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TRUSTING THE FAITHFUL AND DISCREET SLAVE:
A CRITIQUE OF THE AUTHORITY OF
THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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TRUSTING THE FAITHFUL AND DISCREET SLAVE:
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Lucas Nathaniel Butler

Read and Approved by:

Timothy K. Beougher (Chair)

James D. Chancellor

George H. Martin

Date _____

To my bride, Laura,
whose love and encouragement
sustain me.

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PREFACE

This work would not have been a reality without the encouragement of many supportive voices and hearts. The Lord used Dr. James Chancellor to stir my mind and heart toward a desire to understand new religious movements. I am forever indebted to Dr. Chancellor's instruction throughout my graduate studies. As a new chapter opened in Dr. Chancellor's journey, I was blessed with a new supervisor and friend, Dr. Timothy Beougher. Reminding me to fully commit to the Great Commission and stretching me to make my scholarship reflect the Lordship of Christ, Dr. Beougher provided me with unwavering support throughout the dissertation process.

Our family saw several transitions during my doctoral studies; however, the support of our families and friends remained steadfast. Their prayers and visits helped us embrace the various peaks and valleys we have experienced along the way. While hundreds of miles separated us, we always knew that their prayers were near.

As I began the dissertation phase, our family relocated, and I had to reestablish relationships with local Jehovah's Witnesses. Thankfully, not long after our move, Penny and Darryl Camp were out sharing in our neighborhood. Since our first meeting, the Camps have been a blessing to my research and my family. I am incredibly thankful to their receptiveness to my questions and to their provision of Watchtower resources. Unfortunately, Penny lost her battle with cancer before the completion of this dissertation. My prayer is that the truth set her free. Without Darryl's help and hers, this dissertation would not have been possible.

It is impossible to articulate how much my wife and our sons have supported me throughout this pursuit. My two spies, Caleb and Joshua, and my prophet, Elijah, have been my greatest treasure over the past six years. Their antics and their love for baseball have provided a welcome distraction from my studies. They are my biggest fans and I am theirs. My bride sacrificed so much for me to achieve this goal. Singlehandedly she cared for our sons while my studies would require me to travel for days at a time. She worked while I

wrote. She believed in me when I struggled to believe in myself. A gift from God, she has sustained me and pushed me to be the man I am today. I look to what the Lord holds for us as we enter this new chapter of our lives together.

For it is the grace of God that I am most thankful. Without His favor through Christ, I am a corrupt vessel; however, because of His love I can be used for His purposes. May this dissertation be used to further His kingdom among the nations!

Lucas N. Butler

Louisville, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, God installed Jesus Christ as King in the invisible heavens nearly one hundred years ago. Since this glorious event in 1915, the Society has taught that one group of Christians have sought to proclaim the blessings that Christ's kingdom will bring.¹ The Jehovah's Witnesses believe themselves to be the only remaining true Christians; therefore, the Lord has entrusted them alone with the message of his kingdom. Seeking to reach all people, the Society reports that they have 7,965,954 active publishers² worldwide. With missionaries around the world, Witnesses spent over 1.8 million hours in field service in 2013.³ The message they proclaim sets their organization apart from other "Christian-based" faiths. The group's understanding of Matthew 24:45-47⁴ and Luke 12:42-44⁵ serve as the anchor of their corporate uniqueness. Within these synoptic passages, readers find Jesus' parable of "the faithful and discreet

¹2014 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2014), 2.

²All Jehovah's Witnesses are known as publishers. This designation comes from their distribution of published materials about Jehovah's Kingdom. The Society notes that only those involved in field service (door-to-door ministry) are considered "active publishers." Witnesses that participate in more than 30 hours a month in field service are "auxiliary pioneers." Those that can devote more than 70 hours per month are "regular pioneers," while those that spend 130 hours or more a month in field service are "special pioneers." See *Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will Today?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2012), 15.

³2014 *Yearbook*, 176.

⁴"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions" (Matt 24:45-47). All biblical quotations will be taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

slave” (FDS). It is the Watchtower Society’s understanding of this faithful slave that undergirds their organization and their prophetic voice.

This dissertation explores the Society’s understanding of the FDS and the implications of their teachings on the matter. In order to grasp the significance of the FDS parable to the Watchtower organization, a brief historical sketch of the movement is necessary. The following section will track the development of the movement from its founder to its modern-day expression.

The History of the Jehovah’s Witnesses

In 1869, under the preaching of an Adventist minister, Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) developed a new zeal for discovering Scriptural truth. Disheartened by the perceived glimpses of the truth that “were buried under a morass of pagan teachings”⁶ in Christendom’s churches, Russell collaborated with a few acquaintances to form a Bible study group in Allegheny, Pennsylvania.⁷ As they studied together, the group came to realize what they believed to be as errors of long-held doctrines such as the immortality of the human soul and the physical return of Jesus Christ. While contemplating the implications of these newly acquired interpretations, Russell encountered the religious periodical, *Herald in the Morning*.⁸ Within the pages of this January 1876 edition, Russell found affirmation as well as further insight into his group’s revelations.

⁵And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions” (Luke 12:42-44).

⁶*Jehovah’s Witnesses: Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1993), 43. The majority of Watchtower publications do not ascribe any credit to human authorship; therefore, an author’s name will not be found in the bibliographic information for Watchtower resources.

⁷*Ibid.*, 44.

⁸*Ibid.*, 46.

Having discarded the doctrine of the visible second advent of Christ, the Allegheny group found solace in the *Herald's* end time prophecies. The paper's editor, Nelson H. Barbour,⁹ wrote that Christ had begun his invisible *parousia*¹⁰ in 1874. Convinced that Christ had already begun his heavenly reign, Russell understood human history to have shifted into a harvest period in which the spread of the Truth became paramount.¹¹ Desiring to refute Christendom's false teachings about Christ's return, Russell began to write alongside Barbour in the *Herald*. The two theologians published *Three Worlds, and the Harvest of this World* in 1877 in which they directed their readers to 1914 as the year in which the Gentile times would end and the year in which the Messianic kingdom would become a reality.¹² United in many doctrines but divided on the nature of Christ's sacrifice, the partnership split in 1879 and Russell began publishing *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*.¹³

Known as "Bible Students," Russell's small band of followers expanded into a readership numbering in the thousands. With more readers responding to his teachings, Russell sought ways to connect *Watch Tower* readers with each other. In the spring of 1880, he announced plans to visit particular cities and encouraged readers to gather for his visits.

⁹Nelson Barbour (1824-1905) is associated with the Adventist movement of the late nineteenth century. He later abandoned his invisible presence teachings but continued to propose dates for Christ's return. With each unfulfilled prediction, Babourites faded into obscurity. See B. W. Schulz and Rachael de Vienne, "Nelson Barbour: The Time-ists Last Breath," *Journal from the Radical Reformation* (Spring 2008): 54-56.

¹⁰Russell and current Jehovah's Witnesses render the Greek term *parousia* as "presence" whereas most biblical translations of the Greek Scriptures render the word as "advent" or "coming." The Watchtower Society notes that the translation of *parousia* as "coming" places greater emphasis on Christ's arrival and obscures the significance of the presence that follows. Just as the Old Testament contains accounts of Jehovah being invisibly present on the earth, Christ has the power to be invisibly present after his resurrection. His presence would be spiritually invisible to all except his faithful followers. See "Presence," in *Insight on the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), 2: 676-79.

¹¹*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 47.

¹²Nelson H. Barbour and Charles T. Russell, *Three Worlds, and the Harvest of This World* (Rochester, NY: n.p., 1877), 83, accessed January 11, 2013, <http://www.a2z.org/archive.htm>.

¹³*Ibid.*, 48.

These gatherings soon developed into weekly meetings in which Bible Students studied the *Watch Tower* publications and prepared for preaching the good news.¹⁴ As the number of Bible Student groups grew and the urgency of the message intensified, Russell realized the need for greater organization and incorporated the Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society in 1884.¹⁵

Russell's teaching received greater recognition with the publication of *The Divine Plan of the Ages* in 1886. This book was the first of six volumes¹⁶ that conveyed Russell's teachings on the Scriptures. As a series, the books were known as *Millennial Dawn*.¹⁷ Within the pages of this series, Russell laid the groundwork for many of the doctrines that have long been associated with the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The last decade of Russell's life set the tone for the future of the Watchtower organization. In 1909, the founder had the Society's publication headquarters moved from their humble starting point of Allegheny to Brooklyn, New York. Naming the complex "Bethel," Russell and his followers truly believed this "house of God" would serve as the beacon from which Jehovah's message would reach the world.¹⁸ With a new base of operations, Pastor Russell and his students launched their greatest evangelistic endeavor up to that point in history. In 1914, they invited the world to embrace their "Photo-Drama of

¹⁴*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 51.

¹⁵The Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society later became known as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. However, in 1909, Russell moved the organization's headquarters to Brooklyn, New York, and formed the People's Pulpit Association, which is now called the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Incorporated. See M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of the Jehovah's Witnesses*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 29.

¹⁶The six volumes of *Millennial Dawn* are the following: (1) *The Divine Plan of the Ages* (1886); (2) *The Time Is at Hand* (1889); (3) *Thy Kingdom Come* (1891); (4) *The Day of Vengeance* (1897); (5) *The Atonement Between God and Man* (1899); (6) *The New Creation* (1904).

¹⁷*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 52. In 1904 *Millennial Dawn* became known as *Studies in the Scriptures*.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 59.

Creation.” This evangelistic tool was part motion picture and part slideshow with musical recordings and recorded speeches.¹⁹ Lasting four hours, this Watchtower production was seen by nearly ten million viewers in the United States alone.²⁰

As noted earlier, Russell taught that the year 1914 would have a unique significance. Preparing for the end of the Gentile times, the Bible Students anxiously awaited their heavenly reward. With the outbreak of World War I, the signs appeared to be evident; however, Russell and his followers remained on earth. Realizing the widespread disappointment, the founder directed his students to embrace additional time the Lord provided for the harvest.

We imagined that the harvest work of gathering the church would be accomplished before the end of the Gentile Times; but nothing in the Bible so said. Our thought was purely an inference, and now we see that it was an unjustified one. This harvest work belongs to the new dispensation and cannot be identified with the old.

Are we regretful that the harvest work continues? Nay, verily; we rejoice and have the pleasure each day of showing forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his most marvelous light; and we delight in seeing how others are being benefited and made to rejoice. Are we regretful of the experiences we have had in coming to this present point? Do we feel like repining that the Lord did not force upon us more careful attention to the parallelism? Nay, verily; the Lord's leadings have been good.²¹

The dashed expectations surrounding 1914 served as fodder for the first major doctrinal realignment for the Society. Maintaining that 1914 ushered in the end of the Gentile times, Russell now taught that the outbreak of war would produce the battle of Armageddon, which in turn would culminate with entrance of the Messianic kingdom and the saints' exaltation.²²

¹⁹Ibid., 60.

²⁰Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed*, 29.

²¹“Take Heed to Yourselves,” *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (September 1916): 265, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://www.a2z.org/archive.htm>.

²²“Views from the Watchtower,” *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (February 15, 1916), 52, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://www.a2z.org/archive.htm>.

The Watchtower Society experienced its first change in leadership in 1916. Battling personal illness and his tumultuous touring schedule, Russell died on October 31, 1916 on a train in Texas. The organization notified the throngs of Bible students in November edition of *The Watchtower*.

We rejoice to know that instead of sleeping in death, as the saints of old, he is numbered among those whose “works follow him.” He has met the dear Lord in the air, whom he so loved as to lay down his life faithfully in his service.²³

Amidst opposition, Joseph (Judge) Rutherford succeeded Russell as the Society’s next president. Controversy seemed to follow Rutherford during his early years as the organization’s leader.

One of Rutherford’s first orders of business was to continue Russell’s legacy. In 1917, the Society published *The Finished Mystery*, the seventh volume in the founder’s *Studies in the Scriptures*. Proclaimed as a posthumous work of Russell, the book incited conflict with mainstream culture with its teachings against the clergy class and military service. With a world at war, the Society’s rhetoric was not well received and in 1918 seven directors of the Society along with Rutherford were sentenced to twenty years in prison for sedition under the American Espionage Act.²⁴ With its leadership in prison, the movement’s publication efforts suffered. Faced with a shortage of supplies and guidance, the Bethel headquarters closed and operations returned to Allegheny.²⁵ However, Rutherford and his directors were soon released in March of 1919.

Newly released from federal prison, Rutherford sought to reenergize the Society with a flurry of publications and speeches. Based upon a speech he delivered before his

²³“Death of Charles T. Russell,” *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ’s Presence* (November 15, 1916), 338, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://www.a2z.org/archive.htm>.

²⁴*Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Divine Purpose* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1959), 74-80.

²⁵*Jehovah’s Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 71.

imprisonment, the president published *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* in 1920. Within the pages of this work, Rutherford pointed Bible Students to a new date for their hope to be realized.

Seventy jubilees of fifty years each would be a total of 3500 years. 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? In the type there must be a full restoration; therefore the great antitype must mark the beginning of restoration of all things. The chief thing to be restored is the human race to life; 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 faithful men of Israel from the condition of death, being resurrected and fully restored to perfect humanity and made the visible, legal representatives of the new order of things on earth.²⁶

With the publication of *Millions*, the organization now feverishly published with 1925 as their impetus. Members of the Society began to get their affairs in order as that long-anticipated year approached.

As the return of the faithful ones from days gone by loomed, Rutherford continued to highlight the uniqueness of the Society. Equating the Society was the true church; he boldly alienated the organization from other “Christian” congregations.

We should expect the concluding work of the church to be done in an orderly way by a concerted, organized movement. We believe that the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society is such an organized arrangement for the carrying on of the Lord’s work. While the Society is a body corporate, with required officers and servants, yet these alone do not constitute the Society. In the broader sense the Society is composed of the body of Christians organized in an orderly manner under the Lord’s direction for the carrying on of his work; and all the consecrated ones this side the veil harmoniously working together for the proclamation of the message of the kingdom now due to be promulgated constitute the Society.²⁷

Proclaiming the Watchtower Society as the Lord’s sole representative, Rutherford continued his assault on Christian clergy by equating them with the “goat class” of individuals as seen

²⁶Joseph F. Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* (Brooklyn, NY: International Bible Students Association, 1920), 88.

²⁷“Keeping His Commandments,” *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ’s Presence* (November 1921), 329, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://www.jwfacts.com/historical-publications.php>.

in Jesus' parable in Matthew 25.²⁸

While Rutherford directed the Bible Students to the promise of 1925, he also pointed them to the past for realignment. As noted earlier, Russell taught that Christ's invisible presence began in 1874 but Rutherford now pointed followers to 1914.

The Scriptural evidence in the light of recent events shows that the Lord began his reign in 1914. There the nations became angry. The World War, famine, pestilence, and revolution followed. The due time for the Lord's people to specifically obey these commandments when they see and appreciate the time in which we are living. Speaking to his faithful followers, he in substance says: 'Go tell the nations of earth this message. Tell them that the Lord reigns; that the first work of his reign is the dashing to pieces of Satan's empire; that this work is in progress; but comfort their hearts with the message that the King of kings and Lord of lords comes to judge the people righteously and to give them all the truth.'²⁹

This adjustment made sense of the disappointment of 1914. The Lord was indeed at work in this fateful year. For it was now the year he enthroned Christ in the heavens. Through "earnest reexamination of the Scriptures," Rutherford redirected the dashed hopes that lingered within the movement.³⁰

With the expectation of the resurrection of the faithful men of old and the subsequent heavenly reward for the anointed in 1925, the long-anticipated year came and went. Amidst great disappointment, Rutherford urged the Bible Students to press forward in promoting Jehovah's kingdom.

It seems to be a weakness of many Bible Students that if they locate a future date in the Bible, immediately they center as many prophecies upon that date as possible. This has been the cause of many siftings in the past. As far as we recall, all the dates foreseen were correct. The difficulty was that the friends inflated their imaginations beyond reason; and that when their imaginations burst asunder, they were inclined to throw away everything. . . Many can remember how "absolutely sure" some were about 1914. No doubt the Lord was pleased with the zeal manifested by his servants; but did they

²⁸"The Parable of the Sheep and Goats," *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (October 15, 1923), 310-13, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://www.jwfacts.com/historical-publications.php>.

²⁹"Advertise the King and Kingdom," *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (December 15, 1922), 394, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://www.jwfacts.com/historical-publications.php>.

³⁰"Make Jehovah's Reminders the Exultation of Your Heart," *The Watchtower Study Edition* (September 2013), 15.

have a Scriptural basis for all they expected to come to pass that year? Let us be cautious, therefore, about predicting particulars. The Lord will make them clear as fast as they become meat in due season. However, we feel sure that he will not chide us if we earnestly and reverently search for what may be revealed, watching also the facts about us.³¹

The Society's president pointed to inflated imaginations as the reason for their corporate disillusionment. Without admitting fault, Rutherford continued to encourage the Students by proclaiming that the signs of the times certainly pointed to the Lord's imminent deliverance. With hopes dashed thousands of followers left the movement, but many remained zealous for the Lord and his organization.³²

Under Rutherford's leadership, the organization embraced a new name in 1931. In order to distinguish his followers from other Bible Students that had left the Society, the president announced that they now desired to be known as "Jehovah's Witnesses."³³ Basing the new name on Isaiah 43:10-12, Rutherford directed his followers to embrace their name as a reminder of their existing mission to bear witness to Jehovah's name and his kingdom. James Penton noted that the selection of a new name provided "a major psychological break" with the movement's past and helped create a centralized arrangement under Rutherford and his directors.³⁴

The years that followed birthed several distinctive marks for the Watchtower Society. Urged to advertise the kingdom, Witnesses began regular door-to-door preaching. Members illustrated their faithfulness by having "an active share" in the field ministry.³⁵ Fruitful associates also learned to forsake holidays and birthdays. In 1934, Rutherford

³¹"The Year of Jubilee," *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (February 15, 1925), 57, accessed January 26, 2014, <http://www.a2z.org/archive.htm>.

³²Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed*, 58.

³³*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 82.

³⁴Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed*, 62.

directed his followers to a new motivation for their organizational evangelism.

The offering of Isaac as a sacrifice by Abraham foreshadowed that God would permit his beloved Son to be put to death at the hands of Satan and that Jehovah would demonstrate his supreme power and the vindication of his own name by raising his beloved Son out of death. It was a triumph to Jehovah and a vindication of his name. God provided that the death of Christ Jesus, his beloved Son, should furnish the ransom or redemptive price for man; but that goodness and loving-kindness toward mankind is secondary to the vindication of Jehovah's name. All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and obey him, and who receive life, will be a vindication of Jehovah's name and his word.³⁶

The primary purpose of Christ's ransom work was the vindication of the God's name. Just as the vindication of his own name was paramount to Jehovah, his Witnesses must share in that same pursuit. Associates began to go house-to-house attempting to champion the name of Jehovah.

Not only did the Witnesses receive a new impetus, they learned more about some possible spiritual companions. In 1935, Rutherford officially introduced "the other sheep" (John 10:16, Matt 25:31-46) or "the great multitude" (Rev 7:9) to the anointed Witnesses. This new spiritual class of individuals had a different eternal hope than the 144,000. They had the opportunity to dwell forever on a paradisiacal earth.³⁷ From this point forward, the evangelistic focus of the Witnesses broadened.

Not only must the spiritual food provided for God's people be directed to these spirit-begotten ones but it must also now supply nourishment fit to strengthen those whose Scriptural hopes were entirely earthly. No longer were the remnant going into the field looking for just the scattered sheep of Jehovah's anointed ones. Now these ministers must begin to look for the "other sheep." They must prepare for bringing to Christ's fold the many "other sheep" eagerly seeking the divine will and ready to perform whatever was given them to do.³⁸

³⁵"Testing and Sifting in Modern Times," *The Watchtower* (June 15, 1987), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

³⁶Joseph F. Rutherford, *Jehovah* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1934), 320.

³⁷*Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, 140.

³⁸*Ibid.*

Struggling with cancer, Rutherford died on January 8, 1942 at Beth Sarim.³⁹ Five days later the Society's vice president, Nathan H. Knorr, succeeded the fallen leader.⁴⁰ Penton wrote that Rutherford's "real monument" was not some crypt but the way he led the movement through the dark days of World War I and the thereafter. Rutherford made the Witnesses into what they are today.⁴¹

As president, Knorr led the Watchtower Society into an era of increased education. In 1943, the organization established the theocratic ministry school for local congregations and the training school of Gilead for foreign missionaries.⁴² The Society introduced *The Watchtower's* sister publication *Awake!* and produced its own translation of the Bible. In 1950, the Witnesses published *The New World Translation of the Greek Scriptures* and nearly a decade later released *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.⁴³ The Society desired to equip its followers for effective door-to-door ministry.

The era during Knorr's presidency was characterized by growth and tension. Following World War II, German Witnesses that survived Hitler's concentration camps made the most of their reclaimed freedom. The Society's ranks in Europe experienced a swell of growth.⁴⁴ Jehovah's Witnesses also began to find themselves in courtrooms around the world fighting for the right to observe some of their organizational tenets. Whether the issues

³⁹The Society built Beth Sarim, or the "House of Princes," in 1929 in San Diego, California, as a home for the soon to be resurrected faithful ones of old. The president of the Society and his assistants could use the home, but it was to be at the disposal of the resurrected princes. "It was thought well and pleasing to God that the aforementioned house be built as a testimony to the name Jehovah and showing faith in his announced purposes." Joseph F. Rutherford, *Salvation* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1939), 311-12.

⁴⁰*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 90-91.

⁴¹Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed*, 75.

⁴²*Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, 201-5.

⁴³*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 97-99.

⁴⁴*1947 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1947), 137-149.

surrounded school-age children or young men refusing to fight a war, the Witnesses' legal battles helped shape First Amendment law.⁴⁵

In 1966, the Watchtower Society attempted again to point its followers to a prophetic date. After enduring another round of biblical calculations, the organization revealed that it had nearly been 6,000 years since man's creation. In fact, they taught that 1975 would usher in the seventh period of a thousand years of human history. This last final period of one thousand years would fittingly be Christ's millennial reign.⁴⁶ Perhaps learning from their past, the Society did not take a definitive stance on the significance of the year but urged followers to look toward 1975 and perhaps beyond.

They have not dedicated their lives to serve Jehovah only until 1975. Christians have been running this way ever since Christ Jesus blazed the trail and commanded his disciples. "Follow me!" So keep this same mental attitude in you that was in Christ Jesus. Let nothing slow you down or cause you to tire and give out. Those who will flee Babylon the Great and this Satanic system of things are now running for their lives, headed for God's kingdom, and they will not stop at 1975. O no! They will keep on in this glorious way that leads to everlasting life, praising and serving Jehovah forever and ever!⁴⁷

As expected 1975 came and went without the final battle of Armageddon and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Again disappointment settled within the rank and file members of the Society. This prophetic miscue went essentially unmentioned by the leadership for nearly five years; however, the 1980 Yearbook recorded that during the 1979 "Living Hope" Convention the organization provided a talk entitled "Choosing the Best Way of Life" in which the Society's acknowledged responsibility for the disappointment of

⁴⁵ An excellent resource on the role of Jehovah's Witness and the First Amendment law is Shawn Francis Peter's *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses. Judging Jehovah's Witnesses: Religious Persecution and the Dawn of the Rights Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

⁴⁶ *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1966), 28-30.

⁴⁷ "Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?" *The Watchtower* (August 15, 1968), 501, *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

1975.⁴⁸

The Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses found a more defined expression near the end of Knorr's tenure. Beginning in 1944, the Society acknowledged the existence of a governing body within the Christian congregation much like the apostles of the early church. The organization made a distinction between the governing body and the Society's Board of Directors in 1971. They were not one and the same.⁴⁹ On January 1, 1976, all the activities of the Watchtower Society and of the local congregations were brought under the supervision of the Governing Body.⁵⁰ The authority of the Society's president diminished as the control of the organization now shifted to the anointed men who comprised the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Nearly a year and a half after the authority shift, Knorr died on June 22, 1977. Frederick W. Franz assumed the role of the Society's fourth president but the new organizational arrangement assured that he would be a different type of president than those who had served before him.⁵¹ Gone were the days of the autocrat. During his presidency, the organization grew from slightly over 2 million active Witnesses⁵² to 4.2 million.⁵³ Frederick Franz died on December 22, 1992, and was succeeded by Milton G. Henschel.⁵⁴

In 2000, members of the Governing body resigned from their executive positions

⁴⁸1980 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1980), 30-31.

⁴⁹"A Governing Body as Different from a Legal Corporation," *The Watchtower* (December 15, 1971), 755, *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁵⁰*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 109.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²1978 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1978), 30.

⁵³1993 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1993), 33.

⁵⁴"Rewarded with 'the Crown of Life,'" *The Watchtower* (March 15, 1993), 32, *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

within the corporation of Jehovah's Witnesses in order to focus on the spiritual needs of the organization. At that time, Henschel stepped down as the acting president. The Witnesses made distinctions between their religious organization and their corporations.⁵⁵ Currently, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania is the main legal entity of the Witnesses and the current president of this corporation is Don A. Adams. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. handles the administrative concerns for the religious group and its president is Leon Weaver Jr. The Witnesses' third corporation is the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, Inc., which oversees the congregational affairs of Jehovah's Witnesses. In the United Kingdom, the Witnesses also have the International Bible Students Association to oversee their operations.⁵⁶

In 2007, the Society made another significant adjustment to their prophetic timeline. Since 1966, the Witnesses had taught that the "heavenly call" had ceased in 1935. In other words, no one else could be added to the 144,000 anointed after that year. Only if the anointed Christians revealed themselves to be unfaithful then others could be ordained as "replacements." The May 2007 edition of *The Watchtower* noted that Jehovah's election window appears to still be open.

On the other hand, as time has gone by, some Christians baptized after 1935 have had witness borne to them that they have the heavenly hope. Thus, it appears that we cannot set a specific date for when the calling of Christians to the heavenly hope ends.⁵⁷

While the number of the anointed remains the same, the window of history appears to remain open indefinitely for the gathering of Jehovah's remnant. This recent development will receive greater attention in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

⁵⁵"A Special Announcement," *The Watchtower* (January 15, 2001), 31, *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁵⁶Richard N. Ostling, "Jehovah's Witnesses Order Shake-Up," *The Washington Post* (9 October 2000), accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.

⁵⁷"Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower* (May 2007), 31.

The Watchtower Society delighted the rank and file members in late 2013 with the introduction of a revised edition of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. The Bible Translation Committee's goal was to produce "a translation that is not only faithful to the original texts but also clear and easy to read."⁵⁸ The new edition of the *New World Translation (NWT)* contains numerous study aids that the former edition did not include.

Throughout the history of the Jehovah's Witnesses, one truth has remained the same. The organization has taught that the faithful and discreet slave of the end times exists within their membership. As one can imagine, the Society's understanding of the FDS has evolved somewhat over the years but nevertheless Witnesses continue to believe that they possess the sole voice of Jehovah in today's depraved world.

Statement of the Problem

As God's special servant, the FDS believes they alone have the authority to impart Jehovah's saving truth. According to the Society, if someone decides to partake of spiritual food from another source other than the FDS, he or she runs the risk of being spiritually poisoned:

Those who are without are not cooperating with the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society and therefore cannot help you, for they do not have the Lord's blessing, and you will be dishonoring God the Provider. There are those who try serving up meals for the Lord's people on their own tables independent of the Lord's, but it is of no use, for once they have left the Lord's household and set up housekeeping their food gets stale, and so do they; and, besides, consider the fateful results to those who treat the Lord's table with contempt. The safest way for members of God's household is to be content with the food of the Master's providing and as served only by his "faithful and wise servant." Masticate the food well, and you will rejoice and be strong.⁵⁹

⁵⁸*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, rev. ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2013), 39.

⁵⁹"Serving with the Servant," *The Watchtower* (August 1950), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

The Watchtower organization claims to have a monopoly on God's truth. Therefore, those who choose to practice their faith outside the Society and its teachings cannot find salvation.

Jehovah's Witnesses boldly place themselves at opposition with all other religious groups that profess Christianity. As noted earlier, the Society believes itself to be the sole voice of Jehovah in a world rapidly approaching Armageddon. Such a teaching places other "Christian" groups outside of God's favor. Viewed as promoters of apostasy, these other groups are not acceptable vehicles of the Lord's new spiritual light.⁶⁰ For the Witnesses, it is only the FDS that provides saving truth.

If the Society's claims are genuine, what can be said about their conflicts with certain biblical teachings? The faithful slave's denial of the immortality of the soul contradicts the historical teaching of eternal torment. Their end time chronology and its implications deny the promise of Christ's physical return. The Witnesses' message about salvation creates classes of individuals instead offering a heavenly hope to all that exercise faith in Christ. Should other "Christians" embrace the teachings of the FDS as new or recovered truth? On the other hand, should the Christian community view the Jehovah's Witnesses as false prophets who are in need of correction?

A larger question looms concerning the future of the Society. If the Jehovah's Witnesses alone possess the truth, what is the future state of the movement once the remnant of the anointed disappears? According to Watchtower theology, Jehovah only permits members of the heavenly class to partake of the Lord's Evening Meal.⁶¹ Jesus intended the

⁶⁰"The Things Revealed Belong to Us," *The Watchtower* (May 1986), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁶¹Jehovah's Witnesses refer to communion or the Lord's Supper as the Lord's Evening Meal, or the Memorial, since it was Jesus' last meal with his disciples. The meal commemorates the death of Jesus; therefore, it is a memorial of his death. Witnesses believe it to be the only event that Jesus commanded his followers to memorialize. The Memorial is observed once a year after sundown on Nisan 14. See "Memorial," in *Reasoning from the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), 266-69.

meal for only those whom he was inviting to share with him in the heavenly kingdom. Therefore, only the remaining members of the heavenly class can participate in the Memorial. According to the 2013 commemoration of the Memorial, only 13,204 anointed took the emblems.⁶² This number reveals that just a little more than nine percent of the heavenly class remains on the earth.

Thesis

Because of the theological paradigm shift necessary to embrace the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, I am skeptical of the authority that the Watchtower Society has entrusted to the FDS. An examination of the authority vested in the Governing Body of the Society will reveal grave errors in the Witnesses' claims. Along with the seriousness of the Society's errors, the shrinking number of the anointed class jeopardizes the future of the movement. Therefore, the thesis of this dissertation is that the Jehovah's Witnesses' reliance on "the faithful and discreet slave" coupled with the remnant's eventual disappearance continues to necessitate major theological realignments, which in turn lays the apologetic groundwork for evangelism to the Witnesses.

Research Methodology

In order to examine the Watchtower's understanding of the FDS, I employed a variety of methods. While information was certainly gleaned from other scholarly works, primary sources provided the bulk of the data for this study. Along with Watchtower publications, interviews with Witnesses and attendance at local congregations offered the greatest insight into the Society's understanding of the FDS.

⁶²2014 *Yearbook of the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2014), 176. The emblems of the Memorial Meal are simply the wine and bread.

Summary of Scholarly Work

My initial research revealed twenty-five dissertations containing the Jehovah's Witnesses as the subject. Thirteen of these dissertations deal with the Society's struggle for civil rights and the precipitate persecution. Another seven works focus on sociological issues pertaining to the movement's recruitment, growth and loss of members. The five remaining dissertations concentrate on the Watchtower Society's history and theological development. Nonetheless, no one has given the Jehovah's Witnesses' FDS concept adequate treatment.

For the most part, the majority of the works acknowledged the totalitarian nature of the movement but are devoid of any substantial treatment of the FDS concept. Raised as a Jehovah's Witness, Heather Botting in her dissertation described the Governing Body of the Society as the "lawmakers" instead of mere "advocates" of the law.⁶³ While she explored the perceived divine right of the Governing Body, Botting did not venture into the formulation and evolution of the FDS concept. Her work presented the "microsociety" created by the Watchtower Society and examined the responses of five select Witness families as they endured the ebb and flow of the organization's doctrinal vacillation.

Melvin Curry, in his dissertation, "Jehovah's Witnesses: The Effects of Millenarianism on the Maintenance of a Religious Sect," highlighted the "epistemological authoritarianism" of the Society but did not examine the eschatological foundation behind the FDS class' authoritative claims.⁶⁴ The focus of his work centered on the classification of the Jehovah's Witnesses by which he concluded that the Society was "a sectarian group because

⁶³Heather Denise Botting, "The Power and the Glory: The Symbolic Vision and Social Political Dynamic of Jehovah's Witnesses" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1982), 213-14.

