

After attending the Kingdom Hall for about two years I was baptized by the Jehovah's Witnesses on July 9, 1983. I was convinced, as most Witnesses are, that I was part of the only true religion on earth. I was in the antitypical "ark" of Noah, Jehovah's visible Organization on earth. I believed that my membership in this organization was the only way to be saved.

I was very happy to be of the "great crowd of other sheep" because I had no desire to "go to heaven" - the destiny of the "144,000". I looked forward to life on paradise earth. I was single, 25 years old, wanting to marry and have a family, which led me to seeing the first inconsistency in Watchtower teaching. Being part of the "great crowd" my destiny was to receive "human perfection" on earth. This is the hope of all who are of the "other sheep". But what if I died or I was killed? Of course I would be resurrected to human perfection but I could not marry! This would mean that I and all those who are raised to "earthly life" would have to remain celibate forever while all those who lived through Armageddon and did not die could marry, and if already married could remain married and have children. I was perplexed as to why this was the case, since all who received earthly life would be in the exact same physical condition. I remember thinking "Lazarus was raised from the dead and there was nothing to stop him from carrying on his normal functions. If he wasn't married I am sure he wasn't told he could not marry." I found this especially puzzling since we were told that all the resurrections in the Bible "pictured the earthly resurrection!"

Looking back I can now see that the Witness' teaching had forced them into a corner. Let me explain; the "other sheep" do not receive immortality as do the "144,000." They will continue as flesh and blood humans who attain human perfection. They cannot apply Jesus' words in Luke 20:34-36 to the 144,000 because they do not believe the angels are immortal. Luke 20:34-36 says, "*The children of this system of things marry and are given in marriage, but those who have been counted worthy of gaining that system of things and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. In fact, neither can they die anymore, for they are God's children by being children of the resurrection.*" Applying Luke 20 to the 144,000 would then require the Watchtower to teach that the angels are immortal. This they could not do - so their only choice was to apply it to the "other sheep", but in doing so they created this contradiction. I was heartbroken. I did not want to be celibate while many of my family and friends would be enjoying family life in human perfection. Weren't Adam and Eve told to "*be fruitful and become many and fill the earth*"? I did not question the Scripture; it was the application that did not make sense. My constant prayer was that I would not be killed or die of some disease before Armageddon.

Despite this, I did not question the validity of the Watchtower. I was confident that it was some mistake and that a correct understanding would come in the future. Where else could I go? All the churches that I knew about taught the immortality of the soul, and going to heaven at death, or burning in "hellfire" - all teachings that I could never accept.

The next thing that puzzled me was what Jesus states about his apostles in Luke 22:28-30, "*However, you are the ones who have stuck with me in my trials; and I make a covenant with you, just as my Father has made a covenant with me, for a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom, and **sit on thrones to judge the 12 tribes of Israel.***" Such a promise to me, clearly contradicted what the Watchtower organization was teaching:

- The nation of Israel no longer plays any role in God's plan.
- Among Jehovah's Witnesses only the literal number of 144,000 are designated as spiritual Israel.
- The great crowd of other sheep are not spiritual Jews, they are Gentiles who attach themselves to the 144,000. Zechariah 8:23 is used to support this view.
- In the Kingdom, the 144,000 - "spiritual Israel" - will rule over the "great crowd" - people of the "nations" (Zech. 8:23) as kings and priests.
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After reading the Luke 22 passage above, I sought out the Watchtower position on the identity of the "twelve tribes of Israel" of Luke 22:30. To my surprise they actually were teaching that these 12 tribes of Israel are the "nations" of Zechariah 8:23 - the "great crowd" of "other sheep"! In Watchtower theology the "other sheep" are not spiritual Jews. Luke 22 forces them to teach two contradictory teachings at the same time because they have to identify the 12 tribes apart from Spiritual Israel, because the Apostles will be judging them! Once natural Israel is eliminated from their understanding as having a part in God's plan, they have no choice but to state that it is the other sheep who then become the 12 tribes of Israel in Luke 22. They are actually teaching two opposite teachings simultaneously - because they say that the other sheep are not spiritual Israel or Jews of any kind, but in Luke 22 they say these 12 tribes are the other sheep!

Although I was very puzzled I still did not question or doubt the validity of the organization because in my mind there was nowhere else to go. I was still convinced that I was "in the truth" and the Watchtower Society were devoted servants of God and that in time through their intense study of the word in Brooklyn they would clear up the inconsistencies that I saw.

