

THE GENTILE TIMES RECONSIDERED

INTRODUCTION

THE DISILLUSIONING and sometimes dramatic process that ended up in the decision to publish this treatise could fill a whole book. Due to considerations of space, however, that background can be only touched upon briefly here.

Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to put great trust in the Watch Tower Society and its leadership. Toward the end of my twenty-six years as an active Jehovah's Witness, however, the signs indicating that such trust was mistaken had mounted. To the very last I had hoped that the leaders of the organization would honestly face the facts respecting their chronology, even if those facts should prove fatal to some of the central doctrines and unique claims of their organization. But when at last I realized that the Society's leaders—apparently for reasons of organizational or “ecclesiastical” policy—were determined to perpetuate what, in the final analysis, amounts to a deception of millions of persons, doing this by suppressing information which they regarded and continue to regard as undesirable, no other course seemed open to me but to publish my findings, thus giving every individual who has a concern for truth an opportunity to examine the evidence and draw his or her own conclusions.

We are each responsible for what we know. If a person has information on hand that others need in order to get a correct understanding of their situation in life—*information that furthermore is withheld from them by their religious leaders*—then it would be morally wrong to remain silent. It becomes his or her duty to make that information available to all who want to know the truth, however this may appear. That is the reason why this book has been published.

The role of chronology in the teaching of the Watch Tower Society

Few people are fully cognizant of the very central role played by chronology in the claims and teachings of the Watch Tower Society. Even many of Jehovah's Witnesses are not fully aware of the indissoluble connection between the Society's chronology and the message they preach from door to door. Confronted with the many evidences against their chronology, some Jehovah's Witnesses tend to downplay it as something they somehow can do without. "Chronology is not so important, after all," they say. Many Witnesses would prefer not to discuss the subject at all. Just how important, then, is the chronology for the Watch Tower organization?

An examination of the evidence demonstrates that *it constitutes the very foundation for the claims and message of this movement.*

The Watch Tower Society claims to be God's "sole channel" and "mouthpiece" on earth. Summing up its most distinctive teachings: it asserts that the kingdom of God was established in heaven in 1914, that the "last days" began that year, that Christ returned invisibly at that time to "inspect" the Christian denominations, and that he finally rejected all of them except the Watch Tower Society and its associates, which he appointed in 1919 as his sole "instrument" on earth.


For about seventy years, the Society employed Jesus' words at Matthew 24:34 about "this generation" to teach clearly and adamantly that the generation of 1914 would positively not pass away until the final end came at the "battle of Armageddon," when every human alive except active members of the Watch Tower organization would be destroyed forever. Thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses of the "1914 generation" fully expected to live to see and to survive that doomsday and then to live forever in paradise on earth.

As decades went by, leaving 1914 ever farther behind, this claim became increasingly difficult to defend. After *80 years* had passed, the claim became virtually preposterous. So, in the November 1, 1995, issue of the *Watchtower* (pages 10 through 21), a new definition of the phrase "this generation" was adopted, one that allowed the organization to "unlink" it from the date of 1914 *as a starting point*. Despite this monumental change, they still retained the 1914 date—in fact they *could not do otherwise* without dismantling their major teachings regarding Christ's "second presence," the start of the "time of the end," and the appointment of their organization as

May 15, 1984

The Watchtower

Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom



1914

The Generation That Will Not Pass Away

1914 — the generation that would not pass away

Christ's unique instrument and God's sole channel on earth. Though now recognizing "this generation" as defined by its *characteristics* rather than by a chronological period (with a particular starting point), they still found a way to include 1914 in their new definition. They accomplished this by including in the definition an arbitrarily added

factor, namely, that the “generation” is composed of “those persons who see the sign of Christ’s presence but fail to mend their ways,” resulting in their destruction. Since the official teaching continues to be that the “sign of Christ’s presence” became visible *from and after 1914*, this allows for the date’s continuing to form a key part of the definition of “this generation.”

All these factors, then, bear testimony to the highly crucial role that 1914 plays in the teaching of the Watch Tower Society. Since the date itself obviously is not stated in Scripture, what is its source?

That date is a product of a chronological calculation, according to which the so-called “times of the Gentiles” referred to by Jesus at Luke 21:24 constitute a period of 2,520 years, beginning in 607 B.C.E. and ending in 1914 C.E.¹ *This calculation is the real basis of the principal message of the movement.* Even the Christian gospel, the “good news” of the kingdom (Matthew 24:14), is claimed to be closely associated with this chronology. The gospel preached by other professed Christians, therefore, has never been the *true gospel*. Said *The Watchtower* of May 1, 1981, on page 17:

Let the honest-hearted person compare the kind of preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom done by the religious systems of Christendom during all the centuries with that done by Jehovah’s Witnesses since the end of World War I in 1918. They are not one and the same kind. That of Jehovah’s Witnesses is really “gospel,” or “good news,” *as of God’s heavenly kingdom that was established by the enthronement of his Son Jesus Christ at the end of the Gentile Times in 1914.* [Italics mine.]

