

# WITNESSFORJESUS.COM

## Out of Darkness Into the Light

Hello. My name is Jerry Mercer, and I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony of how Jesus delivered me out of the darkness of Jehovah's Witnesses. As Paul put it, He "transferred us out of the darkness into the Kingdom of His dear Son." That's in Colossians 1:13.

### Early Life as a Jehovah's Witness

I grew up as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. My father was a Jehovah's Witness and my grandfather was a "Russellite" as the Witnesses were derisively called back in 1918. I can recall going door-to-door with my father at an early age of 10 or 11, and going to the Kingdom Hall back about 1952 when the "New World Translation Of The Christian Greek Scriptures" came out.

One interesting thing that would happen when I was a child was a dream I would have on occasion, every couple of years as I recall. In this dream I would be standing in the way of these gigantic, wheels that looked like coins, which seemed to be 30 or 40 feet in height and were rolling toward me, threatening to crush me underneath. As they would come near, in my dream I would be terrified. Then I would reach out and touch a wheel, and they all would turn to powder.

I remember once, at the age of 11, I stayed home sick right before and during the Christmas holidays, and while I was laid up in bed, I read the gospels in the New World Translation and identified with Jesus, choosing in my heart to follow Him. Of course, at that time, I understood that commitment to be something I would live out as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I drifted away for awhile, but at the age of 14, I committed myself to Jehovah God and got baptized as a JW. I was very active, and was recognized for my service. At the age of 18 I was appointed to areas of service as a JW. I served as a Territory Servant, which means I divided

up the territory assigned to the local congregation, into sub-areas, to make sure it was completely covered in door-to-door activity.

I was appointed to be a public speaker among the Witnesses, which means I would go to other congregations and deliver "talks," or what Christians would call "sermons." Having learned to use sign language, I translated for the deaf at our conventions. I also played guitar in the convention symphony until the live musicians were replaced with recorded music with which to sing along. I served for a time as a "pioneer," which is someone who spends 100 hours or more each month in door-to-door and in-home book study activity.

At the age of 20, I was surprised to get a glimpse of understanding of my recurring dream. I was at the home of another JW and saw copies of the Watchtower magazine from the 1940's. There on the cover of the Watchtower I saw their depiction of Ezekiel's "Wheels". They looked like gigantic coins with the ridges, as on a silver dollar. They were the source of the image that had appeared in my dreams from my childhood.

As part of an assignment at a Witness convention, I became acquainted with a former missionary for Jehovah's Witnesses, Don Nelson. He had served in Brazil and had these wonderful stories of his work there, trying to share his beliefs with Brazilians who lived in the jungles. Now and then I encountered Born-again Christians, such as this fellow named Kenny who was present at an auto repair place when I had my car fixed; and another fellow with whom I worked on a farm for a few months. As a JW, I had my pat responses to Christian positions, and merely sought to convince them that they were wrong and I was right. Nonetheless, God was reminding me of the Gospel from these encounters.

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Basic Beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses:

## The Name of God.

As a JW, I shared the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Paramount was the recognition of the Name of God, Jehovah. This is huge to JW's. I remember going door-to-door asking people if they knew the name of God, and informing them it was Jehovah, then trying to induce their purchase of the JW version of the Bible, the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures. Our big selling point? First, it restored the name of Jehovah to its proper place. Second, it was a so-called "literal, word for word translation," in modern english. At the time I did not know that there were no Biblical scholars in the New World Translation Committee.

## The Person of Jesus Christ.

As a JW, I was taught and believed that Jesus is God's first creation, and not God himself; that Jesus was then used in the act of creating everything else, a co-worker with Jehovah. The name of Jehovah, the erroneous pronunciation of the Hebrew name of God, transliterated YHWH, was reserved for the Father. Jesus was identified as the Son of God, in the sense of being God's first creation, and the King of Jehovah's Kingdom, installed by the Father. He was even called a "vassal" king, or subordinate king. To the Jehovah's Witness, Jesus had a beginning, and is less than Jehovah, not equal in any sense.

