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**A Comparative Analysis of the Doctrine of Bodily Resurrection in Jehovah's Witnesses
Versus Traditional Christianity**

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Abstract

The present thesis aims to provide a critical analysis of the immaterial resurrection proposed by the Governing Body of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and, in doing so, demonstrates the superiority of the orthodox Christian position on the bodily resurrection because of its consideration of key aspects such as Christology, the resurrection, gospel, and eschatology. The first chapter explains how the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society became a global religious organization. In chapter two, Jehovah's Witness documentation on the immaterial resurrection of Christ is presented, with occasional commentary on issues. Chapter three delves into the historical perspective of the bodily resurrection, building on the minimal facts approach developed by Gary Habermas. The argument demonstrates that the earliest eyewitnesses believed they encountered the risen Jesus in bodily form.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	3
Minimal Facts Approach.....	3
Polemical Approach.....	4
Limitations/Delimitations.....	4
Chapter 1- The Foundation of a New Religion.....	7
Foundation of Jehovah's Witnesses.....	7
An Examination of Jesus' Resurrection in Response to Jehovah's Witnesses Doctrine...	12
Moving Beyond the Trinity: Addressing Jehovah's Witness Doctrine View of the Resurrection.....	13
Understanding the Teachings of the Watchtower.....	15
Chapter 2 – The Redeemer, Archangel Michael.....	16
The Empty Tomb.....	19
Witnesses to the Resurrected Jesus.....	20
Conclusion.....	25
Chapter 3 – The Traditional View on the Bodily Resurrection.....	27
The Crucifixion.....	27
The Empty Tomb.....	31
Eyewitness Accounts of the Bodily Resurrected Jesus.....	38
Conclusion.....	50
The Immaterial Resurrection According to Jehovah’s Witnesses.....	50
Conclusion.....	56

Bibliography.....	58
Appendix 1: Is Heaven for All Mankind or a Select Few?.....	64
The Anointed Class.....	65
The Sheep Will Inherit Eternal Life.....	73
The Goats Who Fail to Inherit the Kingdom.....	77
The Righteous and the Unrighteous.....	80
Appendix 2: Responding to the Authority of the Governing Body.....	87

Introduction

The present thesis aims to provide a critical analysis of the immaterial resurrection proposed by the Governing Body of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and in doing so, demonstrates the superiority of the orthodox Christian position on the bodily resurrection, because of its consideration of key aspects such as Christology, the resurrection, gospel, and eschatology. The Governing Body's reliance on an appeal to authority and selective interpretation of biblical verses may suggest an emphasis on membership above the values of Christ. Through a rigorous examination of these topics, this thesis will establish a clear and cohesive argument that supports the traditional view of bodily resurrection, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse in this field of study.

In the upcoming chapter, we will delve into the methodology used for the research, explore its limitations, and lay the groundwork for our discussion of the foundation of the Jehovah's Witness religion. Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Bible Students, established the foundation for what would later become known as Jehovah's Witnesses. After taking a brief hiatus from Christianity, Russell began exploring the teachings of Adventist and Methodist preachers. In the late 1800s, Russell formed the Bible Students, an active and enthusiastic Bible study group. The primary purpose of the Bible Students was to conduct research and develop precise biblical interpretations while publishing study materials. The Bible Students' teachings have withstood the test of time and are still widely used today. Adjustments to the doctrines made by new Governing Bodies will be noted to demonstrate their authority under Christ as the invisible leader of the Governing Body.

Chapter 2 delves into the teachings of the Governing Body regarding the empty tomb and the accounts of eyewitnesses who saw the risen Jesus. The Bible Students created a classification system to help members comprehend how the Archangel Michael transformed into Jesus, assumed human form, and was granted divine status by Jehovah following the resurrection. Both the Governing Body and orthodox Christianity acknowledge that Christ was crucified, resurrected, and witnessed by many. However, they have different interpretations regarding the nature of the risen Jesus. This chapter will explore how the Governing Body defends their view of the resurrected Christ.

In Chapter 3, the orthodox Christian perspective on the bodily resurrection of Christ is examined by considering biblical verses and the historical-cultural view of resurrection from the perspective of pagan, Jewish, and Christian communities. The term *anastasis* is specifically reviewed to demonstrate how the Governing Body falls short in reconciling historical understanding with contemporary interpretation. The interpretation of the term *anastasis* holds immense significance in understanding how the eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection perceived his appearance. Jesus showcased the reality of his physical presence and emphasized ultimate triumph over death through personal touch and communal dining. Exploring the historical context and analyzing relevant sources is essential to gain a deeper understanding of this significant point in Christian history. The foundation of Christianity and the salvation of humankind were established through Jesus' ultimate victory over death.

Methodology

To compare Jehovah's Witness material, we will use a comprehensive approach by analyzing primary source materials provided by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, publications from current members who support Jehovah's Witnesses, and scholarly sources that either support or contradict their beliefs. Obtaining an accurate biblical depiction of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is crucial in challenging the idea of a non-physical resurrection and building a solid defense against the belief that only members of Jehovah's Witnesses will experience resurrection. The shared beliefs among Jehovah's Witnesses members will be compared to traditional Christian doctrine, demonstrating opposing worldviews.

This thesis will analyze the resurrection theme by identifying broad patterns and themes. Additionally, the author will compare phrases from Watchtower publications and Bible commentaries, including an interpretation of "the 144,000 faithful believers entering a period of final testing," regardless of their tribe of origin.¹ This analysis will reveal the differences between Jehovah's Witness and orthodox Christian beliefs on resurrection.

Minimal Facts Approach

This thesis aims to demonstrate the bodily resurrection of Jesus and will build upon the minimal fact approach developed by Gary Habermas. This approach considers two criteria for an event to be considered historical. Habermas notes, "they are well evidenced, and nearly every scholar accepts them."² The goal is to find common ground between the beliefs of Jehovah's

¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 160.

² Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 44.

Witnesses and orthodox Christians regarding the resurrection. The Bible is treated as a historical document. Where appropriate, a discussion will occur regarding the scholarly opinion of the New World Translations' validity, limiting my presuppositions in its creation.

Polemical Approach

A secondary approach will identify inconsistencies within the Watchtower and Bible Tract Societies' doctrine of the resurrection. The polemic approach is beneficial in debating views in communities forbidden to refer to documentation outside their religious organization. The Governing Body dictates the material available to Witnesses and warns that studying material through secular means disintegrates one's relationship with Jehovah. Witnesses believe that Jesus Christ leads the Governing Body and that the information it provides comes through divine instruction. Individuals exploring external material risk disfellowshipping if their views contradict the Governing Body's.

Limitations/Delimitations

This thesis focuses on Jesus's bodily resurrection and its implications in Christian doctrine compared to Jehovah's Witness theology. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is assumed, and this paper does not seek to argue the role of Jesus Christ within the Godhead. While Jehovah's Witnesses consider the Trinity pagan, we do not intend to dispute this belief.

Jehovah's Witnesses argue against the guarantee of salvation for all believers in Jesus during the resurrection.³ According to Jehovah's Witnesses, only members within their

³ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 1, 6 vols. (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2004). 150. This is further developed in Appendix 1.

organization can achieve salvation. According to the beliefs of the JW community, it is crucial to comprehend God and Jesus Christ, abide by God's Law, allocate time to discipleship, and maintain allegiance to the community. While this reasoning suggests that Jehovah's Witnesses are members of a Christian cult, this author does not intend to prove Jehovah's Witnesses are cult members. This document recognizes that members failing to abide by the authority of the Watchtower Society risk disfellowshipping.⁴ The Governing Body considers ex-communication, or disfellowshipped, a method of removing the wicked from the Witnesses community (1 Cor. 5:13). Disfellowshipping offenses include "sexual offenses, stealing, lying, dishonest business practices, rebellion against Jehovah's organization, slandering, drunkenness, apostasy, teaching false doctrine and other wrongs."⁵ Jehovah's Witnesses are forbidden to contact those ex-communicated, even if they are family members. Disfellowshipping serves the purpose of holding individuals accountable for their mistakes, requiring them to take responsibility, and showing an unwavering commitment to following the teachings of the Governing Body in the future. Disfellowship and ostracizing members that voluntarily leave the Watchtower community is consistent with cultlike behavior. In addition, the role of Jesus as the head of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society or members of the governing body as a source of authority will not be debated. Jesus and the governing body have ultimate authority over members and the New World Translation Bible interpretation.

⁴ Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Innaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow So Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 43, no. 2 (1997): 161–74. 136.

⁵ "What Disfellowshipping Means — Watchtower Online Library," 411, accessed February 26, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1963486?q=disfellowshipped&p=par>. It is noted that the Watchtower Society has multiple spelling options for disfellowshipping including disfellowshipping, disfellowshipping, disfellowshipped, and disfellowshipped depending on the article reviewed.

James Penton, professor of emeritus of history at the University of Lethbridge, was disfellowshipped from the Jehovah's Witness community for challenging teachings by the Watch Tower Society. However, Penton's experience as a former elder within the organization and research experience deem him an excellent resource for the workings of the Jehovah's Witness community. This text compares Penton's views and the current publications of The Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society.

Greg Stafford, a former Jehovah's Witness and founder of the Christian Witness of Jah has also been disfellowshipped by the Governing Body. Stafford has a reputation for defending the Jehovah's Witness community. While his new organization veers from traditional Watchtower beliefs, his writings present relevant material about the resurrection. This paper will not review the differences between the Governing Body and the Christian Witness of Jah community.

Chapter One: The Foundation of a New Christian Religion

The Jehovah's Witnesses began as a small Bible study group organized by Charles Taze Russell in the 1870s. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses website, there are currently 8,686,980 Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide, an increase from the four million documented in a 1995 census.⁶ According to the Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society, the consensus is determined based on the preaching activity reported to local congregations. This number does not include individuals who self-identify in government consensus, nor does it consider the 19,721,672 people who attend the annual Memorial of Christ's death.⁷ The following segment will explore the emergence of a new religion that originated from a small group of people who claimed to be scholars of the Bible, but eventually grew into a global religious institution.

Foundation of Jehovah's Witness

The Birth of a New "Christian" Religion

Charles Taze Russell Was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in 1852 and raised by profoundly religious parents involved in the Presbyterian church.⁸ Throughout his teenage years, Russell struggled with the Calvinistic beliefs in his church, most notably the doctrine of eternal punishment or hellfire, which would cause him to question his faith. In 1869 Russell witnessed

⁶ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "How Many Jehovah's Witnesses Are There Worldwide?," *How Many Jehovah's Witnesses Are There Worldwide?*, 2022, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/how-many-jw>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ James M. Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses, Third Edition* (University of Toronto Press, 2015).

the preaching of Jonas Wendell, an Advent Christian minister whom Russell would credit with restoring his faith in the Bible.⁹ In the 1870s, Russell developed an offshoot of Adventists, later known as the Bible Students, an assembly that systematically analyzed Scripture.¹⁰ Although Russell neglected to join the Adventist church, the future teachings of the society would reflect Adventist teachings. Robert Bowman highlights parallels between Jehovah's Witnesses and Adventist teachings, including the denial of eternal punishment, the grave being referred to as *hell* in the Bible, the annihilation of the soul when the body dies, and the belief that the Bible does not teach eternal punishment.¹¹ The Watchtower has incorporated the principles of the Adventist faith into the Witness doctrine, although it has made certain modifications to its ideology.

Russell's interpretation of the Scripture also appears to have been influenced by George Storrs, a Methodist who preached that the dead are unconscious or asleep until the resurrection, and those who did not know Christ would have a chance to learn of his sacrifice during the earthly resurrection.¹² The interim state between death and resurrection has sparked countless debates and disagreements within the Christian community. The Catholic Church offers purgatory, an idea denied by Protestants. Luther taught of the sleep of the dead, while others, such as Calvin, depicted the righteous dead resting in bliss before the resurrection. Russell believed that the rapture would occur before the destruction of world governments and Christ's

⁹ Penton.15.

¹⁰ Zoe Knox, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Secular World: From the 1870's to the Present (Histories of the Sacred and Secular, 1700-2000)* (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

¹¹ Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991).

¹² Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed*.16-17.

return would be invisible. Russell's view aligns with the Aubrey Park conferences from 1826 to 1830.¹³

Russell and the Bible Students systematically analyzed the Bible, Christian doctrine, books, and newspapers and published what they learned in what is now named *The Watchtower*. This publication was one of the avenues Russell used to promote his self-proclaimed accurate and trustworthy interpretation of the Bible; he controlled the published content. Russell also wrote *Studies in the Scriptures* during his tenure, volumes one through six. Following Russell's death in 1916, the final volume, a commentary on Revelation, *The Song of Solomon, and Ezekiel*, would be written by the Executive Committee of the Society Associates members Clayton J. Woodworth and George H. Fisher.¹⁴ The publications are still used today and referenced in Watchtower instruction.

After Russell passed in 1916, Joseph Franklin Rutherford, a Missouri lawyer who studied with the Bible Students, was elected president. He began making significant changes, including renaming followers Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931 and creating a disciplined organization involving door-to-door discipleship and the creation of pamphlets and periodicals currently in use today.¹⁵ Door-to-door discipleship is a factor in the rapidly expanding Jehovah's Witness community. To this day, members are highly encouraged to engage in door-to-door

¹³ Ibid, 25. It is also noted that Russell's directly quoted Dr. Joseph A. Seiss's *The Day of the Lord* in 1879's *A Supplement of Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence*.

¹⁴ "A Time of Testing (1914-1918) — Watchtower Online Library," accessed February 5, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101993007#h=69:0-73:899>. Due to the authoritative nature of the Watchtower, Jehovah's Witnesses are not permitted to seek materials outside of Watchtower publishing's. Many of the citations in Chapters 2 and 3 are taken from the Online Library in the attempt to research in a manner consistent with church practice.

¹⁵ Zoe Knox, "Writing Witness History: The Historiography of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania," *The Journal of Religious History* 35, no. 2 (2011), 163.

discipleship; individuals who serve as lay clergy and dedicate significant time to discipleship are granted the designation of Pioneer. Door-to-door discipleship plays a substantial role in admittance to the Great Crowd or righteous community that will live in Paradise on Earth.

In 1950, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society released the first part of the New World Translation Bible based on what committee members deemed a reliable, faithful, and literal translation of the original biblical text.¹⁶ The Watchtower Society asserts that their teachings are the only accurate way to understand the Bible. Members cannot seek education from sources other than the Watchtower materials. James Beckford clarified: "the major premise [is] that since Jesus Christ was working at the head of the Society through the medium of its earthly leaders, it would therefore be blasphemous to disagree with their directives."¹⁷ If one were to ask Jehovah's Witnesses who the founder of their religion is, the answer would be Jesus Christ.

Armageddon and the Resurrection

A central theme in the doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses relates to the "Divine Plan of Salvation" with an emphasis on the timing and events surrounding Armageddon, the final battle fought between good and evil described in Revelation 16:16. Russell had established 1914 as the date of Armageddon. When World War I broke out that year, Bible Students understandably saw this as a sign of Armageddon. When the end did not arrive, Russell postponed Armageddon to 1918 but died before that.¹⁸ Joseph Rutherford adjusted Russell's chronology, noting that 1914

¹⁶ Paul M. Gould, Travis Dickinson, and R. Keith Loftin, *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018). 187-188.

¹⁷ Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Innaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow So Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 43, no. 2 (1997): 161-74.

¹⁸ Stark and Innaccone. 135.

was the beginning of the last days, marking Jesus' invisible presence and rule in heaven rather than the date of Armageddon. Rutherford and the Society set multiple dates for Armageddon, and after numerous failed attempts in prophesizing the correct date, including 1873, 1914, 1918, 1925, and 1975, members would modify the biblical interpretation of end times.¹⁹ The Watchtower resolved incorrect prophecy by claiming further study led to the realization of misinterpretation of the Bible, notably the misinterpretation resulting from using the King James Bible.

According to the Watchtower, there will be two distinct groups where humans will experience resurrection. According to belief, 144,000 leaders known as the Anointed Class will rule with Jesus Christ in heaven. Meanwhile, those who live righteously will inherit Paradise on Earth. The *Other Sheep, or Great Crowd*, are Jehovah's Witnesses who have dedicated their life to Jehovah and Christ. A third group, *The Goats*, includes those that will perish not included in the Book of Life. The righteous and the unrighteous groups include those resurrected and allowed to learn about Jehovah and Christ from Jehovah's Witness congregation members. Individuals who choose to convert can reside in a divine location on earth, while those who opt not to convert will experience annihilation. According to the Watch Tower Society, the concept of eternal suffering in hell does not exist. Those who do not follow Jehovah, including the goats and the unrighteous, will face the same destiny as the Devil and his followers. According to the teachings of The Watchtower, those who oppose Jehovah face a specific outcome. However, it's important to note that this doesn't mean they'll suffer eternal punishment. They won't have the

¹⁹ Knox, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Secular World: From the 1870's to the Present (Histories of the Sacred and Secular, 1700-2000.*, 35.

chance to experience a perfect life on earth. The belief stems from the idea that hell and its inhabitants face annihilation after the final judgment.