In agreement with this, *The Watchtower* of May 1, 1982, stated that, “of all religions on earth, Jehovah’s Witnesses are the only ones today that are telling the people of earth this ‘good news’.” (Page 10) A Jehovah’s Witness who attempts to tone down the role of chronology in the Society’s teaching simply does not realize that he or she thereby radically undermines the major message of the movement. Such a “toning down” is not sanctioned by the Watch Tower leader-

1 The designations “B.C.E.” (Before the Common Era) and “C.E.” (Common Era) customarily used by Jehovah’s Witnesses, correspond to “B.C.” and “A.D.” They are often used in scholarly literature, especially by Jewish authors, and have been adopted by the Watch Tower Society, as will be seen in the subsequent quotations from the Watch Tower publications. For the sake of consistency, these designations, B.C.E. and C.E., are regularly used in this work, the exception being where material is *quoted* in which the B.C. and A.D. designations are employed.

ship. On the contrary, *The Watchtower* of January 1, 1983, page 12, emphasized that “the ending of the Gentile Times in the latter half of 1914 still stands on a historical basis as *one of the fundamental Kingdom truths to which we **must** hold today.*”²

The hard reality is that the Watch Tower Society views rejection of the chronology pointing to 1914 as a sin having fatal consequences. That God’s kingdom was established at the end of the “Gentile times” in 1914 is stated to be “the most important event of our time,” beside which “all other things pale into insignificance.”³ Those who reject the calculation are said to incur the wrath of God. Among them are “the clergy of Christendom” and its members, who, because they do not subscribe to that date, are said to have rejected the kingdom of God and therefore will be “destroyed in the ‘great tribulation’ just ahead.”⁴ Members of Jehovah’s Witnesses who openly question or discard the calculation run the risk of very severe treatment. If they do not repent and change their minds, they will be disfellowshipped and classified as evil “apostates,” who will “go, at death, . . . to Gehenna,” with no hope of a future resurrection.⁵ It makes no difference if they still believe in God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. When one of the readers of *The Watchtower* wrote and asked, “Why have Jehovah’s Witnesses disfellowshipped (excommunicated) for apostasy

2 Italics and emphasis added. The Watch Tower Society’s former president, Frederick W. Franz, in the morning Bible discussion for the headquarters family on November 17, 1979, stressed even more forcefully the importance of the 1914 date by saying: “The sole purpose of our existence as a Society is to announce the Kingdom established in 1914 and to sound the warning of the fall of Babylon the Great. We have a *special* message to deliver.” (Raymond Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom*, Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1991, pp. 32, 33).

3 *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1988, pp. 10, 11.

4 *The Watchtower*, September 1, 1985, pp. 24, 25.

5 *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1982, p. 27. In *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1992, page 12, such dissidents are described as “enemies of God” who are “intensely hating Jehovah.” The Witnesses, therefore, are urged to “hate” them “with a complete hatred.” This exhortation was repeated in *The Watchtower* of October 1, 1993, page 19, where the “apostates” are stated to be so “rooted in evil” that “wickedness has become an inseparable part of their nature.” The Witnesses are even told to ask God to kill them, in imitation of the psalmist David, who prayed of his enemies: “O that you, O God, would slay the wicked one!” In this way the Witnesses “leave it to Jehovah to execute vengeance.” Such rancorous attacks on former members of the organization reflect an attitude that is exactly the reverse of that recommended by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount.—Matthew 5:43-48

some who still profess belief in God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ?" the Society answered, among other things:

Approved association with Jehovah's Witnesses requires accepting the entire range of the true teachings of the Bible, including those Scriptural beliefs that are unique to Jehovah's Witnesses. What do such beliefs include? . . . *That 1914 marked the end of the Gentile times and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the heavens, as well as the time for Christ's foretold presence.* [Italics mine]⁶

No one, therefore, who repudiates the calculation that the "Gentile times" expired in 1914, is approved by the Society as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. In fact, even one who *secretly* abandons the Society's chronology and thus may still *formally* be regarded as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, has, in reality, rejected the essential message of the Watch Tower Society and, according to the organization's own criterion, is factually no longer a part of the movement.

How this research began

For one of Jehovah's Witnesses to question the validity of this basic prophetic calculation is, then, no easy matter. To many believers, especially in a closed religious system such as the Watch Tower organization, the doctrinal system functions as a sort of "fortress" inside which they may seek shelter, in the form of spiritual and emotional security. If some part of that doctrinal structure is questioned, such believers tend to react emotionally; they take a defensive attitude, sensing that their "fortress" is under attack and that their security is threatened. This defense mechanism makes it very difficult for them to listen to and examine the arguments on the matter *objectively*. Unwittingly, their need for emotional security has become more important to them than their respect for truth.

To reach behind this defensive attitude so common among Jehovah's Witnesses in order to find open, listening minds is extremely difficult—especially when so basic a tenet as the "Gentile times" chronology is being questioned. For such questioning rocks the very foundations of the Witness doctrinal system and therefore often causes Witnesses at all levels to become belligerently defensive. I have repeatedly experienced such reactions ever since 1977 when I first presented the material in this volume to the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses.

6 *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1986, pp. 30, 31.

It was in 1968 that the present study began. At the time, I was a “pioneer” or full-time evangelist for Jehovah’s Witnesses. In the course of my ministry, a man with whom I was conducting a Bible study challenged me to prove the date the Watch Tower Society had chosen for the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, that is 607 B.C.E. He pointed out that all historians marked that event as having occurred about twenty years later, in either 587 or 586 B.C.E. I was well aware of this, but the man wanted to know the reasons why historians preferred the latter date. I indicated that their dating surely was nothing but a guess, based on defective ancient sources and records. Like other Witnesses, I assumed that the Society’s dating of the desolation of Jerusalem to 607 B.C.E. was based on the Bible and therefore could not be upset by those secular sources. However, I promised the man I would look into the matter.