## The Holy Spirit.

To the JW, the Holy Spirit is God's "active force", or impersonal power, not a person. Considering the Holy Spirit to be not a person, the question of equality with Jehovah is not entertained. Scriptures that combine praise for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are glossed over with very little comment or none at all.

## The 144,000.

Taking two references from the Book of Revelation, JW's believe that only 144,000 are going to heaven, and that all others who live forever will do so here on earth after the battle of Armageddon and the 1,000 year reign of Christ over the earth. Using this division of classes, the Watchtower removes from the privilege of the vast majority any share in the marvelous promises given to the Church (whom they call The Congregation), since they conclude that The Congregation is only the 144,000. The rest, whom they call the "great crowd of other sheep," find themselves obligated to obey the injunctions on The Congregation, but without the privileges of the members of the 144,000. The 144,000 are understood to be selected from A.D. 33 till the early 1900's, so only a few remain. Only the remnant of the 144,000 partake of the bread and wine of communion, which they call "The Memorial of Christ's Death."

## Hell or the Grave?

In the opinion of the Watchtower Society, no one goes to a place of eternal torment, but at death simply ceases to exist. JW's believe that the human soul is not immortal, in fact is not separate and distinct from the human body. As they put it in one publication, "Your soul is you." That is, you as a composite of body and thought are a soul; you don't have a soul. Having this view of death, they do not believe there is consciousness after death. Their view of resurrection is that during the thousand years Jehovah God will reconstitute the individual from raw material and place the person's memories in a newly created mind. In essence, you are duplicated, not resurrected.

## Everlasting life is a hope, not a present reality.

Since the vast majority of JW's do not believe they are headed for heaven but for earth, they do not understand being declared righteous, or justified, by faith. They do not think in terms of having eternal life, but hope to achieve it one day. They believe that IF

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they survive Armageddon, they will have the chance to show Jehovah they are worthy of everlasting life by working their way to human perfection and being declared righteous after the 1,000 years.

## God's Kingdom established in 1914.

Jehovah's Witnesses are taught that God's Kingdom was established in 1914 in the heavens. A quote from a 1997 Watchtower magazine says, "The new Kingdom that Jehovah set up in 1914 is a heavenly power that will never be subject to anyone but Jehovah, nor will it be brought to ruin." The Watchtower has taught that the world will end before the generation that saw that occur passes away. Since that is the case, we would have to be a heartbeat away from the end of the world.

## Calling on the Name of Jehovah.

One of the messages JW's have taken door-to-door is "Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved." That is a quote from Romans 10:13 in their version of the Bible. In a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, prayer is offered only to Jehovah, with the expression "in Jesus' name" tagged onto the end. Prayer is never addressed to Jesus.

## Jesus died on a torture stake.

The cross is the universal symbol of the death of Christ, but the JW does not believe in the cross. They believe that Jesus died on an upright pole, with no crossbeam. They translate the term cross as "torture stake."

## The resurrection of Jesus.

According to the Watchtower Society, Jesus was resurrected a spirit, without his body. They teach that God disposed of the body of Jesus and the manifestations of Jesus to his disciples were basically a trick to convince them Jesus was alive. They say he materialized a body for the occasions, but that Jesus is only a spirit, with no physical body.

## God's channel of communication.

The Watchtower teaches that the "Remnant of the 144,000" is God's sole earthly representative, and that Jehovah's will is revealed through the pages of the Watchtower. The people must align with it to be in obedience to Jehovah. They also teach that the "remnant of the 144,000" is the mediator for the "other sheep" class between them and God. These are the major teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses. While there are others which seem peculiar to most people, these demonstrate the major beliefs of the JW's and illustrate what I personally believed while I was one of them.