An Examination of Jesus' Resurrection in Response to Jehovah's Witnesses Doctrine

This thesis aims to illustrate that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society's belief that Jesus' resurrection was immaterial is insufficient compared to the orthodox Christian doctrine on bodily resurrection. This is because the latter considers critical aspects such as Christology, the resurrection, the gospel, and eschatology. Jehovah's Witnesses are considered by most to have membership in the Christian community. The door-to-door discipleship, community service, and Christian nature of members would lead one to assume that Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian religion. On the surface, and in the hearts of many disciples, the Witness community strives to glorify Jehovah and maintain a righteous lifestyle.

When examining the doctrine of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, it becomes apparent that their beliefs differ from those of traditional Christianity. One significant difference is in the Trinity doctrine. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus, whom they consider the archangel Michael, was crucified and resurrected in an immaterial form to atone for humanity's sinful nature. In Orthodox Christian doctrine, Jesus Christ is believed to be the Son of God sent to be crucified and then physically resurrected. This act is considered to have allowed for the salvation of God's creation. Despite these differences, Jehovah's Witness and orthodox Christian beliefs share the belief in the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of humankind.

Moving Beyond the Trinity: Jehovah's Witnesses Interpretation of the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus is an essential component of Christian faith and practice. To be considered a Christian, one must adhere to Christian doctrine. Jehovah's Witnesses have replaced the resurrection with ideologies that separate it from the second coming of Christ while still adopting selected Christian doctrine. The Governing Body has presented materials aligning with orthodox Christianity, including the belief that Jesus was sent to earth in human form to preach, be crucified, and resurrected to atone for sin. The bodily resurrection of Christ is central to the gospel message. Jesus himself reassures believers that their lives are secured to the resurrection of Christ, saying, "because I live, you will live" (John 14:19, NWT). Additionally, Jesus promised his disciples that they would see him again after his death (John 16:16), and Paul taught that the resurrection was proof that a day had been determined when man would be judged (Acts 17:31).

Examining Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs about the resurrection is crucial, especially given their non-traditional views on the Trinity. Christians must engage in a discussion on their doctrines, in addition to their thoughts on the Trinity, to enlighten Jehovah's Witnesses on how the Watchtower's education system has misled them in their relationship with Jehovah and Jesus. The Watchtower's belief that Jesus is the archangel Michael prompts an examination of his resurrection. According to Witnesses, Daniel referred to a "great prince," while First Thessalonians states that Jesus will descend from heaven at the sound of "an archangel's voice and with God's trumpet. (Dan. 10:13,21; 1 Thess. 4:16)"²⁰ According to the Watchtower, Gabriel is the only other angel mentioned in the Bible and is not referred to as an archangel. According

²⁰ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Aid to Bible Understanding* (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971), 1152.

to Jehovah's Witnesses, Michael and Jesus are believed to be the same entity, as per the Bible verses Revelation 12:7-12 and Revelation 19:11-16. Michael is said to have led the war against Satan to cast him out of heaven, while Jesus is depicted as leading the armies of heaven in the war against the world.²¹ According to their interpretation of the various angelic appearances in the Bible, they maintain that his resurrection took immaterial form. Disproving this view enables the apologist to build a strong case for separating Jehovah's Witnesses from traditional Christianity. Studying the continuity of Jesus's resurrection and humankind's resurrection demonstrates that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society's claim that only Jehovah's Witnesses can achieve salvation is false. John clearly states, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me. (John 14:6, KJV)"²²

By understanding the teachings of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, apologists can provide helpful guidance and assistance to current and former JW community members as they navigate their path of faith. Jehovah's Witnesses cannot refer to material outside Watchtower publications and JW.org for information. Sometimes, Watchtower publications only provide specific details, leaving out the full context and resulting in cherry-picked material, which can lead to a limited comprehension of the subject matter. This selective approach might result in a partial or prejudiced interpretation of the data presented. For discussions with existing

²¹ "Jesus Christ — Watchtower Online Library," 218. The article notes, "Is it not reasonable that Jesus would also be the one to take action against the one he described as 'ruler of this world,' Satan the Devil? (John 12:31) Daniel 12:1 (RS) associates the 'standing up of Michael' to act with authority with a 'time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.' That would certainly fit the experience of the nations when Christ as heavenly executioner takes action against them. So the evidence indicates that the Son of God was known as Michael before he came to earth and is known also by that name since his return to heaven where he resides as the glorified spirit Son of God."

²² "JOHN 14:6 KJV 'Jesus Saith unto Him, I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: No Man Cometh unto the Father, but by Me.,'" accessed February 5, 2023, <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/John-14-6/>. The KJV and New World Living Translation will be used in this thesis. Although Jehovah's Witnesses use the New World Translation, Watch Tower documentation also cites the KJV version of the Bible.

members, one must be capable of using the New World Translation Bible to demonstrate the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society is misinterpreting their translation.

Understanding the Teachings of the Watchtower

To effectively discuss Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs, thoroughly study the materials provided by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. By comparing these materials to the New World Translation, you can identify any inconsistencies in their teachings. Focusing on inconsistencies within their doctrine and teaching materials is essential rather than relying on external sources. To engage in a respectful conversation with this religious community, one must understand and acknowledge their guidelines and materials, as they do not permit referencing documentation outside their organization.

The Watchtower and Bible Tract and Society believe the resurrection of Jesus was immaterial and promotes the segregation of the 144,000 chosen Jehovah's Witnesses to rule with Jesus and those that will live in Paradise on Earth. It is essential to consider the biblical evidence regarding Jesus' resurrection. Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus' resurrection was immaterial and only a select few will reign with him in heaven. However, the evidence suggests that his resurrection was physical and accessible to all who believed in him. The bodily resurrection highlights the significance of Jesus as God in human form rather than merely being the archangel Michael.

Chapter Two: The Redeemer, Archangel Michael

Charles Taze Russell developed a classification system differentiating between spiritual and earthly beings. According to his beliefs, this classification can only change by the will of Jehovah. Russell divided beings into two categories: heavenly and divine. The former was classified as divine or angelic, while the latter were considered superior to earthly beings. Jehovah is considered the highest rank in the divine category. The earthly beings include humans, brute, fowl, and fish; spiritual beings were deemed superior to earthly ones, with the highest being divine.²³ According to Jehovah's will, Christ moved from the angelic realm to the divine nature at his resurrection. Witnesses do not believe in the Trinity; therefore, Jesus is below the rank of Jehovah as no other being is considered equal to the one true God. Russell taught that divine beings could only be spiritual in nature, leading to the conclusion that Jesus was raised in immaterial form. Jesus' spiritual, flesh and bone, and divine nature are significant to the nature of humanity during the tribulation. Jehovah's divine will to change humanity from flesh and bone to a spiritual nature is limited to the true Church selected during the Gospel age.²⁴

As reported by The Watchtower, Christ is the incarnation of Archangel Michael, the first of God's creations through which God made the other creatures. As God's first creation, Jesus is regarded as 'the Son of God' for "the first spirit person God made was like a firstborn son to him."²⁵ Mentioned sparingly in the Bible, Michael leads the waging war with the Devil and his

²³ Charles T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Divine Plan of the Ages*, 1 (Edison, N.J.: Bible Students Congregation of New Brunswick, 2004), 176.

²⁴ Russell, 173. The topic concerning the Great Crowd, Anointed, Goat, righteous, and unrighteous groups will be discussed in the following chapter.

²⁵ "Jehovah Gives Us a Savior," JW.ORG, 14, accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Enjoy-Life-on-Earth-Forever/Jehovah-Gives-Us-a-Savior/>.

demons. Revelation describes Jesus as the leader of an army of faithful angels returning to earth to execute judgment (Rev. 19:14-16). The Watchtower states, "the term 'archangel' occurs in the Bible only in the singular, never in the plural. Moreover, Jesus is linked with the office of Archangel."²⁶ The archangel classification is one of the supporting arguments Witnesses use to defend doctrine claiming Jesus is not a member of the traditional Christian Trinity. 1

Thessalonians states, "because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with the commanding call, with an archangel's voice, and with God's trumpet, and those who are dead in union with Christ will rise first. (1 Thess. 4:16, NWT)" Watchtower doctrine argues that Scripture fails to indicate two armies of faithful angels, one headed by Michael, and one led by Jesus; it is logical to conclude that Michael is Jesus in his heavenly role.²⁷ Jehovah's Witnesses deny Jesus as deity.

The Watchtower defines the body as "the physical structure of a human or an animal. The different kinds of bodies are composed of different kinds of flesh, together with the life force. (1 Cor. 15:39; Jas. 2:26; Gen. 7:22)"²⁸ Spiritual bodies are invisible to the human eyes and beyond the human senses. The person of Jesus, born through the virgin Mary, was born in a flesh and blood body and returned to his spiritual state in the eyes of Jehovah following his baptism by John in the Jordan River. The Watchtower states, "by his water baptism Jesus showed his submitting of himself to do God's will; and now God consecrated him by His Holy Spirit. By acknowledging him as his beloved son, God begot Jesus to be His spiritual son once more

²⁶ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2005), 218.

²⁷ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 219. It is not in the scope of this thesis to argue against the belief in Jesus's divine role in the Trinity or the distinction between Michael and Jesus. However, it is significant to include Witness beliefs to better understand classifications within the divine, spiritual, and human roles.

²⁸ "Body — Watchtower Online Library," 247, accessed March 12, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200010774>.

instead of a human son."²⁹ Jehovah now recognized Jesus as a spiritual being, anointed with the spirit, Jesus became the Messiah or Christ, granting Jesus Christ the office of King in God's Kingdom.³⁰ As the King of the heavenly realm, Jesus's role is to advance judgment on humanity during the tribulation and final battle at Armageddon. According to the Watchtower, "Jesus was resurrected with a spirit body, so he comes as a spirit creature, not in the flesh. (1 Cor. 15:45; 1 Pet. 3:18)"³¹ When Christ hung on the stake, he was resurrected as a divine, spiritual creature that could present himself to witnesses as a manifestation with the appearance of flesh and bone.

The Governing Body claims Jesus was raised as a mighty immortal spirit Son, "with all the power in heaven and earth under the Most High God."³² Jesus, following his resurrection, is now recognized as a member of the divine classification. As King, Jesus will govern the 144,000 spirit beings chosen to rule alongside him in heaven. According to Watchtower teachings, Jesus would be inferior to the angels if he had ascended to heaven with a human body post his resurrection. As previously noted, the spiritual realm is classified as a higher level than the realm of nature.

According to Russell, the flesh and bone resurrection has three main errors. Russell notes, "Firstly, it would prove that his resurrection body is not glorious or perfect, but scarred and disfigured. Secondly, it would prove that we do not know what a spirit body is, notwithstanding

²⁹ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Let God Be True (1946)*, 1946, 40, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.237318>.

³⁰ Watchtower Bible And Tract Society, 41.

³¹ "What Is the Coming of Christ?," JW.ORG, accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/jesus-coming/>.

³² Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Let God Be True (1946)*, 46.

the Apostle's statement to the contrary. Thirdly, it would prove that our redemption price was taken back; for Jesus said, 'my flesh I will give for the life of the world.'³³

Jesus' humanity, or perfect life as a man, was sacrificed for our redemption. Jesus must have undergone a spiritual resurrection to be deemed divine and superior to angels. The Watchtower states, "by his becoming a man, 'we see Jesus, who has made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death. (Heb. 2: 6-9)'"³⁴ In support of the immaterial resurrection, Witnesses quote the Jewish Witness Peter; "Being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. (1 Pet. 3:18, ASV)"³⁵ To clarify the immaterial resurrection of Christ, the Watchtower utilizes the empty tomb and eyewitness accounts of the risen Jesus.

The Empty Tomb

According to the Witnesses, Jesus did not take his human body to heaven to exist eternally as a man in heaven. The teachings of Russell speculate as to the nature of the empty tomb. Russell notes the body "did not decay or corrupt (Acts 2:27, 31)...whether it was dissolved into gases or whether it is still preserved somewhere as the grand memorial of God's love, of Christ's obedience, and of our redemption, no one knows- nor is such knowledge necessary."³⁶ A 1953 article, written by the Watchtower, states Jesus' body "was disposed of by Jehovah God,

³³ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time Is at Hand*, vol. II, II (Edison, N.J.: Bible Students Congregation of New Brunswick, 2007), 129. (John 6:51, NWT)

³⁴ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Let God Be True (1946)*, 44.

³⁵ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 43. Interestingly, the Watchtower claims their translation of the Bible is superior to all other translations, but they often quote from different translations in their literature. JW members are highly encouraged to read the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture referenced by the Watchtower is taken from New World Bible Translation Committee, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, Revised 1984 (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2006).

³⁶ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time Is at Hand*, II:129–30.

dissolved into the constituent elements or atoms."³⁷ The manner of Jesus's leaving the empty tomb is important to the classification system; The Watchtower, believing Jesus was raised in an immaterial body and given divine nature, must leave behind his physical body. Although slight variations exist between the writing of Witness founder Russel and the newer Watchtower article concerning the manner of Jesus' burial body, both sources identify Moses's burial as a parallel to the empty tomb of Christ, noting that God hid the body of Moses (Deut. 34:5). Watchtower teachings mention Moses's body returned to the dust by process of decay while Jesus was body either dissolved or disappeared; both stressing Jehovah's authority over the Devil preventing him from using either man's death for indecent, false religious purposes.³⁸ If Jesus was resurrected in his divine nature, how did he present himself to multiple witnesses?

Witnesses to the Resurrected Jesus

As stated in Watchtower literature, Jesus's words demonstrated he would not be resurrected in a flesh and blood body, noting Jesus would give his "flesh in behalf of the world's life. (John 6:51; Matt. 20:28)"³⁹ The Watchtower claims, "if he had taken back his flesh when he

³⁷ "The Fleshly Body of Jesus — Watchtower Online Library," 518, accessed March 11, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1953641?q=Jesus+dissolved&p=doc>.

³⁸ "The Fleshly Body of Jesus — Watchtower Online Library," 518. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time Is at Hand*, II:130. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever; and for a fact, the bread that I will give is my flesh in behalf of the life of the world. (John 6:51, NWT)

³⁹ "Jesus' Body—Was It Flesh or Spirit After His Resurrection? | Bible Questions," JW.ORG, accessed March 9, 2023, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/jesus-body/>. The Watchtower provides answers to commonly asked questions in online forums. Bible Questions was also a method of providing insight at the end of articles in the printed copies of *The Watchtower*. Literature provided on JW.org is often in single page form and lacks page numbers.

was resurrected, he would have canceled that ransom sacrifice."⁴⁰ Greg Strafford explains, "This view is consistent with the classification system identifying divine entities as superior to the angelic and human realms. The human body requires earthly elements, and a bodily resurrection suggests Jesus's exclusion from his appropriate habitation in the realm of spirits; an earthly presence violates God's laws."⁴¹ Jesus's status as King of the heavens is inconsistent with earthly elements.

Jehovah, Christ, and angels' spiritual bodies are too glorious for the human eyes to observe: only angels can view and endure the sight of Jehovah.⁴² According to Scripture, "At no time has anyone beheld God. (1 Cor. 15:44)" Following the resurrection, Jesus presented himself as a living being to multiple witnesses for the next forty days. One of the eyewitnesses, Saul, was temporarily blinded by a glimpse of the spiritual sighting of Jesus following the resurrection and required a miracle to restore his sight. The 1973 edition of *Awake* explains that Jesus witnessed a blinding, bright light "for the glorified Jesus is the 'exact representation' of the person of his Father and God."⁴³ Humans cannot see the glorified Jesus Christ because he now exists in divine nature. Earthly beings cannot see Jehovah's nature; therefore, they cannot see Jesus in his status in the divine classification. The immortal Christ "dwells in unapproachable light, whom not one of men has seen or can see (1 Tim. 6:16)."

For the other eyewitnesses, the manner Jesus was received parallels instances in Scripture, where angels appeared to humankind in human form. Abraham offered three angels,

⁴⁰ "Jesus' Body—Was It Flesh or Spirit After His Resurrection?" Watchtower literature, including the New World Translation, does not capitalize his' when referring to Jesus because they do not consider Jesus to be a member of the Trinity. Jehovah is considered to be the only God.

⁴¹ "The Fleshly Body of Jesus — Watchtower Online Library," 519.

⁴² "Body — Watchtower Online Library," 247.

⁴³ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "Christ Will Return- Will You See It?," *Awake*, July 22, 1973, 4.

appearing as men, bread and meat from a bull, and watched them eat (Gen. 18: 1-8). Lot, customary to his culture, provided food to two angels, believing they were traveling men, in Sodom (Gen. 19:1-3). Witnesses note that the angels in these instances could leave the physical realm because they were spirit creatures, analogous to how the angel in Judges appeared and left Manoah after the goat was sacrificed as a burnt offering (Jude 13:15-21). How does the Watchtower explain the eyewitness accounts of the resurrected Jesus?

