a mockery of the teaching that the number 144,000 was literal, since there have obviously been more than that number of people claiming to be anointed. The dwindling number of anointed has long been used as evidence of the nearness of Armageddon, so to have a consistent *increase* in numbers is very embarrassing. Rather than change that doctrine though, they have

taken another approach: Questioning the mental stability of some of those who claim to be anointed (implying that not all who claim to be anointed really are)³⁰, and ceasing to publish figures showing the number of memorial partakers.

The bungling of doctrines like this (other bungled examples include the ‘this generation’ doctrine, and the 1975 fiasco – both covered in the accompanying quotes in the appendix), shows up the ‘faithful and discreet slave’ as anything but discreet. If they really are God’s chosen people, he seems to have a bit of a communication problem!

There are other doctrines of JWs which don’t stand up to scrutiny. Questions over the practicality of the resurrection are usually answered with the ‘wait on Jehovah’ thought stopper. Similar logical conundrums afflict the doctrines surrounding salvation, who goes to heaven, what happens after Armageddon, what the holy spirit is exactly, how and why prayer works, or doesn’t work, etc. There are also doctrines that are used to govern modern day procedures or practices, such as refusal of blood transfusions and judicial procedures, which we will look at in the next couple of chapters.

30 “A number of factors—including past religious beliefs or even mental or emotional imbalance—might cause some to assume mistakenly that they have the heavenly calling.” – Watchtower Aug 15 2011, p. 22

9. Blood

Key Facts:

- The Bible does not prohibit blood transfusions, and its comments on the use of blood can be interpreted in various ways.
- The Watchtower society does not have the right to insist that its members adhere to their peculiar interpretation of a Bible passage on pain of death.
- The blood doctrine is incoherent and illogical, allowing blood to be transfused if it is split into certain specified fractions first, but requiring adherents to die rather than accept certain other fractions.

Many JWs have died due to not receiving a needed blood transfusion³¹. Whilst the claim is made that the Bible command to ‘abstain from blood’ is unambiguous, that is not the case – it *is* ambiguous when it comes to blood transfusions, since the command was referring to *eating* blood, not transfusing it, and while you can argue that the principle applies to both, you can also argue that this is not necessarily the case. Even the biblical laws on eating unbled meat had exceptions which expose a fundamental flaw in JW reasoning.

31 This is acknowledged by the Watchtower society, in fact they are quite proud of it:

“Jehovah’s witnesses do not argue that blood transfusions have not kept alive patients who otherwise might have died.” – Blood, Medicine and The Law of God p.38

“In former times thousands of youths died for putting God first. They are still doing it, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue.” – Awake! 1994 May 22 p.2

The Governing Body *interpret* the Bible's prohibition to include transfusion, but it is not the only possible interpretation, and it should therefore be a conscience matter, not a disassociation offence (the Bible says that those taking the lead should not be masters over another's faith³², and should respect the consciences of others³³). This is especially so when a person's life hangs in the balance – if the Governing Body's interpretation is wrong (as many of their previous teachings have been shown to be), they become accountable for the deaths of some of their adherents – as they have been in the past with the issues of organ transplants and vaccinations.

Whilst bloodless procedures are often safe, and in some cases even better for elective surgery when there is time to prepare, this is not always the case, especially with emergency treatment. The risks of using blood are exaggerated by the Watchtower society, as are the benefits of avoiding it (medical professionals are in a much better position than the Watchtower society to evaluate whether the risks associated with transfusion outweigh the risks of not transfusing blood for any given patient in any given circumstance).

Some JWs may (and in fact, do, even some elders and Hospital Liaison Committee [HLC] members) view transfusion as using blood for the purpose it was intended for, whereas eating it causes it to be broken down and metabolised by the body. Eating blood could therefore be viewed as sacrilege, without needing to outlaw life-saving blood transfusions. This view would still be perfectly in harmony with the Bible, as most Christian religions agree. There is actually a 'movement' within JWs which is calling for a change in policy on the blood issue to allow this interpretation (AJWRB).

AJWRB also point out another biblically supported interpretation (see (<http://ajwrb.org/bible/blood-and-the-mosaic-law>)). According to Leviticus 17:10-14, when a person killed an animal for meat or sacrifice (or both), they had to pour out the blood on the ground to show respect for the life they had taken. However, it was not the blood itself that was sacred, it was the life of the animal. This is clearly indicated in the very next verse at Leviticus 17:15, where it is

32 2 Cor. 1:24

33 Rom 14:1-23

permissible to eat unbled meat if the animal was discovered already dead (killed by a predator). In that case, the person eating the meat had not taken a life, and therefore did not have to pour out the blood (which would have been impossible anyway as the blood coagulates soon after death). So JWs actually turn the whole principle on its head – ***instead of discarding the blood out of respect for the sacredness of life, they discard the life for the sake of the sacredness of blood!***

Even if it was against the biblical law to transfuse blood (which it isn't), in Bible times, breaking the Mosaic law was allowed for the sake of saving a life – even the life of an animal (Jesus referred to this when calling the Pharisees to account for being too strict about the Sabbath)³⁴. David's men ate the showbread, which would ordinarily have been met with the death penalty, but they were spared and forgiven because they were literally starving³⁵. Several times, the Bible makes clear that the 'spirit' of the law is more important than the letter ("I want mercy and not sacrifice" – Hos 6:6, "straining out the gnat but swallowing the camel" – Mat 23:24, etc.). Strict Pharisaical insistence on one particular interpretation of a biblical passage at the expense of the life of an adherent, or worse, the child of an adherent, is therefore unscriptural, and makes the Watchtower society "bloodguilty" (a biblical term referring to guilt over causing the loss of life of an innocent person, and usually used in JW literature to disparage other Christian religions).

Interestingly, in Bulgaria, the authorities would only allow JWs to be registered as a religion if they agreed not to impose sanctions on any member who accepts a blood transfusion. The Society agreed to that condition, and in order to "comply", simply changed acceptance of blood from being a disfellowshipping offence, to it being deemed as an act of disassociation (so they now say that by accepting blood, a person is voluntarily leaving the JWs). The end result is of course the same (shunning), and again exposes the dishonesty of the JW leadership.

34 The principle that the Mosaic law can be broken for the sake of saving a life is known as 'pikuach nefesh', and is still practised by Jews today – Jews will not eat blood, but they will accept life-saving blood transfusions.

35 Mark 2:23-28

Aside from the fact that the entire blood issue is unnecessary, the current doctrine makes absolutely no sense. A JW can accept any fraction of blood apart from red cells, white cells, platelets, and plasma³⁶. They can receive transfusions of 100% of blood products, as long as they are broken down into fractions first. And although JWs are not allowed to donate blood, these fractions can of course only come from donated blood.

Quite how they get from “abstain from blood” (in the context of eating unbled meat) to “abstain from life-saving transfusions of whole blood, red cells, white cells, platelets and plasma, but haemoglobin and other fractions are OK, in fact, you can have all of it as long as you split it up into small enough pieces first, oh, but if you do, make sure it comes from ‘worldly’ blood donors, and if you donate blood yourself, or take a product containing platelets or white blood cells you will be classed as a wicked person and shunned by your whole family forever” ... is a mystery!

36 Incidentally, haemoglobin (which is what carries oxygen in the blood) makes up a greater proportion of blood than platelets do – haemoglobin is allowed, but platelets are not – on pain of disassociation. Clearly this is not a scriptural position!

10. Disfellowshipping

Key Facts:

- Judicial procedures used by JWs have no scriptural precedent.
- Watchtower literature abuses and distorts Bible passages to justify their shunning policy.
- The punishment of disfellowshipping is applied to breaking Watchtower laws, not Bible laws – many disfellowshipping offences are not even mentioned in the Bible.

Neither the word ‘disfellowship’, nor the notion of a ‘judicial committee’ are found in the Bible. The closest thing to such a committee that is mentioned in the Bible is the trial of Jesus! The procedure for dealing with serious ‘sin’ that was outlined by Jesus himself did not involve secret meetings and shunning. The matter was discussed with the individual, then with two or three witnesses if necessary, and if still unresolved, it would be brought before the whole congregation to decide (not a judicial committee). If the congregation decided the person was an unrepentant sinner Jesus said they should be treated ‘as a man of the nations, and a tax collector’³⁷. Jesus spoke to and ate with tax collectors³⁸, so could hardly have meant that they should be shunned.

The shunning idea is justified using the words of the apostles Paul and John. Even if they had the authority to override Jesus, their words have been interpreted in an unnecessarily extreme way by the JW leadership. For example, the context of John’s words show he was talking about ‘the antichrist’³⁹. Someone who smokes a cigarette can hardly be regarded as the antichrist. Incorrect definitions of the Greek

37 Mat 18:15-17

38 Mat 9:11

39 2 John 1:7-10

words for ‘greeting’ have also been used to assert that one should not even say a simple ‘hello’ to a disfellowshipped person (compare the Watchtower definitions of the words ‘khairo’ and ‘aspazomai’ with the definitions given in authoritative reference works).

Paul’s words in 1 Cor 5:11 do not advocate strict shunning, and explicitly say that association should be avoided only with those who claim to be ‘a brother’, yet are committing certain specific sins. Nowhere does the Bible imply that one should shun one’s own family members, and there is no distinction anywhere in the Bible between people living in the same house and those that live separately.

The list of offences for which one can be disfellowshipped goes way beyond what is stated in scripture (among them are smoking, any form of gambling or related employment, associating with a disfellowshipped person, celebrating Christmas, joining a political party, or attending another church). Also the assumption is made that by leaving the Watchtower organisation, a person is rejecting God himself – there is no indication in the Bible that a person should be committed to a man-made organisation. Simply disagreeing with Watchtower interpretations of scripture cannot be scripturally valid grounds for shunning. As a control technique though it is very useful.

The judicial procedures themselves (being necessarily invented by the Society, since there is no precedent in scripture) are extremely unfair. They are secret star-chamber hearings, often biased against the accused, who is referred to as the ‘wrongdoer’ even before ‘guilt’ is determined. The assumption that the committee is guided by holy spirit allows for gross miscarriages of justice.

When individual JW’s feel obliged to shun people they care about, they often rationalise it by telling themselves that the disfellowshipped person ‘made a choice’, and the shunning is just the consequences of that person’s own actions. This is not true – **disfellowshipped people do not choose to be shunned**. Projecting blame for one’s own actions (shunning) onto the disfellowshipped person is unfair and illogical, but it allows the shunner to feel that they are doing nothing wrong. Another way it is rationalised is by claiming that shunning is ‘discipline’ which is being done out of ‘love’ – in an effort to help the

disfellowshipped person see the error of their ways and return. In reality, **shunning someone is not a sign of love**, and is hardly likely to attract a person to return. It is emotional blackmail (and on that count, it can sometimes lead a person to return – or in some cases, to commit suicide).

There are lots more issues involved here, not least of which is the human suffering that results. Hundreds of thousands of families have been torn apart as a result of this most unloving, unjust, and extreme practice. Disfellowshipping and blood transfusions are the two main reasons JW's are so unpopular.

11. Birthdays

Key Facts:

- The Bible does not prohibit celebrating birthdays.
- The reasons given by the Watchtower for prohibiting birthday celebrations are illogical and inconsistent with their other teachings.
- When adherents make sacrifices for a cause (such as giving up celebrations) it fosters commitment to the cause and polarises members from society at large.

Many JW's struggle to answer the question "Why don't you celebrate birthdays?", and typically have to refer to some printed explanation. The reasons usually given as to why JW's do not celebrate birthdays are:

1) Birthdays are portrayed in a negative light in the Bible. Only two men, who were not worshippers of Jehovah, are recorded as having a birthday celebration, and executions were carried out on both occasions.

At best, this is a very tenuous line of reasoning, and is insufficient to claim that birthday celebrations are scripturally prohibited. Dogs are portrayed in a negative light in the Bible, but that does not mean they should be banned. Executions are not normally associated with birthday celebrations – it was the men who ordered the executions who were in the wrong, not the birthday parties themselves. People were executed at the time of the passover as well as after the Lord's supper, but that does not stop JW's from celebrating the memorial each year.

The fact that birthdays are mentioned in the Bible at all shows that the practice was well known, so the absence of any command to avoid

birthdays could be seen to indicate that they are not offensive to God. Surely God would have told us if that were the case?

The Watchtower of 1980, 7/15 p.31 admits: “the Bible does not contain a specific prohibition against birthday celebrations”. Surely if the Bible is silent on a matter, each individual should have freedom of conscience?

“Therefore let no man judge you in eating and drinking or in respect of a festival or of an observance of the new moon or of a sabbath” – Colossians 2:16

2) The Bible does not contain any record of a true worshipper observing a birthday celebration.

This is completely irrelevant and meaningless. The Bible does not record any true worshipper observing a wedding anniversary celebration either, but these are practised among JW's. There are countless things that are not recorded in the Bible, but their absence doesn't automatically make them all wrong. In fact the absence of a prohibition lends more weight to it being acceptable, since if God really feels that strongly about it, he could have had a warning included in the Bible.

3) A birthday celebration puts the person on a pedestal as though they are superior, and fosters a spirit of greed.

Again, this statement is unfounded and constitutes a very weak argument for prohibiting celebration. Wedding anniversaries and ‘present days’ for children also put people on a pedestal, but they are permitted. Announcing baptisms, and regular or auxiliary pioneers from the platform with applause from the audience puts people on a pedestal too. There is absolutely no evidence that giving someone extra attention and gifts on their birthday causes them to develop any undesirable traits.

4) Some Israelites and early Christians did not celebrate birthdays because birthday celebrations were associated with paganism and involved idolatrous worship.

Of all the lines of reasoning used, this is perhaps the only one with any merit, but even then, by the Watchtower Society's own reasoning, it fails to qualify as a reason to condemn those whose conscience would allow a birthday celebration today.

It is true that early Christians did not celebrate birthdays because of their association with pagan worship. Anyone who celebrated birthdays in the first or second centuries A.D. could reasonably be assumed to be affiliated with a pagan belief system. However, the same is NOT true today. Birthdays have lost ALL of their religious significance – no form of worship is involved in observing a birthday celebration today – the idolatrous practices of pagans in Israelite and early Christian times have no religious impact on modern birthday celebrations at all.

After discussing the well documented and *much more recent* pagan origins of another festive practise (the Piñata), the Awake! magazine of 22nd September 2003, pages 23, 24 says:

*“A main concern is, not what the practice meant hundreds of years ago, but **how it is viewed today** in your area. Understandably, opinions may vary from one place to another. Hence, **it is wise to avoid turning such matters into big issues.**” (emphasis added)*

A similar stance is taken with wedding rings, wedding cakes, and bridesmaids – all of which have well-known pagan and superstitious origins, but are seen as a matter of individual conscience. Why is it so different with birthdays? Why are birthdays seen as evil when other practises with pagan origins are not? There is no reason to differentiate. The Governing Body arbitrarily decides what to allow and what not to allow. However, the more a person feels they have to sacrifice for their beliefs, the more committed to those beliefs they become, so by requiring the rejection of birthdays and other perfectly normal celebrations, it does have the effect of keeping people loyal to

the cause (a 'sunk cost' fallacy). Being different from everyone else also helps foster an 'us-versus-them' mentality.

This brings us on to the subject of control.

12. Are they a cult?

Key Facts:

- Whilst there is no standard agreed upon definition of what constitutes a cult, JW's do meet a lot of the criteria commonly associated with religious cults.
- The group exercises a high degree of control over its members.
- Psychological manipulation techniques are used to influence the way members think and to stifle independent thinking.
- Members are led to believe that association with the group is essential for their survival of an imminent worldwide catastrophe, that there is no worthwhile existence outside the group, and that those who leave the group (even close family members), deserve to be shunned.

Of course, the Watchtower strongly denies that JW's are a cult. However, it is unlikely that any organisation would acknowledge that they are a cult, regardless of whether they are or not, so their own subjective opinion on the matter does not really count for much!

There are a number of different definitions for the word 'cult'. A narrow definition would apply only to the most extreme cases, such as the Branch Davidians (led by David Koresh) and the People's Temple (led by Jim Jones). The most liberal definition could include all religions, and even families, schools, and other groups, since they all have membership requirements and attempt to control behaviour in some way. As such, it is virtually impossible to conclusively assess whether a particular group constitutes a 'cult', and the word is mainly used as a pejorative term. Many scholars these days use the phrase 'New Religious Movement', but again, this has a wide definition

which encompasses any religion that had its origins in relatively recent times, and in any case is often used as a euphemism for ‘cult’.

Perhaps a more useful term would be ‘high control group’ – indicating that a group imposes a higher than average level of control over its members, and also carrying the implication that there could be some potential danger to the members, or at least some unnecessarily harsh impingement of their freedom.

The International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) provides information on high control groups in general – they are not aimed at JW’s, and in fact do not even categorise whether any particular group comes under the definition of a cult or high control group.

Here are a few of the defining characteristics of a cult according to ICSA (bearing in mind that not all cults exhibit all of the listed traits and although most cults have a single charismatic leader, collective narcissism can exist in a leadership group as well):

- *The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.*
- *Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.*
- *The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (for example, members must get permission to date, change jobs, marry—or leaders prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, whether or not to have children, how to discipline children, and so forth).*
- *The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s) and members (for example, the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar—or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity).*

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- *The group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society.*
 - *The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and/or control members. Often, this is done through peer pressure and subtle forms of persuasion.*
 - *Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before joining the group.*
 - *The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.*
 - *The group is preoccupied with making money.*
 - *Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities.*
 - *Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.*
 - *The most loyal members (the “true believers”) feel there can be no life outside the context of the group. They believe there is no other way to be, and often fear reprisals to themselves or others if they leave (or even consider leaving) the group.*

Most religions attempt to exercise some control over their members, however, the level of control imposed by mainstream religions tends to be lower than that found in religions that are commonly regarded as ‘quirky’ (such as Mormons, JW’s, Moonies, Scientologists, etc.). On the spectrum of high control, some groups certainly rate higher than JW’s, but I think the Watchtower society qualifies as a high control group, and I will give some of the reasons for that here.

Commitment to the leadership is expected, and doubt and questioning are strongly discouraged. Here are a few examples of this:

Avoid Independent Thinking

... How is such independent thinking manifested? A common way is by questioning the counsel that is provided by God's visible organization." – Watchtower Jan 15, 1983 p. 22

"Any person who wants to survive into God's righteous new order urgently needs to come into a right relationship with Jehovah and His earthly organization now." – Watchtower, Nov 15, 1981 pp. 16, 17

To receive everlasting life in the earthly Paradise we must identify that organization and serve God as part of it." – Watchtower, Feb 15, 1983 p. 12

"All who want to understand the Bible should appreciate that the "greatly diversified wisdom of God" can become known only through Jehovah's channel of communication, the faithful and discreet slave" – Watchtower, Oct 1, 1994, p. 8

"Thus, "the faithful and discreet slave" does not endorse any literature, meetings, or Web sites that are not produced or organized under its oversight." – Kingdom Ministry Sep 2007, p. 3

"First, since "oneness" is to be observed, a mature Christian must be in unity and full harmony with fellow believers as far as faith and knowledge are concerned. He does not advocate or insist on personal opinions or harbor private ideas when it comes to Bible understanding." – Watchtower 2001 Aug 1 p.14

"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" – Qualified to be Ministers p.156

These quotes, and many others like them also show that the Watchtower society views itself as having an exalted status, as God's chosen organisation, on a special mission to save people, and the only source of "The Truth".

They also foster an 'us-versus-them' mentality, by viewing non-JWs as 'worldly' (which carries a negative connotation when used by JWs). This mentality is also used to justify limiting association with non-JWs. Those who become JWs are expected to cut off friendship with 'worldly' people (they are to be polite, but not associate with them any more than is necessary), but to choose friends only among other JWs.