## 1968-69 Don Nelson and Peter Hunson

Sometime in 1969 the Witness brother named earlier, Don Nelson, shared some ideas with me and a mutual Witness friend, Peter Hunson, which started a quest for answers. He asked what it was we liked about the New World Translation? We replied that it had the name of Jehovah, and was a literal translation, written in modern english. He asked, "What else?" We had nothing to say. Then he asked some questions like why does the NWT translate John 17:3 "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and the one you sent forth, Jesus Christ," When it should be translated, "This is eternal life, their knowing you, etc?" He pointed out that the greek word here used, **ginosko**, was used by Mary when she asked the angel, "How can this be, when I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34) Then he made the point that this knowing is born of intimate experience, rather than the accumulating of data, such as the way Witnesses applied the text.

Then Don asked, "Why does the New World Translation render the term 'In Christ' and 'Christ in you' as 'in company with Christ,' 'in union with Christ,' 'by means of Christ,' and numerous other phrases?" Not being prepared to respond, I personally promised to do research and seek to answer his questions at

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a later date. I began digging through the books and magazines of the Watchtower Society to find answers to these questions, but I could not find these issues treated anywhere. Interestingly, later that year, at the 1969 Canadian international convention, the Society released a new version of the New Testament, called the Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures. With this new book in my possession, I obtained a basis greek grammar and began to learn some greek, to satisfy myself as well as possible as to what the truth was on these issues.

**They shall honor the Son just as they honor the Father.**

I prayed for God's guidance and the ability to see clearly the truth, with the objective of reaching out to Don and restoring his confidence as a Jehovah's Witness. One of the things he had shared with us was the difference in the way Jehovah's Witnesses spoke of Jesus compared to the way the Apostles like Paul, Peter and John spoke of him. With the apostles, there was constant mention in eloquent, exalted phrasing, of the person and station of Jesus, "Our Lord and Savior." With the Watchtower publications, there was little mention of Jesus, and usually in terms of what he is not, rather than what he is.

Then I found John 5:22, 23. It said, "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father." That was saying that Jesus would be honored in the same way, in the same manner, the same station, as the Father. Then I noticed in virtually all the letters of Paul is this phrasing at the beginning of each epistle: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:3) Notice this language: "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:23,24) Turn to any letter of Paul, Peter, John, and just begin reading. It is

sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph of repeated declaration of the name of Jesus. He is honored right along with the Father, in the same type of glorious praise the Father receives. This is starkly contrasted with the absence of mention of Jesus among Jehovah's Witnesses.

It was like a bolt of lightning, a flash illuminating the night sky to read the book of Revelation with this in mind. There the Apostle John pulls back the curtain on heaven and we see in Chapter 4:11 the twenty-four elders declaring to God, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Notice, the Lord God Almighty, mentioned in verse 8, receives glory, honor and power.

Then in chapter 5 the vision continues, and the Lamb appears, who is worthy to take the scroll and open the seven seals. In verses 11-14 we read that thousands upon thousands of angels, ten thousand times ten thousand, circle the throne and the living creatures and the elders and, "in a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!'"

Here I saw the fulfillment of John 5:23. In heaven they are honoring the Son just as, in the same way, with equal force, as they honor the Father. This struck such a contrast to the JW practice of going through entire meetings and never hearing the name of Jesus once; reading entire publications of the Watchtower Society and never seeing the name of Jesus on any page, and once or twice at the most. And that was the common situation.

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## Declared righteous, justified, by faith in Jesus.

Because of my pursuit of understanding the Greek text of the New Testament, I became aware of the fact that most of the writings of the Apostles were not “statements at large” but rather interconnected flows of thought. For instance, when I studied the Book of Romans, I saw that Paul was writing a very detailed, connected treatise on the problem of man and his sin, and God’s provision for that sin through Christ. He establishes in chapter one the depravity of man in general; in chapter two the sin of the Jew in particular, and in chapter three God’s resolution on the cross of Christ.