As a result, I undertook a research that turned out to be far more extensive and thoroughgoing than I had expected. It continued periodically for several years, from 1968 until the end of 1975. By then the growing burden of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date forced me reluctantly to conclude that the Watch Tower Society was wrong.

Thereafter, for some time after 1975, the evidence was discussed with a few close, research-minded friends. Since none of them could refute the evidence demonstrated by the data I had collected, I decided to develop a systematically composed treatise on the whole question which I determined to send to the headquarters of the Watch Tower Society at Brooklyn, New York.

That treatise was prepared and sent to the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1977. The present work, which is based on that document, was revised and expanded during 1981 and then published in a first edition in 1983. During the years that have passed since 1983, many new finds and observations relevant to the subject have been made, and the most important of these have been incorporated in the last two editions. The seven lines of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date presented in the first edition, for example, have now been more than doubled.

Correspondence with the Watch Tower headquarters

In 1977 I began to correspond with the Governing Body concerning my research. It soon became very evident that they were unable to refute the evidence produced. In fact, there was not even an attempt made to do so until February 28, 1980. In the meantime, however,

I was repeatedly cautioned not to reveal my findings to others. For example, in a letter from the Governing Body dated January 17, 1978, the following warning was given:

However, no matter how strong the argumentation may be in support of those views, they must, for the present, be regarded as your personal viewpoint. It is not something that you should talk about or try to advance among other members of the congregation.⁷

And further, in a letter dated May 15, 1980, they stated:

We are sure you appreciate that it would not be appropriate for you to begin to state your views and conclusions on chronology that are different than those published by the Society so as to raise serious questions and problems among the brothers.⁸

I accepted such advice, as I was given the impression that my spiritual brothers at the Watch Tower headquarters needed time to re-examine the whole subject thoroughly. In their first reply to my treatise, dated August 19, 1977, they had stated: “We are sorry that the press of work here has not allowed us to give it the attention we would like to up to the present time.” And in the letter of January 17, 1978, they wrote:

We have not had the opportunity of examining this material as yet, as other urgent matters are occupying our attention. However, we will look into this material when we have the opportunity.... You can be assured that your views will be examined by responsible brothers.... In due course we hope to look into your treatise and evaluate what is contained therein.

Judging from these and similar statements, Watch Tower officials at the Brooklyn headquarters seemed prepared to examine the data presented to them honestly and objectively. In a very short time, however, the whole matter took quite a different course.

Interrogation and defamation

Early in August, 1978, Albert D. Schroeder, a member of the Governing Body, held a meeting in Europe with representatives from

7 Names of the authors of letters from the Watch Tower Society are never given. Instead, internal symbols are used. The symbol “GEA” in the upper left corner of this letter shows that the author was Lloyd Barry, one of the members of the Governing Body.

8 The symbol “EF” means the writer was Fred Rusk of the Writing Department. For the full correspondence, see <http://kristenfrihet.se/english/corr.htm>

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WATCH TOWER
BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY
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GEA:ESB

January 17, 1978

Carl Olof Jonsson
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Dear Brother Jonsson:

To hand is your letter of December 12, 1977, and also the treatise that you have prepared entitled "The Gentile Times Re-considered."

We have not had the opportunity of examining this material as yet, as other urgent matters are occupying our attention. However, we will look into this material when we have the opportunity.

We appreciate your sincerity in wanting to set forth your views. However, no matter how strong the argumentation may be in support of these views, they must, for the present, be regarded as your personal viewpoint. It is not something that you should talk about or try to advance among other members of the congregation. We mention this because you state in your letter that several brothers have examined your treatise and that "we are all eagerly looking forward to your comments."

As you can appreciate, what you state in your treatise amounts to a radical departure from the present understanding of chronology by Jehovah's Witnesses. We are sure that you can appreciate that if changes of importance are made they should be made in an orderly way, even as was the case in the first century, with central direction being given. (Acts 15:1, 2) We are also sure that you appreciate that for individuals to advance and advocate such changes would have, not a unifying effect, but a divisive one producing confusion. We mention this to you in view of the fact that the treatise you sent contains a statement on the front page describing it as "prepared by Jehovah's Witnesses, for Jehovah's Witnesses." To say that something is "prepared by Jehovah's Witnesses" implies that it has the sanction of Jehovah's Witnesses as a body, and we are sure you realize that this is not the case with the treatise at hand. This could give a false impression and we are confident that this is not your desire. You can be assured that your views will be examined by responsible brothers, and that if doctrinal change should be made at some time it will come through the proper channels. This is important in preserving the unity of Jehovah's organization.

It is hoped that you will observe the counsel supplied above. In due course we hope to look into your treatise and evaluate what is contained therein.

Please be assured of our warm love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower B. & J. Society
OF PENNSYLVANIA
For the Writing Committee
of the Governing Body

European Watch Tower branch offices. At that meeting, he told the audience that there was a campaign going on both inside the movement and from outside to have the Society's 607 B.C.E.—1914 C.E. chronology overthrown.⁹ *The Society, however, had no intention of abandoning it*, he stated.