"Of course, some contact with unbelievers — such as at school, at work, and when sharing in the ministry — is unavoidable. It is quite another matter, though, to socialize with them, even cultivating close friendships with them. Do we justify such association by saying that they have many good qualities? "Do not be misled," warns the Bible. "Bad associations spoil useful habits." (1 Cor. 15:33) Just as a small amount of pollution can contaminate clean water, friendship with those who do not practice godly devotion can contaminate our spirituality and lead us into adopting worldly viewpoints, dress, speech, and conduct." — Watchtower 2013 Feb (study edition). p.24

"Since worldly people are existing as slaves of corruption, their company cannot bring you true happiness." — Awake! 1996, Oct 22 p.15

"We must also be on guard against extended association with worldly people. Perhaps it is a neighbor, a school friend, a workmate, or a business associate. We may reason, 'He respects the Witnesses, he leads a clean life, and we do talk about the truth occasionally.' Yet, the experience of others proves that in time we may even find ourselves preferring such worldly company to that of a spiritual brother or sister." — Watchtower 1994 Feb 15 p.24

“While some contact with worldly people is unavoidable-at work, at school, and otherwise-we must be vigilant so as to keep from being sucked back into the death-dealing atmosphere of this world.” – Watchtower 1987 Sep 15 p.12

As for former members who openly reject JW teachings, they are regarded as even worse than ‘worldly’ people, and to be shunned as ‘apostates’. By instilling fear of apostates in the membership (there is little that the average JW fears more than encountering an apostate!), and urging them to avoid even the slightest contact with apostate books or websites (which are viewed as being from the Devil himself), they are able to prevent most members from discovering many of the scandalous proofs that the organisation is not directed by God. Fear and shunning of former members, or indeed, anyone who criticizes their teachings, thus denies members access to information that is critical of the organisation and is a powerful control technique – one that is commonly employed by high control groups.

The previous edition of the elder’s manual (Pay Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock), on page 94 defines apostates as anyone who deliberately holds to and speaks about teachings that are contrary to what is taught by JWs. Here are some more quotes from the Watchtower:

“Apostates “quietly” bring their ideas into the congregation, like criminals who secretly bring things into a country. Apostates use “counterfeit words.” This means that they say things that make their false ideas sound true, like criminals who make false documents look real. They try to get as many people as possible to believe their “deceptive teachings.” Peter also said that they like twisting the Scriptures. They explain Bible verses in the wrong way to make others believe their ideas. (2 Peter 2:1, 3, 13; 3:16) Apostates do not care about us. If we follow them, we will leave the road to everlasting life.

... The Bible says that apostates are mentally diseased and that they use their teachings to make others think like them. (1 Timothy 6:3, 4) Jehovah is like that good doctor. He clearly tells us to stay away from false teachers. We must always be determined to follow his warning.

What must we do to avoid false teachers? We do not speak to them or invite them into our houses. We also do not read their books, watch them on television, read what they write on the Internet, or add our own comments about what they write on the Internet. Why are we so determined to avoid them? First of all, it is because we love “the God of truth.” So we do not want to listen to false teachings that go against the truth in God’s Word.” – Watchtower 2011 Jul 15 p. 11

“It would be a mistake to think that you need to listen to apostates or to read their writings to refute their arguments. Their twisted, poisonous reasoning can cause spiritual harm and can contaminate your faith like rapidly spreading gangrene.” – Watchtower 2004 Feb 15 p.28

“True Christians share Jehovah’s feelings toward such apostates; they are not curious about apostate ideas. On the contrary, they “feel a loathing” toward those who have made themselves God’s enemies, but they leave it to Jehovah to execute vengeance.” – Watchtower 1993 Nov 1 p.19

“some of the apostate literature presents falsehoods by means of “smooth talk” and “counterfeit words.” (Romans 16:17, 18; 2 Peter 2:3) What would you expect from the table of demons? ... Those who have continued to feed at Satan’s spiritual table, the table of demons, will be forced to attend a literal meal, no, not as partakers, but as the main course-to their destruction!” – Watchtower 1994 Jul 1 p.12

“False religious propaganda from any source should be avoided like poison! Really, since our Lord has used “the faithful and discreet slave” to convey to us “sayings of everlasting life,” why should we ever want to look anywhere else?”- Watchtower 1987 Nov 1 p.20

Use of guilt and fear to pressure members into certain behaviour is commonly used in talks given at meetings and conventions, and of course, in the literature. Pictures in Watchtower literature graphically (and sometimes gleefully) portray people being executed at Armageddon.

“Some who were at one time progressing toward dedication later may seem to be holding back. If they do not have enough love for God in their heart to make an unreserved dedication to him, they ought to ask themselves whether they still have the wonderful privilege of prayer. Apparently not, because those approaching God must be earnestly seeking him and also righteousness and meekness. (Zephaniah 2:3) Everyone who really fears Jehovah is a believer who makes a dedication to God and symbolizes it by getting baptized. (Acts 8:13; 18:8) And only baptized believers have an unrestricted privilege of approaching the King Eternal in prayer.” – Watchtower, May 15, 1990, p. 12

“So, if doubts, complaints, or apostasy threaten to contaminate you spiritually, cut them away quickly! (Compare Matthew 5:29, 30.) Get help from the congregation elders.” – Watchtower 1989 Oct 1 p.18

“If we stop actively supporting Jehovah’s work, then we start following Satan. There is no middle ground.” – Watchtower 2011 Jul 15 p.18

“Disfellowshipping serves as a powerful warning example to those in the congregation, since they will be able to see the disastrous consequences of ignoring Jehovah’s laws.” – Watchtower 1963 Jul 1 p. 411

“Still, if anyone hopes to be concealed in “the day of Jehovah’s anger,” he will need help to do more than be a regular reader of our publications.” – Kingdom Ministry Mar 2005 p.1

“Yes, we cannot expect God to reward us with everlasting life if, as it were, we do not sign up to work for him.” – Watchtower 1978 Nov 1 p.15

Members are also encouraged to report on any ‘wrongdoing’ they may come across among their fellow members, leading to a climate of suspicion and the constant need to keep up appearances.

“Therefore, after we have given the erring individual a reasonable amount of time to approach the elders about his wrongdoing, it is our responsibility before Jehovah not to be a sharer in his sin. We need to inform the responsible overseers that the person has revealed serious wrongdoing that merits their investigation.” – Watchtower 1985 Nov 15 p. 20

The idea that there is no worthwhile life outside the group is constantly reinforced:

“The world is filled with unhappiness, and people generally have a gloomy outlook on the future. However, we have a bright outlook, knowing that one day all sadness will be a thing of the past.” – Kingdom Ministry Feb 2002 p.1

Jehovah’s Witnesses are never off duty. They are expected to be involved in religious activities every day, even when they go on holiday. A typical JW is expected to read a passage of the Bible every day, read the day’s text (a daily Bible verse and Watchtower commentary on it), pray before every meal, and throughout the day, attend meetings at least twice a week, prepare for those meetings by pre-reading the assigned material and underlining the answers to the questions printed in it, hold a family bible study (actually study of a Watchtower publication) once a week, engage in the preaching work

for an average of eight to ten hours per month, but preferably more (and informally whenever they get the chance), read the Watchtower and Awake! magazines, and every other publication they produce (usually two or three per year), prepare for assignments (short talks or demonstrations that are given at the meetings), and consult Watchtower literature before making any important decisions. Elders, ministerial servants, and pioneers have additional responsibilities and meetings to attend.

This is all in addition to family commitments, work, caring for the sick, and all the other things that keep everyone busy enough as it is.

All this work and repetition (there is rarely anything new discussed, it is the same old stuff over and over) serves to keep members busy, and stop them questioning. But it also has a ‘priming’ effect – routine exposure to an idea makes it easier to accept. This is not just gullibility – even the most sceptical person is subject to priming – it is part of the psychological makeup of a human being.

Similarly, the question and answer format that is so commonly used in JW ‘studies’ bears no resemblance to the type of study done at an academic institution – it is purely a case of guiding people into thinking what the writer wants you to think – repeating the Watchtower’s thoughts in your own words.

Some people call this ‘mind control’ – it is at least psychological manipulation. Other psychological manipulation techniques used include love-bombing, using yes-sets, and herd mentality. The structure of meetings and conventions can even induce a mild hypnotic effect⁴⁰.

I don’t think the Governing Body are deliberately seeking out and using mind control techniques – it seems to me that the techniques used have developed over the years, and those that are most effective for the group’s self preservation are employed. Still, the end result is

40 You can of course do further research on these techniques – don’t just take my word for it (but don’t dismiss it either). The hypnotic effect is used by most religions actually – singing or chanting, praying, standing and sitting, and other rituals all have an effect on brain chemistry, leading to people becoming more receptive to suggestion.

much the same – faithful JWs gradually lose the ability to think for themselves and rely on the Watchtower to do their thinking for them. I suppose some people prefer it that way, but it does leave them vulnerable and open to abuse (making them pliable, more easily coerced into shunning others or rejecting life-saving medical treatment).

13. Warning!

Key Facts:

- You cannot usually reason someone out of a position they didn't reason themselves into.
- Most JW's will not listen to any criticism of their religion, regardless of the weight of the evidence.

If you try to share any of this information with a JW, in most cases the likely response would be hostility. A person who has already sacrificed a lot for the sake of a cause is unlikely to let go of that cause easily, even in the face of a large amount of evidence (the sunk cost fallacy). In addition, if the person's emotional attachment to the organisation, or the promise of a paradise and/or resurrection, or fear of Armageddon is stronger than a person's desire to know the truth, they will always find ways of dismissing, ignoring, or rationalising any conflict – even if that means tolerating a high level of cognitive dissonance, or being intellectually dishonest. Also, most JW's are committed to the idea that the religion is 'the truth', and no amount of evidence will change that – since they 'know' their beliefs are true, if the evidence conflicts with that, the only possible explanation they can allow for is that there is something wrong with the evidence.

I was warned of this, but I still tried reasoning with a couple of JW's – I was very surprised at how intractable they were and it just led to frustration. I'm not saying you shouldn't try sharing this information with anyone if you want to, just be prepared to be stonewalled if you do. A JW who is having some doubts of their own already is more likely to be at least a little open-minded.

14. Where to get more information

Key Facts:

- You will not get an accurate or balanced viewpoint by only listening to one source – it is always best to consult several sources.
- Not all sources are equally credible, so choose carefully, check references, and weigh up the evidence.

I would strongly recommend the book ‘Crisis of Conscience’ by Ray Franz. Ray Franz was the nephew of Fred Franz (once the president of the Watchtower society), and was himself a member of the Governing Body for nine years in the 1970’s. His account of how the organisation was run, and what happened to him is told calmly and accurately, without bitterness. He provides plenty of evidence to back up what he says.

Another good starting point for further research is the website jwfacts.com. Again, there are plenty of references provided so you can verify what is being said (although the tone occasionally becomes a little aggressive, it is generally well-researched and factual, and I think a little negative emotion from the author is understandable). Cedar’s blog at jwsurvey.org is a good source of information on current affairs relating to JW’s, with very insightful commentary, and again, generally well researched and evidence based. There are some unreliable and sensationalist anti-JW websites out there, some of which can be quite hateful – these sites are not helpful and can make matters worse.

For support in dealing with issues that arise from having been involved with JW’s, there are plenty of support forums on the internet – again, some are better than others so discretion is required. The ex-JW forum on yuku.com is particularly warm and helpful, as is jehovahs-witness.com.

For more information about the psychological processes that are involved in the way we formulate beliefs, I recommend the book 'Thinking, Fast and Slow' by Daniel Kahneman. This book has absolutely nothing to do with JW's, it is a layman's guide to discoveries made by psychologists in the last few decades about how intuition and analytical thought work together to shape our view of the world. It is fascinating and enlightening.

If you want to learn about the Bible, I recommend trying to find secular scholarly sources – Bart Ehrman's "Misquoting Jesus" is a good introduction to how scholars approach ancient texts. The Oxford Companion to the Bible (edited by Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan) also contains lots of reliable, scholarly information. Any religious group will have their own interpretation and their own agenda, so you will only get a biased view from them. There are many ways of interpreting various passages of the Bible, and this should be acknowledged, rather than insisting that one particular interpretation is correct or 'the truth'.

I have personally compiled a list of quotes from Watchtower publications, which expose some of the dishonesty of the writers – these are included in the appendix.

15. What happened after I left

Key Facts:

- After leaving the JWs, I was harassed, and treated unfairly. Despite this, I got off lightly compared to many who leave.
- There is no dignified way to leave the faith – simply not believing any more is considered to be wicked.

When I stopped attending meetings, an elder came by the house, not to see if he could help, but because he wanted to ‘clarify what my status is in the congregation’ (in other words, was I going to disassociate myself?). I replied that I don’t have a ‘status’.

I also received an e-mail from another elder who said he had been told that I ‘no longer wanted to be one of Jehovah’s Witnesses’. I replied saying that I had made no such statement.

In October 2010, my great aunt died. I was very fond of her. On the day of my wedding anniversary (23rd October 2010), my dad came round to tell me that I would not be welcome at the reception after the funeral, because I had ‘left Jehovah’ (at this point I had not even broken any JW rules, I had simply stopped attending meetings). Not only that, but my two brothers, both of whom were breaking many JW rules, were welcome to attend – because they had never been baptised.

My great aunt had lived 160 miles north of us, and the funeral reception was held in the home of a ‘sister’⁴¹ up there. My parents did not even consult her though, they said that they knew she would follow the Society’s direction on the matter anyway so there was no point in even asking her (not that there was any official direction on

41 JWs refer to each other as ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’.

the matter from the Society – the decision was largely based on a talk given by a circuit overseer and discussions they had with local elders).

Eight months after I stopped attending meetings, not having initiated any discussion with any JW's in that time, and having researched a lot of the issues discussed in this book, the festive season arrived. My daughter was not quite four years old. At that point, I still did not like Christmas – not because of its 'pagan origins', it just wasn't my thing (perhaps because I had emotionally detached myself from it due to never having celebrated). Still, I didn't want to deprive my daughter of celebrating, and she was very keen, so I bought her a present, and took her to a Christmas party at nursery. She loved it. I didn't decorate or get a tree that year though, and I didn't celebrate as such myself.

In January 2011, two elders came to our house and asked if they could speak to me about an allegation that I had celebrated Christmas (shock horror!). I refused to talk to them. They then systematically went round all of my family members (and my one remaining JW friend), including even non-JW's, asking them whether they had seen me celebrating Christmas. They also gave my parents Watchtower articles about how to cope when a loved one is disfellowshipped. This went on over the course of a few weeks. I consulted a solicitor, who confirmed that this was likely to be viewed legally as harassment, and I would very likely be awarded an injunction against the two investigating elders if the case were brought to a magistrate.

I wrote to the two elders and asked them to stop, but they carried on with their 'investigation' (remember, I had not been associating with the congregation for the best part of a year at this point). I then instructed my solicitor to send the elders a cease and desist letter. A few days later, they confirmed receipt of the letter, but said they were going ahead with a judicial committee anyway. A few weeks went by with nothing happening, and when my wife asked, she was told that the matter was dropped because there were not two witnesses.

That was a very stressful time. Had they found me 'guilty', they would have disfellowshipped me, and my own parents and grandmother would not have been allowed to talk to me ever again, and neither

would my mother-in-law. All that because I gave my daughter a Christmas present!

I was lucky. Many others have been in a similar position, *even two years or more after having left*, and have ended up being shunned by their family as a result. One woman was confronted by an elder in hospital over the blood issue, fifteen years after leaving.

The next two chapters deal with issues that are not specific to JW's (evolution versus special creation, and the veracity of the Bible), but which nevertheless have a bearing on my reasons for leaving. Although not specific to JW's, the JW's are unusual in that they have a very literal interpretation of the Bible (in comparison to mainstream Christianity). Though they claim not to be fundamentalists, they nevertheless adopt a fundamentalist position on a number of Bible passages, including many of the statements in the Bible book of Genesis.

16. Evolution/Creation

Key Facts:

- Most JW's, even those who think they have thoroughly researched the subject, do not understand the scientific theory of evolution by natural selection.
- Evolution is compatible with creation by a supreme being, but not with a literal interpretation of the Bible book of Genesis.
- Evolution is a well established scientific theory; there is copious evidence in support of it, and virtually all life scientists (even those who are religious) agree that it is a fact.
- The principal lines of reasoning in favour of special creation used by JW's (and other creationists) rely on personal incredulity, arguments from ignorance and false analogies, not empirical evidence.

There are some basic misconceptions about evolution (especially among JW's and other creationists) which I want to highlight.

Most mainstream Christian religions (including Catholicism) officially allow for the acceptance of the scientific theory of evolution. While it is true that many individual members of mainstream Christian religions believe that humans and other animals were created directly by God in basically the same form we find them today (which is clearly at odds with science), there are ways of reconciling belief in the existence of a supreme being who created life, with the scientific theory of evolution (more on this in a moment). In any case, it is intellectually dishonest to start with a conclusion and then try to find evidence to support it, disregarding evidence that does not support it. That's not to say that everyone who believes in special creation is

being intellectually dishonest, but to dismiss evolution without understanding it, simply because one has already reached a conclusion which is incompatible with it is.

In order to understand evolution, it is important to remember that it takes place on the scale of *millions* of years, and involves *populations*, not individuals. Pick a creature at any point in history, and it is likely that it will very strongly resemble its ancestors that were around a thousand years previously. Likewise, its descendants in a thousand years' time will look very similar. Over the course of a million years though, the resemblance may not be so obvious – some features may well have changed significantly, and it may be that they would now be classified as separate species.

Natural selection is one of the main theories that explains why these changes occur. There is natural variety in the mixture of genes that get passed from one generation to the next, mutations and copying errors which allow for features and characteristics to be slightly different from previous generations (e.g. a child might end up taller than both of its parents). If the environment is such that a particular trait provides the creature with a survival or reproductive advantage, creatures with that feature are more likely to pass on their genes to the next generation. Over many successive generations, these advantageous features (advantageous for reproduction that is) can therefore accumulate and, combined with geographical isolation, an environmental niche, or other survival pressures, result in the development of new species.

I've listed twelve of the most common myths here (among JW's that is), but of course there are others.

First, let's deal with the title of that JW book that originally convinced me that God exists: "Life – How did it get here? By Evolution or by Creation?" – I'm sure you can recognise this is a false dichotomy, but it is also a straw man. It demonstrates either a profound ignorance of what evolution is about, or is a deliberate attempt to mislead the reader (and I don't think saying that is a false dichotomy). You might as well ask: "Life – How did it get here? By Gravity or by Creation?"

Myth no.1: Evolution attempts to address how life got here.

The theory of evolution by natural selection has *nothing* to say about how life got started. It is about how plants and animals diversify over time – not how life arose from non-living matter (that is *abiogenesis*, a separate subject). A naturalistic explanation for the beginning of life, whilst more probable than a supernatural explanation, is *not a prerequisite nor a foundation* of evolution. Therefore, evolution can be compatible with creation (the idea of evolution being started off by and/or guided by a supreme being is known as ‘theistic evolution’, but this is *not* a scientific theory). Most modern Christian religions officially acknowledge evolution, and can do so without being hypocritical (assuming the biblical description of creation is taken as at least somewhat allegorical) because evolution does not *require* that there be no creator. Evolution *is* at odds with ‘special creation’ however (the notion that God created all the current species in basically the same form or ‘kinds’ we see today).

Myth no.2: Organic machinery shows evidence of intelligent design.

Perhaps the most common argument used by proponents of special creation is that complex machinery cannot come about by accident. Analogies are made with regard to various man-made devices such as a watch or a camera, and it is asserted that because it is absurd to suggest that such complex machinery was not designed by an intelligent agent, it is also absurd to suggest that complex biological machinery was not designed by an intelligent agent. This appears to be a compelling argument, which intuitively makes sense, and which I found convincing for many years.

However, living things are not assembled – they grow and develop based on their genetic code. It is important to remember that genes are not a ‘blueprint’ for an organism, they are more like a ‘recipe’. The structures that result from the protein folding they encode adapt according to local rules that they are following, not a predetermined plan of what the end result should look like. So if a genetic mutation causes an organism to grow an extra finger for example, the blood vessels will still fill the finger and nerve endings will still grow into it, as they are following rules that say they should fill up whatever space

is there – they don't "care" that the extra digit is not supposed to be there. This is totally different to a man-made structure – if you build a house and make the hole for the window too big, the window will not grow to fill the available space!

This means that living organisms, *unlike human machines*, can adapt and change, and even develop new features spontaneously – by following local rules, not following a master plan (and when I say 'rules', I just mean the information encoded in the DNA which has been passed on from ancestral organisms – not formal rules that must be invented by an intelligent agent). This behaviour can be modelled in computer programs, and can also be seen in other phenomena, such as the apparent unified movement of a school of fish. Using the fact that we can recognise design in man-made objects to suggest that organic machinery must have been designed is therefore a false analogy (a logical fallacy).