And then I saw it! In Romans 3:21-26 I saw that all who have sinned are justified, declared righteous by faith in Christ. As verse 26 says, “it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies (NWT: “declares righteous”) the one who has faith in Jesus.” It was like God took a celestial flashlight and shone it on this verse! It was all so clear. I was a sinner. God is holy. I cannot approach him in my sin. But when I look at Jesus on the cross, taking my sin on himself and paying the price; when I trust in that payment in the person of Jesus and put my faith in him, the Father sees me as righteous.

I don’t have to wait another thousand years to prove anything to God. I could never make up for my sins anyway. Jesus already paid the price and I am righteous in God’s sight because I accept his payment. My debt is canceled! As I continued on in the writings of Paul, I saw that this was a recurring theme, THE recurring theme in his writings. For instance, in Ephesians 2:8, 9 we find, “For it is by grace you have been saved by faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” So salvation could never be the result of my efforts, even if they lasted a thousand years. It is the grace of God, through the person of Jesus Christ.

## Everyone who believes receives forgiveness of sins.

That still left the question of a heavenly class versus an earthly one unanswered in my mind. Then I read Peter’s declaration to the house of Cornelius in Acts 10:42,43: “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Everyone who believes receives! This is not reserved to a select few as the Watchtower teaches, it is for everyone who believes, and it is a now experience.

The Apostle Paul made a virtually identical declaration in his message to the Jews in Antioch as reported in Acts 13:38,39: “Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” Notice Paul did not say “will be set free.” He said “everyone who believes is set free.”

## Calling on the name.

As I mentioned above, as a Jehovah’s Witness I went door-to-door telling people “Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.” Now is a good time to discuss the translation of the Hebrew name for God, which has been translated erroneously as “Jehovah.” In the original Hebrew and Aramaic, that name was represented by the four letters we would call in our language YHWH. The exact pronunciation was lost, and out of a misguided reverence, the Israelite scribes attached markings to indicate using Adonay or Elohim, for God or Lord, wherever YHWH occurred. When the Old Testament was translated into the Greek of Paul’s day, in the Septuagint version, the word used for YHWH was Kyrios, which we render LORD, in all capital letters. When we read the 10th chapter of Romans with this in mind, it is very clear. When we read in the NWT, it is confusing:

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“Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” That was Romans 10:9-13. As you can tell, it is talking about Jesus, who is the Lord, in whom we must believe, and that gains salvation for us. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, Jesus, will be saved. The NWT inserts Jehovah where it says ‘Lord’ and obliterates this truth in the mind of a JW. So to help the JW understand, I ask a question: “What does it mean to call on the name of Jehovah, or to call on the name of the Lord?”

There is usually suspicion and an unwillingness to commit to a meaning, so I proceed to answer my own question. I tell them, it means to address the Lord or Jehovah in prayer, to cry out to the person of the Lord. So now let’s look at 1 Corinthians 1:2. Paul tells us his letter is to the Corinthians and says, “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” Paul here says that the Corinthian church and Christians everywhere were calling on the name of the Lord, Jesus. In other words, they were putting their trust in Jesus and crying out to him in prayer.

Now, if that is not clear enough, let’s turn over to Acts 7:59. Here is the account of the stoning of Stephen, the disciple who was so capable in witness and debate that no one could best him in argument. As they had intended to do, the authorities were stoning Stephen to death. Verse 59 says, “While they were stoning him, he prayed (literally, ‘he called upon’) ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” Verse 60 says, “Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin

against them.’ When he had said this, he died.” In his final moments, at the very brink of death, would Stephen do something that would displease God? Now a Jehovah’s Witness would never directly address Jesus in prayer, but Stephen did.

Perhaps someone would object and say, “Well, maybe he was not directly addressing Jesus. Maybe he was saying something like, ‘May the Lord Jesus receive my spirit.’” That question is answered when we look at the Greek. If that was the case, Stephen would have used the form of the word for Lord, *kyrios*. But he didn’t. He used *kyrie*, which is the form of direct address. It is the same in verse 59 and verse 60. Stephen directly addressed Jesus, for Stephen recognized Jesus as God.