Watchtower doctrine coincides with orthodox Christianity to the degree that numerous eyewitnesses observed the resurrected Jesus. The appearances of the resurrected Jesus occurred several times to multiple witnesses, eliminating the possibility of a mere illusion or a hoax. According to the Watchtower, Jesus assumed human form temporarily and appeared or disappeared at will. Russell notes Jesus returned as "a spirit being who could go and come as the wind, so that none could tell whence he came or whither he went, but who, for the purpose of instructing them, appeared as a man in various bodies of flesh and bones which he created and dissolved as occasion required."⁴⁴ The fleshly bodies that Jesus materialized in presented differently for each manifestation. The Watchtower claims, "even Jesus' close friends recognized him only by what he said or did (Luke 24:30,31,35; John 20:14-16,7)."⁴⁵ Although unrecognizable in his materialization, Jesus's actions illustrated his identity.

According to John 20:14-16, Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Jesus after encountering angels at the empty tomb. Initially, she mistook him for a gardener and asked about the location of the buried Messiah. But when Jesus called her by name, she recognized him.

⁴⁴ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time Is at Hand*, II:141.

⁴⁵ "Jesus' Body—Was It Flesh or Spirit After His Resurrection?"

The Watchtower's *Aid to Understanding* states, "Several times he manifested himself and was recognized, not by his appearance, but by his words and actions (Luke 24:15, 16, 30, 31, 36-45; Matt. 28:16-18)."⁴⁶ While the article fails to explain the verses, readers can click the online link to a complete *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures Study Edition*. When readers click the links provided, they will notice the familiar language used to describe eyewitness accounts of disappearing and reappearing. For example, when dining with the disciples, "their eyes were open...but then he disappeared from them (Luke 24: 30-31)." *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time is at Hand* notes on the way to Emmaus, Jesus was "recognized by his manners and actions, not by his facial features (John 20:14-16; Luke 24:13-32; Mark 16:12)."⁴⁷

When informed by the disciples they had seen the risen Christ, the disciple Thomas stated, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and stick my finger into the print of the nails and stick my hand into his side, I will never believe it (John 20:25)." In response to Thomas's doubt, Jesus materialized with wound marks so he would be recognized. Watchtower literature recognizes that many people believe Christ was flesh and bone because Thomas could put his hand into the hole in Christ's side. The Bible and Tract Society counters this argument by reiterating Christ was sent to "death in the flesh but being made alive in the spirit (1 Pet. 3:18)." Literature follows up by reminding Witnesses that flesh-and-blood bodies cannot exist in heaven; only spiritual bodies can live in heaven.⁴⁸ Stafford further explains, "the two clauses 'in the flesh' and 'in the spirit' are antithetical to one another. The words flesh and spirit are likely datives

⁴⁶ "Body — Watchtower Online Library," 247.

⁴⁷ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time Is at Hand*, II:519.

⁴⁸ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1982), 144.

indicating the mode of existence in which Jesus died (flesh) and the existence into which he was made alive (spirit)."⁴⁹

The Watchtower provides a reasonable suggestion for the immaterial body by noting Jesus' supernatural abilities. Later, when the disciples were together, Jesus again appeared in a room with locked doors (John 20:26-28), demonstrating his divine ability to materialize and dematerialize a body instantaneously. Watchtower's teaching asserts, "Scientists claim the ability to make material substance out of pure energy. How easy for the power of the resurrected Jesus, then, to materialize a body!"⁵⁰ Given his divine nature, Jesus could defy science.

The Watchtower has identified Luke 24:36-39 as a commonly misinterpreted scripture. Stafford writes, "there is plenty of evidence to show that Jesus was believed to have appeared in a variety of human forms, *real* human forms, real enough to eat with. But manifesting different forms while on earth does not necessarily mean those same forms Jesus took reflect the actual body he has in heaven today."⁵¹ According to Watchtower teaching, the verse refers to a "spiritualized fleshly body," but the correct interpretation, provided by the Watchtower, demonstrates the witnesses saw a vision or manifestation verified in Daniel 10:10-17: Daniel witnessed the manifestation of an angel, causing him to fall in fear.⁵² Daniel saw a spirit and was

⁴⁹ Greg G. Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics* (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 2009), 442.

⁵⁰ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time Is at Hand*, II:519.

⁵¹ Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 445.

⁵² Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time Is at Hand*, II:520. "While they were speaking of these things he himself stood in their midst and said to them: 'May you have peace.' But they were terrified, and because they became frightened they were imagining they beheld a spirit. So he said to them: 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts come up in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; feel me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones just as you behold that I have.'" (Luke 24:36-39, NWT). This relation is at odds with Jehovah Witness beliefs and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

frightened when the angel arrived to provide a vision about his future. God sent the angel to provide a message, much like Jehovah sent Jesus to declare the message of the resurrection.

Jesus notices fear because witnesses believe they are in the presence of a spirit; by physically touching Jesus, the witnesses could feel flesh and bone. The Watchtower also asserts that the flesh and blood resurrection argument is incorrect.⁵³ A deceased body, raised in immaterial form, would not contain blood. Witness literature notes, "it was easily evident to the senses of sight and touch that he had flesh and bones."⁵⁴ According to the Watchtower, flesh and bones does not signify a bodily resurrection.

Conclusion

In the work *Studies in the Scripture: The Divine Plan of the Ages*, Russell writes, "there have been only two, and only two, perfect men- Adam and Jesus... he (Adam) was an earthly image of a spiritual being, possessing qualities of the same kind, though differing widely in degree, range and scope."⁵⁵ Adam, created to live in Paradise on Earth for eternity, lost his eternal privilege when he brought sin into the garden by disobeying Jehovah. The Archangel Michael, willing to pay the penalty for the sins of Adam and his future progeny, was granted permission from Jehovah to take the form of flesh and bone on earth, living the perfect life, experiencing death by crucifixion, followed by his spiritual resurrection three days later. During his temporary manifestation on earth, multiple eyewitnesses recognized Jesus by his actions, not

⁵³ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, II:520. The Watchtower does not provide a source for the claim of a flesh and blood resurrection, citations are not available for review.

⁵⁴ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, II:520.

⁵⁵ Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Divine Plan of the Ages*, 174.

his physical appearance. According to the Watchtower, "Having given up his flesh for the life of the world, Christ could never take it again and become a man once more."⁵⁶

In Summary, Jesus' sacrifice allowed humankind an opportunity to be penciled into the Book of Life. Christ was reclassified as divine for his choice to become a physical sacrifice for humanity by taking on flesh and bone. The Watchtower declares that Christ returned invisibly in 1914 to lead the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. As the heavenly King, Christ will transform the earth into a paradise, resurrecting the dead so that they can enjoy eternal life in that earthy Paradise (Luke 23:42,43).⁵⁷ Jesus's purpose is to lead a particular group of believers during the time of judgment, called the tribulation, culminating in the war of Armageddon.

⁵⁶ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, 143.

⁵⁷ "The Return of Christ: What Happens? What Will Jesus Do? | Bible Questions Answered," JW.ORG, accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20131201/about-the-return-of-christ/>.

Chapter 3: Jesus' Resurrection: The Traditional Christian Interpretation

In this chapter, we will focus on the central belief of orthodox Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus. According to this belief, Jesus, considered the Son of God, was crucified, buried and then rose from the dead in bodily form after three days. We will also delve into the experiences of individuals who claim to have seen Jesus post-resurrection, which serves as evidence for his physical resurrection. Additionally, we will compare the orthodox Christian view with the immaterial interpretation of Jesus' resurrection as Jehovah's Witnesses' advocate.

The Crucifixion

Death by crucifixion, including a scourging prior, was a common technique of execution used during the Roman Empire. Crucifixion was a shameful fashion of death reserved for slaves, political dissidents, pirates, foreigners, and persons found guilty of sedition. The process would generally begin with scourging, a brutal method of torture that caused the death of some victims before they could be crucified. Performed using a whip interweaved with small iron balls or pieces of sheep bone, the intention of the scourging was to cut deep into the skin and weaken the victim.⁵⁸ Roman soldiers were expertly versed in execution and war tactics rendering them one of the most powerful armies in the world. Completed service in the Roman military concluded with soldiers becoming Roman citizens; the punishment for failing in military assignments was harsh; soldiers could be executed for abandoning their duty. Abandoning one's duty included failure to see the crucifixion through to death. The scourging weakened the accused and partially

⁵⁸ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 100.

guaranteed death. Licona writes, "Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Livy, Philo, and Josephus report of people being tortured with whips, fire, and all sorts of tortures before they were crucified."⁵⁹ The severity of the scourging depended on the inclination of the soldiers assigned to the task. Biblical testimony notes Roman soldiers scourged Jesus before crucifying him (John 19:1; Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15).

Multiple accounts of crucifixions throughout the Roman Empire and the embarrassing nature of Jesus' death support the historicity of biblical events described in the four Gospels. As a tax collector, Matthew was educated and a direct disciple of Jesus Christ. Matthew describes Jesus's thirst, the casting of Christ's clothes, and the mockery from those passing by the crucifixion (Matt. 27:32-56). Mark, transcribing the teaching of Peter, describes the wine, mixed with myrrh, the casting of lots, and the insults of those at the crucifixion (Mark 15:21-40). The physician Luke notes the wine vinegar, casting of lots, and insults hurled at Jesus as he died (Luke 23:26-43). John, the youngest of the disciples, describes the same events as the other disciples but in more detail (John 19:17-37). Habermas suggests, "In the real life of historical study, there is no magical truth-sensing scale, and one historian's evaluation often differs from another's."⁶⁰ Four independent witnesses have provided early testimony of the crucifixion, describing similar events with some discrepancies, increasing the credibility of the information.

Multiple non-Christian sources recognize the crucifixion of Jesus. In his book *Annals*, Tacitus writes, "Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut

⁵⁹ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 303.

⁶⁰ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 39.

one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed."⁶¹ Christians were persecuted and put to death during the reign of Nero.⁶² In his work, the *Annals*, Tacitus refers to Nero's expulsion of the Christians from Rome. Tacitus writes, "Nero created scapegoats and subjected to the most refined tortures those whom the common people called 'Christians,' hated for their abominable crimes. The author of this name, Christ, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate."⁶³ Josephus wrote, "Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross."⁶⁴ Both historians indicate Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate.

The trauma caused by the scourging would cause a significant amount of blood loss, clarifying Jesus collapsing, followed by the command from the Roman soldiers for Simon to carry the cross to Golgotha (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). Jesus was too weak to carry the weight of the wood, probably a physical reaction to hypovolemic shock. Dr. Alexander

⁶¹ "Tacitus: Annals: Book 15 [44]," accessed April 29, 2023, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/tac/a15040.htm>. The NT provides the most detailed account of Jesus's crucifixion in ancient history. Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona note a plethora of sources that attest to Jesus' death in ; Josephus refers to the crucifixion in *Antiquities* 18.3; Lucian of Samosata, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13; Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 43a. Modern scholars, including those highly critical of Christianity, also claim the crucifixion as factual. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 145, 154, 196, 201.; Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014), 96.

John Granger Cook, "Roman Crucifixions: From the Second Punic War to Constantine," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 104, no. 1 (2013): 1–32. Cook highlights numerous references to crucifixion, including slaves who were led to the cross between 217 B.C.E and 22 B.C.E. for crimes such as conspiracy and murder, Roman deserters between 208 to 4 B.C.E., those punished for piracy in 75 to 74 B.C.E., conspirators and prisoners between 30 B.C.E. to 4 B.C.E., and Jesus of Nazareth and the two brigands in 33 B.C.E. Due to the social role of those crucified, most individuals are not identified by name. Cook notes that "Beginning with the Second Punic war and ending with the final stages of the persecution of Maximin, only twenty names of crucified individuals appear to have survived in reliable sources, and some of those crucifixions are questionable." Cook notes that the longest surviving narrative of those crucified is that of Jesus Christ.

⁶² Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 49.

⁶³ Bock, 49. Additional accounts include but are limited to Pliny the Younger, Thallus and Peregrinus, Mara Bar Sarapion and Josephus. Pgs. 49-53.

⁶⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.3 63-64. trans. William Whiston, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999).

Metherell notes four physiological responses to hypovolemic shock: "First, the heart races to try to pump blood that isn't there; second, the blood pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse; third, the kidneys stop producing urine to maintain what volume is left; and fourth, the person becomes very thirsty as the body craves fluids to replace the lost blood volume."⁶⁵ The shock caused by the scourging would likely be exacerbated as Jesus continued to lose blood rendering him considerably weak before the crucifixion.

Once raised on the cross, Jesus would experience a shameful and excruciating demise. The process of asphyxiation with the individual's attempts at moving up and down to relieve pain triggered by the nails in his hands and feet. Habermas notes in the down position, "certain muscles would be in the inhale position, making it difficult to exhale."⁶⁶ Jesus is in shock from the scourging and experiencing asphyxiation, most likely leading to his death. The Roman soldiers recognized Jesus had perished when he no longer sought to relieve his pain and remained in a lowered position. Soldiers pierced his side, believing he had passed (John 19:34).

According to a modern medical hypothesis, Jesus most likely died from cardiac rupture, asphyxiation, and shock; death most likely occurred before the stab wound.⁶⁷ The release of water and blood from the spear wound indicates the pericardium was punctured; clear fluid builds up during cardiac arrest. These findings coincide with biblical descriptions of Jesus's final hours. Licona claims, "the authenticity of Jesus' expectation of his violent death and perhaps his

⁶⁵ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of The Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 212.

⁶⁶ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 101.

⁶⁷ Gary Habermas, Jonathan Kopel, and Benjamin C. F. Shaw, "Medical Views on the Death by Crucifixion of Jesus Christ," *Proceedings (Baylor University. Medical Center)* 34, no. 6:2.

vindication is supported by the criteria of embarrassment, multiple attestations, and dissimilarity."⁶⁸

Despite a shameful death, the followers of Jesus would spread the message of the Messiah throughout the lands, which would develop into what the world recognizes as the Christian religion. Christ cautioned his disciples regarding the appearance of false messiahs (Matt. 13:6-22; 24: 5-17; Mark 13:6-22). Several individuals claimed to be the Messiah, such as Theudas, mentioned in Acts 5:36, Judas, the Galilean, mentioned in Acts 5:37, and Simon, who was a slave of Herod.⁶⁹ But it was not the death of the Messiah that convinced followers that Jesus was the Messiah; it was his resurrection; many of the disciples had what they believed to be bodily encounters with the resurrected Jesus.

The Empty Tomb

There are multiple sources attesting to the reality of the empty tomb. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts are unanimous in the burial and empty tomb narrative.⁷⁰ According to Habermas, roughly 75% of scholars accept the empty tomb as a historical fact; the strongest argument favoring the empty tomb places its location in Jerusalem, where the earliest preaching

⁶⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historical Approach*, 289.

⁶⁹ Whiston, "The New Complete Works of Josephus," 648. Josephus notes multiple men claiming to be the Messiah or prophet of God. In Book 20.5.1 he records Theudas whom failed to part the Jordan River, that was executed. Simon, the former slave of Herod claimed to be King of the Jews and led a revolt that would lead to his decapitation (Antiquities 17.10.6). Theudas and Simon were among many men claiming to be the Messiah that died and failed to be resurrected.

⁷⁰ Matt. 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47, 16:1-20; Luke 23:50-56, 24:1-53. John 19:38-42, 20:1-31; Acts 13:28-31, Rms. 6:4; 1 Cor. 15:3-8; Col. 2:12. 1 Cor. 15 is the earliest source that assumes the empty tomb.

occurred.⁷¹ The tomb Jesus' body was placed in belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy council member known as a good and righteous man (Matt. 27:57; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-56). According to John, the tomb was "located in a garden in which no one had been laid (John: 19:41)." Archaeologist Jodi Magness notes, "there is no doubt that the monumental rock cut tombs with ossuaries belonged to Jerusalem's elite, many of whom were Sadducees."⁷² Members of the Sanhedrin, such as Joseph of Arimathea, would be buried in a tomb described in the Gospels.

All of the Gospel writers concur that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. John writes, "(Joseph) besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. (John 19:38)." Mark informs the reader that Joseph "went in boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus. (Mark 15:43)." Luke explains, "This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulcher that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid (Luke 23:52-53)." Matthew explains that Joseph "begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered (Mt. 27:58)." Craig Evans notes that Roman law allowed crucified bodies to be released to family and friends, allowing them to bury their dead.⁷³ Joseph and Nicodemus were well-respected members of society. Pilate granted Joseph's

⁷¹ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 70. While not considered a minimal fact, the empty tomb is included to demonstrate parallels in Jehovah's Witness beliefs: Jesus was crucified, placed in the empty tomb, and resurrected. It is also significant that the first eyewitness to the bodily risen Jesus encountered him near the tomb.

