

Behold, I Stand at the Door and Knock

What to say to Mormons
and Jehovah's Witnesses
when they knock on your door

m i c h a e l l i c o n a

Behold, I Stand At The Door And Knock

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my father in law, Eugene Weible, who died from a rare form of lymphoma cancer in 1998. Gene was a quiet man who enjoyed helping others and walked humbly with God. He was always an encouragement to Debbie and me and looked forward to this book being published. He was a wonderful father-in-law whose strength and friendship will be missed.

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I had not intended to write this book. I was sharing this information with church groups. Many within these groups strongly encouraged me to put the information into book form. So I would like to thank those who encouraged me to do so. I hope it proves helpful.

For anyone I have forgotten to mention, please forgive me. I assure you it was entirely unintentional.

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Introduction

Someday it will happen to you. You are about to sit down for a late breakfast on a Saturday morning. The french toast smells delicious! A glass of orange juice and a cup of coffee will make the start of a great day. You pour the syrup and prepare to take that tasty first bite, when there is a knock on your door. Perhaps it's the neighbor's child asking for your daughter. Maybe it's the guy next door who would like to borrow your *Craftsman Tools* — again. You open the door and . . . *oh! . . . it's the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses!*

Sharply dressed and very friendly, they ask if they can come in and tell you about God's good news. But you are unsure. You remember your Sunday School teacher talking about these visitors who claim they are Christians. Some of the points the teacher made are vague in your mind and many are forgotten. You desire to share with them and feel that you should — *but* — you do not want to get into a conversation unprepared. So you politely say, "I'm too busy" and close the door.

Ah, yes. Where were you? That's right, back to your breakfast. You slice off a piece of French toast with syrup and take a bite. Mmmm! However, while sipping your coffee you feel a sense of disappointment. You know that you just passed up a valuable opportunity to share your faith because you were unprepared. You say to yourself, "If Jesus were here he would have spoken to them."

If you want to be ready the next time they come, this book is for you. Its purpose is to provide the knowledge you need to see why these groups do not represent God's truth and to share this information effectively with Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses the next time they knock on your door!

PART ONE



**WHAT TO SAY
TO MORMONS
WHEN THEY KNOCK
ON YOUR DOOR**

Chapter 1

About the Mormons

1. Who are the Mormons?

A. **History.** Mormonism started in 1830 with twenty-four year old Joseph Smith, Jr. According to Smith, he had several experiences, during which God, Jesus, and the angel Moroni gave him instructions. Part of the instructions was to dig up some gold plates buried by the angel Moroni around A. D. 400 on a hill just outside of Smith's town of Palmyra, New York. Smith dug up the plates, claimed they were written in "Reformed Egyptian," and that God had given him the ability to translate them. This translation became known as the *Book of Mormon*, an account of the ancient inhabitants of North America between 600 B. C. and A. D. 400.¹

Mormons have four sources of authority: the *Bible*, the *Book of Mormon*, the *Pearl of Great Price*, and *Doctrine and Covenants*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has become one of the fastest growing religions in the world. In 1997, Latter-day Saints membership totaled just shy of 10 million worldwide.² The church owns many businesses, including Brigham Young University.

B. **Doctrines.** Mormon beliefs are fundamentally different from Biblical Christianity. These have been detailed in other publications.³ Therefore, it will not be the purpose of this book to spell out the differences in Mormon and Christian doctrine, but rather to answer the question, "Is Mormonism true?" However, a few of the more peculiar Mormon doctrines are mentioned below:

1. *God.* Once a human as we are now, and progressed to become God. He is one of many Gods.
2. *Man.* Has the ability to progress and become a god just as Jehovah did.
3. *Marriage.* Polygamy is no longer advocated, although it once was encouraged.
4. *Jesus.* The son of God, but not part of the Godhead. Mormons do not believe in the Trinity.⁴

C. **The People.** Mormons are wonderful people who are very sincere about their faith and are very caring. Conversations with Mormon missionaries promise to be cordial. Although Mormon scholars, such as those at Brigham Young University, are well aware of the challenges which face Mormonism, Mormon laity, including Mormon missionaries, are pretty much in the dark and will be surprised when you share the information contained in the first half of this book.

2. What Mormons tell you when they knock on your door

When Mormons visit you, they usually will not focus on the doctrines previously mentioned. In fact, they probably will not even bring them up during the first few meetings. Instead they will seek to find common ground with you on many of the doctrines Christians believe. For example, they may begin by saying that God revealed the Old Testament through Moses and the Prophets. Then Jesus came, was crucified and resurrected. His disciples wrote books and letters that became the New Testament. We all agree on these facts. Then the differences begin. They will tell you that before Jesus' ascension into Heaven, he appeared to the inhabitants of North America and gave them the Gospel as well. His message and the history of these inhabitants from 600 B. C. to A. D. 400 are recorded in the *Book of Mormon*.

¹It was originally believed that the events described in the *Book of Mormon* occurred in North America. Most Mormons who come to your door believe this. However, since no archaeological evidence has surfaced, Mormon scholars also consider Central America as a possible setting. However, this theory has serious problems, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

²TIME, August 4, 1997. p. 52.

³Jerald and Sandra Tanner. *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Mission, 1982). The Tanners are former Mormons who have written many books on Mormonism and have one of the best known ministries to Mormons. For information, you may order from your bookstore, call Utah Lighthouse Ministry at (801) 485-8894, or reach them on the internet at www.utlm.org. Judy Robertson. *No Regrets* (Indianapolis: Light & Life Communications, 1997). Judy and her husband, Jim, are also former Mormons. Jim is a former Bishop. For information, you may order from your local bookstore, call the author at (602) 833-2537, or reach them on the internet at www.concernedchristians.org. Henry L. Ropp. *Is Mormonism Christian?* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1995). These books discuss the doctrines and problems of Mormonism in depth.

⁴For a defense of the Trinity, see Chapter 9.

Furthermore, they will tell you that since the apostles were not replaced when they were killed, the Church went into apostasy; in other words, it abandoned the true faith. Therefore, a *restoration* was necessary. Mormons believe that God chose Joseph Smith to bring that restoration and, therefore, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the true Church.

3. How to answer Mormons

Mormons are well equipped to answer many of the issues Christians bring to their attention and have answers adequate to silence the average critic. The Mormon missionaries who come to your door are cordial and will listen to what you have to say. Enjoy the opportunity to share your faith with them, but be prepared by having good answers.

Although there are many issues, which you may bring to the Mormons' attention, focus on four (4) that are of primary importance. These will be the focus of the first half of this book and are:

A. The Bible is reliable. Mormons claim that the *Bible* has been corrupted over the years as evidenced by the many different translations. How do we know that the *Bible* we have today is the same as it was two thousand years ago? In Chapter 2 we will see that the original words of the *Bible* have been preserved with remarkable purity and that its accuracy has been confirmed by both history and archaeology. We will also discuss how the variances among English translations do not call into question the preservation of the *Bible* over the years. Until you have shown this to a Mormon, it is useless to point out that some Mormon doctrines differ from the *Bible*. They will only respond that the *Bible* is unreliable. This is our topic in the next chapter.

B. There is no archaeological confirmation of the Book of Mormon. While the spade of the archaeologist has confirmed many places and peoples mentioned in the *Bible*, it has not been at all favorable to the *Book of Mormon*. Although Mormons will confidently assert that archaeology has confirmed the *Book of Mormon's* accuracy time and time again, professional archaeologists have arrived at quite a different conclusion. You will find out more about this problem in Chapter 3.

C. The Book of Abraham is a fraud. The *Book of Abraham* is one of the books in the *Pearl of Great Price*, one of Mormonism's Scriptures. Joseph Smith purchased some ancient Egyptian papyri and claimed it was an original book penned by Abraham himself while in Egypt. He translated it allegedly by the same gift which God had given him to translate the *Book of Mormon*. Professional Egyptologists have translated the papyri since their rediscovery in 1967. Their translations bear no resemblance to Smith's translation, exposing him as a charlatan. You will find out about this subject of which few Mormons are even aware in Chapter 4.

D. Evidence for Mormonism? Mormons are convinced that Mormonism is true because of the inward testimony of God that tells them so. If you are going to be effective when talking to Mormons, it is crucial that you address this issue as well. Otherwise, no amount of solid evidence, which testifies against Mormonism, will be of help to them. See that their approach is neither prudent nor biblical. This will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 will show you how to communicate these four issues so that you will be able to respond intelligently and effectively to Mormons the next time they knock on your door.

Chapter 2

The Bible is Reliable

If you ask a Mormon if he believes the *Bible*, he will refer to a Mormon document, *The Articles of Faith*, verse 8, which says:

We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

Mormons will tell you they believe the *Bible* “as far as it is translated correctly.” Most Christians will agree with that statement. What Mormons won’t tell you, unless you ask, is that they do not believe the *Bible* has been translated correctly, but that it has been corrupted over the years.

Do you remember when your teacher played a game in class? She whispered something in the ear of three students in the front row, who whispered the message into the ear of the fellow student behind them, who in turn whispered into the ear of the student behind them, until the final three students in the back row received the message. Of course all three had something different to repeat. Mormon thought is if a message can change to that extent in five minutes, we cannot trust a message that has been passed around for 2,000 years! Mormons also claim that the number of different translations on the market evidences this corruption. If we know what the *Bible* originally said, why are so many translations available?

While the arguments of Mormons to discredit the reliability of the *Bible* may seem persuasive on the surface, they collapse when looked at carefully. In this chapter we will see that the *Bible* is a reliable document that has been accurately preserved over thousands of years. Next, we will explain why so many translations exist. Finally, we will discuss how archaeology and secular history have confirmed the historical accuracy of much of the *Bible*. This third section will provide a ground for us to compare the accuracy of the *Book of Mormon*, which we will examine in the next chapter.

1. The text of the *Bible* is pure.

A. The New Testament. Most if not all of the New Testament was originally written in Greek. How do we know that the New Testament which we have today is what was originally written? Let’s take a look at the evidence that consists of thousands of ancient manuscripts, ancient versions, and quotations of the New Testament found in the writings of the early Church Fathers.

1) **Greek Manuscripts.** Approximately 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament have survived in the original language.⁵

2) **Ancient Versions.** By the second century, the New Testament was being translated into different languages. Syriac, Latin, Coptic and other translations provide valuable sources from which to compare.

3) **Early Church Fathers.** Within 300 years of Christ, almost 36,000 quotations of the New Testament appear in the writings of the early Church Fathers. In fact, every verse in the New Testament is quoted but eleven.⁶

What does all of this mean? Let’s go back to grade-school. Remember our game? The teacher notes that mistakes occurred while passing around her message. Suppose another teacher goes around to several of those in the middle of each of our three lines and asks them what message they received. Then suppose he interviews others in the lines as well. After a while he will probably be able to determine where the errors occurred and by comparing what several of the students say, will be able to come back to a statement, which is very close if not exact to what was originally said. Likewise, although there are variations in the New Testament manuscripts, there are literally tens of thousands of manuscripts from which to do a comparative study. And when scholars in the field of textual criticism do it, a text of the New Testament can

⁵Bruce M. Metzger. *The Text Of The New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 36.

⁶Norman L. Geisler & William E. Nix. *From God to Us* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 157.

be produced which is better than 99.5% pure to what the originals said.⁷ And none of the less than one-half of one percent of what is in question affect any doctrine.

B. The Old Testament. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew before the New Testament (between 1400-400 B. C.). One issue on which Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christians agree is Jesus and his apostles believed that the Old Testament was the inspired, uncorrupted Word of God.

Jesus' ministry was dedicated to teaching and fulfilling the Scriptures. When tempted, Jesus appealed to the Scriptures (Matthew 4:1-11). When answering questions concerning himself, he appealed to the Scriptures: "It is written . . ." (Mark 9:12). At his arrest (Matthew 26:52-56), trial (Matthew 26:64), execution (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:26-31; 23:46), and resurrection (Luke 24:27, 44-46), Jesus appealed to the Scriptures. Jesus cites one of Moses' statements found in Genesis as if God spoke it (Matthew 19:4-5). His apostles, likewise, viewed the Old Testament Scriptures as the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

Mormons believe that although Jesus and his apostles had God's Word in their hands (i.e., the Old Testament), much of it has since been corrupted and, therefore, is not trustworthy. Is this true? Let's look at the evidence which consists of the Hebrew text which has been passed on for over one thousand years known as the Masoretic text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient versions, and Old Testament verses cited in the New Testament.

1) **Masoretic Text.** The text of the Old Testament used by translators of the *Bible* is referred to as the Masoretic text, named after the Masoretes who meticulously copied and edited the text between A. D. 600-1000.

2) **Dead Sea Scrolls.** In 1946, hundreds of scrolls and fragments were found in eleven caves in northern Israel. Texts from every book of the Old Testament were found, with the lone exception of Esther. Of most importance are two Isaiah scrolls, which are dated between 200-50 B. C. One of them has been wonderfully preserved and contains the book of Isaiah in its entirety. When this text of Isaiah was compared to the book of Isaiah in the Masoretic text, there was nearly a 100% correlation between the two, which indicated that the Hebrew text has been marvelously preserved from a time before Jesus until the present.

3) **Ancient Versions.** Two ancient versions are helpful when comparing them to the Hebrew text: the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Old Testament used in Jesus' day and is quoted many times by the New Testament writers. If you were to translate the Septuagint back into Hebrew, the similarity to the Masoretic Text is striking. The Samaritan Pentateuch is the first five books of the *Bible* which were used by the Samaritans, a group of Jews which permanently separated themselves from the general Jewish population around 500 B. C. Again the similarities to the Masoretic Text are striking.

4) **Old Testament verses in the New Testament.** The writers of the New Testament cite verses from the Old Testament a total of 330 times!⁸ Most of these citations are from the Septuagint. Others are from the Hebrew texts. Once again there is an incredible correlation to the Old Testament that we have today.

How close can we get to a pure text? Approximately 90% of the text of the Old Testament is without any variation, regardless of the textual tradition.⁹ Within the remaining 10%, the variances are insignificant, none of which affect any biblical doctrine. Most can be eliminated when certain errors are detected: obvious slips of the pen, an inadequate knowledge of the Hebrew language on the part of the translator,¹⁰ partisan thinking,¹¹ and different dialects.¹² Therefore, when proper textual criticism is

⁷A. T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1925), p. 22, and N. L. Geisler and W. E. Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 365. Bruce M. Metzger gives no accuracy percentage but in the Introduction to *The Greek New Testament*, Third Edition (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1985), he explains that textual variants have been assigned a letter of "A," "B," "C," and "D" to indicate the degree of certainty for the particular variant. On p. xiii he states, "By far the greatest proportion of the text represents what may be called an A degree of certainty."

⁸For a complete listing, see Gleason L. Archer & G. C. Chirichigno. *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).

⁹Bruce K. Waltke in "The Reliability Of The Old Testament Text," Willem A. VanGemeren, ed. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), p. 65.

¹⁰This was certainly a problem with the Septuagint. For a brief article on the Septuagint, see G. W. Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume Four (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 400-409.