## Jesus is Jehovah.

When we recognize that the Lord of Romans 10:13 is a reference to Jesus, for a JW a new question arises. It arises because that verse is a quote from Joel 2:32, which says, “And everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved.” This is a case where the YHWH occurs for the name of God. Since the Septuagint used the term *kyrios* in these instances, Paul does the same. This confronts the JW with a difficult conclusion: Jesus is Jehovah. Let’s see if that is born out in another place.

Let’s try Philippians 2:8-11. It tells us, “he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Now let’s turn to Isaiah 45:21-23 and read, “..Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD (YHWH, *kyrios*)? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the

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earth; for I am God and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked; Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.” This powerful reference, along with many more, established for me that Jesus indeed is Jehovah.

## The indwelling Christ.

Now we come to the matter of “Christ in you, and you in Christ.” As I mentioned, the Witnesses change this to “in union with, in company with, by means of, etc.” Jesus introduced this concept in John 14:20 “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you.” He again mentions this in John 17: 21, “As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Paul refers to this in his letter to the Ephesians in chapter 3:17 “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” These are instances where the NWT inserts those phrasings mentioned above to separate the word “in” from Christ. Paul uses similar language in Philippians 2:13, saying, “It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to act.” Once you look at this matter in the Greek, apart from the NWT, it becomes clear that God the Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit come to dwell in the Christian when once we believe in Jesus and commit to him.

Jesus illustrated this for us in John 15 in the picture of the Vine and the branches. In verse 5 he says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” And in verse 7, “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you.” When I really saw these words, I could see the vision of what Jesus was saying. A vine is a unity, a whole made of parts. The trunk supports the branches, and the life flows throughout. There is no question of being merely in agreement, having the same purpose: to bear fruit in the form of grapes. If the branch is not in the vine, not receiving its nourishment as one part of one entity with

the vine, there will be no fruit.

What was really interesting to me, even funny, was the graphic in the inside cover of the Kingdom Interlinear Translation which the Watchtower issued in 1969. It was a demonstration of Greek prepositions. It looked like a football field stood on its head, with the word for above over the field, beside next to the field and the word “en” or in, smack dab in the middle, where it belongs. When the bible says “Christ in you,” it means that he has to be inside you, he must dwell in you by the Holy Spirit, or he can do you no good.

## The cross or an upright pole.

Paul writes, “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” The JW is taught that Jesus did not die on a cross, but on an upright pole, a “torture stake” as they call it, with no crossbeam. What is interesting is that you don’t hear them talking much about the “torture stake” at all. Whether it was a cross or a pole was cleared up for me when my eyes fell on John 20:25. This is the account of Thomas, who did not believe that Jesus has risen from the dead. He had missed the meeting when Jesus showed himself to the others. Thomas said, “unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Note the phrase, “the mark of the nails in his hands.” If the JW was correct, and Jesus was impaled as they say on an upright pole, with the one nail through both hands, Thomas would have said, “the mark of the nail (singular) in his hands,” But he didn’t. He said “the mark of the nails (plural) in his hands.” Jesus has his hands spread on the cross, with a nail in his right hand and a nail in his left, so Thomas said, the “mark of the nails in his hands.” The witness belief in this matter is shown to be erroneous.

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## Partaking of the emblems of Christ's Death

As we began to see that things the Watchtower had claimed were only for the 144,000 were really for "everyone who believes," we began to consider the propriety of partaking of the bread and wine of communion, or what they call "The Memorial of Christ's Death." For virtually all of Jehovah's Witnesses, this is an occasion where they watch the emblems pass by in front of them and do nothing. As our brother Nelson described it, it is "the solemnification of the rejection of Christ." Since the Watchtower teaches only the 144,000 is heaven-bound and thus should partake, for most congregations there is no one partaking.

Jesus, however, taught his disciples to "do this in remembrance of me," and instructed them in Matthew 28: 19, 20 to "make disciples, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you." That being the case, there is no justification for discouraging anyone who professes to be a Christian from taking the bread and wine of communion. What sealed the issue for me was when I read John 6:53-58. It says, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Our forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."