In addition, evolution has certain requirements which are not met by man-made objects. For evolution to occur, an entity has to be self-replicating, the replication must be imperfect (there must be capacity for descendants to differ slightly from their parent entities), and there must be some kind of survival pressure so that the traits that contribute to the entity's ability to replicate are favoured. As such, a watch or a car or a computer cannot evolve – they have to be designed and built by an intelligent maker. Such is not automatically the case with organic machines that are the result of many generations of imperfect self-replication in a competitive environment.

Significantly, where humans have created 'virtual' imperfect self-replicating entities with environmental pressures (I'm referring to computer programs that attempt to model the conditions under which evolution occurs), the entities do indeed evolve, and the end results are entities that were not designed by any intelligent agent, despite being well-refined adaptations. So again, on this count, the analogy is false – when the analogy is corrected (by implementing the conditions required for evolution to occur), it lends more weight to evolution than to special creation (languages are similar – they replicate down the generations with slight alterations and also evolve, albeit by a somewhat different mechanism than biological evolution).

On the subject of ‘design’, the existence of carnivores, viruses, and parasites is a problem for special creation. Typically these things are deemed to be in some way connected to the ‘fall of man’ (Adam and Eve’s “sin” according to the Bible), but there is ample evidence that carnivores and parasites existed long before humans. Many of these destructive organisms show the same level of ingenuity of ‘design’ that is often used to ‘prove’ that other organisms had an intelligent creator. The emerald jewel wasp (as just one example of many) stings a cockroach to paralyse it, chews off one of its antennae, then drags it to its burrow and lays eggs in the cockroach’s abdomen. When the larvae hatch, they eat the cockroach from the inside out, but they consume the organs in just the right order so that the cockroach stays alive (and therefore ‘fresh’) for as long as possible. How do the larvae know what order to eat the cockroach organs in? How does the adult wasp know exactly where to sting the cockroach and how much venom to deliver so as to paralyse the roach without killing it? Did Satan design these things? If so, he is also a creator. If not, why would a benevolent God design such cruelty?

Myth no.3: Evolution says humans evolved from monkeys or apes.

This is inaccurate. Modern monkeys and humans *share a common ancestor*. One does not descend directly from the other. The same is true for all living things (humans also share a common ancestor with cabbage for example, albeit much further removed). It should also be noted that there is a difference between monkeys and apes – both are simian primates, but apes are much more closely related to humans than monkeys are. The same principle applies though – humans did not descend from any modern ape – they share a common ancestor with all apes (a more recent one than the one that humans and apes share with monkeys).

Modern humans are bipedal, have a large brain enabling abstract thought and adaptability to almost any environment (which likely developed in part due to having hands free to use tools), and a mostly hairless body. It is therefore easy for us to fool ourselves into thinking that humans are vastly different from any other ape – that apes all belong to one category and humans to another. However, genetic analysis shows that humans are more closely related to chimpanzees

and bonobos than chimps are to any other ape; it can truthfully be said that humans did not evolve from apes, they *are* apes. The amount of genetic difference between chimps and humans is very close to the difference between African elephants and Indian elephants⁴².

Myth no.4: If ape-men existed, they must have been superior to apes, so should still be around today.

A very common objection to human evolution (one that I raised myself when I was a JW) is that if early apes evolved into ape-men, why are there still apes but no ape-men? If ape-men were better adapted to survive than apes, why did they die out but apes continue to thrive? We will assume that the term ‘ape-man’ refers to some transitional form between early apes and modern humans. As with most of these myths, the question is based on a misunderstanding of how evolution occurs.

Evolution does not make linear progress – it doesn’t just go from simple to more advanced. Apes are not ‘less evolved’ than humans (or ape-men) – *they are just as ‘evolved’ as humans* (or any other species), having traits and skills that humans and other species lack, making them much better adapted to their particular environmental niche than we are. Although human intellect has enabled us to dominate the planet and accomplish things that no other animal can, we should also bear in mind that there are some things that chimps can do far, far better than humans – in fact, we are only just beginning to understand some of the remarkable capabilities of chimps and other apes (for example, staggering feats of extremely fast visual memory).

We should not expect that ape-men would be better able to survive than apes, just that they adapted to their particular environmental niche. The trouble with adapting to a niche is that if that niche disappears, so does the species that relied on it. Likewise if there is fierce competition for resources, only the best adapted (or most adaptable) will survive – hence the vast majority of species that have ever existed have gone extinct (and there will never be a whole series

42 Functional genomics in the chimpanzee, Wolfgang Enard et al. Max-Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig.
https://www.eva.mpg.de/fileadmin/content_files/staff/paabo/pdf/Enardfunktio_nprog.pdf

of intermediate forms existing at the same time). The ones that remain are those that have best adapted to the environment that currently exists. Apes and modern humans did not compete strongly with each other, having adapted to different environments, but both would have competed with a transitional species.

Myth no.5: Evolution is ‘only a theory’ or a ‘belief’ or even ‘requires faith’.

These are also all myths or misunderstandings. First, we should be able to distinguish between a law and a theory. A law describes an observation (typically by way of a mathematical formula). A theory attempts to explain the observation – the underlying mechanisms that make it so. Evolution is not normally regarded as a law (although it is sometimes phrased as such), because it cannot be distilled into a mathematical formula like the laws of physics can – the same is true of almost everything in biology (a ‘squishy science’). Even so, biology encompasses many scientific theories, with evolution being perhaps the most important (“Nothing in Biology Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution” as Eastern Orthodox Christian, Theodosius Dobzhansky, observed).

In common parlance, the word ‘theory’ has come to mean a hypothesis or conjecture – something unproven. A *scientific theory* is not the same thing. In science, a theory is *superior* to a law. It describes how things work – not just vaguely or potentially, but in a way that can be used to model the process, make confident predictions about the outcome of a situation, and even develop technology to exploit it.

In order for a hypothesis to become an established scientific theory, it has to prove its worth. It must be falsifiable (i.e. there must be some test you could do where a certain outcome would prove it wrong – if something can never be proved wrong, it cannot be tested, and does not qualify for the status of scientific theory). It must make predictions that can be verified. The effects must be reproducible by other scientists in well run controlled conditions. It must undergo a peer review process so that experts can scrutinise the theory and probe it for weaknesses.

A scientific theory is never ‘finished’ – there is always the possibility that it can be refined, or even replaced, but that does not invalidate an established theory. For example, Newton’s theory of gravity was replaced by Einstein’s theory of gravity. Einstein’s theory is more accurate and makes more precise predictions, but that does not make Newton’s theory wrong – in fact, Newton’s theory is still used in most cases, as it is accurate enough for everyday use and easier to understand. Both theories of gravity can be regarded as ‘fact’ in that there is so much supporting evidence that it would be perverse to refuse to accept the veracity of either of them.

A theory then, is a model that describes why and how a law operates or a phenomenon occurs. A better, more accurate model might come along later, but that does not mean the first model was incorrect and it certainly doesn’t indicate that the law itself is wrong or that the phenomenon does not occur. The more experiments that validate a theory, the stronger the theory becomes. A well established theory is one that we can have great confidence in, whilst still allowing for further improvements and refinements to be made. And whilst occasionally a scientific theory is proven wrong, this invariably happens with theories that are abstract and theoretical (and therefore difficult to test) or not well established. A well established theory (such as germ theory, gravity, or evolution) is one which has so much supporting evidence that it can safely be regarded as a fact.

Evolution can be observed directly in progress in the laboratory as well as in the wild, and can be traced through the fossil record, by comparative morphology, embryology, geographical distribution of species, and through genetics (more on this in a moment). When scientists engage in debate and disagree about the theory of evolution, they are not discussing whether or not evolution happens! They are discussing *details* about some aspect of the theory of evolution – disagreements arise on the finer details, but there is overwhelming consensus among scientists that evolution is a fact.

Even Michael Behe, one of the most high profile proponents of the ‘Intelligent Design’ movement who argues against Darwinism for the development of microscopic biological machinery (and is often quoted

in Watchtower publications), still accepts that Darwinian evolution explains the adaptation and evolution of plants and animals⁴³.

Myth no.6: There is little or no evidence to support evolution.

Proof of evolution can be found in many areas – here are some of them:

Laboratory experiments: Bacteria are usually the subject of laboratory experiments involving evolution because they can reproduce very rapidly, with two or three new generations appearing every hour (rather than every twenty years or so as with humans). Richard Lenski's experiments for example, have allowed 'irreducible complexity'⁴⁴ to be observed developing by Darwinian processes in E.coli bacteria, in experiments that have been running for decades and that can reliably reproduce their results. Nylon-eating bacteria have evolved recently which produce three different types of enzyme that are only effective at breaking down nylon by-products (nylon was only invented in the 1930's), and are unlike any other species of bacteria – they have specifically evolved the ability to digest nylon due to the man-made production of nylon – and scientists have been able to force another species of bacteria to evolve this ability, by restricting available nutrients. Various bacteria and viruses are known to constantly evolve resistance to antibiotics and vaccines through Darwinian processes (the individual organisms that are better able to tolerate the treatment are the ones who survive and pass on the advantage to their descendants, making the treatment ineffective).

43 "Further, I find the idea of common descent (that all organisms share a common ancestor) fairly convincing, and have no particular reason to doubt it. I fairly respect the work of colleagues who study the development and behavior of organisms within an evolutionary framework, and I think the evolutionary biologists have contributed enormously to our understanding of the world. Although Darwin's mechanism – natural selection working on variation – might explain many things, however, I do not believe it explains molecular life." – Darwin's Black Box, p.5 (Michael Behe).

44 Proponents of intelligent design argue that a system which has inter-dependent parts and cannot be simplified without losing its function (that is 'irreducibly complex') is impossible to explain by Darwinian processes. The Lenski experiments are one way to prove that this is not the case.

Observation: With speciation (the development of new species) typically taking place on the scale of millions of years, it is not possible to observe large scale changes as they occur due to our comparatively minuscule life span. Even so, speciation has been observed in the wild. The London underground has a population of mosquitos that has evolved in the tube tunnels, isolated from their above ground ancestors, and now considered a separate species (it is almost impossible for them to reproduce with their above ground ancestral species, and they exhibit unique behaviours).

Perhaps the most spectacular example of observed evolution in the wild is that of Italian wall lizards. In 1971, a small population of lizards were deliberately transported from one island to another. Nearly 40 years later, it was observed that the descendants of this population had evolved to adapt to the new environment. The new population had a much higher amount of vegetation in their diet, and had developed larger heads with more bite force and new, less territorial behaviours. Most striking of all though, was that the new population had evolved an entirely new feature: cecal valves (sphincter muscles which separate the small and large intestines to prevent colonic reflux, slow down digestion, and provide fermentation chambers for digesting plant matter). Just a few decades is incredibly quick for such a sophisticated new feature to evolve before our eyes.

Comparative morphology: The physical structure of different species also shows strong indications of evolution and common descent (this includes homologous structures, where different animals use the same body part, sometimes for different functions, and analogous structures, where different body parts are used for the same functions). For example, all mammalian tetrapods (four-limbed mammals) have a hand or forefoot with the same number and arrangement of bones, but a bat's hand has been modified to act as a wing – the bones in a bat's wing are fingers and are identical in number and arrangement to those in other mammalian hands (albeit elongated and reduced in density), because the bat's wing *is* a hand (not originally designed as a wing). Similar rearrangements of existing body parts are seen throughout the animal kingdom – exactly as one would expect from the evolutionary model (but unnecessary and counter-intuitively restrictive for something specially designed). There are also cases where

environmental pressures have led to the evolution of similar structures from different body parts – such as the tail of a whale or dolphin, which is horizontal due to evolving from land mammals, not directly from fish, and is analogous to the tail of a fish or shark (which is vertical).

The recurrent laryngeal nerve (which runs from the brain to the larynx) shows evidence of an evolutionary past – in fish, these nerves run in a direct route from the brain, past the heart, to the gills. In animals that evolved from fish, as the heart moved lower down the body, and the neck formed, the nerve had to take a detour – it cannot just break apart and re-form in a direct line, so it had to lengthen. In the case of giraffes, this means that the nerve makes a detour of over four and half metres! The nerve runs from the brain, down the neck, round the aortic arch (near the heart), back up the neck, to the larynx – completely unnecessary if the giraffe was specially designed, but in reality an unavoidable relic of evolution due to its ancient fishy ancestry.

Geographical distribution: Where a population of animals becomes isolated from other members of the species, the evolutionary model predicts that they will evolve to fill whatever environmental niche they are isolated in. Geographic isolation can occur with the formation of islands, where a population is accidentally transported from one island to another, or where some other geographical feature such as a river or volcano causes a long-lasting separation of a group. It was comparison of the fauna on different islands of the Galapagos that helped Darwin develop the theory of evolution – local populations adapt to local conditions and develop new traits. When an island is separated from the mainland for an extended period of time, the evolutionary path diverges much further – hence there are so many creatures that are unique to Madagascar, or unique to Australia – they are unique because they evolved there in isolation from their ancestral populations. Such an exact fit with evolutionary theory does not make sense for special creation (unless the creator wanted to make it look like the creation had evolved), and also presents a problem for the biblical account of a global flood (since animals would need to be teleported to and from their native islands – more on that in the next chapter).

Genetics: Studying the genetic code of different organisms allows us to trace family lines where different species are related. Mutation rates can be observed and corresponding predictions made about evolutionary timescales and relationships which can then be verified with the fossil record and comparison with extant species. There are key markers in genetic machinery, including copying errors, which prove a common ancestry.

Certain retroviruses will infect a creature and actually alter the DNA sequence in its cells (all viruses use the host's cellular machinery to make copies of themselves, but retroviruses actually leave behind a copy of their genes in the host's cells). When this happens in a reproductive cell, and that cell goes on to become a viable organism, the altered genome is incorporated into that organism's genome and passed on to the next generation (becoming an 'endogenous retrovirus', or 'ERV'). Estimates vary, but up to 5% of the human genome is understood to be made up of ERVs (it is thought that some artefacts that are considered to be ERVs did not actually originate with retroviruses, but we needn't complicate matters here). ERVs can be used to identify hereditary relationships between different species. For example, if the first common ancestor of all mammals was infected with a certain ERV, we can expect all mammals to have that same ERV. If the common ancestor of mice and rats had been infected with another ERV, all mice and rats should have that ERV as well as the first one. If the common ancestor of apes and humans had a certain ERV, all apes and humans should have the first one and the one from their common ancestor, but *not* the one shared by mice and rats. Using ERVs then, we can trace out a complex family tree which *exactly matches* the evolutionary history of modern organisms that have already been established by other means (fossils, gene sequencing, body plans, geography, etc.).

There are copious examples of genetic evidence for evolution, but another particularly striking example involves the human "Chromosome 2". All the great apes have 24 pairs of chromosomes (which hold the DNA), but humans have 23 pairs. If humans evolved from a common ancestor with apes, we would expect to see evidence of two of those pairs of chromosomes merging into a single pair. At each end of each chromosome is a telomere – telomeres do not

normally appear in the middle of a chromosome. In the middle of each chromosome is a centromere – there is normally only one centromere per chromosome. So a chromosome typically looks something like this: tt-----cc-----tt (where tt is the telomere, and cc is the centromere). Chromosome 2 in humans contains two telomeres in the middle of the chromosome, and a centromere in each half: tt----cc----tttt----cc----tt – indicating that this chromosome must be the result of the merging of two other chromosomes – which of course correspond exactly with the disparity between the chromosomes of great apes and humans. The gene sequences on these chromosomes in chimps and humans can be matched up (in fact they are almost identical), and prove beyond reasonable doubt that apes and humans share a common ancestor.

Atavisms and comparative embryology: Another strong indicator of evolution is the presence of vestigial traits in the genetic code, in embryos during their development, and sometimes even in fully developed creatures (where an ancestral feature is present in a creature, such as hind limbs on a whale, it is known as an ‘atavism’). All vertebrates (including fish, reptiles, birds, and humans) share the same characteristics during early embryonic development – they all start out with the same type of skin, ‘gill arches’ (not gills, but the scaffold on which gills develop in fish) and a tail. As development progresses, the different groups of animals diverge along their evolutionary path – an early human embryo shares characteristics with early fish embryos, early reptile embryos, and other mammal embryos. Embryonic development is like a miniature evolutionary history played out in the womb.

Humans have the genetic information needed to grow a tail. The tail is very much in evidence during the embryonic stage and although it is usually re-absorbed during later development, some people are in fact born with a tail (not all cases of humans with appendages are true tails, but some are – there are documented cases of tails containing vertebrae and even muscles). Dolphin embryos have the ‘buds’ of hind limbs (even though dolphins don’t have any form of hind limb). Chickens have the genes for teeth (and these genes can be artificially ‘switched on’ to hatch a chick with teeth). Attempts are underway right now to create a ‘chickenosaurus’. By switching on the teeth genes,

suppressing the gene that re-absorbs the long tail, and trying to locate the gene for keeping the fingers separate (chicken embryos have fingers which become fused into a wing during development), scientists are attempting to create a more dinosaur-like creature from the genetic material present in a chicken's DNA. They can only do this because the genes are already there – leftovers from the chicken's dinosaur ancestors. This is not something you would expect to see if creatures were special creations, but is exactly what is predicted by evolutionary theory.

The fossil record: The amount of fossil evidence in support of evolution is staggering. One of the interesting things about fossils is that it would be very easy to prove evolution wrong simply by finding a fossil in the 'wrong' layer of rock. Even when a layer of rock cannot be accurately dated, we can certainly deduce the order in which the layers formed – newer rocks being laid down on top of older layers. Thus, the depth or layer of rock that a fossil appears in indicates where it should fit in the evolutionary tree. If evolution is true, the deeper we dig, the more primitive forms should dominate – it would be impossible to find a fossil of a flower in the Paleozoic layer for example. This is not the case with special creation – species would not have to be created in any particular order, and even if the creator decided to make organisms more complex as time went on, their fossil placement still would not have to fit perfectly with the evolutionary tree, but again we find that *without exception*, the fossils we find are ones that fit exactly with the evolutionary model.

Myth no. 7: The fossil record does not support evolution, as there are many 'missing links'.

Despite creationist protestations about 'missing links', there are lots of examples of transitional forms in the fossil record. Huge numbers of fossils have been found in China and the US in recent years which provide quite a detailed account of the evolution of birds – from sparse display feathers to non-flight plumage to gliding dinosaurs to powered flight (in fact, birds are classified as avian dinosaurs today). The evolution of humans, whales, horses and other modern species are also very well documented in the fossil record. Don't take creationists' word for it that transitional fossils are 'missing' – they aren't. Look them up!

Also note that every time a new fossil is found, it creates an extra gap – where there was previously one gap between two species, on finding an intermediate form, you now have two gaps between those species! So we should expect that the number of gaps between fossils will increase as more ancient species are discovered (fossilization is rare enough that we will never find every link between every organism that ever lived), but the existence of gaps in the record is entirely expected and does no harm to the theory of evolution. In fact, even if we had *no* fossils, it would not even make a dent in the theory of evolution because of all of the other lines of evidence, as summarised above.

Myth no.8: Evolution requires that a creature could have ‘half an eye’ or ‘half an organ’.

All transitional forms were complete, fully formed organisms. At the time they lived, they were not transitional, they were current. Again such an argument displays complete ignorance of how evolution works (or in some cases could be a deliberate ploy to deceive). No animal ever had half an eye. The most primitive eye would have simply been a collection of light sensitive molecules – enough to provide a survival advantage, but not highly complex and refined like the eye of a human. The ability to detect shape, colour, depth, to focus, to adapt to different lighting conditions, etc. are all separate features which could each confer a survival advantage and evolve gradually – it does not have to jump from blindness to a fully formed human eye.

Even now, across the animal kingdom, we find animals with varying degrees of vision – some are completely blind, some have very poor eyesight, some have good vision, some excel (some birds of prey for example have eyesight far superior to our own). Some have even lost their eyes through evolution – blind cave fish still have the basic structures for eyes, but due to their light deprived habitat, the ‘cost’ of having eyes (the resources needed to develop an eye can be put towards some other feature or process that favours reproduction) has meant that for them, eyes no longer confer a survival advantage and they have gradually been lost.