Three weeks later, on September 2, I was summoned to a hearing before two representatives of the Watch Tower Society in Sweden, Rolf Svensson, one of the two district overseers in the country, and Hasse Hulth, a circuit overseer. I was told that they had been commissioned by the Society's branch office to hold such a hearing because "the brothers" at the Brooklyn headquarters were deeply concerned about my treatise. Once again I was cautioned not to spread the information I had gathered. Rolf Svensson also told me that the Society did not need or want individual Jehovah's Witnesses to become involved in research of this kind.

Partly as a result of this meeting, I resigned from my position as an elder in the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses and also from all my other tasks and assignments in the congregation and the circuit. I did this in the form of a lengthy letter, addressed to the local eldership and the circuit overseer, Hasse Hulth, in which I briefly explained the reasons for the position I had taken. Soon it became widely known among my Witness brothers in different parts of Sweden that I had rejected the chronology of the Society.

In the following months, I and others who had questioned the chronology began to be condemned privately as well as from the platforms of Kingdom Halls (congregational meeting places) and at Witness assemblies or conventions. We were publicly characterized in the most negative terms as "rebellious," "presumptuous," "false prophets," "small prophets who have worked out their own little chronology," and "heretics." We were called "dangerous elements in the congregations," "evil slaves," "blasphemers," as well as "immoral, lawless ones." Privately, some of our Witness brothers, including a number of the Watch Tower Society's traveling representatives, also intimated that we were "demon-possessed," that we had "flooded the Society with criticism" and that we "should have been disfellowshipped long ago." These are just a few examples of the widespread

9 Except for my treatise, which came from inside the movement, Schroeder could have had in mind two non-Witness publications which attack the Society's chronology: *The Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Speculation*, by Edmund C. Gruss (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1972), and *1914 and Christ's Second Coming* by William MacCarty (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1975).

defamation, one that has gone on ever since, although no names, for obvious legal reasons, have ever been mentioned publicly.

That such obvious slander was not just a local phenomenon, but had the sanction of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, was evident from the fact that similar statements were printed in *The Watchtower* magazine.¹⁰

This description of the situation that developed has not been given in order to criticize Jehovah's Witnesses as individuals. These people are usually kind and sincere in their belief. The description has rather been given to illustrate how easily an individual may unwittingly fall prey to the irrational, psychological reactions described earlier in this introduction. In a letter to Albert Schroeder, dated December 6, 1978, I described the new turn of events, calling attention to the sad fact that although my treatise had been composed with the greatest thoughtfulness and sent to the Society in all sincerity, I had become the victim of backbiting, vilification and character assassination:

How tragic, then, to observe how a situation develops, where the attention is drawn away from the question raised—the validity of the 607 B.C.E. date—and directed to the person who raised it, and *he*—not the question—is regarded as the problem! How is it possible that a situation of this kind develops in our movement?

The answer to this question, one to which the Society never officially responded, is to be found in the psychological defense mechanism described by Dr. H. Dale Baumbach:

Insecure individuals, when faced with a problem which highlights their insecurity, instinctively respond by attempting to destroy that

10 Abandoning the 607 B.C.E.—1914 C.E. calculation also implies abandoning those interpretations founded upon it such as the idea that God's kingdom was established in 1914 and that Christ's "invisible presence" began in that year. Of Jehovah's Witnesses who cannot embrace such views, *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1979, stated on page 13: "*Lawless persons* have even tried to penetrate the true Christian congregation, arguing that the 'promised presence' of our Lord is not in this day . . . Persons of this kind are included in Jesus' warning recorded at Matthew 7:15-23: 'Be on the watch for the *false prophets* that come to you in sheep's covering, but inside they are ravenous wolves. . . . In that day I will confess to them: I never knew you! Get away from me, you *workers of lawlessness*.'" Further, *The Watchtower* of August 1, 1980, page 19, said: "Peter was also speaking of the danger of being 'led away' by some within the Christian congregation who would become '*ridiculers*,' making light of the fulfillment of prophecies concerning Christ's 'presence' and adopting a *law-defying* attitude toward 'the faithful and discreet slave,' the Governing Body of the Christian congregation and the appointed elders." [Italics mine] See also paragraph 11 on the same page and paragraph 14 on page 20 of the same issue.

which addresses their insecurity or to banish it to the recesses of the mind.¹¹

Awareness of this defense mechanism, it is hoped, will help those readers who are associated with Jehovah's Witnesses to examine the evidence presented in this work with due consideration and an open mind.

Eventually the Watch Tower Society did attempt to refute the evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date, but this was not done until a special representative of the Governing Body in Sweden had written to the Society asking them to provide an answer to *the content* of the treatise sent to them, telling them that the author was still waiting for a reply. This representative was the coordinator of the Society's work in Sweden, Bengt Hanson.

Hanson had paid me a visit on December 11, 1979, to discuss the situation that had developed. During our discussion, he was brought to realize that it was the *evidence* I had presented to the Society against the 607 B.C.E. date—not me, my motives or attitude—that was the real issue. If the evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date was *valid*, this was a problem that should be of equal concern to every Witness in the organization. Under such circumstances, my personal attitude and motives were as irrelevant as those of other Witnesses.