⁷² Jodi Magness, "Ossuaries and the Burials of Jesus and James," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 1 (2005): 132, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30040993>.

⁷³ Craig A. Evans, "Getting the Burial Traditions and Evidences Right," in *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus' Divine Nature*, Michael F. Bird et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 76.

request to bury Jesus after confirming with the Centurion (Mark 15:4). Nicodemus wrapped Jesus in linen and placed him in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:55). Joseph and Nicodemus were the last two witnesses to see Jesus in the tomb before the stone was moved to block the opening.

Some skeptics doubt Jesus was buried in the tomb, suggesting his body was stolen. In *Dialogues with Trypho*, Justin Martyr describes rumors Jews were speaking concerning the burial of Christ. Justin writes:

"you not only have not repented, after you learned that He rose from the dead, but, as I said before, you have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven."⁷⁴

Justin supports the claim that the disciples moved Jesus's body to fake a resurrection. Tertullian offers a different explanation suggesting the disciples stole the body or a gardener moved Jesus to preserve crops. Tertullian writes, "This is he whom his disciples secretly stole away that it might be said he had risen again or the gardener abstracted that his lettuces might come to no harm from the crowds of visitants."⁷⁵ It is crucial to mention that these assertions do not reject the notion of an empty tomb but propose different reasons why it was found empty. The Gospel of Matthew contains a passage (Matt. 28:11-15) that refutes the claim that Jesus' body was stolen from the tomb. The Jewish leaders attempted to come up with an explanation for the empty tomb and resorted to bribing the Roman soldiers into fabricating a story that supported their narrative.

⁷⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 108.

⁷⁵ Tertullian, *Of Spectacles*, 30.

Justin and Tertullian's arguments are suggestions based on personal opinion and lack of evidence. Similarly, according to Matthew, the elders paid a significant sum of money for soldiers to claim the disciples stole the body of Jesus in the night (Matt. 28:2-14). It is essential to note in each description that the tomb was empty. Historian Michael Grant states, "the historian . . . cannot justifiably deny the empty tomb" because normally applied historical criteria indicate that "the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty."⁷⁶

According to Jewish tradition, it is necessary to have at least two witnesses to verify that Jesus was buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. Joseph and Nicodemus were respected members of society who provided accounts of the burial, during which they prepared Jesus's body with linen and anointing oils, with no expectation of a resurrection. However, Justin and Tertullian's theory aims to undermine Christianity by proposing that Jesus was not buried in the tomb. Their argument suggests that he could not have been resurrected if Jesus was not buried there. It is important to note that this perspective does not deny that the tomb was discovered empty but offers an alternative explanation.

The testimony of women at the empty tomb means the criterion of embarrassment. Women as witnesses make it more difficult to believe, but their testimony was essential and remains in the Bible. Richard Bauckham notes,

"in the Synoptic Gospels the role of the woman as eyewitnesses is crucial: they see Jesus die, they see his body being laid in the tomb, they find the tomb empty. the fact that some of the women were at all three events means that they can

⁷⁶ Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels* (N.Y.: Collier, 1992), 176. Quoted in Gary R Habermas, "Experiences of the Risen Jesus: The Foundational Historical Issue in the Early Proclamation of the Resurrection," *Dialog* 45, no. 3 (2006): 292.

testify that Jesus was dead when laid in the tomb and that it was the tomb in which he was buried and that they subsequently found empty."⁷⁷

The Gospel writers were convinced of the women's discovery at the empty tomb. If the testimony were of minor importance, it would have been removed or changed by the male writers, perhaps similar to Josephus, who focused on Isaac receiving revelation from God.⁷⁸

The Women at the Empty Tomb- Mary Magdalene

In Jewish culture, women were not considered reliable witnesses in court proceedings due to their societal roles. Shimson Ettinger states this perception of women comes from the view that women had poor judgment, the declaration of biblical verses, and because women were generally not considered reliable.⁷⁹ The Mishnah notes that women are deemed unfit witnesses. Jewish law also required a minimum of two witnesses to testify against the accused. Tractate Shevuot states, "an oath of evidence applies to men but not to women, to those who are not near of kin but not to such as are kinsfolk, to those who are eligible but not to those who are not qualified. And it applies only to such as are fit to give evidence."⁸⁰ Sabato notes that women

⁷⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 48.

⁷⁸ *Excursus: Did Jesus's Body Dissolve?* The Watchtower's description of the body of Christ differs from Charles Taze Russell's speculation on the empty tomb. Both sources claim Jesus's body did not decay or corrupt. The lack of decomposition is consistent with orthodox Christian views; the disciples would not view Christ conquering death if he rose in a decayed body. Russell claims no one knows what happened to the body of Christ; he may have dissolved or been moved by Jehovah to an undisclosed location. The Watchtower now promotes the body of Christ dissolving and ascending to heaven. According to Russell, it doesn't matter how Jesus left the tomb; Jehovah raised him spiritually, promoting him into the divine classification system. Traditional views of Christianity agree, Jesus died at the crucifixion, and the tomb was empty.

⁷⁹ Ilan Fuchs, "Women's Testimony in Jewish Law: A Historical Survey," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82 (2011): 129.

⁸⁰ Tractate Shevuot, *m.Shev.4:1*. Quoted by Fuchs, 124.

were unfit to give testimony due to their nature of dishonesty; for example, Sarah lied about laughing (Gen. 18:12-15).⁸¹ Like Eve, women could easily be persuaded to provide false testimony. Women could, however, testify in court in defense of their virginity, in the event of the death of their husband, testimony in a divorce proceeding, or if no men were available to testify.

Jewish historian Josephus wrote that Isaac, rather than Rebekah, received revelation from God concerning the birth of the twins to avoid a woman's testimony. Josephus wrote, "and when her belly was greatly burdened, Isaac was very anxious, and inquired of god: who answered that Rebecca should bear twins; and that two nations should take the names of those sons."⁸² Referencing the Bible, one sees that God was speaking to Rebekah, not Isaac: "And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger (Gen. 25:23, KJV)." Josephus, a leader in the Jewish community, had social aversions to women being reliable witnesses and having direct revelations from God. His opinion is consistent with the social structure in ancient Israel, where men held high-ranking positions, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. Women communicating directly with God would be considered heresy; she would likely be regarded as irrational.

The accounts of women at the tomb are crucial eyewitness testimonies of the risen Jesus. All four gospels mention women who returned to Jesus's tomb and found it empty, although their accounts differ slightly. Mary of Magdala (also known as Mary Magdalen) is the most well-known woman, as she is the only woman mentioned in all four gospels and was the first to see

⁸¹ Morddechai Sabato, *Sidra 21* (2008,) 27, cited by Fuchs, 125.

⁸² Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.18.1. trans. William Whiston, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 70.

the risen Jesus. Mary witnessed the crucifixion and burial of Jesus with Joseph and Nicodemus. She returned to anoint the body but found the stone had been removed from the empty tomb (John 20:1; Luke 24:1-2; Mark 16:1-5; Matt. 28: 1-7). Mary encountered a man she assumed was the gardener and asked him about the location of Jesus. Jesus then revealed himself to Mary by calling her name, and Mary clung to him. However, Jesus asked her to stop clinging to him as he had not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:14-17). Initially, Jesus needed to capture Mary's attention and make her aware of the individual she conversed with. This interaction shows how Jesus caught Mary's attention and revealed himself to her. Mary's ability to cling to Jesus's bodily form was remarkable; Mary had a physical encounter with the risen Jesus.

Matthew informs the reader that Mary, the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna, experienced an encounter with what they believed to be the risen Jesus. Matthew states, "And look! Jesus met them and said: "Good day!" They approached and took hold of his feet and did obeisance to him (Matt. 28:9)."⁸³ Although there are slight differences in the number of women encountering the risen Jesus, the theme throughout the Gospels remains consistent: the women touched the body of Jesus and paid him respect. After encountering Jesus, the women reported their discovery to Peter and the other disciples. However, Jesus' apostles were skeptical of a women's testimony. Luke writes, "Their words seemed to them an idle tale, they did not believe them right away (Luke 24:11)." To verify the account, Peter and John accompanied Mary and the other women to the empty tomb (Luke 24:12; John 20:3-10).

⁸³ New World Bible Translation Committee, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. Also seen in the KJV "And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet and worshipped him." The translations between the NWT and KJV provide the same message, the physical encounter with the Messiah.

Eyewitness Accounts of the Bodily Resurrected Jesus

There are arguably hundreds of witnesses who saw the risen Christ. Matthew 28:17 explains that those who saw Jesus initially doubted he was the risen Jesus. Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, known as doubting Thomas, required physical proof of the risen Jesus after learning of Jesus' return (John 20:24-29). The disciples, who had direct communication and knowledge from Jesus before the crucifixion, questioned his reappearance. During his prosecution, Peter denied Jesus three times out of fear but later proclaimed Christ the Messiah. Their unique experiences of the risen Jesus confirmed to the witnesses that he was the Messiah. According to Paul's words in Acts 17:30-31, Jesus has the power to judge because of his righteousness, which was confirmed by the Father's resurrection of him. The testimony of the witnesses is not verbatim and occurred at different locations, dissipating any claims that the experiences were hallucinations marking the credibility of the Gospels. These experiences would lead to the disciples preaching the Gospel under threat of death.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he stressed the bodily resurrection of Christ. Paul wrote:

"Now if it is being preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how is it that some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If, indeed, there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised up. But if Christ has not been raised up, our preaching is certainly in vain, and your faith is also in vain. Moreover, we are also found to be false witnesses of God, because we have given witness against God by saying that he raised up the Christ, whom he did not raise up if the dead are really not raised up (1 Cor. 15:12-19, NWT)."

Paul is clear that without the bodily resurrection of Jesus, there is no hope for humankind's salvation; all one has is their current life. For believers, the hope of everlasting life is connected to the soul's relationship with God. In his letter, Paul provides details for humankind's future resurrection at the return of Christ. According to Swindoll,

"In the ancient world, the vast majority of people believed in some kind of conscious existence after death- either in heaven, hell, or some other uncertain place. Jews and Christians were unique in their expectation of a physical, bodily resurrection at the final judgment, in which the righteous would be rewarded in their restored but glorified bodies while the wicked would be punished in their resurrection bodies. In the Bible, ultimate salvation involves more than 'life after death.' It includes *anastasis*- resurrected physical life *after* 'life after death.'"⁸⁴

Wright notes that pagans, Jews, and Christians understood the Greek word *anastasis* to mean "new life after a period of being dead... a fresh living embodiment following a period of death-as-a-state... This meaning is constant throughout the ancient world, until we come to a new coinage in the second century."⁸⁵ The term the disciples use to refer to Jesus' resurrection denotes a physical bodily resurrection, not a mere spiritual one. To fully understand the resurrection, it's crucial to interpret the meaning of *anastasis* as seen through the lens of biblical authors rather than through the modern perspective of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Pagan citizens in the ancient world understood *anastasis* as life after death but often associated the term with mythological entities rather than existent persons. Cook has recorded various pagan depictions of death and sightings after a resurrection. Aristeas, who died and was temporarily laid to rest in the fuller's shop, appeared as a phantom in Metapontum. He was also depicted as a raven accompanying Apollo, as a deity, and as a being able to have sexual contact that produced a child with Demaratus of Sparta's mother; the depiction differs depending on the

⁸⁴ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carol Stream, IL, United States: Tyndale House Publishers, 2017), 218.

⁸⁵ N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God: The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol.3 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 31. Wright notes pagans denied the possibility, Jews affirmed it as a long-term hope, and Christians claimed it occurred with Jesus. Cook notes, "Pagan and Jewish usage of ἐγείω (wake/raise) and ἀνίστημι (raise) and related words for resurrection does not refer to the resurrection of a soul (ψυχή) or spirit (πνεύμα)." Cook, "Empty Tomb, Resurrection, Apotheosis", 619.

author in reference.⁸⁶ Cook also mentions the pagan theme of dying and rising gods, such as Osiris, Horus, Dionysus, Heracles, Dumuzi, Baal, and Adonis.⁸⁷ In his *Dialogue* with Typho, Justin wrote, "after he was torn to pieces and died, he arose again [*anastēnai* – a verb used frequently for resurrection in the New Testament]."⁸⁸ In Aeschylus's play *Eumenides*, Apollo declares that a dead man cannot be resurrected once his blood is spilled on the ground.⁸⁹ In his sermon at the Areopagus, Paul referred to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers' worship of pagan deities. He mentioned the altar bore the inscription of the Unknown God and explained that this was the focal point of his message (Acts 17:18-32). When Paul spoke about the resurrection of the dead, some people ridiculed him because pagans did not believe in the possibility of a bodily resurrection. Guy Gedalyah Strousma argues that the Christian ideas of a bodily resurrection resulted in a "major discontinuity in the very concept of a person" between Christianity and Greco-Roman culture.⁹⁰ The Christian belief in resurrection differs significantly from the pagan concept because Jesus is a verifiable historical figure, not mythical.

There is a tradition of bodily resurrection in ancient Jewish texts. Setzer summarizes Jewish views on the afterlife by noting:

⁸⁶ John Granger Cook, *Empty Tomb, Resurrection, Apotheosis* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 247–54. Herodotus, Apollonius, Plutarch, Origen, Celsius, and Aeneas of Gaza provide slightly different interpretations of Aristeas's death and resurrection. Cook provides multiple quotes from ancient sources pertaining to the death and postmortem appearances of Aristeas. According to Cook, some pagans considered Aristeas to be a competitor of Jesus. While this point is acknowledged, it is not in the scope of this thesis to investigate this claim.

⁸⁷ Cook, 143. Cook notes the resurrection of Osiris is the closest analogy (or concept) to the resurrection of Jesus, although Osiris remains in the Underworld. Cook also notes Justin, Tertullian, Theophilus, and Origen indicate a willingness to examine pagan analogies to the birth and ascension of Jesus.

⁸⁸ Justin, *Dialogue*, 8.1, Quoted by John Granger Cook, "Resurrection in Paganism and The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *The City (a Publication of Houston Baptist University)*, 2016. Anastenai bracket stressed by Cook.

⁸⁹ Nicholas Thomas Bp Wright, "Jesus' Resurrection and Christian Origins," *Gregorianum* 83, no. 4 (2002): 616.

⁹⁰ G.G. Strousma, noted by Cook, *Empty Tomb, Resurrection, Apotheosis*, 456.

"... Jewish materials from the second century B.C.E. through the first century C.E. exhibit a range of understandings of the afterlife. Fairly explicit claims of bodily resurrection appear in texts like 1 Enoch (51), 2 Maccabees, 4Q521, and Sibylline Oracle 4. A mix of concepts of resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul appear in 1 Enoch (91, 103), 1QH, 5 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch and Pseudo-Phocylides. Ambiguity prevails in works that nevertheless imply resurrection, such as 'the Book of the Watchers' [1– 36] in 1 Enoch, The Testament of Judah, 6 Psalms of Solomon, and CD 2:7– 12. 7"⁹¹

Cook notes the most explicit reference for the resurrection of the dead in the Hebrew Bible, and Septuagint is in Daniel.⁹² He emphasizes, "it is apparent that the Greek translators (LXX and Theodotion) understood bodies to be rising, since verbs associated with bodily motion upward are used...these verbs are never used in resurrection context with 'spirit' or 'soul' in Jewish or Pagan texts."⁹³ According to Wright, the Jewish faith acknowledges an intermediate state in between death and resurrection; resurrection pertains to one being given back their body following "life after death."⁹⁴

⁹¹ Claudia Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Christianity*, quoted by Cook, 456. It is noted in citation 7, page 456 that Setzer admits CD 2: 7-12 is too ambiguous to be of use as an illustration of resurrection.

⁹² Cook, 464. The original language and translation are available for comparison. Cooks also provides commentary on the location of the dead.

12:2 Many of those who sleep in the dusty earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky/firmament, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever (NRSV, modified).

12:2 And many of those who sleep in the flat of the earth will arise, some to everlasting life but others to shame and others to dispersion [and contempt] everlasting. 12:3 And those who are intelligent will light up like the luminaries of heaven, and those who strengthen my words will be as the stars of heaven forever and ever (LXX NETS).

12.2 (Theod) And many of those who sleep in a mound of earth will awake/rise, these to everlasting life and those to shame and everlasting contempt. 3. And those who are intelligent will shine like the splendor of the firmament, and some of the many righteous, like the stars forever and anon (NETS, slightly mod.).

⁹³ Cook, 466. (LXX: ἀναστήσονται; Theodotion ἐξεγερθήσονται)

⁹⁴ Wright, "Jesus' Resurrection and Christian Origins," 619. There is a spectrum in the Jewish faith from ancient to modern views concerning the interim between death and resurrection. It is also noted that differing sects of the faith embody different views concerning the resurrection of the body. However, the Jews that followed Jesus ultimately experienced events concerning the bodily resurrection of Jesus, leading to their teaching that Jesus was the risen Messiah.