¹¹Such changes are obvious within the Samaritan Pentateuch in which the Samaritans made minor changes to justify some of their differences with the Jews.

¹²As is evident in the Qumran tradition in the Dead Sea Scrolls which contains different spellings and grammatical structures than the standard Hebrew of the day.

conducted, a text with a purity exceeding 95% results. The remaining uncertainties mostly amount to a simple discrepancy in word order.

Therefore, when the evidence is considered, we can confidently assert that the *Bible* in our possession today, both the Old and New Testaments, is a pure and trustworthy text we can rely on. Even scholars who do not believe the *Bible* refuse to levy the charge that the *Bible* has been corrupted over the years resulting in a text which we cannot be certain of. The *Bible* is a text which has been preserved with amazing accuracy, far better than any other work of antiquity.

2. What about all the translations?

We have established that the Hebrew and Greek texts used today by translators are essentially pure to what the originals said. So why are there so many English translations of the *Bible*? Does this indicate that we cannot be certain what those Hebrew and Greek texts said?

It has been nearly 400 years since the *King James Version (KJV)* of the *Bible* was produced. The English language has changed considerably over that period of time. The orthography (i.e., the way a word was written) of 1611 is not readable to most of us today as anyone picking up a *KJV* from 1611 will immediately find. Likewise some spellings and word meanings are different today than four hundred years ago. For example, Psalm 5:6 in the *King James Version* reads:

Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing. (*KJV*)

To “speak leasing” today might refer to a consumer going to a car dealership and discussing the leasing of an automobile. However, in Elizabethan English, the term “leasing” meant to lie. Modern translations “update” the language.

Thou dost destroy those who speak falsehood. (*NASB*)¹³

You destroy those who tell lies. (*NIV*)¹⁴

Consider 1 Corinthians 15:9 where Paul says,

For I am the least of the apostles, that *am not meet* to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (*KJV*)

The word “meet” is no longer used in the sense of being worthy or deserving. The original text and the meaning of the Greek word remains unchanged, but our English translation of the word should be “updated” as our language changes. Modern translations have responded.

For I am the least of the apostles, who *am not fit* to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (*NASB*)

For I am the least of the apostles and *do not even deserve* to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (*NIV*)

English translations were also created to serve different purposes. If you have studied another language, for example French or Spanish, you know that the grammar of one language is different from the grammar of another. Some translations were made for the purpose of being a literal translation (almost a word for word accuracy). The *New American Standard Bible* is a good example of such a translation. Other translations were made for the purpose of being accurate but easier to read. The *New International Version* attempts to maintain accuracy while putting the message of the original Greek and Hebrew in today’s English vernacular. The *Living Bible* is not a translation but a paraphrase. It attempts to restate the meaning of the verse solely for ease of reading. The *New Living Translation*

¹³New American Standard Bible

¹⁴New International Version

seeks to be an accurate translation while promoting a simpler vocabulary. So translations are not necessarily scholars disagreeing with one another, but language updates and different objectives.

The Mormon Scriptures affirm that Mormons believe the *Bible* is the Word of God “*as far as it is translated correctly*” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Article of Faith 8). Since we can now know with a great deal of certainty what the original texts of the *Bible* said, the linguist can translate the Hebrew and Greek into English. An understanding of the role of different translations reveals that most of them faithfully and accurately render the message of the original languages.

3. Archaeology and history have confirmed the *Bible*.

Is the *Bible* myth or are the places and events described in it a part of human history? Many findings from archaeology have confirmed the historical accuracy of the *Bible*. In their book, *When Skeptics Ask*, Geisler and Brooks describe a fascinating archaeological find:

The excavation of Gezer in 1969 ran across a massive layer of ash that covered most of the mound. Sifting through the ash yielded pieces of Hebrew, Egyptian, and Philistine artifacts. Apparently all three cultures had been there at the same time. This puzzled researchers greatly until they realized that the Bible told them exactly what they had found.¹⁵

What does the *Bible* say regarding Gezer?

For Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up and captured Gezer, and burned it with fire, and killed the Canaanites [Philistines] who lived in the city, and had given it as a dowry to his daughter, Solomon’s wife. So Solomon rebuilt Gezer . . . (1 Kings 9:16-17).

The Egyptians killed the Canaanites (Philistines) who lived in Gezer, burned the city and gave it to Solomon’s wife. Solomon rebuilt it and populated it with Jews. The biblical account explains the ashes and the Hebrew, Egyptian, and Philistine artifacts.

The Smithsonian Institution’s Department of Anthropology has an official statement on “THE BIBLE AS HISTORY.” In it they say,

. . . much of the Bible, in particular the historical books of the old testament, are as accurate historical documents as any that we have from antiquity and are in fact more accurate than many of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, or Greek histories. These Biblical records can be and are used as are other ancient documents in archeological work. For the most part, historical events described took place and the peoples cited really existed.¹⁶

Outside sources have confirmed much of the New Testament as well. Suetonius was an ancient Roman Historian who wrote in the very early part of the second century. In *The Twelve Caesars*, Suetonius writes,

Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city.¹⁷ (Claudius, Section 25)

“Chrestus” may refer to Christ. However, what is of real interest is that the pagan historian says that the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome. Approximately sixty years earlier Luke wrote,

“And he [Paul] found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.” (Acts 18:2)

¹⁵Geisler and Brooks. *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990), p. 198.

¹⁶The Smithsonian’s official statement may be obtained by request to: Anthropology Outreach Office, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History MRC 112, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560.

¹⁷Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1989), p. 202.

The New Testament, especially the writings of Luke, is filled with accurate historical data. So much that archaeologists and historians alike have been impressed. The famous archaeologist and once skeptic Sir William Ramsey wrote, “Luke is a historian of the first rank . . . this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.”¹⁸ The classical historian A. N. Sherwin-White writes, “. . . for Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming . . . any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.”¹⁹

The spade of the archaeologist, the pen of ancient non-Christian historians, and tens of thousands of ancient manuscripts provide evidence that the *Bible* is a volume which is historically reliable and that its text has been preserved in a pure form. In other words, it is trustworthy. Unfortunately for the Mormon Church, as we shall see, the same cannot be said for their Scriptures.

¹⁸William M. Ramsey. *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), p. 222.

¹⁹A. N. Sherwin-White. *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), p. 189.

Chapter 3

Archaeology and the Book of Mormon

In the last chapter we saw that the *Bible* is reliable, being textually pure and verifiably accurate in many places. Therefore, the Mormon can have confidence that the *Bible* is the word of God and that it can be accurately translated. In this chapter we will examine the *Book of Mormon* to see how it holds up to the historical test. The Mormons at your door will tell you that many findings within archaeology have confirmed the *Book of Mormon* time and time again. Is this true? What does the historical data we have tell us about the events recorded in the *Book of Mormon*?

1. There is *no* specific confirmation of the *Book of Mormon* from archaeology.

A. What Mormon archeologists say.

Brigham Young University (BYU) is owned by the Mormon Church and has a department of professional archeologists who are dedicated to archaeology as it pertains to the *Book of Mormon*. These professionals, who are practicing Mormons, are to be applauded for their honesty. What many of them have to say will be a shock to the lay Mormon who is unaware that archaeology and the *Book of Mormon* are at odds with one another. The lay Mormon is told by the Mormon Church that archaeology continues to confirm the *Book of Mormon*, while Mormon scholars who actually study archaeology for a living have something quite different to say.

[It appears that the *Book of Mormon*] had no place in the New World whatsoever . . . [It] just doesn't seem to fit anything . . . in anthropology [or] history It seems misplaced.²⁰

The first myth that we need to eliminate is that Book of Mormon archaeology exists. Titles on books full of archaeological half-truths, dilettante on the peripheries of American archaeology calling themselves Book of Mormon archaeologists regardless of their education, and a Department of Archaeology at BYU devoted to the production of Book of Mormon archaeologists do not insure that Book of Mormon archaeology really exists.²¹

What I would say to you is there is no archeological proof of the *Book of Mormon*. You can look all you want. And there's been a lot of speculation about it. There've been books written by Mormon scholars saying that "this event took place here" or "this event took place here." But that's entirely speculative. There is absolutely no archeological evidence that you can tie directly to events that took place.²²

Now, I'm an archeologist, and I work in Mexico where some people think that the events occurred. So a lot of Mormons ask me every week if I find any evidence. And I tell them, "No." . . . (T)he question of how to translate what the Book says in terms of real evidence that we can grab in our hands, archeologically, is still a huge problem.²³

Keep in mind that all of these are practicing Mormons who are professional *Book of Mormon* archeologists!

²⁰ Dr. Ray Metheny, Professor of Anthropology, BYU. Address at the Sixth Annual Sunstone Theological Symposium, Salt Lake City, 8/25/84.

²¹ Dr. Dee Green, Former Editor of the University Archaeological Society Newsletter "Book of Mormon Archaeology: The Myths and the Alternatives," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 4, No. 2 (Summer 1969), pp. 77-78.

²² Dr. David Johnson, Professor of Anthropology, BYU. In a personal telephone conversation, 7/23/97.

²³ Dr. John Clark, Professor of Anthropology, BYU. In a personal telephone conversation, 7/25/97.

B. What non-Mormon archeologists say.

Earlier we read from the Smithsonian Institution's statement "The Bible as History." We saw that archaeology confirms much of the *Bible* and that professional archeologists use the *Bible* in their work. The Smithsonian also has a "STATEMENT REGARDING THE BOOK OF MORMON." This statement can be requested at the same address. Every one of the statements are damaging to the reliability of the *Book of Mormon*. Here is the first of eight statements:

The Smithsonian Institution has never used the Book of Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archeologists see no direct connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book.

In 1989, Michael Ammons wrote to the National Geographic Society requesting information on the *Book of Mormon* and archaeology. The Society replied in a letter dated April 26, 1989:

. . . neither the Society nor any other institution of equal prestige has ever used the Book of Mormon in locating archaeological sites. Although many Mormon sources claim that the Book of Mormon has been substantiated by archaeological findings, this claim has not been verified scientifically.

Also in 1989, Linda Hansen wrote to the Department of Archaeology at Boston University with a similar request. In a reply letter dated April 5, 1989, Julie Hansen of the Department responded:

The Archaeological Institute of America has never used the Book of Mormon as a scientific guide in locating historic ruins on the Western Hemisphere . . . Over the past 30 years The New World Archaeological Foundation, located at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, has conducted numerous scientific excavations in Mesoamerica, originally with a view to confirming the claims in the Book of Mormon. They have discovered no evidence that supports the Book of Mormon in any way. Nonetheless, they have published in full detail the results of their excavations in *Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation* volumes 1-55, 1959 and following. . . They are accepted by the Archaeological Institute of America and the Society of American Archaeologists as legitimate scientific investigations and the New World Archaeological Foundation is to be commended for publishing the results of their work that essentially refutes the basic beliefs of the Mormon Church on which the Foundation is based.²⁴

Therefore, there is a consensus from professional archaeologists, Mormon and non-Mormon alike, that there is no specific confirmation of the *Book of Mormon* from archaeology.

2. The lack of archaeological evidence is sometimes damaging.

A) The *Book of Mormon* claims that the ancient inhabitants spoke and wrote in "Reformed Egyptian" and Hebrew.²⁵ If this were the case, we would expect to find artifacts with writings in these languages. However, the Smithsonian's eighth statement regarding the *Book of Mormon* says:

Reports of findings of ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, and other Old World writings in the New World in pre-Columbian contexts have frequently appeared in newspapers, magazines, and sensational books. None of these claims has stood up to examination by reputable scholars. No inscriptions using Old World forms of writing have been shown to have occurred in any part of the Americas before 1492 except for a few Norse rune stones which have been found in Greenland.

²⁴Copies of the reply letters from the National Geographic Society and Boston University were provided by Jim and Judy Robertson of Concerned Christians.

²⁵Mosiah 1:4; Mormon 9:32-33; Also see Joseph Smith *History* 1:64.

B) The *Book of Mormon* states that the two peoples mentioned (Nephites and Lamanites) had Jewish beliefs that became Christian when the resurrected Christ appeared to them. However, there is no evidence that the ancient inhabitants in the Americas had either Jewish or Christian beliefs.

C) Hill Cumorah is located in New York, southeast of Rochester. Joseph Smith claimed that when Moroni appeared to him, he was told that Moroni's father, Mormon, buried the gold plates upon which the *Book of Mormon* was based on the hill Cumorah just before the great final battle there (Mormon 6:6). In the *Pearl of Great Price*, Smith writes that the day after his second vision, he went to a large hill outside of the village where his family lived (the hill Cumorah) and found the gold plates.²⁶ This identifies the hill where Smith dug up the plates as the same hill where Mormon buried them and where the great battle took place. In Mormon 6:10-15, it is claimed that hundreds of thousands of people were killed on or near the hill Cumorah during that final battle. It says that "their flesh, and bones, and blood lay upon the face of the earth, being left by the hands of those who slew them to molder upon the land, and to crumble and to return to their mother earth" (Mormon 6:15). In other words, their bodies were left there, unburied.

To help you understand the magnitude of casualties at hill Cumorah, let's consider another major battle. During the Battle of Gettysburg of the American Civil War there were 55,000 soldiers wounded, 6,000 of them killed on the battlefield and 4,000 more whose wounds were mortal. Eyewitnesses said that there was so much blood from the dead and injured that there were parts of the battlefield that seemed like streams of blood. So many men and horses died that all could not be buried at once and many corpses were left on the battlefield until a few days later when others were hired to do the task.

If 6,000 men died on the battlefield at Gettysburg, what would a battlefield look like with hundreds of thousands dead? Since they were left unburied at hill Cumorah, wouldn't there be some artifacts made of metal and stone? Bullets by the thousands are found at Gettysburg. Nothing however has been found at hill Cumorah.

University of Rochester paleontologist and stratigrapher Carl Brett has worked in the Palmyra, New York area where hill Cumorah is located and is familiar with the hill and its geologic conditions. He says that if hundreds of thousands were slaughtered at the hill and not buried, there would still be skeletal remains on the surface today, even after 1,600 years. Scavengers and weather conditions would account for why much is gone, but there would still be quite enough left to look at. Metallic artifacts from weapons and armor would also be easily found.²⁷ But nothing has ever been found at hill Cumorah.

3. Attempts by Mormons to answer the archeological problem fail.

During a series of conversations I once had with a Mormon friend and some Mormon missionaries, I turned to them on the first meeting and said that one objection I had to Mormonism was that there is no archaeological evidence to support the stories in the *Book of Mormon*. One of the missionaries smiled confidently and claimed there was a lot of evidence from archaeology to support the historical truthfulness of the *Book of Mormon*. I asked him to show me some. He said he did not have any information with him, but would bring some to our next meeting. He did. Needless to say he was shocked when I quoted the Mormon scholars below who refuted the very materials he had in hand!