I continued actively in the "door to door service." One day I was asked to explain Matthew 8:11, *"But I tell you that many from east and west will come and recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of the heavens;"* As soon as I read it, I could hardly speak. I had never noticed this passage before. At the time I was convinced that there were "two classes" of believers. The 144,000 would go to heaven and receive the "heavenly kingdom" while all the rest would remain on earth. "All the rest" included Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I could not escape the clear words of Jesus himself that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be in the *"kingdom of the heavens."* I told the man that I would come back with an explanation.

When I researched the Watchtower understanding of this passage, it was so unbelievable that I was too embarrassed to give the man the explanation. I felt it couldn't possibly be true. The explanation given was that Abraham is "symbolic of Jehovah God", Isaac is "symbolic of Jesus Christ", and Jacob is "symbolic of the 144,000". Additionally, what proved to me that this explanation was incorrect is the parallel statement in Luke 13:28 where Jesus adds "all the prophets" to his statement about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Who did all the prophets "symbolize"?

From then on I started to read other translations as well as reading the Bible without the Watchtower Publications to guide me. My existing belief, at that point, was that all the faithful men and women in the Old Testament had the earthly hope and that they didn't even know that there was such a thing as the "heavenly hope". I was stunned when I read Hebrews 11:16 in the King James version. Since most Witnesses have the KJV it's quite normal to see a Witness read this version. In referring to the faithful believers in the Old Testament, including Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham, the passage reads, *"But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly..."* How was that possible? I wondered. How could all these men and women of faith "desire" a "heavenly" country if this was not "revealed to them"? I turned immediately to my New World Translation which reads, *"But now they are reaching out for a better [place], that is one belonging to heaven..."*

This discovery in Hebrews 11 was very devastating; every Bible I could find read, "heavenly" or "celestial" in this passage. The most devastating of all was the Watchtower's own Kingdom Interlinear. The word-for-word English beneath the Greek reads, *"Now but of better(one) they are reaching out for, this is of heavenly one..."* I wondered why they would paraphrase the Greek word to read "one belonging to heaven" in Hebrews 11:16 and translate it as "heavenly" in the very next chapter -12:12?

In my heart I thought I knew the reason for this inconsistency. The Watchtower could not have their members read a verse that so thoroughly contradicted their fundamental beliefs.

For the very first time I was deeply troubled. In fact I was shattered, for my mental safety-net was gone. The man I had been talking to in my door-to-door service did not believe in the immortality of the soul, going to heaven when you die, hellfire or the trinity. He believed that the Kingdom of God would be on earth, all of which I believed and still believe to be Bible truths.

The living nightmare began. I was now married to a Witness, I had a stepson and I had persuaded my mother to become a Witness. My brother-in-law was a Witness and my two nephews were Witnesses. I knew what leaving meant - total shunning from family and friends.

As each year passed, the nightmare deepened as I continued to see more and more from reading the Bible on my own and realizing that my belief-structure was probably wrong. I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I confided in my doctor who put me on antidepressants. I could not confide in any Witnesses because they would have immediately gone to the Elders and told them I was doubting. I wanted the freedom to sort this out myself.

I eventually sent a lengthy letter to the Brooklyn headquarters. In the letter I pleaded for help. I told them that I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and had been put on medications by my doctor. I did not mention the letter to anyone in my family or to anyone at my Kingdom Hall. About two months later a Witness Elder from my congregation phoned and told me that he was asked to deal with my issues. Brooklyn had contacted the Elders as opposed to addressing my letter personally.

The Elder came to my house and pointed out all the "good works" the "organization was doing that no other organization was doing. To him this was "proof that Jehovah's Witnesses had the Truth." To put things in perspective I asked him to read Matthew 6:1-4, "*Take care not to practice your righteousness in front of men to be noticed by them; otherwise you will have no reward with your Father who is in the heavens. So when you make gifts of mercy, do not blow a trumpet ahead of you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be glorified by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.*" I also asked him to read Matthew 23:15, "*...you travel over sea and dry land to make one proselyte...*" After he read these two passages he was furious! I pointed out to him that I was not trying to be disrespectful but the fact of the matter is that no one should boast. Secondly, all the preaching in the world does not make us right, as the inspired Word clearly says. Traveling over sea and dry land to make one proselyte is not proof that we have the Truth! I also pointed out to him that the contents of my letter was what I hoped to be discussing. He refused.

Over 30 years later I still remember word-for-word what he told me. "If you cannot see that the Watchtower Organization has the truth," he said, "there is nothing more I can do for you and if you even attempt to approach the other Elders over this matter there will be trouble." He then picked up his case, stood up and walked out the door. My wife looked at me and said, "Your attitude stinks."