To the Israelis who heard that, it seemed unthinkable, but it later became clear to his disciples that Jesus was talking about a spiritual feasting on his flesh and blood, through faith in his person and work. That faith in Jesus and his provision on the cross and by his resurrection is symbolized and demonstrated by taking the bread and cup in communion. To refrain is to demonstrate a lack of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, or a sense

of unworthiness to partake. In Christ we are made worthy and so for us the choice was simple: We had to partake.

## The Person of the Holy Spirit.

One of the last major tenets of the traditional Christian faith to become real to me was the personality of the Holy Spirit. I remember being helped by Walter Martin's book on Jehovah's Witnesses on this point. Actually, that understanding came after having left the organization and continuing to seek God on this issue. What Martin pointed out is John 14:16,17 where Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him But you know him for he lives with you and will be in you." When Jesus says "another Counselor," he uses the Greek word "allos," which means another like the first. So Jesus was saying he would send someone like himself. That indicates personality.

This reference to the Holy Spirit occurred in the time of the Lord's Supper. Later in this discussion, Jesus again mentions the Holy Spirit in John 16:13-15: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." Speaking, hearing, glorifying, are things a person does, not an impersonal force.

In the Book of Acts, in chapter 13, verse 2, we have the record of when Paul and Barnabas were with the brothers in Antioch and, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart Barnabas and Paul for the work to which I have called them.'" Hear we have the Holy Spirit speaking. Forces don't speak, a person speaks.

# WITNESSFORJESUS.COM

## Eternal Punishment.

As a Jehovah's Witness, I had been taught that the only thing I had to fear was eternal destruction, or annihilation, not a place of torment called Hell. The Watchtower position is based on Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10, "For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten...Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." This text is taken out of context in order to support their view. The never quote verse 6, which says, "Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun." Actually, the writer of Ecclesiastes is pointing out that life is to be enjoyed to the fullest while you are alive, because when you die, you have no part in what happens "under the sun."

In adopting their view, JW's ignore the testimony of many scriptures on the subject of what happens after death. Paul hints at it in Romans 5:9 when he says, "Since we have now been justified (or declared righteous) by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"

Actually, this was one of the teachings that took longer to see after having left the Witnesses. But when I looked at Luke 16:19-31, it began to clear up. Jesus here talks about a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus, who both die. In verses 23 and 24, we read, "In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'"

The Watchtower treatment of this chapter is laughable. They say this is a parable and try to turn it into some present day resentment on the part of Christendom toward Jehovah's Witnesses because of the latter's

supposed blessed state. But in this instance, Jesus names one of the participants, which he never did in his parables, and stamps this as a snapshot into the other side. There is a place of great sorrow waiting for those who refuse the gospel of Christ. Paul affirms this in 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 when he says, "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut off from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power." We see here that the future for the unrepentant sinner is one of eternal separation from God. The Bible describes that as unending torment.

A typical objection of the Witnesses is that "A loving God would not send a person to such a place." The answer to that is that Jesus showed in Matthew 25:41 that hell was not made for man. There he said, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Hell was made to receive Satan and his angels, but rebellious humanity winds up going there. And it is in reality not God who sends them there, but their own unrepented sin. God has done everything he can to provide a pathway into heaven for us, even sending his own Son to die on the cross for us. All we have to do is accept that sacrifice and submit ourselves to God's will, which is faith in Jesus and obedience to him as Lord.

But the Hell which JW's have convinced themselves is nonexistent awaits those who do not turn to Jesus.

## 1970, New Set of Beliefs

By the year 1970, I had acquired an entirely new set of beliefs, conventional Protestant positions, just by embarking on this earnest study of the Scriptures and asking God for the Holy Spirit to guide and teach me. I have several times prayed the sinners prayer, repenting of sin and committing my life to Christ, but I particularly remember in 1969, getting down on my knees and praying to the Father, "If I can have Jesus

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in me, I want Him in me.” God answered that prayer and began revealing more and more of the depths of His Word.