Few of the writings they have produced are of genuine consequence in archaeological terms. Some are clearly on the oddball fringe; others have credible qualifications. Two of the most prolific are Professor Hugh Nibley and Milton R. Hunter; however, they are not qualified to handle the archaeological materials their works often involve.²⁸

Those volumes which most flagrantly ignore time and space and most radically distort, misinterpret, or ignore portions of the archaeological evidence are the popular Farnsworth volumes. Also inadequate, from a professional archaeologist's point of view, are the well intentioned volumes by Milton R. Hunter and a number of smaller pamphlets and works by various authors New World-Old World comparisons have been less popular but

²⁶Joseph Smith. *History*, verses 51-52. Hill Cumorah is located in Manchester, New York, about 25 miles east of Rochester. Smith lived in Palmyra, about five miles away from the hill.

²⁷A personal telephone conversation on September 8, 1997.

²⁸John L. Sorenson, Assistant Professor of Anthropology & Sociology, BYU. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 1, No. 1 (Spring 1966), pp. 145-246.

fraught with problems. The best known examples are the two volumes by Nibley which suffer from an overdose of ‘Old Worlditis’ He does not know New World culture history well, and his writing ignores the considerable indigenous elements in favor of exclusively Old World patterns.²⁹

In situations where sources of religious and secular authority conflict with each other, a Latter-day Saint sometimes finds himself in a quandary. He has been assured by a folklore transmitted in lessons, talks and church literature that archaeologists (usually Gentiles) are steadily proving the Book of Mormon authentic, while through his formal education and secular literature he has become aware that in actuality ‘the experts’ seem to contradict the scripture.³⁰

Science does not arrive at its conclusions by syllogism, and no people on earth deplore proof demonstration by syllogism more loudly than real archaeologists do. Yet, Mr. Jakeman’s study is nothing but an elaborate syllogistic stew. The only clear and positive thing about the whole study is the objective the author is determined to reach.³¹

Again, everyone of the above are practicing Mormons. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, BYU is owned by the Mormon Church and has a Department dedicated to *Book of Mormon* archaeology. According to BYU anthropologist John Clark, virtually all of the professional archaeologists there admit that archaeological finds which specifically tie the past to events in the *Book of Mormon* are missing. These practicing Mormons, call books and their authors that list sensational findings not qualified, inadequate, and speculative.

Some Mormons will respond that these archeologists do not represent the official Church position, so their opinions are not credible. But why trivialize and dismiss the findings of the overwhelming consensus of practicing Mormons who are professional archaeologists, yet accept, *without question*, the official Mormon Church position? Could it be that the ground’s silence is indicative of a Mormon Church position that is false? After all, if it is false, silence from archaeology is precisely what we might expect to find.

It is fair to mention that professional Mormon archaeologists claim there is *general confirmation* of the *Book of Mormon* from archaeology, citing peoples existing where it is thought *Book of Mormon* peoples may have existed. This general confirmation, however, does not show that the Mormon picture of history is true. These same archaeologists (Johnson, Clark) admit that conclusions regarding the findings are pure speculation. The issue is not, “Did people exist in the Americas between 600 B. C. through A. D. 400?” We know that they did. The issue is, “Can we identify these civilizations as the ones mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*?” And the answer from virtually all professional Mormon and non-Mormon archaeologists alike is “No.”

In the last chapter we saw that the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts in our possession today allow us to have an accurate translation of the *Bible*. Therefore, even by Mormon standards, we can be confident that we have the Word of God. We also saw that secular history has attested to the accuracy of the *Bible* so that we can know with certainty that many of the events recorded in it took place. Unfortunately, the Mormon cannot have this same confidence when it comes to the *Book of Mormon*. Archaeology and secular history are silent when asked if the events took place. Not only is this silence disturbing to professional Mormon archaeologists, but it is evidence against Mormonism when no artifacts turn up in areas which should be abundant with relics such as the hill Cumorah. However, as damaging as these may be, Mormonism’s greatest challenge concerns another one of their scriptures, the *Book of Abraham*, which will be the subject of our next chapter.

²⁹ Dee Green, General Officer, Univ. Archaeological Society. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 4, No. 2 (Summer 1969), p. 74.

³⁰ John L. Sorenson, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 4, No. 2 (Summer 1969), p. 81.

³¹ Dr. Hugh Nibley, quoted by Dee Green. *Book of Mormon Archaeology*, p. 75.

Chapter 4

The Book of Abraham

In the last chapter, we saw some of the problems Mormonism faces with the *Book of Mormon* and archaeology. In this chapter we will examine another book of the Mormon Scriptures called the *Book of Abraham*. The problems encountered here are devastating to the credibility of Mormonism.

Mormonism has four (4) sources that they consider to be Scripture: the *Bible*, the *Book of Mormon*, the *Pearl of Great Price*, and *Doctrine and Covenants*. The *Pearl of Great Price* contains the *Book of Moses*, the *Book of Abraham*, and the *Writings of Joseph Smith* which include his translation of Matthew 23:39 through all of Chapter 24, and excerpts from *History of the Church*.

The *Book of Abraham* is of particular interest. In 1835, Smith purchased some mummies that were accompanied by ancient Egyptian papyri. Smith claimed to be able to translate the papyri because they were written in the same language as the *Book of Mormon*, “Reformed Egyptian.” As he translated the manuscripts, he claimed that part contained the *Book of Abraham*, a book written by Abraham himself.

1. There are problems with the *Book of Abraham*.

The papyri for the *Book of Abraham* contained some drawings with Egyptian writing that were subsequently published in *Times and Seasons*, a Mormon newspaper. The papyri were lost after Smith’s death in 1844. In 1967 the papyri were rediscovered by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York who returned them to the Mormon Church which confirmed them to be the originals and published them for others to see. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* asked three prominent Egyptologists to translate the papyri. The Mormon Church had no need to fear. Since Joseph Smith was a true prophet, the contemporary translation would be very close to Smith’s. However, the stakes were high. The translations of the Egyptologists could either confirm Joseph Smith as a true prophet or convict him as a charlatan. Furthermore, if Joseph Smith was terribly wrong in his translation of the *Book of Abraham*, it follows that he cannot be trusted to have produced an accurate translation of the *Book of Mormon*, which he himself claimed was in the same language.

John Wilson and Klaus Baer, both Professors of Egyptology at the University of Chicago, and Richard Parker, a Professor of Egyptology at Brown University, were asked to do the task. Here are the results:

John Wilson said that the text Smith used to translate the *Book of Abraham* was actually “a related mortuary text of late times, the so-called Book of the Breathings.” The *Book of Breathings* was an ancient Egyptian document, which was buried with the dead in order to provide guidance in the afterlife (which explains why Joseph Smith’s papyri were found among the mummies he had purchased). Wilson also claimed that one of the drawings Smith included in the *Book of Abraham* was actually a hypocephalus, “a cartonnage disk which was placed under the head of a mummy toward the end of ancient Egyptian history.”³²

Klaus Baer said that the papyri that Smith thought was the *Book of Abraham* were actually “The *Breathing Permit* belonging to the priest Hor.”³³ This is another name given for the *Book of Breathings*. Baer provided a comparison of his translation with Joseph Smith’s. It is quite easy to see that there is not the slightest resemblance between the two. For example . . .

Baer’s translation: “the”

³²*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Vol. III, No. 2 (Stanford: Dialogue Foundation, 1968), p. 68. To order back issues or request a subscription you may write to: Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, P. O. Box 658, Salt Lake City, UT 84110 or call (801) 363-9988.

³³*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Vol. III, No. 3, p. 111. In a footnote on the same page Baer said, “The identification is now certain. It was immediately evident the ‘Facsimile From the Book of Abraham No. 1’ of the *PGP* [Pearl of Great Price] was copied from P. JS I. The interpretation proposed by Joseph Smith for the first two lines of text in P. JS XI corresponds to Abraham 1:4-2:6 . . . The fact that the name of the owner is identical in both papyri, and that the left edge of the P. JS I appears to fit the right edge of P. JS XI (see n. 15) — that is, that they are parts of the same scroll — confirm this.”

Smith's translation: ". . . now this priest had offered upon this altar three virgins at one time who were the daughters of Onitah, one of the royal descent directly from the loins of Ham, these virgins were offered up because of their virtue they would not bow down to worship gods of wood or stone, therefore they were killed upon this altar"³⁴

Richard Parker, likewise identifies Smith's *Book of Abraham* papyri as the *Book of Breathings*.³⁵

These results are absolutely devastating to Mormonism. Joseph Smith did not have the faintest idea of what he was doing while he was translating the papyri into the *Book of Abraham*. This certainly brings into question his ability to translate the gold plates into the *Book of Mormon*, since both the *Book of Mormon* and the *Book of Abraham* were in "Reformed Egyptian."

2. Attempts by Mormons to answer the *Book of Abraham* problem fail.

Mormon missionaries who come to your door will be stunned when you bring up the problem with the *Book of Abraham*. Some are completely unaware that such a problem exists. Others have heard of a "tension" but are unaware of its magnitude. Mormon scholars also have not had much success in their attempts to provide an explanation for the problem. Here are a few of the most common responses:

A. "We do not have the original papyri which Joseph Smith used for the *Book of Abraham*. They remain lost." Klaus Baer, however, has proven that we do have them in our possession today. (See Footnote 23). Furthermore, they are identical to reproductions that appeared in the Mormon newspaper, *Times and Seasons*. (See as examples, March 1, 1842 and May 16, 1842.)

B. "If you compare the *Book of Abraham* with other ancient writings about Abraham such as Jewish Midrash, the Genesis Apocryphon (found among the Dead Sea Scrolls), the Apocalypse of Abraham, the Testament of Abraham, and the Book of Enoch, you will find their stories agree on a number of points. This is remarkable because Joseph Smith would have had no way of knowing about these other Abrahamitic writings in 1842. They either had not yet arrived in the United States or were still undiscovered. So Joseph Smith could not have made it up." Jewish Midrash includes stories that took parts of the Old Testament and attempted to make them relevant to a different time as well as provide solutions to questions unanswered in the Old Testament. Midrash began to be developed before the completion of the Old Testament and continued up until no later than the fifth century A. D.³⁶ While it is true that large volumes of Midrashim did not appear in print until the late nineteenth to early twentieth century,³⁷ for nearly two thousand years much Midrashim were orally transferred from one generation to another. Many were printed in little informal collections.³⁸

The first Jews arrived in the colonies of the New World in 1654.³⁹ By 1655 the first Jewish congregation in the United States (Shearith Israel) had formed in Joseph Smith's home state of New York.⁴⁰ Nearly two hundred years later, Smith was engaged in learning Hebrew. The Mormon Church hired a prominent Jewish professor, Joshua Seixas, to teach Smith and the Mormon high Elders.⁴¹ Since Midrash existed in the United States during Smith's day (unquestionably in oral form) and Smith lived relatively close to the nation's first Jewish congregation, it is easy to see where Smith may have obtained his source. Miraculous knowledge on Smith's part was not necessary.

What about these other writings? I have had Mormons tell me that there are ancient writings including one from the Dead Sea Scrolls that confirm the authenticity of the *Book of Abraham* because the stories are very similar. One prominent Mormon scholar claimed that the books mentioned above have

³⁴Ibid., pp. 130-132. The *Book of Abraham* reference is 1:11.

³⁵*Dialogue*, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 86.

³⁶Addison G. Wright. *The Literary Genre Midrash* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1967), p. 51.

³⁷See Louis Ginzberg's monumental anthology, *Legend of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society).

³⁸Dr. Mark Lee Raphael, Professor of Religion at the College of William and Mary in a personal telephone conversation, September 2, 1998.

³⁹Margolis and Marx. *A History Of The Jewish People* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society Of America, 1927), p. 603.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 605.

⁴¹*History of the Church*, vol. II, p. 388. You may order *History of the Church* from any Mormon bookstore or call Mormon book dealer *Deseret Bookstore*, ZCMI Center, 36 S. State St., Salt Lake City, UT 84111, (800) 453-4532. In an article for *Dialogue*, Vol. III, No. 2, Louis C. Zucker, Professor of English and Lecturer in Hebrew at the University of Utah said ". . . there is little doubt that Joshua Seixas was the ablest Hebraist . . . in the 1830's" (p. 45). Interestingly, Seixas was a relative of Gershom Mendez Seixas, the leader of Shearith Israel, the first Jewish congregation mentioned above.

many parallels to the *Book of Abraham* and, thus, confirm that Joseph Smith received the translation of the *Book of Abraham* through divine inspiration, because he could not have possibly known these accounts in his day. I must admit that his argument sounded pretty convincing — until I went to the library, obtained, and read copies of these writings.⁴² Here are the “many,” “very similar” parallels:

- 1) The *Book of Abraham* and *Genesis Apocryphon* both speak of Abraham going to Egypt. However, the *Bible* does as well. So there is no uniqueness since Joseph Smith was well versed in the *Bible*.
- 2) The *Book of Abraham*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the *Testament of Abraham* all speak of an attempt on Abraham’s life. However, the context in each rules out any parallel. In the *Book of Abraham*, a pagan priest attempts to sacrifice Abraham to the Egyptian gods in Abraham’s homeland. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, he fights with an evil spirit. In the *Testament of Abraham*, it is time for Abraham’s natural death. He refuses the requests of the archangel, Michael, to accompany him to Paradise.
- 3) The *Book of Abraham* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* both speak of God’s promise to make a nation out of Abraham’s descendants. However, the *Bible* gives an account of this as well. So there is no uniqueness since Joseph Smith knew the *Bible*.
- 4) The *Book of Abraham* says that God instructed Abraham to lie to Pharaoh concerning his wife in order to save his own life in Egypt. The *Genesis Apocryphon* does provide perhaps our only true parallel. It says that Abraham had a parabolic dream (from God?) while in Egypt which encouraged him to lie concerning his wife in order to save his own life. The *Bible* speaks of Abraham’s lie but says it was Abraham’s idea, not God’s. The *Bible* never records that God encourages lies. In fact, quite the opposite is true (1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 5:6; 34:13; Proverbs 12:22; 30:8; Hebrews 6:18). Even other Mormon scriptures are emphatic against lying (Ether 3:12; D&C 10:28).
- 5) The *Book of Abraham* and the *Book of Enoch* both contain a divinely revealed account of creation. However, the stories are obviously not parallel accounts. In the *Book of Abraham*, God reveals the story of creation to Abraham. The *Book of Enoch* has an angel revealing the story to Enoch. The *Book of Abraham* refers to “the Gods” involved in creation. The *Book of Enoch* speaks of only one God. The creation account in the *Book of Abraham* has many parallels in the *Bible* and, therefore, is not unique. The creation account in the *Book of Enoch* is not at all like the biblical account.

Where are the parallels? One weak parallel is all we have. Therefore, the assertion that there are close parallels to the *Book of Abraham* in other ancient writings is a fabrication.

C. “Joseph Smith never attempted to translate the *Book of Abraham* by his own intellect. He did so by the power of God. The Egyptian papyri had nothing to do with it.” Joseph Smith said, “I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham”⁴³ When he identified the papyri as the *Book of Abraham*, he labored to translate it accurately.⁴⁴ He also put together an Egyptian grammar. Smith’s statements and actions make no sense if the Egyptian had nothing to do with his translation, since they implicitly claim the Egyptian had everything to do with his translation.