⁶⁴Melvin Dotson Curry, Jr. "Jehovah's Witnesses: The Effects of Millenarianism on the Maintenance of a Religious Sect" (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 1980), 186-87.

they advocate a monopolistic authoritarian posture for universe maintenance and have created a radical millenarian community that is characterized by a deviant belief system.”⁶⁵

The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ social construction of reality was the focus of Daniel D. Cronn-Mills’ dissertation, “A Social Construction of Reality Evident in the Discourse of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.” In his dissertation, Cronn-Mills sought to discern the meaning and the understanding Witnesses embraced from their given paradigm. Amidst his observations, he noted the tension between three worlds: Satan’s, the Witnesses’, and Jehovah’s.⁶⁶ While Cronn-Mills presented the Watchtower prescribed reality, he did not examine the evolution or impact of the FDS upon their social construct.

One work that bears some similarities to my dissertation is Don Cameron’s book, *Captives of a Concept: Understanding the Illusionary Concept that Holds Jehovah’s Witnesses Captive*.⁶⁷ Cameron emphasized the significance of Matthew 24:45-47 (the FDS passage) and its impact on the development of the Watchtower Society. He examined the Witnesses’ FDS doctrine and compared the Society’s pre-1918 teachings. He concluded that the movement’s teachings were contradictory and could not have warranted the designation of the FDS at Jesus’ supposed examination of God’s household in 1918. According to Cameron, if Christ did indeed inspect the church in 1918 the Watchtower would not have been deemed faithful.⁶⁸

Another book that treads common ground with this dissertation is Daniel Rodriquez’s *The Watchtower’s Coming Crisis*. Distributed by Chick Publications,

⁶⁵Ibid., 243.

⁶⁶Daniel D. Cronn-Mills, “A Social Construction of Reality Evident in the Discourse of the Jehovah’s Witnesses” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Nebraska, 1994), 182.

⁶⁷Don Cameron, *Captives of a Concept: Understanding the Illusionary Concept that Holds Jehovah’s Witnesses Captive* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press, 2008).

⁶⁸Ibid., 23-40.

Rodriquez's primary focus is the evangelism among Jehovah's Witnesses. He makes a distinction between true or historic Jehovah's Witnesses and those who claim the Witness name but are mere members of the great crowd. Rodriquez does devote some space to the identity of the FDS and its importance, but again sets his focus on delineating the identity of a true Jehovah's Witness. He argues that helping members of the great crowd to realize their real place within the Society's world will in turn open their hearts to biblical truth.⁶⁹

In his book *20 Questions Jehovah's Witnesses Cannot Answer*, Charles Love introduced the pending dilemma of the fading anointed class. Writing as former Jehovah's Witness, he notes the following:

According to the Witnesses Jehovah would only work through the Spirit led anointed class. It was only the anointed class that could dispense spiritual food to the Great Crowd. Now that the anointed are almost all gone or too old to function in the capacity as leader, Jehovah's Witnesses have an organization being run by non-anointed Jehovah's witnesses. That can't be. That can't work! It goes against the whole basis of Jehovah's Witnesses doctrine.⁷⁰

Love essentially stirs the proverbial pot of questions surrounding the disappearance of the anointed class but does not present any resolutions to the movement's imminent crisis.

Watchtower Resources

Since Russell penned the first Watchtower periodical in 1879, the Jehovah's Witnesses have used print as their primary source for evangelism. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has published over twenty billion pieces of "bible-based" literature over the past ten years.⁷¹ There was no shortage of published material to aid in the composition of this dissertation. Witnesses boast of circulating Bible-based materials in over 500 languages.

⁶⁹Daniel Rodriquez, *The Watchtower's Coming Crisis* (Ontario, CA: Chick Publications, 2009), 49-57.

⁷⁰Charles Love, *20 Questions Jehovah's Witnesses Cannot Answer* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2005), 99.

⁷¹"Fast Facts – Worldwide," accessed October 19, 2012, <http://www.jw.org>, jehovahs-witnesses.

Currently, the Witnesses provide 205 translations of *The Watchtower* periodical and 116 versions of the *New World Translation*.⁷² For the sake of this dissertation, I will confine my research to the English language versions of the Witnesses' publications.

Over the past three and a half years, I have had the opportunity to build relationships with local Witnesses, which have provided valuable resources for my research. One couple in particular has been instrumental in my collection of Watchtower publications. Darryl and Penny Camp⁷³ of Rome, Georgia, are two Witnesses that have become close family friends. In the past few years, they have met with me in my home and worked through the Watchtower publication *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*⁷⁴ They have graciously provided me with *The Watchtower* and *Awake* periodicals each month as well as other available Society resources that I did not already possess. Aside from their friendship, the greatest resource that the Camps have supplied was the Watchtower Library CD-ROM.⁷⁵ This resource provides its user with access to the entire Watchtower library from 1950 to 2010.

My relationship with the Camps has also awarded me an open invitation to the local Kingdom Hall. Over the past two years, I have made it a regular occurrence to attend their Theocratic Ministry School⁷⁶ on Wednesday nights. I have also attended The

⁷²*The Watchtower* (March 2013), accessed 14 January 2013; available from [http://www.jw.org, media_magazines](http://www.jw.org/media_magazines); Internet.

⁷³Darryl and Penny Camp are both lifetime Jehovah's Witnesses. They have always lived in Rome, Georgia. They have a son and a daughter, who are Witnesses as well. Darryl is an elder at the Rome congregation. He was imprisoned during the Vietnam War for his refusal of conscription.

⁷⁴*What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2005).

⁷⁵*Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2011).

⁷⁶The Theocratic Ministry School lasts for about thirty minutes at the Kingdom Hall's midweek evening services. This portion of the night begins with a discussion of an assigned selection from the Bible. Those who are enrolled in the school give short presentations demonstrating the use of publications and other evangelistic tools. An elder oversees the demonstrations and provides insight to the students. See *Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will Today?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2012), 7.

Watchtower Study Meetings on Sundays and several district conventions. Over time, I have built other relationships, one of such being with an elder and former Bethel⁷⁷ missionary, Michael Spratling. In addition to providing additional resources for my research, Elder Spratling has reviewed some of my writings on the Witnesses and has spoken openly with me about my perspectives on Watchtower theology.

Within the past two years, the Watchtower Society has made a concerted effort to increase the accessibility of their resources through the internet. The official website for the Jehovah's Witnesses (www.jw.org) now provides access to many of their publications whereas in the past an interested party would have to contact a local Kingdom Hall for the resources. Currently, the site hosts downloadable versions of the *New World Translation*, recent editions of *The Watchtower* and *Awake* magazines, recordings for private worship, educational videos, and nearly eighty other books or brochures. Aside from the downloadable material, the site also provides an online library that permits its users to search Watchtower publications from 2000 to the present. This online library is also accessible through a data application (JW Library) for smartphones.

Concerning research materials published before 1950, I possess a CD-ROM resource from Bible Students Publications.⁷⁸ This disc contains the complete works of Charles Taze Russell including his sermons dating back to 1903. I have also acquired Russell's *Studies in the Scriptures*,⁷⁹ which contains six volumes of his writings beginning with *The Plan of the Ages* originally published in 1886 and concluding with *The New*

⁷⁷As noted earlier, Bethel is the designation for the facilities that the Jehovah's Witnesses have established to direct and support the preaching work. Those who serve at the world headquarters in New York are known as the Bethel family. The men and women who live at Bethel do not receive a salary but receive room and board. All at Bethel have a special assignment, whether it is in an office, a kitchen, housekeeping, laundry, printing or bindery. See *Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will Today?* 21.

⁷⁸*Bible Study Library* [CD-ROM] (Bensonville, IL: Bible Students Publications, 2007).

⁷⁹Charles T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures* (Fort Worth: Fort Worth Bible Students, 1999).

Creation published in 1904. Concerning other early works, I have another CD-ROM of Rutherford's rainbow book collection, which dates from 1928 to 1940. Other early out of print Watchtower writings are accessible through the Internet. Useful websites such as WTArchive,⁸⁰ Watchtower Documents,⁸¹ Watchtower Archive,⁸² and JWfacts⁸³ provided convenient downloadable access to periodicals and documents that date back to the founding of the Watchtower Society.

Field Interviews

This dissertation used the published works of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society to determine the Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of "the faithful and discreet slave" and the possible implications of such an understanding. In order to discover the level of commitment to the FDS within a local congregation, I have conducted interviews and distributed questionnaires among a local Kingdom Hall congregation in Rome, Georgia. These interviews and questionnaires have provided valuable insight into the local Witnesses' perception of the importance of the FDS and the future of the movement.

Organization of Study

Chapter 2 of this dissertation explores the FDS passages of Matthew 24:45-47 and Luke 12:42-45. This portion of the paper examines the biblical context of both selections and seeks to discern the meaning of the FDS parable. Within the second chapter, readers will also find the Watchtower's understanding of the FDS passages and the evolution of the identity of the FDS within the Society.

⁸⁰"WTArchive," <http://www.a2z.org>.

⁸¹"Watchtower Documents," <http://www.watchtowerdocuments.com/documents.html>.

⁸²"Watchtower Archive," <http://www.wtarchive.svhelden.info/books-and-tracts>.

⁸³"Historical Watchtower Publications," <http://www.jwfacts.com/historical-publications.php>.

Chapter 3 focuses on the workings of the FDS within the Watchtower organization. A survey of the organizational structure provides insight in the FDS stewardship of Jehovah's resources. This section of the dissertation covers the methods that the Society employs to disseminate its message. Finally, the chapter offers a synopsis of the "gospel" message provided by the FDS.

Chapter 4 delves into the pending dilemma of the disappearance of the anointed class. This chapter explores the problem of the shrinking number of the 144,000 still on earth. An examination of the lack of authority entrusted to the great crowd reveals the magnitude of the FDS' disappearance. The chapter investigates the Witnesses' annual reports to analyze the anointed presence at recent Memorial meals.

Chapter 5 examines the implications for the Watch Tower Society following the imminent disappearance of the FDS class. The chapter analyzes the crisis the movement will face when their millennial message faces unfulfillment. This portion of the dissertation also investigates possible solutions the Society might embrace to solve such crisis. More importantly, the final chapter proposes the path for evangelism to the Witnesses.

CHAPTER 2

THE IDENTITY OF THE FAITHFUL AND DISCREET SLAVE

In order to understand the Jehovah's Witnesses' current perception of the faithful and discreet slave (FDS), an examination of Matthew 24:45-47 and Luke 12:42-45 will be provided. The context of both passages will be explored to highlight any clues that might help readers discover the biblical meaning of these select passages. This chapter will also provide interpretative insight from several biblical scholars in order to uncover the identity of the FDS that Jesus described in Matthew and Luke. After a survey of the relevant historical interpretations, the focus will shift to the evolution of the Watchtower Society's perception of the FDS beginning with Charles Taze Russell's teachings on the concept and concluding with the Society's October 2012 statement on the FDS identity.

The Context of Matthew 24:45-47

Matthew's Gospel places the FDS passage within the context of the Passion Week. During the week leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus shared with His disciples about His future *Parousia*. Matthew chapters 24 and 25 record His teachings on the matter. Within these two chapters, many of Jesus' sayings have produced a multitude of interpretations over the ages. For the sake of this discussion, an in-depth commentary on the context surrounding the FDS passage will not be provided.

Chapter 24 opens with Jesus' description of the signs that must accompany His second advent. Referred to as the Olivet Discourse, this body of teaching depicts future events that will precede "the end of the age." Describing these signs as "birth pains" (v. 8),

Jesus instructed His followers to watch for the threat and reality of wars (v. 6), widespread global tension (v. 7), natural disasters (v. 7), persecution of the brethren (v. 9), dispersion of followers (v. 10), rise of false prophets (v. 11), and the proclamation of the gospel in the whole world (v. 14).¹

After listing these nine precursory events, Jesus informed His disciples that there would be a defining event that would impact redemptive history. The “abomination of desolation” (24:15) would usher in a time of great distress. While scholars throughout the ages have had much to say about this “desolating sacrilege” and its timing, Jesus focused His attention on the severity of the days that would follow the event.²

Biblical scholars such as Craig L. Blomberg and Robert H. Stein note that Christ’s words in Matthew 24:15 foreshadow the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. Linking Luke 20:21-24 with the Matthean passage, Stein suggests that Matthew used Jerusalem’s destruction as an example of the type of the persecutions that would accompany the end of time.³ Again examining the synoptic relationship between the Lukan and Matthean passages, Blomberg points to the actual events of the first century and Luke’s more explicit wording to build his case for the fact that Matthew’s text was focused on the events that would unfold in A.D. 70.⁴ However, John Calvin protests to such interpretation while insisting that it is an error to suppose that Matthew 24:15 denotes the siege of Jerusalem.⁵ He

¹Craig Blomberg in his commentary on Matthew notes that like a woman’s contraction before her eminent delivery, these preliminary events would remind followers of the inevitability of Jesus’ return. He also suggests that just as a woman may endure false labor and be accompanied by genuine contractions, they still leave her uncertain about the precise time of delivery. Therefore, the events described in Matt 24:4-8 do not enable believers to pinpoint the time of Christ’s *parousia*. See Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 401.

²Ibid., 406.

³Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1993), 519.

⁴Blomberg, *Matthew*, 406.

⁵John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 17:134.

acknowledged the events of A.D. 70 but proposes a more devastating event in Jerusalem in the future that would precede the return of Christ.⁶

Following his mention of this desolation, Jesus informed his followers of the severity of the days to follow. Matthew 24:16-20 reveals the haste people must exhibit in order to escape the distress of those days. Individuals must be ready to flee at a moment's notice. Readers of the Matthean account will notice a shift between verses 20 and 21. Matthew introduced an unrivaled "great tribulation" in verse 21. Jesus stated that this tribulation would be one that "such has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will." The unparalleled nature of this tribulation directs readers to a future event, one that could not have been fulfilled in A.D. 70. Noting a gap of at least two thousand years, Blomberg suggests that this period of great tribulation refers to span of time between the Jerusalem destruction of the first century and progressing until Christ's return.⁷ Whether this time of distress began nearly two millennia ago and has increased in severity to this day or it has yet to be initiated with a future "abomination of desolation," the fact of the matter is that a season of unfathomable tribulation will precede the Second Advent.

Amidst his words of warning, Christ offered consolation to his disciples. In verse 22, Jesus revealed to his disciples that these days of tribulation will be "cut short." This mercy will be for the sake of the "elect." Calvin noted that God would never permit his wrath to proceed to the degree that he could not provide for the safety of the elect.⁸ Believers would indeed face unparalleled distress but the Lord's mercy would result in their eventual deliverance.

⁶Ibid., 135.

⁷Blomberg, *Matthew*, 407.

⁸Calvin, *Commentaries*, 17:138.

Returning to his mention of false prophets (v. 11), Jesus warned his followers that false Christs and false prophets would appear after the time of great tribulation. It is important to notice the plurality of these deceivers. Jesus stressed the appearance of multiple individuals claiming to be Christ in verses 23-25. From the first century until the genuine Second Advent, history will be littered with false Christs. Seeking to deceive even the elect, they will perform miracles. Jesus provided this advance warning to his disciples so that they may be informed and not fall victim to the deceptions of the coming pseudo-Christs. He assured his disciples that his return would be undeniable. There will be nothing secretive about his return but it will be “just as lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west.” Christ’s *parousia* will be visible for all to behold.

In verses 29-31, Jesus described the events that would accompany his physical return to earth. While referencing Isaiah 13:10, Christ employed the imagery of a cosmic disturbance to illustrate the tumultuous nature of His return. Blomberg suggested that Christ did not intend for his listeners to take this imagery literally but that he was using metaphors to warn his audience of pending “earth-shaking developments.”⁹ With the heavens shaken, the sign of Christ will appear in the sky. Again much speculation has surrounded the actual nature of “the sign of the Son of Man.” Early church father, Chrysostom teaches that this unique sign was indeed the cross and its appearance in the sky would be brighter than the sun.¹⁰ Whether his sign will be that of the cross or of something else miraculous, the fact is that His appearance will be undeniable.

Jesus’ appearance will produce mourning for some and delight for others. Verse 30 notes that “all the tribes of the earth will mourn” at his return. Calvin notes, “It is proper, that by [Christ’s] presence he should crush and destroy the rebels, who, while he was absent,

⁹Blomberg, *Matthew*, 409.

¹⁰Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 76.3, PG 58:698.

despised his authority.”¹¹ This future global mourning draws readers back to Zechariah 12:10-11¹² and Daniel 7:13-14¹³ in which these prophets proclaimed that at the coming of the Son of Man he will have dominion over all nations. Revelation 1:7¹⁴ also serves as a parallel passage to Matthew 24:30.

Jesus’ return will provide a stark contrast from his previous advent. He will not appear in humility as an infant but he will appear as one with “power and great glory.” Echoing Daniel 7:13-14 once again, the Son of Man will come in the clouds to exercise his dominion over the earth. Blomberg highlighted the fact that Jesus’ description was quite distinct from his eminent suffering and crucifixion. These gruesome events were days away from his current proclamation of future glory.¹⁵

Christ will not return alone. According to verse 31, angels will accompany the Lord and they will gather “his elect” from the earth. This gathering of Christ’s elect has generated a great deal of debate over the centuries. Acknowledging that 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17¹⁶ describes what seems to be the same event, scholars have pointed to these two passages as evidence for the rapture of the church. Much of the debate has centered on the

¹¹Calvin, *Commentaries*, 17:147.

¹²“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. 11 On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo” (Zech 12:10-11).

¹³“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:13-14).

¹⁴“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen” (Rev 1:7).

¹⁵Blomberg, *Matthew*, 410.

¹⁶“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:16-17).

time of this apparent rapture. Will Christ gather his elect before or after the tribulation of the last days? Anthony Hoekema directs readers to the context of the Matthean account. He argues that this rapture will follow the second coming of Christ, which according to Jesus will occur after the great tribulation. He also notes that Paul's word in 1 Thessalonians also deny a pretribulational rapture.¹⁷ To interpret these passages otherwise would imply the existence of multiple returns for Christ whereas Jesus only describes one in this Matthean passage.

In order to illustrate the certainty of his return, Jesus used another brief parable in verses 32-35. Directing his listeners to the fig tree, Christ noted the discernable signs the tree exhibits as summer approaches. Just as the tree's branches and leaves herald the coming season, the events that Christ has described will also serve as obvious signs that the culmination of history approaches. Noting that the end is "at the very gates," the Lord informed his listeners "this generation would not pass away until all these things take place." Blomberg notes that verse 34 does not mean that Jesus was telling his disciples that he would return in their lifetime, but that Christ taught that the listening generation would experience "all these things" that were to precede the second advent.¹⁸ Calvin also understood that the listening generation would learn through experience the truthfulness of Christ's claims. This first generation of believers endured the same "birth pains," the present church experiences today.¹⁹

In the next section (vv. 36-41) of the Matthean account, Jesus focused on the uncertainty of his return. While history will illustrate the certainty of Christ's return, the "day and hour" of his advent are uncertain. In verse 36, Christ himself noted that neither he nor the

¹⁷Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 167.

¹⁸Blomberg, *Matthew*, 411.

¹⁹Calvin, *Commentaries*, 17:151.

angels knew the time of his return. Only God the Father knows the appointed time of revelation. This eschatological truth has Christological implications. How can God the Son not have knowledge of something God the Father knows? For the sake of brevity, the answer lies in Christ's self-emptying in order to become like us. The gospels reveal the incarnate Son to be limited in his divine knowledge but possessing knowledge pertinent to the revelation of God's glory in his ministry. However, Calvin notes that until Christ "discharged his office" as Mediator, Jesus did not have access to this eschatological revelation. Only after his resurrection did Christ receive this knowledge as he gained power over all things.²⁰

It would be remiss at this point not to highlight an interpretative epidemic that has plagued scholars since Jesus uttered his Olivet discourse. If Christ taught that neither he nor angels had knowledge of the exact time of the end, how can members of flawed humanity boast of knowing the exact date of the Lord's return? Whether someone proclaims a specific year or precise date, one suggests he knows more than Christ. If someone boasts of being greater than Christ in some regard then he denies the very deity of the Son. Such a transgression is equivalent to rejection of God's redemptive gift.

In verses 37-42, Christ likened his future return to the days of Noah. As in the days of Noah, man will be pursuing life as usual when Christ interrupts history once again. D. A. Carson comments that "despite the distress, persecutions, and upheavals, life goes on: people eat, drink, and marry . . . for the final climax of human history will suddenly come on ordinary life."²¹ Jesus further illustrated the unexpected nature of his return by providing a couple examples of two people performing the same ordinary tasks. At his return, Christ will

²⁰Ibid., 154.

²¹D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1984), 509.

gather one person to himself and will leave the other behind. In verse 42, Christ urged his listeners to “stay awake” because His return will be certain but unexpected.

Starting in Matthew 24:43, Christ introduced four parables that illustrate the believers’ need for alertness in the final days. According to Blomberg, each of these parables highlights an important aspect of the needed watchfulness. The parable of thief in the night (vv. 43-44) depicts Christ’s return as entirely unexpected whereas our focal parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants (vv. 45-51) portrays Jesus’ *Parousia* as sooner than expected. The third parable (25:1-13) describes ten virgins that discover the bridegroom’s return is later than expected. In the fourth parable (25:14-30), the master’s return finds three servants who have varied in their stewardship of the resources entrusted to their care.²² As believers await the return of Christ, they must exhibit a watchfulness that results in faithful stewardship.

As noted above, the first *Parousia* parable (vv. 43-44) reveals the completely unexpected nature of Christ’s return. Jesus equated his second coming to that of a thief burglarizing a home. If the homeowner had been ready and had “stayed awake,” the thief could not have broken into his home. The Lord urged his listeners to be prepared for the unexpected. Joachim Jeremias noted the strangeness of this parable: “the subject of discourse is a nocturnal burglary, it refers to a disastrous and alarming event, whereas the *Parousia*, at least for the disciples of Jesus, is the great day of joy.”²³ While the parable portrayed a startling event, Christ’s goal in sharing such an analogy was not to equate his return with a criminal act but to communicate the overwhelming nature of his *Parousia* to those who would be unprepared.²⁴

²²Blomberg, *Matthew*, 411.

²³Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), 49.

²⁴*Ibid.*

The second *Parousia* parable (vv. 45-52) of the faithful servant portrays Christ's return as being sooner than expected. This parable will receive greater treatment later in this chapter. Suffice it to say at this point that this parable further illustrates the need for Christ's followers to exhibit a faithful stewardship until his return.

The parable of the virgins in Matthew 25:1-12 highlights the possibility of Christ's return being later than expected. In this analogy, Jesus revealed a contrast between five wise and five foolish virgins that awaited the arrival of the bridegroom. Taking lamps with them to await his arrival, the five wise virgins took oil with them to keep their lamps burning whereas the five foolish made no such provision. The foolish virgins plead with their prepared counterparts to share their oil but are denied. Blomberg noted that Christ most likely wanted to teach "spiritual preparedness may not be transferred from one individual to another."²⁵ Needing oil from their lamps, these five young women left to purchase more oil but they returned too late. The bridegroom had arrived and had shut the door to the marriage feast. As Christ the bridegroom tarries, his disciples must keep watch by staying prepared for his return. Followers of Christ must persevere in their discipleship.²⁶

The fourth parable (25:14-30) returns to the theme of faithful stewardship. Jesus described a master that went on a journey and entrusted three of his servants with a particular amount of money. The first two servants are faithful to their stewardship and multiplied their master's resources. These servants are commended as "good and faithful" and were instructed to enter "the joy of your master" (Matt 25:21, 23 ESV). However, the third servant merely hid his master's money and returned it without increase. Proclaimed as "wicked and slothful," this servant was cast out into "the outer darkness" where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Knowing their master would return, the servants responded in

²⁵Blomberg, *Matthew*, 417.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 418.

conjunction with their devotion to their master. Jeremias noted that the third servant assumed a cautious approach out of fear of his master's anger at potentially losing the money. Out of caution, this servant neglected the master's resources.²⁷ Using this *Parousia* parable, Christ not only taught his listeners to be found faithful at his return but also to multiply the gifts he has entrusted to their care while he is away.²⁸

After examining the Matthean context, there are three truths that set the context for the focal passage of Matthew 24:45-51. First, Christ will indeed return. Just as Jesus interrupted human history as an infant born in Bethlehem, he will return in glory to bring hope and condemnation. The second fact is that the "day and the hour" of his second advent are unknown. While the signs of the times will proclaim his imminent return, the actual date of its occurrence will elude humanity until he visibly appears. His return is certain but will be unexpected. Lastly, the context around the FDS selection reveals that Christ's followers should exhibit a watchfulness that produces faithfulness. As the previous statement reveals, a believer should be attentive to the "birth pains" of history, which should spur followers to maintain a steadfast faith in Christ.

The Context of Luke 12:42-45

The Gospel of Luke places the FDS passage in a broader body of Jesus' teachings than previously seen in Matthew. The first half of Luke 12 (vv. 1-34) addresses issues such as the work of the Holy Spirit and worry whereas the latter half (vv. 35-59) primarily focuses on the return of Christ.

Luke 12 begins following a note of hostility in 11:53-54. After Jesus openly rebuked the Pharisees, these religious leaders sought ways to entrap the Lord in his teachings.

²⁷Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 61-62.

²⁸Carson, *Matthew*, 515.

In response to their aggression, Christ warned his listeners in verses 1-3 to be careful of the hypocrisy that plagues the Pharisees. Stein noted that the Lord used two proverbs to illustrate the severity of such deception (vv. 2-3).²⁹ The hidden shall become visible and things said in secret will be broadcast to all. Christ urged his listeners to acknowledge the superiority of God over those who may harm the flesh. For the one who “has authority to cast [one] into hell” (Luke 12:5) is worthy of man’s fear for He knows man’s true value.

Jesus offered a second warning in verses 8-12. Revealing the dangerous nature of the Pharisees’ religion, he defined authentic Christian discipleship. Bock argued that the heart of matter in these verses rests on “the disciple’s ability to express commitment to Jesus before other people.”³⁰ Is a believer willing to publicly confess Christ? The public confession of followers results in the Lord’s heavenly confession of them before “the angels of the Lord.” However, their denial of him solicits his denial of them. Is this individual’s denial a single event or life-long pattern of rejection? Examining the life of Peter, Bock proposed that Christ’s denial of confession rests on those who chose to deny Christ throughout their lives.³¹

Within Christ’s second warning, He uttered one of the most debated statements of his teaching ministry. In verse 10, the Lord informed his audience that those who speak against him could receive forgiveness but those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit commit the unpardonable sin. What is blasphemy against the Spirit? Why is such a sin unforgiveable? Stein suggested that such blasphemy is “a hardened attitude toward God and unrelenting opposition to what he is doing through his Spirit in leading individuals to faith.”³²

²⁹Stein, *Luke*, 346.

³⁰Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1138.

³¹*Ibid.*, 1139-40.

³²Stein, *Luke*, 348.

Bock noted that blasphemy against the Spirit is a person's life-long rejection of the Spirit's testimony about Christ.³³ He further wrote that blasphemy of the Son of Man was an "instant rejection" whereas blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was a "permanent decision of rejection."³⁴ Through every season of life, true followers of Christ cannot help but publicly confess the lordship of Jesus and acknowledge the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

Believers that acknowledge the testimony of the Spirit about Christ will reap the benefits of such faith. Matthew 12:11-12 describe an aspect of the Spirit's work in the lives of believers that boldly profess their faith. I. Howard Marshall notes that those who received the warning of blasphemy against the Spirit could also receive the assurance of the Spirit's help in times of temptation.³⁵ Authentic disciples will face persecution, but in the face of accusations, believers should trust that the Spirit would give them guidance in how to respond to such treatment. Stein writes that while the Holy Spirit would indeed give believers the right words on such occasion they should not neglect preparing for such incidents but "be at peace knowing that the Spirit will guide in the preparation of their defense."³⁶ Christ offered these encouraging words of empowerment to believers as they seek to trust the Lord in the face of hostility.

The Lord followed His words of warning and exhortation with a parable that challenged his listeners to examine their attitudes toward greed. Before the Parable of the Rich Fool found in Matthew 12:13-21, readers find Jesus being questioned by someone in the crowd about a squabble over a family inheritance. It is in response to this individual's question that Christ shares a parable about the dangers of greed. He told of how a rich man

³³Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1141.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 1143.

³⁵I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 516.

³⁶Stein, *Luke*, 350.

had a very productive tract of land. In fact, the production from the land was so bountiful that the man felt he had to destroy his existing barns and build larger ones in order to store all his crops. However, this abundant reaping led the rich man to assume a posture of idleness. Because of the man's attitude of self-indulgence, God demanded his soul that very night; therefore, his stored crops were left to spoil. Christ concluded the parable by warning his listeners to avoid storing up treasure for themselves but to seek to be rich toward God instead.

Just as the hypocrisy of the Pharisees has no place among the Lord's followers, the love of possessions should not have a hold on the lives of the faithful. Bock noted the awkwardness of the parable's placement following Christ's encouragement to trust in the Lord in the face of persecution. However, he later shared that since persecution likely involved "social ostracism and loss of livelihood, material security [would be] an attractive alternative to rejection."³⁷ Personal wealth can be an obstacle to devotion to Christ. Marshall suggests, "A disciple is one who has a true sense of values and recognizes that real life is not measured in terms of possessions."³⁸ Stein explores this truth further when he writes that believers can "avoid becoming a slave to possessions by recognizing their temporary quality. The rich fool did not realize that he 'owned' nothing."³⁹ Christ's followers must be willing to publicly acknowledge their commitment to the Lord and they must be willing to inwardly proclaim their devotion to their Savior by treasuring His plan for their lives.

While commentators like Bock and Stein see the Parable of the Rich Fool as another opportunity where Christ sought to teach principles of authentic discipleship, Jeremias interprets the parable to have a greater meaning. He believes the parable to have an eschatological significance. The death that came suddenly upon the rich man was more than

³⁷Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1146.

³⁸Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 521.

³⁹Stein, *Luke*, 353.

the demise of a foolish individual. For Jeremias, Christ used this parable to point to the pending eschatological catastrophe. Believers would be “just as foolish as the rich fool under the threat of death if [they] heap up property and possessions when the Deluge is threatening.”⁴⁰ Judging from the context, Christ was most likely speaking about the individual death of a foolish landowner as opposed to the end of times when all humanity will be held accountable.

The attitude of the rich fool served as a contrast to the proper outlook Jesus beckoned his followers to possess. Christ urged his listeners in verses 22-33 to avoid being consumed by the worry of life and to seek “to be rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). Marshall highlights that Jesus chose to use a positive contrast to the previous warning about wealth. As the rich fool attempted to take control over his seeming abundance, the Lord encourages his followers not to be anxious over the things that they cannot control.⁴¹ Bock noted that the security followers tend to look for in material things could only be found in God. He highlighted Christ’s two-part assertion in verse 23 to illustrate his point.⁴² “For life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.” Certainly life is more than the material.

In order to clarify His teaching, Jesus used several illustrations from nature to depict man’s dependence on God’s provision. Pointing to the ravens, the lilies, and the grass of the field, Christ directed his listeners to forsake worrying and the pursuit of material things but to seek after the kingdom of God first and foremost. Stein notes that Christ employed an *a fortiori* argument to illustrate man’s need for God. Christ’s established the Lord’s care for these lesser creatures, how much more then would God provide for those made in His

⁴⁰Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 165.

⁴¹Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 525.

⁴²Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1159-60.

image.⁴³ If these creatures which man has dominion over do not worry about the material, how much less should those who are “conscious of God’s promises and loving care”⁴⁴ worry about such temporal things.

Amidst His teachings on worry, Jesus emphasized the believer’s lack of control. In verses 25 and 26, Christ asked the two rhetorical questions, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” These two questions make it clear that being anxious is useless. Nothing is gained by worrying. Bock provided valuable insight into the selection when he wrote “disciples cannot add to their life by worry, so energy is wasted when it is directed toward things over which one has no control.”⁴⁵ Walter Liefeld further notes how futile it was for individuals to worry about small matters that they cannot control and he went on to add that how ridiculous it was to worry about the greater matters that are even farther beyond man’s control.⁴⁶ The energy wasted upon worrying should be redirected toward the pursuit of God’s kingdom that will meet every need. Christ offered a word of encouragement to his listeners in verses 32-34 when He instructed his “little flock”⁴⁷ to not be afraid but to live in such a way that the treasure of heaven outshines the pursuit of earthly possessions.