For awhile, we tried to maintain our connection to the Witnesses, going door-to-door with the Watchtower and Awake magazines, so as to be regarded as active Witnesses. Witnesses who don't go door-to-door are not considered active. But that became more and more difficult to reconcile in our hearts, knowing that what those magazines were teaching was unscriptural.

I remember once when I was going door-to-door, I was meditating on what Jesus had done for us, and the realization came crashing through that if I had been the only human on earth to save, Jesus would have died for me. That filled me with such awe, such amazement, I could barely keep myself from screaming it out on the street where I stood.

## The Convention in 1970.

When the convention arrived in Oakland, California, in 1970, we were interested to see if any new revelations would be shared regarding Jesus. What a disappointment that convention was. Don and Peter talked me into trying to set up a meeting with Milton Henschel, the major representative from the Watchtower Society, the keynote speaker. After his speech in the afternoon of Thursday, I approached him and asked if I could speak with him. He said he was very busy and could we meet the next day at 2 p.m.? I said that would be fine.

The next day I waited for him at the agreed time and when he finally came out, I thought we were going to talk. He started to walk on by me and I reminded him of our meeting. He said, “That was supposed to be yesterday. I don't have time now.” I was flabbergasted. It was totally dishonest of him. He suggested I write to the Society.

At that convention an interesting thing occurred. Each

year there is a count of how many partake of the emblems at the Memorial. Since JW's believe only 144,000 go to heaven, and at that time only about 10,000 were left of that number, the total of partakers would decrease by about 200 each year. They were dying off. This year something startling occurred. There was an increase in the number of partakers. Don, Peter and I believed it was an indication that God was doing in others what had occurred in us among Jehovah's Witnesses.

## A Letter to The Watchtower.

In April, 1971, I composed a letter to the Watchtower Society, which the three of us signed, describing to them our concerns about the lack of recognition of the person of Jesus among Jehovah's Witnesses, and asking for permission to send a tape for them to listen to, or let us meet with someone in the governing body to talk these things through. Their response was that they didn't have a tape player, so that wouldn't work, and they would not meet with us. They said that they talked a lot about Jesus, and saw no need to mention him more. The recommendation was to submit to our leaders.

Needless to say, we were disappointed with the response, and we continued to find more exciting truths in the Word of God which kept us eager to talk about Jesus. The more we studied, the more convinced we became that we were supposed to partake of the emblems of communion, which they called “The Memorial of Christ's Death.” Finally, in 1972, the 3 of us partook. Since the Witnesses believe only the 144,000 are to partake of the bread and the wine, and only a few thousand of those survive, most congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses simply watch the emblems go by, and no one partakes. Peter suggested that we go to the Memorial dressed up as a loaf of bread and a cup of wine. I said, no I am not that expressive.

Don, Peter and I all went to different congregations, so I was all alone when I sat in the fourth row and watched

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the emblems go up one row and down another, no one partaking, and then finally come to me. That was the loudest cracker in the world. Everyone there must have heard each crunch. Every eye was on me, either in shock or adoration. It was also the driest cracker in the world. I thought I would never get it moist enough to swallow. I was eager for the wine to get to me, if only to wash it down. I was not sure what to expect, either outrage or acceptance. I was prepared for both. After the meeting, I was called aside by the Presiding Elder and interrogated. Did I realize that to be one of the Anointed, I had to die and leave my family behind? I assured him I understood, and that my decision was a deeply considered one. The concern on his face turned to delight. He was excited to know one of the remnant of the 144,000!