Scientists have not unravelled the detailed mechanisms by which every feature of every animal evolved. In some cases we have strong evidence of exactly how a feature formed, even down to the exact

genetic mutations involved. In other cases we have a general idea based on skeletal structures in fossils or other evidence. In other cases, we can have an educated guess or come up with several alternatives. In some cases we have no idea how a feature came to be. There are limitations to what we can learn, and undoubtedly some things will always be a mystery, but the absence of a concrete explanation, or even a hypothetical explanation for a particular feature cannot be held as evidence that the feature could not have evolved – the failing is with human imagination and knowledge and the limitations of our place in history and relatively short life span, not with the theory of evolution, which has proved itself time and again to have extraordinary explanatory power. Even if there are factors at play other than those that have already been discovered, history has shown that when supernatural explanations have been invoked to explain the apparently inexplicable, simpler, natural explanations have often been found by means of scientific investigation, rendering the supernatural unnecessary (still, if you want to resort to the supernatural, that's up to you – there will likely always be gaps in our knowledge which can easily be filled in by a God until such time as new evidence comes to light).

Myth no.9: Life/Species got here either by blind chance or by design. Probability rules out blind chance, leaving us with no choice but to accept design.

This is a false dichotomy. Blind chance is not the only mechanism by which evolution occurs. Environmental pressure, natural selection, sexual selection, genetic drift, self-organisation, and other factors *influence* the outcome. Not all outcomes are equally probable, so trying to use the probability of chance events to discredit evolution is specious reasoning. When applied to the origin of life (as it often is), this is still problematic, as it is quite possible that abiogenesis is inevitable given certain conditions (however unlikely it might seem to someone who does not know how it happened).

For example, rolling a dice is commonly accepted as invoking a random result – the number on the upper face is a result of blind chance. If the dice is weighted though, the result is no longer just blind chance – there is a stronger probability a certain outcome will be

achieved. Likewise, natural processes can cause certain outcomes to be more likely than others, without any intelligent guidance.

In the case of natural selection, we can use the analogy of a monkey sitting at a typewriter. If the monkey taps out random letters, the chances it will ever produce the entire works of Shakespeare are so small as to be regarded as impossible – even several million monkeys could tap away for billions of years and never produce the complete works of Shakespeare. But if you were to record each letter that is typed, keep any that are correct, and discard any that are incorrect (effectively applying a filter to the results), it becomes inevitable that the complete works of Shakespeare will be produced within a relatively short space of time. In fact this experiment has been performed using a few million ‘virtual monkeys’ (computer programs to randomly select letters), and it took just over two months to produce the entire works of Shakespeare⁴⁵.

Natural selection is a filter which keeps the genetic information that confers a reproductive advantage, and discards any that is reproductively harmful, leading to ever more refined organisms, well adapted to their environment. That is not blind chance – it is non-random – but not intelligently guided either.

Myth no.10: Evolutionists are biased against the evidence for a supernatural designer.

It is true that scientists are humans and are just as prone to bias and prejudice as anyone else. That’s why the scientific method is needed to weed out the effects of bias and ensure that conclusions are only reached based on empirical evidence that can be reliably tested. The peer review process also weeds out bias and mistakes, and even on occasion outright deceit. These processes are not perfect of course, but they are absolutely the best mechanism we currently have, and the

45 The experiment was performed by US programmer Jesse Anderson in 2011. Rather than keeping every letter that was correct, he only kept groups of 9 letters that were correct – otherwise it could have been done in a much shorter time. The concept is dealt with more thoroughly by Richard Dawkins in his ‘weasel’ thought experiment, which provides a somewhat closer analogy to what actually occurs in natural selection.

results (scientific and technological progress) speak for themselves – no such bias-correcting procedures are used for religious revelations!

Where scientific hoaxes have been performed, it has been the scientific method that has exposed them as being false. If special creation had any scientific merit, it would withstand the rigours of the scientific method, but it doesn't. If someone has a better explanation for the diversity of life, the onus is on them to use the scientific method to demonstrate it. Until they do, evolution is the best explanation we have, and there is so much supporting evidence that virtually all biologists accept it as fact – these are experts who have studied the subject in much greater detail than most, and who know what they are talking about. To suggest that they are all mistaken, biased, or taking part in a worldwide conspiracy is quite a serious allegation, and whilst it is not unheard of for the majority of experts to be wrong about something, it has never happened with any well established scientific theory, so it would require substantial contradictory evidence to substantiate such a claim.

Myth no.11: Evolution has no explanation for how new genetic information can be created.

Development of new features in an organism requires new information to appear in the genome. Since mutations involve changing what is already there, asking how new genetic information can be created is a good question. The vast majority of the DNA in our cells does not go into making genes – only strings of DNA that follow a certain pattern are interpreted as genes and encode how proteins should be organised. The rest of the DNA (about 98% of it in humans), is often referred to as 'junk DNA' – it is passed on from generation to generation, but doesn't actually affect the organism in any way. This 'junk DNA' provides a rich soup of raw materials from which new genes can form.

There are several ways that new genes can be created. Sometimes a gene will make an extra copy of itself or split in two, sometimes two genes will merge, and sometimes random mutations or copying errors in the junk DNA will spontaneously result in a new gene. We already discussed endogenous retroviruses (in myth no. 6, above), which can also insert new genetic information in an organism. Some genes act as controllers for other genes, and can change the way other genes are

expressed – in other words, changing the genetic recipe only slightly can have quite large implications for the resulting organism. In many cases, these changes are detrimental, but sometimes they are useful, and those useful changes are filtered through natural selection.

A recent study of the genome of fruit flies found that about 90% of new genes were a result of the duplication of a gene and subsequent divergence⁴⁶. The same study found that sometimes, when a gene is duplicated, although at first it is unnecessary baggage, it quickly adapts to provide a new function and becomes indispensable (the organism would die without it, even though its ancestor managed just fine). Gene duplication is relatively common, and provides plenty of scope for the development of new genetic information for natural selection to act on. That's not to say that every gene duplication results in novel features – the human genome is littered with dead “pseudogenes”: duplications of genes which ended up not performing any function.

Myth no.12: Microevolution is possible but macroevolution is not.

For the sake of convenience, some biologists have at times referred to “micro” and “macro” evolution to distinguish between small scale changes that occur within a population but do not give rise to new species, and larger scale changes that generally happen over much longer time periods (thousands or even millions of years) and cannot be directly observed.

Many, perhaps most, creationists make a *qualitative* distinction between the two (i.e. they claim that microevolution and macroevolution are two different things) – accepting that microevolution occurs, but denying macroevolution – allowing for adaptation within a species (or a biblical ‘kind’, which doesn’t really have a firm definition), but asserting that development of new species that are vastly different from their distant ancestors is not possible. For biologists, the distinction is not qualitative, but *quantitative* – the two expressions refer to exactly the same thing (evolution), just over

46 *Science* 17 December 2010: Vol. 330 no. 6011 pp. 1682-1685.

different timescales. As small changes accumulate, they lead to larger changes over a long period of time.

Many creationists say that it is wrong to make the assumption that small changes accumulate to create larger ones, however (besides the fact that the assumption is strongly based on observation), for that *not* to happen would require some kind of barrier – a point beyond which no further change is possible. Selective breeding is often used as an example of what happens in evolution (with survival and reproductive needs ‘choosing’ the organisms to breed from in place of a human). On the point of microevolution and macroevolution, creationists point out that there are limits to how much variation can be achieved by selective breeding, and that this never results in speciation, thus, the same must be true of natural selection.

However, selective breeding as done by humans is highly intensive (we can’t wait millions of years), and pays attention only to certain desired traits – ignoring (or being unaware of) the effects such breeding has on the overall fitness of the organism. Thus, although the desired trait is enhanced, this comes at a cost – the organism is no longer as fit (reproductively speaking), and in many cases this can lead to health problems and a limited life span (especially when the gene pool is very limited, as it often is with pedigree breeding programmes). The more the desired trait is enhanced, the greater this effect becomes.

In nature, the reproductive fitness of the organism (ability to pass on its genes) is of paramount importance – traits that evolve always tend towards improving the chances of survival and reproduction – any cost to fitness incurred in the development of a new trait must be of lesser importance than the gain to the organism from the new trait (otherwise the organism cannot compete and dies without passing on its genes). This balance is an intrinsic part of the process, and although it comes with the baggage of requiring an extended period of time for changes to accumulate, it does away with the artificial barriers to large scale change experienced in selective breeding. There is no known mechanism for a hypothetical barrier to speciation, so until such time as someone discovers one, it can only be regarded as imaginary.

With the special creation hypothesis, all of the above can be ‘explained away’ in one way or another. In fact, there is absolutely nothing that could possibly disprove special creation – the hypothesis is not falsifiable. To attempt to disprove special creation would be as futile as trying to disprove that everything was created thirty seconds ago and all our memories were implanted. Every possible outcome, every possible piece of evidence can be made to fit somehow. That is not the case with evolution – there are many ways that it could be proved wrong if it were wrong. To have such an overwhelming abundance of evidence all in striking agreement leaves us to choose between the possibility that a supernatural creator decided to create things in a way that made it look like they had evolved, or they really did evolve (the latter option does not preclude the process being started off by a creator, but the role of the creator becomes smaller and smaller as science discovers more and more about how the universe works).

For more information, I would recommend ‘The Greatest Show on Earth’ by Richard Dawkins (ostensibly about the evidence for evolution, but I found it more useful as an explanation of how evolution works), and ‘Why Evolution is True’ by Jerry Coyne.

17. The Bible

Key Facts:

- The Bible is littered with inaccuracies, contradictions, and shocking injustices which are very difficult to reconcile with a loving God.
- The notion that the Bible's account of a worldwide flood is literally true cannot be supported without resorting to extreme and illogical invocations of supernatural intervention.
- Out of all of the prophecies in the Bible, none can be proven to be genuine – it is either impossible to verify that they were written before the event they describe, the only record of the fulfilment is from a non-neutral source, or the prophecy is vague enough to have several possible interpretations.

In order to accept the Bible as the true 'word of God', you have to do a lot of rationalising. This is one of the things I got tired of when I was a JW. From condoning slavery⁴⁷ to genocide⁴⁸ to forcing a rape victim to marry her attacker⁴⁹, there are many examples of injustice in the Bible which have to be 'explained away'.

- Why did Lot get away with being so drunk that he committed incest with his own daughters (not once, but twice, two nights

47 Exodus 21:7-11, 20-21; Leviticus 25:44-46; Ephesians 6:5; 1 Timothy 6:1-2

48 Deuteronomy 2:34; Deuteronomy 3:6; Joshua 10:40; 1 Samuel 15:2-3

49 Deuteronomy 22:28-29

in a row!)⁵⁰, whereas his wife was killed by God just for taking a peek while he rained fire and sulphur on her house?⁵¹

- How could God justify killing 70,000 innocent people, his own followers, just because their King (David) took a census?⁵²
- How many people were directly killed by God in the Bible? Compare that with how many people were directly killed by Satan.
- Why would a just and loving God ‘strike’ (murder) the completely innocent love-child of King David and Bath-Sheba? Not a quick death either – the baby was made to suffer for a full week before it finally died⁵³.
- Is stoning to death really a just punishment for a child who curses their parents? Apparently Jesus thought so⁵⁴.
- Should a rape victim really be stoned to death just because she didn’t scream?⁵⁵

It goes on and on and on. Whilst it is possible to rationalise away just about any atrocity mentioned in the Bible, if the author really is a benevolent supreme being with much greater justice and wisdom than humans, it should not be necessary to do so. The amount of ‘explaining away’ that has to be done becomes increasingly uncomfortable.

Mythology

Let’s take the Noachian flood as an example of biblical mythology. Jews take the Bible’s account literally. Many other religions regard it as

50 Genesis 19:30-38

51 Genesis 19:26

52 2 Samuel 24:1-17

53 2 Samuel 12:15-18

54 Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Mark 7:10

55 Deuteronomy 22:23-27

a local event, or just an allegory, but to make it work as a literal historical account, you have to make a lot of ridiculous assumptions:

- The ark was not big enough for all the animals and all the food they would need for a year – a miracle is required to generate food from nothing.
- There are around 8 million species of animals in existence today (plus many more plants, fungi, and bacteria). If we assume that all of these are natural adaptations of more generic ‘kinds’ (as the JW’s do to explain how they all fit in the ark), we require extremely rapid evolution to occur after the flood on an unprecedented scale to make up the number of species we now have. According to JW theology, ‘kinds’ are groups of animals that can interbreed. This is also a common definition of ‘species’. The number of animals that would need to fit in the ark cannot be reduced sufficiently to be plausible with this line of reasoning.
- Even working sixteen hours a day full time, eight people would not be able to feed and clean up after so many animals as well as look after their own needs – can you imagine a zoo containing a specimen of every species being run by a team of eight? (and if the ark was sealed shut, how did they get rid of all that poop?). A miracle is required to look after the animals and maintain hygiene.
- Why didn’t the birds eat the insects, the carnivores eat their natural prey etc.? A miracle is required to maintain harmony.
- Why didn’t the animals run amok and cause damage? They were confined to extremely cramped quarters for over a year (377 days)! A miracle is required to keep order and to stop their muscles atrophying from lack of exercise.
- Vessels made entirely of wood cannot be more than 350 feet long, otherwise they break apart on the open sea – a wooden box of the ark’s size containing such a huge payload could not

have survived the flood – a miracle is required to keep it intact.

- If the floodwaters were salty, all the fresh water fish would have died. If it was fresh, all the salt water fish would have died – a miracle is required to keep them alive (or maybe Noah had an aquarium on board!).
- If a truly global flood occurred in 2370 BCE, why is there no evidence of this (e.g. silt, debris, etc.) in ice core samples from the polar regions? Likewise, why does rock all around the world show a history of slow formation of sedimentary layers with no sudden catastrophe? A miracle is required to remove the evidence that the flood happened, but why would God want to remove the evidence?
- If a truly global flood occurred in 2370 BCE, how did some Bristlecone pine trees survive this (some have lived for nearly 5,000 years), and without even any evidence of a problem in the tree rings for that period? A miracle is required to remove the evidence.
- If a truly global flood occurred in 2370 BCE, the Egyptian pyramids must have been built long after that date (how long would it take for such an advanced civilisation to arise from a family of eight?), requiring Egyptian history to be compressed into an impossibly short space of time (as in literally impossible), and also requiring ALL of the methods of dating Egyptian artefacts to be wrong, even where they all agree.
- Why did lemurs migrate from Madagascar to the Middle East without leaving any fossil evidence, then after the flood, migrate all the way back again, without reproducing on the way and thus remain endemic to Madagascar? Likewise for various other animals such as kangaroos and koala bears which would need to make an even longer migration, across water, without establishing any communities along the way. A miracle is required to teleport these animals from one place to another and back again.

- How did plants and vegetables survive so many months of submersion? A miracle is required to protect them.
- What did the carnivores eat when they came out of the ark? A miracle is required to feed them or make them temporarily vegetarian (in which case why didn't they stay vegetarian?).
- Why did God want to kill all those animals that wouldn't fit in the ark anyway? (If he miraculously spared the fish, why not miraculously spare all the animals?)
- Why did God feel it was necessary to drown people, including babies and children? If they really did not deserve to live, why not just take their lives away painlessly? What kind of parent drowns his own children?

There comes a point when you just have to say 'enough'. The Noachian flood story, when taken literally is simply not plausible.

Much of the mythology surrounding Jesus was very likely borrowed from other pagan religions that were prevalent at the time, and prior to the rise of Christianity. Just do a search for the 'Pagan origins of Christianity' to see the evidence.

Contradictions

The JW's claim that there are no contradictions in the Bible, and that any 'apparent' contradictions can be explained (or rationalised). It is indeed possible to rationalise almost any contradiction, but the sheer number of them (not to mention contradictions with science and other secular sources) make this difficult to justify. The believer is starting with the assumption that the Bible is true and then trying to force the evidence to fit that conclusion, instead of following the evidence wherever it leads. I won't provide a long list of examples here, as it is easy enough to research these for yourself. A handful of examples are available here: <http://www.thethinkingatheist.com/page/bible-contradictions>.

Prophecy

When I was having doubts about the Bible, I decided to make a list of all of the Bible prophecies that are clear and unambiguous, that can be proven to have been fulfilled, and that also can be proven to have been written before the event they describe. I felt sure this would help bolster my fading faith. ***I didn't find any.*** All of the specific prophecies (e.g. about Cyrus and the destruction of Babylon) are alleged to have been written prior to the events they foretold, but there is no way of verifying this. The only cases where we know the date of writing, the prophecies are too vague to be convincing, and have many possible interpretations, or the fulfilments cannot be verified (for example, gospel writers were not eye witnesses of the events they described and were biased towards the belief that the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Jesus, so they cannot be considered neutral sources). There are also some failed prophecies in the Bible (such as the destruction of Damascus) – again this is easy enough to research on the internet.

Conclusion

Key Facts:

- A sceptical approach is the only way of avoiding being duped into believing things that are not true.
- I don't feel the need to have answers for everything. I would rather just accept that something is unexplained than cling to a supernatural explanation that might provide answers or validation but has no good quality evidence to support it.
- Beliefs and opinions should always be open to modification in the light of new evidence, and genuine challenges to one's viewpoint should be investigated, not suppressed.

The foregoing represents the main gist of my reasons for leaving, as well as my reasons for never going back. There is an awful lot more that could be said, and that has influenced my view of the Jehovah's Witness organisation, but I have neither the time nor the inclination to go into greater detail right now.

Since leaving the JWs, I have adopted a sceptical outlook on just about everything. This doesn't mean I am a cynic, it just means that I will only grant credence to things in accordance with the amount of evidence there is to back them up, and that I recognise that I am susceptible to the built-in irrationality of human psychology. I no longer believe in God, the devil, angels, demons, ghosts, or 'real magic'. I don't categorically rule out any of those things – they are not falsifiable, so nobody can – but supernatural claims are so far beyond our normal experience of the way the world works, that they require extraordinary evidence to back them up – and that is sorely lacking. People have asked me how I explain spooky experiences. One of the great things about leaving JWs is that I don't have to! JWs and other

religions (but especially high control groups) like to think they have all the answers – it is one of the things that gives members a feeling of security. I have learned that it is OK to say “I don’t know”. I don’t have to be able to explain everything.

Many things that were once thought to be of supernatural origin have now been explained by science (thunder, rainbows, eclipses, epilepsy, ouija boards, etc.). The same may eventually be true of my own spooky experiences (I have had some). Or it may not. Either way, there is no need to jump to supernatural conclusions just to get ‘an answer’ – there are far more ways of being wrong than there are of being right, so the probability is high that any such explanation based on intuition or anecdotal evidence is going to be wrong.

Finally, in the introduction, I mentioned the common experience suffered by JWs of cognitive dissonance – where evidence that conflicts with your world view generates a feeling of discomfort, and, rather than adjust your whole world view, motivates you to rationalise. For example, if you accept the view that the Bible is true and that God’s justice is perfect, but then read in the Bible that a man of whom God approved, and who was regarded as righteous, handed over his daughters to a mob to be gang raped so as to protect two strangers who he may have believed to be angels⁵⁶ (and therefore able to look after themselves!) – a feeling of cognitive dissonance arises.

To overcome that feeling, you cannot dismiss the evidence, as it comes from the Bible itself, so you have to rationalise – perhaps by saying that the man had faith that God would protect his daughters (so why did he not have faith that God would protect the men without him having to offer his daughters?), or that God’s justice is so superior to our own that we cannot always understand it (a thought stopper, and totally illogical).

56 I am referring to Lot, in Genesis 19:5-8. According to the Bible account, it turned out alright in the end – Lot’s daughters were not gang raped, as the mob were miraculously struck blind. But Lot wasn’t to know that when he offered his daughters to the crowd. The concubine in Judges 19:22-30 (an uncannily similar story) wasn’t so lucky – she was raped, killed, and dismembered.

If we really want to know the truth, challenges to our viewpoint should not be rationalised, downplayed, or suppressed but embraced and investigated. If your viewpoint is correct, you have nothing to fear from examining new evidence. If your viewpoint is not correct, refusing to consider the evidence means that you are deluding yourself – in my opinion, it is better, and more intellectually honest, to adjust my viewpoint when new evidence arises than to stick to what I have always believed, even if I don't like the conclusion it leads to. When someone asks me 'what would it take to change your mind?', I never want to be the person who responds with 'nothing'. The answer should always be 'evidence'.

In the end though, everyone has to make up their own mind, and I respect the fact that everyone has the right to choose what to believe. If you choose the Watchtower, I will try not to think less of you as a person. I just hope that you (and your family) are lucky enough to avoid any harmful consequences that may result.