Jesus's disciples had experiences seeing Jesus alive, supporting the notion that Jesus was resurrected bodily. Josephus writes, "those that loved him at first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him."⁹⁵ Christ's followers believed Jewish prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. N.T. Wright wrote, "The only possible reason why early Christianity began and took the shape it did is that the tomb really was empty and that people really did meet Jesus alive again... the best historical explanation for all these phenomena is that Jesus was indeed bodily raised from the dead."⁹⁶ Bart Ehrman, an opponent of Christianity, states, "if the Gospels and acts are right, immediately after the resurrection of Jesus, his followers included maybe fifteen to twenty men and women who had been with him previously, in Galilee, and who came to believe that he had been raised from the dead."⁹⁷ The consensus among ancient Jewish populace, Christians, pagans, and modern scholars is that resurrection involved a physical body.

The Five Hundred Brothers

While little is known about the five-hundred witnesses, it is documented by Paul that he considered them brothers, implying they were Christians. Paul explains that following his physical appearance to the twelve, Jesus "was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:6)." According to Licona, the appearance of Jesus to the five hundred, while controversial, is reported

⁹⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.3.3 63-64. trans. William Whiston, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 590. This author recognizes that many scholars believe this was later added in by a scribe.

⁹⁶ N.T Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God, Volume III of Christian Origins and the Question of God*, Quoted in Habermas, "Experiences of the Risen Jesus," 289.

⁹⁷Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know About Them)* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 145.

in the earliest traditions.⁹⁸ Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus occurred after the five-hundred witnesses experienced the appearance of Jesus placing the events before Paul's letter to the Corinthians, demonstrating the witnesses saw Jesus shortly after his resurrection. Paul also admits some of the witnesses have fallen asleep, denoting many were alive during Paul's travels. John Piper, New Testament scholar and Chancellor at Bethlehem College and Seminary writes, "What makes this so relevant is that this was written to Greeks who were skeptical of such claims when many of these witnesses were still alive. So it was a risky claim if it could be disproved by a little firsthand research."⁹⁹ Paul referred to the witnesses to support the reality of the resurrection.

The Disciples Collectively

When the disciples saw the risen Jesus, they witnessed the conquering of death firsthand. Jesus ate food, showed the wounds from the crucifixion, and offered the disciples to touch his wounds (Luke 24:39). In addition, Jesus ate bread with the disciples reminding his followers of the Passover meal (Luke 24:30-32). Jesus was in bodily form, walking and talking, demonstrating eternal life. Habermas states, "Heaven had broken into Earth and they witnessed it."¹⁰⁰ The disciples' grief over the death of Jesus and their fear of death was resolved by the resurrected Messiah appearing in bodily form. Jesus told the disciples, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me

⁹⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 320.

⁹⁹ "Eight Reasons Why I Believe That Jesus Rose from the Dead, Easter (Pascha), Holy Week, Malankara World," accessed April 3, 2023, http://www.malankaraworld.com/library/lent/passion/Easter_8-reasons-for-resurrection-piper.htm.

¹⁰⁰ Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 179.

have Luke 24:39)." Jesus, knowing the disciples had a doubt, shows them the wounds in his hands, feet, and side to relieve their worry. Thomas, who was not among the first disciples to see the risen Jesus, upon hearing the report of Jesus' return, states, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and stick my finger into the print of the nails and stick my hand into his side, I will never believe it (John 20:25)." Jesus allowed (doubting) Thomas to inspect his physical wounds to satisfy his doubts (John 20:26-28).

Rhodes notes three significant proofs of a physical resurrection: "1) Christ indicates that He is not a spirit. 2) the resurrected Christ indicates that his resurrection body is made up of flesh and bones, and 3) Christ's physical hands and feet represent physical proof of His resurrection from the dead."¹⁰¹ The fact that the tomb was empty serves as evidence that Jesus had been buried there and his body was no longer present. In addition, as demonstrated earlier, the word anastasis refers to the physical body. If Jesus had returned only in spirit, his disciples would have been hesitant to believe him, and their relationship with him would have been affected. However, Jesus's physical presence, meal sharing, and scripture explaining demonstrated that he had risen from the dead in the flesh. The bodily resurrection solidified the disciple's belief in Jesus, causing them to be willing to die for him. Bart Ehrman states, "What is certain is that the earliest followers of Jesus believed that Jesus had come back to life, in the body, and that this was a body that had real bodily characteristics: It could be seen and touched, and it had a voice that could be heard."¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Ron Rhodes, *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Jehovah's Witness* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2001), 51.

¹⁰² Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*, 183.

One explanation for the disciples' shared experience of Jesus' resurrection is a naturalistic approach, suggesting that the group may have hallucinated collectively. According to the American Psychological Association, a hallucination is a "false sensory perception that has a compelling sense of reality despite the absence of an external stimulus. It may affect any of the senses, but auditory hallucinations and visual hallucinations are most common."¹⁰³ Gerd Ludemann noted the disciples were of "low degree and intellectual culture,...imagined that they were surrounded by miracles; they took no part whatsoever in the positive science of the time," had a collective hallucination.¹⁰⁴ It is important to note that Ludemann and other naturalistic believers may not fully comprehend that hallucinations do not equate to a collective experience. Zachary Breitenbach notes, "hallucinations are mental projections derived from the content of the hallucinator's own mind, and consuming food is impossible because hallucinations do not cause alterations to the physical world."¹⁰⁵ Medical diagnosis, not intellectual ability, determines the probability of experiencing a hallucination. Furthermore, hallucination is a symptom of underlying psychophysiologic, psychobiochemical, or psychodynamic etiologies.¹⁰⁶

The Apostle Peter

¹⁰³ "APA Dictionary of Psychology," accessed July 21, 2023, <https://dictionary.apa.org/>. See also Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historical Approach*, 483.

¹⁰⁴ Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 175.

¹⁰⁵ Zachary Breitenbach, "A New Argument That Collective Hallucinations Do Not Adequately Account for the Group Appearances of Jesus in the Gospels," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 2 (2019): 349. The Gospels of Luke and John show (1) new information being given by Jesus to the witnesses of the appearances; and (2) Jesus eating in the presence of the witnesses.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph W. Bergeron and Gary R. Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Clinical Review of Psychiatric Hypotheses for the Biblical Story of Easter," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (May 1, 2015): 6. Psychophysiologic, arising from alteration of brain structure and function; Psychobiochemical, due to neurotransmitter disturbances; and Psychodynamic, arising from intrusion of the unconscious into the conscious mind.

As a prominent figure in all four Gospels as one of Jesus's closest disciples, it is an embarrassing admission that Peter denied Jesus three times before the crucifixion, as predicted by Christ. The act of deserting a leader is not a common reaction, indicating that Peter feared for his life and doubted Jesus's teachings.

Peter was deeply impacted by Jesus' resurrection, and he was willing to die for his faith. In 1 Corinthians 15:5, Paul confirms that Peter had seen Jesus after he rose from the dead. This is consistent with Paul's meeting with Peter and James in Jerusalem, as mentioned in Galatians 1:18-20. Additionally, Luke records that Cleopas and another disciple had encountered Jesus on their way to Emmaus. Upon realizing who he was, he rushed back to inform the other disciples about their experience (Luke 24:30-33). According to Luke 24:34, Jesus also appeared to Simon after his resurrection. Jesus later joined the disciples in a room, showing them his wounds and eating with them (Luke 24:40-43).

Peter grew courageous enough to preach in the face of hostile Jews and Romans following his encounter with Christ. According to Cook, "it is probable that Peter was crucified during the Neronian persecution."¹⁰⁷ In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Clement writes, "Through envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars [of the Church] have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours, and when he had finally suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Cook, "Roman Crucifixions," 17–18.

¹⁰⁸ Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 5.

James, The Brother of Jesus

James, Jesus' brother, was a skeptic until he encountered the resurrected Jesus. Mark 3:21 suggests that Jesus' family deemed him "out of his mind," but in 3:31-35, they are portrayed as actively "seeking him" with the possibility of returning him home. Towards the end of Jesus's ministry, John explains, "For neither did his brethren believe in him" (John 7:5). Although James witnessed Jesus heal a disabled man and feed the five thousand, he remained skeptical. However, after his encounter with Jesus, James transformed from an embarrassed brother to a critical leader in the early church. He headed the church in Jerusalem and became one of the disciples who passed on oral tradition to Paul (Gal. 1:18-19, 2:1-10).

Bart Ehrman notes that followers with an apocalyptic worldview, such as Peter, James, and Paul, would believe "a person who was alive after having died would have been bodily raised from the dead, by God himself, so as to enter into the coming Kingdom. That's how the disciples interpreted Jesus's resurrection."¹⁰⁹ Scholars concur that James was an unbeliever before his experience in 1 Corinthians 15:7. John Meier argues that James' unbelief is multiply attested.¹¹⁰

The criterion for embarrassment is demonstrated in James' accounts in Mark and John. Habermas notes, "it would be highly unlikely that the early church would otherwise sponsor what would potentially be some "deeply offensive" statements regarding Jesus' brother, as well as a major leader."¹¹¹ In addition, it would be likely that the remaining non-believers in James'

¹⁰⁹ Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*, 203. Paul's experience will be reviewed in the next section.

¹¹⁰ Habermas, "Experiences of the Risen Jesus," 291.

¹¹¹ Habermas, 291.

family would treat James similarly to how Jesus was taunted. James chose his brother, the Messiah, above his family.

The Apostle Paul

According to Bowman, all scholars agree that Paul wrote at least seven of the thirteen epistles and expressed broad agreement about when they were written.¹¹² The testimony of Paul is significant because he was a former opponent and prosecutor of the followers of Christ (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal 1:13-14; Phil. 3:4-7). Saul, who would become Paul, witnessed the risen Christ on his way to persecute Christians, an event leading to his conversion (Acts 8:3-6; 22:6-11). This experience is unique because Paul saw the risen Jesus after he had ascended to heaven. Ludemann states "that the appearance language employed by Paul is that of sight: "active sensual perception... Paul is claiming a visual side to the appearance."¹¹³ The experience on the road to Damascus led Paul to boldly proclaim Christ as the Messiah and preach his message before he was executed in a manner consistent with his prior persecution of Jesus's followers.

When Paul penned his letter to the Corinthians, multiple witnesses to the risen Jesus were still alive. Paul writes, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve (1 Cor 15:2-5)." Habermas and Licona summarize, "At minimum, we have source data that dates within two decades of the alleged event of Jesus's resurrection and it comes from a

¹¹² Robert M. Jr. Bowman, *Jesus' Resurrection and Joseph's Visions: Examining the Foundations of Christianity and Mormonism* (Tampa, FL: DeWard Publishing Company, 2020), 109. Romans (AS 57), 1-2 Corinthians (54-56), Galatians (48/49 or 54), Philippians (60), 1 Thessalonians (49/50), and Philemon (60).

¹¹³ Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 50; cf. 37. Quoted by Habermas, "Experiences of the Risen Jesus," 293.

source that Paul thought was reliable."¹¹⁴ Paul visited Jerusalem to visit Cephas (Peter) and James, the brother of Jesus, to gather eyewitness accounts of the teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus so he could know them correctly (Gal. 1:19-20). Habermas writes, "an important hint here is Paul's use of the verb *historesai* (1:18), a term that indicates the investigation of a topic."¹¹⁵ The immediate context both before and after reveals this subject matter: Paul was inquiring concerning the nature of the Gospel proclamation (Gal. 1:11-2:10), of which Jesus' resurrection was the center (1 Cor. 15:1-2, 14, 17; Gal. 1:11, 16).

Paul did not have written accounts of the eyewitnesses; it was vital to assemble with the apostles in person and receive an oral account of the death and resurrection of Christ.¹¹⁶ The meeting demonstrates Paul's desire to propagate the correct message in his future discipleship. Oral repetitions of Jesus's message were common in ancient Jerusalem. Skeptics, including Gerd Ludemann, are in agreement noting, "the elements in the tradition are to be dated to the first two years after the crucifixion of Jesus...not later than three years...*the formation of the appearance traditions mentioned in 1 Cor. 15. 3-8 falls into the time between 30 and 33 C.E.*"¹¹⁷ Paul ensured that his Gospel message coincided with God's message delivered through the apostles. The oral tradition given in the Gospels corresponds with the writings of Paul.

¹¹⁴ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 53.

¹¹⁵ Habermas, "Experiences of the Risen Jesus," 290.

¹¹⁶ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 53. Habermas reports, "most scholars agree that many of the sermons in Acts contain oral summaries included in the text that can be traced to the earliest teachings of the church and *possibly* to the disciples themselves." The following scholars are noted to agree: Ulrich Wilckens, Joachim Jeremias, Walter Kasper, and James D.G. Dunn. *Delivered* and *received* are also technical terms for passing on tradition formally.

¹¹⁷ Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 50; cf. 37. Quoted by Habermas, "Experiences of the Risen Jesus," 290. Skeptics agreeing include Michael Goulder and Thomas Sheehan.

Conclusion

Multiple attestations, early attestation, and enemy attestation demonstrate the events of the empty tomb are historical. Social constructs decreed women were too emotional and untrustworthy to testify in court. The embarrassing nature of the testimony, included in all four Gospel accounts, demonstrates that the eyewitness testimony was significant enough for men to include the experience in their teachings. Opponents of Christianity agree that eyewitnesses to Jesus's risen body witnessed the bodily resurrection of Christ, transforming them from fear of prosecution to followers willing to die for their faith. While claiming the accounts cannot be proven, critics of the resurrection agree that the witnesses at least thought they had experienced the risen Jesus.¹¹⁸ There were reported sightings of Jesus after his resurrection, where he appeared in physical form.

The Immaterial Resurrection According to Jehovah's Witnesses

It is a firmly held belief among Jehovah's Witnesses that Jesus did not experience a bodily resurrection. Witnesses maintain that Jesus' physical body dissolved and that he appeared before eyewitnesses in an immaterial form, as previously noted. Although leaders of the Governing Body have adjusted their teaching, noting the body may have dissolved or even did dissolve, the conviction of the empty tomb continues to be a steadfast belief held by both Jehovah's Witnesses and orthodox Christians. However, the argument for the immaterial, postmortem appearance of Jesus, as claimed by the authority of the Governing Body, pales in comparison to the numerous arguments supporting his physical resurrection. According to Witnesses, support for the physical resurrection can be identified in John 2:19-21: "Jesus

¹¹⁸ Habermas, 292.

answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body." The Jews misunderstood Jesus, assuming he spoke of the temple that took forty-six years to build. However, Jesus spoke of his resurrection in physical form, not as a spirit being.

In keeping with the classification system, the Governing Body claims the physical body cannot enter the divine realm, and humans cannot see divine beings. Strafford noted earthly elements are a violation of God's laws. The resurrection of Jesus represents the Lord conquering death by being bodily raised. After his resurrection, Jesus did not belong to the angelic classification, so comparing his bodily resurrection to angelic beings visiting humans is unfitting. Unlike angels, Jesus was born of a virgin, crucified, and resurrected according to the will of Jehovah. In Russell's classification system, it is clear that the appearance of angels and divine beings differ.

Additional proof of the physical resurrection is backed by writings from both Christian and non-Christian authors like Cook and Josephus. During ancient times, *anastasis* referred to the concept of bodily resurrection. Wright notes, "Only in the late second century, a good 150 years after the time of Jesus, do we find people using the word *resurrection* to mean something quite different from what it meant in Judaism and early Christianity, namely, a spiritual experience and the present leading to a disembodied hope in the future."¹¹⁹ The Governing Body struggles to reconcile modern and ancient languages, prioritizing contemporary viewpoints over understanding how past cultures perceived the world.

¹¹⁹ N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008), 42.

The Watchtower refers to Peter for proof of a spiritual resurrection: "He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit (1 Pt. 3:18)." The Watchtower, in this reference, is guilty of cherry-picking a verse to support their view. The context of 1 Peter 3:18 does not support a spiritual resurrection on earth. Peter provides an example of a particular quality: a perfect, sinless man, violently executed, that satisfied God's just penalty for humankind's sin, opening the way to God for all who repentantly believe. MacArthur explains that "made alive by the spirit" refers to the true inner life of Jesus, which is His *own* spirit. Jesus died in His flesh, which was dead for three days, but His spirit (deity) was alive and present, literally "in spirit."¹²⁰ Continuing in Peter, it is explained that between Christ's death and resurrection, he travels to preach to spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:19), there since the time of Noah (v. 20). To reiterate, "made alive in the spirit" occurs before Jesus returning in a bodily state, Jesus had a mission before his return to earth. MacArthur continues, "the point of application to Peter's readers is that suffering can be the context for one's greatest triumph, as seen in the example of the Lord Jesus."¹²¹ As Christians, we have faith in the redemptive power of Christ's work, which allows us to live on through his spirit. The Watchtower utilizes 1 Peter 3:18 to endorse the divine classification system, but in the process, they overlook the practical application of the verse in an individual's life.