As a result of this, early in 1980, Hanson wrote a letter to the Governing Body explaining the situation, telling them that I was still waiting for a reply to the evidence I had brought against their chronology. And so, at long last, nearly three years after my sending them the research material, in a letter dated February 28, 1980, an attempt was made to tackle *the question* instead of *the questioner*.

The argumentation presented, however, turned out to be largely a repetition of earlier arguments found in various places in the Watch Tower Society's literature, *arguments which had already been demonstrated in the treatise to be unsatisfactory*. In a letter dated March 31, 1980, I answered their arguments and added two new lines of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date. Thus the Society not only failed

11 *Spectrum*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1981, p. 63. (This journal was published by the Associations of Adventist Forums, Box 4330, Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.) The *Awake!* magazine of November 22, 1984, similarly explained that such behaviour is a sign of "a closed mind," saying: "For example, if we are unable to defend our religious views, we may find ourselves lashing out against those who challenge our beliefs, not with logical arguments, but with slurs and innuendos. This smacks of prejudice and of a closed mind." (Page 4; compare also the *Awake!* of May 22, 1990, page 12.)

to defend its position successfully, but the evidence against it also became considerably stronger.

No further attempt to deal with the whole matter was made by the Society until the summer of 1981, when a short discussion of it appeared as an “Appendix” to the book *“Let Your Kingdom Come”* (pages 186-189). This latest discussion added nothing new to the earlier arguments, and to anyone who has carefully studied the subject of ancient chronology, it appears to be no more than a feeble attempt to save an untenable position by concealing facts. This is clearly demonstrated in the last chapter of this present work, titled “Attempts to overcome the evidence.” The contents of the Watch Tower Society’s “Appendix,” however, finally convinced me that *the leaders of this organization were clearly not prepared to let facts interfere with traditional fundamental doctrines.*

“Waiting upon Jehovah”

It may be noted that while the Society’s officers feel perfectly free to publish any argument *in support of* their chronology, they have gone to great lengths to try to keep Jehovah’s Witnesses at large in ignorance of the heavy burden of evidence *against it*. Thus they had not only repeatedly cautioned me not to share my evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date with others, but they have also supported the widespread defamation of any and all Jehovah’s Witnesses who have questioned the organization’s chronology. This mode of procedure is not only unfair towards those who have questioned it; it is also most unfair towards Jehovah’s Witnesses in general. They have a right to hear *both* sides of the issue and learn *all* the facts. That is why I decided to publish *The Gentile Times Reconsidered*.

Interestingly, various arguments have been advanced by representatives of the Watch Tower Society to justify the position that facts and evidence which go contrary to its teachings should not be made known among Jehovah’s Witnesses. One line of reasoning goes as follows: Jehovah reveals the truth *gradually* through his “faithful and discreet slave” class, whom Christ has appointed “over all his belongings.” (Matthew 24:47, NW) This “slave” class expresses itself through those who oversee the publishing and writing of Watch Tower literature. We should, therefore, *wait upon Jehovah*—wait, in other words, until the organization publishes “new truths.” Anyone who “runs ahead” of the organization is therefore *presumptuous*, for he thinks he knows better than “the faithful and discreet slave.”

Such an argument, however, is invalid *if the Society's suppositions regarding Bible chronology are wrong*. How so? Because the very concept that it is possible today to identify a “faithful and discreet slave class,” whom Christ, as the “master” in the parable at Matthew 24:45-47, has appointed “over all his belongings,” rests unequivocally on the *chronological calculation* that the “master” arrived in 1914 and made such an appointment a few years later in 1919. If, as will be shown in this work, the Gentile times *did not* end in 1914, then the basis for claiming that Christ returned in that year disappears, and Watch Tower leaders cannot claim to have been appointed “over all his belongings” in 1919. If this is so, neither can they rightfully claim a divinely-assigned monopoly on publishing “the truth.”

It should also be noted that it is the “master” of the parable who, on his arrival, decides who is “the faithful and discreet slave,” *not the slaves themselves*. So, for a group of individuals to claim—in the “master’s” absence—to be “the faithful and discreet slave,” elevating themselves over all the master’s “belongings,” *is itself grossly presumptuous*. On the other hand, an individual who claims for himself no lofty position can hardly be regarded as presumptuous if he publishes information that contradicts some of the teachings of the Watch Tower Society.

To “wait upon Jehovah,” of course, is the duty of every Christian. Unfortunately, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, like many other apocalyptic movements, has time and again “announced” that the time has come for the fulfillment of God’s prophecies, doing this in each case without regard to God’s own “times and seasons” for their fulfillment. This has been the case ever since the very beginning in the 1870s.

When the leaders of the Watch Tower movement for about 55 years (1876-1931) persistently taught that Christ had arrived invisibly in 1874, were they setting an example of “waiting upon Jehovah”?

When they taught that the “remnant” of Christ’s church would be changed (1 Thessalonians 4:17), first in 1878, then in 1881, then in 1914, then in 1915, then in 1918, and then again in 1925, did they “wait upon Jehovah”?¹²

12 *The Watch Tower*, February 1, 1916, p. 38; September 1, 1916, pp. 264, 265; July 1, 1920, p. 203.