Appendix – Quotes from Watchtower Publications

Key Facts:

- The historical teachings of the Watchtower Society leave no doubt that they have never been guided by an intelligent supreme being.
- Hypocrisy and dishonesty are rife in Watchtower literature.
- Some teachings have been very harmful – and some still are.

The quotes that follow (in italics) are all taken from publications produced by the leadership of the organisation now known as Jehovah's Witnesses (some of them are from before they took on that name). The comments about those quotes (not in italics) are my own. What follows is not meant to represent a balanced view of the whole body of teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, however, I have endeavoured to present them honestly and without taking them out of context, and they do represent the prevailing view of the Watchtower society at the time the literature was published. I have personally compiled and verified the legitimacy of these quotes – although I was directed to most of them by other people, books, and websites, this is not just a list I found on the internet!

It is not my intention to be pedantic, to 'nit-pick', to find fault with the writers, or to highlight the inevitable mistakes of people who make no claim to be perfect. If you think everything negative in here can be put down to genuine and understandable mistakes, or 'new light' of understanding, then I respect your right to come to that conclusion (albeit I would regard such a conclusion as seriously mistaken). Whilst some issues might be considered 'minor' from a doctrinal standpoint, they nevertheless often involve disfellowshipping offences, demonstrate a lack of divine guidance, or otherwise drastically impact on peoples' lives, which can elevate them to major issues.

Some may also argue that publications written 50 years ago or more are no longer relevant to the modern day organisation of Jehovah's Witnesses and their teachings. I once felt that way, but having looked at the older publications for myself, I now find myself disagreeing with that sentiment – not for the sake of dredging up embarrassing incidents from the past, but because the history of failures speaks directly to the claim that the organisation is being (or ever has been) guided by God and also exposes the dishonesty in their later writings (where they deny ever having said what they did, or claim to have said something they didn't).

Claims of Divine Guidance

The Watchtower has always claimed to be guided directly by God:

Clearly, those who desire to serve God can only turn to the one organization that enjoys Jehovah's spirit and blessing. – Watchtower 1991 11/01 p.31

It is clear to me that Jehovah's spirit-directed organization on earth receives guidance on what is to be done and how. His whole universal organization, visible and invisible, works together. – Watchtower 1994 08/01 p.26

The only reliable guidance by which to direct our steps is spiritual guidance, which comes through Jehovah's Word, his spirit, and his organization. – Watchtower 2005 09/01 p.22

Jehovah gives us sound counsel through his Word and through his organization, using the publications provided by "the faithful and discreet slave." ... counsels us through his channel of communication – Watchtower 2003 03/15 p.27

All who want to understand the Bible should appreciate that the "greatly diversified wisdom of God" can become known only through Jehovah's channel of communication, the faithful and discreet slave. – Watchtower 1994 10/01 p.8

Holy spirit has likewise been working in behalf of true Christians in our day. This became evident to a small group of Bible students in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., in the latter half of the 19th century... Charles Taze Russell, said regarding his quest for Scriptural truth: "I prayed ... that I might be enabled to rid my heart and mind of any prejudice that might stand in the way and be led of his spirit into the proper

understanding.” God blessed this humble prayer...Confidently, they looked to God’s spirit for guidance. “Our Lord’s assurance,” said Russell, “is that ... the holy spirit of the Father, sent on account of and at the instance of Jesus our Redeemer, Mediator and Head, will be our instructor.” And instruct it did! These sincere Bible Students continued to take in the pure waters of truth from the Bible and proclaim them worldwide...The modern-day organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses has remained sensitive to the leadings of God’s holy spirit for well over a century now – Watchtower 2000 04/01 p.9-10

Each article in both The Watchtower and Awake! and every page, including the artwork, is scrutinized by selected members of the Governing Body before it is printed. Furthermore, those who assist in writing articles for The Watchtower are Christian elders who appreciate the seriousness of their assignment. ... They spend many hours in researching the Bible and other reference material to make sure that what is written is the truth and that it faithfully follows the Scriptures. – Watchtower 1987 03/01 p.15

Have you read the older publications of the Society in your language? To the extent that you can make time to read the material, there is a blessing in store for you. – School Guidebook, study 4 p. 21

The Watchtower is not the instrument of any man or any set of men, nor is it published according to the whims of men. No man’s opinion is expressed in the Watchtower. – Watchtower 1931 11/01 p.327

It is through the columns of The Watchtower that Jehovah provides direction and constant Scriptural counsel to his people. – Watchtower 1964 05/01 p.277

On several occasions, as shown here, they have gone beyond the idea of guidance, and have directly attributed the printed word in the Watchtower as coming from God himself.

Racism

I was somewhat alarmed to discover white superiority among the early teachings of the organisation:

We have not the slightest of race prejudice, and that we love the colored brethren with just the same warmth of heart that we love the white ... so far as we are able to judge, colored people have less education than whites – many of them quite insufficient to permit them to profit by such reading as we have to give forth. Our conclusion therefore is based upon the supposition that reading matter distributed to a colored congregation would more than half of it be utterly wasted, and a very small percentage indeed likely to yield good results. We advise, therefore, that where the Watch Tower literature is introduced to colored people it be not by promiscuous circulation, but only to those who give evidence of some ear for the truth. – Watchtower 1900 4/15 p122

Can The Ethiopian Change His Skin?

*We answer, no. But all will admit that what the Ethiopian cannot do for himself God could readily do for him. The difference between the races of men and the difference between their languages have long been arguments against the solidarity of the human family. The doctrine of restitution has also raised the question, How could all men be brought to perfection and which color of skin was the original? The answer is now provided. **God can change the Ethiopian's skin in his own due time.***

Prof. H.A. Edwards, Supt. of Schools in Slater, MO, has written for the public press an elaborate description of how Julius Jackson, of New Frankfurt, MO, a Negro boy of nine years, began to grow white in September, 1901, and is now fully nine-tenths white. He assures us that this is no whitish skin disease; but that the new white skin is as healthy as that of any white boy, and

that the changed boy has never been sick and never taken medicines – Watchtower 1904 02/15 pp. 52-53

While it is true that the white race exhibits some qualities of superiority over any other; we are to remember that there are wide differences in the same Caucasian (Semitic and Aryan) family; and also we should remember that some of the qualities which have given this branch of the human family its preeminence in the world are not such as can be pointed to as in all respects admirable....The secret of the greater intelligence and aptitude of the Caucasian undoubtedly in great measure is to be attributed to the commingling of blood amongst its various branches; and this was evidently forced in large measure by circumstances under divine control. It remains to be proven that the similar commingling of the various tribes of Chinese for several centuries would not equally brighten their intellects; and the same with the peoples of India and Africa. – Watchtower 1902 07/15 p.215-216

The Negro race is supposed to be descended from Ham, whose special degradation is mentioned in Gen 9:22-25 – Watchtower 1898 08/01 p. 230

We are not able to determine to a certainty that the sons of Ham and Canaan are the Negroes; but we consider that general view as probable as any other – Watchtower 1902 07/15 p. 216

Is there anything in the Bible that reveals the origin of the Negro? It is generally believed that the curse which Noah pronounced upon Canaan was the origin of the Black race. Certain it is that when Noah said, 'Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren,' he pictured the future of the Colored race. They have been and are a race of servants .. There is no servant in the world as good as a good colored servant, and the joy that he gets from rendering faithful service

is one of the purest joys there is in the world. – Golden Age 1929 07/24 p. 702

Even up to a hundred years ago the Catholic Church held the view that blacks were cursed by God. . . . What great harm has resulted from the misapplication by churchmen of this Biblical curse! The slavery of African blacks, and their mistreatment since the days of slavery, can in no way be justified by the Bible. The truth is, blacks are not, and never were, cursed by God! – Awake! 1977 10/8 p. 29

Here the Catholic church is censured for holding the view that ‘blacks were cursed by God’ up to a hundred years previously – when the Golden Age had made the same claim only 48 years previously! Not only are they thereby at least as reprehensible as the ‘churchmen’ they berate, they also throw in a sprinkling of hypocrisy.

how foolish it is to interpret God’s curse on Canaan as referring to a dark-skinned people. – Awake! 1982 2/8 p. 14

Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? – New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, Matthew 24:45

Worshipping Jesus

I was also surprised to learn that for many decades, the organisation taught that Jesus should be worshipped (given how such a teaching is now regarded as being a sign of Christendom's apostasy).

Question. The fact that our Lord received worship is claimed by some to be an evidence that while on earth he was God the Father disguised in a body of flesh and not really a man. Was he really worshiped, or is the translation faulty? Answer. Yes, we believe our Lord Jesus while on earth was really worshiped, and properly so. While he was not the God, Jehovah, he was a God. The word "God" signifies a "mighty one," and our Lord was indeed a mighty one. So it is stated in the 'first two verses of the gospel of John'. It was proper for our Lord to receive worship in view of his having been the only begotten of the Father and his agent in the creation of all things, including man. – Watchtower 1898 07/15 p.216

*Jehovah God commands all to **worship Christ Jesus** because Christ Jesus is the express image of his Father, Jehovah, and because he is the Executive Officer of Jehovah always carrying out Jehovah's purpose (Heb.:3-6). – Watchtower 1939 11/15 p.339*

Since Jehovah God now reigns as King by means of his capital organization Zion, then whosoever would worship Him must also worship and bow down to Jehovah's Chief One in that capital organization, namely, Christ Jesus, his Co-regent on the throne of The Theocracy." – Watchtower 1945 10/15 p.313

*for public Christian **worship of Almighty God and Christ Jesus** – Charter of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1945*

*no distinct worship is to be rendered to Jesus Christ –
Watchtower 1954 01/01 p.31*

1914

The Society's current understanding is that 1914 marked the end of the gentile times, the start of the last days, and the beginning of Christ's second presence. Most JWs believe that these things were predicted for the year 1914 in advance.

A real milestone was reached, therefore, in 1925, when The Watch Tower of March 1 featured the article "Birth of the Nation." It presented an eye-opening study of Revelation chapter 12. The article set forth evidence that the Messianic Kingdom had been born-established in 1914, that Christ had then begun to rule on his heavenly throne – Jehovah's Witnesses Proclaimers of God's Kingdom p.138, 139

At the back of our house in Tojo-cho, Osaka, there was a house with a sign: "Osaka Branch of the International Bible Students Association." Assuming it to be a Christian group, I visited the house.

"Do you believe in the second advent of the Lord?" I asked the young man who came to the door.

"Christ's second advent was realized in 1914," he answered.

*In astonishment, I told him that was impossible. "You should read this book," he said, handing me **The Harp of God**." – Watchtower 1988 05/01 22*

Here the claim is made that the Harp of God contained the teaching that Christ's second advent began in 1914. Whilst there certainly were some claims being made about 1914 at that time, Christ's second advent was not one of them:

This date, therefore, when understood, would certainly fix the time when the lord is due at this second appearing. Applying the same rule, then, of a day for a

year, 1335 days after 539 A.D brings us to 1874 A.D, at which time, according to Biblical chronology, the Lord's presence is due...The searcher of truth can find an extensive treatment of this question in volumes 2 and 3 of "studies in the scriptures". – The Harp of God, 1921 p.230 [or (1928 Revision) p.235]

Prior to 1914, that year was never considered the **beginning** of anything. It was predicted to be the **end** – Armageddon. The beginning of Christ's presence was believed to be 1874, and the beginning of the 'last days' was pegged as 1799.

Noting these parallels, we find 1874 as the beginning of this "harvest" and the gathering together of the "elect" from the four winds of heaven; 1878 as the time when Babylon was formally rejected, Laodicea spewed out--the time from which it is stated, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen"--fallen from Divine favor. The parallel in 1881 would seem to indicate that certain favors were still continued to those in Babylon up to that date, notwithstanding the rejection of the system; and since that date we would understand that that relationship has been in no sense an advantageous one, but has been in many senses of the word a distinct disadvantage, from which only with difficulty could any free themselves, the Lord's grace and truth assisting. And in harmony with this parallelism, October, 1914, will witness the full end of Babylon, "as a great millstone cast into the sea," utterly destroyed as a system. – Watchtower 1911 06/15 p.190

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 – Studies in the Scriptures Vol 2: The Time is at Hand (1889) p.98,99

we present proofs that the setting up of the Kingdom of God is already begun, that it is pointed out in prophecy

as due to begin the exercise of power in A.D. 1878, and that the “battle of the great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:14), which will end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of earth’s present rulership, is already commenced. – Studies in the Scriptures Vol 2: The Time is at Hand (1889) p.101

The date of the close of that “battle” is definitely marked in Scripture as October, 1914. It is already in progress, its beginning dating from October, 1874. – Watchtower 1892 01/15 p.22

*Twelve hundred and sixty years from A.D. 539 brings us to 1799, which is another proof that 1799 definitely marks the beginning of “the time of the end”. ... “The time of the end” embraces the period from 1799 A.D to the time of complete overthrow of Satan’s empire and the establishment of the kingdom of messiah. **The time of the Lord’s second presence dates from 1874 and is during the latter part of the period known as “the time of the end”.** – Creation (1927) p.315, 319*

This was not merely a minor mistake, a suggestion by imperfect men who were eager to see God’s will done. The predictions were directly attributed to God:

*We see no reason for changing the figures-nor would we if we could. They are, we believe, **God’s dates and 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. – Watchtower 1894 July p.1677*

*God’s people who had been anxiously **awaiting his second presence** toward the end of the nineteenth century – Watchtower 1965 07/15 p.428*

As can be seen from the foregoing, this statement is false. The Watchtower did not even exist until 1879, five years after the second

presence was believed to have started – so they could not have been ‘awaiting’ it!

Jehovah’s witnesses pointed to the year 1914, decades in advance (footnote: See, for example, the Bible Examiner, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (Whole No. 313), October 1876, pages 27, 28.), as marking the start of “the conclusion of the system of things.” – Awake! 1973 01/22 p.8*

It is hard to justify such a blatant untruth. Yes they pointed to 1914 decades in advance, but not as marking the start of the conclusion of the system. The expectations for 1914 were all wrong. Let’s see what that Bible Examiner article cited really said:

the seven times will end in A. D. 1914; when Jerusalem shall be delivered forever, and the Jew say of the Deliverer, “Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him and He will save us.” – Bible Examiner, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (Whole No. 313), October 1876, page 27

False Prophets

When called out as false prophets, this is the first line of defence:

Jehovah's Witnesses, in their eagerness for Jesus' second coming, have suggested dates that turned out to be incorrect. Because of this, some have called them false prophets. Never in these instances, however, did they presume to originate predictions "in the name of Jehovah". Never did they say, "These are the words of Jehovah." – Awake! 1993 03/22 p.4

...as though a prediction only counts as a prophecy if you use the exact words 'These are the words of Jehovah' – whereas if you say 'They are God's dates not ours' that isn't prophesying? It gets worse...

Jehovah's Witnesses do not claim to be inspired prophets. They have made mistakes – Reasoning from the Scriptures (1985) p.136 par 2

IDENTIFYING THE "PROPHET"

Who is this prophet? ...

Jehovah did not let the people of Christendom, as led by the clergy, go without being warned that the League was a counterfeit substitute for the real kingdom of God. He had a "prophet" to warn them. 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 Christian witnesses. They are still proclaiming a warning, and have been joined and assisted in their commissioned work by hundreds of thousands of persons who have listened to their message with belief.

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. What does it show? – Watchtower 1972 04/01 p.197

In this article, the word prophet is placed in inverted commas – why? Inverted commas are sometimes used to imply that the word is being used symbolically, or taking on a slightly different meaning. But any such difference in meaning is never explained – the meaning implied by the context of the article is that they are God’s messengers, and are indeed claiming the status of ‘prophet’.

Somehow, a JW can read and accept as true the following paragraph without applying it to the Watchtower organisation – I struggle to understand how I could have done the same back in 1997 when I read this:

JEHOVAH GOD is the Grand Identifier of his true messengers. He identifies them by making the messages he delivers through them come true. Jehovah is also the Great Exposer of false messengers. How does he expose them? He frustrates their signs and predictions. In this way he shows that they are self-appointed prognosticators, whose messages really spring from their own false reasoning—yes, their foolish, fleshly thinking! – Watchtower 1997 05/01 p.8

The failed prophecies don’t end with 1914...

The data presented ... prove that the Spring of 1918 will bring upon Christendom a spasm of anguish greater even than that experienced in the Fall of 1914 – The Finished Mystery (1917) p.62 [Italics theirs]

Also, in the year 1918, when God destroys the churches wholesale 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.” – The Finished Mystery (1917) p.485

Even the republics will disappear in the fall of 1920 ... Every kingdom of earth will pass away, be swallowed up in anarchy. – The Finished Mystery (1917) p.258

That period of time beginning 1575 before A.D. 1 of necessity would end in the fall of the year 1925, at which time the type ends and the great antitype must begin. What then, should we expect to take place? ... the beginning of restoration of all things. ... and since other Scriptures definitely fix the fact that there will be a resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other faithful ones of old, and that these will have the first favor, we may expect 1925 to witness the return of these ... being resurrected and fully restored to perfect humanity and made the visible, legal representatives of the new order of things on earth. ... Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the faithful prophets of old ... to the condition of human perfection. – Millions Now Living Will Never Die (1920) p.88,89,90

All of these ‘confident expectations’ failed to materialise. But were they just innocent mistakes or suggestions of what the humble leaders thought might happen? Or actual concrete predictions/prophecies?

Brother Russell was the Lord’s servant. Then to repudiate him and his work is equivalent to a repudiation of the Lord ... Again the test is on. This time it is on chronology. And following this lead, it will be found that the road of doubt and opposition will carry one into ... a repudiation of God and our Lord Jesus Christ – Watchtower 05/01 1922 p.132

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. – Millions Now Living Will Never Die (1920) p.97

These physical facts [i.e. technological improvements] can not be disputed and are sufficient to convince any reasonable mind that we have been in the “time of the

end” since 1799. – *The Harp of God* (1921) p.239 par 408

The indisputable facts, therefore, show that the “time of the end” began in 1799; that the Lord’s second presence began in 1874; – Watchtower 1922 03/01 p.73

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.... it is an easy matter to locate 1925, probably in the fall, for the beginning of the anti typical jubilee. There can be no more question about 1925 than there was about 1914. – Watchtower 05/15, 1922, p. 150

*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 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. ... It is ... 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 been abundantly confirmed by the dates and events of 1874, 1914, and 1918.*

... present-truth chronology displays indisputable evidence of divine foreknowledge of the principle dates, and that this is proof of divine origin, and that the system is not a human invention but a discovery of divine truth. ... we believe that it bears the stamp of approval of Almighty God. – Watchtower 1922 06/15 p.187 (Text shown in bold here was printed in italics in the original publication.)

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 – Watchtower 1922 07/15 p. 217

Bible prophecy shows that the Lord was due to appear for the second time in the year 1874. Fulfilled prophecy shows beyond a doubt that he did appear in 1874. ... these facts are indisputable – Watchtower 1922 11/01 p.333

There are many similar quotes in addition to the above. Can they really claim that they never attempted to prophesy, or that they never attributed their words to God? They can, and do, but it is blatantly dishonest to do so. Not only that, but they even deny being dogmatic!...

As true Christians, we want to be, not fanatic or dogmatic, but humble and reasonable. – Watchtower 04 2/1 p.20

The Watchtower does not claim to be inspired in its utterances, nor is it dogmatic. – Watchtower 1950 08/15 p.263

Never ... did they presume to originate predictions 'in the name of Jehovah.' – Awake! 1993 03/22 p.4

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. – Reasoning from the Scriptures p.136

Here, the writer attempts to liken the failed prophecies of the Watchtower with the 'wrong expectations' of the apostles. Is this really a fair comparison? Compare the above quotes with what the cited scriptures say about the apostles...

While they were listening to these things he spoke in addition an illustration, because he was near Jerusalem and they were imagining that the kingdom of God was going to display itself instantly – New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, Luke 19:11

When, now, they had assembled, they went asking him: “Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?” – New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, Acts 1:6

The apostles ‘were imagining’, so they checked whether they’d got it right or not – they were not making public pronouncements and charging anyone who disagreed with repudiating God. This is clearly not an adequate defence – the charge of ‘false prophets’ stands.