D. “We just do not know how Joseph Smith translated the *Book of Abraham*. It was apparently done by a process unknown to anyone but Joseph.” While this may be a possibility, the Mormon should be honest with himself or herself and ask, “Does every problem in Mormonism need to be explained away by an unexplainable and unverifiable cause?” Certainly the *Bible* does not work that way. Is it possible that Mormonism is wrong?

⁴²You can do this as well. See Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., & Edward Cook. *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1996). This is an English translation of all of the Dead Sea Scrolls available to date. The English translation of the *Genesis Apocryphon* is found on pp. 74-84. For an Aramaic original with English translation including an informative introduction and commentary, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J. *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971). R. H. Charles. *The Book Of Enoch* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1942). Michael E. Stone, transl. *The Testament Of Abraham. The Greek Recensions* (Missoula: University of Montana, 1972). A short summary of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* with bibliography may be found in James H. Charlesworth. *The Pseudepigrapha And Modern Research With A Supplement* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981).

⁴³*History of the Church*, vol. 2, p. 236. The introductory statement to the *Book of Abraham* is an excerpt from *History of the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 235, 236, 348-351 and says, “A Translation of some ancient Records, that have fallen into our hands from the catacombs of Egypt. — The writings of Abraham while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus.”

⁴⁴*History of the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 238, 286, 320.

I once asked two Mormon missionaries, “Is there anything which could show you that Mormonism is wrong?” They said they didn’t know. So I asked them, “I know this has never happened, but what if archaeologists began digging around Joseph Smith’s home and found some rusted plates with foreign engravings buried under the back porch? Let’s say they examined them and were able to date them to the 1830’s. Let’s also say traces of gold paint were found on and around the plates that had since worn off. Would that cause you to question your faith?” They both agreed that it would. We then discussed the *Book of Abraham* problem. They were shocked. They were hardly aware such a problem existed! I assured them it was real and that Dr. Hugh Nibley, a chief defender of Mormonism, admitted of all the problems facing the credibility of Mormonism, “that’s the big one.”⁴⁵

The two missionaries remained steadfast saying, “We will believe the Church over all findings to the contrary.” I asked them if they honestly believed that was a rational stance. “Would you want the folks you talk to on a daily basis, attempting to convince them of Mormonism’s truth, to adopt the same type of position that they will not change to Mormonism no matter what you show them? If everyone did that, you would quickly become unemployed.” I further pointed out that earlier they said such a problem would justify their questioning Mormonism and that if what I am sharing is true it would be healthy for them if they did.

The *Book of Abraham* problem is the death knell for Mormonism. In order to understand its significance, let’s say the bones of Jesus were found. One day archaeologists find a big box in Jerusalem during a dig. As they bring the box up and clean it off, there is writing on the box that says, “Jesus, son of Joseph the Carpenter, the one who was called the Christ.” As the archaeologists lift the lid off the box, there is silence as everyone zooms in on the skeleton of one who had been crucified. On top of the skeleton is a papyrus which says, “We fooled the world, until today,” and it’s signed, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, etc. Well, you might say, “That doesn’t prove anything. It could be a first century Jewish fraud.” And you would be right. It could be. But suppose we did a DNA test on the bones and compared the results with a similar DNA test from a blood stain on the Shroud of Turin — and they matched! Christian leaders were responding, “We have no answer. There’s definitely a match. It’s a mystery!” What would you do? The Apostle Paul said, “If Christ has not been raised . . . your faith is worthless.”⁴⁶ The *Bible* says Jesus rose bodily and ascended into Heaven. But we have his bones. “Gosh, I thought it was true. I thought I had a relationship with Christ.” What would you do? *What would you do?* What the bones of Jesus would do to Christianity, the *Book of Abraham* does to Mormonism.

You can expect your Mormon visitors to be confused. But do not expect them to leave Mormonism that day. If it was claimed that the real bones of Jesus were discovered, would you give up Christianity on the spot? Probably not. You would investigate the story to make sure all of the facts were true. After all, many such stories have been proven to be sensational, embellished truths, or simply false. Your Mormon visitors will probably want to do the same. Encourage them to do so. Unfortunately, Mormon missionaries are not allowed to read any literature that has not been approved by the Mormon Church. However, they are allowed to listen to something that you read to them. So read parts of this book to them. Offer to show them anything they would like to see for themselves. Mormons who are not missionaries are permitted to read literature that has not been approved by the Mormon Church. Offer to give or loan this book to them. I have attempted to document every important point, so that anyone can check these things for himself or herself.

So far we have seen that, contrary to Mormon claims, the text of the *Bible* is trustworthy. We have also seen that the discipline of archaeology has been anything but friendly to the *Book of Mormon*. Finally, we have just observed that, **at best**, Joseph Smith was mistaken to believe that he had the ability to translate Reformed Egyptian and, therefore, render the *Book of Mormon* and the *Book of Abraham* as unreliable. **At worst**, he was a fraud. In other words, if Joseph Smith really believed he was given the gift to translate (from God) and that the *Book of Mormon* contains an historical account of real peoples, he was deceived. He was either self-deluded or the recipient of the tricks of the Devil. The other option is that Joseph Smith knew his claims to be able to translate the *Book of Mormon* and the *Book of Abraham* accurately were false. If this was the case, he was a deceiver. Deceived or deceiver? Either way, it seems pretty clear that Joseph Smith was not a Prophet of God.

⁴⁵Dr. Nibley in a personal telephone conversation with this author on August 19, 1997.

⁴⁶1 Corinthians 15:14, 17.

Chapter 5

Mormon Evidences?

So what evidence is there that Mormonism is true? While Mormon scholars admit valid challenges to Mormonism from archaeology and the *Book of Abraham*, they say the evidences of Mormonism's truthfulness is the *Book of Mormon* itself, God's confirmation in your spirit, and the number of changed lives. When talking to Mormons expect to hear them say, "I know the *Book of Mormon* is true because I have prayed to God and asked him to tell me if it is true. And he has confirmed it in my spirit that it is."⁴⁷ In other words, "We don't need evidence. God has told me that the *Book of Mormon* is true. He has confirmed it in my spirit so that no amount of evidence against Mormonism would convince me that it is wrong." Mormon missionaries are trained to keep on telling you how the Holy Spirit has confirmed to them that the *Book of Mormon* is true, that Jesus has changed their life and has meant so much to them. Expect it and don't let it surprise you. This belief is extremely difficult to overcome when talking to your Mormon friends. Much is going to depend on them having an open mind. So we have now come to the heart of the matter in talking with Mormons. In this important chapter we will discuss the insufficiency of these evidences provided by Mormons for Mormonism's truth.

1. Feelings are often inaccurate.

Have you ever doubted your salvation? Many have at some time. However, your feelings do not change the fact that either you are or are not saved. Can you imagine God requiring a new conversion every time you have a mood swing which results in doubts? It is possible for someone to have doubts about being a Christian, and still be one. Likewise, it is possible for someone to feel confident that they are okay in their relationship with God but in reality are not (Matthew 7:21-22). Think of the confidence many of the Jewish leaders in Jesus' time had that they were doing the will of God. Yet, Jesus said to them, "You are of your father, the devil" (John 8:44). The apostle Paul was a perfect example. He believed he was doing the will of God by persecuting and killing Christians, but found that he was actually persecuting the Son of God (Acts 22:1-8).

People of other religions claim a confirmation from within themselves as evidence that their religion is true. Islam makes the same claims and yet Mormons do not regard the *Qur'an* or Islamic doctrine as being divinely inspired. Mohammed made claims of visions similar to Joseph Smith's. Regarding the *Qur'an* he claimed that "this Qur'an is not such as can be produced by other than God" (10:37). He further boasts "if the whole of mankind and Jinn [good and evil spirits] were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support" (17:88). What supposedly makes the *Qur'an* even more amazing is that someone alleged to be illiterate wrote it (7:157). Muslims also argue that the number of changed lives and cultures by the *Qur'an* are evidence of its divine origin.⁴⁸ In other words, the *Qur'an* is so beautiful in its literary style that all of mankind and spirits working together could not produce it, only God could. The truthfulness of Islam is also evidenced by its incredible transforming power.

Is Islam true? No.⁴⁹ Certainly Mormons do not believe that it is. So one can be sincere and confident that God has shown them the way and still be mistaken, as is the case with Muslims. Satan can

⁴⁷Mormons appeal to Moroni 10:3-5 found in the *Book of Mormon*: "Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things."

⁴⁸Islamic scholar, Ajjola claims that "the transformation wrought by the Holy Qur'an is unparalleled in the history of the world and thus its claim to being unique stands as unchallenged today as it did thirteen centuries ago. . . . No faith ever imparted such a new life to its votaries on such a wide scale." Alhaj A. D. Ajjola. *The Essence of Faith in Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, Ltd., 1978), pp. 100-101.

⁴⁹For a critique of Islam see Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb. *Answering Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995). For a debate between a Muslim and Christian, see Josh McDowell and John Gilchrist. *The Islam Debate* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1983). For an audio taped debate, see Jamal Badawi and William Craig. *The Concept of God in Islam and*

counterfeit feelings of certainty and answer prayer.⁵⁰ The Mormon says, “God has confirmed it to me.” But the Muslim says the same thing and so do Christians. What is the difference between the confirmations of Mormons, Muslims, and Christians?

Mormons are not the only ones to err on this point. Many Christians, myself included, have been guilty at some point of presenting feelings and spiritual experience as evidence that their beliefs are true. I don’t want to downplay the authenticity of feelings and spiritual experiences. I believe much of the peace in the life of the Christian and his or her spiritual experiences are authentic. I acknowledge that people of other faiths have experiences as well. However, I interpret them as having a different source than my own (e.g., self or demonic). The only way to determine the true source is to look at outside evidence. When we do this with Mormonism, the prognosis is not good.

2. Defenders of the faith, both the religious leaders of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament, used proof, not feelings.

The Old Testament leaders encouraged people to remember what God did for them: delivering them from Egypt, the plagues and the parting of the Sea, delivering them in the wilderness from the snakes, giving them manna from Heaven, and bringing them into the land he promised (1 Chron. 16:12; Is. 46:9). The New Testament leaders “reasoned” from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19) and offered proof, namely Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 9:22; 17:31). No one ever suggested, “Just read this book and pray about it. God will show you that it’s true.”

I once had a discussion with a Mormon gentleman who works for the Mormon Church in Utah. I shared many of the challenges to Mormonism presented earlier. He responded that Mormon leaders are continually telling Mormons that they must believe *in spite of the facts*. I pointed out to him that neither the Old Testament prophets nor the New Testament apostles were hesitant to provide evidence for their claims. I continued, “What the Mormon Church is asking you to do is to believe that God worked a certain way until less than 200 years ago.”

Be prepared to present the evidence for your position. For example, you can say to Mormon missionaries, “We both are confident and assured that we are correct in our own beliefs. Since our beliefs differ, and they do or you wouldn’t be here today, one of us is wrong. How will we know which one? Only by looking at the evidence outside of ourselves. When we do we observe that the *Bible* is reliable and has been accurately preserved. This verifies my position, because I accept the *Bible*. When we look at Mormonism independently we observe that there is no confirmation of the truthfulness of the *Book of Mormon* from archaeology or history. In fact, the lack of archaeological evidence that ought to be there is hurtful to Mormonism. Finally, since Smith’s translation of the *Book of Abraham* has been shown to be fraudulent, his ability to translate the *Book of Mormon* accurately is also in serious question. Since we both have inward feelings that our own view is true, the outside evidence makes my position much more likely than yours.”

3. One can be sincere but wrong.

When Mormons sense they are losing a lot of ground during the conversation, they may bring up universalism, the belief that every sincere person will make it to Heaven, regardless of their beliefs. This is in accordance with Mormon doctrine. However, it is not compatible with biblical doctrine.

Romans 10:1-2 says, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” Paul prayed for the Jews’ salvation, although he recognized they had a zeal for God. Their zeal, however, was not compatible with truth. Sincerity is not a test for truth and is not enough for eternal life. Several other verses in the *Bible* indicate that Jesus is the only way to obtain eternal life. (See John 3:36; 14:6, Acts 4:12; Hebrews 10:26-31.)

Christianity: A Muslim-Christian Dialogue (Madison: InterVarsity Audio, 1997). This tape can be ordered by calling 1-800-828-2100.

⁵⁰See Luke 4:5-7 where Satan offers to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world if he will worship him.

The biblical view of faith is that it is always a trusting commitment based on known fact. The disciples knew their faith was grounded in truth, not because they had the feeling that it was true but because Jesus had fulfilled his promise to rise from the dead. There are three (3) types of faith:

- 1) Faith with evidence. This is reasonable faith (e.g., many events in the *Bible* including Jesus' Resurrection).
- 2) Faith with no evidence, for or against. This is blind faith (e.g., the Exodus from Egypt).
- 3) Faith in spite of evidence against it. This is stubborn faith (e.g., archaeological problems with the *Book of Mormon* and the translation problem with the *Book of Abraham*).

The type of faith Mormons exhibit is the third type and is not the way God works as modeled throughout the *Bible*. Unless there is a better foundation than feelings for your faith in a system that you hope will allow you to have eternal life, it may be time to start looking around at alternatives.

Chapter 6

Conclusion & Application

There is no need to be defensive or hostile to Mormon missionaries who come to your door. I have always found them to be intelligent, honest, and cordial people who need an equally sincere Christian to share the truth with them lovingly. Do not view them as enemies, but as dedicated people who have been misled. Love them. Pray for them. You can make a difference. Mormon missionaries have had the door slammed in their faces more times than they can count and have heard weak attempts to refute their beliefs. Dare to be different! Remember that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Here are a few suggestions you may use when meeting with Mormons:

1. Set the agenda.

Mormons missionaries have several presentations they would like to share with you. I recommend that *you, not they*, start the conversation by admitting that since no one is 100% accurate about everything they believe, it is possible that you could be wrong on some things you believe. Tell them that you are satisfied with being a Christian but are open-minded and would like to discuss some issues concerning their beliefs that are bothersome to you. Ask them what it would take to convince them that Mormonism is false. When they say there is nothing, ask them, "If the bones of Jesus were someday discovered and they did a DNA test on the bones and compared it with a DNA test on the shroud, and if somehow it was clearly and irrefutably concluded that these were the bones of Jesus, would you continue to be a Mormon since the *Bible* said that the tomb was empty because Christ had bodily risen and 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless?' Would that at least cause you to consider that Mormonism may be false? What if the gold plates from which Joseph Smith translated the *Book of Mormon* were someday discovered and translated by twenty professional Egyptologists and if their translation bore no resemblance to the *Book of Mormon*, would that make you seriously consider that maybe Mormonism is false?" Most will agree that these would certainly make them think long and hard.

2. Establish that the *Bible* is reliable.

This is important. According to those who have devoted their lives to helping Mormons find the truth about Mormonism, many times when a person leaves Mormonism they become skeptical because they include the *Bible* with their other Scriptures. Once they see that their own Scriptures are not from God, they may assume the *Bible* is not either. Take the time to show them that the *Bible* is trustworthy. This gives them a solid place to go when they leave the Mormon Church. I have found that most of the time, Mormon missionaries will end up agreeing with me that the *Bible* is reliable after the evidence in Chapter 2 is presented to them.