As explained in Chapter 2, The Watchtower provides contradicting evidence for bodily resurrection. On one side, they claim the immaterial resurrection following the dissipation of Jesus into gas; a material body cannot enter heaven. But, the evidence used to support their claim demonstrates the witnesses saw a bodily Jesus. The New World Translation states:

¹²⁰ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1915.

¹²¹ MacArthur, 1916.

"While they were speaking of these things he himself stood in their midst and said to them: 'May you have peace.' But they were terrified, and because they became frightened they were imagining they beheld a spirit. So he said to them: 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts come up in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; feel me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones just as you behold that I have (Luke 24:36-39).'"

According to the eyewitnesses, Jesus stated that he is not a spirit, explaining that spirits do not have a physical form. Russell noted that Jesus appeared to the disciples in various bodies of flesh and bone and dissolved as the occasion required.¹²² Jesus was seen by the women at the empty tomb, the 500 witnesses, the disciples collectively, Peter, James, and Paul. On the one hand, the Watchtower claims an immaterial resurrection, but later notes Jesus could defy science by materializing a body. As demonstrated above, multiple eyewitnesses touched Jesus and partook in meals with him. Mary clung to Jesus at the empty tomb, the women took hold of his feet at the empty tomb, the disciples ate with Jesus, and Jesus told the disciples to inspect and touch him. One cannot be touched or partake in meals with an immaterial body. Furthermore, science cannot create *matter*, only manipulate that which already exists.

Paul preached a bodily resurrection following his experience on the road to Damascus. Habermas and Licona reflect on Paul's early creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 as implying a bodily resurrection by referring to Paul's use of the metaphor of the seed in verses 42-44 to make the same point that "What goes down in burial comes up in resurrection."¹²³ The sown seed does not

¹²² Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time Is at Hand*, II:141. Noted in the section on *Witnesses to the Resurrection* above.

¹²³ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 155. The authors also note that "Many critics appeal to 1 Corinthians 15:44-50 to support their view that Paul, the earliest author we know to have written about Jesus's resurrection, says that he was raised in spirit rather than when the *physical body*." They also note that "in 1 Corinthians Paul uses the word translated "spiritual" (pneumatikos) in the sense of the spiritually mature in the world, or of something that has to do with, or has as its origin, the Holy Spirit. With the possible exception of Ephesians 6:12, the term is never used in the Pauline letters either to refer to or describe a being as immaterial." (pg. 164)

raise spiritually; the seed is sown and physically grows again. In Acts 13, Paul's sermon speaks of the passing of King David and the decay of his body, contrasting it with the death of Jesus and the fact that his body did not decay. Habermas and Licona illustrate that the bodily resurrection fulfilled the prophecy referred to in Psalm 16:10.¹²⁴ Paul's message was to highlight the superiority of Jesus over King David, which he wanted his audience to grasp.

The disciple's convictions are historical. Habermas writes, "the very nature of his resurrection indicates an actual *example* of victory over death."¹²⁵ Watchtower doctrine promotes a sense of fear concerning death. Promoting different classifications like sheep and goats and suggesting one's name is written in the Book of Life in pencil indicates a religion that focuses on control of its members rather than focusing on eternal life because of Jesus's sacrifice. The righteous can be blotted out of the Book of Life following death if they do not adhere to Watchtower teaching stating their role is to convert the unrighteous. Even after death, the threat of annihilation looms. Due to the authoritative ruling that Jehovah's Witnesses are not to seek literature outside of Watchtower teaching, the next Chapter will discuss methods independent of the minimal fact approach to assist in correcting false teachings.

Witnesses' explanation of the resurrection is insufficient, similar to the misunderstanding the Jews faced with the temple. Compared to the plethora of evidence scholars present, claiming that the Governing Body declares an immaterial body is not a convincing argument. It has been observed that the Governing Body utilizes a classification system that differentiates between the divine and angelic realms. They selectively choose verses to support the idea of an immaterial

¹²⁴ Habermas and Licona, 156. "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Ps. 15:10, KJV).

¹²⁵ Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, 179.

resurrection and adjust doctrine to their liking. Additionally, they claim to receive revelation from an invisible Jesus who leads the organization. The concept of bodily resurrection has substantial evidence, such as eyewitness testimonies, an understanding of the historical-cultural beliefs surrounding *anastasis*, and contextual analysis of relevant verses. Christians may be apprehensive when the Governing Body claims they receive direct revelations from the spiritual Jesus, an invisible mediator overseeing the Governing Body. Some may be concerned that these revelations are only given to a select group of men.

Conclusion

This thesis demonstrated the inadequacy of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society's interpretation of Jesus' immaterial resurrection compared to the overwhelming evidence supporting the bodily resurrection due to its consideration of key aspects of Christology, the resurrection, the gospel, and eschatology. Chapter 1 briefly overviews Russell's group, the Bible Students, and its evolution into the Jehovah's Witnesses religion we know today. The Governing Body's appeal to authority and selective use of Scripture has developed a unique view of the role of Christ in the Jehovah's Witness religion.

Chapter 2 explores the Governing Body's teachings on the empty tomb, and the eyewitness encounters with the risen Jesus, highlighting the impact of the classification system on Jesus's nature. The classification system helps Witnesses comprehend how the archangel Michael transformed into Jesus, took on a human form, and eventually progressed to become a divine being according to God's plan. Both the Governing Body and orthodox Christians affirm that the tomb was empty. Nevertheless, Witness's teaching has experienced a significant shift, now asserting that Jesus dissolved in the tomb rather than merely acknowledging the possibility. According to Watchtower teachings, John 6:51 and Matthew 20:28 are the main arguments supporting the immaterial resurrection of Jesus. Witnesses also believe that because Jesus was divine, he could not be seen by human eyes. This means that the immaterial resurrection would be similar to encounters with angels. It is worth noting that when individuals saw Jesus after his passing, they were unable to recognize him at first. Through Jesus' sacrifice, humanity has been granted an opportunity to be *penciled* into the Book of Life.

Chapter 3 examines the historical evidence of the crucifixion and the empty tomb, laying the groundwork for discussing the cultural perspectives of resurrection in ancient society,

including pagan, Jewish, and Christian views. The term "anastasis" denotes bodily resurrection, and it is essential to understand it in the right context. However, the Governing Body's inability to bridge the gap between ancient and modern ideas of resurrection is demonstrated as they assume that the writers of the New Testament had a modern perspective. It is essential to understand that the eyewitness account of the risen Jesus describes a physical resurrection of his body. A being without a physical body cannot eat or interact with people corporeally. Jesus' resurrection in bodily form was the ultimate triumph over death and is the foundation of the Christian faith. Unfortunately, the recent changes to Christian doctrine made by the Governing Body have resulted in a misinterpretation of Scripture to support their agenda.

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Appendix 1: Is Heaven for All Mankind or a Select Few?

The apostle Paul stated Jehovah would "gather all things together again in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth (Ep. 1:9, 10)." The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society asserts the purpose of Jehovah is universal peace for the gathered in a paradise where sin, death, failure, and suffering cease to exist.¹²⁶ The beneficiaries of universal peace stem from true believers living between the period of Adam and continuing through Armageddon. The Watchtower identified true believers as: (1) those who love one another as Christ loved us, (2) adhere to God's Word, (3) sanctify God's name, (4) preach the good word, and (5) remain politically neutral and separate from the world. All true believers will live in Paradise on earth, except for a distinct group of 144,000, chosen by Jehovah to co-rule with Jesus in heaven. According to the Watchtower, by 1945, Witnesses looking forward to Paradise on earth made up 86% of those preaching the good news. By 1975, those claiming to be members of the anointed included less than one-half of 1 percent of the total worldwide Jehovah's Witness organization.¹²⁷ The significant drop-off in the number of new anointed members coincides with the belief that the class would be whole during the second coming of Christ. The 144,000 will judge the Great Crowd, true believers, along with Jesus, in heaven, to determine if they are genuinely worthy of Paradise on earth (Acts 17:30-31; Rev. 20:4).

The desire of Russell and the early Bible students' goal in preparing Watchtower publications and preaching was not to draw church members away from their church community

¹²⁶ "Gathering Things in Heaven and Things on Earth," JW.ORG, accessed February 9, 2023, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20060215/Gathering-Things-in-Heaven-and-Things-on-Earth/>.

¹²⁷ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1993), 501.

but to assist them in drawing closer to the one true church so they could live in Paradise or be a member of the 144,000 united as the bride of Christ.¹²⁸ For those not members of the one true church, everlasting destruction looms. Into which class do individuals belong?

The Anointed Class

The Watchtower states, "a small number of men and women will be resurrected to life in heaven."¹²⁹ The apostle John wrote that the 144,000 would be sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:4-8). The Watchtower refers to this class as the Anointed class or the faithful and discreet slave. Members of the faithful and discreet slave look forward to a spiritual existence in heaven and are called to co-rule as kings with Jesus Christ for 1000 years, assisting Christ with bringing humankind and the earth back to perfection (Rev. 5:9-10; 14:1-3). Russell, believing Armageddon would arrive in 1914, conveyed the Anointed would be chosen by 1914 to lead the Great Crowd. According to Penton, Russell instructed that the 144,000 individuals mentioned in Revelation 7 and 14 consisted of the Bible Students.¹³⁰ The 1889 publication of *Studies in the Scriptures* documented that by 1914 the "battle of the great day of God almighty" (Rev. 16:14) would end in 1914.¹³¹ The 2007 reprint of *Studies in the Scriptures* adjusted the year to 1915.¹³² A Watchtower review of Bible chronology would later reveal that the dates were a poor

¹²⁸ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 160.

¹²⁹ "A Sure Hope — Watchtower Online Library," 27, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101998059?q=will+adam+be+resurrected&p=par>.

¹³⁰ Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed*, 97.

¹³¹ "The-Time-Is-at-Hand-1889ed-P101.Jpg 820×1,322 Pixels," accessed February 18, 2023, <https://www.jwfacts.com/images/the-time-is-at-hand-1889ed-p101.jpg>.

¹³² Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Studies in the Scriptures: The Time Is at Hand*, II:101.

translation of the King James Version of the Bible, along with certain other factors.¹³³ Rutherford adjusted Russell's teaching, noting Jesus had arrived in spirit to lead The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society before the final battle. Rutherford wrote, "Jehovah does everything orderly and on time and exactly in his own due time, and not man's due time."¹³⁴ Jesus said in the New World Translation, "No one knows the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven or the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). The Governing Body consistently fails to acknowledge Jesus' teachings in the Bible, yet they assert that Witness leaders are receiving wisdom from Jesus. According to Deuteronomy 18:22, if someone claims to be speaking on behalf of Jehovah, but their predictions do not come to fruition, then their message is not from Jehovah. Consequently, there is no reason to fear what they say.

The Watchtower states, "anointing with holy spirit signified not only that persons were in line for future service as kings and priests with Christ in heaven *but also that they had a special work to do while still in the flesh.*"¹³⁵ The Anointed alive in the flesh on earth are appointed to share the good news with the meek, to honor Jehovah's name so the meek might find vindication in the presence of his enemies. Watchtower documentation claims the positions of those destined to serve in the new covenant were filled by the spring of 1935.¹³⁶ Jehovah's plan is "to be published broadcast in opposition to all the worldly-wise schemes which men are and have been trying to invent."¹³⁷ The Governing Body would develop these publications to guide humanity in

¹³³ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 633.

¹³⁴ Joseph F. Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die!* (Brooklyn, NY: International Bible Students Association, 1920), 9.

¹³⁵ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 12.

¹³⁶ "The Recent Pen for 'Other Sheep' — Watchtower Online Library," accessed February 25, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1984124?q=other+sheep&p=doc>.

¹³⁷ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 160.

servicing Jehovah correctly. Rutherford remarks that Jesus' second coming, or Golden Age, marked when a new order and righteousness would be established on earth.¹³⁸ The new order is led by the Governing Body, headed by Jesus, working through the Watchtower and Bible Tract Society. Written documentation, VHS tapes, CDs, and online documentation are now available worldwide.

Jehovah's Witness doctrine places Jesus as the mediator of the 144,000 alone, not the "great crowd" that will live in Paradise. The Watchtower claims Paul's use of the word "mediator" in 1 Timothy 2:5 indicates, "Jesus is the 'mediator' only for anointed Christians."¹³⁹ Jesus, as the mediator of the Anointed class, places the 144,000 apart from the rest of humanity, giving them a special relationship with Christ. Early Watchtower doctrine, until 1935, indicated that 144,000 positions had been filled. A 1927 publication of *The Watch Tower* notes that eleven members include the eleven disciples that the Society "has every reason to believe constitutes part of that new creation."¹⁴⁰ Partaking in the bread and wine for the disciples symbolized "the new covenant" made between Jesus and the 144,000.¹⁴¹ The remaining members of the Anointed class would stem from the Governing Body appointed by Jesus to lead the church. John writes, "And you have an anointing from the holy one, and all of you have knowledge (1 John 2:20, NWT)." John continues, "And as for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in

¹³⁸ Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die!*, 11. Online Library," accessed February 12, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1001060093>. Jehovah's Witnesses prefer the term "presence" as a translation of Parousia. Witnesses rarely use the term "second coming."

¹³⁹ "Questions From Readers — Watchtower Online Library," accessed February 9, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1996607>.

¹⁴⁰ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "Servant- Good and Evil" XLVIII, no. 4 (February 15, 1927): 67.

¹⁴¹ "Questions From Readers — Watchtower Online Library."

you, and you do not need anyone to be teaching you; but the anointing from him is teaching you about these things and is true and is no lie. Just as it has taught you, remain in union with him (1 John 2:27)." Anointed ones do not require a confirmation from the human sphere; they have the unlimited warranty from Jehovah and the Holy Spirit that they are members of this class. One knows they are members of the anointed.

The principle of "theocracy," or "God-rule," defines the basis of leadership for Jehovah's Witnesses. According to Jehovah's *Witnesses Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, Jesus Christ entrusted his faithful and discreet slave as his agency to provide needed oversight for the congregations.¹⁴² As James Beckford explained: "the major premise [is] that since Jesus Christ was actually working at the head of the Society through the medium of its earthly leaders, it would therefore be blasphemous to disagree with their directives."¹⁴³ The Governing Body contains members chosen by Jesus, who has been the organization's head since his spiritual arrival in 1914. Witnesses questioning the Governing Body risk severe rebuke or risk being disfellowshipped. Greg Stafford, Jehovah's Witness apologist, wrote, "No one can 'get along' without the Watchtower organization, and a Christian 'must feel a sense of loyalty' to the Governing Body and to its 'agencies' all of whom give Witnesses the 'opportunity' to 'work in support of them for their own eternal salvation.'"¹⁴⁴ Without the guidance of the Watchtower,

¹⁴² Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 218.

¹⁴³ Stark and Innaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow So Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," 137.

¹⁴⁴ Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 499. It is noted that Greg Stafford was officially dissociated in 2009 for having beliefs not in line with the Governing Body including, but not limited to, Jesus' role within the Trinity and receiving blood transfusions. However, Stafford remains one of the leading authors defending Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses would not have the education and tools needed to educate the risen before judgment by Jesus and the Anointed.

Known to many Christians as the sacrament, once a year, on Good Friday, Jehovah's Witnesses celebrate The Memorial. The Anointed class has a unique new covenant with Jesus, represented by partaking in the emblems of bread and wine. Members looking forward to Paradise on earth who are not associated with the new covenant are "neither baptized into Jesus' death nor called to rule with him in heaven."¹⁴⁵ Partaking in the bread and wine emblems during the annual memorial of the death of Jesus is reserved for the Anointed class. A 2006 publication of the Watchtower notes, "Since sharing in the bread and wine passed during the Memorial involves this, it would obviously be inappropriate for those having an earthly hope to partake."¹⁴⁶ Between 1935 and 1992, 215,877 members participated in the emblems of the 38,290,545 Jehovah's Witnesses in attendance.¹⁴⁷ Very few members currently partake in the emblems because the Anointed class's remaining seats are mostly complete. After acknowledging they are not called to the heavenly life, the Watchtower claims members newly baptized that participate in the bread and wine ask for God's merciful understanding, noting they recognized partaking was an emotional response to physical or mental strain. For those mistakenly partaking of the emblems or claiming they are members of the Anointed, The Watchtower reminds Witnesses that Jesus knows his sheep. How does one know if they are a member of the Anointed class?

If a person is wondering if he is anointed or not, The Watchtower offers guidelines to help Witnesses understand their appropriate class. The January 2016 edition of the Watchtower,

¹⁴⁵ "Gathering Things in Heaven and Things on Earth."

¹⁴⁶ "Gathering Things in Heaven and Things on Earth."

¹⁴⁷ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 717.

available online, states, "Perhaps you are wondering if you have received this wonderful invitation. If you think that you might have, ponder some important questions."¹⁴⁸ The publication suggests the following six questions:

1. Do you feel that you have more than average zeal in the ministry?
2. Are you a keen student of God's Word who loves to delve into "the deep things of God"? (1 Cor. 2:10)
3. Have you seen Jehovah's special blessing on your ministry?
4. Do you have a burning desire to do Jehovah's will?
5. Do you have a deep inner feeling of responsibility to help others spiritually?
6. Have you seen proof that Jehovah has personally intervened in your life?