I was broken. Only those who have experienced a similar situation regardless of the particular religion they belong to, can understand. I asked for a fish and was handed a serpent. I asked for a loaf and was handed a stone. (Matthew 7:9-10)

I suppressed my doubts for a few more years and said nothing to anyone. Eventually we moved to another province "where the need was great" hoping that the Watchtower would receive "new light" and that everything would be ok. One evening speaking from the platform I happened to quote Romans 2:21 "*Do you, however, the one teaching someone else, not teach yourself?...*" How could I possibly go "door to door" and tell others to question the teachings of their church and act upon that questioning, when I was unwilling to do the same?

This time there was no turning back. I still had the hope that the Watchtower was right but I was not

going to allow men to be masters of my faith. How ironic it was that I concluded that this was the reality - God was not the master of my faith but men. I was not the only witness in this position.

This new harsh reality was brought home in an agonizing way when a young witness friend of mine committed suicide by jumping into the Atlantic Ocean. I had played table tennis together with this young man in my basement. He was a very handsome, God-fearing, clean-cut young man. He was just 23 years old. All the times we had played together neither of us could trust the other enough to confide our doubts. I had no excuse. I had become a Witness as an adult. No one forced me to join. Rodney, on the other hand, was raised a Witness. His whole family were Witnesses; his entire circle of friends were Witnesses. For Witness youth there is no way out. Even if you do not get baptized and leave, you are still shunned as a "disapproved associate." Rodney was not a rebellious young man; he was a "regular pioneer" putting in 90 hours per month. He had nowhere to turn but the Atlantic Ocean. When he killed himself the thoughts expressed among the congregation were that he was "selfish" and "couldn't face the difficulties of being a true Christian." I found out later from neighbours that Rodney had actually confided in some of his school friends about his religious doubts. I found it ironic that he could not go to his own brothers and sisters when he was experiencing such traumatic difficulties in his life.

I began to wonder what place do Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30 have for "Jehovah's visible Organization"? The "faithful and discreet slave class?" The "anointed remnant?" *"Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you..."*

For Witnesses "there is no way to leave" without experiencing the harsh consequences of doing so. The "reason" is irrelevant. If you leave to become a criminal or leave to pursue a path that you feel is a path of true righteousness, the treatment you experience is the same.

Rodney's suicide will haunt me all the days of my life. What if we both had had the freedom to confide in one another? He might still be alive today.

In April 1991 I left the Watchtower religion. On April 28th I was baptized into Christ. My wife divorced me and my stepson hasn't spoken to me in 27 years. My mother read the Bible from cover to cover without the Watchtower publications and three years later she left the Organization and was baptized into Christ. The ordeal almost killed her. She was 83 years old. On June 18, 2017 she fell asleep at 100 years of age awaiting the resurrection.

I know that there are thousands of Witnesses young and old that are living the nightmare that I lived. I also know that there is tremendous guilt for those who do not have the courage to do a thorough research out of fear that their suspicions will be confirmed. For those who do realize that the Watchtower Society is not "Jehovah's visible Organization" there is a lot of guilt for not leaving. For many, they think that suicide is the only way out. Who knows how many are so confused that they do not know what to believe? Too many so-called "counter-cult-ministries" run by Ex-Witnesses are more concerned with propounding their own doctrines as opposed to helping Witnesses end Ex-Witnesses to think for themselves. For them, if you do not believe in the "trinity" you are still shackled by "cult-mentality."

For the first time in my life I had actual faith. I had a firm belief that God and Christ would actually guide me. Is it frightening at first? Yes! Most importantly, it is a true promise from God and Christ that they will help you to find your way. *"Keep on asking, and it will be given you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you; for everyone asking receives, and everyone seeking finds, and to everyone knocking, it will be opened."* (Matthew 7:7) The very passages that I assured others with, now assures me, "Indeed, a man's enemies will be those of his own household." (Matthew 10:36) *"... Do not forsake me and or leave me, my God of Salvation. Even if my own father and mother abandon me, Jehovah himself will take me in."* Psalm 27:9,10.

It's one thing to be able to quote a Scripture, it's another to be able to live it.

In the 27 years since I've left the Watchtower Organization I have found freedom like never before. I can actually have discussions with those of my own congregation and disagree without fear that I'll be cast out for doubting or questioning. It gives me so much joy to take out my Bible and read it for myself - whole chapters - all the way through. I feel so much relief that I no longer need to tally up my 'good deeds' in a monthly time card. My nagging questions are finally answered. I believe that I have found the Truth and the freedom to keep researching whenever necessary. In the end I am only concerned with whether or not I believe and teach the Truth according to God. It's God's Truth that I want to believe and teach to others - not the teachings of men.

If anyone would like to speak to me I would be delighted to do so.

Norman Smith
reinodejesus@aol.com

Ex-Jehovah's Witness website: www.exjw.org.uk

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