3. Discuss the challenges to the *Book of Mormon* posed by archaeology and history.

Since you have discussed the trustworthiness of the *Bible* with them, they will now be able to see a big difference between the *Bible* and the *Book of Mormon*. They will be shocked to find that Mormon archaeologists from B.Y.U. have admitted that unambiguous *Book of Mormon* archaeology is non-existent.

4. Discuss the challenges to the *Book of Abraham* presented by professional Egyptologists who have translated the papyri that Joseph Smith used.

This point in particular destroys the credibility of Joseph Smith. If Smith's translation of the *Book of Abraham* is completely wrong, then there is no reason to believe his translation of the *Book of Mormon*

is any better. His claims of having a God-given ability to translate and to being a chosen Prophet of God become dubious.

5. Be prepared to address the value of feelings.

In my own experience, I have found that Mormons have very little to say in their defense after the above has been pointed out except that God has confirmed in their hearts that Mormonism is true. Yet we have seen that feelings can be misleading and actually prove nothing. Since you and your Mormon friend both have feelings that your beliefs are true, external evidence is the only test. And Mormonism fails to pass.

In conclusion, when Mormons knock on your door, embrace the opportunity. Show yourself to be a loving and knowledgeable Christian. The object is *not* to win an argument but to try to lead a sincere person to the truth. Therefore, present the evidence in a patient and loving manner. The apostle Paul wrote:

And the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

Christianity is trustworthy because the text of the *Bible* is pure and much of it is confirmed by archaeology and secular history. We also have the proof from Jesus' resurrection.⁵¹ Mormonism offers no proof of its truthfulness. There is no confirmation of the *Book of Mormon* from archaeology or history. Translations by professional Egyptologists of the *Book of Abraham* papyri are completely different than Joseph Smith's translation. If his translation skills are in question for the *Book of Abraham*, they are also in question for the *Book of Mormon*. Mormon scholars admit this is a serious problem, and attempts to reconcile it fail. Mormonism's only "proof" is the confirmation God gives when one reads the *Book of Mormon*. However, this evidence is weak, since people of other religions claim God has convinced them of their own religion's truthfulness. Who's confirmation can be trusted, and why?

When you consider Mormon doctrines such as the plurality of Gods, God having been once a man, man becoming a God, Jesus created by God, an afterlife much different than Jesus describes, and salvation requirements, Mormonism presents a gospel much different than we find in the *Bible*. Therefore, the Apostle Paul's words in Galatians 1:8-9 may very well apply:

But though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so I say now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

These are sober words for Mormons, who are not in a position to be confident of their own salvation. They are zealous for God. But so were the Jews Paul wrote about in Romans 10:1-2 and prayed for their salvation. They believe in Jesus. But so did the Gnostics who were heretics of the early Church, who, like Mormons today, taught a concept of God and Jesus that was fundamentally different than what the apostles taught. They do great works in the name of Christ. But so did those of whom Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7:21-23, saying, "I never knew you."

Many Mormons have been brought up in the Mormon Church and it is difficult to jettison what one has believed his or her entire life. Encourage the Mormons with whom you are sharing to pray and think about their personal situation. It is their souls that are on the line. Ask them, "Suppose you learned that some stock you had inherited from your parents would soon be worthless because the company had just announced that it was going out of business. You may not like that fact, but you would welcome an opportunity to sell the stock and get out of it before losing it all. Then you could put your money in a safe place. If you would do that with your money, how much more with your eternal soul! Why hold on to a false hope and lose everything when you have the opportunity to embrace the truth and be saved?"

⁵¹For a defense of Jesus resurrection, see Michael R. Licona. *Cross Examined* (Virginia Beach: TruthQuest Publishers, 1998).

PART TWO



WHAT TO SAY TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES WHEN THEY KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

Chapter 7

About the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW's)

1. Who are the JW's?

A. History: The movement was started by Charles Taze Russell. In 1870, at the age of 18, Russell formed a *Bible* class whose members eventually made him their pastor. Russell wrote, traveled, preached, and formed the Watchtower Society, the governing body for the Jehovah's Witnesses. He died in 1916 and was succeeded by Joseph F. Rutherford, who coined the term "Jehovah's Witnesses" for the group. Rutherford died in 1942 and was succeeded by Nathan H. Knorr, under whose leadership the Watchtower's own *New World Translation* of the *Bible* was produced. Knorr died in 1977 and was succeeded by Frederick W. Franz, the spokesman for the translation committee of the *New World Translation*. As of the writing of this book in 1998, there are approximately 5 million Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide.

B. Doctrines. The following are a few of the theological points held by the Jehovah's Witnesses which differ from orthodox Christianity.

1. *Jesus.* Originally created by God as the Archangel, Michael. Michael was later given a human body and renamed Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is not God.
2. *Holy Spirit.* Not regarded as a person, but rather God's force.
3. *Heaven.* The home of God. The majority of believers will not spend eternity with God in Heaven, but rather with Jesus on a refurbished Earth.
4. *Soul Sleep.* Believers will not immediately be with Christ after death. They remain in a soul sleep until his second coming.

C. The People: As with Mormons, JW's are very sincere and caring. Generally, they are better students of the *Bible* than Mormons. In my personal experience, I have found that conversations with JW's are more likely to become adversarial than with Mormons. Therefore, extra caution is needed when talking with them.

2. What JW's tell you when they knock on your door

As with Mormons, much of what Jehovah's Witnesses initially tell you when they come to your door is in agreement with the beliefs of most Christians. "God loves you and wants to do something special with your life. Make sure of where you stand with him because he's coming back again." They will walk you through the *Bible* explaining God's good news and that Christians are commanded to be "witnesses" to others of this news. JW beliefs begin to differ from those of orthodox Christians when they mention that Christ is going to permanently reign on a refurbished Earth — not in Heaven. However, the major difference will surface when they claim that Jesus was created by God and is inferior to him.

3. How to answer JW's

Although Mormons believe that the text of the *Bible* has been corrupted over the years, JW's unquestionably believe in its preservation and inspiration by God. This provides a common ground. Therefore, your strategy should be different when talking with them than it is with Mormons. Christians and JW's may discuss doctrinal issues and go no further than the *Bible*. JW's, however, differ on the *interpretation* and *translation* of many verses. This is why they prefer to use their *New World Translation*, which has translated many verses in such a manner as to be friendly to their own theological interpretation. JW's will claim that the *New World Translation* is a much more accurate translation of the *Bible* than other English translations. They will also claim that the consensus of scholarship has acknowledged this. However, to my knowledge, not a single credible biblical scholar has ever made such a claim much less a consensus and JW's will be hard pressed to mention the names of even a few — or one.

Learning how to refute their interpretation and translation of key verses will require more technical knowledge than for answering Mormons. In most cases, this will involve a little knowledge of the Greek language (the original language of the New Testament). A little Hebrew will be discussed as well (the original language of the Old Testament). But don't worry. We will explain these as we go.

As mentioned above, the Watchtower has several doctrines that differ from orthodox Christianity and JW's will want you to know them. These become focal points as they discuss the *Bible* with you. For example, JW's insist that you should call God by his name, Jehovah, rather than by his title, God. They also believe that Jesus will reign on a refurbished Earth. However, these doctrines are of secondary importance when compared to the main doctrine in contention, the deity of Christ.

Deity is a theological term for *Godness*. To believe in the deity of Jesus is to believe he is God. JW's do not believe in Christ's deity but rather that he is a being created by God originally as an angel.⁵² Christians believe that Jesus is God, by his very nature and essence, as is the Holy Spirit.⁵³ Christians also believe that although God the Son is subordinate to God the Father, they are equal in their essence. JW's, on the other hand, believe that Jesus is inferior not only in his position to God, but in his essence.⁵⁴ Therefore, the issue to discuss is *Is Jesus God?* The reason this issue is so important is because if I am worshipping Jesus as God, and he is not, then I am guilty of blasphemy. However, if Jesus *is* God and JW's refuse to worship him as such, then they are guilty of just as great a sin, since they refuse to worship the true God.

When talking to JW's, it is easy to get sidetracked and move from one issue to another. Many of these issues are of minor importance. So why spend a lot of time on them? Does it really matter if I spend eternity with Jesus on a "heavenly Earth" rather than in Heaven? Stick to the single issue that really matters: the deity of Christ. This will keep the conversation on the focal point that separates JW's from Christians. Watchtower founder Charles T. Russell said in reference to one's belief about the deity issue, "It means our salvation." Russell believed that where a person stands on the deity issue may mean their own salvation. Unfortunately for Russell, as we shall see, it was *he* who stood on the wrong side.

Our study of the *Deity of Christ* will be two-fold:

A. Biblical texts used by JW's against the Deity of Christ. We will examine the six (6) major biblical texts used by JW's for their belief that Jesus is NOT God, but rather was created. Unless indicated otherwise, the Watchtower's *New World Translation (NWT)* will be the translation quoted in this section, so you can meet on the same playing field when you talk to the JW who knocks on your door.

B. Biblical texts for the Deity of Christ. In this section, we will look at five (5) biblical texts that support the belief that Jesus is God. Many more could be given. However, for brevity sake, we will stay away from those that are not the strongest.⁵⁵ This is not to say those texts do not support the deity of Christ. Many of them do. However, your time with JW's will be limited (usually by them). So discuss only those texts that are extremely difficult if not impossible for them to answer, because they clearly refer to Jesus as God.

⁵²The terms "divinity" and "deity" can be confusing. In most cases the terms have identical meanings. However, some have used "divine" to refer to an angel, since it came from God. However, an angel would not be a deity, since it is not by its nature God.

⁵³This book will only be concerned with the deity of Jesus.

⁵⁴JW's may on occasion say that Jesus is a "god." However, they do not believe that he is "God" in the fullest sense of deity. In their opinion, he is still a created being, unequal to God in his essence.

⁵⁵New Testament scholar, Raymond Brown, explains multiple ways of understanding Titus 2:13, "the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Is Paul referring to our *great God* and *Savior Jesus Christ* as two persons? Or is he saying Jesus Christ is our *great God-and-Savior*? Naturally, one can see how it can be understood both ways. Brown notes that several careful scholars have understood the first option to be the more correct, while the latter is virtually the unanimous view held by grammarians and lexicographers. Raymond E. Brown. *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1994), pp. 181-182.

Chapter 8

Biblical texts used by JW's against the Deity of Christ

In this chapter, we will examine the six (6) main arguments given by JW's to support their belief that Jesus is not God but was created by God. First, the verse used will be cited as it appears in the translation used by JW's (*NWT*). Next the JW interpretation of the verse will be provided. A refutation of their interpretation follows. Finally, a summary of each discussion is provided as a "Bottom Line."

1. Revelation 3:14: "And to the angel of the congregation in Laodicea write: These are the things that the Amen says, the faithful and true witness, **the beginning of the creation by God.**"

JW Interpretation: "the beginning of the creation by God" means Jesus was the first thing created by God.

To understand why the Watchtower's interpretation is incorrect, a little knowledge of Greek is helpful. The Greek word for "beginning" is *arche* and rhymes with "parkay." *Arche* is used with different shades of meaning throughout the *Bible*. The following illustrate a few:

A. Time. The apostle John writes, "In the *arche* (beginning) the Word was . . ." (John 1:1). In other words, in the beginning of time the Word existed. The same word is used in Genesis 1:1 in the Septuagint.⁵⁶ In the verse we are presently considering (Revelation 3:14), if John meant *arche* in the sense of time, the verse may be translated as the *New World Translation* renders it, "the beginning of the creation by God." If translated as such, Jesus was the beginning of God's creation by being the first thing created by God. "Beginning" is used in a passive sense; in other words Jesus is receiving the action (being created). However, *arche* could also be translated as the majority of translations render it, "the beginning of the creation of God." If translated this way, "beginning" can be interpreted in an active sense. When a word is used in the active sense, it is producing the action; in other words, Jesus was the "beginning one" or the originating source of creation (i.e., the Creator).

B. Political. When *arche* is used in this manner it means a government or ruler. For example, Luke 20:20: ". . . so as to turn him over to the *arche* (government) and to the authority of the governor." Colossians 1:16: ". . . whether they are thrones or lordships or *archai* (governments. *Archai* is a plural form of *arche*) or authorities . . ." Most translations render *arche* in these verses as "rule" or "rulers." The sense, however, is the same. *Arche* is the top (or beginning) of a power hierarchy. Imagine the pyramid structure of a corporation. The President is at the top or *beginning* of the pyramid. A few Vice Presidents are below him. And below them are more managers who oversee even more employees.⁵⁷ If John means *arche* in a political sense, the verse may be translated "the ruler of God's creation" (*NIV*).

What in fact does John mean when he says Jesus is the *arche* (beginning) of the creation of (by) God? In order to translate and interpret a verse correctly, there are four general rules that can be helpful.

- A) **Consider the various meanings of a word.** We have already done this and observed that the word for "beginning" could have any of several meanings.
- B) **Consider the verse and see if any particular meaning fits best.** The *NWT* renders this verse in such a manner that Jesus was the first thing created "by God." However, the preposition *hypo* (by) does not appear in the Greek text.⁵⁸ Therefore, this verse does not help us.
- C) **Consider the context.** Unfortunately, "the beginning of the creation of (by) God" is a title given to Jesus by John and is not explained by the context surrounding Revelation 3:14.

⁵⁶The Septuagint is the Greek Translation of the Old Testament. This was the common translation in Jesus' day and used by the New Testament writers the majority of the time when quoting the Old Testament. Genesis 1:1 in the Septuagint reads: "In the *arche* (beginning), God created the heavens and the earth."

⁵⁷The Apostle Paul was particularly fond of using *arche* in this sense. Of the twelve (12) times he used it in his writings, nine (9) are in the political sense: Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1.

⁵⁸The translation "by God" is possible, but it is not required.

D) Consider other Scriptures that would support a view. You can support taking “beginning” in the active sense with John 1:3, “*All things came into existence through him . . .*” and Colossians 1:16, “*because by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth . . .*” (NWT).⁵⁹ Both verses support Jesus as Creator and would justify understanding Revelation 3:14’s description of Jesus as the originating source of creation. “Ruler” is also justified since *arche* is frequently used in the political sense and agrees with other New Testament verses which say the same thing (Rev. 1:5; 19:16). Unless the JW’s can produce other verses that legitimately indicate God created Jesus, they are not justified in translating *arche* in a passive sense.

Bottom Line: The Greek word for “beginning,” *arche*, is used in several ways. In John 1:1 it means the “beginning of time.” In Colossians 1:16 it means a “ruler.” In Revelation 3:14 *arche* can be used in a passive sense (he was created), or in an active sense (he was creating). The context provides no clue to what he means. So we look at other Scriptures. John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16 clearly speak of Jesus as Creator and justify taking *arche* in the active sense. Unless the JW’s can give you any Scriptures that clearly speak of Jesus being created, they cannot use this verse as proof that he was.