In 1938 Jehovah revealed this correspondency to his servants and it was published in The Watchtower – Watchtower 1965 June 1 p.352

No man’s opinion is expressed in the Watchtower. – Watchtower 1931 11/01 p.327

Having made bold pronouncements and attributing them directly to God, who gets the blame when the promises fail to materialise?

Anna MacDonald recalls: ‘1925 was a sad year for many brothers. Some of them were stumbled; their hopes dashed. They had hoped to see some of the ‘ancient worthies’ [men of old like Abraham] resurrected. Instead of its being considered a ‘probability,’ they read into it that it was a ‘certainty,’ and some prepared for their own loved ones with expectancy of their resurrection. – 1975 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses, p.146

It was stated in the ‘Millions’ book that we might reasonably expect them to return shortly after 1925, but this was merely an expressed opinion. – Comment made

by J F Rutherford, reported on in *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses 1980* p.62

Merely an expressed opinion? Seriously?

On arriving to inspect his slaves in 1918, therefore, whom did the Master, Jesus Christ, find giving to his body of attendants their measure of food supplies at the proper time? Well, by then, who had given truth seekers the correct understanding of the ransom sacrifice, the divine name, the invisibility of Christ's presence, and the significance of 1914?.... The facts show that it was a group of anointed Christians associated with the publishers of Zion's Watch Tower – Watchtower 1990 03/15 p.13, 14

Once again the claim is made that the early organisation had the correct understanding of Christ's presence and the significance of 1914. This is not true.

Regarding his misguided statements as to what we could expect in 1925, he [Rutherford] once confessed to us at Bethel, "I made an ass of myself." – w84 10/1 p. 24

Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? – New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, Matthew 24:45

*A prophet I shall raise up for them from the midst of their brothers, like you; and I shall indeed put my words in his mouth, and he will certainly speak to them all that I shall command him. 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.
 "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. And in case you should say in your heart:*

“How shall we know the word that Jehovah has not spoken?” 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

Can any Bible believer really read those verses from Deuteronomy and sincerely claim that it does not apply to the failed predictions of the Watchtower?

Sadly, they did not learn much from those mistakes, and continued to whip up expectations for Armageddon to occur on their timetable – perhaps not quite so dogmatically as in the past, but still with an air of authority and certainty which required members to have no doubts, but to demonstrate their faith – sometimes with devastating implications for those who believed. And when the expectations failed there were no apologies – blame once again being placed on the shoulders of the rank and file believers. Here’s more...

It did not take the brothers very long to find the chart beginning on page 31, showing that 6,000 years of man’s existence end in 1975. Discussion of 1975 overshadowed about everything else. “The new book compels us to realize that Armageddon is, in fact, very close indeed,” said a conventioner. Surely it was one of the outstanding blessings to be carried home!” – Watchtower 1966 10/15 p.628, 629

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. – Kingdom Ministry May 1974 p.3

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 C.E. So six thousand years of man's existence on earth will soon be up, yes, within this generation. ... 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! This would be most timely for mankind. It would also be most fitting on God's part, for, remember, mankind has yet ahead of it what the last book of the Holy Bible speaks of as the reign of Jesus Christ over earth for a thousand years, the millennial reign of Christ. ... 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. – *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God* (book) 1966 pp. 26-30

the fact that we are nearing the end of the first 6,000 years of man's existence is of great significance. ... Does God's rest day parallel the time man has been on earth since his creation? Apparently so. ... 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. ... 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.' – *Awake!* 1966 10/8 p.19, 20

In view of the short period of time left, we want to do this as often as circumstances permit. Just think, brothers, there are only about ninety months left before 6,000 years of man's existence on earth is completed...

Do you remember what we learned at the assemblies last summer? The majority of people living today will probably be alive when Armageddon breaks out, and there are no resurrection hopes for those who are destroyed then. – Kingdom Ministry 1968 p.4

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!

Does this mean that the year 1975 will bring the battle of Armageddon? No one can say with certainty. Jesus said: “Concerning that day or the hour nobody knows.” (Mark 13:32) Sufficient is it for God’s servants to know for a certainty that, for this system under Satan, time is running out rapidly. How foolish a person would be not to be awake and alert to the limited time remaining, to the earthshaking events soon to take place, and to the need to work out one’s salvation! – Watchtower 1968 05/01 p.271-273

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! (Matt. 24:34) 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.” (Matt. 24:36) 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. – Watchtower 1968, 08/15 p.500, 501

6,000 Years Nearing Completion ... The fact that fifty-four years of the period called the ‘last days’ have

already gone by is highly significant. It means that only a few years, at most, remain before the corrupt system of things dominating the earth is destroyed by God. – Awake! 1968 10/08 p.14, 15

If you are a young person, you also need to face the fact that you will never grow old in this present system of things. Why not? Because all the evidence in fulfillment of Bible prophecy indicates that this corrupt system is due to end in a few years. ... as a young person, you will never fulfill any career that this system offers. If you are in high school and thinking about a college education, it means at least four, perhaps even six or eight more years to graduate into a specialized career. But where will this system of things be by that time? It will be well on the way towards its finish, if not actually gone! ... those who do not understand where we are in the stream of time from God's viewpoint will call this impractical. But which is really practical: preparing yourself for a position in this world that soon will pass away? or working toward surviving this system's end and enjoying eternal life in God's righteous new order? – Awake! 1969 05/22 p.15

it is clear that the time left is reduced, with only approximately six years left until the end of 6,000 years of human history. (1 Cor. 7:29) This corroborates the understanding of Jesus' words that the generation alive in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I would not pass away until the end comes. Only a short time, then, remains for persons who love righteousness to show God that they want to be in his "ark" of protection and live to see the blessings of the new system of things.- Matt. 24:34-42. – Watchtower 1970 05/01 p.273

Shortly, within our twentieth century, the "battle in the day of Jehovah" will begin against the modern anti-type of Jerusalem, Christendom. – The Nations Shall Know That I Am Jehovah – How (1971) p.216

as the critical year of 1975 enters, it may well be asked: Has the Most High God of prophecy made a name for himself? The answer is self-evident, Yes! By whom? Not by Christendom or by Jewry, but by Jehovah's Christian witnesses! ... as the year 1975 opens up, some thousands of the anointed remnant, still alive on this earth, look ahead to realizing that joyful prospect. The increasing "great crowd" of their sheeplike companions look forward with them to entering the New Order without interruption of life. – Watchtower 1974 12/15 p. 764-766

Having whipped up Armageddon mania to fever pitch, when the fateful year of 1975 arrived (and the rate of increase in the number of JW's swelled to the fastest growth in their history), they started slipping in a few cautious statements that they could fall back on after the inevitable failure...

F. W. Franz, the Society's vice-president, forcefully impressed on the audience the urgency of the Christian preaching work. He stressed that, according to dependable Bible chronology, 6,000 years of human history will end this coming September according to the lunar calendar. This coincides with a time when "the human species [is] about to starve itself to death," as well as its being faced with poisoning by pollution and destruction by nuclear weapons. Franz added: "There's no basis for believing that mankind, faced with what it now faces, can exist for the seventh thousand-year period" under the present system of things.

Does this mean that we know exactly when God will destroy this old system and establish a new one? Franz showed that we do not, for we do not know how short was the time interval between Adam's creation and the creation of Eve, at which point God's rest day of seven thousand years began. (Heb. 4:3, 4) But, he pointed out, "we should not think that this year of 1975 is of no significance to us," for the Bible proves that Jehovah is

“the greatest chronologist” and “we have the anchor date, 1914, marking the end of the Gentile Times.” So, he continued, “we are filled with anticipation for the near future, for our generation.”-Matt. 24:34. – Watchtower 1975 05/01 p.285

Amid all the Armageddon hype, a little get-out clause is inserted here – we don’t know how long there was between Adam’s creation and Eve’s, so we might have to wait just a few more years. But how dare you rank and file speculate?!?...

The publications of Jehovah’s witnesses have shown that, according to Bible chronology, it appears that 6,000 years of man’s existence will be completed in the mid-1970’s. But these publications have never said that the world’s end would come then. Nevertheless, there has been considerable individual speculation on the matter. – Watchtower 1974 10/15 p.635

1976. Some have sold all their possessions so they could pioneer while living in a caravan – as they were encouraged to do in the 1974 Kingdom Ministry (see above). Still no sign of Armageddon. Who is to blame?

It may be that some who have been serving God have planned their lives according to a mistaken view of just what was to happen on a certain date or in a certain year. They may have, for this reason, put off or neglected things that they otherwise would have cared for. But they have missed the point of the Bible’s warnings concerning the end of this system of things, thinking that Bible chronology reveals the specific date ... 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. ... And say you now, temporarily, feel somewhat disappointed; are you really

the loser? Are you really hurt? We believe you can say that you have gained and profited by taking this conscientious course. Also, you have been enabled to get a really mature, more reasonable viewpoint.-Eph. 5:1-17. – Watchtower 1976 07/15 p.440, 441

A very candid observation indeed! Too much emphasis was placed on a date by some Bible teachers. Many newly baptized ones took up the truth on a wave of emotion. Even some elders had their hopes pinned to 1975. – Yearbook 1988 p.190

There were strong expectations concerning the year 1975 and what it might mean in the fulfillment of Jehovah's purpose. Some set their hearts on that date as the time when the old system would be destroyed and God's new world would be established. – Yearbook 1995 p.227

many Witnesses conjectured that events associated with the beginning of Christ's Millennial Reign might start to take place in 1975. ... These erroneous views did not mean that God's promises were wrong, that he had made a mistake. By no means! The mistakes or misconceptions, as in the case of first-century Christians, were due to a failure to heed Jesus' caution, 'You do not know the time.' The wrong conclusions were due, not to malice or to unfaithfulness to Christ, but to a fervent desire to realize the fulfillment of God's promises in their own time. – Awake! 1995 06/22 p.9

Flip-flopping Teachings

It is not just failed predictions that have brought misery to those who believed. Other teachings which caused significant hardship for members were later amended (thus indicating that the original teaching was not of divine origin, but of human invention, and the hardship suffered – on pain of disfellowshipping – was unnecessary). Perhaps we will see an apology for these mistakes from the humble ‘just imperfect men’ who take the lead and set the example for all of God’s people?

it was felt that the higher powers must be Jehovah God and Jesus Christ. ... it must be said that this view of things, exalting as it did the supremacy of Jehovah and his Christ, helped God’s people to maintain an uncompromisingly neutral stand throughout this difficult period. ... The precise translation of the words used not only in Romans chapter 13 but also in such passages as Titus 3:1, 2 and 1 Peter 2:13, 17 made it evident that the term “superior authorities” referred, not to the Supreme Authority, Jehovah, and to his Son, Jesus, but to human governmental authorities. – Watchtower 1996 05/01 p.14 (Italics theirs)

In the past, some Witnesses have suffered for refusing to share in an activity that their conscience now might permit ... they rejoice that they had the opportunity of demonstrating publicly and clearly that they were determined to be firm on the issue of universal sovereignty. – Watchtower 1998 08/15 p.17

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.- Watchtower 05/15, 1922, p. 150

Rather than admit responsibility, the blame is shifted onto ‘the Lord’. It was God who deliberately made the mistake? God teaches his people by making them believe in errors? Compare that attitude with the following statement for one of many examples of Watchtower hypocrisy:

What are some of the traits that we must “watch out” for? Self-righteous individuals usually “speak, and stand, and look as if they had never done a wrong,” explains the Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics. The self-righteous are also boastful and self-promoting, which was a major problem with the Pharisees. – Watchtower 1995 10/15 p.29

Another example of a flip-flopping teaching is with regard to the medical use of blood. Until the 1940’s, whole blood transfusions were acceptable to JW’s:

one of the attending physicians in the great emergency gave a quart of his blood for transfusion, and today the woman lives and smiles gaily over what happened to her in the busiest 23 minutes of her life. – Consolation 1940 12/25 p. 19

In 1956, blood fractions were banned:

While this physician argues for the use of certain blood fractions, particularly albumin, such also come under the Scriptural ban. – Awake! 1956 09/08 p.20

Two years later, fractions are allowed:

Are we to consider the injection of serums such as diphtheria toxin antitoxin and blood fractions such as gamma globulin into the blood stream, for the purpose of building up resistance to disease by means of antibodies, the same as the drinking of blood or the taking of blood or blood plasma by means of transfusions? – N.P., United States.

No, it does not seem necessary that we put the two in the same category, although we have done so in times past. ... While God did not intend for man to contaminate his blood stream by vaccines, serums or blood fractions, doing so does not seem to be included in God's expressed will forbidding blood as food. It would therefore be a matter of individual judgment whether one accepted such types of medication or not. – Watchtower 1958 09/15 p.575

Three years after that, they are banned again:

Is it wrong to sustain life by infusions of blood or plasma or red cells or the various blood fractions? Yes! ... But regardless of whether it is whole blood or a blood fraction, whether it is blood taken from one's own body or that taken from someone else, whether it is administered as a transfusion or as an injection, the divine law applies. God has not given man blood to use as he might use other substances; he requires respect for the sanctity of blood. – Watchtower 1961 09/15 p 558

Another three years and they are allowed:

The Society does not endorse any of the modern medical uses of blood, such as the uses of blood in connection with inoculations. Inoculation is, however, a virtually unavoidable circumstance in some segments of society, and so we leave it up to the conscience of the individual to determine whether to submit to inoculation with a serum containing blood fractions for the purpose of building up antibodies to fight against disease. If a person did this, he may derive comfort under the circumstances from the fact that he is not directly eating blood, which is expressly forbidden in God's Word. It is not used for food or to replace lost blood. Here the Christian must make his own decision based on conscience.- Watchtower 1964 11/15 p.682

Note the reasoning used here – using blood fractions is not ‘directly eating blood, which is expressly forbidden in God’s Word’ – admitting that the medical use of blood is **not** expressly forbidden in God’s Word. Why this line of reasoning is used for fractions but not whole blood is unclear.

In 1975 we flip-flop back to banning fractions:

Certain clotting “factors” derived from blood are now in wide use for the treatment of hemophilia, a disorder causing uncontrollable bleeding. However, those given this treatment face another deadly hazard: the Swiss medical weekly Schweizer Med Wochenschrift reports that almost 40 percent of 113 hemophiliacs studied had cases of hepatitis. “All these patients had received whole blood, plasma, or blood derivatives containing [the factors],” notes the report. Of course, true Christians do not use this potentially dangerous treatment, heeding the Bible’s command to ‘abstain from blood.’ – Awake! 1975 02/22 p30

Another 3 years pass, and fractions are allowed:

What, however, about accepting serum injections to fight against disease, such as are employed for diphtheria, tetanus, viral hepatitis, rabies, hemophilia and Rh incompatibility? This seems to fall into a ‘gray area.’... Hence, we have taken the position that this question must be resolved by each individual on a personal basis. – Watchtower 1978 06/15 30, 31

Winding back the clock a little for one particular example, in 1972, hemodilution was expressly forbidden:

Men of science are constantly developing new methods for performing surgical operations. The Journal of the American Medical Association, dated November 15, 1971, described a procedure for open-heart surgery that

employs severe hemodilution. Early in the operation a large quantity of blood is drawn off into a plastic blood bag. Though the bag is left connected to the patient by a tube, the removed and stored blood is no longer circulating in the patient's system. It is replaced with a plasma volume expander, which dilutes the blood remaining in the veins and which gradually dissipates during the operative procedure. Near the conclusion of the operation the blood storage bag is elevated, and the stored blood is reinfused into the patient..... These techniques are noteworthy to Christians, since they run counter to God's Word. – Awake! 1972 04/08 p29, 30

In 1983, not only is hemodilution allowed, but they are wondering why it is not used more often!

It is with this in mind, and not just to honor the requests of Jehovah's Witnesses, that Denton Cooley [of Houston, Texas] has performed open-heart operations now for over seven years, limiting transfusions wherever possible by substituting hemodilution, diluting the patient's blood with a glucose and heparin solution. If this method has given excellent results since then . . . one wonders why it has not been extended to present-day surgery. – Awake! 1983 03/22 p.16

Jehovah's Witnesses refuse transfusions of both whole blood and its primary blood components. The Bible directs Christians to 'abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from fornication.' (Acts 15:29) Beyond that, when it comes to fractions of any of the primary components, each Christian, after careful and prayerful meditation, must conscientiously decide for himself. – Watchtower 2000 06/15 p. 31

So how can all these flip-flops be justified? Simple: tacking.

it may have seemed to some as though that path has not always gone straight forward. 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. And that goal in view for Jehovah's servants is the "new heavens and a new earth" of God's promise. – Watchtower 1981 12/01 p. 27

Seriously? The adjustments *seemed* to be to a previous point of view, but this has *not actually been the case*? Words fail me!

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 1976 May 15 p.298

We should have confidence in the channel God is using – Watchtower 1981 February 15 p.19

we should no longer be babes, tossed about as by waves and carried hither and thither by every wind of teaching – New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, Ephesians 4:14

Why is there this decline in religion?

One of the reasons is that people are disturbed by what is happening in their churches. Yes, millions of persons have been shocked to learn that things they were taught

as being vital for salvation are now considered by their church to be wrong. Have you, too, felt discouragement, or even despair, because of what is happening in your church? A businessman in Medellín, Colombia, expressed the effect the changes have had on many.

“Tell me,” he asked, “how can I have confidence in anything? How can I believe in the Bible, in God, or have faith? Just ten years ago we Catholics had the absolute truth, we put all our faith in this. Now the pope and our priests are telling us this is not the way to believe any more, but we are to believe ‘new things.’ How do I know the ‘new things’ will be the truth in five years?” – Awake! 1970 4/22 p.8

Another case of hypocrisy. Another interesting snippet that is conveniently forgotten by JW's now, is that initially they did not see any problem with the theory of evolution.

Nothing in the Genesis account would interfere with an evolutionary theory with regards to vegetation. . . . a measure of evolution is suggested by the statement that “the waters brought forth abundantly” the various kinds, under divine supervision. Only in the case of man does the Bible distinctly declare a personal creation. – Watchtower, 1912 12/01 p. 372, 373

The statements of Genesis in respect to lower creatures rather favor something along the lines of specialized evolution.... the beginning of life came from the waters, and later extended to the birds, and still later to the land animals – The Golden Age, 1920 02/18 p.341

On arriving to inspect his slaves in 1918, therefore, whom did the Master, Jesus Christ, find giving to his body of attendants their measure of food supplies at the proper time? who had warned of the dangers of evolution and spiritism? The facts show that it was a group of anointed Christians associated with the

*publishers of Zion's Watch Tower – Watchtower, 1990
03/15 p.13, 14*

...and yet also claim that they had been 'warning of the dangers of evolution' around 1918.

This Generation

The ‘generation’ fiasco provides more evidence that the leadership of JW’s are just bungling men with no supernatural guidance. There have been many different definitions of the word ‘generation’ (used by Jesus in Matthew 24). By trying to calculate the approximate length of a ‘generation’, this has been used to indicate that Armageddon is imminent. As each definition of the word became untenable, the definition was modified. If it wasn’t for the fact that this evolving teaching has caused so much alarm and psychological trauma among the membership, this farce would be almost comical...

Other uses of this Greek word (genea) prove that it is not used with the significance of race, but in reference to people living contemporaneously.... In other words, the signs mentioned will occur within a generation – epoch in the close of the age. – Studies in the Scriptures Vol. 4, p.603

A “generation” might be reckoned as equivalent to a century (practically the present limit) or one hundred and twenty years, Moses’ lifetime and the Scripture limit. (Gen. 6:3.) Reckoning a hundred years from 1780, the date of the first sign, the limit would reach to 1880. Or, since the Master said, “When ye shall see all these things,” and since “the sign of the Son of Man in heaven,” and the budding fig tree, and the gathering of “the elect” are counted among the signs, it would not be inconsistent to reckon the “generation” from 1878 to 1914--36 1/2 years-- about the average of human life today.” – Studies in the Scriptures Vol. 4, p.604, 605

The irresistible conclusion therefore is that Jesus referred to the new creation [the anointed] when he said: This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled. This then would be a strong indication that some members of the new creation will be on the earth at the time of Armageddon. – Watchtower 1927 02/15 p.62

The actual meaning of these words is, beyond question, that which takes a 'generation' in the ordinary sense, as at Mark 8:12 and Acts 13:36, or for those who are living at the given period. So it was on 'this generation' that the accumulated judgments were to fall. (Matt. 23:36) This therefore means that from 1914 a generation shall not pass till all is fulfilled, and amidst a great time of trouble. – Watchtower 1951 07/01 p.404

Some persons living A.D. 1914 when the series of foretold events began will also be living when the series ends with Armageddon. All the events will come within the span of a generation. There are hundreds of millions of persons living now that were living in 1914, and many millions of these persons could yet live a score or more years. Just when the lives of the majority of them will be cut short by Armageddon we cannot say." – Watchtower 1952 09/01 p.543

Jesus was obviously speaking about those who were old enough to witness with understanding what took place when the 'last days' began. ... Even if we presume that youngsters 15 years of age would be perceptive enough to realize the import of what happened in 1914, it would still make the youngest of 'this generation' nearly 70 years old today." – Awake! 1968 10/08 p.13

15, 15, any advance on 15 years of age?