Luke 12:35 shifts the reader’s attention from Jesus’ warnings against materialism to the follower’s need for watchfulness. Within the context of verses 35-40, Christ urged his

⁴³Stein, *Luke*, 354.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1162.

⁴⁶Walter L. Liefeld, *Luke*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 963.

⁴⁷Jehovah’s Witnesses view Jesus’ use of the “little flock” in Luke 12:32 as well as His references to “my sheep” in passages like John 10:26-27 as indications of a special class of followers. These followers are of a different class than the “other sheep” Christ revealed in John 10:16. This concept will receive greater treatment in chap. 3 of this dissertation.

listeners to “be dressed in readiness” (Luke 12:35). Jesus shared a parable about attendants who awaited their master’s return from a wedding feast. Upon his return, the master would grant favor to the slaves that were immediately ready for his arrival. He will invite them to his table and serve them. No matter how long the master delayed his return, the faithful slaves should be found ready. In this parable, Jesus certainly directed his listeners to be ready for his second coming. Bock noted the importance of the blessing guaranteed to the “ready” slaves, “Jesus will be so pleased with those who wait for him that he will serve them at the great banquet table, which pictures final eschatological blessing.”⁴⁸ This ultimate blessing would only come to those who will be found ready despite the hour and circumstances.

In verse 39, Luke introduced Christ’s parable of the thief in the night. The inclusion of this parable mirrors the FDS context found in Matthew 24. Like the account in Matthew, Jesus informed his listeners that if the master of the house had known the hour in which a burglar would have come to break into his home, surely the homeowner would not have left his house vulnerable. Again, Christ equated this parable with a follower’s preparedness for the Lord’s second advent. They “must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:40).

While Matthew and Luke’s accounts become similar at the inclusion of the previous parable, Luke included 12:41, which has interpretative value when trying to discern the audience of the FDS passage. In this verse, Peter the disciple asked Christ if the previous parable was directed at the general public or at those who followed the Lord. Jesus responded to Peter’s interruption with the FDS parable. Seeking to answer Peter’s question, Stein directs readers back to 12:1 where Luke noted Jesus’ direct speech to the disciples.⁴⁹ Liefeld and Bock point to Christ’s introduction of the following FDS parable as the answer to Peter’s

⁴⁸Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1175.

⁴⁹Stein, *Luke*, 361.

question. Bock noted that Christ elaborated on the imagery by adding the dimensions of stewardship and leadership.⁵⁰ While the Lord encouraged all to be ready, the disciples had a special responsibility.⁵¹ Individuals will be responsible for the knowledge of God that he or she possesses. Careful inspection awaits those who have knowledge of Christ and his work.⁵² Jesus directed the parable of the thief and the FDS parable at his followers. They alone have been entrusted with the truth; therefore, they must remain faithfully alert for the Lord's return is imminent.

As noted earlier, Luke included our focal parable in 12:42-48. This parable will receive greater treatment later in this chapter. However, as in Matthew's inclusion, this parable reminded listeners of the unexpected nature of the master's return and the need to be found faithful at his advent. The Lord's favor awaits the loyal servants whereas punishment awaits the unfaithful ones.

Luke's Gospel appears to make a transition following its inclusion of the FDS parable. Luke 12:49-53 directs readers back to Christ's present mission whereas the previous two parables pointed toward the future coming of the Lord and his followers' watchfulness. Bock notes that 12:49-53 could serve as a "mission statement" of Jesus' ministry.⁵³ In this selection, Christ spoke of his necessary "baptism" or death that would indeed divide the masses. The work of Christ brings division and peace. Peace to the believing individual, but division even among society's fundamental unit, the family. Stein remarked, "In apocalyptic literature such a division formed an integral part of the coming of God's kingdom. Elsewhere in Luke, Jesus' coming is described as bringing peace, but at the same time it brought the rise

⁵⁰Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1178.

⁵¹Liefield, *Luke*, 966.

⁵²Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1178.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 1192.

and fall of others.”⁵⁴ Faithful followers of Christ must acknowledge the truth that obedience to the Lord will bring division and rejection. Watchful disciples will have experienced the reality of separation from those that chose not to believe in Christ as the Day of Lord approaches.

Luke recorded in 12:54-59 that Jesus directed his attention back to the crowds when he addressed the significance of the present time and the reality of settling a debt with one’s accuser. Pertaining to the issue of the present time, Christ scolded the crowd for not understanding the importance of the days at hand. “You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” (Luke 12:56). Bock notes that despite the crowd’s ability to discern the weather patterns, they were “inept at reading what God was doing right before them.”⁵⁵ While the previous parables of the thief in the night and the FDS directed believers to a future event in salvation history, Jesus’ statement in 12:56 instructed the masses to take notice of the present reality of Christ’s salvific work. He was in their midst and the masses were clueless to his significance. In his commentary, Bock further notes that Christ provided ample evidence of divine activity; however, the people did not respond well, which in return left them “in jeopardy.”⁵⁶

Concerning the settling with an accuser, Christ urged his listeners to make every effort to reconcile with one’s accuser before appearing before a judge. In regard to this passage, Stein noted that Christians should avoid appearing before legal authorities because “this present time” announces that God’s kingdom has come.⁵⁷ Jeremias understood this brief

⁵⁴Stein, *Luke*, 365. At this point in his commentary, Stein noted the following passages to illustrate Christ’s presentation of peace: Luke 1:79; 2:14; 7:50; 10:5-6; 19:38; Acts 10:36.

⁵⁵Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1198.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 1197.

⁵⁷Stein, *Luke*, 367.

parable as eschatological in nature. The threat of condemnation and imprisonment loom; therefore, “the opportunity must be seized before it’s too late.”⁵⁸ Jesus stressed that the urgency of “the present time” should compel the masses to seek reconciliation with God.⁵⁹

After examining the Lukan context, there are three truths that set the context for the focal passage of Luke 12:42-48. Again, acknowledging that Luke’s context included a broader spectrum of teaching than the Matthean context, readers need to understand first that genuine followers of Christ must publicly confess their devotion to the Lord by seeking God’s kingdom above all other things. Only authentic disciples will be watchful in the interim between Christ’s first and second advent. Secondly, the Lukan context revealed that believers should “stay dressed for action.” Jesus’ return will be at an unexpected hour; therefore, his followers must be watchful so that they may be found faithful at his return. The final truth gleaned from Luke chapter 12 was that salvation history continues to unfold. Just as Christ directed his listeners to the importance of “the present day,” another significant day rapidly approaches. The day of Jesus’ second coming will usher in an age when genuine disciples will experience the fullness of their Lord’s favor.

The Faithful and Discreet Slave Parable

In Matthew 24:42-51 and Luke 12:42-48, Jesus shared with his disciples about his second coming. According to both Gospel accounts, Christ urged his followers to be vigilant since they did not know the hour in which He would return. He equated their need for watchfulness with the concept of a faithful and wise servant/slave that was placed in charge of his master’s household while the master was absent. The servant that the master discovers as faithful will be placed in charge of all the master’s belongings.

⁵⁸Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 44.

⁵⁹Stein, *Luke*, 368.

Questions emerge from the reading of these selections in Matthew and Luke that play a significant role in the Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of the FDS concept. First, was Christ equating a specific person or group of people in the future with the identity of the faithful slave? Second, is there something significant about the distribution of food "at the proper time?" Lastly, what did Jesus mean by the potential reward for the servant being given charge of all the master's belongings? Does this statement indicate the possibility of a continued greater stewardship for the obedient servant?

The following paragraphs will seek to answer the aforementioned questions from the insight of biblical scholars as well as provide the Witnesses' understanding on each concept. This survey will provide greater emphasis to the identity of the slave, which is the central focus of this dissertation. This work will not address the identity and punishment of the unfaithful servants described in the parable.

The Identity of the Slave

Biblical scholars have varied in their interpretations of the identity of the slave. Blomberg in his commentary on Matthew suggests that all Christians should be about the Lord's work. Therefore, each believer has a responsibility to be a faithful steward of the Lord's continuing work on earth.⁶⁰ Like Blomberg, other scholars understand the slave or servant to be a collective group of individuals; however, writers like Stein and Marshall note that the servant most likely corresponds to Christian leaders that Christ placed over the church as opposed to all believers in general. The decisive factor in this understanding stems from the slave's responsibility to feed the master's household.⁶¹ This position finds support in John 21:15-17 where readers find the Apostle Peter's reinstatement by Jesus. In this passage,

⁶⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 415.

⁶¹ Stein, *Luke*, 361. See also Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 540.

the Lord repeatedly instructed Peter to “feed my sheep” which supports the idea that the apostles had a special responsibility to provide spiritual nourishment for Christ’s followers.

The Witnesses’ interpretation of the servant’s identity is deeply rooted in the group’s soteriology. While the Watchtower’s understanding of salvation will receive greater treatment later in this dissertation, it is sufficient to say at this point that the organization teaches that there are two possibilities of salvation for the faithful. Jehovah has ordained a limited number of believers to go to heaven and reign with Jesus. The remainder of the faithful will have the opportunity to populate the coming paradise on earth for all eternity.

The faithful with the heavenly hope comprise the FDS. The Scriptures depict these individuals as the “little flock” as seen in Luke 12:32. They are also known as the 144,000 as seen in Revelation 14:3: “And they were singing as if a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one was able to master that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, who have been brought from the earth.” Therefore, only 144,000 faithful will enter into a heavenly hope and it is only among these believers that the FDS can be found.⁶²

Since the development of the organization, some confusion has surrounded the actual identity of the FDS. The following section will examine the evolution of the Witnesses’ understanding of the FDS. In addition, it is important to note that in regard to Watchtower doctrine pertaining to the FDS as well as other Society teachings that researchers be aware of the organization’s interpretation of Proverbs 4:18.⁶³ Witnesses are taught that since centuries separate the original writers of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures from modern readers, interpretation of the biblical text can be difficult. However, as time approaches

⁶²*What Does God Require of Us?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1996), 12.

⁶³“But the path of the righteous is like the bright morning light; That grows brighter and brighter until full daylight” (Prov 4:18, *New World Translation*, rev. ed. [Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2013]).

Christ's second advent, the light of revelation grows ever brighter. Watchtower publishers claim that progressive divine illumination provides greater clarity into the Scriptures and its relationship to current events. This didactic use of Proverbs 4:18 permits the organization to modify existing doctrines without debilitating criticism from the local congregations. The following quote reflects the relationship between the FDS and the growing revelatory light:

In modern times, there have been refinements in our understanding of certain Bible teachings. This should not trouble us; it should bolster our confidence in the faithful and discreet slave class. When representative members of the "slave" discern that our viewpoint on some point of truth needs to be clarified or corrected, they do not hold back from making the adjustment. The slave class is more interested in cooperating with God's unfolding purpose than in shielding itself from criticism over an adjusted understanding.⁶⁴

The Watchtower Society has ingrained theological realignment as a major tenet of its theological paradigm. With an evolutionary approach to revelation at its foundation, the Jehovah's Witnesses have welcomed multiple changes to their corporate understanding of the identity of the FDS.

The evolution of the slave's identity. Just as confusion has surrounded the historical development of the Society's understanding of the FDS, so too has uncertainty shrouded Charles Taze Russell's teachings on the matter. In the early days of the movement, the founder appeared to propose a collective understanding of the FDS.

"Who then is that faithful and wise servant whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household," to give them meat in due season? Is it not that "little flock" of consecrated servants who are faithfully carrying out their consecration vows – the body of Christ – and is not the whole body individually and collectively, giving the meat in due season to the household of faith – the great company of believers?⁶⁵

It would appear from his 1881 teaching on the parable that he pointed to the "little flock," or

⁶⁴"God's Rest – Have You Entered It?" *The Watchtower* (July 2011), *Watchtower Online Library*, accessed January 20, 2014, <http://wol.jw.org>.

⁶⁵Charles T. Russell, *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (October-November 1881), 5, accessed January 12, 2014, <http://www.a2z.org/wtarchive>.

all the faithful with the heavenly hope, as the FDS. He understood them to live up to their responsibility both individually and corporately. However, some sixteen years later, Russell appeared to advocate an individualistic understanding of the concept when he taught in his work *The Day of Vengeance* that the Lord chose “one channel for dispensing the meat in due season But if unfaithful [the servant] will be deposed entirely and put into outer darkness.”⁶⁶ In Russell’s presentation of this individual “channel,” he continuously used the singular pronoun “he” to refer to the faithful servant. In addition, he explained that other servants bore the responsibility of “bringing the food to the household.”⁶⁷ A careful reading of the selection presents an individual servant dispensing spiritual food while other servants aid in the distribution of the message. Within Russell’s teaching there appeared to be a discrepancy in his understanding of the FDS.

Toward the end of Russell’s life and beyond, the founder became known as that “one channel” for providing food at the proper time. Russell’s wife claimed that her husband fulfilled the role of the faithful and discreet slave. The Bible Students also held her espoused view for nearly three decades.⁶⁸ Aware of the group’s perception, Russell himself did not reject their view but was leery of the adoration that might come with such a designation. In addition, his disdain for the idea of a clergy class kept him from publicly acknowledging such a commissioned role.⁶⁹ Russell’s wife was the most prominent source for equating the identity of the FDS with Russell.

After the founder’s death, Judge Rutherford took the helm of the organization and

⁶⁶Charles T. Russell, *The Day of Vengeance* (Allegheny, PA: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1897), 613, accessed January 12, 2014, <http://www.a2z.org/wtarchive>. This book later was renamed *The Battle of Armageddon* and served as the fourth volume in Russell’s *Studies in the Scriptures*.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸*Jehovah’s Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 143.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

continued to promote the idea of Russell as the FDS. In an attempt to conclude Russell's *Studies in Scriptures*, Rutherford published the final volume, *The Finished Mystery* in 1917 as a posthumous work of Russell.⁷⁰ In the preface of this volume, Rutherford stated the following about the current age and Russell's role:

In the last days [the Lord] would then make bare the unholy alliance between the unrighteous ecclesiastical systems and the corrupt political elements of the earth, which religious systems have prospered and grown fat in the name of Christ; that the Lord pronounces His indignation and wrath against all such Babylonish systems and marks their utter destruction in a Time of Trouble such as the world has never known and will never again know; and that the earthly creature made prominent therein above all others is the messenger of the Laodicean Church—"that wise and faithful servant of the Lord"—CHARLES TAZE RUSSELL.⁷¹

Later in the foreword, Rutherford wrote Russell was "the special messenger to the last Age of the Church" and that Russell privately admitted that the Lord chose him for this important role before his birth.⁷²

The propagation of Russell as the FDS continued for eleven years after his death through various writing from the organization. In the February 1918 edition of *The Watch Tower*, Rutherford again wrote that the "faithful servant" was Russell and that the brethren should look to Russell's interpretations of Scripture as the channel in which the Lord sought to teach them.⁷³ Russell's importance to the organization received greater clarity in the May 1922 version of *The Watch Tower*.

Jesus clearly indicated that during his second presence he would have amongst the

⁷⁰Controversy existed over whether *The Finished Mystery* was actually Russell's writings. Rutherford gave two associates, George H. Fisher and Clayton J. Woodworth, the task of editing Russell's notes to compile this seventh volume. However, the general sentiment that followed its publication was that the work was not a posthumous work of Russell, but an original work composed by Fisher and Woodworth. For more information, see Robert Compton, *Counting the Days to Armageddon: Jehovah's Witnesses and the Second Presence of Christ* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co, 1996), 84-85.

⁷¹Charles T. Russell, *Studies in Scripture: The Finished Mystery*, series 7 (Brooklyn, NY: Peoples Pulpit Association, 1917), 5, accessed 12 March 2013, <http://www.a2z.org/wtarchive/>; Internet.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 53.

⁷³Joseph Rutherford, "Two Classes in the Church," *The Watch Tower: Herald of Christ's Presence* (February 15, 1918), 52.

church a faithful and wise servant, through whom he would give to the household of faith meat in due season. The evidence is overwhelming concerning the Lord's second presence, the time of the harvest, and that the office of "that servant" has been filled by Brother Russell. This is not man-worship by any means. It matters not who Charles T. Russell was--whether he was a doctor, a hod-carrier or a seller of shirts. St. Peter was a fisherman: St. Paul a lawyer. But these matters are immaterial, above all, these men were the chosen vessels of the Lord. Regardless of his earthly vocation, above all, Brother Russell was the Lord's servant.⁷⁴

In the March 1923 edition, the Society presented another clear picture of its understanding of the identity of the FDS.

In connection with his and the harvest work, the office of that "faithful and wise servant" is important and is made so by the Lord himself. The one who fills 'that office is made *ruler* over all the Lord's goods during the time of his incumbency in office. The office of that "faithful and wise servant" therefore *is a part of the orderly manner* in which the Lord carries on his work during his second presence. The *office* is of far greater importance than the *individual* who fills the office; for if the officer placed in the office should fail to fill it properly, the office would still exist, and the Lord could easily appoint or assign some one else to fill that office.

We believe that all who are now rejoicing in present truth will concede that Brother Russell faithfully filled the office of special servant of the Lord; and that he was made ruler over all the Lord's goods.⁷⁵

Under Rutherford's leadership, the organization acknowledged the teaching that the FDS was an individual and Russell fulfilled that office.

Through 1923-1927, the organization republished Russell's *The Divine Plan of the Ages* in which they included a biography of the founder. Within this biographical sketch of Russell, the Society acknowledged his special role.

It is here interesting to note that Jesus said, "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find so doing! Verily I say unto you that He shall make him ruler over all his goods." Thousands of the readers of Pastor Russell's writings believe that he filled the office of "that faithful and wise servant," and that his great work was giving to the Household of Faith meat in due

⁷⁴"The Gentile Times," *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (May 1922), 132, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://www.a2z.org/wtarchive>.

⁷⁵*The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (March 1923), 68, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://www.a2z.org/wtarchive>.

season. His modesty and humility precluded him from openly claiming this title, but he admitted as much in private conversation.⁷⁶

As in the foreword to *The Finished Mystery*, the Society acknowledged Russell's own understanding of his role as the FDS. As late as 1927, the Watchtower organization recognized its founder as the faithful and discreet slave of Matthew 24.

Although the 1927 edition of *The Divine Plan of the Ages* pointed to Russell as the FDS, some of Society's other publications that year began to promote a different understanding. The February 15, 1927 edition of *The Watch Tower* introduced a new understanding for the identity of FDS.

Some have claimed that the scripture, "The faithful and wise servant," specifically applies to Brother Russell. He never made that claim himself. That Brother Russell was greatly used of the Lord no one can doubt who knew him. That the Lord used him more wonderfully than any one on earth since St. Paul's day there can be no doubt. But that does not at all affect the explanation of this scripture. It is clearly manifest from the scriptures hereinbefore cited that the elect Servant of God is Christ, Jesus the Head and his body members; and that Christ Jesus speaks of these faithful members as a part of himself.

To say that "that faithful and wise servant" specifically applies to one individual and to none other would imply that a large proportion of the body members of Christ could not be classed either as faithful or wise.⁷⁷

The identity of the FDS had now shifted from an individual to a body of faithful members. While acknowledging Russell's significant contribution to the organization, the Society stripped its founder of the FDS designation and gave this commissioned title to 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses.

There seems to be no ground, within the meaning of Scriptures, for concluding that "the faithful and wise servant" refers to any individual person, but does have reference to the feet members of Christ on earth – those who are blind to everything except the will of

⁷⁶Charles T. Russell, *The Divine Plan of the Ages* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, 1927), 7, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www.heraldmag.org>.

⁷⁷"Servant – Good and Evil," *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (February 15, 1923), 56, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://www.a2z.org/wtarchive>.

the Lord, and who are harmoniously lifting up their voices together in declaring his message of the kingdom.⁷⁸

While the Society's view of the FDS in 1927 may not have been consistent, their teachings on the matter from that point forward have held fast to a collective understanding of the servant. However, in 1932 Rutherford added another element to the "divine" arrangement. The president of the Society introduced his Jehovah's Witnesses to another class of faithful people.

Let the anointed encourage all who will to take part in telling the good news of the kingdom. They do not have to be anointed of the Lord in order to declare the Lord's message. It is a great comfort to Jehovah's witnesses to now know that they are permitted to carry the waters of life to a class of people that may be taken through Armageddon and given everlasting life on the earth by reason of the bounteous goodness of Jehovah.⁷⁹

The anointed 144,000 could now be joined in Jehovah's work by the "other sheep." With the introduction of those with an earthly hope, Rutherford expanded the faithful and discreet slave's stewardship. The FDS class now had the responsibility to share spiritual food with their un-anointed spiritual companions.

In an effort to distance themselves from their past teachings on the FDS, the Society continued to publish articles that promoted a composite understanding of the slave. Within the pages of the October 1950 *Watch Tower*, the Society granted itself the title of "the discreet slave organization."⁸⁰ Not only was the FDS not an individual, but it was an organization of the anointed. A 1954 article also provided greater clarity to the relationship between the FDS and the other faithful members of the organization.

For years it used to be thought that this "faithful and discreet slave" was one man or was the responsible office to be filled by an individual man. But is the visible theocratic

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Joseph F. Rutherford, *Vindication*, bk. 3 (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1932), 84.

⁸⁰"Riches of the Full Assurance of Our Understanding," *The Watchtower* (October 15, 1950), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

organization dependent upon any single man for spiritual “food at the proper time”? No; and now in the light of accomplished prophecies we correctly see that the appointed “slave” is a class, the remnant or the remaining ones of the anointed, spiritual followers of Jesus Christ who are called to be joint heirs with him in his heavenly kingdom. Today, in administering all the belongings of the Lord Jesus on earth, this “slave” class serves the “food at the proper time,” not only to the members of the anointed remnant, but now also to a “great crowd” of the Lord’s “other sheep,” the faithful believers who await an earthly destiny in the new world. Since the Lord has appointed the “slave” class to administer all his visible belongings, the Lord Jesus as the Right Shepherd does not feed his sheep on earth today by any other than this “slave.”⁸¹

As the Lord’s only channel for spiritual nourishment, the remaining FDS class had a responsibility to provide for their anointed brethren and those with an earthly hope.

The Society also addressed past publications or individuals that once advocated the individual servant understanding of the FDS. In the 1973 book, *God’s Kingdom Has Approached*, the Witnesses sought to undermine the authority of *The Finished Mystery*. As noted earlier, this 1917 work contained a preface that equated Russell with the FDS.

Speaking about Russell as the slave, the book argued the following:

This view [about Russell] was prominently featured in the book published in July of 1917 by People’s Pulpit Association of Brooklyn, New York. This book was called “The Finished Mystery” and furnished a commentary of the Bible books of Revelation and Ezekiel and The Song of Solomon. On its Publishers page the book was called the “Posthumous Work of Pastor Russell.” Such a book and religious attitude tended to establish a religious sect centered around a man.⁸²

The *God’s Kingdom* book also noted that the remaining copies of Russell’s *Studies in the Scriptures* and *The Finished Mystery* were removed from circulation in 1927.⁸³

The Society attempted to separate itself from this past promotion of Russell as the FDS by highlighting the publishing company. As seen earlier this aberrant People’s Pulpit

⁸¹“Recognizing the Theocratic Organization of Life,” *The Watchtower* (September 1954), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁸²*God’s Kingdom Has Approached* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1973), 347.

⁸³*Ibid.*

Association was simply the former name for Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.⁸⁴

Emphasizing their tendency toward theological realignment, the Witnesses pointed to the growing revelatory light as another reason for the shift in FDS understanding.

[T]he “faithful and discreet slave” has alerted all of God’s people to the sign of the times indicating the nearness of God’s Kingdom rule. In this regard, however, it must be observed that this “faithful and discreet slave” was never inspired, never perfect. Those writings by certain members of the “slave” class that came to form the Christian part of God’s Word were inspired and infallible, but that is not true of other writings since. Things published were not perfect in the days of Charles Taze Russell, first president of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society; nor were they perfect in the days of J. F. Rutherford, the succeeding president. The increasing light on God’s Word as well as the facts of history have repeatedly required that adjustments of one kind or another be made down to the very present time. But let us never forget that the motives of this “slave” were always pure, unselfish; at all times it has been well-meaning.⁸⁵

It is interesting to note that the Society directed its followers to the increasing light of revelation but they also highlighted the imperfection of their past leaders and their publications. On the surface, it would appear that the organization attempted to address any possible criticism. In reality, they created a contradiction within their reasoning. Essentially, the Society informed their adherents that while the FDS had “well-meaning” motives, its teachings were never perfect.

Whether by the increasing revelatory light or by the imperfection of past teachings, the Watchtower started to refine their understanding of the FDS once again in the early twenty-first century. Instead of permitting all of the anointed Witnesses to be representative of the FDS, a smaller group among the remaining 144,000 began to inherit that mantle.

[T]oday a limited number of anointed men have the responsibility of representing the slave class. They make up the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses. These spirit-

⁸⁴ *Jehovah’s Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 229. The People’s Pulpit Association began in 1909 when the Society moved its offices to Brooklyn, New York. The organization changed their publishing name to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc. in 1939. However, since 1956 it has been known as Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York.

⁸⁵ “To Whom Shall We Go But Jesus,” *The Watchtower* (March 1979), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

anointed men oversee the Kingdom work and the spiritual feeding program. As in the first century, though, the Governing Body does not consult with each individual member of the slave class before making decisions. However, all anointed Witnesses are deeply involved in the vital harvest work that is now taking place. As a class, “the faithful and discreet slave” is one body, but as individuals, they have various work assignments.⁸⁶

While embracing the class terminology, the organization placed a greater emphasis on the responsibilities within the FDS class. Those anointed men who oversee “the spiritual feeding program,” the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses began to receive greater esteem for their responsibility. The Society began to pave the way for another refinement in their FDS understanding.

The current understanding of the FDS. On October 6, 2012 the Watchtower Society introduced their most recent understanding of the FDS. While hosting their Annual Meeting in New Jersey, the organization confirmed that the slave was not an individual but a composite group, and this group worked together as one body. The Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses alone is this united body of the anointed.⁸⁷

“The faithful and discreet slave” was appointed over Jesus’ domestics in 1919. That slave is the small, composite group of anointed brothers serving at world headquarters during Christ’s presence who are directly involved in preparing and dispensing spiritual food. When this group works together as the Governing Body, they act as “the faithful and discreet slave.”⁸⁸

The refinement in the Society’s teaching on the FDS narrowed the scope of who actually was this faithful servant of the end times. The July 2013 *Watchtower Study Edition* provided more insight into the organization’s new teaching.

Who, then, is the faithful and discreet slave? In keeping with Jesus’ pattern of feeding many through the hands of a few, that slave is made up of *a small group of anointed brothers who are directly involved in preparing and dispensing spiritual food during*

⁸⁶“Faithful Steward and Its Governing Body,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (June 2009), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁸⁷“Food at the Proper Time,” accessed February 17, 2013, <http://www.jw.org>.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

Christ's presence. Throughout the last days, the anointed brothers who make up the faithful slave have served together at headquarters. In recent decades, that slave has been closely identified with the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. Note, however, that the word "slave" in Jesus' illustration is singular, indicating that this is a *composite* slave. The decisions of the Governing Body are thus made collectively.⁸⁹

Acknowledging the historical development of the teaching, the FDS began as a collective group then became an individual in Russell's teachings. Under Rutherford's leadership, the Society promoted Russell as the FDS but later proclaimed all the anointed believers as the faithful slave class. Until late 2012, the organization maintained this FDS class understanding. However, today it is among the anointed that members of the FDS emerge. Only a select few anointed will have the chance to serve as a member of the Governing Body, and the Body alone is the FDS.

The Witnesses note that only some of the believers were instrumental in the distribution of spiritual food to the brethren in the New Testament. In order to support this position, the Watchtower organization points to the fact that while the New Testament documents the ministries of many faithful witnesses, Jehovah only chose a small number of men to write the Greek Scriptures and oversee the congregations.⁹⁰ Therefore, the 144,000 anointed comprise Jehovah's household or "domestics" as noted in the *New World Translation's* rendering of Matthew 24:45, but only a small number of this composite group constitutes the Governing Body.⁹¹ Therefore, Witnesses teach that the faithful members of the Governing Body constitute the FDS. This collective group is responsible for providing Jehovah's people with food at the proper time.

⁸⁹"Who Really Is the Faithful and Discreet Slave?" *The Watchtower Study Edition* (July 2013), accessed January 15, 2014, <http://wol.jw.org>.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹*Ibid.*

The original Governing Body consisted of Christ's apostles, but today seven anointed Jehovah's Witness men⁹² comprise this significant group. It is important to note that the size of this select group has varied over the years, reaching as many as seventeen members in 1975.⁹³ The FDS has the responsibility of providing spiritual oversight and nourishment to their fellow domestics and members of the other sheep. Concerning spiritual oversight, the Governing Body appoints qualified men for positions of service within the organization as well as organizes various conventions for the purpose of greater ministry. In the primary matter of spiritual nourishment, these men seek to teach and clarify points of doctrine through their extensive publication efforts.⁹⁴ According to the latest teaching of the Watchtower organization, it is only when these anointed Witness men work together as the Governing Body that they can be considered to be the FDS.⁹⁵

The new understanding of the faithful and discreet slave generates some significant questions. First, can there be continuity to the identity of the FDS? Since the conception of the movement, the identity of the slave has endured multiple changes. The most recent adjustment appears to have embraced the necessity of change. While the concept of the Governing Body may endure the life of the organization, the members that constitute it will not. Currently seven anointed men comprise the FDS. Next year that number could increase or decrease.

⁹²The current members of the Society's Governing Body are Samuel Herd (1999), Geoffrey Jackson (2005), Stephen Lett (1999), Gerrit Losch (1994), Anthony Morris III (2005), Mark Sanderson (2012) and David Splane (1999). More discussion will be provided on each member of the current FDS in the next chapter of this dissertation.

⁹³*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 108.

⁹⁴"The Faithful Slave and Its Governing Body," *The Watchtower* (March 1990), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁹⁵"Food at the Proper Time."

Another question that emerges from the current slave teaching is what happens when there is no longer a remnant of the 144,000 alive to compose the FDS? As the Lord tarries, the remaining anointed will disappear. When the final anointed Witness draws his last breath, will the FDS vanish from the earth? If this faithful servant is not present at the prophetic return of Christ then the organization's FDS could not have been the genuine slave.

Lastly, will the imminent disappearance of the anointed solicit another shift in the Society's FDS understanding? As noted above, the death of the remnant presents a dilemma for the Watchtower. In order for the movement to survive, another theological realignment will be necessary. Either a change in the Society's understanding of the anointed must happen or another adjustment in their teaching on the FDS awaits. For the Watchtower Society to endure, some of the "other sheep" will likely have to experience a change of eternal hope.

The Distribution of Food

Concerning Jesus' comments about food distribution at the appropriate time, scholars link this action with the responsibility of an obedient servant. Bock notes that the major responsibility for a slave left in charge of his master's household would be to provide for the welfare of other servants.⁹⁶ Therefore, providing food at the proper time would simply mean to take care of the daily needs of other servants. Marshall explains that Christ merely highlighted the responsibilities of a faithful servant and he was not attempting to convey some allegorical idea of providing spiritual nourishment to the church.⁹⁷

Conversely, the Witnesses' perspective on the faithful slave's food distribution does center on the dispersal of spiritual food. The organization, through the administration of the Governing Body, is responsible for the distribution of spiritual food to Jehovah's faithful.

⁹⁶Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1179.

⁹⁷Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 541.