2. Proverbs 8:22ff: “*Jehovah himself produced me as the beginning of his way, the earliest of his achievements of long ago.*”

JW Interpretation: Verse 12 identifies “wisdom” as the one speaking in this passage. “Wisdom” is Jesus who says he was “produced” by God and became his “master worker” (vs. 30). He was involved in the creation process, *after* he himself was created since he was “the earliest of his achievements.”

First point out that neither Jesus nor any of the writers of the New Testament apply Proverbs 8 to Jesus. Next, point the JW to verse one in the same chapter where wisdom is also talking.

Does not wisdom keep calling out, and discernment keep giving forth its voice?

Ask: If “wisdom” is an actual person (Jesus) in this text, then who is “discernment” in verse 1? And who is “shrewdness” in verse 12 with whom “wisdom” is said to reside?

I, wisdom, I have resided with shrewdness . . .

At this point, the JW usually does not have an answer except to ask how you understand these verses. Solomon is using a figure of speech called “personification.”⁶⁰ He attributes the qualities of being a person to character qualities in order to make the reading more enjoyable and to have a greater impact. This is obvious throughout Proverbs.⁶¹ Consider Chapter 7:4-5.

*Say to wisdom: “You are my sister;” and may you call understanding itself “Kinswoman,” to guard you against the woman stranger, against the foreigner who has made her own sayings smooth.*⁶²

Solomon teaches that if we are intimately acquainted with wisdom and understanding in our lives, we will not be ensnared by the enticements of the adulteress described in verses 6 and following.

Finally, point out that the purpose to which Solomon wrote Proverbs was

⁵⁹Notice that the word “other” is in brackets. This means the word is not found in the Greek text but was inserted by the translators of the NWT to clarify their interpretation. Their *Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* provides their rationale in the footnote to verse 16, “All [other], as in Luke 11:41, 42” (p. 880). But these are not even good texts to support the NWT’s interpretation, because “other” might be inserted in order to smooth the translation, but it is not required. Hebrews 2:10 has a Greek construction closer to Colossians 1:16, and yet “other” is not inserted in the NWT. Therefore, the NWT’s insertion of “other” in Colossians 1:16 is clearly based on the Watchtower’s assumption that Jesus was created and not because the Greek requires it.

⁶⁰For other examples see Genesis 4:10 and Psalm 85:10. Also see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures Of Speech Used In The Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968).

⁶¹See also 1:20-21; 3:13-16; 4:5-9; 9:1-6. Also see Psalm 85:10.

⁶²One may also ask if “Wisdom” is Jesus, why refer to Him in the feminine gender.

. . . for one to know wisdom and discipline, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive the discipline that gives insight, righteousness and judgment and uprightness, to give to the inexperienced ones shrewdness, to a young man knowledge and thinking ability.
(Proverbs 1:2-4)

We would expect Solomon, therefore, to talk about these qualities. A history of Jesus would be out of place, totally unrelated to the rest of Proverbs.⁶³ Moreover, just a few verses after Solomon states his purpose behind writing Proverbs (1:1-6), he personifies wisdom (1:20ff). That wisdom is personified as a figure of speech is apparent in Proverbs 9 where folly is likewise personified alongside of wisdom.

In another of his books, Solomon tells his readers that he has used literary tools throughout his writings:

And besides the fact that the congregator had become wise, he also taught the people knowledge continually, and he pondered and made a thorough search, that he might arrange many proverbs in order. The congregator sought to find **the delightful words** and the writing of correct words of truth. (Ecclesiastes 12:9-10)

In Proverbs 8, Solomon is telling his readers that if God used the quality of wisdom to create the universe, think of how it can be used in your own life for avoiding pitfalls and being successful at your endeavors. Wisdom, therefore, is not referring to Jesus. So we still have no Scriptures that indicate Jesus was created.

Bottom Line: The New Testament writers never employ Proverbs 8 in reference to Jesus. If “Wisdom” in Proverbs 8 is in fact “Jesus,” who is “Shrewdness” in verse 1 and “Discernment” in verse 12? Finally, referring to Jesus in this passage is both out of place and goes against what Solomon is trying to teach. Solomon is not referring to Jesus in Proverbs 8, but is simply using a figure of speech called personification, as he does throughout Proverbs in order to be creative.

3. John 3:16: *“For God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son . . .”*

JW Interpretation: “Only-begotten” means Jesus was begat or given birth by God. So he had a beginning.

Ask the JW to define “only-begotten.” His answer is usually that God brought him into existence; he created him and no other son. Then ask the JW to read Hebrews 11:17.

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, as good as offered up Isaac, and the man that had gladly received the promises attempted to offer up [his] only-begotten [son].”

Was Isaac Abraham’s only begotten son in the sense that he brought him and no other son into existence? No. Remember Ishmael? Ishmael was Abraham’s son through Hagar.⁶⁴ Ishmael was born to Abraham prior to Isaac. So when the author of Hebrews calls Isaac Abraham’s “only-begotten son,” he must mean something other than Abraham’s only son. Isaac was unique to Abraham. He would be the son through whom God’s covenant would be fulfilled.⁶⁵ “Only-begotten,” therefore, means “unique,” “chosen,” “special,” or “exalted” in some sense.⁶⁶ The Greek word for “only-begotten” in Hebrews 11:17 is the same word used in John 3:16. The JW may respond, “But, ‘begotten’ signifies a beginning to existence.” Ask if it does in Hebrews 11:17. So we still have no Scripture that indicates Jesus was created.

⁶³This becomes especially clear when Proverbs 8 is taken in context with Proverbs 7 and 9. Verses 22-30 would seem completely misplaced if they referred to Jesus. However, they fit right in if “wisdom” is taken as a character quality which Solomon personifies.

⁶⁴Genesis 16.

⁶⁵Genesis 17:20-21.

⁶⁶*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. 2, p. 725* states that the word “is used to mark out Jesus uniquely above all earthly and heavenly beings; in its use the present soteriological [salvific] meaning is more strongly stressed than that of origin.”

Bottom Line: In John 3:16, “only-begotten” does not mean “only-born,” but special in some sense as indicated by Issac being called Abraham’s “only-begotten” son in Hebrews 11:17 in spite of Ishmael being Abraham’s son as well.

4. Colossians 1:15: “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*”

JW Interpretation: Jesus was the first thing created by God.

Does the word “firstborn” indicate Jesus was created? The Greek word for “firstborn” is *prototokos*. It appears throughout both the Old Testament (Septuagint) and the New Testament with different shades of meaning.

- A. **Chronological:** Emphasis is on the order of birth (Genesis 10:15; 19:30-31; Exodus 13:15).
- B. **Positional:** Emphasis is on the position of being the firstborn, with all of the honor and favor that is due to one being born first. For example, look at the following:

Also, I myself shall place him as firstborn, The most high of the kings of the earth.
(Psalm 89:27)

This Psalm refers to King David.⁶⁷ Yet David was not the first king appointed by God. Saul was.⁶⁸ And it is clear that God chose Saul to be king.⁶⁹ David was firstborn in the positional sense; he was God’s chosen and favored king, although he was not the first.

In Colossians 1:15, when Paul calls Jesus “the firstborn of all creation,” is he using “firstborn” in a chronological or a positional sense? Paul is helpful in the verses that follow by explaining what he means when he says “firstborn.”

Verse 16: “because by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth . . . All [other] things have been created through him and for him.”

“Other” is in brackets indicating it does not appear in the Greek text. The NWT translators have inserted it, because they assume the chronological sense of “firstborn.”⁷⁰ However, if Paul had meant the chronological sense, he would have probably used a different preposition. Instead of saying, “in him” or “by means of him,”⁷¹ he could have said, “after him,”⁷² i.e., “after him all things were created.” But Paul says “by means of him all things were created” and establishes Jesus as Creator of the universe – a position.

Verse 17: “Also, he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist.”

The Greek word for “made to exist” means “to place or hold together, to frame, to cause to exist.”⁷³ In other words, Paul says the universe exists because of Jesus who put it together. Verse 17, therefore, reinforces verse 16 by stating Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe – a position.

Verse 18: “and he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that he might become the one who is first in all things.”

Jesus is the head of the Church—a position. He is also the *firstborn* from the dead. This second use of *prototokos* could be either the chronological or positional sense. Jesus was either the first risen from the dead with an immortal body or stands in a position over all those who will be resurrected. Why is this important? The final statement provides the answer, “*that he might become the one who is first in all things.*” The Greek word for “the one who is first” means “to hold the highest rank or dignity, to be

⁶⁷Verses 3, 20, 35, 49.

⁶⁸1 Samuel 8.

⁶⁹1 Samuel 9:15-17; 10:1.

⁷⁰No other major translation renders it as such.

⁷¹*en auto*.

⁷²*meta auton*.

⁷³*synesteken*. See Kittel and Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament*, Volume VII (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 897.

chief.”⁷⁴ He is firstborn from the dead so he might now be chief of everything. As Christ holds rank over all creation and the Church, he especially does so as risen Lord.⁷⁵ Once again, Paul points to position. In fact, there is nothing in this passage that lends support to a chronological interpretation of “firstborn” in verse 15.

So what are these verses saying? Paul defines Jesus as “firstborn” by saying he is the Creator of the universe, the Sustainer of the universe, the Head of the Church, and the Risen Lord, so that he can be chief over all things. This entire passage points only to the position definition! Then lest there be any doubt in the reader’s minds that Jesus, the image of God and chief of everything, possesses the very essence of God, Paul makes that very clear in verse 19 when he says all the fullness of God dwells in Christ. He states the same even more clearly in 2:9, “*Because it is in him that all the fullness of divine quality dwells bodily.*” This verse is discussed in depth in the next chapter. Since Jesus is “firstborn” in a positional sense, this verse may not be used as a text in support of the view that Jesus was created. If anything, it points to the deity of Christ. Therefore, we still have no Scriptures that indicate Jesus was created.

Bottom Line: The word “firstborn” can be used in a chronological sense (first to be born or first created) or in a positional sense (one who has the honor and rights of a firstborn son [Ps. 89:27; Jer. 31:9]). We are fortunate that Paul explains what he means by “firstborn” in the verses that follow. If Paul had meant “firstborn” in a chronological sense (order of creation), he would have said “after him all things were created.” Instead, Paul says Jesus is the Creator of the universe, Sustainer of the universe, Head of the Church, Risen Lord and, therefore, Chief of all things. This points only to the positional sense, not the chronological.

5. John 14:28: “. . . the Father is greater than I am.” **JW Interpretation:** “How can Jesus be God when He says, “the Father is greater than I am?” Jesus may be referring to his incarnate position, not his essence.

A husband and wife are one in essence (one flesh),⁷⁶ yet two distinct persons. Likewise, God is one in essence, yet three distinct persons. In theology, this is referred to as the “Godhead.” The biblical standard is that the husband is positionally greater than the wife in the home,⁷⁷ yet both he and his wife are equal in essence—one flesh. As the wife voluntarily submits herself to her husband, the Son voluntarily submits himself to the Father.

Perhaps another analogy may be helpful. Consider the New York Yankees. There are many members on the team: players, coaches, the manager, and the owner. The members are, in essence, one team. Positionally, there is an authority structure. The owner is the final authority (as many Yankee managers have found!). The manager has authority over the players. The team is one, in essence, but is made up of many members that have different levels of authority. Likewise, all three members of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) make up the Godhead. The Godhead is one in essence, but the Son submits to the authority of the Father. There are Scriptures that say Jesus and the Father share the same essence of God (see the next chapter). Since the JW’s still cannot provide biblical reasons to support their view of Christ (i.e., that he was created), their particular interpretation of John 14:28 should not be preferred. So we still do not have any Scriptures that teach Jesus was created.

Bottom Line: When Jesus said the Father was greater than himself, he was referring to the Father’s position, not his essence.

6. Passages where the Father is called the God of Jesus (Mk 15:34; Jn 20:17; Eph. 1:3, 17) or where God is referred to being distinct from Jesus (Jn 17:3).

JW Interpretation: Both the New Testament writers and Jesus himself called the Father the God of Jesus on several occasions. If Jesus was God, why would he call the Father his God?

⁷⁴ *proteuon*. Ibid., Volume VI, pp. 881-882.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 877-878.

⁷⁶ Matthew 19:4-5.

⁷⁷ Ephesians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:18.

Of all the reasons provided by the Watchtower to support their view of Jesus, this is the most difficult to answer. The prominent New Testament scholar Raymond Brown says although the question, “Did New Testament Christians call Jesus God?” must be answered in the affirmative, there are nevertheless “Passages that Seem to Imply that the Title ‘God’ Was Not Used for Jesus.”⁷⁸ What are we to make of these passages?

A. The New Testament writers, particularly John and Paul, clearly say Jesus is God and refer to the Father as the God of Jesus. So there was a sense in which they understood these two beliefs to be compatible. See John’s writings (John 1:1; 20:17, 28; Revelation 22:13) and Paul’s writings (Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 2:9).

B. The Earliest Church Fathers, particularly Ignatius and Polycarp, clearly call Jesus “God,” and also refer to the Father as the God of Jesus.⁷⁹ Just like the New Testament writers, they did not appear to see a tension between the two. Ignatius was the Bishop of Antioch and wrote seven letters to the Churches while en route to his execution in Rome around the year A. D. 110. In Ignatius’ letter to the Ephesians 18:2 he states:

For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God’s plan . . .

In 19:3 he states:

Consequently all magic and every kind of spell were dissolved, the ignorance so characteristic of wickedness vanished, and the ancient kingdom was abolished, when God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life . . .

And in 1:1 . . .

Being as you are imitators of God, once you took on new life through the blood of God you completed perfectly the task so natural to you.

In his letter to the Smyrnaeans 1:1 he states:

I glorify Jesus Christ, the God who made you so wise . . .

Polycarp also testifies to the teachings of the early Church regarding Jesus’ deity. The early Church fathers, Irenaeus (circa A. D. 120-190) and Eusebius (A. D. ?-342) write that Polycarp was “instructed” and “appointed” by the apostles, “conversed with many who had seen Christ,” and “having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles.”⁸⁰ So his view of Jesus is very important. In *The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*, he mentions “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “our Lord and God Jesus Christ.”⁸¹

Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal High Priest himself, the Son of God Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth and in all gentleness and in all freedom from anger and forbearance and steadfastness and patient endurance and purity, and may he give to you a share and a place among his saints, and to us with you, and to all those under heaven who will yet believe in our Lord and God Jesus Christ and in his Father who raised him from the dead.

Thus, Polycarp agrees with the teachings of the apostles, which we will study in the next chapter, that Jesus is God. The JW’s may point out that some Church leaders before the fourth century did not believe in the deity of Christ. However, these are much later than Ignatius and Polycarp (80-200 years). The historian is more interested in knowing what the earliest Church leaders believed than later ones, realizing that heretical teachings

⁷⁸Brown. *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, pp. 174, 189.

⁷⁹For the writings of Ignatius and other early Church Fathers see J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, eds. and transl., *The Apostolic Fathers*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).

⁸⁰Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:3:4. In this passage, Irenaeus also claims to have spoken with Polycarp when he (i.e., Irenaeus) was young. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4:14. In the latter, Eusebius quotes Irenaeus.