Thus, when it comes to the application in our time, the "generation" logically would not apply to babies born during World War I. It applies to Christ's followers and others who were able to observe that war and the other things that have occurred in fulfillment of Jesus' composite "sign." – Watchtower 1978 10/01 p.31
As indicated by an article on page 56 of U.S. News & World Report of January 14, 1980, "If you assume that 10 is the age at which an event creates a lasting impression on a person's memory," then there are today

more than 13 million Americans who have a “recollection of World War I.” And if the wicked system of this world survived until the turn of the century, which is highly improbable in view of world trends and the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, there would still be survivors of the World War I generation. However, the fact that their number is dwindling is one more indication that “the conclusion of the system of things” is moving fast toward its end. – Watchtower 1980 10/15 p.31

10! 10, 10, do I hear younger than 10? (Note: logically, NOT babies though)

If Jesus used “generation” in that sense and we apply it to 1914, then the babies of that generation are now 70 years old or older. And others alive in 1914 are in their 80’s or 90’s, a few even having reached a hundred. There are still many millions of that generation alive. Some of them “will by no means pass away until all things occur.” – Watchtower 1984 05/15 p.5

Oh, OK, Babies! Thank you very much Watchtower 1984. Any advance on babies? Do I hear ‘born in that year’?

J. A. Bengel states in his New Testament Word Studies: “The Hebrews . . . reckon seventy-five years as one generation, and the words, shall not pass away, intimate that the greater part of that generation [of Jesus’ day] indeed, but not the whole of it, should have passed away before all should be fulfilled.” This became true by the year 70 C.E. when Jerusalem was destroyed.

Likewise today, most of the generation of 1914 has passed away. However, there are still millions on earth who were born in that year or prior to it. And although their numbers are dwindling, Jesus’ words will come true, “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” This is yet another

reason for believing that Jehovah's thieflike day is imminent. – *Awake!* 1988 04/08 p.14

Oh dear! 1995 and still no Armageddon. Even 'born in that year' is not gonna cut it for much longer...think of something, quick!

Jesus was not departing from his established use of the term 'this generation,' which he consistently applied to the contemporary masses with their 'blind guides' who together made up the Jewish nation. ... Jesus refers principally to contemporary people of a certain historical period, with their identifying characteristics. – *Watchtower* 1995 11/01 p.14, 17

Eager to see the end of this evil system, Jehovah's people have at times speculated about the time when the "great tribulation" would break out, even tying this to calculations of what is the lifetime of a generation since 1914. However, we "bring a heart of wisdom in," not by speculating about how many years or days make up a generation, but by thinking about how we "count our days" in bringing joyful praise to Jehovah. – *Watchtower* 1995 11/01 p.17

his usage was no basis for calculating – counting from 1914-how close to the end we are. – *Watchtower* 1997 06/01 p.28

As a class, these anointed ones make up the modern-day "generation" of contemporaries that will not pass away "until all these things occur." (footnote: The time period during which "this generation" lives seems to correspond to the period covered by the first vision in the book of Revelation. (Rev. 1:10–3:22) This feature of the Lord's day extends from 1914 until the last of the faithful anointed ones dies and is resurrected.) This suggests that some who are Christ's anointed brothers will still be alive on earth when the foretold great tribulation begins.* – *Watchtower* 2008 02/15 p.24

“John Barr ... twice read the comment: “Jesus evidently meant that the lives of the anointed ones who were on hand when the sign began to be evident in 1914 would overlap with the lives of the other anointed ones who would see the start of the great tribulation.” We do not know the exact length of “this generation,” but it includes these two groups whose lives overlap. Even though the anointed vary in age, those in the two groups constituting the generation are contemporaries during the part of the last days. How comforting it is to know that the younger anointed contemporaries of those older anointed ones who discerned the sign when it became evident beginning in 1914 will not die off before the great tribulation starts! – Watchtower 2010 06/15 p.5

Oh yes, of course, it's obvious now – when Jesus said ‘generation’ he meant ‘overlapping lives of the JW's who claim to be anointed over the course of more than a hundred years’.

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. – Watchtower 1881 02/01 p.188

*“I did not send the prophets, yet they themselves ran. I did not speak to them, yet they themselves prophesied.”
– New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures,
Jeremiah 23:21*

Requirements for Salvation

Do you believe that you are the only ones who will be saved?

*No. Many millions who have lived in centuries past and who were not Jehovah's Witnesses will come back in a resurrection and have an opportunity for life. Many now living may yet take a stand for truth and righteousness before God's time of judgment, and they will gain salvation. Moreover, Jesus said that we should not be judging one another. Humans look at the outward appearance; God looks at the heart. He sees accurately and judges mercifully. God has committed judgment into Jesus' hands, not ours. – Jehovah's Witnesses Official Media Web Site: FAQ About Beliefs.
<http://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/who-saved/>*

This is the answer served to the public. It is a very dishonest answer, since that is not what JW's are taught, as can be seen from the following quotes (and there are many many others with similar sentiments)...

Do not conclude that there are different roads, or ways, that you can follow to gain life in God's new system. There is only one. There was just one ark that survived the Flood, not a number of boats. And there will be only one organization — God's visible organization — that will survive the fast-approaching "great tribulation." It is simply not true that all religions lead to the same goal... You must be part of Jehovah's organization, doing God's will, in order to receive his blessing of everlasting life – You Can live Forever (1982, 1990) p.255

Jehovah God has also provided his visible organization, his "faithful and discreet slave," made up of spirit-anointed ones ... 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 1981 12/01 p.27

Bible students need to get acquainted with the organization of the “one flock” Jesus spoke about at John 10:16. They must appreciate that identifying themselves with Jehovah’s organization is essential to their salvation – Kingdom Ministry November 1990 p.1

Baptism

If you feel the same about serving Jehovah God and taking Christ's yoke upon you, we suggest that you consider the following two questions, which are asked of candidates for baptism:

(1) ...

(2) *On the basis of this faith in God and in his provision for salvation, have you dedicated yourself unreservedly to God to do his will henceforth as he reveals it to you through Jesus Christ and through the Bible under the enlightening power of the holy spirit? – Watchtower 1973 05/01 p.280*

At the close of the convention baptism talk, the baptism candidates will be in position to answer with depth of understanding and heartfelt appreciation two simple questions that serve to confirm that they recognize the implications of following Christ's example. ...

The second is:

Do you understand that your dedication and baptism identify you as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in association with God's spirit-directed organization?

Having answered yes to these questions, candidates are in a right heart condition to undergo Christian baptism. – Watchtower 1985 06/01 p.30 [Bold theirs]

JEHOVAH has specific requirements for those seeking salvation. They must acquire accurate knowledge, exercise faith, repent of their sins, be converted, make a dedication to God, and undergo baptism as believers. (John 3:16; 17:3; Acts 3:19; 18:8) Baptismal candidates must acknowledge publicly that on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice they have repented of their sins and have dedicated themselves to Jehovah. They must also understand that dedication and baptism identify them as Jehovah's Witnesses.

*The entire baptismal arrangement, including this public expression of faith, is essential for salvation. (Romans 10:10) This was confirmed when the apostle Peter wrote: “Immersion . . . saves us.” (1 Peter 3:21, ED)
But exactly how should we understand these words?
What does the context show? – Watchtower 1989 01/15
p.15*

The wording of the baptism questions changed to indicate that the commitment was no longer only to God, but also to the organisation. Not only that, but that dedicating oneself to the organisation is regarded as essential for salvation (compare that with the answer to the FAQ quoted previously).

Politics

In no country do Jehovah's witnesses take part in politics. They are not of this world. (John 17:14) Therefore they do not take part in voting at elections. They do not compromise their neutral standing in matters of politics, however, if they go to the polls and make the ballot void in some manner, either by crossing it out or by putting down, for example, the words "For God's Kingdom." That is telling what he is for. By doing this their ballot will become void; it will not count in the election of a man. They have complied with the law and gone to the polls and likely avoided punishment. – Watchtower 1964 05/15 p.308

Late in October a large number of Christian women from the Mlanje area were assaulted and raped, and on October 25, 1967, a fifteen-year-old girl at Mkuwila Village, because of refusing to compromise her religious convictions, was tied to a tree and raped six times. How sadistic these persecutors were can be seen from the fact that they even forced a wooden plug into one Christian woman ...

Why the Persecution?

Since this is the way the witnesses of Jehovah conduct themselves, why, then, all this violent persecution of them in Malawi? One of the main reasons is that the Witnesses refuse to buy membership cards in Malawi's Congress Party as well as refuse to buy and wear badges with the picture of the President of Malawi, Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda. – Watchtower 1968, 02/01 p.71, 72

As to whether they will personally vote for someone running in an election, each one of Jehovah's Witnesses makes a decision based on his Bible-trained conscience and an understanding of his responsibility to God and to the State. ... If someone decides to go to the polling booth, that is his decision. What he does in the polling

booth is between him and his Creator. ... There may be people who are stumbled when they observe that during an election in their country, some Witnesses of Jehovah go to the polling booth and others do not. They may say, 'Jehovah's Witnesses are not consistent.' People should recognize, though, that in matters of individual conscience such as this, each Christian has to make his own decision before Jehovah God.—Romans 14:12. – Watchtower 1999 11/01 p.28, 29

The official stance of the Watchtower as far as governments are concerned, is that voting is a conscience matter, as stated in the above 1999 Watchtower. As all JWs know, this is baloney. The secret elder's handbook makes it clear that anyone who engages in 'non-neutral activity' (including voting) is automatically 'disassociating themselves', and thus subject to shunning. Exactly the same tactic is used with the blood issue and with political neutrality – deem it as a disassociation rather than a disfellowshipping, that way you can claim (technically accurately, but completely dishonestly) that JWs don't punish people for doing those things.

Disfellowshipping

The judicial process and shunning used by JW's has very little to do with the Bible. There is no scriptural precedent for a judicial committee. In the past (right up until the late 1940's), the organisation spoke out against such practices as being pagan and unscriptural, but now they are widely used to maintain control.

Moreover, if your brother commits a sin, go lay bare his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take along with you one or two more, in order that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be established. If he does not listen to them, speak to the congregation. If he does not listen even to the congregation, let him be to you just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector. – New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, Matthew 18:15-17

According to this Scripture the very most that the church could do would be that, after having vainly endeavored to get the brother to repent and reform, it should withdraw special brotherly fellowship from him until such time as he would express willingness thereafter to do right. Then he should be received again into full fellowship. In the meantime the brother may merely be treated in the kindly, courteous way in which it would be proper for us to treat any publican or Gentile, withholding the special rights or privileges or greetings or voting opportunities that belong to the church as a class separate from the world – Watchtower 1919 03/01 p.69

The authority for excommunication, they claim, is based on the teachings of Christ and the apostles, as found in the following scriptures: Matthew 18: 15-19; 1 Corinthians 5:3-5; 16:22; Galatians 1:8,9; 1 Timothy 1:20; Titus 3:10. But the Hierarchy's excommunication, as a punishment and a "medicinal" remedy (Catholic

Encyclopedia), finds no support in these scriptures. In fact, it is altogether foreign to Bible teachings. ... The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says that papal excommunication is not without pagan influence, "and its variations cannot be adequately explained unless account be taken of several non-Christian analogues of excommunication." – *Awake!* 1947 01/08 p.27

if anyone is not obedient to our word through this letter, keep this one marked, stop associating with him, that he may become ashamed. And yet do not be considering him as an enemy, but continue admonishing him as a brother. – *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15

It was with the change of leadership from Rutherford to Knorr that the clamp down began, and stricter control was applied to members. The reasons a person can be disfellowshipped even extend to associating with a disfellowshipped person – such association being viewed on a par with witchcraft and idolatry:

If a publisher refuses to do this and ignores the prohibition on associating with the disfellowshipped one, that publisher is rebelling against the congregation of Jehovah, and rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim. If after sufficient warning the publisher persists in associating with the disfellowshipped person instead of aligning himself with Jehovah's organization he also should be disfellowshipped. – *Watchtower* 1955 10/01 p.607

But now I am writing YOU to quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner; not even eating with such a man. For what do I have to do with judging those outside? Do YOU not judge those inside, while God judges those outside? Remove the wicked [man] from among

yourselves. – New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 5:11

There was a brief relaxing of the rules in the 1970's when there was a power shift from a single president to a group of leaders (the 'Governing Body'):

We may note, too, that at 1 Corinthians 5:11 the apostle warns against mixing in company with one who "is" a fornicator or practicer of some other kind of serious wrongdoing. What, however, of the one who has been disfellowshipped for being that kind of person but who thereafter, either at an early point or at a later point in time, gives consistent evidence of discontinuing such wrong practice, stopping it? Can it be said that he or she still "is" a fornicator or whatever type of wrongdoer such a one was that caused him or her to be as "leaven" toward the congregation?

For example, a young person disfellowshipped for fornication may thereafter marry, raise a family and live a respectable life. Or one who was disfellowshipped for drunkenness may abandon such practice and, if drinking at all, may do so in moderation only. By such changes these individuals may now regain the respect of the community. Such ones may not yet have come and formally sought reinstatement by the congregation. Is there, however, not an evident difference between these and others who continue right on in the wrongdoing that brought their disfellowshipping? Those giving up the wrong practice may still manifest some appreciation for Christian truth, perhaps even defending the true Christian congregation when someone speaks evil against it. Should not such circumstances be given due weight and have an effect on our attitude as a congregation toward such ones?

Surely if the prodigal son of the parable had returned home in a drunken state, perhaps dragging along one of

his harlot companions, the father's reaction would not have been the same. But the father had reason to believe that the son was approaching with a right motive and, rather than suspect the worst, the father hoped the best and went out to meet his errant son. – Watchtower 1974 08/01 p.468, 469

I have heard JWs claim that they 'do not shun'. The Watchtower usually avoids that word, as they find it distasteful to admit to what is commonly regarded as cruel behaviour. But following the disfellowshipping of Ray Franz (a member of the Governing Body during the 1970's) for having a meal with his landlord and employer (who had disassociated himself before the decree that disassociated ones should be shunned), the remaining Governing Body members once again clamped down with ferocity:

“disfellowshipping” is what Jehovah's Witnesses appropriately call the expelling and subsequent shunning of such an unrepentant wrongdoer....a simple “Hello” to someone can be the first step that develops into a conversation and maybe even a friendship. Would we want to take that first step with a disfellowshipped person? – Watchtower 1981 09/15 p.22,25

The doctrine of disfellowshipping is based on the mis-application of a couple of scriptures. In this one, the context clearly shows that John was talking about 'the antichrist', and therefore should not be applied to someone who buys a raffle ticket (for example). The Greek word for 'greeting' used here is defined by JWs as including a simple 'hello'. If you do some secular research into the meaning of the Greek word used, you will find that definition to be incorrect.

This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Look out for yourselves, that YOU do not lose the things we have worked to produce, but that YOU may obtain a full reward. Everyone that pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching of the Christ does not have God. He that does remain in this teaching is the one that has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to YOU

and does not bring this teaching, never receive him into YOUR homes or say a greeting to him. For he that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works. – New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, 2 John 7-11

Watchtower hypocrisy again comes into play as the inquisition is criticised for not allowing a fair and open trial (in exactly the same way as judicial committees are handled):

Anyone—man, woman, child, or slave—could accuse a person of heresy, without fear of being confronted with the accused or of the latter even knowing who had denounced him. The accused rarely had someone to defend him, since any lawyer or witness in his behalf would himself have been accused of aiding and abetting a heretic. So the accused generally stood alone before the inquisitors, who were at the same time prosecutors and judges. – Awake! 1986 04/22 p.21

...and judicial matters in ancient Israel are lauded for being public:

Criminal trials were doubtless much speedier in Israel than they are at present in countries such as the United States, where clogged courts and elaborate procedure give rise to many delays. Since the local court was situated at the city gates, there was no question about the trial being public! (Deut. 16:18-20) No doubt the public trials helped influence the judges toward carefulness and justice, qualities that sometimes vanish in secret star-chamber hearings. – Awake! 1981 01/22 p.17

While their own judicial committees are are ‘confidential’ – a euphemism for ‘secret’:

Some will, at times, criticize a decision made by a body of elders or a judicial committee. Yet, they are not privy to all the details that the elders had to consider in order to reach a decision – Watchtower 1998 06/01 p.17

if there is a judicial committee case in the congregation, individuals should be satisfied with whatever the elders see fit to say and not pry in order to find out any details. Wives and children of elders should not try to pressure them into revealing confidential matters. In every way, we should learn not to 'meddle in what does not concern us.'—2 Thessalonians 3:11. – Watchtower 1985 11/15 p.14

I wrote something to the congregation, but Di-ot 're-phes, who likes to have the first place among them, does not receive anything from us with respect. That is why, if I come, I will call to remembrance his works which he goes on doing, chattering about us with wicked words. Also, not being content with these things, neither does he himself receive the brothers with respect, and those who are wanting to receive them he tries to hinder and to throw out of the congregation. – New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, 3 John 9-10

In the early days, the leaders were quite tolerant towards those who left:

*All who feel dissatisfied with the spiritual food which our great Master has privileged us to send broadcast to every nation **should certainly be looking anywhere and everywhere for something better.** Our wish for them is that they might find something better. If we were dissatisfied ourselves, or if we knew where something better could be obtained, we certainly at any cost would seek it. And how could we find fault with others for doing what we ourselves would do? Rather let us bid them God-speed in their search for something more satisfactory.* – Watchtower, 1909 10/01 p.293 (Text in bold was shown in italics in the original publication)

We would not refuse to treat one as a brother because he did not believe the Society is the Lord's channel.... If

others see it in a different way, that is their privilege. There should be full liberty of conscience. – Watchtower 1920 04/01 p.100, 101

Compare that attitude with the prevailing view thirty years later:

Being limited by the laws of the worldly nation in which we live and also by the laws of God through Jesus Christ, we can take action against apostates only to a certain extent, that is, consistent with both sets of laws. The law of the land and God's law through Christ forbid us to kill apostates, even though they be members of our own flesh-and-blood family relationship. However, God's law requires us to recognize their being disfellowshipped from his congregation, and this despite the fact that the law of the land in which we live requires us under some natural obligation to live with and have dealings with such apostates under the same roof. – Watchtower 1952 11/15 p.703

This really does seem to be saying that it would be nice if we could kill apostates, and especially if they are our relatives!

Count how many ad hominem fallacies there are in this paragraph:

From time to time, there have arisen from among the ranks of Jehovah's people those who, like the original Satan, have adopted an independent, faultfinding attitude. They do not want to serve "shoulder to shoulder" with the worldwide brotherhood. (Compare Ephesians 2:19-22.) Rather, they present a "stubborn shoulder" to Jehovah's words. (Zech. 7:11, 12) Reviling the pattern of the "pure language" that Jehovah has so graciously taught his people over the past century, these haughty ones try to draw the "sheep" away from the one international "flock" that Jesus has gathered in the earth. (John 10:7-10, 16) They try to sow doubts and to separate unsuspecting ones from the bounteous "table" of spiritual food spread at the Kingdom Halls of

Jehovah's Witnesses, where truly there is 'nothing lacking.' (Ps. 23:1-6) They say that it is sufficient to read the Bible exclusively, either alone or in small groups at home. But, strangely, through such 'Bible reading,' they have reverted right back to the apostate doctrines that commentaries by Christendom's clergy were teaching 100 years ago, and some have even returned to celebrating Christendom's festivals again, such as the Roman Saturnalia of December 25! Jesus and his apostles warned against such lawless ones.— Matt. 24:11-13; Acts 20:28-30; 2 Pet. 2:1, 22. — Watchtower 1981 08/15 p.28, 29

Also interesting here is the accidental admission that if you read the Bible without the Watchtower 'spin' on it, you end up believing the doctrines of Christendom! That really ought to ring alarm bells, but the JW mind is too well trained to think about the implications of that.