In fact, the first edition of Russell's *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* stated that its aim was to give spiritual "meat in due season" to the household of faith.⁹⁸ Since its first printing, the *Watchtower* magazine has been a crucial vehicle for supplying "food at the proper time" to the anointed and the other sheep.⁹⁹ The Society claims that just as the apostles of the first century had the responsibility and the authority to dispense the truth so does the Governing Body of the present day Jehovah's Witnesses. With this perspective in mind, the Witnesses remind their brethren that it is of utmost importance that they recognize this acceptable channel for the distribution of spiritual food.¹⁰⁰

While most contemporary translations of the New Testament point to the servant's responsibility over his master's "household," the Society chose to use the term "domestics" in Matthew 24:45. Who are these domestics? Before their October 2012 adjustment, the organization confined this group of household servants to the anointed remnant of Witnesses who did not bear the responsibility of overseeing the "spiritual feeding program."¹⁰¹ Therefore, the FDS provided food for their fellow anointed along with the other sheep. Once the Society declared the acting Governing Body alone as the FDS, they broadened the scope of the "domestics" as well. The domestics now consist of all genuine believers. The organization delighted the other sheep by making them members of the domestics.¹⁰²

⁹⁸*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers*, 142.

⁹⁹"Caring for the Master's Belongings," *Our Kingdom Ministry* (June 1998), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

¹⁰⁰"The Faithful Steward and Its Governing Body."

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*

¹⁰²"Food at the Proper Time."

The Faithful Slave's Reward

Concerning the servant's reward for his faithfulness, Christ directed his listeners to the faithful servant's position in eternity. Marshall notes that the faithful servants shift from being temporarily in charge to being eternally in control of their master's possessions. The master grants the servants positions of equality.¹⁰³ On the other hand, Bock suggests the possibility that the faithful servant's reward involves an ongoing stewardship after Christ's return with regard to kingdom administration.¹⁰⁴

An examination of the Witnesses' perspective on the FDS's reward must include a brief discussion of the Society's end-time chronology. As noted earlier in chapter 1, Russell taught that 1914 would serve as a significant year in the history of humanity. With the outbreak of World War I, Russell and his followers came to believe that Jehovah enthroned Jesus as king of the world in 1914 with the end of the Gentile times.¹⁰⁵ Since its founding in 1884, the Society had sought to prepare the world for the events of 1914 and Christ rewarded their faithfulness in 1918. Russell's successor, Judge Rutherford, taught that Christ accompanied Jehovah into the spiritual temple in 1918 and began judgment of God's household. Amidst the perversions of Christendom, the Witnesses claim that Christ found the FDS class among the Watchtower organization.¹⁰⁶

Before the October 2012 declaration, the Society taught that Jesus rewarded the FDS class in 1919 with all of his belongings on earth. These possessions were his "royal interests on earth, which include the Kingdom's earthly subjects and the material facilities

¹⁰³Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 541.

¹⁰⁴Bock. *Luke 9:51-24:53*. 1180.

¹⁰⁵Charles T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1937), 138.

¹⁰⁶"Overseers on the Right Hand of Christ," *The Watchtower* (January 1958), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

used in preaching the good news.”¹⁰⁷ At this time, the Witnesses believed that Christ spiritually resurrected the members of the FDS class that had already died before 1918. The remaining 144,000 that were still living would receive their resurrection immediately at death. Nevertheless, Jesus gave this FDS remnant the charge of managing the global preaching of the good news of Jehovah’s kingdom and warning the world of the approaching war of Armageddon.¹⁰⁸

The shift in the Society’s understanding in 2012 revealed that the faithful slave’s reward would be a future event. Instead of centering on the significance of 1918, the organization now connected the slave’s future reward with the outbreak of the great tribulation.¹⁰⁹ At this time, Jesus will pronounce and execute judgment at end of this world system.¹¹⁰

When Jesus comes for judgment during the great tribulation, he will find that the faithful slave has been loyally dispensing timely spiritual food to the domestics. Jesus will then delight in making the second appointment—over all his belongings. Those who make up the faithful slave will get this appointment when they receive their heavenly reward, becoming co-rulers with Christ.¹¹¹

Under the organization’s new understanding, the slave’s first appointment was the assignment to feed the domestics. This appointment occurred in 1919 after the Lord’s inspection. As noted above, the second appointment for the FDS will come when Christ executes judgment. At this time, he will grant the slave authority over all his belongings, both physical and spiritual, which includes his Messianic Kingdom. Along with the faithful slave’s

¹⁰⁷“The Faithful Steward and Its Governing Body.”

¹⁰⁸“Grafting form the Wild Olive Tree,” *The Watchtower* (March 1958), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

¹⁰⁹“Food at the Proper Time.”

¹¹⁰“Who Really Is the Faithful and Discreet Slave?”

¹¹¹*Ibid.*

second appointment; Jehovah will also resurrect all of the faithful anointed Witnesses to their heavenly hope.

Conclusion

The hour in which the end of time occurs is uncertain, but genuine followers of Christ must certainly be ready for his return. As history unfolds, the day of the Lord's second advent approaches rapidly. The FDS parable encourages believers to be ready for the Lord's return and acknowledges that Christ will reward those whom he finds faithful.

The significance the Watchtower Society has attached to Matthew 24:45-47 and Luke 12:42-44 demands a close examination. The authority of the movement rests in its interpretation of the parable of the faithful and discreet slave. If the organization's understanding of the FDS is incorrect, then the movement will emerge as nothing more than an aberrant religious group. For the Society, the faithful slave featured in the parable is the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The FDS provides spiritual food to all of Jehovah's followers and awaits its future stewardship in the Messianic Kingdom. While the Watchtower organization's past understanding of the FDS faced multiple adjustments, it is certain that the future of the movement will be dependent upon more theological realignments pertaining to the slave's identity.

CHAPTER 3

THE AUTHORITY OF THE FAITHFUL AND DISCREET SLAVE

According to their most recent “light,” Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that their Governing Body is the faithful and discreet slave of Matthew 24:45-47 and Luke 12:42-44. This composite slave, comprised of seven anointed Witnesses, provides Jehovah’s faithful followers with spiritual food at the proper time. The Watchtower Society teaches that its FDS is the only God-ordained messenger for these end times. As Christ entered the spiritual temple in 1914, he inspected all of Christendom and only found the leaders of the Watchtower to be faithfully proclaiming his truth. Because of their loyalty to his kingdom concerns, the Lord entrusted them with the management of his household until Christ comes in judgment. This “holy” stewardship granted to the Governing Body of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is the focus of this chapter of the dissertation.

This portion of the dissertation consists of four sections. The first section of this chapter examines the organizational structure of the Watchtower Society. This examination begins with a discussion of the management of a local congregation in the organization and progresses to an explanation of the composition of the Governing Body. The methodology the FDS utilizes to influence its followers is the focus of the second section of this chapter. In this portion of the work, the emphasis rests on the Governing Body’s use of publications to disseminate its teachings. The third section centers on the “gospel” message proclaimed by the FDS. Presenting the Society’s view on salvation, this segment of the dissertation outlines what the FDS teaches is necessary to be a “friend of Jehovah.” The perspective of local Witnesses concerning their understanding of the Governing Body’s authority is the focus of

the final section in this chapter. Using the results from personal interviews and completed questionnaires, this final division analyzes the responses from members from a local Witness congregation in Rome, Georgia.

The Organizational Structure of the Society

As noted earlier in this dissertation, the Witnesses point to the first century to highlight the existence of the first governing body. Just as in New Testament times, Jehovah only used a select few followers of Jesus to write the Scriptures and oversee the churches; therefore, only a select group of faithful anointed men can comprise the composite group that is today's Governing Body. It is this Body that leads Jehovah's organization under theocratic rule.

According to the Watchtower, "for an organization on to be approved of the Most High God and to be usable for him to do his work of preaching 'the gospel of the kingdom' that organization must be theocratic."¹ Unhindered by the democratic rule of local congregations, such an organization answers only to Jehovah while his representatives, the Governing Body, provide his leadership to the organized followers. How indeed are the Society's followers organized? The following section will examine the congregational level of the organization.

Local Witness Congregations

In 2013, there were nearly 114,000 local congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide.² These local witnesses typically meet in buildings called "Kingdom Halls." The names of these structures originated from their stated purpose, which was "to promote true

¹"Organized for Final Work," *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* (October 15, 1944), 311.

²*2014 Yearbook of the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2014), 176.

worship and serve as a hub for the preaching of the ‘good news of the kingdom.’”³ They are called Kingdom Halls because they are intended to equip Witnesses for Jehovah’s kingdom work. Within these buildings there is an auditorium where Witnesses of all ages and genders meet together for bible study programs and lectures. Halls may also have additional classrooms, an office, and a small library. The simple goal of the building is to provide biblical instruction.⁴

On a given week in a Kingdom Hall, there are usually two days in which the congregation meets. Witnesses begin the week on Sunday at the Hall with a 30-minute “talk” on a biblical topic. The weekly “Watchtower Study” follows this biblical discourse. During this portion of the meeting, the congregation engages in a guided discussion of an assigned article from *The Watchtower Study Edition*. During this study, sections of the article are read aloud then an elder asks the congregation to respond to the questions found in the article. This process is done for each section of the article until the entire article has been read. Usually this portion of the meeting lasts one hour.⁵

The second meeting that occurs on a weekly basis at the Kingdom Hall is the Society’s three-part midweek program. A monthly leaflet entitled, *Our Kingdom Ministry*, dictates the assigned readings and order of the meeting. The first portion of the assembly is a thirty-minute Congregational Book Study. Typically the congregation will focus on a particular Watchtower publication for this study. The assigned material is read aloud then the congregation responds to questions about the readings. All of the questions are located at the

³“Our Readers Ask: What is a Kingdom Hall?” *The Watchtower* (May 1 2010), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁴Ibid.

⁵*Who Are Doing Jehovah’s Will Today?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2012), 7.

bottom of the page following the readings. This feature in Watchtower publications enables readers to adequately prepare for their congregation meetings.

Following the midweek book study, the Theocratic Ministry School portion of the evening begins. At this point, the congregation directs their attention to assigned chapters of the Bible. An elder shares highlights from the text and asks the congregation to share what selections were significant to them. After this congregational response, a male member of the congregation will read aloud a select chapter of the assigned portion. As he reads, there are specific presentation skills he tries to exhibit. Following his reading, the Ministry School overseer addresses these particular communication skills with the reader and the congregation. More critical evaluations of the presentation may be presented privately after the meeting. Once the public reading section of the School is complete, particular “students” will share a presentation in which they may role-play sharing a certain tract or publication. Following their presentation, the overseer will again address the participants and the congregation about the skills necessary to communicate in the prescribed situation. This portion of the meeting lasts thirty minutes.⁶

The final part of the midweek assembly is the Service Meeting. This last thirty-minute section of the night focuses on field ministry service, or door-to-door ministry. Elders may introduce the congregation to new materials or methods that may be useful in their field service. As a whole, Service Meetings should reach the following objectives:

- (1) to encourage [Witnesses] to participate in the public ministry to the fullest extent possible—whether witnessing from house to house, on the street, or wherever people may be found – and to improve in our presentation of the good news; (2) to teach [members] who to make return visits on individuals who show interest or accept Bible literature; (3) to motivate [publishers] to set aside time for regularly conducting home Bible studies and directing students to the organization; (4) to give [Witnesses] ideas on how to witness informally; (5) to show [members] who to improve in [their] efforts to help new ones, our children, and other young people to become dedicated disciples.⁷

⁶Ibid.

⁷*Organized to Do Jehovah's Will* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2005), 66.

Following the Service Meeting portion of the evening, the congregation closes with a song and prayer.

Other meetings are held weekly at the Kingdom Hall but are not considered congregational in nature. Most of these assemblies are meetings for field service. Groups of Witnesses may designate a time to meet at the Hall to prepare for the day's witnessing work. Practical instruction and encouragement are the focus in these brief meetings. Witnesses leave these meetings and proceed to their assigned areas for field service.⁸

With such activity at local Kingdom Halls, the Watchtower organization has prescribed certain congregational leaders to lead these meetings. Believing that "each Witness is a minister charged with the responsibility of preaching 'the good news of the kingdom' to others," Witnesses do not have paid clergy.⁹ The local congregational leaders are known as elders or ministerial servants.

Elders are congregational overseers. Reflecting on the qualities found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7¹⁰ and Titus 1:5-9,¹¹ the Governing Body appoints qualified overseers, or elders, in each congregation. Witnesses believe that overseers today like their predecessors in the New

⁸Ibid., 72.

⁹"You Received Free, Give Free," *The Watchtower* (August 2003), 20-21, accessed May 14, 2014, <http://wol.jw.org>.

¹⁰"This statement is trustworthy: If a man is reaching out to be an overseer, he is desirous of a fine work. The overseer should therefore be irreprehensible, a husband of one wife, moderate in habits, sound in mind, orderly, hospitable, qualified to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but reasonable, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, a man presiding over his own household in a fine manner, having his children in subjection with all seriousness (for if any man does not know how to preside over his own household, how will he care for the congregation of God?), not a newly converted man, for fear that he might get puffed up with pride and fall into the judgment passed on the Devil. Moreover, he should also have a fine testimony from outsiders so that he does not fall into reproach and a snare of the Devil" (1 Tim 3:1-7 NWT).

¹¹"I left you in Crete so that you would correct the things that were defective and make appointments of elders in city after city, as I instructed you: if there is any man free from accusation, a husband of one wife, having believing children who are not accused of debauchery or rebelliousness. For as God's steward, an overseer must be free from accusation, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy of dishonest gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, sound in mind, righteous, loyal, self-controlled, holding firmly to the faithful word as respects his art of teaching, so that he may be able both to encourage by the teaching that is wholesome and to reprove those who contradict" (Titus 1:5-9 NWT).

Testament are responsible for shepherding Jehovah's flock.¹² While presiding over congregational meetings, elders provide spiritual encouragement and protection for the individual members of the congregation. Outside of the regular meetings, elders are to lead by example in field service.¹³

Ministerial servants work alongside the elders in the local congregation. The Governing Body appoints qualified men to be ministerial servants¹⁴ in the local congregation in accordance with the qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.¹⁵ These special servants assist the elders of the congregation so that they may focus on their teaching and shepherding responsibilities. The primary tasks of the ministerial servants rest in the practical services needed to conduct congregational meetings. Some of these tasks may include being a parking lot attendant, handling the sound equipment, distributing literature, or assigning witnessing territories to members of the congregation.¹⁶ The Society encourages ministerial servants to "demonstrate that they have a sense of responsibility and are working for the advancement of Kingdom interests and for the benefit of everyone in the congregation."¹⁷

While the elders and the ministerial servants appear to serve in the more prominent roles in the congregation, there are other members within the fellowship that have a special

¹²*Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*, 28.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Ministerial servants are equivalent to deacons. Early in the organization's history, the term "deacon" was used more frequently. Over time the two terms became interchangeable. However, today the Society uses only the term "ministerial servant" in their teachings. Most likely, this shift denotes an attempt to highlight a contrast with the terminology of Christendom's churches.

¹⁵"Ministerial servants should likewise be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in a lot of wine, not greedy of dishonest gain, holding the sacred secret of the faith with a clean conscience. Also, let these be tested as to fitness first; then let them serve as ministers, as they are free from accusation. Women should likewise be serious, not slanderous, moderate in habits, faithful in all things. Let ministerial servants be husbands of one wife, presiding in a fine manner over their children and their own households. For the men who minister in a fine manner are acquiring for themselves a fine standing and great freeness of speech in the faith that is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 3:8-13 NWT).

¹⁶*Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will Today?*, 16.

¹⁷*Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*, 58.

status in the organization on the local level. Within each congregation, there are baptized and unbaptized publishers. A publisher is just simply a follower of Jehovah that seeks to have an active role in field service. All Jehovah's Witnesses are publishers. However, there may be some in the congregation that have exhibited a greater dedication to the proclamation work. Pioneers are publishers that spend 70 hours or more a month in the field ministry. Then there are special pioneers that dedicate over 130 hours to the ministry each month. For those that desire to be more involved in field ministry but cannot pioneer full-time, they may serve as auxiliary pioneers. Such individuals increase their fieldwork to over 30 hours a month.¹⁸ Whether a particular congregation hosts multiple pioneers or not, the organization encourages all Witnesses to have an active share in the preaching of the kingdom news.

Beyond the Local Congregation

In order to encourage local congregations, the Society has appointed traveling overseers. Patterned after Paul and Barnabas' visits to the New Testament churches, these overseers visit congregations to incite them towards Jehovah and his organization. As alluded to earlier, there are different types of overseers. There are circuit, district, and branch overseers.

Circuit overseers provide elder leadership to approximately 20 congregations. This type overseer will visit each one of his assigned congregations twice a year for a weeklong visit.¹⁹ During his visit, the circuit overseer follows a very rigid schedule. On the Tuesday afternoon of his weeklong visit; he will check the records of the congregation. Such records include the Congregation's Publisher Records,²⁰ meeting attendance records, territory

¹⁸*Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will Today?*, 13.

¹⁹"Traveling Overseers-Gifts of Men," *The Watchtower* (November 15, 1996), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

²⁰The Congregation's Publisher Records keeps track of the field service activity for a particular congregation. Each member, or publisher, submits a monthly report documenting the hours he or she spent in

records, and accounts. The Society believes this examination will give the overseer insight into what kinds of needs this particular congregation may have as well as how he can aid them in being more effective with the kingdom message.²¹ For the rest of his visit, the overseer will lead several talks during the meetings already on the congregation's weekly schedule. One of his primary goals for the visit is to encourage increased participation in field service. The overseer will visit the local territories with the congregation's publishers and pioneers seeking to set an example for effective field ministry.²² On a broader scale, the circuit overseer also has the responsibility to lead an arranged yearly circuit assembly and special assembly day.²³

District overseers travel a ten congregation circuit visiting Kingdom Halls and serving as the chairmen at yearly circuit assemblies.²⁴ Like the circuit overseers, they participate in the meetings and field service with their host congregations. He also serves as an encourager to the circuit overseers. Both the district and circuit overseer report their field service and expenses to the branch office.²⁵

In 2013, the Watchtower organization reported 91 branch offices worldwide. Each one of these branch offices is known as Bethel, meaning "house of God." The United States Bethel is in three locations in the state of New York – Brooklyn, Patterson, and Wallkill.²⁶

the field ministry. In 2014, a smartphone application entitled "MyService" was released in order to aid publishers in keeping track of their field service activity.

²¹*Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*, 47.

²²*Ibid.*, 48.

²³*Ibid.*, 49.

²⁴*Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will*, 17.

²⁵*Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*, 47.

²⁶*2003 Yearbook of the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2003), 24.

The Bethel at Brooklyn also serves as the world headquarters for the Society. Witnesses that serve at the branch offices are known as the Bethel family or Bethelites. Members of this unique family take a legal vow of poverty trusting only Jehovah and his organization for their daily needs.²⁷ The Society provides each worker with room and board and a small stipend to aid with personal expenses. Members of these Bethel families willingly serve any assignment in order to “make Bible truth available to as many people as possible.”²⁸

At the US Bethel, two schools aid in the advancement of the Society’s message, the School for Traveling Overseers and the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead. Circuit and district overseers begin their training at the School for Traveling Overseers. This school offers participants “intense Bible education” that aids overseers in fulfilling their many responsibilities.²⁹ The branch office invites overseers and their wives to live at Bethel for two months for the training.³⁰ While at Bethel, the couple gets the opportunity to experience life inside the Bethel family.

The organization trains its international missionaries at the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead. Located in Patterson, New York, the Gilead school is for married couples that have served for at least three years without interruption as special pioneers, traveling overseers, Bethel family members, or field missionaries that have not attended the school.³¹ The Gilead school hosts two classes per year. Each class undergoes a five-month missionary training course. At the completion of the course, the class graduates and the Society

²⁷“Trust in Jehovah!” *The Watchtower* (December 15, 1993), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

²⁸*Who Are Doing Jehovah’s Will*, 21.

²⁹*2005 Yearbook of the Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2005), 8-9.

³⁰“Theocratic Schools: Evidence of Jehovah’s Love,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (September 2002), 15-16, accessed May 14, 2014, <http://wol.jw.org>.

³¹*Ibid.*, 17.

commissions them to enter missionary service.³² The 136th class of the Gilead school graduated in March 2014 and consisted of 48 students representing 23 different countries.³³

Overseeing the operations at each Bethel is a branch committee. Appointed by the Governing Body, this committee consists of three or more faithful Witness men that help process the appointments of the elders and ministerial servants as well as approve the formation of the new congregations. They also encourage the activity of the pioneers, missionaries, and traveling overseers assigned to their territories.³⁴ The primary objective of each branch committee is “to see to it that the good news of the Kingdom is preached throughout the territory assigned and that congregations, circuits, and districts are set up to give proper oversight to the needs of the field.”³⁵ Each committee also reports to the Governing Body about the progress of activity in their particular jurisdiction. The Governing Body in turn uses the insight gathered from the branch committees to decide what topics or issues need to be addressed in upcoming publications or at future assemblies.³⁶

As noted earlier, the US Bethel not only serves as the branch office for congregations in United States but also serves as the world headquarters for the Society. It is from this Bethel that the Governing Body, the Society’s FDS operates. From the local congregation to the guidance of the traveling overseers to the oversight of the branch office, all levels of the organization find their direction from the Governing Body. Seemingly empowered in 1971, the Governing Body is more significant than the other legal entities

³²*Jehovah’s Witnesses: Organized to Share the Good News* [DVD] (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2007), 19:00.

³³“The Graduation of the 136th Class of Watchtower Bible School of Gilead,” accessed May 22, 2014, <http://www.jw.org>.

³⁴*Who Are Doing Jehovah’s Will*, 22.

³⁵*Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will*, 52.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 22.

within the Society.³⁷ The following section will examine the responsibilities of the FDS within the organization and will introduce the current members of the FDS.

The Governing Body

The FDS of the Watchtower organization leads and directs Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide. As they seek to guide Jehovah's people, the Governing Body employs six committees to manage the vast responsibilities entrusted to the FDS. Since 1976, members of the Governing Body along with helpers from among the other sheep have served on one of the following committees: Coordinators' Committee, Personnel Committee, Publishing Committee, Service Committee, Teaching Committee, and Writing Committee.³⁸

The Coordinators' Committee essentially oversees the other five Governing Body committees. The members of this committee include the five coordinators from the other committees and a secretary from among the members of the Governing Body. This committee ensures the efficiency of the other committees. It also responds to major emergencies such as persecution and disasters affecting Witnesses worldwide.³⁹

The Personnel Committee's responsibilities focus primarily on the Bethel families. This committee has been charged with the oversight of the Bethelites' personal and spiritual welfare worldwide. It also oversees the selection and invitation of faithful Witnesses to become members of a particular Bethel family. Once selected, Bethelites can look to this committee for instruction regarding their family responsibilities.⁴⁰

³⁷“A Governing Body as Different from a Legal Corporation,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (December 1971), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

³⁸“How the Governing Body Is Organized,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (May 2008), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

³⁹*Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

Arguably one of the busiest committees of the Governing Body is the Publishing Committee. Charged with the supervision of the printing, publishing, and shipping of biblical literature worldwide, this committee certainly has a great responsibility in the Society. In addition, this committee also oversees the management of the properties owned and operated by the entities of the organization. As if oversight of the Watchtower's publications and properties was not enough, this committee also directs the use of the funds donated to the Society.⁴¹

The Service Committee supervises the proclamation work and matters affecting congregational life, pioneering work, elder leadership, and traveling overseers. It selects and oversees the instruction of the students in the Gilead School and the School for Traveling Overseers. This committee also assigns graduates of these schools to their postgraduate assignments.⁴²

The committee responsible for the oversight of the instruction provided at local assemblies and congregational meetings is the Teaching Committee. This committee provides spiritual instruction for the Bethel families, Gilead School, and beyond. In order to accomplish its responsibilities, this committee supervises the use of the multimedia resources such as audio and video programs.⁴³ The fact of the matter is “the Teaching Committee of the Governing Body oversees the preparation of all spiritual programs for the instruction of Jehovah's people earth wide.”⁴⁴

The sixth committee of the Governing Body is the Writing Committee. This committee has the responsibility of taking the spiritual food the FDS provides and

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴“Do Not Tire Out,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (March 2013), 29.

transferring it into written form. In addition to helping provide the food at the proper time, it oversees the worldwide translation work. This committee is also charged with approving resources such as talk outlines and drama scripts.⁴⁵

Organized into six committees, the FDS seeks to efficiently dispense spiritual food to Jehovah's household. As seen in the brief description of each committee, the recurrent theme among the committees is control, or management. The Governing Body exercises control over all facets of the Watchtower organization. Just who are these men that comprise the FDS that oversees the spiritual well being of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide? When the Governing Body took a more prominent role in 1971, there were eleven anointed Witnesses that constituted this authoritative body. As of May 2014, there are now seven members of the FDS. The following paragraphs will provide information about each anointed member starting with those selected earliest.

In 1994, the Society selected Gerrit Losch as a member of the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Losch graduated from the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead and entered "full-time service" in 1961. He served Jehovah in Austria for twenty-seven years. For nearly half of his time there, Losch served as a member of the Austria Bethel family in Vienna. In 1990, the Society transferred him to its headquarters in Brooklyn, New York.⁴⁶

The membership of the Governing Body swelled with four additions in October 1999. With the addition of these four anointed members, the Body consisted of thirteen devout Witnesses at this time. One of these newly added members was Samuel Herd. He began his pioneer work in the organization in 1958 and served as a circuit or district overseer

⁴⁵"How the Governing Body Is Organized," 29.

⁴⁶"Governing Body Addition," *The Watchtower* (November 1994), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

for thirty-two years. In 1997, Herd and his wife became members of the United States Bethel family. There he has served as an aid to the Service Committee.⁴⁷

Another member of the class of 1999 was Stephen Lett. After serving as a pioneer for over a year, Lett resided at Bethel in the United States from 1967 to 1971. Following his wedding in 1971, he and his wife entered special pioneer service then served as a circuit overseer for nine years. In 1998, Lett's family became members of the United States Bethel family. There he has worked in the Service Department and served as an aid to the Teaching Committee.⁴⁸

Along with Herd and Lett, David Splane joined the ranks of the Body in 1999. As a graduate of the Gilead School, Splane served as a missionary in Senegal, Africa. Following his time in Africa, he worked as a circuit overseer in Canada for nineteen years. In 1990, he and his wife joined the Bethel family in the United States. There he has worked in the Service and Writing Departments.⁴⁹

The fourth member added in 1999 was Guy Pierce. After he and his wife raised their family, Pierce starting pioneering in 1982. Before his addition to the Governing Body, he served as a circuit overseer for eleven years.⁵⁰ In March 2014, Pierce died at the age of seventy-nine. Before his death, he traveled extensively encouraging Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the world.⁵¹

⁴⁷"New Members of the Governing Body," *The Watchtower* (January 2000), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹"Guy H. Pierce, Member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, Dies," accessed May 5, 2014, <http://www.jw.org>.

In 2005, the Society added multiple members to the Governing Body once again. This time the organization added two anointed members, Geoffrey Jackson and Anthony Morris III. With their additions, the FDS consists of ten members at this time. Jackson began his pioneering work in 1971 in Australia. From 1979 to 2003, he and his wife served as missionaries on several islands in the South Pacific. While serving as missionaries, the Jacksons aided in the translation of Bible literature. After becoming members of the United States Bethel family in 2003, they worked in the Translation Service Department. Later Jackson became an aid to the Teaching Committee.⁵²

Anthony Morris III also entered the pioneer service in 1971 but confined his service to the United States. After starting a family, the Morris family served in Rhode Island and North Carolina. As he served as in circuit work, Morris' sons dedicated themselves to regular pioneer service. In 2002, the Society invited the family to live at the United States Bethel. Morris has served an aid to the Service Committee.⁵³

The most recent addition to the Governing Body is Mark Sanderson. Added in 2012, Sanderson began his pioneering work in Canada in 1983. After serving as a substitute circuit overseer, the Society invited him to become a part of Canada Bethel family in 1997. Three years later, Sanderson relocated to the United States branch. However eight years later, the organization appointed him to the Philippines branch. In 2010 he returned to live among the United States Bethel family where he has served as an aid to the Service Committee.⁵⁴

With the recent death of Pierce, another addition to the Governing Body could be imminent. However, at the time of the writing of this dissertation, the FDS consists of the

⁵²“New Members of the Governing Body,” *The Watchtower* (March 15, 2006), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴“A New Member of the Governing Body,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (July 2013), 26.

seven previously mentioned Jehovah's Witnesses. Each one of these men continues to serve the Watchtower organization by speaking at conferences and at the dedications of new branches as well as supervising the publications of Bible literature.

With the aid of the FDS' six committees, these seven anointed Witnesses disseminate their teachings worldwide. Their greatest vehicle used for the spread of the organization's message is its publications. The following section will examine this primary channel of the FDS' communication.

From Bethel to the Kingdom Hall

In order to instruct its nearly 7 million followers, the FDS oversees the publication of over thousands of magazines, booklets, or tracts each year. The most significant of these works are their periodicals, but there are a handful of books in "circulation"⁵⁵ that the FDS uses for instruction. These books and periodicals direct the Society's followers to the Governing Body's latest provision of spiritual food during these last days. While some of the following books and magazines may have specific audiences in view, they are all available online at Watchtower Online Library (www.jw.org).

Books

There are mainly four books other than their *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* that the Society regularly utilizes to instruct its followers. Granted there are a multitude of other small books that the organization periodically sends their followers back to for reference purposes, but the following four texts are the most widely used. The first book that Witnesses use regularly in their training and in field service is *Reasoning from the Scriptures*. The Society stated the following purpose for this resource:

⁵⁵The Watchtower organization places some publications on restrictive circulation. This practice occurs after the Society reveals new "light" that may not harmonize with an existing publication.

It provides valuable information that is meant to be used in reasoning with individuals who will allow you to do so. Some of them may ask questions to which they really want satisfying answers. Others, in the course of conversation, may simply state their own beliefs and they may do so with some conviction. But are they reasonable persons who are willing to listen to another viewpoint? If so, you can share with them what the Bible says, doing so with conviction that it will find welcome response in the hearts of lovers of truth.⁵⁶

The format of the *Reasoning* book consists of topics arranged in alphabetical order with questions provided that can be asked of “interested” parties. Brief explanations follow each question. For example, under the heading of “Baptism,” here are some of the questions found in the *Reasoning* book: Do persons who really believe God’s Word hold back from being baptized? Christian water baptism—is it by sprinkling or by complete immersion? Was infant baptism practiced by first-century Christians?⁵⁷ As stated above, solutions are listed after the introduction of each of previously mentioned questions. In many cases, some topics have an additional section entitled “If Someone Says.” These special sections aid the publishers in responding to potential questions that may be asked of them as they seek to share in the community. Like all of the texts about to be presented, the *Reasoning* book can be found online at the Watchtower Online Library.⁵⁸

A second book that the Society often encourages its followers to reflect upon is their *Benefit From Theocratic Ministry School Education*. Congregations use this text weekly during their Theocratic Ministry Schools (TMS). Following a presentation during the TMS, the school overseer will direct the congregation to particular chapters in the book that address the skills that were recently modeled before them. In other words, the *Benefit* book is the textbook for the TMS. The purpose of this book, which mirrors that of the TMS, is to provide education that will enable Witnesses to “think clearly, act wisely, and communicate

⁵⁶*Reasoning from the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1985), 7.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁵⁸Watchtower Online Library, <http://wol.jw.org>.

effectively the marvelous truths from God's inspired Word."⁵⁹ As with the *Reasoning* book, this resource serves as a tool to Witnesses as they prepare for field service.

Another text that the organization often directs its followers to is the reference book, *Insight on the Scriptures*. This two-volume work replaced the Society's former reference work, *Aid to Understanding*. The *Insight* books are the Watchtower organization's official Bible dictionaries.

The objective of this publication is to help you to acquire insight on the Scriptures. How is it done? By bringing together from all parts of the Bible the details that relate to subjects being discussed. By drawing attention to original-language words and their literal meaning. By considering related information from secular history, archaeological research, and other fields of science and evaluating this in the light of the Bible. By providing visual aids. By helping you to discern the value of acting in harmony with what the Bible says.⁶⁰

The fourth book that the Society regularly cites and encourages its adherents to study is the organization's history book, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*. Up until this work's publication in 1993, the Watchtower organization did not have an official document detailing the Society's development. According to the foreword of the *Proclaimers* book, one of the primary reasons for its publication was to answer the numerous accounts that were critical of the movement.

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. To all who are aware of what the Bible foretells for the last days, this history of a people who intensely believe and preach what the Bible says will be especially enlightened.⁶¹

⁵⁹*Benefit from Theocratic Ministry School Education* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2001), 8.