## The Year of Favor

Then followed a year of favor among the general Witness family, even while there were those who were plotting to get rid of us. We continued to hold group meetings in our homes to read portions of the Bible together and comment on what we would see there. Slowly our numbers grew. Then in 1973 I was summoned to a judicial committee meeting. Attending the meeting were two elders from a congregation I had previously attended. I was grilled about my beliefs and accused of causing division in a congregation where I knew no one. At the conclusion of the meeting I was told, "Stop talking about Jesus." Wanting to be original, I told them "I can't stop speaking the truth." It looked like I would be disfellowshipped. I told them I was going to write to the Society, and they said they would write also. I fired off another letter to the WT society, incorporating my original letter and asking for their intervention.

I remember in the evening going out in my back yard, which overlooked the Kingdom Hall about a quarter of a mile away. I prayed "Lord don't let them kick us out." The amazing thing is none of us was disfellowshipped at that point. The Watchtower's response was again to

obey our elders. They observed that I seemed to think very highly of myself. That was not a compliment. So we managed to stay in another year, seeking to share what God had revealed to us. I am not sure of the time frame on this, but at one point I shared a discussion with a Circuit Overseer on some of the points I had written to the Society about, and he agreed that the Witnesses in general did not show a recognition of Jesus that he deserved, and agreed on some other key points.

## Egg on Their Faces.

The elders that were from the other congregation couldn't wait, though, to declare us personae non grata. Unknown to me at the time, they announced on the Sunday following our committee meeting that Don, Peter and I had been placed on probation for "suspicion of apostasy." I began to notice that old acquaintances were acting strange. I heard from a waitress that she had heard someone say I had died from a bad heart. When I went to my bank, the teller, who was black, turned pale when she saw me. She was a Jehovah's Witness and when I asked what the problem was, she told me she had heard I was disfellowshipped. When I investigated, I discovered what the San Pablo congregation had done and complained to my elders.

My elders were very upset that the San Pablo elders had acted on their own to besmirch the names of one of their members. There was a big to-do about it, and the San Pablo group had to retract their announcement.

## Cutting The Cord

By early 1974 we were tired of it all, going to the Kingdom Hall and never hearing the name of Jesus, never hearing him spoken highly of, only hearing what he "was not." One of our group mentioned some special event in Santa Rosa and so we decided to try out an Assembly of God church there. I was not personally impressed with the experience, but that became the

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basis for our disfellowshipping. I was disfellowhipped for “Running ahead and not remaining in the teaching of the Christ.” How’s that for irony? When we all left there was 40 of us.

Wanting to reach out to someone I knew who was still a Witness, I took a trip to Yuba City, California, and there met Jerry Russell, the pastor of Community Church in Marysville. I mentioned the church I had seen described in 1 Corinthians 12, and he said, “That’s just like our church.” I took my family to their Sunday service that weekend, a drive of two hours, and was thrilled to experience worship as God had shown me it could be. That was in May of 1974. A little more than a month later, I was baptized in a cow pond at the Santa Cruz Festival of the Son, along with my wife and her sister-in-law, a former JW.

## What difference it makes.

A lot of things have happened since that time, but I have never been burdened with the kind of depression I knew as a Jehovah’s Witness. In place of the the insecurity about life, I now possess a certainty about my relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned: he has crossed over from death to life.

As was quoted at the beginning of this statement, “He has transferred us out of the darkness into the kingdom of his dear son.” (Colossians 1:13) It is comforting to know that I am already in the Kingdom of God. It is not just off in the heavens somewhere, but is present wherever there is a saved believer, for the Kingdom of God is where God dwells and is obeyed.

Now I know my sins are forgiven, and I don’t have to wait for Jehovah God to declare me righteous, I have already been declared righteous by faith in the crucified and resurrected Son of God.

Now I know that I can call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, addressing him in prayer and being

confident that he hears and blesses my prayer in his name. I pray that you also will know the love of God which surpassing understanding, by entering into a personal, intimate relationship with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ by means of the Holy Spirit.

I invite your response to this message.  
If you have prayed to receive Christ,  
please let us know, and seek out a  
church where Jesus is the focus of  
attention. If you feel led to contribute to  
this effort, send correspondence to:

Jerry J. Mercer  
P.O. Box 121773  
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