The answer following this section clarifies that the Anointed, or "sealed" class, has discernment from Jehovah that they are anointed. One questioning their appointment into this class eliminates them from this category; the anointed would never question their position. Witnesses that are active participants in the church and follow the ways of Jehovah earn a place in Paradise on earth.

Major Issues Within the Witness Doctrine

Stating that Jesus is the mediator solely for the 144,000 anointed members, who are mostly from the Jehovah's Witnesses, poses various issues. First, if Jesus is not the mediator between Jehovah and the rest of humanity, then his death and resurrection occurred only for the anointed class, leaving the rest of God's creation dead in their sins. The New World Translation of the Bible states, "for there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, a man, Jesus

¹⁴⁸ "The Spirit Bears Witness With Our Spirit (Romans 8:16) | Study," JW.ORG, accessed February 7, 2023, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-january-2016/anointing-process/>.

Christ, who gave himself a corresponding ransom for all -this is what is to be witnessed to in its own due time. (1 Tim. 2:5-6)” Scripture does not indicate Jesus as a mediator between God and a select few; The author of Hebrews identifies Jesus as the mediator of a better covenant and, for those called, everlasting inheritance (Heb. 8:6; 9:15).¹⁴⁹ John 3:16-17 states God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son to save those who believe in him and give them eternal life. His Son came to deliver, not condemn the world. The apostle Peter wrote, “Jehovah is not slow concerning his promise, as some people consider slowness, but he is patient with you because he does not desire anyone to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance. (2 Pt. 3:9)” It is God's wish that every being He created repents. In chapter 2 of Romans, Paul consistently refers to all creation noting all will be paid back according to their works (v. 6), all who disobey truth will face wrath and anger (v. 8), there will be tribulation and distress on every person whose work is harmful (v.9), glory, honor and peace for everyone whose works is good (v.10), and all sinners will be judged (v. 12).¹⁵⁰ Paul is saying that all of humanity deserves judgment because they are sinners, and he is also calling out religious people for judging others. Witnesses demonstrate a biased approach by cherry-picking certain verses to align with their beliefs while

¹⁴⁹ The Online Bible on JW.org offers links to parallel verses. This can be used to further demonstrate how the Watchtower pulls text out of context in their Watchtower literature. See also- New World Bible Translation Committee, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

¹⁵⁰ Jehovah’s Witnesses believe in justification based on works. Salvation is based on the basis of Christ’s redemptive work, not on one’s works. Grudem notes evidence in Romans explicitly stating salvation is a *free gift* (Rom. 6:23), not something earned by works. We are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1, 9:30-32; Gal 2:16, 3:10). See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 901.

Romans (5:10; 10:9-13): The concept of salvation by grace through faith means that we are forgiven and deemed righteous by Christ, even though we are undeserving of it. Believing in Christ's resurrection and acknowledging Him as our Lord is essential for our salvation. We must openly declare our faith, as Paul stated.

conveniently ignoring contradictory ones. It is crucial to uphold the text's integrity by not altering, adding, or omitting any parts.

Second, the 144,000, and their function, are identified in the Book of Revelation. Scripture identifies this group as Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel, dedicated to serving God (Rev. 7:3; 14:4-5). John states, “these are the ones who did not defile themselves with women; in fact, they are virgins. These are the ones who kept following the lamb no matter where he goes. These were bought from among mankind as first fruits to God and to the Lamb (Rev. 14:4).” God seals and protects the 144,000 and spares them from judgment and death (Rev. 7:2-3; 14:1). The goal of the 144,000 is to preach the gospel and lead many to Christ (Rev. 7:9-10).

Third, The Watchtower implies that Jehovah waited until the creation of the Jehovah’s Witness religion to fill the 144,000 anointed positions. MacArthur notes the 144,000 will be “the first fruits of a new redeemed Israel. (Zech. 12:10)”¹⁵¹ This event will occur in God’s time, not the Governing Bodies.

Fourth, the Governing Body has attempted to draw a parallel between the spiritual "raising" 144,000 to heaven and that of Christ. Christ and the anointed attain immortality and ascend to heaven in spirit bodies to judge mankind. However, the Watchtower neglects to clarify the classification system to which the anointed class belongs. They are neither granted divine status by Jehovah nor do they belong in the angelic category. The Witnesses have created a new classification category. Hoekema writes, “The early fathers vigorously defended the resurrection of the body (in a physical sense) as a distinctively Christian doctrine over against those who, under the influence of Greek philosophy or Gnostic speculation, denied this teaching. Yet today's Jehovah's Witnesses, claiming to be listening to scripture alone, are again

¹⁵¹ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 2008.

reviving this ancient heresy!"¹⁵² There is an issue with how the Governing Body categorizes the state of Jesus' resurrected body. This mistake leads to a chain reaction of misclassifications concerning Jesus and the resurrection of humanity.

Finally, multiple failed prophecies give the reader an indication concerning the validity of the Governing Body. Deuteronomy 18:21-22 warns that if a prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and the prediction does not come true, then the word does not come from God.¹⁵³ Jeremiah explains that false prophets will fill believers with false hopes, speaking from visions in their own minds, not from Gods (Jer. 23:16). The Watchtower teaches that the unrighteous will face annihilation rather than eternal suffering for sin. Russell founded his religion based on the conviction that a loving Father would not allow eternal suffering. Modern false prophets have attempted to provide a date of the Lord's return, but the Bible is clear that even Jesus does not know the day and hour (Matt. 24:36).

The Sheep Will Inherit Eternal Life

During the October 2018 Annual Meeting, Brother Cook stated:

“Isaiah 26 in verse 9 says of Jehovah then when that when there are judgments from you for the earth, the inhabitants of the land learn about righteousness. And that will certainly prove to be true in the new world. The great crowd will soon be invited to teach vast numbers of resurrected ones. You may study with someone who lived 3000 years ago or more. Imagine how hopeful will be to have learned how to explain unfamiliar terms...your student may have lived during the Middle Ages when people were taught to fear the clergy rather than to love God. But you have already learned from study 19 how to reach the heart of your student. And when you're asked to summarize all that Jehovah did for his people during the last days, you'll need to keep things simple. Something you learned in study 14, *Main Points Made To Stand Out*. ... by doing this, the Bible tells us you will save both

¹⁵² Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 305.

¹⁵³ Deuteronomy also states one must be put to death for false prophecies (Deut. 13:5, 18:320).

yourself and those who listen to you.”

Why did Jesus use the sheep illustration to represent those receiving life? Jesus stated, "And I have other sheep which are not in this fold; those also I must bring, and they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock, one shepherd (John 10:16)." Sheep are timid and prone to attack by predators, they need a good shepherd to protect the flock. The Watchtower declares the sheep must "flock together and follow the leading of the Good Shepherd and their appointed overseers."¹⁵⁴ Failure to follow the Good Shepherd and the overseers indicates sickness and the need for assistance. Millions of people will have the opportunity to gain perfection over one thousand years and gain a position in Paradise. The responsibility of the sheep is "extending the invitation to still others down to the terminus of this conclusion of the system of things."¹⁵⁵ Since the sheep are not of the new covenant, they are not among the Israel of God or the 144,000.¹⁵⁶ Jesus is the Anointed class's mediator, the Anointed will mediate the sheep, and the sheep will strive to bring unbelievers to the fold. According to the Watchtower, this process began in 1914, when Jesus spiritually came to earth to rule over the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. The sheep, also regarded as the "great multitude," will display zeal for Jehovah and live a righteous life dedicated to the church. As a demonstration of their place in the proper fold, believers are fully immersed in water during baptism showing recognition to Jehovah's Undershepherd, who surrendered his human soul on behalf of all sheep.¹⁵⁷ The single

¹⁵⁴ 'Shepherd My Little Sheep' — Watchtower Online Library," 219, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1961248>.

¹⁵⁵ "The Recent Pen for 'Other Sheep' — Watchtower Online Library," 17.

¹⁵⁶ "The Recent Pen for 'Other Sheep' — Watchtower Online Library," 21.

¹⁵⁷ "The Recent Pen for 'Other Sheep' — Watchtower Online Library," 20. Jehovah is recognized as Jehovah as the Supreme Shepard with Jesus ranked as Undershepherd. A brief overview of the roles within the Trinity will be discussed in the next chapter.

function of the sheep is to preach the good news of the Kingdom throughout the earth before the end of the old system of sin and unrighteousness.

Most Jehovah's Witnesses look forward to eternal life on earth, not eternal life in heaven with Jesus. The Governing Body teaches that God "did not create [the earth] simply for nothing" but "formed it even to be inhabited (Is.45:18)."¹⁵⁸ The heavenly realm will be occupied by the spiritual bodies of Jesus and the 144,000, the Great Crowd will live in Paradise in a physical body. According to the Watchtower, Jesus promised that God would approve and gift them righteous everlasting life (Mark10:30), security (Lev. 25:18,19; Is. 32:18; Micah 4:4), plenty of food (Ps. 145:16, 67:6), peace with animals (Is. 11:6-9, 65:25), no sickness (Matt. 9:35; Mark 1:40-42; John 33:24, 35:5,6), and a reunion with dead loved ones (Acts 24:15; John 5:28,29).¹⁵⁹ Rutherford referred to the great blessing of Paradise as the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.¹⁶⁰ The resurrected will be raised from death and restored as they were in life (1 Cor. 12:13). The Great Crowd are the survivors of Armageddon whose names are written in the Book of Life (Rev. 7:17). The Great Crowd is tasked to educate those raised from the dead about Jehovah, allowing them to obey and serve him.¹⁶¹

The Holy Spirit Dwells Within Us

As seen earlier, Witnesses falsely claim the 144,000 are filled with those mainly selected from the Governing Body or Bible Students if one refers to Russell. Upon closer examination of

¹⁵⁸ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 27.

¹⁵⁹ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 33–36.

¹⁶⁰ Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die!*, 11.

¹⁶¹ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, 178.

Scripture, it is revealed that the 144,000 will be composed of virgin men from the twelve tribes of Israel. One must note the distinctiveness between the spiritual resurrection of the 144,000 and the physical resurrection of the sheep. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul mentions that he was informed about Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and sightings by eyewitnesses such as Cephas, the twelve, James, and others (v. 1-7). The disciples, being Jewish, understood the resurrection to be a bodily resurrection (*anastasis*). Christ's victory over death was demonstrated to the eyewitnesses by being resurrected in the same physical body that had died. Paul began his conversation with the Corinthians by discussing Jesus' resurrection to help them understand the concept of their future resurrected bodies. Paul sought to help the Corinthians understand the concept of resurrection, as they rejected it (v.12).

According to Witnesses, the belief in the nonphysical resurrection of Jesus is founded on 1 Corinthians 15. They cite verse 44, which states, "It is sown a physical body, there is also a spiritual one." Verse 50 is used as evidence by members to support that neither flesh, blood, nor corruption can inherit God's kingdom. It is important to note that the primary focus on the spiritual body here is not on an immaterial body but on a body dominated by a supernatural spirit. Rhodes writes, "The Greek words *soma pneumatikos* (translated 'spiritual body' here) mean a body *directed* by the spirit, as opposed to one under the dominion of the flesh."¹⁶²

According to Robert Gundry, "soma" always pertains to the physical aspect.¹⁶³ Gundry writes,

¹⁶² Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 83, 190. Rhodes also notes, "the Greek word for 'body' (*soma*), when used of a person, always refers to a physical body in the New Testament. There are no exceptions to this." Paul writes, in 1 Corinthians 2:15 "However, the spiritual man examines all things, but he himself is not examined by any man." It is obvious that the man was not immaterial, but one "whose life had spiritual direction." (p.102).

¹⁶³ Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 15.

“Because of sin, the present physical body must be destroyed. Therefore, the resurrection requires a new physical body so that the whole man might be saved in both his parts. And the link of continuity between the old body and the new is provided by the human spirit.”¹⁶⁴ To enter the kingdom of God, one must be resurrected in a new, imperishable body, as the sinful body cannot gain entry.

Jehovah's Witnesses interpret the Scriptures in their own way regarding the differentiation between the anointed and the sheep. Jesus stated, “And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; those too I must bring in, and they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock, one shepherd. (John 10:16).” These "other sheep" were referring to the Gentiles not part of the Jewish community. Jesus spoke of his intention to bring the Gentiles into his fold as a shepherd for all mankind. This is similar to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, where he discusses the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles from sin and death to eternal life (Eph. 2:11-22). There will be one flock, not a separation of Jew and Gentile or a distinction between the anointed and the sheep.

The Goats Who Fail to Inherit the Kingdom

The "goats" failed to achieve what the "sheep" class performed; they include the wicked, not written in the Book of Life. These individuals are described in the parable of the sheep and goats in the book of Matthew as those who have sided with the Devil and his angels and turned away from Christ. Like the shepherd has a flock of sheep and goats that he separates, so will Jesus separate the peoples of all nations, putting the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his

¹⁶⁴ Gundry, 175. Concerning the resurrection of Christians, Gundry later notes, “physical body renovated by the Spirit of Christ.” (p. 166)

left (Matt. 25:33). Jesus states, "Be on your way from me, you who have been cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I became hungry, but you gave me nothing to eat, and I got thirsty, but you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not receive me hospitably; naked, but you did not clothe me; sick and in prison, but you did not look after me (Matt. 25:41-43)." Members of the goat class are under a divine curse, excluded from the opportunity to have their name written in the Book of Life during Jesus' thousand-year reign.¹⁶⁵ The goats are to receive everlasting destruction (2 Thess. 1:9). When faced with judgment, goats will claim they never saw the Lord hungry or those in need. Those classified in this group are comparable to those that stood before Pontius Pilate and chose Barabbas over Jesus, supporting Jesus's torture and crucifixion. Goats cannot claim ignorance of the command to assist those in need, even if they are not in the presence of the disadvantaged but are aware of those in need. One looking down upon the homeless, asking for food, then claiming to care for others while at church falls into this category. The disregard for human suffering does not differ from clergy members misleading their flock with false doctrine. Watchtower states since 1935, Jesus has been separating the sheep from the goats noting, "Either they are for Jehovah's Messianic kingdom in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, or they are against it."¹⁶⁶ Disregarding the plight of others or misleading the flock is ignoring Christ.

The Watchtower Society is making an apparent dichotomy - either you are part of Jehovah's Witnesses or face annihilation. Multiple countries have banned Jehovah's Witness activities, including Eritrea, Russia, Tajikistan, Singapore, and South Korea.¹⁶⁷ According to

¹⁶⁵ "Why Goatlike Ones Fail to Inherit the Kingdom — Watchtower Online Library" 284, accessed February 21, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101973025?q=goats&p=par>.

¹⁶⁶ "Why Goatlike Ones Fail to Inherit the Kingdom — Watchtower Online Library."

¹⁶⁷ Policy Analysts Jason Morton, "Issue Update: The Global Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses," 2020.

Watchtower logic, one can only be Christian if they are members of the Witnesses community. Therefore, if one lives in a country where their religion is banned, they cannot be Christian and are considered a goat. Residing in a country where Watchtower doctrine is prohibited poses difficulty in obtaining the literature distributed by the Governing Body. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, For I am God, and there is no one else. (Isa. 45:22)” The Messiah was prophesized to come from the nation of Israel to save His people from sin; they were to be saved from all nations. The Bible does not speak of a chosen group of people arising out of the late 1800s that would be God’s chosen, gifted with the task of teaching non-believers during the tribulation so that they may be saved. Salvation is a free gift for all of God’s creation (Ep. 2:8; Rom. 5:8, 5:15-18, 6:23;t. 18-19). John 3:16 clearly conveys, “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.” The core belief of Christianity is straightforward: anyone who trusts and believes in Jesus will receive eternal life.

The Watchtower's idea of having distinct groups, the anointed class, the sheep, and the goats, is inaccurate. Richard T. France remarks, “the Old Testament often describes God's people as his sheep, but never as his goats. The point here is not the identification of the animals, but the fact of their separation.”¹⁶⁸ According to the Bible, no separate groups of people are resurrected. Jesus only has one bride. Those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior will be saved, while those who reject him will face eternal punishment in hell.

¹⁶⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 190.

The Righteous and the Unrighteous

Watchtower doctrine speaks of two resurrections for humankind, one of the righteous and one of the unrighteous. The righteous will experience a resurrection of life, and the unrighteous will encounter a resurrection of judgment.¹⁶⁹ At the end of Christ's thousand-year reign, the Devil and his angels will be released to test the restored humankind.¹⁷⁰ Jesus and the Anointed will then determine the names of those faithful to Jehovah; the righteous will remain in the Book of Life, and the unrighteous that have learned to follow Jehovah faithfully.