⁸¹Polycarp. *Philippians* 12:2.

form over time. However, what one finds when you read the very Church Fathers cited by the Watchtower in support of the inferiority of Jesus, is that every one of them actually supports the deity of Jesus!⁸²

C. The Father may be God to Jesus in the sense that he is the final authority to Jesus. Verses such as John 1:1 and Colossians 2:9 clearly speak of Jesus having the same essence of deity that the Father has (See Chapter 9). Nevertheless, Jesus submits to the Father who is his final authority. The “one flesh” analogy is again helpful. The parents, Mom and Dad, are the final authority to their children. Mom and Dad share the same essence as persons and are “one flesh.” However, there is a divinely ordained authority structure within the marriage; the husband is head. Therefore, Mom can accurately tell her children, “Your dad is my final authority and yours.” By doing this she acknowledges her husband’s position as final authority and gives up nothing of her own position and essence as parent and final authority to her children.

Bottom Line: Jesus referred to the Father as his God. This does not mean Jesus himself was not God, for the Apostles and the earliest Church fathers all recognized him as God while at the same time recognizing that the Father was Jesus’ God with no apparent tension. Furthermore, the Father may be God to Jesus in the sense that he is his final authority before whom unswerving and unquestioned love and devotion are given above all others.

Here are some other arguments Jehovah’s Witnesses use:

1. **“The word ‘Trinity’ is not found in the Bible.”** Neither are the terms “Jehovah’s Witnesses” and “theology.” Trinity is the term we use to describe the Godhead, one in essence but three persons. The question is not what we call it, but if the concept is taught in Scripture.
2. **“The concept of the ‘Trinity’ has pagan origins before Jesus.”** The story of a catastrophic flood is also found in pagan religions. Does this indicate that it has pagan origins as well? Even if the concept of a Trinity preceded Christianity, it would not prove Christianity copied it from other religions. The question is, “Does the *Bible* teach that Jesus is God?” As we shall see in the next chapter, the answer is clearly, “yes.”
3. **“If Jesus is God, then he prayed to himself in John 17.”** Jesus did not pray to himself. He prayed to the Father, another person of the Godhead, to whom he submits. If we view the Godhead (Trinity) as some sort of team (see #5 above), then there is no contradiction. Remember, the difference is in *position*, not *essence*.

⁸²The topic of how the early Church Fathers viewed Jesus is beyond the scope of this book. However, you may find an article on the subject by this author on his web site at www.risenjesus.com. Go to the “Articles” section and select “The Early Church Fathers on Jesus.”

Chapter 9

Biblical texts *for* the Deity of Christ

In this chapter, we will examine five (5) biblical texts that strongly support the doctrine that Jesus is God. Third century theologians saw such biblical teachings and formally called God a Trinity: the belief that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, yet there are not three Gods, but rather three persons in one God. While the Trinity may not be easy to understand, I think that the baseball team analogy in the previous chapter may be of help. However, one does not need to be able to understand the essence of God in order to believe that he is a Trinity. There are perhaps many things that we cannot understand about a God who is infinite in every respect. Our lack of full comprehension, however, does not negate an attribute of God. So the question is *not*, “Can I understand the Trinity?” Rather, the question is, “Does the Bible teach the Trinity?” In the following, the biblical verse will be provided (usually from the *New American Standard Bible*), followed by the reason why the verse points to the deity of Christ, usually followed by the JW response, followed by how to answer their response.

1. Isaiah 9:6: “*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*”

Most Christians understand this verse to be a prophecy about the coming Messiah. You may remember it from Handel’s *Messiah*. Jesus is here referred to as “Mighty God.” The JW expects you to bring up this verse and will respond that comparative language is used here: Jesus is a “mighty god,” but Jehovah is described as “Almighty God” elsewhere and, therefore, is more powerful (i.e., Jesus is mighty, while God is almighty). They may further note that Jesus is never referred to as “Almighty God.” However, the Watchtower interpretation of Isaiah 9:6 is incorrect.

While in English the words may be taken in a comparative manner, the original Hebrew is not at all comparative.

- A) **Almighty God** is the Hebrew *El Shaddai*. The exact meaning of this word is uncertain. Most often it is linked to mountains and therefore can mean “God of the mountain.”⁸³ “The idea behind the root in Akkadian and in Hebrew seems to be that of impelling force, hence, the sovereign, ‘Almighty God.’”⁸⁴ The translation, “Almighty God,” is from the Septuagint.
- B) **Mighty God** is the Hebrew *El Gibbor*, and can be translated “God, the hero or champion among the army.”⁸⁵ It means a God who is mighty or superior, strong, brave, valiant, a hero.

These Hebrew words have different, unrelated meanings. “Mighty God” does *not* stand inferior to “Almighty God” as the term, “strong,” stands inferior to “strongest.” They are unrelated terms, as in “brilliant” and “strong.” More problematic to the Watchtower interpretation of the words “almighty” verses “mighty” is the fact that God is called *El Gibbor* (Mighty God) just one chapter later in Isaiah 10:20-21! Also in Jeremiah 32:17-18 and Deuteronomy 10:17, the Father is referred to as the “Mighty God” (*El Gibbor*). Therefore, Isaiah 9:6 clearly refers to Jesus as God.

Bottom Line: Isaiah calls Jesus, “God.” The Watchtower’s attempts to explain this by claiming “mighty God” is less than “almighty God” reveals a lack of knowledge of the Hebrew language because the words “mighty” and “almighty” are not comparative in meaning, and Isaiah calls the Father “mighty God” one chapter later.

⁸³Har

ris, Archer, Waltke, eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Volume 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 907.

⁸⁴Richard Patterson, “Joel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin and Richard P. Polycyn, eds. Volume 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), p. 243.

⁸⁵Harris, Archer, Waltke, eds. *TWOT*, Vol. 1, p. 149.

2. John 20:28: “*Thomas answered and said to him: ‘My Lord and my God!’*”

After his resurrection Jesus appears to doubting Thomas who calls him, “God.” This is a difficult verse for the JW because it is so clear. The JW will respond that either Thomas said, “My Lord” to Jesus, then looked heavenward and said, “My God!” or Thomas was saying it out of exclamation, much like someone today might say “Oh, my God!” when astonished. However, there are four (4) reasons why the Watchtower response is inadequate:

- A) The text says, “Thomas answered and said *to him*: ‘My Lord and my God!’ ” Thomas was addressing Jesus.
- B) In Psalm 35:23 (Septuagint), the same Greek grammatical structure is used as in John 20:28. The Psalmist David says, “Awake, O Lord, and attend to my judgment, even to my cause, *my God and my Lord.*”

Psalm 35:23: *ho theos mou kai ho kurios mou.*

My God and my Lord.

John 20:28: *ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou.*

My Lord and my God.

David was addressing one person. His God and his Lord were one and the same. Since the Greek grammatical structure in John 20:28 is the same, Thomas is most likely referring to Jesus as God.

- C) Jesus never rebuked Thomas for calling him “God.”
- D) It is unlikely that Thomas, a pious Jew who was accustomed to carefully guarding his lips, would take the Lord’s name in vain, especially when he saw the risen Jesus.⁸⁶

Bottom Line: Thomas addresses Jesus as his God. Attempts by the Watchtower to explain this by claiming Thomas was looking heavenward when he said “my God” or that he just uttered the statement as an expression of surprise fails to carefully observe Thomas’ statement “to him,” the similar Greek grammatical structure in Psalm 35:23, that Jesus never rebuked Thomas for calling him God, and the fact that the pious Jew, Thomas, would be unlikely to take the Lord’s name in vain.

3. Colossians 2:9: “*for in him all the fulness of deity dwells in bodily form.*”

The New World Translation renders “divine quality” instead of “deity.” What does the word mean? The Greek word is *theotetos*. There are two words in the Greek language Paul had to choose from.

- A) *theiotetos*: divinity or has the quality of the divine; that which shows God to be God, and gives Him the right to worship.⁸⁷ The emphasis is on his attributes.
- B) *theotetos*: one who occupies the divine office and possesses all divine power.⁸⁸ The emphasis is on his nature.

Both words are almost identical in spelling and meaning. Both acknowledge the deity of Christ. But the latter, *theotetos*, is stronger and is the word Paul uses. All the fulness (nothing excepted) of God’s essence dwells in Christ in bodily form. Thus, Colossians 2:9 clearly refers to Jesus as God.

A few years ago, I met an engineer from Greece who was visiting the United States. After a brief conversation, I asked if he could read Koine Greek, the language in which the New Testament was originally written. He said that in Greece it was a requirement in school to become familiar with the ancient forms of the language. I wrote Colossians 2:9 in Greek for him and substituted the original *theotetos* with *theiotetos*. I asked him to translate it for me. He read it and said, “This says, ‘God’s qualities are in Christ’s body.’ But it doesn’t make much sense.” I scratched out the substituted word and wrote the original word, *theotetos*, where it belonged. I then asked him to translate it for me. He looked at it and said with confidence, “Oh, this says that God came down and put on a body!”

⁸⁶Dr. Ron Sauer, Professor of New Testament at Moody Bible Institute, kindly pointed this out to me. Dr. Sauer was the last student of the late F. F. Bruce. When I studied under him at Liberty University, he devoted 8-14 hours daily to his personal study in the Greek New Testament and instilled a passion in this student and many others to learn the Greek language of the New Testament.

⁸⁷NIDNTT, Vol. 2, p. 86. TDNT, Vol. III, p. 123. See Romans 1:20 for its only use in the New Testament. Interestingly, the NST has rendered the word “Godship.”

⁸⁸NIDNTT, Vol. 2, p. 86. TDNT, Vol. III, p. 119. Also, see Fritz Rienecker. *A Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 573.

Bottom Line: The Greek word Paul uses for “deity” means Jesus is in essence God.

4. God and Jesus are both referred to as the: a) Alpha and Omega, b) First and Last, c) Beginning and End.

A) God: Rev. 21:6 (Alpha & Omega; Beginning & End); Is. 44:6 (First & Last)

B) Jesus: Rev. 1:8 (Alpha & Omega), 17-18 (First & Last); 2:8 (First & Last); 22:13 (Alpha & Omega, First & Last, Beginning & End)⁸⁹

Bottom Line: Since John addresses Jesus and God interchangeably throughout these passages, it is clear he viewed Jesus as God. This is strengthened further by our fifth text, which is also from John.

5. John 1:1: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*”

John 1:14 tells us that “the Word” is Jesus. Therefore, when John states in the third clause of verse 1 that “the Word was God,” he claims that Jesus is God in the plainest of terms. JW’s, however, will not allow you to cite this verse without opposition. They claim that the final clause should be translated “*the Word was a god*” (*NWT*). In a Watchtower tract they are likely to leave with you titled, “Should You Believe in the Trinity,”⁹⁰ reasons are provided why they believe the clause should be translated, “*the Word was a god.*”⁹¹

The first reason provided in the tract is that “someone who is ‘with’ another person cannot be the same as that other person.” This is correct and is brought up because of the verse’s second clause, “the Word was with God.” However, Christians do not believe that Jesus is the same person as the Father. Rather, from the early Church to the present, Christians believe that God is One, in three persons. Therefore, the Watchtower’s objection is without any strength.

The tract then cites an article from the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.⁹² Apparently they didn’t believe anyone would actually check the article and read it. Otherwise they would have never cited it. We will look at this article in-depth in a moment.

The tract continues by listing nine (9) translations which render the third clause as the Word (Jesus) is “a god,” “godlike,” or “divine.” The average reader will not recognize any of these translations. The most recognized and certainly the majority of translations all render the verse, “the Word was God.”⁹³ However, the issue is *not* how many scholars believe something, but why they believe it.

The Watchtower returns to the *Journal* article and states that “expressions ‘with an anarthrous [no article] predicate preceding the verb, are primarily qualitative in meaning.’ As the *Journal* notes, this indicates that the *lo’gos* can be likened to a god. It also says of John 1:1: ‘The qualitative force of the predicate is so prominent that the noun [*the-os*] cannot be regarded as definite.’” These are heavy statements for the non-Greek student. Let’s try to simplify them somewhat with a few definitions.

Logos is the Greek term for “word” and is referring to Jesus in the context of John 1 (see verse 14). *Theos* is the Greek word for “God.” A predicate is a word(s) that describes the subject of the sentence. For example, in the sentence, “the girl is smart,” “girl” is the subject and “smart” is the predicate, since it is describing the girl. Articles are either definite or indefinite. When an article is definite (e.g., the), it is identifying something. For example, suppose I was in a public debate with a JW and someone asked, “Which of the two is Mike?” The answer, “Mike is *the* tall guy,” identifies me from the other. Now let us suppose that later on someone else heard about the debate and asks, “What is Mike like?” The

⁸⁹Revelation 22 is somewhat difficult to follow because John changes from one speaker to another without warning, as he seems to do in verses 7, 12, and probably 17. The *KJV* (Red Letter editions) and the *NIV* seem to present the conversation most clearly. The *NASB* seems confused on where to place the quotation marks. It has Jesus speaking in verses 6 and 7. But that is awkward because it would force the Father to send the angel in verse 6 and then Jesus to send the same angel for the same purpose in verse 16. The *NWT* is likewise confused, identifying Jesus as the angel in verse 6 and also as the one who sends the same angel (quite a task to send yourself) in verse 16.

⁹⁰*Should You Believe in the Trinity?* New York: Watchtower Bible And Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989, pp. 26-28.

⁹¹The same is also found in *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible And Tract Society Of New York, Inc., 1985), pp. 11-39-1140.

⁹²The article is specifically identified in Appendix 2A of *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, pp. 1140 as Philip B. Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, ed. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Vol. 92, 1973, pp. 75-87.

⁹³*King James Version, American Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, New International Version, Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, New American Bible, New Jerusalem Bible, New English Bible, Revised English Bible* (“what God was, the Word was”), *Amplified Bible* (“the Word was God Himself”), *Today’s English Version* (“he was the same as God”), *New Living Translation* (“he was God.”)

answer, “Mike is *a* tall guy” employs an indefinite article (e.g., a, an) and points to a quality or trait (i.e., tallness). There is no attempt to distinguish or identify the noun from others when the indefinite article is used. In Greek, there are no indefinite articles. However, the absence of the definite article in Greek usually has the same effect as the English indefinite article and places stress on the quality or trait of the noun. With this in mind, let us now look at the *Journal* article cited by the Watchtower and what the Watchtower claims regarding it.

In order to determine what John meant when he wrote, “the Word was God,” the *Journal* article’s author, Philip Harner, lists five ways in which John could have said it in Greek. We will refer to these as Clauses A-E as Harner does.⁹⁴ The clauses have been translated below in English for the reader. The word “the” indicates that the Greek definite article appears before the word.

- A. The Word was the God.
- B. God was the Word. (This is what John wrote.)
- C. The Word God was.
- D. The Word was God.
- E. The Word was divine. (A different word, *theios*, is used.)