⁶⁰*Insight on the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), 1:4.

⁶¹*Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1993), 5.

The *Proclaimers* book begins by recounting the creation of man and highlights Abel as “the first witness of Jehovah.”⁶² Focusing on Jesus as a faithful witness, the text notes the first century church’s genuine stewardship of Christ’s witness but describes “the great apostasy” that soon followed after the days of the early church. According to the Society’s history book, it was during this “centuries-long apostasy” that Jehovah stirred Charles Taze Russell to Christian watchfulness.⁶³ Beginning with Russell’s early understandings, the *Proclaimers* book highlights the development of the “modern-day” Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Periodicals

The Society has three magazines that it regularly publishes. It is within the pages of *The Watchtower*, *Awake!* and *The Watchtower Study Edition* that the FDS dispenses its teachings monthly. Each month, the organization encourages Witnesses to spend considerable time studying the articles contained in these three periodicals. Not only are the articles written to instruct the brethren, they are the primary tools used for field service. Witnesses often distribute copies of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* to homes they visit.

As noted earlier, *The Watchtower* is the Society’s first periodical. When it was originally released in 1879 as *Zion’s Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*, Russell had 6,000 copies printed.⁶⁴ The *Watchtower* began as a short eight-page paper published once a month but by 1892 it was sixteen pages in length and distributed semimonthly. In 1950, a thirty two-page format began for the magazine.⁶⁵ Currently, the Society publishes 42,180,000

⁶²Ibid., 13.

⁶³Ibid., 43.

⁶⁴Ibid., 48.

⁶⁵Ibid., 724.

copies of each issue in 195 languages.⁶⁶ From its first printing to when the most recent issue comes off the press, the organization's primary objective for *The Watchtower* has been to use it "to serve spiritual food to the household of faith."⁶⁷

Over the past one hundred thirty plus years, *The Watchtower* has undergone numerous name changes. According to the Society, the name changes gave clarity to the objective of the periodical. In 1909, Russell changed the magazine's name from *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* to *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. In January 1939, the organization altered the title to *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Kingdom*. This change illustrated an emphasis on the belief that Christ was already ruling from heaven. Another change came two months later in March 1939 when the Society transitioned to *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*, focusing on "Jehovah as the Universal Sovereign, the one who gave ruling authority to his Son."⁶⁸ This title is still in use by the organization today.

The organization's other prominent periodical, *Awake!*, originally known as *The Golden Age* began publication in October 1919. Designed for public distribution, the magazine highlighted the events of the world and revealed to its readers that the real solution to man's struggles was Christ's millennial reign.⁶⁹ In October 1937, the Society changed the title to *Consolation* in order to focus on the hope that the truth provides during the tumultuous times surrounding World War II. The periodical receives its current name in August 1946 when it became known as *Awake!* The magazine centers on awakening

⁶⁶*Examining the Scriptures-2014* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2013), 62.

⁶⁷*Proclaimers*, 724.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

individuals to the significance of world events.⁷⁰ Currently this periodical has a circulation of 41,042,000 copies in 84 languages.⁷¹

In 2008, the Society released a new magazine designed just for Jehovah's Witnesses and "progressive Bible students." *The Watchtower Study Edition* is a monthly publication that consists of four or five study articles.⁷² As noted earlier, this periodical serves as the text for the Watchtower study on Sundays at the Kingdom Halls. With the introduction of the *Study Edition*, the regular *Watchtower* magazine shifted from being distributed semimonthly to monthly. While touting both magazines as *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*, the Society dates the periodicals for the general public on the 1st of each month whereas they date the *Study Edition* on the 15th of each month.⁷³

The Message of the FDS

With the distribution of so many publications, the Watchtower organization believes it has a message worth sharing. As with most "Christian-based" religions, there is a clear mandate to proclaim the gospel message. Proclaiming themselves Jehovah's organization, the Witnesses state that their voice is the only viable message of hope in the end times. So what is the spiritual food that the FDS provides?

Proclaiming the "good news" of Jehovah is the prime concern for the Watchtower Society. In 2013, Witnesses spent over 1.8 billion hours preaching the "good news," and they baptized 277,344 new converts.⁷⁴ What is this message of hope that they share with the masses? The life-changing truth for all men, women, and children is that Jehovah will take

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹*Examining the Scriptures-2014*, 62.

⁷²"The New Study Edition of the Watchtower," *The Watchtower Study Edition* (January 2008), 3.

⁷³"To Our Readers," *The Watchtower* (January 2008), 3.

⁷⁴*2014-The Yearbook of the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2014), 176.

care of the world. While Satan presently controls the world, a day will come when Jesus will return and overthrow all worldly governments. This truth fuels the Witnesses' drive to publish and to go door-to-door. The "good news" is that Jehovah has kingdom arrangements.⁷⁵

The details of these kingdom arrangements seek to reveal a present reality and a future hope. According to the Witnesses, an invisible ruler controls the world and its governments, and that hidden force is Satan.⁷⁶ When Jehovah enthroned Jesus as the king of the kingdom in 1914, Christ threw Satan and his wicked angels out of heaven and confined them to earth. The increasing hardship that characterizes earthly life is indicative of Satan's presence here and Jesus' presence in the heavenly temple.⁷⁷ The occurrence of World War I in 1914 was physical validation of Christ's commenced reign in heaven and Satan's confinement to earth.⁷⁸ Therefore, as the world's system nears its end, wickedness on the earth will grow more intense. Thankfully, Jehovah is a merciful God, and he will not abandon his Witnesses.

As the world becomes overrun with depravity, the FDS teaches that Jehovah will purify the earth at Armageddon. At this time, Jehovah will crush all man-made governments and religions, and "he will bring ruin to those ruining the earth."⁷⁹ Only the faithful will remain once the dust of Armageddon settles, and God's kingdom will govern humanity from that day forth. This kingdom will commence as Christ invisibly returns and begins his one thousand year reign over the earth. Jehovah's forces will also imprison Satan and his wicked

⁷⁵Andy Zylstra and Dean Milke, members of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, interview by author, Thompsons Station, TN, October 8, 2008, written record.

⁷⁶"Can Humans Guarantee a Happy Future?" *Awake* (May 2008): 6.

⁷⁷"Hail Christ the Glorious King," *The Watchtower Study Edition* (February 2014), 5.

⁷⁸*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1958), 179.

counterparts for the duration of Christ's reign.⁸⁰ At the end of this 1,000-year reign, man's salvation can become a reality.

Many other questions remain concerning Jehovah's promised kingdom and how it relates to the Witnesses' understanding of salvation. Throughout the remainder of this section, the answers to these questions will be unpacked as they relate to the FDS' teachings of salvation. This pursuit for clarity begins with an examination the Jehovah's Witnesses' doctrines of creation, sin, and ransom.

Creation and the Fall

Essentially, the Witnesses adhere to a traditional evangelical understanding of creation and the fall. They believe that Jehovah created Adam in order to produce a race of intelligent people with free will. Adam had limited perfection for only Jehovah possesses unlimited perfection. In his perfect design, Jehovah created the earth to be a perfect paradise. He placed Adam and Eve there with perfect health and the potential for eternal life. Jehovah wanted "a global paradise filled with perfect humans in joyful subjection to their Ruler."⁸¹

Unfortunately, Satan's schemes temporarily derailed Jehovah's perfect plan. In an attempt to undermine God's sovereignty, Satan deceived Adam and Eve into using their free will to disobey God. Their disobedience disqualified them from fulfilling Jehovah's purpose and from the possibility of everlasting life. Adam and Eve as well as their descendants must now face the consequence of death. Since Adam did not produce any offspring before his

⁷⁹"A Future You Can Count On!" *Awake* (May 2008): 8.

⁸⁰*What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2005), 82-84.

⁸¹"Will Earth Be Paradise?" *Awake* (May 2008), 10.

disobedience, all of his future descendants would be born imperfect. They inherited a nature corrupted by sin; therefore, all humanity is sinful, and death overtakes them all.⁸²

However, Jehovah's purpose could not be thwarted. Immediately after Adam and Eve's act of disobedience, God promised that "a seed" of woman would eventually destroy Satan. Once this seed leveled his deathblow against his demonic opponent, Jehovah's initial purpose could be realized. This victory would vindicate Jehovah's name and permit him to reestablish a perfect paradise inhabited by perfect humanity living in perfect submission to him.

The Corresponding Ransom

This foretold deathblow had to liberate humanity from the shackles of sin and death. How could the anticipated seed remove the pervasive power of sin that inflicted all of Adam's offspring? According to the Witnesses, a ransom was needed for exactly what Adam lost. The seed must buy back the right for perfect human life on earth. Divine justice required a corresponding ransom for this purchase.⁸³ This type of sacrificial transaction meant that one thing replaced another, satisfying the requirements of justice and resulting in a "balancing" of matters.⁸⁴ In order to cover the value of a perfect individual like Adam, another perfect human life was required. The seed must be perfect like Adam in his original state, but he must also be an untainted offspring of Adam. Jehovah required a "like for like" transaction.⁸⁵ He had to stay true to his word as reflected in Exodus 21:23, "But if a fatal accident should occur, then you must give soul for soul."

⁸²"Our Readers Ask," *The Watchtower* (October 2008), 27.

⁸³*Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), 15.

⁸⁴"Ransom," in *Insight on the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971), 2:736.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 736

Apart from Jehovah's intervention, humanity could not produce an incorruptible individual that would be willing to be the corresponding ransom. Since all men were descendants of Adam and therefore imperfect, they could not provide a covering for their sin nor for the sins of others. Therefore, God laid the foundation for man to vindicate his divine name by providing the seed that could stand in the gap for humanity. Jehovah gave the world his son, Jesus. However, unlike evangelicals, the Witnesses believe that in order for Jesus to provide the appropriate ransom, he must not be divine. If he was God, his death could not produce a corresponding ransom. Jehovah demanded like for like. While on earth, Jesus was a perfect man, "nothing more nothing less."⁸⁶

In order to understand the Witnesses' depiction of Jesus, a look at their Christology will shed some light on potential questions. As stated above, Jesus is the son of Jehovah, but not God. For Witnesses, the doctrine of the trinity is a perversion concocted by Satan. Jehovah alone is the true God. The widespread belief in the trinity is a sign of the world's gradual demise. Satan has control over established religion, and he has used this alleged misrepresentation of Jehovah's gracious gift, Jesus, as a tool of deception among the masses.

According to the FDS, Jesus was the first created spiritual being. In addition, at his creation Jesus was known as Michael, the archangel. Michael was "the firstborn of all creation" and the creator of all "other" things. He was the master worker and Jehovah's "junior partner."⁸⁷ Witnesses base this belief on the *Revised New World Translation* rendering of Colossians 1:16-18.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; because my means of him all other things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All other things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is

⁸⁶J. F. Rutherford, *Reconciliation* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1928), 111.

⁸⁷*Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, 13.

before all other things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist, and he is the head of the body, the congregation.

Jehovah also gave Jesus, or Michael, the title of “the Word” since he was God’s chief spokesperson.⁸⁸

God foreknew and foretold the Messianic seed’s mission and work, but he did not originally know the identity of that seed. After time, He selected Jesus for the role of savior. Therefore, Jehovah did not predestine his firstborn to be humanity’s ransom.⁸⁹ With this truth in mind, God selected the time and place to initiate his plan for vindication and salvation. Over two thousand years ago, Jehovah transferred the archangel Michael’s life force into the womb of a first century Jewish virgin named Mary.⁹⁰ Since Jesus did not have a human father, he did not inherit any imperfection or sin.⁹¹ Jesus willingly left his home in heaven to dwell among men, so that he could free them from sin and death.

The FDS teaches that Jesus became a perfect human to rescue humanity from death, but his ministry revealed other reasons for his presence among humankind. He came to teach the truth of Jehovah so that man could know the truth about God’s kingdom. The miracles that accompanied his teachings illustrated Jehovah’s compassion and proved Jesus’ identity to the world. His miracles also served as a foreshadowing of his future merciful reign over humanity. As Jesus lived among men, he maintained perfect integrity and provided an example for the faithful to emulate.⁹² All of these aspects of his ministry validated Jesus’ qualifications as the corresponding ransom sacrifice.

⁸⁸*What Does God Require of Us?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1996), 6.

⁸⁹“Foreknowledge,” in *Insight on the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971), 1:859.

⁹⁰*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 42.

⁹¹*What Does God Require of Us?*, 6.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 6-7.

After eating his last evening meal with his disciples, Jesus' life began to race toward the time of sacrifice. As one of his closest disciples betrayed him and the others deserted him, Jesus found himself facing a multitude of afflictions. In the face of a treacherous death, he proved that a perfect man with free will could keep perfect integrity towards God no matter what Satan did.⁹³ Jesus gave up his perfect human life at the torture stake⁹⁴ after a barrage of worldly injustices.

The ransom sacrifice was the greatest expression of Jehovah's love. By suffering and dying, Jesus proved his faithfulness and exhibited his worthiness of God's high esteem.⁹⁵ Jesus' sacrificial death fulfilled Jehovah's divine requirement of "like for like." Jesus' perfect human life equaled the purchase price for all the rights that Adam's descendants had lost because of Adam's disobedience. Jehovah's son paid the price that fully corresponded to the value of the damage.⁹⁶ This transaction released humanity from condemnation and granted them the opportunity for forgiveness and everlasting life. By the right of purchase, Jesus became the owner of Adam's offspring.⁹⁷ According to the Witnesses, Romans 5:12-19 provides the Scriptural imagery for this unique transaction. In this passage, Paul told his readers that by the transgression of one man, many died. However, by the act of righteousness of another man, many may have everlasting life.

Students of the bible know that the biblical account of Jesus' work does not end at his death. The Gospels record the resurrection of Jesus. Unlike evangelicals, the FDS teaches

⁹³*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 51.

⁹⁴Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus actually died on a torture stake instead of a cross. They argue that the Greek word *stauros*, in most translations meant an upright stake instead of a cross. They suggest that the cross imagery has its origin in pagan religions, and the use of the cross has become a form of idolatry in Christendom. See "Cross," in *Reasoning from the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), 89-93.

⁹⁵*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, 142.

⁹⁶*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 49.

⁹⁷J. F. Rutherford, *Salvation* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1939), 38.

that Jesus' resurrection was spiritual in nature instead of physical. The man Jesus had to remain dead forever in order to be the substitute for Adam. It was necessary for the man Jesus to die and never live again. If he remained dead, he remained the ransom price. However, if Christ rose again physically, he would nullify the ransom, and humanity would still be under condemnation. Jesus would also forfeit his exalted spiritual status for all eternity.⁹⁸ Therefore, he did not have a bodily resurrection. The Watchtower also bases this belief on the apostle's usage of "spirit" in 1 Peter 3:18.

Why, even Christ died once for all time concerning sins, a righteous person for unrighteous ones, that he might lead you to God, he being put to death in the flesh, but being made alive in the spirit.

Jesus died as a perfect human and rose as an immortal spirit being. In other words, Michael returned to his previous exalted status in heaven and Jehovah awarded him with immortality. As for the physical appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, he simply materialized in different bodies to encourage his followers.⁹⁹

According to the Witnesses, Jesus' work at the torture stake graciously opened the door for man to find salvation and help vindicate Jehovah's name. Outside of Jesus' ransom, there is no other way of salvation for humanity. The work of Christ provided a way for all people to escape everlasting destruction. Purchased by Jesus, humanity now has the freedom to choose Jehovah's way. However, those who do not choose to accept Jesus' sacrifice remain under the wrath of God.

The Three Fates of Humanity

While Jesus' sacrifice opened the door of salvation, Witnesses believe it revealed two avenues to eternity. In order to experience eternal life, an individual must be genuinely

⁹⁸Charles T. Russell, *Studies in Scripture* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1937), 5:454.

⁹⁹Zylstra and Milke, interview.

repentant and seeking forgiveness because of his faith in the ransom sacrifice. He must also seek to learn from the Scriptures and exercise his faith through good works.¹⁰⁰ Then a few may enter into a heavenly hope and others into an earthly hope. In other words, there are two possibilities of salvation for the faithful. Jehovah has ordained a limited number of believers to go to heaven and reign with Jesus. The remainder of the faithful will have the opportunity to populate the paradise on earth for all eternity. Those who refuse to enter Jesus' door of salvation will face eternal death.

As stated above, Jehovah has selected some faithful to go to heaven. The Scriptures depict these individuals as the "little flock" as seen in Luke 12:32. They are also known as the 144,000 as seen in Revelation 14:3.

And they were singing as if a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one was able to master that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, who have been brought from the earth.

Therefore, only 144,000 faithful will enter into a heavenly hope.¹⁰¹ The Witnesses do not believe the 144,000 is confined to the physical nation of Israel. They interpret the passages that reflect this number to refer to those who are spiritual Israelites; therefore, the heavenly class will be comprised of Jews and Gentiles.¹⁰²

In order to become a part of this heavenly class, or spiritual nation, individuals must exercise faith, repent, accept Christ as Redeemer, do good works, and follow Jesus' example of baptism. The rest depends on Jehovah's sovereign will.¹⁰³ God makes imperfect humans a part of his spiritual nation to illustrate his compassion and to reveal his appreciation

¹⁰⁰*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 53-55.

¹⁰¹*What Does God Require of Us?*, 12.

¹⁰²"Have You Received 'the Spirit of Truth?'" *The Watchtower* (February 2002), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

¹⁰³*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, 152.

for their faithfulness.¹⁰⁴ For the Witnesses, Jehovah's selection of an individual for the "little flock" is truly an act of mercy.

Members of the heavenly class distinguish themselves from other believers by self-proclamation. After seasons of faithfulness, Jehovah reveals an anointed individual's heavenly calling. They in turn share the news with their fellow congregants; however, rarely do they publicly announce such a blessing. Their proclamation comes through their annual participation in the Memorial. The detailed records kept by the Watchtower organization provide support for their claim.

Concerning the Memorial or Lord's Evening Meal, God only permits the heavenly class to partake of the emblems. Jesus intended the meal for only those whom he was inviting to share with him in the heavenly kingdom. Therefore, only the remaining members of the heavenly class can participate in the Memorial. If the faithful from the earthly class were to participate in the Evening Meal, they would be doing so in "an unworthy manner" as described in 1 Corinthians 12:27. According to last year's commemoration of the Memorial, only 13,204 anointed took the emblems.¹⁰⁵ This number reveals that a little more than nine percent of the heavenly class is currently on the earth.

If only a select few have a heavenly hope, then some of the Scriptures are not directly applicable to all believers. For example, Jesus told Nicodemus that if someone wants to see the kingdom of God, he must be "born again" (John 3:3). Witnesses argue that Jehovah only requires the anointed heavenly class to be born again. Since God has purposed to associate only a limited number of faithful people with Jesus in the heavenly kingdom, only members of the "little flock" are born again. The other faithful that are not born again have a

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 153.

¹⁰⁵2014-*The Yearbook of the Jehovah's Witnesses*, 176

hope for a perfect life somewhere other than in heaven.¹⁰⁶ The earthly class will not see heaven; therefore, it is not necessary for them to be born again.

Concerning the members of the “little flock” that have already died, Jehovah has already spiritually resurrected them and granted them immortality. Once Jesus entered the heavenly temple in 1914, he initiated the ascent of the dead heavenly class who had passed away since his death and resurrection. The firstborn from the dead beckoned all that would share in his resurrection to join him in his heavenly kingdom. Since Jesus’ established presence, Jehovah instantly resurrects the remaining anointed to heaven at their death.¹⁰⁷ They are recipients of the first resurrection as depicted by Revelation 20:6.¹⁰⁸

Once the heavenly class reaches heaven and the thousand-year reign of Christ begins, the “little flock” will serve a unique purpose. The FDS teaches they will be associate kings and under priests with Jesus.¹⁰⁹ Jehovah will permit the 144,000 to be co-rulers because they struggled with human weaknesses, and they will be able to sympathize with the earthly class that will be under their rule.¹¹⁰ During his one thousand year reign, Jesus will also employ the anointed to assist him in specific priestly duties. Apart from their intercessory roles, He will grant the 144,000 the power to cleanse humanity of sin and imperfection.¹¹¹ Ultimately, Christ will use the members of his heavenly kingdom to crush Satan and his

¹⁰⁶“Born Again,” in *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 76-78.

¹⁰⁷*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 74.

¹⁰⁸“Happy and holy is anyone having part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no authority, but they will be priests of God and of the Christ, and they will rule as kings with him for the 1,000 years” (Rev 20:6 NWT).

¹⁰⁹*God’s Eternal Purpose Now Triumphant for Man’s Good* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1974), 188.

¹¹⁰*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 79.

¹¹¹*The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1968), 106-07.

demonic forces. After the destruction of Satan, the “little flock” will continue to dwell in heaven for eternity with Jehovah and the rest of his created spirit beings.¹¹²

As stated earlier in the section, Jehovah’s original purpose was to create an earthly paradise filled with perfect people living under his compassionate rule. Adam’s disobedience created a major obstacle for God’s plan. Fortunately, Jesus provided a corresponding ransom sacrifice in order to restore the hope of an earthly paradise. Jehovah and those faithful to him anticipate the day that his purpose will come to fruition.

According to the FDS, this hope for an earthly paradise is the cornerstone of the salvation that awaits the majority of humanity. Jehovah did not limit his majestic love to only those with a heavenly calling. He has graciously purposed for the kingdom to have earthly subjects.¹¹³ Other than the 144,000 anointed, humanity can experience everlasting life in paradise on earth. Witnesses believe that Jehovah has filled the pages of Scriptures with references to this promised hope. In Psalm 37, God led David to proclaim three times that the faithful would inherit the land and dwell in it forever. In the Beatitudes, Jesus told his listeners that the meek would inherit the earth (Matt 5:5). For every day that passes, this truth becomes a growing comfort for Jehovah’s Witnesses.

In order for perfection to come, corruption must increase. Since Jesus threw the devil out of heaven, Satan has continued to wreak havoc on the world, and today’s culture clearly reflects his demonic influence. Witnesses understand this present decline of morality as blatant signs of the end of this world. As the days grow darker, the only place of safety and salvation will be in God’s organization under Christ.¹¹⁴ All other organizations or governments will become vehicles of Satan’s handiwork. At some point during this pervasive

¹¹²Zylstra and Milke, interview.

¹¹³“Resurrection,” in *Insight on the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971), 2:791.

wickedness, Jesus will gather the last of the anointed to heaven and initiate the great tribulation upon the earth. This season of distress will culminate in the battle of Armageddon. Members of the Watchtower Society believe that only preachers of Jehovah's kingdom can expect God's protection during this time.¹¹⁵ At Armageddon, the wicked will perish, and only those faithful to Jehovah will remain. As Jesus begins his 1,000-year reign, Christ will also imprison Satan at this time.¹¹⁶

Revelation 7:9-14 provides a name for the survivors of Armageddon. Witnesses call them the "great crowd." The second president of the Watchtower Society, Judge Rutherford, labeled them as "companions" to the anointed class.¹¹⁷ Other Watchtower contributors have heralded them as the "other sheep" of John 10:26. Despite their nametag, this faithful multitude is the firstfruits of the earthly class of believers.

Immediately following Jehovah's victory at Armageddon, Christ will begin his one thousand year reign. However, since Jesus is a spirit creature, people will not witness his return with their physical eyes. They will know he is present just as the Egyptians knew Jehovah was present when he inflicted them with the ten plagues before Israel's exodus.¹¹⁸ At his return, Jesus will initiate the resurrection of the dead. Since the "great crowd" that survives the tribulation will be too small to repopulate the earth, the awakening of the dead is necessary.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴Rutherford, *Salvation*, 59.

¹¹⁵*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, 249.

¹¹⁶*What Does Require of Us?*, 10.

¹¹⁷Rutherford, *Salvation*, 61.

¹¹⁸"What Christ's Coming Will Accomplish," *The Watchtower* (March 15 2007), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

¹¹⁹*God's Eternal Purpose Now*, 188.

In order to examine the Witnesses' understanding of the resurrection, a brief look at their concept of death is required. The dead that Christ will resurrect await him in the common grave of humanity, or *Sheol*. At death, the soul does not linger for ages, it simply ceases to exist. Rutherford believed that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul was a result of Satan's first lie to Eve.¹²⁰ Despite what the devil may have claimed, man truly does die, all of him. According to the Witnesses, the terms *soul* and *body* are synonymous with each other; therefore, when an individual dies nothing survives. The person is at rest in death, as though in a deep dreamless sleep.¹²¹ At death, God stores the individual's life force in his divine memory. Therefore, those who are dead are said to be in a memorial grave or tomb. However, Jehovah does not hold in his memory anyone that refused to obey his teachings.¹²² Concerning the resurrection, believers can trust in the trustworthiness of God's memory to restore their departed loved ones in every detail.¹²³

The resurrections that will accompany Jesus' return will be physical in nature. Those who have an earthly hope cannot become spirit beings like the heavenly class.¹²⁴ The "great crowd" will gradually gain more co-inhabitants on earth as Christ oversees three separate earthly resurrections. The apostle John recorded Jesus' words as the following:

Do not marvel at this, because the hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who did good things to a resurrection of life, those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29 NWT).

From this passage, the Witnesses reveal three earthly resurrection groups. The dead Witnesses that perished before the return of Christ comprise the first group. Good people who

¹²⁰Rutherford, *Salvation*, 36.

¹²¹*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 59.

¹²²Rutherford, *Salvation*, 343.

¹²³*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 71.

¹²⁴Rutherford, *Salvation*, 274.

died without the knowledge of Christ's ransom sacrifice make up the second resurrection class. The "resurrection of judgment" is the final group. It consists of individuals whom Jehovah is going to give another opportunity to prove their faithfulness.¹²⁵ The last two resurrection groups will receive more clarification.

The saints that died before Jesus will comprise the second resurrection group. This class will include all of Jehovah's faithful witnesses that the Hebrew Scriptures have recorded; therefore, none of the men and women of faith that existed prior to Jesus' first advent are part of the heavenly class.¹²⁶ Awaiting Jesus' return, the lifeforce of great men like David and John the Baptist rest in Jehovah's memory until the time of their earthly resurrection. Witnesses believe the Scriptures clearly reveal that neither David nor John the Baptist are members of the heavenly kingdom. In Peter's sermon at Pentecost, the apostle proclaimed that David did not ascend into heaven like Christ (Acts 3:24). Moreover, Jesus describes John the Baptist as being less than the least in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 11:11); therefore, he is not a member of Christ's anointed class. For members of the Watchtower Society, these two passages are enough biblical evidence to determine the status of David and John the Baptist's eternal hopes.

The third resurrection group illustrates the magnitude of Jehovah's kindness. Those who will comprise the "resurrection of judgment" are individuals that God will grant a second chance to obey him. It is uncertain why Jehovah keeps them in his memory in the first place, but his recollection of them is an act of grace. While God's foreknowledge reveals the existence of the particular classes of people, he does not know which specific individuals comprise these classes.¹²⁷ This belief may shed some light on the "resurrection of judgment"

¹²⁵*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, 232.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

¹²⁷"Foreknowledge," in *Insight on the Scriptures*, 1:855.

mystery. Whatever the reason, Jehovah will give those who stood in opposition to him and his Witnesses another chance at everlasting life on earth. However, if their former disposition towards Jehovah does not change after a period of time on the new earth, they will face annihilation.¹²⁸

Not all three of these resurrection groups will occur at the same time. Jesus will spread out the resurrections over time in order to avoid neglecting some of the newly raised individuals. The survivors of Armageddon and the earlier resurrected groups will work together to prepare for the arrival of later paradisiacal residents.¹²⁹ It is unclear whether Jehovah will resurrect each group in entirety at the same time, or if he will raise portions of each group in the same moment. Either way, it is certain that this time will not be one of confusion but of celebration.

At Jesus' invisible return, the earth will come under his direct rule. Assuring the elimination of evil, He will imprison Satan, and initiate the restoration of the earth. Christ promised that in the new world, those who remained faithful would receive everlasting life. This righteous new earth will be a society of people who receive Jehovah's approval.¹³⁰ This future hope will become a reality as Jesus and his anointed co-rulers govern humanity for one thousand years.

As a result of Jesus' reign, the "great crowd" and the resurrected individuals will progressively become perfect. Aided by the heavenly class, Christ will cleanse humanity of sin and imperfection. This elevation of humanity will remove all sickness, suffering, and death from the world. It is important to note that during the resurrections, Jehovah will not raise the dead to perfect physical bodies. According to the Witnesses, perfect resurrected

¹²⁸*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, 238.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 232.

¹³⁰*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 33.

individuals would be unrecognizable to those awaiting their return.¹³¹ Members of the earthly class will gradually return to perfect manhood and womanhood like that which Adam and Eve originally enjoyed. This transformation will require an age reversal for many of the new earth's inhabitants.¹³² The Witnesses believe Job 33:24-25 speaks of this miracle when it states, "Then he favors him and says, 'Let him off from going down into the pit! I have found a ransom! Let his flesh become fresher than youth; let him return to the days of his youthful vigor.'" These transformations will enable the earthly class to work together to turn earth back into paradise.¹³³

During his reign, Christ will appoint "princes in all the earth" from among the "great crowd" to help supervise the restoration of paradise. These former congregational elders will lead a progressively perfected work force as they seek to return the planet to its original state.¹³⁴ Once humanity achieves paradisiacal conditions, they will live in perfect harmony under the perfect reign of Christ. However, their salvation will not yet be complete.

At the end of his one thousand year reign, Jesus will hand the kingdom back over to Jehovah. At this time, God will also set Satan free from captivity to test humanity one last time. The devil will try to tempt and mislead humanity, and he will be successful with some of the new earth's perfect residents. Jehovah will destroy those who do not prove to be faithful to him. However, he will declare the inhabitants who did not yield to Satan's temptations as righteous, and he will grant them everlasting life in the earthly paradise.¹³⁵ Salvation will then be a reality for the earthly class of believers.

¹³¹*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, 234.

¹³²*Life-How Did It Get Here?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1985), 240.

¹³³"A Secure Future Under God's Rule," *Awake* (May 2008): 7.

¹³⁴*Man's Salvation: Out of World Distress at Hand!* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1975), 362.

¹³⁵*God's Eternal Purpose*, 190-91.

Obviously, the individuals that continue to rebel against Jehovah are unappreciative of his kindness, and they do not possess the hope of salvation either on earth or in heaven. This disobedient class of people cannot reap the benefits of Christ's ransom sacrifice. Witnesses believe Jesus' teaching on the judgment found in Matthew 25 best describes the contrast between the faithful and the disobedient. In this discourse, Christ stated that when he returns in glory, he would separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep will be the righteous followers of Jehovah, and they will inherit eternal life. However, the goats will be those who are disobedient to God, and Christ will condemn them to everlasting punishment (Matt 25:31-46).

According to the FDS, when God cuts off an individual from life, it is punishment. Therefore, being eternally cut off from life would be eternal punishment.¹³⁶ The unrighteous simply cease to exist, and will never have the opportunity to live again. Jehovah will not store their life force in his memory; therefore, the disobedient will be the eternally forgotten.

Concerning the eternal torment in hell, the Witnesses believe that this doctrine is another one of Satan's lies that he has used to defame Jehovah's sovereign name. The devil attempts to convince the world that God tortures people for eternity. Jehovah is a God of love and he would never make anyone suffer in such an extreme fashion.¹³⁷ Rutherford proclaimed that hell is not a place; it is a condition. It is the condition of nonexistence, or death. Because of this belief, Witnesses can confidently say that Jesus was in hell for three days before his spiritual resurrection.¹³⁸ If someone dies, he or she goes to hell. However, only the unrighteous remain in hell for eternity. The goats do not burn, but they are silent forever.

¹³⁶“Hell,” in *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 171.

¹³⁷*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 64.

¹³⁸Rutherford, *Reconciliation*, 296-97.

The lack of security. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that God has written their names in the book of life, but he has done so in pencil. No one should become too confident in his or her spirituality.¹³⁹ The Scriptures refer to the Christian life as a race with salvation as its reward. Runners must be careful not to disqualify themselves.¹⁴⁰ God has foreordained specific classes of people, but he does not know which particular individuals belong to each class. Therefore, believers cannot think that Jehovah has predestined them for salvation. An individual's final salvation is not determined at the moment he or she begins to put faith in Jesus' sacrifice.