When they taught that the end of the present system of things would come in 1914, then in 1918-20, then in 1925, then about 1941-42, and then again about 1975, were they “waiting upon Jehovah”?¹³

If 1914 is not the terminal point of the “Gentile times” as the Watch Tower Society continues to hold, then the numerous current “prophetic” applications stemming from it are additional proofs that the Society *still* is not prepared to “wait upon Jehovah.” In that light and under such circumstances it seems a bit misplaced to advise others to “wait upon Jehovah.” The one who *genuinely* wants to wait upon Jehovah cannot simply wait until the leaders of the Watch Tower Society are prepared to do that. If, upon careful consideration of the evidence he comes to the conclusion that the Watch Tower Society has produced, within the framework of its chronology, a clearly arbitrary “fulfillment” of Bible prophecy in our time, then he needs to dissociate himself from the persistent attempts made to *impose* that arbitrary position on others as required belief. Then he could rightly be said to be prepared to start “waiting upon Jehovah.”

The expulsion

For over a century the Watch Tower publications have been filled with a massive and continuous criticism of the errors and evils of other Christian denominations. Even if this criticism often has been sweeping and superficial, it has not infrequently also hit the target. The Watch Tower literature often has denounced the intolerance shown in the past by various churches against dissident members. “Christendom has had it fanatics—from people who set themselves on fire in political protest to *individuals acting intolerantly toward those holding different religious views*,” noted *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1987, page 28. This kind of intolerance found a frightening expression in the Inquisition, which was established by the Roman Catholic Church in the 13th century and lasted for over six centuries.

The word “Inquisition” is derived from the latin word *inquisitio*, meaning “examination.” It is briefly described as “a court established by the Roman Catholic Church in order to discover and punish her-

13 *The Time Is At Hand* (= Vol. 2 of the series *Studies in the Scriptures*, published in 1889), pp. 76-78; *The Finished Mystery* (= Vol. 7 of *Studies in the Scriptures*, published in 1917), pp. 129, 178, 258, 404, 542; *Millions Now Living Will Never Die!* (1920), p. 97; *The Watchtower*, Sept. 9, 1941, p. 288; *Awake!*, Oct. 8, 1966, pp. 19, 20; *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1968, pp. 271-272.

etics and apostates.”¹⁴ What was the situation of the people under this intolerant clergy rule? *The Watchtower* of September 1, 1989, explains on page 3:

No one was free to worship as he pleased or to express opinions conflicting with those of the clergy. This clerical intolerance created a climate of fear throughout Europe. The church established the Inquisition to root out individuals who dared to hold different views.

Such statements might give the impression that the Watch Tower Society, in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, acts with tolerance toward members who “hold different religious views” and defends their right to express opinions conflicting with the teachings of the organization. The truth is, however, that this organization takes exactly the same attitude to members holding different religious opinions as did the medieval Catholic Church. “Beware of those who try to put forward their own contrary opinions,” cautioned *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1986, page 17. In answer to the question why Jehovah’s Witnesses have “disfellowshipped (excommunicated) for apostasy some who still profess belief in God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ,” the Watch Tower Society said:

Those who voice such an objection point out that many religious organizations claiming to be Christian allow dissident views. . . . However, such examples provide no grounds for our doing the same. . . . Teaching dissident or divergent views is not compatible with true Christianity.¹⁵

The Watch Tower Society has even established examination courts similar to those organized by the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, the only essential difference being that the Society’s “judicial committees” have no legal authority to torture their victims *physically*. I knew that the conclusions I had reached would eventually cause me to be tried and expelled by such a “court of inquisition,” provided that I did not leave the organization of my own accord before that. But I knew, too, that the consequences in both cases would be the same.

After twenty-six years as an active Jehovah’s Witness I was now, in 1982, prepared to leave the Watch Tower organization. It was quite clear to me that this would mean a complete break with the whole

14 The Swedish encyclopaedia *Nordisk Familjebok*, Vol. 11 (Malmö: Förlagshuset Norden AB, 1953), p. 35.

15 *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1986, pp. 30, 31.

social world I had been a part of during all those years. The rules of the Watch Tower Society require Jehovah's Witnesses to cut off all contacts with those who break with the organization, whether this break occurs by excommunication or by a voluntary resignation. I knew that I would not only lose virtually all my friends, but also all my relatives within the organization (of which there were over seventy, including a brother and two sisters with their families, cousins and their families, and so on). I would be regarded and treated as "dead," even if my physical "execution" would have to be postponed until the imminent "battle of Armageddon," a battle in which the Witnesses expect Jehovah God to annihilate forever all who are not associated with their organization.¹⁶

For some time I had been trying to prepare myself emotionally for this break. My plan was to publish my treatise as a public farewell to the movement. However, I did not manage to get the material ready for publication before a letter arrived from the Watch Tower Society's branch office in Sweden, dated May 4, 1982. The letter was a summons to an examination before a "judicial committee" consisting of four representatives of the Society, who had been appointed, the letter said, to "find out about your attitude toward our belief and the organization."¹⁷

I realized that my days within the organization now were numbered, and that I might not be able to get my treatise ready in time for publication. In a letter to the branch office I tried to have the meeting with the judicial committee postponed. I pointed out that, as they very well knew, the grounds for my "attitude toward our belief and the organization" consisted of the evidence I had presented against the Society's chronology, and if they genuinely wanted to change my