Some people insult those who disagree with them by questioning character or motives instead of focusing on the facts. Name-calling slaps a negative, easy-to-remember label onto a person, a group, or an idea. The name-caller hopes that the label will stick. If people reject the person or the idea on the basis of the negative label instead of weighing the evidence for themselves, the name-caller's strategy has worked. — Awake! 2000 06/22 p.6

Sound familiar?

In reality, apostates are only following this advice (which again, the Watchtower only applies to others, not themselves):

When persons are in great danger from a source that they do not suspect or are being misled by those they consider their friends, is it an unkindness to warn them? They may prefer not to believe the warning. They may even resent it. But does that free one from the moral responsibility to give that warning?

If you are among those seeking to be faithful to God, the issues these questions raise are vital for you today. Why? Because God's servants in every period of history have had to face up to the challenge these issues present. They have had to expose falsehood and wrongdoing and warn people of dangers and deception—not just in a general way, but in a specific way, in the interest of pure worship. It would have been far easier to keep silent or say only what people wanted to hear. But faithfulness to God and love of neighbor moved them to speak. They realized that “better is a revealed reproof than a concealed love.”—Prov. 27:5. – Watchtower 1974 01/15 p.35

And perhaps the single most hypocritical statement ever found in Watchtower literature:

No one should be forced to worship in a way that he finds unacceptable or be made to choose between his beliefs and his family. – Awake! July 2009 p29

Unfortunately, many have had to make that very choice due to the Watchtower's shunning policy.

Revisionist History

The power struggle that followed the death of Charles Taze Russell (CTR) is dishonestly presented by the Watchtower's revisionists. Rutherford used his legal acumen to seize control of the organisation, going directly against the expressed will of CTR. The majority of the organisation's leadership rejected this coup, and several splinter groups formed – some of which are still around today.

How would The Watchtower maintain the purity of its printed message? The magazine's first editor, C. T. Russell, instituted safeguards to make certain that what was printed in The Watchtower was the truth as then understood. One of those safeguards is identified in his will made on June 27, 1907. (Russell died on October 31, 1916.) His will states:

“I direct that the entire editorial charge of ZION'S WATCH TOWER shall be in the hands of a committee of five brethren, whom I exhort to great carefulness and fidelity to the truth. All articles appearing in the columns of ZION'S WATCH TOWER shall have the unqualified approval of at least three of the committee of five, and I urge that if any matter approved by the three be known or supposed to be contrary to the views of one or both of the other members of the committee, such articles shall be held over for thought, prayer and discussion for three months before being published—that so far as possible the unity of the faith and the bonds of peace may be maintained in the editorial management of the journal.”

Each member of the Editorial Committee, according to Russell's will, had to be “thoroughly loyal to the doctrines of the Scriptures” and had to exhibit, as prominent characteristics, “purity of life, clearness in the truth, zeal for God, love for the brethren and faithfulness to the Redeemer.” Also, Russell stipulated that “it shall not in any manner be indicated by whom

the various articles appearing in the journal are written ... that the truth may be recognized and appreciated for its own worth, and that the Lord may more particularly be recognized as the Head of the church and the Fountain of truth.” – Watchtower 1987 03/01 p.14

When it came to editing the Watchtower, Rutherford was only on the reserve list, to fill the place of any of the first choices who didn't want to or couldn't be on the committee.

In his will Brother Russell outlined an arrangement for an Editorial Committee of five to determine the contents of The Watch Tower. In addition, the board of directors of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society made arrangements for an Executive Committee of three—A. I. Ritchie, W. E. Van Amburgh, and J. F. Rutherford—to have general supervision of all the work of the Society, subject to the control of the board of directors

The five members of the Editorial Committee as named in Russell's will were William E. Page, William E. Van Amburgh, Henry Clay Rockwell, E. W. Brenneisen, and F. H. Robison. In addition, to fill any vacancies, others were named—A. E. Burgess, Robert Hirsh, Isaac Hoskins, G. H. Fisher, J. F. Rutherford, and John Edgar. Page and Brenneisen, however, promptly resigned—Page because he could not take up residence in Brooklyn, and Brenneisen (later the spelling was changed to Brenisen) because he had to take up secular work to support his family. Rutherford and Hirsh, whose names were listed in the December 1, 1916, Watch Tower, replaced them as members of the Editorial Committee. – Jehovah's Witnesses Proclaimers of God's Kingdom (1993) p.64, 65

It turned out that although the four opposing directors had been appointed by Brother Russell, these appointments had never been confirmed by vote of the

corporation members at the annual meeting of the Society. Therefore, the four of them were not legal members of the board of directors at all! Rutherford had been aware of this but had not mentioned it at first. Why not? He had wanted to avoid giving the impression that he was going against Brother Russell's wishes. However, when it became evident that they would not discontinue their opposition, Rutherford acted within his authority and responsibility as president to replace them with four others whose appointments were to be confirmed at the next annual meeting, to be held in January 1918. – Jehovah's Witnesses Proclaimers of God's Kingdom (1993) p.67, 68

Even with all the 'within his authority and responsibility' sugar-coating, it is quite plain to see that Rutherford deliberately and knowingly went against Russell's wishes and took control of the organisation because of his disagreements with the committee appointed by Russell.

Undeterred by the abject failure of his prophecy for the resurrection of the 'men of old' in 1925, Rutherford had a mansion built in San Diego – ostensibly to house the 'men of old' when they did eventually put in an appearance. In the meantime, during the 1930's (the great depression), Rutherford lived there himself in the lap of luxury (swimming pool, chauffeur driven cadillacs, and of course, plenty of booze [Rutherford was vehemently opposed to the prohibition]). It is very difficult to find any mention of Beth Sarim in the Society's literature (and nearby Beth Shahn – which had some kind of underground bunker – is not mentioned at all). But you can find secular evidence in the title deeds and in Time Magazine at least (Mar 31st 1930). You can also visit the house as it is still standing today (albeit now privately owned).

At San Diego, California, there is a small piece of land, on which, in the year 1929, there was built a house, which is called and known as Beth-Sarim. The Hebrew words Beth Sarim mean "House of the Princes"; and the purpose of acquiring that property and building the

house was that there might be some tangible proof that there are those on earth today who fully believe God and Christ Jesus and in His kingdom, and who believe that the faithful men of old will soon be resurrected by the Lord, be back on earth, and take charge of the visible affairs of earth. The title to Beth-Sarim is vested in the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society in trust, to be used by the president of the Society and his assistants for the present, and thereafter to be forever at the disposal of the aforementioned princes on earth. . . . while the unbelievers have mocked concerning it and spoken contemptuously of it, yet it stands there as a testimony to Jehovah's name; and if and when the princes do return and some of them occupy the property, such will be a confirmation of the faith and hope that induced the building of Beth-Sarim." – Salvation (1939) p.311

[Excerpt from Title Deed for Beth Sarim:] That among those who will be thus the faithful representatives and visible governors of the world will be David, who was once King over Israel; and Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthai, and Joseph, formerly ruler of Egypt, and Samuel the prophet and other faithful men named with approval in the Bible at Hebrews 11th. chapter. The WATCH TOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY shall hold said title perpetually in trust for the use of any or all of the men above named as representatives of God's kingdom on earth and that such men shall have possession and use of said property hereinabove described as they may deem for the best interest for the work in which they are engaged. ... Any persons appearing to take possession of said premises shall first prove and identify themselves to the proper officers of said Society as the person or persons described in Hebrews chapter eleven and in this deed. – Golden Age 1930 03/19

It had fully served its purpose and was now only serving as a monument quite expensive to keep; our faith in the return of the men of old time whom the King Christ Jesus will make princes in ALL the earth (not merely in California) is based, not upon that house Beth-Sarim, but upon God's Word of promise. – Watchtower 1947 12/15 p.382

Brother Rutherford had a severe case of pneumonia after his release from unjust imprisonment in 1919. Thereafter, he had only one good lung. In the 1920's, under a doctor's treatment, he went to San Diego, California, and the doctor urged him to spend as much time as possible there. From 1929 on, Brother Rutherford spent the winters working at a San Diego residence he had named Beth-Sarim. Beth-Sarim was built with funds that were a direct contribution for that purpose. The deed, which was published in full in "The Golden Age" of March 19, 1930, conveyed this property to J. F. Rutherford and thereafter to the Watch Tower Society. – Jehovah's Witnesses – Proclaimers of God's Kingdom (1993) p.76

Funny how the purpose of building Beth-Sarim changed between 1939 and 1993! Can this really be called 'candid' history?

Yet, many still wonder, 'Who really are Jehovah's Witnesses?' Others have written about them, not always impartially. Probably they were not aware of all the facts. Certainly, no one knows their modern-day history better than they themselves do. The editors of this volume have endeavored to be objective and to present a candid history. – Jehovah's Witnesses – Proclaimers of God's Kingdom p.5

Clearly, the 'Proclaimers' book is neither impartial, nor candid.

Beating Children

What is now generally regarded as child abuse was once not only tolerated, but actively encouraged by the organisation. It was only when society at large had become established in condemning such violence towards children that the tone of the literature softened (thus, again, clearly not the guidance of ‘holy spirit’).

Modern parents, in this age of delinquent youngsters, can take a lesson from the mother “teddy bear,” the koala. When baby koalas “are really naughty,” writes Ivan T. Sanderson in his new book Living Mammals of the World, “the mother turns them over her knee and spansks them on their bottoms for minutes on end with the flat of her hand, during which time their screams are soul-rending.” – Watchtower 1956 02/01 p.95

A spanking may be a lifesaver to a child, for Jehovah says: “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. If you beat him with the rod you will save his life from Sheol.” Again, “Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts.” ... So it is with children. Some are more sensible than others; some are meeker than others. A rebuke may discipline them more than a whipping would others who are more stubborn and in whose childish heart may be bound up a more than usual amount of folly. ... Jehovah’s wisdom is reflected in his creations, so to look to animals for instruction is not to lower our thinking to their level, but to lift it to God’s thoughts ...

*There is no juvenile delinquency in the animal realm, because there are no delinquent animal mothers. They do not spare the paw and spoil the young, but spank to preserve the young. ... So, while it may not be pleasant for them to be spanked, it is **better to be beaten** than to be eaten...*

You parents know what you must do. You children know what you must do. Jehovah knows what he will do. If we obey him, he will do things for us. If we disobey him, he will do things to us. – Watchtower 1954 01/15 p.54-62

It was explained to him that some day he would be grown and would have children of his own, and, when asked what he would do if his child threw his food on the floor, he unhesitatingly responded: “I would whip him.” He knew what was right and that proper corrective measures should have been administered. – Watchtower 1956 05/15 p.306

the howls grew louder as I turned off the television every night and announced it was time for Bible reading. Many times I sat with the Bible in one hand and the rod of correction in the other – Watchtower 1964 11/01 p.644

Not only must parents in the Christian home be mild in temper toward each other, but they must also have the same mental disposition toward their children. ...

If you want to live under God’s kingdom rule, these devilish hereditary tendencies must be forcefully rooted out and supplanted with godly qualities, and the parental rod of correction will help to do this. ...

There may be rare instances where a child is so hardened in its stubbornness that even the rod of correction cannot drive it out. In the days of Israel parents were instructed by Jehovah to take such a rebel to the city fathers and they, in turn, took the incorrigible one out and stoned him to death. There were no juvenile delinquents under such a system. (Deut. 21:18-21) So also today, the New World society of Jehovah’s witnesses can not and will not tolerate juvenile delinquency to exist in its midst. So, to avoid a possible death-dealing blow by being disfellowshipped from the

congregation, wise theocratic children give heed to and follow what God's Word says: "Children, be obedient to your parents in union with the Lord, for this is righteous." – Watchtower 1960 02/01 p.80

when wrongdoing occurs and discipline must be administered, it should be done in love and according to the needs of the particular child. Some children need only a word and they understand. Some need firmer discipline down low enough and hard enough. – Watchtower 1962 08/01 p.460

All children of Adam need correction, and at times firm discipline requires the rod, in the administration of pain. "Foolishness is tied up with the heart of a boy; the rod of discipline is what will remove it far from him." (Prov. 22:15) Jehovah's discipline is thus not a watered-down discipline such as that advised by some worldly authorities who would always hold back the rod. But the literal rod is what is basically meant at Proverbs 23:13, 14: "Do not hold back discipline from the mere boy. In case you beat him with the rod, he will not die. With the rod you yourself should beat him, that you may deliver his very soul from Sheol itself." At times, then, a parent will need to speak to the child by the administration of pain. This pain, God's Word assures us, is not going to kill the child; but it will have beneficial effects, protective benefits for the child, protecting "his very soul from Sheol." – Watchtower 1963 08/15 p.497

Thankfully, more recently this stance has been softened, not due to divine guidance, but due to western society no longer tolerating such abuse:

A rod is a symbol of authority. At Proverbs 13:24, it refers to parental authority. In this context, employing the rod of discipline does not necessarily mean spanking a child. Rather, it represents the means of correction,

*whatever form it may take. – Watchtower 2004 07/15
p.31*

Inspected and Chosen by Jesus

The manner in which Jesus has just left the earth is without public fanfare and with only his faithful followers observing. So he will return in like manner—without public fanfare and with only his faithful followers discerning that he has returned and has begun his presence in Kingdom power. – The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived chapter 131

So, to recap, what are some of the things Jesus found when he allegedly ‘arrived’ to inspect his slaves? Were the Bible Students giving ‘food at the proper time’?

On arriving to inspect his slaves in 1918, therefore, whom did the Master, Jesus Christ, find giving to his body of attendants their measure of food supplies at the proper time? – Watchtower, 1990 03/15 p.13, 14

1799 definitely marks the beginning of “the time of the end”. ... The time of the Lord’s second presence dates from 1874 – Creation (1927) p.315, 319

So no, they hadn’t discerned the time of his presence.

We may as well join with the civilized world in celebrating the grand event ... – “Christmas day.” – Watchtower, 12/01 1904 p.364

They were engaging in pagan celebrations.

a measure of evolution is suggested – Watchtower, 1912 12/01 p. 372, 373

They accepted evolution.

must ... worship ... Jesus – Watchtower 1945 10/15 p.313

They worshipped Jesus.

the white race exhibits some qualities of superiority over any other – Watchtower 1902 07/15 p.215

They held certain racist views.

gave a quart of his blood for transfusion, and today the woman lives and smiles gaily over what happened – Consolation 1940 December 25 p. 19

They were accepting blood.

The Great Pyramid in Egypt is a Witness to all these event of the ages and of our day -- testifying in symbols – The Divine Plan of the Ages, [Studies in the Scriptures vol I] 1886 (1908 edition) end notes

They were using pyramidology to make false predictions.

For years, Bible Students wore a cross and crown as a badge of identification, and this symbol was on the front cover of the “Watch Tower” from 1891 to 1931 – Jehovah’s Witnesses Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom p. 200

They were using images in worship.

Could wearing a cross, even as just an ornament, be harmonized with the admonition of the apostle Paul at 1 Corinthians 10:14: “Therefore, my beloved ones, flee from idolatry”? – Watchtower 1987 08/15 p.24

Taking into account all the foregoing, this question is certainly valid:

really, would you want to be even associated with a religion that had not been honest with you? – Is This Life All There Is? (1974) p.46

Quackery

Just for fun, let's have a look at some of the other 'spiritual food' that was being dispensed by this 'faithful and discreet slave' under the guidance of God:

A Cure for Surface Cancer

We have recently learned of a very effective and simple remedy for cancers which show themselves on the surface of the body. We are informed that a physician, after testing this remedy, paid \$1000 for the information, and that he has established a Cancer Hospital which is doing good work. The recipe has come to us free and we are willing to communicate the formula, but only to those who are troubled with surface cancers and who will write to us directly, stating particulars. No fee will be charged, but in order to protect the sufferers, we require a promise that they will not sell the formula to others, nor receive pay for the use of it, nor communicate the formula to anybody. Any one known to be a sufferer can be informed of the terms on which the prescription is obtainable through us.- Watchtower 1913 07/01 p.200

Even years ago it was known by some people that the use of pacifiers by babies is one of the chief causes of diseased and enlarged tonsils and adenoid growths, which results from the suction. – The Golden Age 1919 11/26 p.153.

Thinking people would rather have smallpox than vaccination, because the latter sows the seed of syphilis, cancers, escema, erysipelas, scrofula, consumption, even leprosy and many other loathsome affections. Hence the practice of vaccination is a crime, an outrage and a delusion. – The Golden Age, 1929 05/01 p. 502.

But the dog-rabies-vaccine imposition is the latest... Rabies! When it has been shown conclusively that there

*is no such thing as rabies!... a mental hoax...
Vaccination, summed up, is the most unhygienic,
barbaric, filthy, abhorrent, and most dangerous system
of infection known. Its vile poison taints, corrupts, and
pollutes the blood of the healthy, resulting in ulcers,
syphilis, scrofula, erysipelas, tuberculosis, cancer,
tetanus, insanity, and death – Golden Age 1923 01/01
p.214*

*It has never been proven that a single disease is due to
germs. – Golden Age 1924 01/16 p.250*

*I HAVE named this new discovery, which I believe will
be epochal in the history of the treatment of disease, and
which I am exclusively announcing in THE GOLDEN
AGE prior to its general publication elsewhere, The
Electronic Radio Biola, which means life renewed by
radio waves or electrons. The Biola automatically
diagnoses and treats diseases by the use of the
electronic vibrations. The diagnosis is 100 percent
correct, rendering better service in this respect than the
most experienced diagnostician.... THE principle of
operation of the Biola is the collection... of the disease
vibrations.... the fluid containing the same waves or
vibrations enters the body, meets the disease waves and
destroys them.... This is a great step forward, marking
the Biola as the most valuable treatment apparatus
obtainable today, and well worthy of notice in the
columns of a magazine like THE GOLDEN AGE – The
Golden Age 1925 04/22 p.454*

*If the organs are diseased, heal them by correcting your
diet. Avoid the use of aluminum cooking utensils and
alum baking powders as they are injurious to your
health, poisoning your blood stream... Sleep on the right
side or flat on your back, with the head toward the north
so as to get benefit of the earth's magnetic currents.
Avoid serum inoculations as they pollute the blood
stream with their filthy pus.... Stop chewing gum, as you*

need the saliva for your food. – The Golden Age 1929 11/12 p.107.

Vaccination has never saved a human life. It does not prevent smallpox. – The Golden Age 1931 02/04 p.294

We do well to bear in mind that among the drugs, serums, vaccines, surgical operations, etc., of the medical profession, there is nothing of value save an occasional surgical procedure. Their so-called “science” grew out of Egyptian black magic and has not lost its demonological character.... we shall be in a sad plight when we place the welfare of the race in their hands. ... Medicine originated in demonology and spent its time until the last century and a half trying to exorcise demons. During the past half century it has tried to exorcise germs. – The Golden Age 1931 08/05 p.727, 728

A subscriber... finds a drop or two of kerosene excellent for quickly cleaning sinks and bathtubs; it cuts the dirt immediately and leaves no odor; and when applied to cuts the cuts heal sooner. Try it. – Consolation 1931 12/01 p. 12.

The earlier in the forenoon you take the sun bath, the greater will be the beneficial effect, because you get more of the ultra-violet rays, which are healing. – The Golden Age 1933 09/13 p.777.

HOW many people know, I wonder, of the curative properties of olive oil. The word “cure” is a strong term.... I personally know of more than one being relieved of liver trouble, and even cured of gall stones, by the use of olive oil.... A friend who for years has suffered pain in the region of the appendix was entirely relieved by the oil treatments. – The Golden Age 1935 07/05 p.632.

Man's head is shaped differently; therefore he can think of subjects about which the lower animals cannot think... A man with a head of a given shape cannot think with the same breadth of mind as a man with a better shaped head -- a man who is less fallen. Some have lost more, others less, of the original perfection, of the original intelligence, given man in his creation. – Watchtower 1915 01/15 p.5611

The size of the nose, as also the size of the eyes, is not without significance. The small-nosed man cannot have a judicial mind, whatever his other excellencies may be. And a man whose nose upturns can no more be expected to administer justice than a pug dog can be expected to act as a shepherd. – Golden Age 1921 01/19 p.224

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