Members of the heavenly class are not exempt from apostasy. The number 144,000 is preordained but the individual members of the heavenly class are not. Therefore, faithful Witnesses can replace former members of the "little flock."¹⁴¹ The continued emergence of new members of the anointed class reveals that an increasing number of elderly Witnesses are not persevering in their faith.¹⁴²

As seen earlier, the faithful earthly class of believers is uncertain of their salvation until the end. Although, Christ and his under priests will cleanse the "other sheep" from sin and imperfection, a portion of them will fall away at the end of Jesus' 1,000-year reign. Members of the "great crowd" and the resurrection groups will not know if they received the promise of salvation until after Satan's last barrage of temptations. Only then will they know that they will spend eternity in paradise on earth.

¹³⁹Zylstra and Milke, interview.

¹⁴⁰"What Must We Do to Be Saved?" accessed October 7, 2008, http://www.watchtower.org/article_02.htm.

¹⁴¹*Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1966), 149.

¹⁴²Zylstra and Milke, interview.

Conclusion

The spiritual provision that the FDS provides its followers has multiple deviations from orthodox Christian teachings. From the Society's beliefs on the identity and work of Christ to its view on the last days, the organization stands in juxtapose to the evangelical message of gospel. (The following chapter will give greater attention to this marked contrast.) However, faithful Witnesses reveal their trust in the FDS and its provision as they proclaim its teachings door to door. The criticism and persecution they receive because of their message's aberrant content only solidifies their understanding that they are faithful followers of Jehovah.

The Sheep and their Servant

Both "the little flock" and "the other sheep" submit to the authority of the faithful and discreet slave. In order to understand the Witnesses' perception and accompanying trust of the FDS, I interviewed local members of a Rome, Georgia, Kingdom Hall. While the identities of the interviewees will remain anonymous, it is interesting to note that among the thirty Witnesses questioned there were former Gilead missionaries, circuit overseers, congregational elders, and ministerial servants. As expected many of their responses were very similar.

The questionnaire consisted of eleven questions. The first four questions of the survey focused on the individual's personal background as a Jehovah's Witness whereas the remaining seven questions centered on his or her understanding in regard to the role of the FDS. The questionnaire can be found in appendix 2 of this dissertation.

As noted above, the questionnaire began by seeking to discover the organizational background of each interviewee. The first question was "How long have you been a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses?" An overwhelming majority of the responses received to this initial question pointed to the participants being at least a second or third generation Witness.

Only three responses noted an adult “conversion” to the Watchtower organization. It is interesting to note that one subject grew up attending the Kingdom Hall with her mother and a local Baptist church with her father. Her decision to become a member of the Society resulted from her feeling that she was “preached at but not really taught” at her father’s church.¹⁴³

The second background question was “How long ago were you baptized?” Among those who were surveyed, the most recent baptism was seven years ago while two of the participants were baptized over fifty-six years ago. A Witness’ baptism is an outward expression of a life dedicated to Jehovah. It is necessary to be identified as a Jehovah’s Witness. Several of the interviewees noted that their day of baptism was the most important day of their life.

Questions 3 and 4 of the questionnaire sought to discover the participant’s level of involvement in the organization. The third question inquired about his or her monthly attendance at Kingdom Hall meetings. It is important to note for this questionnaire that meetings were defined as occasions in which the individual attended the Kingdom Hall for a scheduled time. For example, this questionnaire considered a member’s attendance on a scheduled Wednesday night as one meeting even though the program would have been separated into three separate components (The Congregational Book Study, Theocratic Ministry School, and the Service Meetings). Therefore, a typical week would have two scheduled meetings outside of field service meetings. All of the participants except for one answered that they attended eight or more meetings a month. The subject that noted otherwise reported attending less than eight but more than five meetings a month.

¹⁴³Subject J, member of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, interview by author, Rome, GA, November 15, 2013, written record. Interview and questionnaire participants were recorded as anonymous. I assigned each participant a letter to differentiate his or her responses from others.

The fourth question sought to reveal the interviewee's field service involvement. Among those questioned, four of the subjects were pioneers, spending more than 70 hours a month in field service. One individual noted participation of "more than 25 hours a month." While the remainder of those in the study reported "more than 10 hours a month." Some subjects submitted their actual hours of participation from the previous month. These numbers were precise, revealing the number of hours to the tenth place.

The remaining questions in the survey centered on the individual's perception of the FDS. It is important to note that I conducted these interviews briefly after the organizational shift in understanding about the identity of the FDS. Some of the responses reflected the old language of the FDS class as opposed to the newer teaching that focuses on the singularity of this composite group.

The fifth question sought to reveal the participant's understanding of the authority of the FDS in relation to Bible study. The question centers on the FDS's primary didactic tool, the Watchtower publications and their significance. The overwhelming response from those surveyed revealed the use of the Watchtower publications was necessary to achieve a proper understanding of the Bible. Three primary images emerged from the responses to this question. First, Watchtower publications are like Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-31). People cannot understand Jehovah's truth unless someone helps them comprehend. The second image points to the Society's publications as the primary tool for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. As Jesus commanded his followers to teach and to make disciples, the Watchtower resources are crucial to the completion of that task. Without the aid of these publications, genuine disciples cannot exist. The third image is that of a unifying force that binds the worldwide body of Jehovah's Witnesses together under one banner of teaching.

Question 6 probed the individual's understanding of the identity of the FDS. For the most part, each participant noted that the FDS is a small group of anointed brothers that

work together to provide spiritual food for Jehovah's servants on earth. In their responses, two individuals highlighted the recent shift from the class understanding to the Governing Body. Acknowledging the similarities between the roles of the first-century apostles and the modern-day Governing Body, two others pointed to the significance of 1919 as the year that FDS began functioning.

The seventh question centered on the participant's view of the duties of the FDS. At the time of its composition, the questionnaire inquired about the individual's "understanding of the duties of the slave class." Only one interviewee noted the need to change the language of the question. Two participants used the "class" designation in their responses. Two main duties of the FDS emerged from the data collected. The first duty was the responsibility of the slave is to prepare and dispense spiritual food to Jehovah's household. The second responsibility is to manage the household of faith, which includes the oversight of the organization's material assets, assemblies, literature production, and field service activity.

The next question sought to reveal the individual's perception of his or her role in relation of the FDS. The theme of submission emerged from the responses collected. Each participant noted his or her humble support of the assignments made and of the spiritual food provided by the FDS. Three of the interviewees noted that they viewed the direction of the FDS as coming from Jehovah; therefore, they felt the need to faithfully follow in obedience. One subject remarked that the FDS kept "watch over their souls" so he sought to be obedient to whatever teaching or assignment the Governing Body provided.

Question 9 sought to discover the participants' perspectives on the development of the FDS's teaching in connection to Proverbs 4:18.¹⁴⁴ Unanimously each respondent

¹⁴⁴"But the path of the righteous is like the bright morning light. That grows brighter and brighter until full daylight" (Prov 4:18 NWT).

answered that as the end draws nearer, the clearer the understanding of Jehovah's truth becomes. Spiritual knowledge is progressive according to these Witnesses. Due to the progressive nature of such knowledge, refinements in teachings are sometimes necessary. Three of the participants highlighted former incorrect understandings that the Society endorsed. In each response, the interviewee noted that the FDS was not concerned with the criticism they received for the adjustment but more concerned with cooperating with Jehovah's unfolding purpose.

The tenth question was an inquiry into the participant's understanding of the membership of the FDS. Acknowledging that the Governing Body is only comprised of Witnesses with a "heavenly hope," interviewee responded to the question, "Do you believe a Witness with an 'earthly hope' could ever become a member of the slave class?" This question produced three different responses among the participants. The first response was an unequivocal "no." Those in this camp noted that only those with a heavenly hope could possibly become a member of the FDS. The second group pointed to a conditional "no." These participants remarked that Witnesses with a heavenly hope could not become members of the FDS unless a brother with a heavenly hope unrepentantly fell away from Jehovah. Then and only then would Jehovah change a Witness' hope, either to heavenly or to earthly. Several in this group noted that this transition would be a rarity. The final group simply answered in the affirmative. Their responses pointed to Jehovah's divine prerogative in regard to who will or will not be a member of the FDS.

The final question focused on the future state of the FDS. The question was "Do you believe there will ever be a day when a member of the slave class is not on the earth?" In hindsight, this question was not specific enough. While its intention was to uncover the participant's thoughts about the potential disappearance of the FDS before Armageddon, the language of the question did not accomplish the desired goal. As it was stated, the question

simply asks the interviewees to recount the Society's teaching on the 144,000 and this group's heavenly hope. Each participant responded in the affirmative noting that the anointed would be gathered to heaven to receive their heavenly reward to rule as kings and priests over those still on earth following Armageddon. Therefore, earth will be without the FDS.

The data collected from the interviews is not groundbreaking but does give insight into the perspectives of local Witnesses. As expected, the majority of their responses mirrored each other's. On closer examination, the language of some responses was identical, which obviously points to a common source of information, the teachings of the FDS. It was interesting to discover the variation in thought regarding the possibility of those with a heavenly hope becoming members of the FDS. Of course, it is insightful to observe how the printed words of the Watchtower publications take root in the minds of local Witnesses.

Conclusion

Operating as a theocratic organization, the Watchtower Society looks to the Governing Body for Jehovah's direction. From the world headquarters at the US Bethel to the Kingdom Hall in the Falkland Islands, Witnesses willfully submit to the teachings of the FDS. Found within the pages of the most recent Watchtower publications, these teachings inform followers how to live and what to proclaim as Jehovah's Witnesses. This most recent "light" becomes the truth that continues to define the organization's distinctive message. It is a message that contains a two-fold hope. For those who are faithful to Jehovah's direction, they may spend eternity reigning with Christ in heaven or dwelling on the future paradise of earth. It is from this eternal outlook that local Witnesses submit to the direction of the Governing Body.

CHAPTER 4

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE FAITHFUL AND DISCREET SLAVE

Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide submit to the authority of the Society's Governing Body. This select group of seven anointed Witness men has the power to influence millions of lives. Believed to be Jehovah's faithful and discreet slave, these men provide direction for the Watchtower organization. The significance of the FDS to the Society cannot be overstated. With that truth in mind, the disappearance of this authoritative body would produce a theological crisis for its followers. How could the organization function without its divinely inspired leadership? Can the Society find a solution to this pending dilemma? This chapter will seek to examine such questions that relate to this imminent event.

Chapter 4 consists of three sections. The first section of this chapter examines the biblical data and the Watchtower interpretations of the 144,000 Israelites mentioned in Revelation 7 and 14. This examination begins by contrasting the Society's understanding of the 144,000 as the anointed Witnesses with the findings of modern biblical scholarship. The second section analyzes the records of the Watchtower organization. With a special focus on the annual Memorial statistics, this section examines the possible implications that emerge from the numerical trends. The eventual disappearance of this group is the focus of the third section of this chapter. In this part of the work, the emphasis rests on the Society's teachings about the future state of the 144,000 and on the organization's need to address imminent theological crises that will arise as a result of current trends among the remaining anointed.

The Identity of the 144,000

In Revelation 7:1-14 and 14:1-5, the apostle John described visions about the end of time that the Lord had revealed to him. Both of these visions pertain to a specific group of people, the 144,000 whom God has sealed and redeemed from the earth. Nevertheless, who are the 144,000? The identity of these saints is crucial to the Watchtower understanding of salvation. As noted earlier in this dissertation, the Society's teachings on this matter are directly related to their belief about the faithful and discreet slave. The following paragraphs examine both passages in Revelation while comparing modern biblical commentaries with Watchtower interpretations.

Revelation 7 and the 144,000

In the biblical text, the account of John's vision in Revelation 7 immediately follows his description of the six seals that the Lamb, Christ, will open in order to usher in the wrath of God upon the earth. Following this unsettling depiction, the apostle relays that the Lord will first seal 144,000 from the earth before he will permit the devastation of the earth to begin. According to John's vision, the Lord will select this group from "out of every tribe of the sons of Israel" (Rev 7:4-8). He then listed "12,000" from each of the tribes associated with Jacob's sons.

After introducing the 144,000, the apostle's vision presented another group of people. In Revelation 7:9-14, "a great crowd, which no man was able to number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues" stood before the Lord. Amidst the vision, God reveals to John that this "great crowd" will come out of "the great tribulation" that will befall the earth. This second select group plays a significant role in Watchtower theology as well.

The apostle John's apocalyptic visions are challenging to interpret. However, Paige Patterson and Robert H. Gundry in their commentaries on Revelation provide valuable insight into this passage. Noting the sealing of the 144,000, Patterson describes the protection

that God will provide for this group as the judgments that unfold upon the earth.¹ Who are these special individuals that the Lord will set apart for deliverance? This question has produced multiple interpretations over the years.

As John listed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel from which the 144,000 would be selected, he recorded them in an unusual manner. His list of the tribes in Revelation 7:4-8² is unlike others found in the bible.³ Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the apostle omitted Dan and Ephraim but added Levi and Joseph to the list. It is also interesting to note that John listed the tribe of Judah first instead of Jacob's firstborn, Reuben. The presence of these irregularities may point to something other than a literal rendering of the passage.

Gundry and Patterson explore the significance of these irregularities in John's list. Most likely, the exclusion of Dan correlates to the tribe's slide into idolatry (Judges 18:1-31) whereas the omission of Ephraim is a result of the inclusion of Joseph.⁴ Tribal lists usually do not include Levi because of the tribe's priestly orientation and their lack of territorial allotment; however, John's vision reveals the tribe among the others listed.⁵ Finally, the key to this unusual list is the placement of the tribe of Judah. This tribe displaces Reuben atop the list because Christ came from the tribe of Judah. Patterson notes that this order denotes a

¹Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, The New American Commentary, vol. 39 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2012), 216.

²"And I heard the number of those who were sealed, 144,000, sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel: Out of the tribe of Judah 12,000 sealed; out of the tribe of Reuben 12,000; out of the tribe of Gad 12,000; out of the tribe of Asher 12,000; out of the tribe of Naphtali 12,000; out of the tribe of Manasseh 12,000; out of the tribe of Simeon 12,000; out of the tribe of Levi 12,000; out of the tribe of Issachar 12,000; out of the tribe of Zebulun 12,000; out of the tribe of Joseph 12,000; out of the tribe of Benjamin 12,000 sealed" (Rev 7:4-8 NWT).

³For more information on the difference between John's list in Rev 7:4-8 and others found in the bible see the following passages: Num 1:17-46, Num 13:1-15, 1 Chr 27:16-22.

⁴Patterson, *Revelation*, 222.

⁵Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 61.

Jewish Christian hand in its writing.⁶ The Lord used the apostle John, a first century Jewish Christian, to record this vision to communicate a redeemed list of the tribes. With the tribe of Christ at the head, the list finds greater significance than its former versions. Gundry proposes that the tribe of priests, Levi, find inclusion because the work of Christ creates a kingdom of priests.⁷

Acknowledging the peculiarities of the apostle's list, Gundry directs his readers to the significance of the number 144,000. He notes this number is the square of twelve multiplied by a thousand. The twelve tribes of Israel squared would infer completeness and multiplication by a thousand would illustrate "multitudinousness."⁸ According to Gundry, the apostle pointed to the Lord's sealing of this mathematically illustrated group as symbolic reference to the universal church.⁹ On the other hand, Patterson weighs the interpretations of other commentators concerning the literal or symbolic understanding of the 144,000 and returns to the apostle's original audience. He concludes that John and his original audience would have understood this vision to represent 12,000 people of each of the listed tribes of Israel; therefore, it is a literal group of 144,000.¹⁰

In Romans 11, the apostle Paul reveals a hope for the tribes of Israel. For centuries, the hearts of Israel have experienced a partial and temporary hardening. Since the advent of Christ, only a remnant of Israel has found salvation. However, a time will come when "all Israel" will find salvation (Rom 11:26). While the meaning of "all Israel" may be uncertain, God will redeem godly Israelites after the preordained number of Gentiles has come to faith

⁶Patterson, *Revelation*, 221.

⁷Gundry, *Commentary on Revelation*, 61.

⁸Ibid., 63.

⁹Ibid., 64.

¹⁰Patterson, *Revelation*, 219.

in Christ. Certainly the fullness of the Gentile number will not be complete until after the days of the Great Tribulation; therefore, the redeemed “all Israel” will be ethnic Israelites that persevered amidst the struggles of the Tribulation. Robert Mounce notes that “all Israel” will receive salvation just like other believers. These believing Jews will place their faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.¹¹ A question arises, what is the correlation between “all Israel” of Romans 11:26 and the 144,000 of Revelation 7? Assuming Gundry’s “multitudinousness” approach reveals that these future persevering Israelites will indeed be a part of the 144,000. The apostle Paul’s remarks about these Jewish believers provide additional insight into the composition of this symbolic group found in Revelation 7. Jews and Gentiles will comprise the 144,000.

As noted earlier in this dissertation, the Watchtower Society teaches a different perspective on the identity of the 144,000. Certainly, Witnesses are in agreement with Gundry’s assessment of the group as a multiethnic composite of believers, but they reject his multitudinousness interpretation. With Patterson, the Society finds an ally in interpretation concerning the actual number of individuals sealed by the Lord; however, they part company with the scholar over his insistence that the group is actual Israelites. The FDS teaches that the 144,000 are a literal group of symbolic Israelites.

Referencing Revelation 7:9-13, the Society contrasts the 144,000 with “the great crowd, which no man was able to number” (Rev 7:9 NWT). Whereas the first group is a literal number, the second group appears to be countless.

Note, however, the contrast that John draws between verses 4 and 9 of Revelation chapter 7. He states that the first group, “those who were sealed,” has a definite number. However, the second group, “a great crowd,” is without a definite number. With that in mind, it is logical to take the number 144,000 to be literal. If the number 144,000 were symbolic and referred to a group that is actually numberless, the force of the contrast

¹¹Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1995), 224.

between those two verses would be lost. Thus, the context strongly indicates that the number 144,000 must be taken literally.¹²

Again, the Witnesses find common ground with Patterson with their interpretation of the two groups. As one would expect, Patterson notes that “the great crowd” is different from the 144,000 sealed believers.¹³ This throng of people found in verse 9 is from every nation, tribe, and language. In addition, they will persevere through “the great tribulation” in order to receive their salvation.

Complementing his multitudinous interpretation of the 144,000, Gundry argues that “the great crowd” is another reference for the sealed group. This innumerable crowd corresponds to his mathematical interpretation. The vast saved crowd from every nation represents the true spiritual Israel.¹⁴ For Gundry, God’s work of salvation is not limited by number in relation to any ethnicity.

Revelation 14 and the 144,000

The same 144,000 appear in Revelation 14 sealed by God standing with Christ on Mount Zion. In this account, the apostle provided more details about this special group first introduced in Revelation 7. John depicted this sealed group as singing a “new song” only they had to the ability to learn. Redeemed from the earth, these men are virgins, truthful, and blameless. They are delivered as “firstfruits to God and to the Lamb” (Rev 14:4).

The unique ability to sing a “new song” is an interesting trait these redeemed 144,000 possess. Consistent with his multitudinous interpretation, Gundry notes that those who can learn this song must have been bought from the earth for they share the experience of redemption. All those whom the Lord saves from the earth can sing this song of

¹²“Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower* (September 2004): 30.

¹³Patterson, *Revelation*, 224.

¹⁴Gundry, *Commentary on Revelation*, 64.

redemption.¹⁵ Patterson echoes Gundry's sentiment about the song being one that only the redeemed can sing. However, Patterson proposes that these redeemed singers must come from the twelve tribes of Israel found in Revelation 7.¹⁶

Not only do these men redeemed from the earth have the ability to sing a new song, they are also "virgins." Patterson proposes that these redeemed 144,000 have never married and have remained celibate in order to pursue the kingdom task at hand during the great tribulation.¹⁷ As expected, Gundry suggests the virginity of these redeemed illustrates their "moral and religious purity that characterizes true Christians."¹⁸ For they did not defile themselves with the worship of false gods or engage in sexual immoral acts associated with idolatry. Like Gundry, the Watchtower understands these sealed individuals to have remained spiritual virgins by not defiling themselves with the beliefs and practices of false religion.¹⁹

John depicted these redeemed "virgins" as the "firstfruits of God and the Lamb" (Rev 14:4). They are truthful and innocent in their ways and Patterson believes them to be the first wave of responses to come to Christ following the future great tribulation. He suggests that God will protect these 144,000 during this time of great distress so that they may be the first to commit themselves to him during the millennial reign of Christ.²⁰ Without belaboring eschatological details, Gundry simply notes that the "firstfruits" designation denotes that this group belongs to the Lord just as the "firstfruits" of the harvest. Therefore God owns these

¹⁵Gundry, *Commentary on Revelation*, 109.

¹⁶Patterson, *Revelation*, 305.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 306.

¹⁸Gundry, *Commentary on Revelation*, 110.

¹⁹"They 'Keep Following the Lamb,'" *The Watchtower Study Edition* (February 2009): 24.

²⁰Patterson, *Revelation*, 308.

redeemed individuals.²¹ Acknowledging Jehovah's ownership of the 144,000, the FDS teaches that the term *firstfruits* indicates "a small representative selection."²² The anointed that will rule with Christ in heaven are only a few in comparison with those who will inhabit the paradise on earth.

An interpretive approach to the identity of the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14 must be consistent. Interpreters cannot present one portion of the selection literally and then chose to view the rest of the apostle's description as figurative. As the Lord revealed this vision to John, he had one message to convey. Both Patterson and Gundry are consistent in their approaches to the passages. Patterson views both accounts as literal depictions of things to come. He writes that God will seal 144,000 Israelites (12,000 from each of the tribes listed in Revelation 7) from a group of celibate men that He will redeem after the great tribulation. As seen earlier, Gundry approaches the two selections from a symbolic perspective. He argues that the 144,000 communicates the idea of completeness. This sealed group of spiritual virgins is the universal church which is also depicted as "the great crowd" of Revelation 7:9.

The FDS is not consistent in its interpretation of these two passages. As noted above, the Watchtower Society teaches that the 144,000 in Revelation 7 and 14 is a literal number. However, Witnesses believe that Jehovah has not confined this group to the twelve tribes of Israel. Therefore, they believe that readers should consider John's accounts as part literal and part symbolic. The number of the group is literal but the members of the group are symbolic. In both passages, the Society holds fast to the literal number of 144,000 while spiritualizing the other distinguishing marks of this select group. According to the Watchtower organization, the 144,000 are anointed Christians that have abstained from the

²¹Gundry, *Commentary on Revelation*, 110.

snare of false religion. This literal symbolic group is different from “the great crowd.” They have a heavenly hope and will not face the Armageddon whereas members of the crowd have an earthly hope and must preserve the devastation of Armageddon.

The identity of the 144,000 is a key element in the theology of the Watchtower Society. If this group is not a literal number, then their designations of the two classes of the faithful are flawed. If Jehovah confined this group to the twelve tribes of Israel, their perception of the heavenly hope is incorrect. In addition, the membership and the identity of the FDS come into question. The Witnesses are wrong; these passages do not have a double meaning. Whether it is a literal or symbolic group, the Society has created a theological construct that cannot withstand either interpretation. The FDS and the rest of 144,000 must be ethnic Israelites or people from every tribe and nation have a heavenly hope. Within the tenets of Watchtower theology, neither is permissive.

Open or Closed Membership

According to Watchtower teachings, before the battle of Armageddon the anointed 144,000 will be in heaven with Christ. As time marches toward the last days, the question emerges, “Is the membership to the 144,000 still open?” Since the FDS teaches that 144,000 are a literal group of redeemed individuals, there has to be a point in history in which the membership ceases to add to its number. As long as the membership remains open, the finality of time remains distant.

According to Watchtower publications, membership to the Society’s 144,000 anointed was closed. This “little flock” became a closed group in 1935 and they did so indirectly. In 1935, Judge Rutherford delivered a speech entitled “The Great Multitude” in which he equated “the great crowd” of Revelation 7:9 with those who belonged to the

²²“Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower* (September 2004): 31.

organization but did not possess a heavenly hope but had an earthly hope. By identifying the great crowd in 1935, “the calling of the 144,000 anointed Christian was virtually complete.”²³

Since Pentecost 33 C.E., these anointed, spirit-begotten ones have served as ambassadors of Christ on earth. Today, only a remnant of them remain, serving together as the faithful and discreet slave class. Since the year 1935 in particular, they have been joined by “other sheep,” Christians with an earthly hope, who now number into the millions. These assist in preaching the good news in all the earth.²⁴

Those sharing in preaching this good news of the Kingdom in modern times are confident that Jehovah God is leading his dedicated servants by means of his visible spirit-begotten organization, the “faithful and discreet slave.” Under its direction the heavenly hope was held out, highlighted and stressed until about the year 1935. Then as ‘light flashed up’ to reveal clearly the identity of the “great crowd” of Revelation 7:9, the emphasis began to be placed on the earthly hope. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that by that time the full number of 144,000 would have been nearly completed.²⁵

As noted above the organizational shift in 1935 to reach those with the earthly hope indicated a close to the call to fill the 144,000. Therefore, it would appear the membership of the 144,000 closed by 1935. Since it has been nearly eighty years since the closing of the anointed class, one might wonder if this select group remained closed.

While the ranks of the 144,000 may have officially closed in 1935, the Society continues to add new members to the anointed class. These new members have been considered to be replacements for anointed brethren that failed to remain faithful to Jehovah’s purposes.

Of course, any individuals proving unfaithful would need to be replaced. But, understandably, these would be comparatively few. And by whom would these be replaced? It seems reasonable also to conclude that most likely this heavenly hope would be extended to some who had endured in integrity, who had stuck to their dedication over the years, rather than its being held out to unproved newly dedicated ones.²⁶

²³“Behold! The Great Crowd!” *The Watchtower* (May 15, 2005): 15.

²⁴“Have No Fear, Little Flock,” *The Watchtower* (February 15, 1995), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

²⁵“Born Again – Man’s Part and God’s Part,” *The Watchtower* (February 1982), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

²⁶*Ibid.*

Therefore, the rate in which the organization added new members to the 144,000 corresponded in some degree to the growing unfaithfulness among the existing selected brethren. The more unfaithfulness abounds among the anointed, the greater the influx of new members after the closing of 1935.

With an increase in “replacements,” the Society began to look for other reasons why Jehovah would continue to add to this closed group. Believing that the number of the anointed ones who fell into unrepentance was a small group, the Watchtower organization began to point toward Jehovah’s divine prerogative.

Jehovah has evidently made sure that we will have anointed Christians among us all through the final days of this system of things until the destruction of “Babylon the Great.” And we can be confident that the full number of 144,000 members will be completed in Jehovah’s due time and that all will eventually take their place in the Kingdom government. We can also believe the prophetic Word that the ever-growing great crowd will as a group continue to prove itself faithful. Soon it will “come out of the great tribulation” brought upon Satan’s world and will joyfully move on into God’s new world.²⁷

Whether it is through the previously anointed losing their sealed position or Jehovah simply revealing new members to the closed group, the Society has had to adjust their understanding of the group’s membership.

[A]s time has gone by, some Christians baptized after 1935 have had witness borne to them that they have the heavenly hope. Thus, it appears that we cannot set a specific date for when the calling of Christians to the heavenly hope ends.²⁸

The year 1935 is no longer a fixed date for the closing of the anointed membership. The 144,000, which was once a complete group, is now open. While the call goes out today for members of the great crowd to come into the fold, the emergence of more anointed members is not a surprise.

²⁷“Counted Worthy to Receive a Kingdom,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (January 2008): 23-24.

²⁸“Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower* (May 2007), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

Memorial Math

Each year at the observance of the Memorial on Nisan 14, Witnesses worldwide gather to reflect on the ransom work of Jesus Christ. As they remember Jesus' last supper with his disciples and its symbolism, congregants at each Kingdom Hall pass the emblems of the meal just as the original twelve did in that upper room thousands of years ago. As each person passes the bread and the wine, the elders are on watch. They are waiting to see if anyone partakes of the emblems. Since only members of the anointed class can drink the wine and eat the bread, most congregations participate in the Memorial meal without an individual partaking of the emblems. However, if someone were to consume the emblems, the elders would take notice that they have an anointed brethren among them. Each Kingdom Hall reports the presence of the anointed at the annual Memorial. The Society shares this data in the "Grand Totals" section of the annual organizational yearbook. Therefore, examining the "Grand Totals" reveals the number of "Memorial partakers worldwide." Each year, these numbers show how many of the 144,000 are still on the earth.

In this section of the chapter, an examination of the Society's "Memorial partakers" numbers occurs. The trends of the numbers will indicate periods of growth and decline in the presence of the 144,000 among mankind. Certainly these statistics cannot produce exact annual numbers for the living members of the anointed class. A variety of factors could have kept some members of the anointed from participating in the observance of the Memorial on any given year. However, the data from the "Grand Totals" does provide valuable insight into the trends in the anointed presence on earth.

The following tables track the Memorial numbers from 1950 until 2013. Table 1 provides the number of Memorial partakers at the beginning of every decade beginning with 1950. The Watchtower Society's annual yearbooks and the year's first issue of *The Watchtower* provided the information found in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. “Memorial Partakers” by the decade

<u>Decade</u>	<u>“Memorial Partakers”</u>
1950	22,723
1960	13,911
1970	10,368
1980	9,564
1990	8,850
2000	8,661
2010	11,202

Table 2. “Memorial Partakers” 2000-2013

<u>Year</u>	<u>“Memorial Partakers”</u>
2000	8,661
2001	8,730
2002	8,760
2003	8,565
2004	8,570
2005	8,524
2006	8,758
2007	9,105
2008	9,986
2009	10,857
2010	11,202
2011	11,824
2012	12,604
2013	13,204

As anticipated, the number of “Memorial partakers,” or anointed declined from 1950 to the present decade. Between 1950 and 1970, the living portion of the 144,000 decreased by 54 percent. Over half the existing anointed ended their earthly course during that span of time. In the twenty years between 1970 and 1990, the number of the living remnant decreased by nearly 15 percent. It appears that the rate of disappearance among the anointed slowed dramatically. In the most recent two decades, the membership of the 144,000 increased by almost 27 percent. When compared with numbers from 1970, there are 8 percent more partakers in 2010. Table 2 provides further insight into this interesting trend.

The figures in table 2 reveal the gradual increase in the recorded “Memorial partakers.” From 2000 to 2013, there was an increase of over 52 percent of the living anointed. Between the years of 2008 and 2009 alone, the number of the remnant jumped almost 9 percent. Since the start of this decade, the number of the remaining 144,000 on earth has increased by nearly 18 percent. In 2000, the Society reported that 94 percent of the 144,000 were realizing their heavenly reward. However, by 2013 that percentage changed to 91 percent.

With the apparent closing of the 144,000 in 1935 and the acknowledgement of Jehovah’s prerogative in replacing members, the numbers of the living anointed should be decreasing as each year passes. However, as seen above, the trend is the opposite. Since 2006, the number of “Memorial partakers” has increased each year. However, the Watchtower Society noted in 2009 that “the number of the anointed ones has decreased over the decades” while the number of the other sheep has increased.²⁹ The organization also published the following statement in an attempt to downplay the increase in “Memorial partakers.”

²⁹“They Keep Following the Lamb,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (February 2009), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

Does this total represent the number of anointed ones on earth? Not necessarily. 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. We thus have no way of knowing the exact number of anointed ones on earth; nor do we need to know. The Governing Body does not keep a list of all partakers, for it does not maintain a global network of anointed ones.³⁰

It is interesting to note, that the Society does not “need to know” the number of anointed ones on earth. Why include the total number of “Memorial partakers” in each year’s worldwide report? For an organization that appears to have a strong emphasis on numbers, their expressed lack of concern over such numbers is not plausible.

Multiple factors could be responsible for the increase in the living 144,000. As noted earlier, a portion of this swell in membership could be due to replacement members. However, it is unlikely that the dramatic increase in the past decade would be the result of an epidemic of unfaithfulness among the anointed. According to the Society, another possible reason for the increase may rest in the hasty “proclamation” of new members. The newly baptized may have felt compelled to partake of the Memorial emblems because they retained some theological baggage from their previous religious tradition.