16 The disfellowshipping (excommunication) rules are discussed, for instance, in *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1981, pages 16-31, and in *The Watchtower*, April 15, 1988, pages 27, 28. With respect to the impending destruction of the present world system *The Watchtower* of September 1, 1989, states on page 19: "Only Jehovah's Witnesses, those of the anointed remnant and the 'great crowd', as a united organization under the protection of the Supreme Organizer, have any Scriptural hope of surviving the impending end of this doomed system dominated by Satan, the Devil." (Compare also *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1988, pages 14, 15)

17 The action was probably taken at the request of the headquarters in Brooklyn, New York. As Raymond Franz, who was a member of the Governing Body until Spring, 1980, wrote to me afterwards in a letter dated August 7, 1982: "I suppose it was somewhat of a foregone conclusion that the Society would take action toward you. In my own case, I feel that it had to be only a matter of time until they did something about me, no matter how low a profile I kept. I would not doubt that in your case the Branch office contacted Brooklyn and was advised to take action."

attitude, they had to start with the burden of evidence that was the *basis* for it. I requested, therefore, that the members of the committee be allowed to make a thorough examination of my treatise. After that we might reasonably have a meaningful meeting.

But neither the branch office nor the four members of the judicial committee showed any interest in the kind of discussion I had proposed, and they did not even comment on the conditions I had stated for having a meaningful meeting with them. In a brief letter they just repeated the summons to the committee examination. It seemed obvious that I was already judged in advance, and that the trial I had been summoned to would only be a meaningless and macabre farce. I therefore chose to stay away from the examination and was consequently judged and disfellowshipped in my absence on June 9, 1982.

Attempting to gain time I appealed the decision. A so-called “appeal committee” of four new members was appointed, and once again I repeated in a letter the conditions I found reasonable for having a meaningful conversation with them. The letter was not even answered. On July 7, 1982, therefore, the new committee met for another sham trial in my absence, and as expected it just confirmed the decision of the first committee. In both instances the sole “judicial” issue considered obviously was, Did I or did I not agree totally with Watch Tower teaching? The question of whether the reasons for my position were *valid* was simply treated as irrelevant.

Are the conclusions destructive of faith?

As pointed out earlier, the conclusions arrived at in this work upset the central claims and apocalyptic interpretations of the Watch Tower Society. Such conclusions, therefore, could cause some unrest among Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the leaders of the Society clearly feared that their dissemination would disrupt the unity of their flock. I was well aware that my efforts would be interpreted by Watch Tower officials as an attempt to destroy faith and to disrupt the unity of the “true Christian congregation.” But faith should rightly be in harmony with truth, with fact, and this includes historical facts. Thus I felt confident that publishing the facts on the subject at hand would not disturb peace and unity among those who are truly Christians. True unity is founded upon *love* among them, for love is the “perfect bond of union.” — Colossians 3:14.

On the other hand, there is also a false unity, founded, not upon love, but upon fear. Such “unity” is characteristic of authoritarian

organizations, political as well as religious. It is a *mechanistic* unity enforced by the leaders of such organizations who want to maintain their authority and keep control over individuals—a unity that does not depend on truth. In such organizations, individuals relinquish to central authorities their right and responsibility to think, speak, and act freely. Since the evidence and the conclusions that are presented in this work overthrow the authoritarian claims of the Watch Tower Society, the publication of this work may possibly be a threat to the *enforced* unity within this organization. But the *true* unity founded upon love among Christian individuals, whose “fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ,” will surely not be affected by this.—John 17:21-23; 1 John 1:3, *NIV*.

Thus, even if the prophetic claims and interpretations of the Watch Tower Society are found to be groundless, nothing of *real* value will be lost when these things dissolve and disappear. A Christian still has God’s Word, the real source of truth and hope. Christ is still his Lord, his only hope for future life. And he will still enjoy Christian peace and unity, with his Father, with Jesus Christ, and with those individuals on earth who turn out to be his true brothers and sisters. Even if he were to be expelled from an authoritarian religious system because he accepts what he clearly sees to be true, Christ will not forsake him, for he said: “Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.” (John 9:30, 34-39; Matthew 18:20, *NIV*) The answer to the question, “Where shall we go without the organization?” is still the same as at the time of the apostles, when Peter said: “Lord, *whom* shall we go away to? *You* have sayings of everlasting life.” (John 6:68) It is Christ, not an organization, who has “sayings of everlasting life.”¹⁸

During the years that have passed since this research started, I have come to know, personally or by letter, a growing number of Jehovah’s Witnesses at different levels of the Watch Tower organization who have examined thoroughly the question of chronology and independently arrived at the same conclusions that are presented in this volume. Some of these men tried very hard to defend the Society’s chronology before they were forced by the biblical and historical evidence to abandon it. Among such were members of the Watch Tower research committee appointed to produce the Society’s Bible

18 In the Watch Tower Society’s comments on this text, the “organization” has been substituted for Christ as the one to whom one should go to find “everlasting life.” See for example *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1981, page 19, and December 1, 1981, page 31.

dictionary, *Aid to Bible Understanding*. The section on chronology in this work on pages 322 through 348 is still the most able and thorough discussion of Watch Tower chronology ever published by that organization.¹⁹ Yet the individual who wrote the article in question ultimately came to realize that the Society's 607 B.C.E. date for the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians could not be defended, and later he abandoned it altogether, with all the calculations and teachings founded upon it. In a letter to me, he stated:

In developing the subject 'Chronology' for *Aid to Bible Understanding*, the Neo-Babylonian period, extending from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's father Nabopolassar to the reign of Nabonidus and the fall of Babylon, presented a particular problem. As Jehovah's Witnesses, we were obviously interested in finding and presenting some evidence, however small, in support of the year 607 B.C.E. as the date of the destruction of Jerusalem in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year. I was well aware of the fact that historians consistently point to a time some twenty years later and that they place the start of Nebuchadnezzar's reign in 605 B.C.E. (his accession year) rather than 625 B.C.E., the date used in Watch Tower publications. I knew that the 607 B.C.E. date was crucial to the Society's interpretation of the 'seven times' of Daniel chapter four as pointing to the year 1914 C.E.