For Jehovah's Witness, members excluded from the anointed class, upon passing, will sleep until resurrected in a new physical body to live on earth. The righteous "faithfully served Jehovah while they were alive."¹⁷¹ Having done good things when alive, the righteous had their sin canceled at death. Biblical men and women, such as Abraham, Isaac, Job, Deborah, Ruth, and Daniel, are included in the resurrection of the righteous. The millions of Jehovah's Witnesses that faithfully served Jehovah by preaching His Word door-to-door, excluding themselves from the secular world, practicing self-sacrifice, and holding to the authority of the Bible will be included in the righteous community. When resurrected, their names will be written in pencil in the Book of Life.¹⁷² To remain in the Book of Life, one must remain faithful during the tribulation. The righteous, sheeplike people who do good to Christ's spiritual "brothers" will find approval from Jesus, be restored physically and mentally, and live a perfect human life for eternity. If one were

¹⁶⁹ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, 180.

¹⁷⁰ "Why Goatlike Ones Fail to Inherit the Kingdom — Watchtower Online Library."

¹⁷¹ "Is Your Name in 'the Book of Life'? — Watchtower Online Library," 16, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2022567>.

¹⁷² "Is Your Name in 'the Book of Life'? — Watchtower Online Library," 17.

to die tomorrow, one would be resurrected under the Kingdom of Christ. Families and loved ones will recognize each other and rejoice in reunions.

Jehovah's Witnesses contradict the teachings of the Bible. They claim that to remain in the Book of Life, one must have faith in Jesus and perform good deeds before and after death. However, there are two significant issues with this teaching. First, the term *penciled in* suggests a second chance, following death, to choose to have a relationship with Jesus. On the one hand, Witnesses claim good works are required for salvation; on the other hand, the good works performed during life are of no consequence as they need to be repeated following death and resurrection. The pursuit of redemption does not wait until after death but begins during our earthly existence. In John 14:6, Jesus states he “is the way and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” The only path to achieving salvation is by following Jesus Christ. Yet, the righteous will offer Bible studies through the many publications provided by the Governing Body, led by an invisible Jesus. Witnesses believe the Bible is considered the highest authority and can only be comprehended through teachings found in Watchtower publications. The Bible is the only publication necessary to comprehend God. John begins his work by stating, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god. (John 1:1)”¹⁷³ Jesus is the expression of the Word. John continues by noting, “to all who receive him, he gave authority to become God’s children. (John 1:12)” In Ephesians, Christians are told, “take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (v. 6:17).”

¹⁷³ New World Bible Translation Committee, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. The New World Translation has faced criticism for altering words, removing verses, and making other modifications in an attempt to align with their teachings. While this thesis does not seek to argue the inerrancy of the New World Translation, this verse is an example of adding the word “a” to demonstrate Jesus was not a member of the Trinity; according to the Watchtower, Jesus is a lesser God.

Second, Watchtower teaching proposes that achieving salvation is unattainable. The Bible explicitly states that Jesus was sent to earth in human form to serve as the ultimate role model for humanity. He endured suffering and temptation, ultimately becoming the originator of our salvation. Through his bodily resurrection, Christ empowers us to overcome the fear of death and the shackles it imposes upon us. According to Paul, our salvation comes from having faith in Jesus Christ and receiving God's grace, not from our actions or accomplishments (Eph. 2:8-9). Good works are an expression following salvation. According to Mark Stirling, "learning Christ" means being raised and seated with Christ (2:6), being saved by grace (2:8-9), becoming a part of God's people, reconciled with both God and others (2:14-18), and continuously shedding the old self, renewing the mind, and putting on the new self (4:22-24).¹⁷⁴ Paul expected the Ephesians to mature in their walk in faith by adhering to their calling. A person's faith in Christ is reflected in their righteous life rather than simply fulfilling a checklist for entry into heaven.

Watchtower doctrine assures Witnesses that the wicked will cease to exist, noting, "The wicked one will be no more...But the meek ones themselves will possess the earth (Ps. 37:10,11)."¹⁷⁵ Those not resurrected will face annihilation because eternal damnation in Hell does not exist. Adam and Eve deliberately disobeyed God; therefore, they were disinherited by Jehovah, but their offspring have a different opportunity. The exciting time of the Thousand Year Reign will include "the greatest educational program ever undertaken here on earth."¹⁷⁶ Led by

¹⁷⁴ Mark. Stirling, "Transformed Walking and Missional Temple Building : Discipleship in Ephesians," *Presbyterion* 45, no. 2 (2019): 92, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rvh&AN=NTA0000089101&site=ehost-live&scope=site&custid=liberty&authtype=ip,shib>. Ephesians

¹⁷⁵ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, 34.

¹⁷⁶ "Is Your Name in 'the Book of Life'? — Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY," 19.

Jesus and the Anointed, the Great Crowd will expound their knowledge to the unrighteous in the hopes of adding to the membership of those living forever in Paradise. Adam and Eve deliberately disobeyed God; therefore, Jehovah disinherited them, but their sinful offspring have a choice to become members of God's family through Jesus Christ.

The unrighteous comprise those who were unfamiliar with Jehovah's requirements and failed to live in service to Jehovah while alive on earth. Some of these individuals committed vile crimes, preventing them from having their names penciled into the Book of Life. The Watchtower notes, "Although their sins were canceled at death, they have not established a record of faithfulness. They do *not* have their names written in the Book of Life."¹⁷⁷ This group will need much assistance learning how to live according to Jehovah's standards. For the unrighteous to have their name written in the Book of Life, they must be educated by the great crowd and the righteous. Jesus and the Anointed will judge their progress to prevent ruin from entering the new world. Those stubbornly refusing to learn about Jehovah and practice righteousness will be destroyed during the final judgment. According to witnesses, individuals who claim to believe in Christ but are not members of the Witness community and have not been disfellowshipped may have a final opportunity for redemption. Essentially, by denying the Watchtower, you are also denying Christ. It is important to note that the authority to determine who will be resurrected does not lie with the Governing Body; judgement and salvation belong to the Lord (Ps. 96:13, Jonah 2:9). Furthermore, the unjust will face the consequence of eternal punishment. Matthew tells us Jesus will send his angels to gather the sinners and throw them into the furnace of fire (13:41-42, 49-50), adding they will be bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness (22:13). Luke notes workers of iniquity will gnash their teeth when Jesus denies

¹⁷⁷ "Is Your Name in 'the Book of Life'? — Watchtower Online Library," 18.

knowing them (Luke 13:27-28). According to John 5:25-29, everyone, including those who have passed away, will hear His voice and be raised to either eternal life or condemnation.

The Watchtower acknowledges changes throughout publications since the inception of its journal. These changes have been adjusted to reflect the spiritual food provided through Bible study, noting, "adjustments in viewpoint are never made more acceptable to the world by adopting its declining moral values. On the contrary, the history of Jehovah's Witnesses shows that changes are made with a view adhering even more closely to the Bible, being more like faithful first-century Christians, and so being more acceptable to God."¹⁷⁸ Therefore, new enlightenment of the Governing Body will be placed on paper, online documentation, and preached door-to-door by Witnesses determined to enlarge the population of Paradise. The three resurrections, that of the spiritually anointed, followed by the bodily resurrections of the righteous and concluding with the unrighteous, suggest a class order led by Jesus designed to guide humankind through Armageddon.

Many professions worldwide, including clergy members, often yield to the flattery of the secular world. According to Rutherford, clergy who neglect to teach the Gospel of the Kingdom lead people astray. Rutherford believes that many clergy disregard the truth of the Gospel and focus solely on converting the entire world instead of their primary duty of preaching. Still, the true goal is to "take out from the world a people for his name (Acts 15:14)." Rutherford writes, "let each one, then, apply the measuring rod to himself and see which class he is in. And if he sees he is in the wrong one, he will if he is honest get into the right class as quickly as possible."¹⁷⁹ Rutherford notes that clergy members give false hope to their congregations. The

¹⁷⁸ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 148.

¹⁷⁹ Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, 41.

word church means called-out class, not a denominational system.¹⁸⁰ Supporting his view, Rutherford notes when the Apostle Paul speaks of the church; Paul speaks of the firstborn, written in heaven (Heb. 12:23), who the Lord records in the heavenly records for their consecration and faithful service to him. The bride of Christ is the true church; the harlot symbolizes the false systems attempting to convert the world and those lacking faith in the resurrection.

Hebrews 12:23 states, “in general assembly, and the congregation of the firstborn who have been enrolled in the heavens, and God the Judge of all, and the spiritual lives of righteous ones who have been made perfect.” Guthrie notes, “We should note that for Paul there was only one *prototokot* (firstborn), i.e., Christ (Col. 1:15). There is some connection with the thought here if the *prototokot* are those reborn through Christ. Their names are *enrolled in heaven*, showing them to be officially accepted members of the heavenly Jerusalem.”¹⁸¹ The concept of being enrolled in the Book of Life is mentioned in Luke 10:20 and Revelation 21:27. The reference in Luke appears to include all followers of Christ. According to Hebrews 12:2, Jesus is referred to as “the Chief Agent and Perfector of our faith” and is seated at the “right hand of the throne of God.”

Interestingly, the Watchtower fails to mention Hebrews 12:24 when discussing Jesus' role as a mediator of the new covenant. Guthrie explains that the sprinkled blood symbolizes Jesus' sacrificial act and serves as a reminder of the old covenant's ratification through sprinkling (cf. 9:19).¹⁸² This emphasizes the superiority of Christ's offering and signifies a new way to approach

¹⁸⁰ Rutherford, 77.

¹⁸¹ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 177.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 264. Guthrie, 15:264.

God. Additionally, the sprinkling has a distinct voice that differs from the one heard at Sinai, further emphasizing the significance of this new approach.¹⁸³ The Bible does not state that Jesus is exclusively a mediator between God and the 144,000. Jesus is the mediator between God and humanity in a new covenant (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:15).

It is indeed valid to agree with Russell's perspective on how some clergy members misuse their authority to spread inaccurate teachings. Surprisingly, the Watchtower has provided erroneous teachings, such as multiple dates for Armageddon and Christ's invisible return to rule over the Governing Body. When an institution declares itself as God's mouthpiece, it declares expert biblical knowledge. Paul explains that false apostles will disguise themselves as apostles of Christ just as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light; he also notes their end will parallel their deeds (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Peter warns that there will be false teachers among you, secretly bringing destructive heresies, bringing destruction upon themselves (2 Peter 2:1-3). Matthew 7:15 warns Christians against false prophets (v. 7:15). Paul instructs that one must be ready to preach sound doctrine patiently and rebuke those in error (2 Tim. 4:2).

¹⁸³ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 264.

Appendix 2: Responding to the Authority of the Governing Body

The Watchtower Society is Not the Earthly Representative of God

According to the Watchtower Society, without its vast literature and interpretation of the Bible, the true meaning of Scripture cannot be ascertained even if one reads the Bible regularly.¹⁸⁴ Rhodes notes three reasons Jehovah’s Witnesses adhere to the Watchtower society’s teachings: first, Jehovah’s Witnesses are the “faithful and discreet slave” while other religions are represented as the evil slave (Matt. 24:45-47, 48-51, NWT). Second, 2 Peter 1:20-21 states there should be “no private interpretations” of the Bible. Finally, The Watchtower is God’s Bible-interpreting organization on earth based on Acts 8:30-31.¹⁸⁵ The faithful and discreet slave is led by the Governing Body, a group of leaders, claiming to receive discernment directly through Jesus, the head of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Failure to adhere to the interpretation of the Governing Body is considered apostasy and can lead to the member being disfellowshipped from the organization. Before reviewing the misapplication of the Watchtower doctrine, one must address The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society’s role as God’s representative.

Matthew 24:45-47; 48-51

Rhodes articulates Jehovah’s Witnesses are reading into the text (eisogesis), rather than deriving meaning from the text (exegesis).¹⁸⁶ In the case of the faithful slave, Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to be the sole faithful followers of Jehovah based on the parable of the wise servant in Matthew. Rhodes notes the faithful servant will fulfill his obligations while his master

¹⁸⁴ Rhodes, *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Jehovah’s Witness*, 11.

¹⁸⁵ Rhodes, 12–13.

¹⁸⁶ Rhodes, 14.

is away while the unfaithful servant does not fulfill his responsibilities; this passage is not referring to an organization it is referring to “all who profess to follow Christ and is exhorting them to be faithful as opposed to unfaithful servants of Christ.”¹⁸⁷ Also, if the only method of discernment of Scripture is through an organization, then discernment from the Holy Spirit would not be necessary.

Former Witness, David Reed, points out the circular reasoning within the organization's thinking. Reed notes that Russell, the founder of the Watchtower Society, was viewed as a faithful and wise servant, but after his death, the organization had a significant split when Joseph Rutherford gained complete control of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society; if two groups exist, both founded on the original beliefs of Russell, which group of witnesses is the true servant?¹⁸⁸ There is a significant amount of Watchtower literature that mentions and speaks to the beliefs of Russell.

2 Peter 1:20-21

About the meaning of 2 Peter 1:20-21, Bowman claims Peter is talking about how the Bible came to be written originally, not the individual interpretation of the Bible.¹⁸⁹ Further evaluation of Peter tells the reader to be wary of false teachers (2:1), and as Bowman articulates, “to tell true teachings from false teachers is to compare the teaching with what the Bible itself says, not, as the Jehovah's Witnesses argue, by appeal to what God's organization says the Bible

¹⁸⁷ Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses*, 33. Also mentioned in Rhodes, *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Jehovah's Witness*, 13–14.

¹⁸⁸ David A. Reed, *Jehovah's Witnesses Answered Verse by Verse* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 1986), 59.

¹⁸⁹ Bowman Jr., *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses*, 62.

means.”¹⁹⁰The New World Translation reads, “for you know this first, that no prophecy of Scripture springs from any private interpretation. For prophecy was at no time brought by man’s will, but men spoke from God as they were moved by Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21).” It would be beneficial for one to ask a Jehovah’s Witness to read from the New World Translation and offer the question “whom were they moved by?” These verses are telling the reader that men wrote the Bible through God, moved by the holy spirit, not an organization. Rhodes notes the word *for* at the beginning of verse 21 explains verse 20 by restating its contents and pointing to God as the author of scripture.¹⁹¹ Bowman reminds us that according to Peter’s letter, he is warning against those that twist the scriptures due to their spiritual immaturity, “not due to lack of conformity with some organization.”¹⁹²

Acts 8:30-31

Scripture can present the reader with complex passages where seeking guidance from those more learned is necessary. Peter acknowledges Paul’s letters were difficult to understand, leading to the meaning of Scripture being twisted (2 Pet. 3:16). Rhodes mentions that the need for guidance is why God has provided man with “teachers” from the church, such as the Ethiopian man being taught by Philip; no organization is mentioned in Acts 8:30-31.¹⁹³ In Acts 8:30-31, Philip instructed the Ethiopian man directly from Scripture, not by literature designed by man.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Bowman Jr., 62.

¹⁹¹ Rhodes, *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Jehovah’s Witness*, 15.

¹⁹² Bowman Jr., *Understanding Jehovah’s Witnesses*, 63.

¹⁹³ Rhodes, *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Jehovah’s Witness*, 16.

¹⁹⁴ Rhodes, 16.

Incorrect Prophecy from the Watchtower Organization

One can see from the false prophecies delivered by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society that they are not receiving direct revelation from Jesus Christ. Rhodes notes three notable incorrect prophecies from the Watchtower:

- 1914: *Studies in the Scriptures* (1891) refers to “the full establishment of the Kingdom of God in the earth at AD 1914.”¹⁹⁵
- 1925: *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* (1920) said, 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old.”¹⁹⁶
- 1975: *Our Kingdom Ministry* (in 1968) claimed: “There are only about ninety months [7 1/2 years] left before 6,000 years of man's existence on earth is completed.” This marks the time when human history would end, and the thousand-year reign of Christ would begin.¹⁹⁷

Rhodes also points out that the response from Witnesses may be to state biblical prophets held mistakes but were not branded as false prophets.¹⁹⁸ Deuteronomy states the punishment for false prophecy is death by stoning (Deut. 13:5).

In addition to identifying many false dates provided by the Watchtower for the tribulation and second coming of Christ, one must refer to Jesus' direct words concerning His return. Jesus states, “Concerning that day or the hour nobody knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father. Keep looking, keep awake, for you do not know when the appointed time is (Mark. 13: 32-33).” Jesus admitted he did not know the exact time of his return; Jesus would not change his remark for the Governing Body. Humankind is below the divine and angelic realms in the classification system provided by The Watchtower Society; if Jesus, now

¹⁹⁵ Rhodes, 17.

¹⁹⁶ Rhodes, 17.

¹⁹⁷ Rhodes, 17.

¹⁹⁸ Rhodes, 18.

divine, and the angels do not know the date or the time, man will not have the date or time. Man cannot situate a timetable on Jehovah; God establishes the future of His creation. Christians are required to be prepared for the return of Jesus by studying God's Word and submitting to His Law.