However, from reports at hand it appears that even some newly dedicated Christians have considered themselves to be “born again.” Any who in comparatively recent times dedicated themselves and were baptized and who consider themselves to be “born again” would do well to reflect seriously on the following questions: What reasons have you for feeling that Jehovah God has planted this hope in you? Could it be that your emotional feeling is a holdover from the mistaken belief you previously held while in Babylon the Great that heaven is the destiny of all good people? Or could it be that you feel this way because you had great inward disturbances, that you at first fought against the idea but it gradually won out? But did it win out because *you* wanted it that way, perhaps even unconsciously? Such struggles do not of themselves prove that you were “born again.”³¹

According to the Watchtower, it is possible for “newly dedicated Christians” to improperly consider themselves one of the “born again,” or anointed. This proposal is also unlikely to

³⁰“Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (August 2015): 22.

precipitate the substantial increase in the living remnant. In order for an individual to become a baptized member of the Jehovah's Witness, he or she must know and accept the basic teachings of the Society.³² These basic teachings include the organization's understandings about the difference between the two eternal hopes. It is unlikely that a newly dedicated Witness would misunderstand this trademark teaching.

The final two factors are more likely to be the reasons for the increase in the living anointed membership. From the Society's perspective, it could be that Jehovah has simply chosen to provide living members of the 144,000 as the end of this system of things approaches. Jehovah could exercise his divine prerogative to ensure that his organization has faithful leadership in the dark days ahead.³³ While this factor may carry some validity with Witnesses, those outside the organization may see otherwise. Daniel Rodriguez in his book, *The Watchtower's Coming Crisis*, encourages researchers to reexamine the Society's Memorial records. Noting the similar trends as this dissertation did above, Rodriguez proposes another factor for the numbers anomaly, the organization has manipulated its records.

In his book, Rodriguez points to the significant year of 1935 for the chief evidence for this deception.³⁴ At the Memorial observance in 1935, the number of partakers was 27,006.³⁵ In 1988, the Society highlighted the 1935 Memorial observance in *The Watchtower*. "In 1935 attendance worldwide at the Memorial observance of Jesus's death was 32,795. Of

³¹"Born Again – Man's Part and God's Part," *The Watchtower* (February 1982), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

³²*What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2013), 176.

³³"Counted Worthy to Receive a Kingdom," *The Watchtower Study Edition* (January 2008): 23-24.

³⁴Daniel Rodriguez, *The Watchtower's Coming Crisis* (Ontario, CA: Chick Publications, 2009), 24.

these attendees, 27,006 partook of the emblems as being the remaining ones on earth of the 144,000, whose hope is heavenly.”³⁶ In 1996, the organization chose to highlight the observance of 1935 once again but this time their records were different. “[T]he Memorial celebration in 1935, attended by 63,146, those partaking of the emblems in evidence of their profession to be anointed numbered 52,465.”³⁷ Why the discrepancies in the two reports? There is a difference of 25,459 partakers between the two conflicting reports. Comparing the data from the 1988 report with the stats from table 2, the number of the living remnant has decreased by 51 percent since the “closing” of the sealed group to 2013. However, the information from the 1996 account and table 2 reveal nearly a 75 percent decrease among the living anointed by 2013. It is likely that the 1988 report is accurate since it is a reflection of original report published in 1935.

The Society adjusted the numbers in the 1996 report in order to mask the partakers trend. The 1935/1988 numbers revealed only a 51 percent decrease among the 144,000 for nearly eighty years. Apart from the replacement factor, this rate of decrease would indicate that in 1935 about half of the anointed class were 15 years old or younger.³⁸ The 75 percent decrease seen with the 1996 data produces a remnant with 25 percent of his membership 15 years old or younger in 1935. While the Society probably did not have an insurgence of youth among the anointed in the 1930s, the adjusted numbers of 1996 reflect a more acceptable rate of disappearance for the anointed class. Both sets of numbers are problematic when

³⁵*Yearbook of the Jehovah's Witnesses for 1936* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1935), 53.

³⁶“Angelic Messages for Our Day,” *The Watchtower* (December 15, 1988), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

³⁷“Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower* (August 15, 1996), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

compared to today's number of partakers, but the 1996 data provides a numerical path for a more realistic decline in living membership. In other words, the Society adjusted the 1935 Memorial numbers in order to cloak the lack of decline and possible increase of partakers in recent years.

The Memorial math is perplexing. According to general logic, the number of the living anointed should be declining with the passage of time. However, the opposite trend is in play. Like its teachings about the FDS, it appears the Watchtower Society has adjusted their understanding about the membership of the 144,000. The organization originally taught that the group membership closed in 1935, but Witnesses apparently are now in a “wait and see” mode in regard to the emergence of new members of the 144,000. From this uncertain posture, they have modified their records to account for the pattern of increase they have reported in recent years. Whether the numbers continue to increase or the logical progression of decline returns, a greater realignment of Watchtower doctrine will be necessary in the coming days.

The Future of the 144,000

While the numbers of the living 144,000 may be in flux, the FDS's teachings about the future of the anointed have remained constant. This section examines the Society's understanding about the eternal hope of the 144,000 and their responsibilities in the Jehovah's kingdom. In addition, this portion of the chapter will propose possible outcomes of these teachings if the 144,000 die out before the anticipated end or if the number of the living anointed continues to increase.

³⁸The logic behind these calculations rests in the presupposition that members of 144,000 would not live beyond 95 years of age. Since it had been nearly eighty years since the closing of the group in 1935, surviving members would have to be 15 years old or younger in that significant year.

According to the FDS, the anointing of Jesus' disciples began in 33 CE and progressed until the death of those first apostles. At that point, the "great apostasy" foretold in 2 Thessalonians 2:3³⁹ began to occur.⁴⁰ Weeds sprung up among the faithful wheat. Centuries of satanic sowing led to the rise of Christendom, which includes Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches.⁴¹ However, in the late 1800s through the ministry of Russell light began to emerge from the darkness. As Russell and his followers began to restore bible truths, the anointing of Jehovah's faithful began again.⁴²

Not all 144,000 anointed Christians were selected in the first century. Their calling continued throughout the apostolic period and then apparently slowed down. However, it did continue throughout the succeeding centuries into modern times. Eventually, after Jesus began to reign in 1914, things moved ahead rapidly. First, Jesus cleansed the heavens of all vestiges of opposition to godly rule. Then he turned his attention to the gathering of the remaining prospective members of his Kingdom government so as to complete the number of 144,000.⁴³

In 1914, the calling of the 144,000 rapidly increased and slowed as the number supposedly reached completion in 1935.

As the little flock awaits their heavenly reward, some of them have a task to perform. As noted throughout this work, select members of the 144,000 serve as the FDS of the Jehovah's Witnesses. As these anointed men constitute the Governing Body, they serve as stewards over Jehovah's household and as his channel of communication to the world. What about the remaining anointed that do not have the blessing of serving as the FDS?

The reality is that not all anointed ones have a role in dispensing spiritual food to fellow believers worldwide. Among the wheat are anointed brothers who may serve as ministerial servants or elders in their local congregation. They teach from house to

³⁹“Let no one lead you astray in any way, because it will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness gets revealed, the son of destruction” (2 Thess 2:3 NWT).

⁴⁰“The Righteous Ones Will Shine Brightly as the Sun,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (March 2010): 21.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²“Look! I Am With You All the Days,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (July 2013): 11.

⁴³“Counted Worthy to Receive a Kingdom,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (January 2008): 23.

house and in their congregation, and they loyally support the direction from headquarters. But they do not have a part in dispensing spiritual food to the worldwide brotherhood. Also among the anointed are humble sisters, who would never try to assume the role of teachers in the congregation.⁴⁴

As they serve as a domestic⁴⁵ or as the FDS, the anointed seek to remain faithful to Jehovah and his kingdom so that they may not lose their calling among the 144,000.

Over the centuries, thousands of the anointed have already ended their earthly course. According to the Watchtower, these dead members of the little flock have initiated the “first resurrection” which will become complete before the Battle of Armageddon. Therefore, this resurrection of the anointed takes place over time.⁴⁶ As they await the company of their anointed brethren, the newly resurrected inherit “a spiritual body fit for service in heaven.”⁴⁷ This service will begin once the remainder of the anointed class joins them in the heavenly Kingdom.

Jehovah will deliver a final sealing of the previously resurrected and the living members of the 144,000 as his possessions as the end approaches. Referred to in Revelation 7:1-4, this final sealing⁴⁸ of the anointed brethren will occur before the outbreak of the great

⁴⁴“Who Really is the Faithful and Discreet Slave?” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (July 2013): 22.

⁴⁵The domestics are those who are spiritually fed by the faithful and discreet slave. The Society formerly taught that the domestics were the other 144,000 not serving as the FDS. However, Witnesses presently teach that the other sheep, or great crowd, are part of the domestics. For more information see “Who Really is the Faithful and Discreet Slave?,” 23.

⁴⁶“The First Resurrection – Now Under Way!” *The Watchtower* (January 2007), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁴⁷“The Resurrection – A Teaching that Affects You,” *The Watchtower* (May 2005), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁴⁸“There are two phases in the sealing of anointed ones. The initial sealing differs from the final sealing (1) in purpose and (2) in time. The sealing in an initial sense serves to select a new member who is added to the number of anointed Christians. The sealing in a final sense serves to confirm that this chosen and sealed individual has fully demonstrated his loyalty. Only then, at the final sealing, will the seal be permanently placed ‘in the forehead’ of the anointed one, identifying him conclusively as a tried and faithful ‘slave of our God.’ The sealing mentioned in Revelation 7 refers to this final phase of the sealing.” See “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower* (January 2007), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

tribulation.⁴⁹ Newly sealed, living members of the anointed will finish their earthly course before receiving their heavenly reward. “All the anointed ones who still remain on earth after the initial part of the great tribulation has passed will at some point be raised to heaven before the outbreak of the battle of Armageddon.”⁵⁰

As the battle of Armageddon rages, the newly gathered anointed will play a special role alongside Christ. The FDS directs its followers to Revelation 2:26-27 in order to describe the role of the 144,000 at Armageddon.

And to the one who conquers and observes my deeds down to the end, I will give authority over the nations, and he will shepherd the people with an iron rod so that they will be broken to pieces like clay vessels, just as I have received from my Father.

Christ’s heavenly armies will include angels and the anointed brethren. These resurrected co-rulers will be at Christ’s side as he subdues the nations.⁵¹

Following Armageddon and during Christ’s millennial reign, the anointed will receive their full heavenly reward. Based on Revelation 5:10,⁵² the FDS teaches that the heavenly resurrected 144,000 will become kings and priests alongside Christ.⁵³ Serving as priests and kings, the anointed will serve for 1,000 years to help bring about the complete reconciliation of humanity. Together the anointed and Christ will present Jehovah with a perfectly restored creation.⁵⁴ After Christ’s millennial reign, the role of these heavenly kings is uncertain.

What will [the anointed’s] future activity be? The Bible does not say. But if we

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (July 2013): 8.

⁵¹“Hail Christ, the Glorious King!” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (February 2014): 6.

⁵²“And you made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings+ over the earth” (Rev 5:10 NWT).

⁵³“Perfection,” in *Insight on the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971), 2:606.

⁵⁴“A Royal Priesthood to Benefit All Mankind,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (January 2012): 30.

faithfully uphold Jehovah's sovereignty, we will be alive at the end of the Thousand Year Reign to find out what Jehovah has purposed for them as well as for his awesome universe.⁵⁵

According to Watchtower doctrine, it is certain that the 144,000 will remain in heaven for eternity while members of the great crowd will live for eternity in the paradise on the restored earth.

The future of the 144,000 is crucial to the future of the Watchtower organization. Should the anointed disappear from the earth before the events of the end of time, the Society would have to adjust their theology. If the membership of the living remnant continues to grow, the theology of the organization would need refinement as well. In either scenario, the Watchtower Society would face major realignment in the future.

As time passes, the number of the living anointed should slowly diminish. Suppose a day comes when not a single member of the 144,000 remains alive. According to Watchtower theology, this phenomenon could only occur amidst the great tribulation but before the battle of Armageddon.⁵⁶ The disappearance of anointed before this eschatological timeline would send massive ripples through the Society's didactic paradigm. With the disappearance of the 144,000 comes the disappearance of the FDS. The faithful and discreet slave has been in existence in some form since the conception of the organization. If the FDS were to vanish from the earth, Jehovah's Witnesses would be devoid of Jehovah's direction. Witnesses would be like sheep without a shepherd. The household of Jehovah would spiritually starve.

According to Matthew 24:45-47,⁵⁷ the faithful and discreet slave will remain in

⁵⁵*Worship the Only True God* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2006), 100.

⁵⁶“Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (July 2013): 8.

⁵⁷“Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? Happy is that slave if his master on coming finds him doing so! Truly I say to you, he will appoint him over all his belongings” (Matt 24:45-47 NWT).

service until the master, Christ, returns. It is at his return, that the master will reward the slave for his faithful stewardship. According to Watchtower teachings, Christ's return inspection will be during the great tribulation.

When Jesus comes for judgment during the great tribulation, he will find that the faithful slave has been loyally dispensing timely spiritual food to the domestics. Jesus will then delight in making the second appointment—over all his belongings. Those who make up the faithful slave will get this appointment when they receive their heavenly reward, becoming co-rulers with Christ.⁵⁸

If the FDS disappears before the great tribulation, Christ cannot return to “delight in making the second appointment.” Without this second appointment, the anointed cannot receive their heavenly reward. The FDS must survive until Christ's return inspection or the Society's entire theological framework will collapse.

On the other hand, the recent increases in the Memorial partakers could produce a different challenge for the Watchtower organization. With the inflexibility of 1935 slowly fading and the Society assuming a “wait and see” approach to the 144,000 membership, the future could host a steady increase in the living remnant. While candidates for the FDS may be plentiful, the integrity of the organization would be in jeopardy. From the Witnesses' perspective, most newly identified anointed are replacement members.⁵⁹ With a 52% increase among the living little flock between 2000 and 2013, the replacement argument collapses. A replacement would be a one for one transaction. Therefore, replacements should not change the total number of the living remnant unless former members of the 144,000 proved themselves unfaithful postmortem. The Society has also directed followers to Jehovah's divine prerogative as an explanation for the increase in the living anointed. Exercising his

⁵⁸“Who Really is the Faithful and Discreet Slave?” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (July 2013): 25.

⁵⁹“Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower* (May 2007), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

divine right, Jehovah has added 4,680⁶⁰ to the living remnant in the past seven years. If Christ tarries and Jehovah continues to add to the little flock, a day may come when the number of the anointed dead and alive will exceed 144,000. The number of the living remnant must decline or the Watchtower Society may have to abandon the literal understanding of the 144,000.

Conclusion

Reflecting on Revelation 7 and 14, the Watchtower organization believes the 144,000 found in these passages to be a literal group with a symbolic membership. The Society originally taught the membership of this group closed in 1935 but have adjusted that stance over the past decade. The organization's annual reports reveal this shift in understanding. Examining the recorded number of Memorial partakers, research reveals an increase in the living 144,000 instead of a decline. Coupled with the FDS's teachings on the future of the 144,000, these number trends will produce theological crises for the organization.

Throughout its existence, the Society has championed Proverbs 4:18 as their needs for theological adjustments have arisen. With the imminent changes approaching the Watchtower's understandings of the 144,000 and the FDS, it is certain they will soon speak of a new brighter light. Nevertheless, where will this light of revelation shine for the solutions? The following chapter examines the Society's potential paths for their pending realignments.

⁶⁰Using table 2, the lowest number of Memorial partakers was in 2005 with 8,524. The most recent record from 2013 was 13,204. The difference between the two numbers is 4,680.

CHAPTER 5

THE UNCERTAIN WATCHTOWER

The Jehovah's Witnesses face an organizational crisis. The foundation of the Society rests upon the authority of the faithful and discreet slave. However, the future of the FDS and its anointed brethren is uncertain. As noted in the previous chapter, the eventual disappearance of the 144,000 or the continued swell in membership of this group will force the Society to respond with a theological realignment. The doctrinal adjustments that are necessary will reshape some of the central tenets of the organization. This reshaping has the potential to produce disenfranchised members as well as lay the apologetic groundwork for biblical evangelism to the Witnesses.

This final chapter consists of four sections. The first section examines the uncertain future for the Witnesses and proposes the Watchtower's possible solution to the imminent crisis. One focus for this section is the identity and role of the Watchtower's potential solution. This portion of the chapter also outlines the future significance of the great crowd of Revelation 7 and describes the continued instability despite the future efforts of the Watchtower organization to realign. Section 2 contrasts the untenable beliefs of the Society with the truth of biblical theology. The third section highlights various methods used to evangelize Jehovah's Witnesses. The final section offers some concluding thoughts for the dissertation.

The Waning Watchtower

The Watchtower's perception of the 144,000 is the lynchpin for the future of the organization. As the Society's understanding of the anointed shifts so also does its teaching

on salvation, Jehovah's Kingdom, and eternity. As noted in the last chapter, the assault on the organization's understanding of the little flock is two-pronged. The first incursion comes from time. As days pass, people age and eventually die. Under the Watchtower's present theological constructs, a day will come when the remainder of the 144,000 should vanish from the face of the earth. If this disappearance does not harmonize with their eschatological expectations, the Society will be facing a drastic change in belief or the death of the movement. The second attack comes from within the organization. Over the past seven years, there has been a steady increase in the Memorial partakers revealing a growing number of living anointed Witnesses. While this phenomenon defies the progression of the time, it also presents challenges for the future of the Society. Presently, the FDS teaches that 144,000 is a literal "closed" number but if the membership of the anointed continues to increase, new understandings of this group's identity will be necessary. The following paragraphs outline possible adjustments the Watchtower Society may propose in order to dodge the pending dilemma surrounding the 144,000.

The Light of Adjustment

Since Russell and his associates first started to publish their interpretations of the bible, the principle of Proverbs 4:18 has been emphasized. When foretold hopes were not realized, the Society comforted its followers by reminding them that the light grows brighter and brighter as they approach the end of this system of things. When the teachings like those about the identity of the FDS are refined, the organization encourages its followers to yield to the revelatory light that continues to become clearer. James Penton notes the Society's use of progressive revelation in his book *Apocalypse Delayed*.

For when they have spoken dogmatically on some doctrine, for example with respect to some future eschatological date, they have frequently claimed that they have had proof of definite knowledge which was revealed to them, evidently by the holy spirit acting through them as God's channel. But when their predictions have proved wrong, as time and again they have, Watch Tower writers have fallen back on the idea that progressive

revelation can simply mean enhanced knowledge which can, of course, be mistaken, usually about certain details. In effect, then, the concept of progressive revelation has often been used, whether consciously or not, as a sort of spiritual shell game on the Witness community. That this has been so can be demonstrated clearly by the way the society has in fact used the concept over the years, especially with regard to prophetic speculation.¹

Certainly, throughout the years critics such as Penton have scrutinized the Society's approach to revelation and adjusted teachings. However, the Watchtower organization has responded to such voices of criticism with statements such as the following:

Those writings by certain members of the "slave" class that came to form the Christian part of God's Word were inspired and infallible, but that is not true of other writings since. Things published were not perfect in the days of Charles Taze Russell, first president of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society; nor were they perfect in the days of J. F. Rutherford, the succeeding president. The increasing light on God's Word as well as the facts of history have repeatedly required that adjustments of one kind or another be made down to the very present time. But let us never forget that the motives of this "slave" were always pure, unselfish; at all times it has been well-meaning. Moreover, the words found at Romans 8:28 are fitting here also: "God makes all his works cooperate together for the good of those who love God, those who are the ones called according to his purpose." Actually, any adjustments that have been made in understanding have furnished an opportunity for those being served by this "slave" to show loyalty and love, the kind of love that Jesus said would mark his followers. For those who truly love God's law there is no stumbling block.²

The organization claims the FDS has never been infallible, but in reality, the Society presents their teachings as such. It is only when particular teachings need refinement that the FDS becomes imperfect once again. This sometimes-infallible line of communication from Jehovah shields itself from scrutiny behind the growing light of progressive revelation. As the dilemma facing the doctrine of the 144,000 becomes more apparent, the Society will soon appeal to this growing light of revelation again to explain the needed realignment.

¹M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of the Jehovah's Witnesses*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 163-64.

²"To Whom Shall We Go But Jesus?" *The Watchtower* (March 1979), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

The Great Solution

As noted earlier, the first and greatest crisis facing the Watchtower Society is the disappearance of the 144,000. Apart from manipulating the Memorial numbers, how can the organization keep an anointed presence upon the earth long enough to fulfill their eschatological expectations? Faced with this dilemma, the FDS will undoubtedly look to the great crowd for the solution. It is within the membership of these other sheep that the future of the 144,000 and the FDS rests. In order to understand the potential role these spiritual companions may play, a closer examination of the Society's teachings on these other sheep is necessary.

Judge Rutherford introduced the other sheep to the Jehovah's Witnesses nearly eighty years ago. With John 10:6 and Luke 12:32 as their validation, the Society has distinguished the two classes of Witnesses ever since. In John 10:6, Jesus told his listeners that he had "other sheep, which are not of this fold." Using this passage in conjunction with Christ's word in Luke 12:32 in which Jesus addressed his disciples as the "little flock," the FDS teaches that Christ shepherds two complementary groups of sheep, or followers.

Who are the sheep? Well, it would be good to fix in mind that all of Jesus' loyal followers are referred to as sheep. At Luke 12:32, he called those of his disciples who would be going to heaven the "little flock." A flock of what? Of sheep. The "sheep" of the "little flock" will be part of the Kingdom in heaven. However, there are others, those with a different hope, whom Jesus also views as sheep. We can see this in John chapter 10. After speaking about sheep such as his apostles whom he would call to life in heaven, Jesus added in verse 16: "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; those also I must bring." Jehovah's Witnesses have long recognized that in this verse Jesus was speaking of people having the prospect of life on earth.³

Chapter 3 of this dissertation gave some attention to the composite identity of the other sheep, but the following paragraphs will provide greater explanation about these individuals that will possess an earthly hope. As a whole, this group consists of faithful

Witnesses that Jehovah has not numbered among 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14. According to Watchtower teachings, these unnumbered individuals will demonstrate their faithfulness after the millennial reign of Christ. At such time, Christ will release Satan from his imprisonment. If these men and women illustrate perseverance during the final testing of Satan, they will inherit their eternal reward, everlasting life on earth.⁴

The identity of those with the opportunity to secure eternity in an earthly paradise spans thousands of years. There are three types of individuals that share the prospect of securing this earthly hope. The first type is those who were faithful to Jehovah before the time of Christ. As noted in chapter three, Jehovah will resurrect champions of the Hebrew faith so that they may reveal their faithfulness as one of the other sheep.⁵ The second type among the other sheep is the Witnesses that may have died before Christ's return. This type would also include the great crowd of Revelation 7. The final type of individual that could comprise the other sheep belongs among those whom were once hostile to Jehovah's purposes. As a compassionate God, Jehovah will resurrect them and provide them with another opportunity for redemption.⁶ While centuries may separate the earthly lives of these possible other sheep, they each share the common prospect of eternal life on earth.

Without the prospect of being "born again" and inheriting a heavenly reward, the other sheep seek to become a "friend of Jehovah."⁷ The Society directs followers to the

³"Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower* (May 15, 1997), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

⁴"What Will Happen on Judgment Day?" *The Watchtower* (September 2012): 17.

⁵*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1958), 232.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Learn from the Great Teacher* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2003), 227.

example of Abraham to illustrate the type of relationship they should have with Jehovah in order to possess an earthly hope.

[The other sheep] have not received “the free gift of righteousness” with heavenly life in view “through the release by the ransom paid by Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:24; 5:15, 17) Nevertheless, they exercise deep faith in God and his provisions, and they manifest their faith by good works. One such work is that of “preaching the kingdom of God . . . and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 28:31) Thus, Jehovah can view these as righteous in the sense that he did Abraham. The gift such ones receive—friendship with God—differs from “the free gift” the anointed receive. Yet, it certainly is a gift that they accept with deep gratitude.⁸

It is by the faithful demonstration of good works that the other sheep may secure a friendship with God, which results in their eternal earthly reward.

The present day Witnesses who are members of the other sheep are not without responsibilities in Jehovah’s arrangement. While unable to serve as the FDS, members of the other sheep are able to serve alongside some their anointed companions. The Society encourages members of the other sheep to support the work of the anointed in three ways. The first method of support is by “wholeheartedly sharing in the preaching work.”⁹ The remnant cannot reach the world with Jehovah’s truth without the aid of their companions among the other sheep. As members of the other sheep engage in proclaiming the truth, they help the anointed fulfill the commission entrusted to them by Christ.

Another way those with an earthly hope can assist the 144,000 is by “financially supporting the preaching work.”¹⁰ Witnesses can prove their friendship with Jehovah and his anointed by using their material assets to promote kingdom interests. Whether it is by helping fund the construction of new Kingdom Halls or by simply contributing money toward the

⁸“God Recommends His Love to Us,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (June 2011): 15.

⁹“You Are My Friends,” *The Watchtower Study Edition* (October 2009): 16-17.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

global preaching work, these financial gifts from the other sheep aid their anointed brethren in fulfilling their commission.

A third method the other sheep can illustrate their support of Jehovah's anointed is by "cooperating with the instruction provided by congregation elders."¹¹ As Christ uses these elders to instruct, Witnesses should submit to their authority as they would submit to Christ's direction. Faithfully following the leadership appointed by the FDS illustrates a true friendship with Jehovah. In fact, qualified men from among the great crowd have the opportunity to serve as congregational elders and as ministerial servants. As elders, some members of the great crowd have the authority to exercise a stewardship over Witnesses that Jehovah has entrusted to the FDS.¹² However, the most important task entrusted to the great crowd as well as to all Witnesses will always be the proclamation of Jehovah's kingdom truth.

It is among this class of Witnesses that the Society will find their solution to their pending crisis. The great crowd could become the organization's great solution. Former members of the other sheep have already aided Jehovah in maintaining the integrity of the 144,000. As seen in the last chapter, many from among the great crowd have become replacements for some of the anointed that have become unfaithful to Jehovah.¹³ This replacement "ministry" of the great crowd could provide a living membership of the anointed for an indefinite period. However, the premise of the replacement principle rests in unfaithfulness. An anointed Witness must become unrepentant of his or her sin in order to

¹¹Ibid.

¹²"Counted Worthy to Be Guided to Fountains of Waters of Life," *The Watchtower Study Edition* (January 2008), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

¹³"Counted Worthy to Receive a Kingdom," *The Watchtower Study Edition* (January 2008), *Watchtower Library* [CD-ROM] (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2011).

need a replacement. Embracing this principle as the solution for the future of the movement is flawed. How could Jehovah use an organization that continued to anticipate unfaithfulness in order to survive? In order to accomplish the necessary adjustments needed to counter the pending disappearance of the 144,000, more would be required of the great crowd.

Likely introduced as brighter light, a refinement in the membership of the great crowd could be on the horizon. As noted above, there are essentially three types of individuals among the other sheep. Of these three types, only one of them could exercise faith in the ransom work of Christ before Armageddon. This trait belongs to the Witnesses that would die before the return of Christ. From among the other sheep, they alone would have the opportunity to demonstrate their faithfulness, whereas, the other types could do so only after their earthly resurrection. Therefore, the Society could reveal that all Jehovah's Witnesses between the ascension and Christ's earthly return belong to the little flock.

If a refinement in the great crowd's membership occurred, the identity of Jehovah's anointed would broaden. While acknowledging the past teachings on the 144,000, the FDS could direct followers to Jehovah's prerogative to provide leadership until the fulfillment of his kingdom arrangements. With such a vast membership to the little flock, the Society would not lack for candidates for the FDS. The future presence of leadership for the organization would be certain. Jehovah's followers would not be without his channel of instruction.

Since all Jehovah's Witnesses are domestics, this refinement would enhance their commonality. Before this possible shift, only the 144,000 faithful anticipated a heavenly reward. However, the individuals with the prospect of an eternity in heaven could grow exponentially under this potential new light. Those with an earthly hope would now be Jehovah's friends before the first advent of Christ and those enemies of Jehovah that he graciously resurrects.

Such a proclamation would produce a response among the Society's followers. It is unlikely that this potential refinement would cause much discord among the Witnesses. Those who were once anticipating an earthly reward would now have the prospect of an eternity in heaven. This news would produce celebration not disillusionment. One can imagine the applause and shouts of acclamation among the publishers if the Society chose to announce this adjusted teaching at a convention gathering.

With this potential addition to the heavenly membership, the Society would also solve the second crisis facing the 144,000. As noted earlier, the swell in living membership over the past several years could force the organization to refine its teachings as well. However, an inclusion of the Witnesses between the advents would provide a wealth of followers from which the anointed class could emerge. Therefore, a steady increase in the Memorial numbers would not be surprising or problematic under these new understandings.

A Problematic Number

One glaring problem exists with this potential broadening of the little flock. What will the Society do with the number 144,000? This dissertation has mentioned numerous times that the Society interprets the 144,000 in Revelation 7 and 14 as a literal symbolic number. While the closing date for selection of the anointed is no longer fixed, the membership number has remained constant. Under this new potential teaching, the Watchtower organization could no longer interpret the 144,000 as a literal number. Since the current membership of the Society is nearly 8 million active publishers,¹⁴ an inclusion of just the living Witnesses would increase the number of those with a heavenly hope by about 5456 %. It would be difficult for the FDS to explain this exponential change.

¹⁴2014-Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2013), 176.

Forsaking the literal interpretation of the 144,000 would recast over a century of organizational teachings. In the infancy of the movement, Russell proclaimed the significance of this literal number¹⁵ and Rutherford continued to labor on the founder's theological construct throughout his tenure as the president.¹⁶ Therefore, a new light that undercuts this foundational teaching would certainly bring the validity of the entire movement into question. While Witnesses may rejoice at the announcement of this heavenly expansion, the truth of the matter is that such realignment would highlight the unstable nature of their organization.

Certainly, the above paragraphs contain a great deal of conjecture, but the proposed solution is essentially the only option available to the Society in the face of their pending dilemmas. The Watchtower organization has to expand the membership of the anointed in order to survive and the Witnesses currently with an earthly hope are their sole solution. Whether the FDS introduces new teachings like the previously proposed or not, they have realized that their possible solutions rests among the other sheep. In the past, the FDS has employed smaller inclusions of the earthly class in attempts to answer the discrepancies in the anointed membership. As noted earlier, the replacement approach proves to be inadequate because of the unfaithfulness necessary to make the theory plausible. This proposal also fails because it requires postmortem apostasy among the anointed in order to be an adequate explanation. Directing followers to Jehovah's prerogative as an explanation for the current swell in the living anointed membership proves to be a deficient solution as well. The Society cannot simply hide behind Jehovah's will as the increase in the 144,000 continues to challenge their foundational teachings. Therefore, an adequate response requires

¹⁵Charles T. Russell, *The New Creation* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1904), 93-94.

¹⁶Joseph F. Rutherford, *Let God Be True* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1946), 136.

an abandonment of the literal understanding of the anointed number. However, that forsaking would further reveal the flawed nature of Society and its FDS.

With over a century of organizational refinements and another significant change pending, it becomes clear that the Watchtower Society cannot be Jehovah's channel of communication for his people. While the "truth" of the Jehovah's Witnesses has certainly changed over the years, the God they claim to represent does not change. James 1:17-18 reveals that the heavenly Father does not change like "the shifting shadows." How can an organization that claims to be God's voice of truth be like "the shifting shadows" when it comes to their foundational teachings? The true light of revelation drives back the shadows of the Society to reveal that the FDS cannot be Jehovah's representative. God wants his followers to be people of truth (Ps 48:11), not people of uncertainty.

Conflict with the Slave

As the veracity of the movement continues to come into question, it becomes ever clearer that the Society and its followers stand outside of the Christian faith. This truth finds collaborating evidence in the message the FDS proclaims. Chapter 3 of this dissertation highlights many of the tenets of the organization's theological construct. Among those Watchtower doctrines, conflicts emerged with biblical theology. While an investigation into each of these aberrations could warrant a dissertation of its own, this work only examines two of the Witnesses' soteriological doctrines. This section contrasts the Society's teachings about Christ and personal salvation with evangelical theology.

Michael or Jesus?

The biblical understanding of salvation is anchored in the identity of Christ. It is only through Jesus Christ that man finds salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). He is the cornerstone of the Christian faith (Acts 4:11; Eph 2:20). Christ alone embodies the fullness of

God's truth and he is man's only hope for reconciliation with God (Heb 1:1-2; Col 1:19).