A large amount of research went into the effort. At that time (1968), Charles Ploeger, a member of the Watch Tower headquarters staff, was assigned as an assistant to me. He spent many weeks searching through the libraries of New York City for any sources of information that might give some validity to the date of 607 B.C.E. as the time of Jerusalem's destruction. We also went to Brown University to interview Dr. A. J. Sachs, a specialist in astronomical texts relating to the Neo-Babylonian and adjoining periods. None of these efforts produced any evidence in support of the 607 B.C.E. date.

19 *Aid to Bible Understanding* was published in its entirety in 1971. A slightly revised edition in two volumes was published in 1988. The most important new feature is the addition of visual aids (maps, pictures, photographs, etc.), all in full color. The name of the dictionary was changed, however, to *Insight on the Scriptures*, evidently because the three principal authors, Raymond Franz, Edward Dunlap, and Reinhard Lengat, left the headquarters in 1980, and that two of them, Franz and Dunlap, were disfellowshipped because of their divergent views. In *Insight on the Scriptures*, more than half of the contents of the original article on "Chronology" has been cut off (see Vol. 1, pp. 447-467), the reason likely being the information on the subject presented in the treatise sent to the headquarters in 1977, along with a recognition of the tenuous nature of the organization's claims.

In view of this, in writing the article on ‘Chronology’ I devoted a considerable portion of the material to efforts at showing the uncertainties existent in ancient historical sources, including not only Babylonian sources but also Egyptian, Assyrian and Medo-Persian. Though I still believe that a number of the points presented as to such uncertainties are valid, I know that the argumentation was born of a desire to uphold a date for which there was simply no historical evidence. If the historical evidence did, in fact, contradict some clear statement in Scripture I would not hesitate to hold to the Scriptural account as the more reliable. But I realize that the issue is not some contradiction of clear Scriptural statement but contradiction of an *interpretation* placed upon portions of Scripture, giving to them a meaning that is not stated in the Bible itself. The uncertainties that are to be found in such human interpretations are certainly equal to the uncertainties to be found in chronological accounts of ancient history.²⁰

Acknowledgements

Before this introduction is concluded, I would like to thank the many knowledgeable persons all over the world, some of whom were still active Jehovah’s Witnesses at the time the treatise was written, who, by their encouragement, suggestions, criticism and questions have greatly contributed to this treatise. First among these I should mention Rud Persson in Ljungbyhed, Sweden, who participated in the work from an early stage and who more than anyone else assisted in these respects. Other friends of the same background, especially James Penton and Raymond Franz, have been of great help in preparing the book for publication by polishing my English and grammar.

With respect to the ideo-historical section (chapter one), my contacts with Swedish scholar Dr. Ingemar Lindén stimulated my interest and initiated my research in this area. Alan Feuerbacher, Beaverton, Oregon (now in Fort Collins, Colorado) provided important documents for this section. For the chapters on Neo-Babylonian chronology (chapters three and four) the contacts with authorities on the Babylonian cuneiform texts have been of invaluable help. This applies particularly to Professor D. J. Wiseman in England, who is a leading expert on the Neo-Babylonian period; Mr. C. B. F. Walker, Deputy Keeper in the Department of the Ancient Near East in the

20 Raymond Franz, former Governing Body member, wrote this letter, dated June 12,

British Museum, London, now retired; Professor Abraham J. Sachs in the U.S.A; Professor Hermann Hunger in Austria, who since the death of Abraham Sachs in 1983 is the leading expert on Babylonian astronomical observational texts; Dr. John M. Steele in Toronto, Canada, and Dr. Béatrice André at the Louvre Museum in Paris. On the exegetical sections (chapters 5-7), finally, a number of capable linguists and Hebraists willingly shared their expertise, especially Dr. Seth Erlandsson in Västerås, Sweden; Dr. Tor Magnus Amble and Dr. Hans M. Barstad, both in Oslo, Norway, and Professor Ernst Jenni in Basel, Switzerland.

First of all, however, my thanks go to the God of the Bible, who in the Old Testament from the time of Moses onwards carries the personal name Yahweh or Jehovah, but whom we in the New Testament meet and can approach as our heavenly Father, as this research has been done under constant prayer for his help and understanding. All honor goes to Him, since it is his Word of truth that has been the basis of this study. Although certain religious theories and interpretations were found to be untenable and had to be rejected, his prophetic Word was confirmed, over and over again, during the biblical and historical research connected with the subject under discussion. This faith-strengthening experience has been a real and lasting blessing to me. My hope is that the reader will be blessed in a similar way.

Carl Olof Jonsson
Göteborg, Sweden, 1982
Revised in 1998 and 2004