One's perspective on the identity and the work of Christ must align with biblical truth in order for an individual to possess salvific knowledge.

As seen in chapter 3, the Society's presentation of Christ stands in contrast to the evangelical perspective on the Savior. The FDS teaches that Jesus Christ is the son of Jehovah. He is unique for he has no rival in all of creation, both the seen and unseen.

Since all created things had a beginning, there was a time when God was alone. Countless ages ago, however, God became a Creator. Who was his first creation? The last book of the Bible identifies Jesus as "the beginning of the creation by God." (Revelation 3:14) Jesus is "the firstborn of all creation." That is so "because by means of him all other things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible." (Colossians 1:15, 16) Yes, Jesus was the only one directly created by God himself. Therefore, he is called God's "only-begotten Son." (John 3:16) The firstborn Son also bears the title "the Word." (John 1:14) Why? Because before being born as a human, he served in heaven as one who spoke for God.¹⁷

As the first created spiritual being, Michael the archangel (Jesus Christ) creates all other things. This junior partner of creation had a beginning and had to earn the prospect of immortality.¹⁸ The Society's Christ is not equal with God and therefore not eternal.

According to the Watchtower organization, the work of the human Jesus Christ removed the results of Adam's sin, physical death and inherited sin. In his ransom sacrifice, Jesus gave up his perfect human life in order to buy back that which Adam lost for all humanity.

Unlike Adam, Jesus remained perfect. Indeed, "he committed no sin." (1 Pet. 2:22) Jesus thus had the potential for fathering a perfect human race. Instead, however, he allowed God's enemies to put him to death so that he could adopt Adam's sinful descendants and make it possible for those exercising faith in him to receive everlasting life. The Scriptures explain: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a corresponding ransom for all."—1 Tim. 2:5, 6.¹⁹

¹⁷"Who is Jesus Christ?" *The Watchtower* (September 15, 2005): 5.

¹⁸*The Truth Shall Make You Free* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1943), 44.

¹⁹"How the Ransom Saves Us," *The Watchtower Study Edition* (August 2010): 14.

When Christ gave up his perfection, he gained immortality and the role as man's mediator.

The nature of Jesus' miraculous resurrection is also a product of his sacrifice. The FDS teaches that since Christ ransomed his perfect humanity, he could not assume that sacrificed body again.

If a man pays a debt for a friend but then promptly takes back the payment, obviously the debt continues. Likewise, if, when he was resurrected, Jesus had taken back his human body of flesh and blood, which had been given in sacrifice to pay the ransom price, what effect would that have had on the provision he was making to relieve faithful persons of the debt of sin?

It is true that Jesus appeared in physical form to his disciples after his resurrection. But on certain occasions, why did they not at first recognize him? (Luke 24:15-32; John 20:14-16) On one occasion, for the benefit of Thomas, Jesus appeared with the physical evidence of nail prints in his hands and a spear wound in his side. But how was it possible on that occasion for him suddenly to appear in their midst even though the doors were locked? (John 20:26, 27) Jesus evidently materialized bodies on these occasions, as angels had done in the past when appearing to humans. Disposing of Jesus' physical body at the time of his resurrection presented no problem for God.²⁰

The Society's Christ did not have a bodily resurrection. He arose from dead in a spiritual form. Before his ascension, he materialized bodies that appeared to be recognizable to his disciples.

Just as the FDS teaches that Jesus returned from the dead in a spiritual form, they instruct their followers to be aware of the signs associated with his invisible spiritual return. As seen earlier, Witnesses believe Christ's presence as King in heaven began in 1914. However, he will return to the earth later to execute judgment against his enemies.

Before Jesus Christ ascended to heaven in 33 C.E., he promised to return. He likened himself to a nobleman who went away for a long time and returned with power to rule as king. The purpose of Jesus' return is to provide mankind with good government.

In what form does Christ return? He was resurrected as an invisible spirit person. (1 Peter 3:18) Then, he went to heaven and sat at God's right hand. (Psalm 110:1) Much later, Jesus was brought before Jehovah God, "the Ancient of Days," who granted Jesus power to rule over mankind. So, Jesus returns, not as a human, but as an invisible King.

²⁰"Jesus Christ," in *Reasoning from the Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2009), 217.

When Jesus arrives invisibly with his angels, he will judge mankind. He will destroy wicked people but grant everlasting life to those who accept him as King. Jesus' rule as King will transform the earth into a paradise. He will resurrect the dead so that they can enjoy life in that earthly Paradise.²¹

The Society's Christ has already begun to reign in heaven but he will return invisibly to the earth to judge the nations. Just as the clouds hid his materialized form at the ascension, the physical eye will not behold the triumphant king at his victorious return.

The Savior of the Watchtower organization was once an archangel, whom Jehovah created before all other things. At a particular point in human history, this archangel took upon human flesh and walked among mankind. He lived a perfect life just as the first created man, Adam, was created to do. Through his perfect humanity, he became a ransom for sinful humanity. No longer able to assume his ransomed body, the archangel arose from the dead and materialized in human bodies to encourage his disciples. Before he left the earth to return to his celestial home, he instructed his followers to be on the watch for his return. The FDS teaches that this archangel has begun his heavenly reign but will invisibly return to the earth to bring judgment to his terrestrial enemies.

The Bible reveals a different Savior. Jehovah did indeed create Michael the archangel, but he and Jesus Christ are not the same person. The biblical portrayal of Jesus is one of eternal deity. Just as God the Father exists for all eternity so does his Son (Ps 90:1-2; Eph 3:21). Christ, the second person of the Trinity, was with God in the beginning and he was God (John 1:1).

Certainly, the Witnesses protest such an understanding of Christ. Basing their beliefs on the Scriptures and the FDS's most recent teachings, members of the Society deny

²¹"Bible Questions Answered," *The Watchtower* (December 2013): 16.

the power of passages like John 1:1 with some interesting translation techniques.²² From their “scriptural” standpoint, the FDS directs followers to passages like Colossians 1:15²³ to discredit the evangelical understanding of Christ’s deity. Like their heretical grandfathers, the Arians, before them, the Witnesses use the apostle Paul’s designation of Christ as “the firstborn of all creation” as evidence of his created nature. However, the title of “firstborn” does not carry a temporal significance but one of preeminence. Christ is first in rank above all things, for he is the creator of all things.²⁴ He is not the creator of all “other” things as the Witnesses teach, but he is the creator of all things. The Christ of the Bible is the eternal creator God.

The effects of Adam’s transgression have tainted all of humanity. Only one individual has walked on the earth that has not suffered from the sickness of sin. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life. Tempted like all humanity, he knew no sin (Heb 4:15). Just as death came through Adam’s sin, life came through Christ’s righteousness (Rom 5:15-19). Jesus’ divinity and his perfect obedience made him the only adequate sacrifice to satisfy the wrath of God that rested on all humanity. His death was “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The price was paid and man can now have redemption.²⁵ This substitutionary sacrifice did more than remove the stain of original sin. From the evangelical perspective, the sacrifice of Christ

²² “*The New World Translation* renders this text: ‘In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.’ True, there is no indefinite article (corresponding to ‘a’ or ‘an’) in the original Greek text. But this does not mean one should not be used in translation, for *Koine*, or common Greek, *had no indefinite article*. Hence, throughout the Christian Greek Scriptures, translators are obliged to use the indefinite article or not according to their understanding of the meaning of the text. All English translations of those Scriptures do contain the indefinite article hundreds of times; yet most do not use it at John 1:1. Nevertheless, its use in the rendering of this text has sound basis.” “Jesus Christ,” in *Insight on the Scriptures*, (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), 2:54.

²³ “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15 NWT).

²⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 714.

²⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 580.

removes the effects of guilt and condemnation for those whom believe. By his perfect blood, Jesus secured reconciliation with God for the faithful (Rom 5:10-11). The Christ of the Bible gave his life as a sufficient sacrifice for the salvation of all who believe.

The work of Christ did not end with his death. His physical death preceded his physical resurrection. The body, which Jesus voluntarily sacrificed for the sins of many, returned to life as evidence of his deity. His resurrected body was both physical and special in nature. He returned from the dead as the “firstfruits” of those who will later experience the blessing of resurrection (1 Cor 15:20). In this resurrected body, he bore the marks of his sacrificial work. Wayne Grudem notes, “By raising Christ from the dead, God the Father was in effect saying that he approved of Christ’s work of suffering and dying for our sins, that his work was completed, and that Christ no longer need stay dead.”²⁶ God raised Jesus for our justification (Rom 4:25). The Christ of the Bible physically arose from the dead in order to reveal the prospect of humanity’s full justification before God.

Just as Christ appeared to his followers in his resurrected body, he will return in the same manner. Jesus promised his disciples that at his return his appearance in the sky will produce mourning among all the nations (Matt 24:30). At his ascension, angels appeared and told his disciples that he would return in the same manner in which he left them – visibly in the sky (Acts 1:11). The descriptions of Christ’s return in the Bible make it clear that he will come again in a “quite conspicuous” manner.²⁷ The Christ of the Bible shall return in an undeniable manner for his visible reappearance will bring hope to some and judgment to many.

The Society’s Christ and the Christ of the Bible are not the same individual. One is a creation and the true Christ is the Creator. One gave his life so his followers could earn

²⁶Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 615.

²⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1196.

their salvation whereas the true Christ gave his life for the salvation of his followers. The world will not know when one returns; however, the true Christ's return will be inescapable. Only the true Christ brings reconciliation with God. Who can benefit from the work of the true Christ?

Born Again?

The Bible reveals that in order for someone to spend eternity in heaven, he or she must be "born again" (John 3:3). God causes the faithful to be born again to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3). This second birth produces an "imperishable" nature that believers will assume for eternity (1 Pet 1:23). Those who experience this spiritual rebirth, or regeneration, will spend eternity with God in heaven.

As stated in chapter 3, the FDS teaches that only those born again have a heavenly hope. However, they also proclaim that another eternal hope exists – an earthly hope. Those with the heavenly hope play a special role in Jehovah's eternal kingdom.

Many believe that one needs to be born again to receive eternal salvation. Note, though, what Jesus himself said about the purpose of the new birth. He stated: "Unless anyone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) Thus, one needs to be born again in order to enter into God's Kingdom, not in order to receive salvation. 'But,' some may say, 'are not these two expressions—entering the Kingdom and receiving salvation—referring to the same reward?' No, they are not.

What, then, did Jesus mean when he stated that one must be born again to "enter into the kingdom of God"? He meant that one needs to be born again in order to become a ruler with Christ in heaven. Simply put, the purpose of the new birth is to prepare a limited group of humans for heavenly rulership.²⁸

The blessing of the new birth belongs only to the 144,000. The other sheep will not be born again because they cannot experience heaven. Heaven is for the anointed class alone.

The Bible reveals a different understanding of regeneration. The regenerate will spend eternity in God's presence. As seen earlier, sin corrupts all humanity. Because of sin,

²⁸“The New Birth – What is Its Purpose?” *The Watchtower* (March 2009): 7-8.

man is spiritually dead in his sin (Eph 2:1). No one is righteous; no one seeks after God (Rom 3:10-11). Apart from a divine intervention, man cannot trust in Christ. Unregenerate man is unable to change his plight. He cannot perceive the truth of God.²⁹ Millard Erickson writes, “The necessity of the new birth is an indictment of all of us, for it points out that none of us is good enough in his or her natural state; we all need to undergo metamorphosis if we are to please God.”³⁰

No one can exercise faith in God apart from regeneration. Therefore, all who exercise faith in God are born again. The FDS teaches that those with an earthly hope must persevere in their faith in order to spend eternity in paradise on earth. However, they cannot exercise faith without being born again. Those who are genuinely born again will spend eternity in heaven with God.

The Society’s teachings on Christ and the new birth stand in opposition to the biblical teachings on these matters. Trusting in the Watchtower’s message cannot bring salvation to man. Those who have placed themselves under the direction of the Society’s FDS need to know the truth. The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ reliance on FDS lays the apologetic groundwork for evangelism to the Witnesses.

Reaching the Witnesses

As Witnesses knock on each door, they believe they are proclaiming the truth of Jehovah. Every hour they spend at the Kingdom Hall, they believe they are preparing to become better communicators of the truth. For every page they turn in a Watchtower publication, they trust that the spiritual food provided to them is the truth. Unfortunately, the FDS has deceived its publishers. Witnesses stand outside the truth. However, they are not

²⁹Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 955.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 956.

enemies of the truth, but people that need to know the saving power of the truth of Christ.

Sharing with the Publishers

As the anointed class of Witnesses disappears and with it the FDS, the credibility of the Society continues to wane. It is that lack of organizational integrity that serves as the foundation for reaching Witnesses with the gospel of truth. From their “modified” prophecies to their refined teachings, the FDS has created a path for evangelicals to evangelize Watchtower publishers.

Ron Rhodes, president of Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries, encourages Christians to begin their conversations with Witnesses by addressing the credibility of the Watchtower organization.³¹ It is only after displacing a publisher’s trust in the Society that one can share with him or her about the true Christ. As long as they believe in the authority of the FDS, they will not listen to conflicting viewpoints. Rhodes encourages evangelicals to use “tactical” conversations to reach Witnesses.³² These conversations are essentially small talk about Watchtower doctrines that have a larger purpose. Within these tactical conversations, Christians should respectfully listen and ask questions that guide the conversation without offending the Witness.³³ When shown respect, publishers are more receptive to hear the presentation of others.

Daniel Rodriguez also notes that evangelists must first undermine the reliability of the Watchtower Society. “Before the individual can come to know Christ, he must first reject the authority of the Watchtower over his mind and life.”³⁴ In fact, Rodriguez encourages

³¹Ron Rhodes, *Conversations with Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2014), 38.

³²*Ibid.*, 8.

³³*Ibid.*, 25-38.

³⁴Daniel Rodriguez, *The Watchtower’s Coming Crisis* (Ontario, CA: Chick Publications, 2009), 50.

Christians to avoid using the Bible in their initial encounters with publishers.³⁵ Thanks to the FDS, Witnesses already possess their own interpretations of the Bible. Therefore, discussions on particular biblical passages will be unproductive. It is only after the publisher has forsaken the leadership of the Watchtower that the use of the Bible should enter the evangelistic discussion.³⁶

After a year's worth of discussions with a Witness, J. L. Moore encourages Christians to reach out to publishers with sensitivity. He suggests two principles that evangelicals should be mindful of as they seek to reach Jehovah's Witnesses. First, never view a publisher as "an evangelistic project."³⁷ Approach them as a friend that desperately needs to hear the truth. The other principle Moore provides is that Christians should not refer to former Jehovah's Witnesses in their comments.³⁸ Since the FDS instructs its followers to stay clear of apostates, references to such individuals will likely eliminate any future opportunities to share with the Witness.

Like this dissertation, the works of all three of the previously mentioned authors acknowledge the hold the FDS has over its followers. In order to reach the Witnesses, the authority of the Society must be discredited. The imminent disappearance of the 144,000 provides fodder for such an approach. However, discrediting the authority of the Society is no easy task. Simply highlighting the eventual disappearance of the anointed will not break the shackles of deception for the Witnesses. As noted earlier, theological realignment has become part of the organization's spiritual identity. It is imminent that the Society will provide an adjusted teaching on the matter of the 144,000, and for the most part Witness

³⁵Ibid., 52.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷J. L. Moore, *Conversations Worth Having: Insights from a Year's Worth of Discussions with a Jehovah's Witness* (Denver: Outskirts Press, 2014), 3.

³⁸Ibid., 84.

congregations worldwide will adopt this future teaching without hesitation. Therefore, can the Society's hold over its publishers be broken? Certainly so, or this dissertation would not exist.

In order to reach the Witnesses, two important elements must be acknowledged. First, seeking to reach anyone for Christ requires the work of the Holy Spirit. It is only by the intervention of the Spirit that a publisher's eyes can be opened to his or her need to trust Christ and to forsake the Society. While the bulk of this dissertation focuses on tangible data, the spiritual aspect of evangelism cannot be ignored. The second element that must be recognized is the existence of a "microsociety"³⁹ within the Watchtower organization. Witnesses associate with other Witnesses. As prescribed by the FDS, the Society's followers must be careful of those outside the organization. It is taught that association with those outside the fold could introduce dissenting thoughts or teachings. Therefore, becoming a part of a Witness' life can be challenging but it is worth the time and effort. As Moore notes, Christians must be intentional in their relationship-building with Witnesses.⁴⁰

It is within the bounds of authentic friendship that an outsider may sensitively begin to share the truth with a publisher. There are a few evangelistic strategies that should be considered once a Christian has gained a relational trust with a Witness. First, evangelists must speak the language of the Society. In order to communicate with publishers, Christians need to understand their perspective. The beginning of the dialogue needs to emerge from the Watchtower teachings. Initially, publishers will not place value on any teachings unless they come from their source of authority, the FDS. Taking the time to learn the Society's teaching

³⁹Heather Botting uses the term microsociety throughout her dissertation. The term illustrates the unique culture created by the Watchtower Society for its followers. Heather Denise Botting, "The Power of the Glory: The Symbolic Vision and Social Political Dynamic of Jehovah's Witnesses" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1982).

⁴⁰Moore, *Conversations Worth Having*, 3.

on certain matters earns the respect of Witnesses. It is within the joint examination of FDS' teachings that Christians can begin to highlight areas of concern with publishers. Instead of being roadblocks, these questionable issues can become topics for discussion among friends.

The second strategy also centers on acknowledging the Witnesses' perspective. Watchtower teachings are reason-based. If a particular doctrine cannot be reasonably explained, it is likely unsound. Witnesses reject the doctrine of the Trinity for this reason among others. The mystery of God in three persons defies human reason; therefore, it cannot be a sound doctrine. Certainly, evangelicals embrace a different theological approach. For Christians, reason and faith work together to produce a theological framework that humbly acknowledges the benevolence and the mystery of God. In order to engage Witnesses, evangelists need to begin with an information-based approach. It is within the discussion of Watchtower information and particular points of conflict that Christians can begin to share about the power associated with God's true information.

A Christian's personal testimony best illustrates the power of God's truth to Witnesses. This third strategy provides evangelists with a path to sharing the transformational side of the God's word. Once a relationship has been built with a Witness, a Christian has gained an audience with a publisher. While disagreement may be a possibility in doctrinal discussions, the Witness cannot disagree with the Christian's personal story. As a publisher listens to a Christian friend's journey of faith, his or her heart may begin to develop a desire to move from a reliance on the Society to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Taking the time to develop a relationship with a Jehovah's Witness will help establish a climate of receptivity. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christians should graciously share how the word of God and Watchtower teachings conflict. Because of the established trust, the sharing can move beyond these doctrinal discussions to conversations about the life-changing power of God's truth. As noted earlier, the spiritual nature of

evangelism cannot be ignored. Therefore, whether a Christian just had his first encounter with a Witness or he has spent weeks studying with the publisher, prayer should saturate all interactions.⁴¹ Prayer fosters a dependency on God and it is because of such reliance that an evangelist can possess sensitivity and wisdom while sharing with a Witness.

The Memorial Approach

As seen in this dissertation, several points of conflict exist between the Watchtower's teachings and evangelical Christianity. As Christians seek to build relationships and to share with Witnesses, any number of doctrinal discussions could arise but the credibility of the FDS must first be addressed. The findings of this dissertation can provide evangelists with an approach that focuses on the unreliable nature of the Society. The following paragraphs outline an approach that uses the imminent disappearance of the 144,000 and the perplexing Memorial numbers.

One of the "trademark" cultural distinctions between Jehovah's Witnesses and most evangelicals is the celebration of holidays. While there are certain benefits and detriments associated with particular holidays, those issues are not the focus here. However, what is important is that Witnesses only corporately acknowledge the uniqueness of one day, Nisan 14. As noted in earlier chapters, it is on this day every year that the Society observes the Memorial meal of Christ. Understanding the Witnesses' perception of holidays and the Memorial, Christians can open conversations with publishers by asking about the Society's teachings on holidays and about the significance of the Memorial.

Within discussions about the Memorial observance, evangelists can begin to ask questions that may direct Witnesses to reexamine some of the Watchtower's teachings. The

⁴¹While prayer is crucial to sharing the truth with Jehovah's Witnesses, Christians should not ask to pray with publishers. This request will likely be denied. Witnesses believe that Jehovah hears only members of the Society's prayers. The prayers of people that claim to serve Jehovah but do not embrace his truth or do not live according to his laws are repulsive to Jehovah. The Society based this belief on Proverbs 15:8.

question that needs to be asked is “Who can participate in the Memorial meal?” Of course, their answer will be that only the living remnant of the 144,000 anointed are able to partake of the emblems. At this point of the conversation, it is helpful to be familiar with some of the Memorial numbers and to create comparisons between the differences in the reported partakers. For example, in 2010 the Society reported 11,202 Memorial partakers⁴² but in 2013 the organization recorded 13,204.⁴³ Christians should highlight these differences. For this example, over a three year span there was an increase of over 2,000 partakers. Evangelists should note the increases and ask the question, “Why are the annual reported numbers of partakers increasing instead of decreasing?” Witnesses will likely respond to this question by espousing the replacement argument or appealing to Jehovah’s divine prerogative. However, as noted earlier, the replacement argument is faulty and Christians should graciously help their Witness friends understand its inadequacies. On the other hand, the prerogative argument creates more room for discussion.

After discussing the perplexing trend of the Memorial numbers, Christians should shift the focus of the conversation to Jehovah’s perceived prerogative. Again, knowledge of Watchtower teachings would prove to be beneficial at this point. The question should be asked “Since more people are becoming part of the 144,000, what changed – Jehovah’s will or the FDS’ teachings on the matter?” In response, publishers will certainly retreat to Proverbs 4:18 and note the FDS’ growing understanding of Jehovah’s will. It is this shifting perception of God’s will or truth that should be addressed with the Witnesses. Christians should try to help their publisher friends realize that the Society appears to be in state of constant revision. Whether it is the identity of the FDS or the open call of the 144,000, the

⁴²2011 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2011), 52.

⁴³2014 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2014), 176.

organization continues to modify its teachings. The question emerges, “How can an organization that claims to be Jehovah’s sole voice today, be so inconsistent in its teachings?” Most Witnesses will struggle to answer this question. Christians need to share that God is not a God of confusion (1 Cor 14:33) and he does not change like the Society’s teachings (James 1:17-18). It is at this point in the conversation, evangelists can begin to share how this unchanging God desires to have a personal relationship with man. Again, the power of a Christian’s testimony is crucial at this point.

As the anointed class vanishes or as the Society proclaims some new light in an attempt to answer this crisis, Christians need to be ready to build relationships with these “sheep” that are without a shepherd. Evangelicals must help the Witnesses escape the bondage of the Society to experience the embrace of Christ the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).

Conclusion

The history of the Watchtower Society reveals numerous theological adjustments. However, the organization remains committed to their belief that the faithful and discreet slave of Matthew 24 and Luke 12 exists within their membership. While their understanding of the slave’s identity may have changed over the years, Witnesses continue to believe that they possess the sole voice of Jehovah in these last days.

The authority of the Watchtower organization rests in its interpretation of Jesus’ parable of the faithful and discreet slave. Chapter 2 presents the Society’s perspective on this parable as well as those of evangelical scholars. The servant described in this parable most likely corresponds to Christian leaders in the church that share the responsibility of shepherding God’s people. Christ was not describing one particular servant that holds the sole responsibility of feeding Jehovah’s household. Despite the Watchtower’s interpretation of this parable, the Governing Body of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is not the faithful and discreet slave. Therefore, the Society does not possess the sole voice of Jehovah in these last

days.

Proclaimed as a theocratic organization, the Watchtower Society looks to the Governing Body for Jehovah's direction. Witnesses around the world willfully submit to the teaching of the FDS. The words printed on the pages of their publications become the truth. However, the truth of the Society does not bring freedom. The organization holds publishers captive with its aberrant theology. The organization that boasts of two hopes provides no hope to its followers.

The Society's false hope begins with their misunderstanding of the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14. Interpreting this redeemed group as a literal symbolic group, the FDS creates an organizational dilemma that further highlights the Society's unreliability. The number must be literal or symbolic but not both. If the 144,000 is a literal number, then the anointed class and the FDS face imminent disappearance. Such a disappearance would leave the Society without leadership and discredit the teachings of the FDS. If the number is symbolic, then all who believe have a heavenly hope and the Society's teachings on salvation are aberrant.

Jehovah's Witnesses cannot escape the approaching crisis. The Society's teaching on the 144,000 will force the organization to refine many of its foundational teachings. This refinement will further highlight the dishonest nature of the Watchtower Society. It is by helping publishers realize the falsehoods of their parent organization that Christians can begin to share the truth of Christ with them. Evangelicals must help Witnesses realize the inadequacies of the Society's Christ and lead them to embrace the sufficiency of the true Christ. May evangelicals be faithful stewards by making disciples from among the Witnesses!

APPENDIX 1

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ORGANIZATIONAL TIMELINE

- 1870 Charles Taze Russell and the “Allegheny” group began a systematic study of the Bible.
- 1875 Russell taught that Christ’s *Parousia* (2nd presence) began in 1874.
- 1876 Russell joined N.H. Barbour in the publication of *Herald of the Morning*.
- 1879 Russell broke with Barbour and published first issue of *Zion’s Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*.
- Russell began to be known as the “faithful and discreet slave” of Matthew 24:45.
- 1881 Zion’s Watch Tower Tract Society is organized.
- 1882 Russell rejected the doctrine of the Trinity.
- 1886 Russell published *The Divine Plan of the Ages* (the first volume of what is later called *Studies in Scriptures*).
- 1889 Headquarters of the Society established in Allegheny, Pennsylvania.
- 1909 Headquarters moved to Brooklyn, New York.
- 1914 The Society released the “Photo-Drama of Creation” film. Audiences in North America, Europe, and Australia viewed the production.
- “Times of the Gentiles” ended with the commencement of World War I.
- 1916 Russell died on October 31.
- 1917 Joseph F. Rutherford became the president of the Society on January 6. The book *The Finished Mystery* released.
- 1918 Rutherford and seven associates arrested for treason and began imprisonment. Brooklyn headquarters closed and operations are transferred back to Pennsylvania.
- 1919 Rutherford and Society officers released from prison.
- 1920 Watch Tower Society began its own printing operations in Brooklyn.

- 1925 Rutherford taught that in 1925 would mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other prophets of old to a state of human perfection.
- 1927 Rutherford began to portray the “faithful and discreet slave” as the Society instead of Russell.
- 1929 Rutherford taught that all governments of the world are under the control of Satan.
- 1930 Doctrine of the 1874 *Parousia* changed to 1914.
- 1931 The name Jehovah’s Witnesses adopted by resolution at a convention in Columbus, Ohio on July 26. New name based on Isaiah 43:10.
- 1933 Witnesses banned in Germany. Underwent intense persecution lasted until the end of World War II.
- 1934 The Society focus shifted to the vindication of Jehovah’s name.
- 1935 The “anointed” class of Witnesses are joined by “other sheep” with a earthly hope.
- 1936 The cross of Christendom proclaimed as pagan symbol and an item of idolatry.
- 1939 The Society renamed *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ’s Presence* to *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah’s Kingdom*.
- 1942 Rutherford died and Nathan H. Knorr became the third president of the Society.
- 1943 Watchtower Bible School of Gilead began. Theocratic Ministry School introduced for local congregations.
- 1946 *Awake* magazine began publication. Congregations organized into circuits.
- 1950 Society released *New World Translation of the Greek Scriptures*.
- 1957 The Society identified its organization as the “mother” of the faith as Jehovah is the father.
- 1961 Society released *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.
- 1966 Watchtower leadership taught that 1975 would be the end of man’s 6,000 years of existence.
- 1971 Society’s Governing Body enlarged.
- 1975 Governing Body reorganized. Work responsibilities assigned to six committees.
- 1977 Knorr died. Frederick Franz became the fourth president of the Society.
- 1979 Power shifted to the Governing Body and the authority of the president of the Society decreased.

- 1992 Milton Herschel succeeded Franz as the president of the Society.
- 2000 A distinction made between the Governing Body and the Watchtower Society. The Governing Body focused on spiritual matters whereas the Society and its entities addressed administrative matters.
- Herschel stepped down and Don A. Adams became president of the Society. Adams is not a member of the Governing Body.
- 2012 Society taught that the “faithful and discreet slave” is not the body of the anointed brethren but confined to the Governing Body.

APPENDIX 2

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to better understand a kingdom publisher's perception of the "faithful and discreet slave" of Jehovah's organization. This research is being conducted by Lucas Butler for the purposes of doctoral dissertation research. In this research, you will respond to several questions about your involvement in Jehovah's organization and share your understanding of the "faithful and discreet slave." Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Questionnaire:

1. How long have you been a member of Jehovah's Witnesses? (Please feel free to share any special events that led to your decision to become a member.
2. How long ago were you baptized? Please explain the personal significance of that day.
3. How often do you attend meetings at the Kingdom Hall?
☐ 8 or more meetings a month
☐ Less than 8 but more than 5 meetings a month
☐ Less than 5 but more than 2 meetings a month
☐ Fewer than 2 meetings a month
4. How often do you participate in field service?
☐ More than 100 hours a month
☐ More than 70 hours a month

- _____ More than 50 hours a month
- _____ More than 25 hours a month
- _____ More than 10 hours a month
- _____ Less than 10 hours a month

5. Please explain the significance of Watchtower publications in relation to Bible study.
6. Please explain your understanding of the identity of the faithful and discreet slave.
7. Please explain your understanding of the duties of the slave class.
8. What do you believe is your role in relation to the faithful and discreet slave?
9. Please explain the significance of Proverbs 4:18 in relation to the teachings of the slave class.
10. Do you believe a Witness with an “earthly hope” could ever become a member of the slave class? Please explain your response.
11. Do you believe there will ever be a day when a member of the slave class is not on the earth? Please explain your response.

If you have any questions or need clarity about questionnaire, please contact Lucas Butler at 615 218-2075 or lucas.n.butler@gmail.com.

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ABSTRACT

TRUSTING THE FAITHFUL AND DISCREET SLAVE: A CRITIQUE OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Lucas Nathaniel Butler, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014
Chair: Dr. Timothy K. Beougher

Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be the sole advocates for God's truth at this point in redemptive history. Basing this belief on their interpretation of Matthew 24:45-47 and Luke 12:42-45, the Watchtower Society proclaims that their organization is led by "the faithful and discreet slave" (FDS) of the end times. This FDS is the Governing Body of the Society, which has been charged with the responsibility of providing spiritual food for Jehovah's people. According to the Witnesses, to discount the message of the FDS is to ignore the voice of God.

History reveals that the identity and the message of the FDS have changed since the conception of the Watchtower organization. The movement's founder, Charles Taze Russell, was first known as the FDS of Matthew 24 but lost the title after his death when the new leader of the group shifted the identity away from an individualistic understanding to a corporate one. After proclaiming for the bulk of the organization's history that the 144,000 anointed Witnesses were the FDS, the Society recently changed their understanding of this end times' servant in 2012. Currently, the FDS is only the anointed Witness men that are serving on the Governing Body of the Society. This progressive shift in the organization's understanding of the FDS and the eventual disappearance of these anointed Witnesses

continues to necessitate theological realignments, which in turn lays the apologetic groundwork for evangelism to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

As redemptive history continues to unfold, the Watchtower Society will be forced to clarify or reinterpret many of their foundational teachings. Such reinvention further opens the apologetic door for evangelism among disillusioned Witnesses. When the Watchtower organization again searches to recast their leadership along with their message, authentic Christians must be ready and seeking to direct Witnesses to the unchanging message of the gospel.

VITA

Lucas Nathaniel Butler

EDUCATION

B.A., Union University, 1998

M.Div., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005

ACADEMIC

Adjunct Faculty, Shorter University, Rome, Georgia, 2010

MINISTERIAL

Associate Pastor, Community Baptist Church, Crosby, Texas, 1999-2002

Associate Pastor, Walker Memorial Baptist Church, Franklin, Tennessee, 2002-2008

Minister of Education, New Armuchee Baptist Church, Armuchee, Georgia, 2011-2012

Associate Pastor, New Armuchee Baptist Church, Armuchee, Georgia, 2014