Harner states that if the word *theos* [God] had the article [as in Clause A above], then Clause A “would contradict the preceding clause of 1:1, in which John writes that *the Word was with God* [translated from Greek].” This is because the two (i.e., *logos*, *theos*) would be equivalent to the point that there would be no differentiation between the two as persons and John’s statement that “the Word was with God” certainly indicates that two persons are involved. So the Watchtower tract is correct when it says that “if the latter part of John 1:1 were interpreted to mean ‘the’ God, this ‘would then contradict the preceding clause,’ which says that the Word was *with God*.”

Harner continues, “Clause D, with the verb preceding an anarthrous [without the article] predicate, would probably mean that the *logos* was ‘a god’ or a divine being of some kind [as the Watchtower translates it] . . . Clause E would be an attenuated form of D [i.e., carrying a lesser force than D]. . . . John evidently wished to say something about the *logos* that was other than A and more than D and E.”⁹⁵ In other words, Harner says that John wanted to say something other than that God and Jesus were the same person and that the proper way to say that the Word was “a god” or “divine” would be to use Clause D or E. However, John wanted to say something stronger about the Word, since he uses Clause B.

Harner’s very next statement is cited by the Watchtower tract—yet not in its entirety and its commentary is deliberately misleading. According to the tract, “The *Journal of Biblical Literature* says that expressions ‘with an anarthrous [no article] predicate preceding the verb, are primarily qualitative in meaning.’ As the *Journal* notes, this indicates that the *logos* can be likened to a god. It also says of John 1:1: ‘The qualitative force of the predicate is so prominent that the noun [*the os*] cannot be regarded as definite.’”

Now here is what Harner actually said in the *Journal*. After stating that John wished to say something other than A and more than D and E, he continues, “Clauses B and C, with an anarthrous predicate preceding the verb, are primarily qualitative in meaning. *They indicate that the logos has the nature of theos* [italics mine].”⁹⁶ In other words, clauses B and C stress *theos* as the quality or character of the Word and indicate that the Word and God share the same nature! And this statement is omitted from the Watchtower tract, although it comes immediately after the statement they quote! Moreover, contrary to the tract, the *Journal* does not note that the Word “can be likened to a god.” Harner has clearly said in the statement immediately preceding that John wished to say something more than that! This is deception on the part of the Watchtower. They are deliberately misleading its followers and every reader of their tract.

He continues that if *theos* in Clauses B and C was taken as definite instead of qualitative, then B and C would be the same as A and would be problematic as well given the context. Therefore, *theos* must be referring to the quality of the *logos* [Word].⁹⁷ But what is the quality John is wishing to emphasize?

The Watchtower tract says, “So John 1:1 highlights the quality of the Word, that he was ‘divine,’ ‘godlike,’ ‘a god,’⁹⁸ but not Almighty God.” Remember that the very article they cite states that John did

⁹⁴Harner, p. 84.

⁹⁵Harner, p. 85.

⁹⁶Harner, p. 85. New Testament scholar, Murray Harris agrees. See his excellent book, *Jesus As God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), p. 70. The late New Testament scholar, Raymond Brown agrees in *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, pp. 187-188.

⁹⁷Harner, p. 85.

not mean to say that, but more; that the Word has the nature of God. So what does Harner claim is the quality John wished to emphasize? At the end of the article, he states, “These examples [i.e., Clauses A-E] illustrate the difficulty of translating the clause accurately into English. This does not mean that the translators were not aware of the issue involved . . . Perhaps the clause could be translated, ‘the Word had the same nature as God.’ This would be one way of representing John’s thought, which is, as I understand it, that *ho logos* [the Word], no less than *ho theos* [the God], had the nature of *theos* [God].”⁹⁹ The Word, no less than God, has the nature of deity. Deity is the quality John wishes to ascribe to the Word.

So to sum up the article, Harner states that if John had wished to say that the Word was “a god” or “divine,” he had two ways, even a different word, by which he could have done so. But it is evident that he wished to say something even stronger about Jesus. He did not wish to say that Jesus and God are the same person, since he has already stated that they are two persons and there was a way in Greek for him to have done so if he had wished. What John does say is that Jesus and God share the same nature; that Jesus, no less than God, has the nature of deity. This is an extremely strong statement, since it rules out any interpretation that Jesus was merely acting in God’s place, but was not God Himself. Rather, Jesus was God in his very nature and essence. John’s words echo Paul’s in Colossians 2:9 discussed above when he says that in Jesus, “all the fulness [nothing excepted] of deity dwells.”

So we observe that the Watchtower has taken a few statements out of context to justify their translation, “*the Word was a god*,” from an article, which states that their translation is wrong, and that Jesus possesses the nature of God. It is also interesting to note that the tract states that “[t]here are many other Bible verses in which almost all translators in other languages consistently insert the article ‘a’ when translating Greek sentences with the same structure.” What they do not say is that such does not take into account a simple Greek rule found in just about any Greek Grammar: proper names, places, and certain words such as “God,” “Lord,” and “Holy Spirit” appear numerous times throughout the New Testament with and without the article with no apparent change of meaning and are, therefore, exempt from the very general rule of when to insert the indefinite article ‘a’ when translating Greek.¹⁰⁰ Such a gross lack of scholarship is not a reflection on the JW’s who come to your door with a sincere heart and are good students of Watchtower interpretations. However, it reflects a dangerously deceptive and intellectually naïve leadership at the Watchtower that should neither be followed nor trusted.

Now let’s observe how consistent the Watchtower is with this rule concerning “an anarthrous [no article] predicate preceding the verb” throughout its own translation, the *New World Translation*. In the New Testament there are exactly four (4) occurrences where *theos* (God) appears as a singular predicate noun, without the article, before the verb (Luke 20:38; John 1:1; 8:54; Philippians 2:13). Remember the Watchtower said that this grammatical structure merited the translation, “a god.” Yet, in every instance, the *New World Translation* has rendered *theos* as “God,” contrary to the committee’s rule, except one — *John 1:1*! In other words, they made a rule then broke it every time except one occurrence when convenient. (See Appendix 1 in this book for a detailed look at each of these four verses.)

Therefore, the Watchtower has not only deliberately deceived its trusting followers, but has demonstrated a lack of knowledge of basic rules of Greek and is grossly inconsistent in applying its own rule. This is pseudo-scholarship at its finest!

On the other hand, Harner has shown why the translation, “the Word was God” is an accurate rendering of the Greek which is even more precise by saying that the Word possesses the very nature of deity, no less than God Himself. Indeed, the majority of translators render the clause “the Word was God.”

But one other point can be made here. It is interesting to note how the earliest Church Fathers who commented on John 1:1 interpreted it. This is especially noteworthy, since the earliest Church Fathers wrote in Greek. Therefore, their views on how it should be translated may reflect not only what the early Church thought of Jesus, but how the original readers of John understood his statement in the original Greek.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸“god” verses “God,” much like “mighty god” verses “Almighty God.”

⁹⁹Harner, p. 87.

¹⁰⁰e.g., John 4:20; 5:15; 20:31. A. T. Robertson. *A Grammar Of The New Testament In The Light Of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 759-761, 795 and H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey. *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. 139-140, 148-149.

¹⁰¹As mentioned earlier, you may find an article on the subject of the early Church Fathers on Jesus by this author on his web site at www.risenjesus.com. Go to the “Articles” section and select “The Early Church Fathers on Jesus.”

Irenaeus wrote around A. D. 185 and mentions John 1:1 five times.¹⁰² In one reference he comments, “‘and the Word was God,’ of course, for that which is begotten of God is God.”¹⁰³ Irenaeus understood Jesus as more than “a god” or a divine being of a sort. He referred to Jesus as God.

Origen is another Church Father who wrote in Greek around A. D. 200. In a reference regarding John 1:1 he comments, “John, however, with more sublimity and propriety, says in the beginning of his Gospel, when defining God by a special definition to be the Word, ‘And God was the Word, and this was in the beginning with God.’ Let him, then, who assigns a beginning to the Word or Wisdom of God, take care that he be not guilty of impiety against the unbegotten Father Himself, seeing he denies that He had always been a Father, and had generated the Word . . .”¹⁰⁴ Origen understood John to be saying that the Word was God and without a beginning. Elsewhere he refers to Jesus as “God the Word” a total of 18 times!¹⁰⁵

Clement of Alexandria wrote in Greek around A. D. 200 as well. He alludes to John 1:1 and Jesus as God when he says, “For since Scripture calls the infant children lambs, it has also called Him — God the Word — who became man for our sakes, and who wished in all points to be made like to us — ‘the Lamb of God’ — Him, namely, that is the Son of God, the child of the Father.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, Clement also interprets John as referring to Jesus as God in John 1:1.

Therefore, all of the earliest Church Fathers who comment on John 1:1 interpret John as claiming that the Word was God. Moreover, not a single Church Father, early or otherwise, interprets John as saying that “the Word was a god” or the “Word was divine.”

In summary, we have seen that there are no good reasons for translating John 1:1 as “the Word was a god” as the *NWT* does. We have seen good reasons to translate it “the word was God” with the understanding that John is claiming that Jesus, no less than God, possesses deity. And finally, we have seen that all of the early Church Fathers who commented on John 1:1 and who also wrote in Greek clearly interpreted John 1:1 to be saying “the Word was God” and that there were no Church Fathers who understood it otherwise. For these reasons, the normal rendering, “The Word was God,” is correct. Therefore, John 1:1 clearly refers to Jesus as God. I know this section on John 1:1 has been quite technical. Carefully read through it a few times and it will serve you well when discussing this verse with JW’s.

Bottom Line: The very article in the biblical journal appealed to by the New World Translation Committee to justify their translation of John 1:1 actually advises that it should not be translated “the Word was a god” as the *NWT* translates it, but rather “the Word was God” as with most translators. Furthermore, the Watchtower is inconsistent in applying its own rule because the Greek grammatical structure referred to by the Committee appears with the word *theos* a total of four (4) times in the New Testament. In every instance, the *NWT* has translated it “God,” except one — *John 1:1!* The Greek John used in this verse indicates that he believed Jesus, no less than God Himself, possesses the very nature of deity. Finally, every Church Father who comments on this verse translates it, “the Word was God.”

Some final thoughts on the Deity of Christ:

Multiple biblical figures all viewed Jesus as God; Isaiah, John, Thomas, and Paul. We have seen that the doctrine of Christ’s deity carried from the biblical writers to their successors, the Apostolic Fathers such as Polycarp who knew the apostles and Ignatius who probably did. The doctrine did not stop there, but continued through the Church Fathers who succeeded them such as Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and Hippolytus.¹⁰⁷

Although Jesus is never recorded as coming right out and saying, “I am God,” his actions and claims spoke very loud. He accepted worship (Matthew 14:25-33; 28:8-10; John 9:35-38). Yet he knew worship was for God alone (Matthew 4:8-10 [quoting Deuteronomy 6:13]). His disciples also recognized worship was for God alone (Luke 4:7-8; Acts 10:25-26; Revelation 19:10). Yet they worshipped him (Matthew 14:25-33; 28:8-10; Hebrews 1:6). In addition, he claimed to have authority over the Sabbath day that God had instituted (Matthew

¹⁰²Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*, Book 1, Ch 8; Book 3, Ch 11 (3 x’s); Book 5, Ch 18.

¹⁰³Ibid., Book 1, Ch 8.

¹⁰⁴Origen. *De Principiis*, Book 1, Ch 2, Section 3.

¹⁰⁵Origen. *Contra Celsus*, Book 1, Ch 66 [1:66]; 3:62; 4:99; 5:22; 6:48, 61, 68; 69 (2 x’s), 71; 7:17 (3 x’s), 42; 8:15, 22, 39, 75.

¹⁰⁶Clement of Alexandria. *The Instructor*, Book 1, Ch 5.

¹⁰⁷For details, the reader may refer to the article by this author titled, “The Early Church Fathers on Jesus,” located at www.risenjesus.com. Click on the “Articles” tab.

12:1-8), something it would seem was reserved for God alone. Finally, he taught with an authority that none of the prophets claimed. The prophets would say, “Thus says the Lord . . .” Jesus, on the other hand, said, “Truly, truly, *I say to you.*” It will not do to say that Jesus had the authority to forgive sins, since he granted this right to his disciples (Jn 21:21-23).

A fair question is “If Jesus thought of himself as God, why didn’t he just come out and say it clearly?” This is to import 21st century Western thought back into the 1st century Middle East. It appears that the culture in which Jesus lived expected actions rather than words. Consider the question posed by John the Baptist to Jesus in Matthew 11:2-5. When in prison, John sent some of his disciples to Jesus and asked him, “Are you the expected one (i.e., Messiah) or are we to expect someone else?” We pick up at verse 4: “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.’” Jesus answered their question by pointing to his works. John presents a similar thought in 10:24-25. The Jews asked Jesus “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, ‘I told you and you do not believe; the works that I do in my Father’s name, these testify of me.’”

The question we need to ask then is “Did Jesus do anything that would indicate that he thought of himself as God?” When we consider that he accepted worship that he knew was only for God, claimed to have authority over God’s Law, and spoke using his own authority, it seems clear that Jesus did think of himself as God.

Chapter 10

Conclusion & Application

Jehovah's Witnesses are very sincere about their beliefs and well versed in them. When they come to your door, invite them in. Be cordial and patient. Remember Peter's instruction: "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, *yet with gentleness and reverence*" (1 Peter 3:15). Unfortunately, most of the Christians JW's encounter are unprepared and become extremely defensive and unpleasant with them. This just encourages the Witnesses to believe they are on the correct path. Why would they change unless someone soundly shows them their error? That someone may be *you!* Dare to be different by having a response, which is both biblically sound and loving.

It is easy to become upset with someone who disagrees with you on so important a subject. A few years ago, I blew it with a JW who knocked on my door. She was going around the neighborhood with her teenage daughter and I invited them in. We discussed the deity of Christ. It turned into a heated discussion and I eventually asked her to leave. Although she initially became quite unpleasant when I let her know that I disagreed with her on the issue, my attitude was bad to begin with. I was more excited about "winning an argument" than compassionately sharing the truth and patiently attempting to reveal Watchtower error. I thank my wife, Debbie, who pointed out my attitude problem to me. Do we listen with an open mind when someone angrily or arrogantly tells us that we are wrong? We shut off our minds to whatever that person tells us. JW's are people too! If your attitude is bad, they will shut off their minds as well. You will get nowhere and mistakenly blame their unreceptiveness on their disinterest in truth. Remember that it is the Watchtower that has led its followers down the wrong path. Lead them to the right path. These are sincere and committed people, just the kind you want in your church!

When you begin talking with them, limit your conversation to the question, "Who is Jesus?" This is the most important difference between their beliefs and historical Christianity. You may say something like this: "I admire you for being so diligent about your beliefs. However, we disagree on a major point, the deity of Christ, and I would like to discuss this with you." They will agree without hesitation.

Tell them you would like to hear their reasons for believing Jesus is a creation of God, then you would like their responses to your reasons for believing he is God. Then dialogue with them. When everything has been said and done, you can tell them that they have not provided any good reasons for believing Jesus was created and that you have provided five reasons why he is God, one which even exposes some inconsistencies in their own translation of the *Bible*.

Watch out for detours. JW's may try to answer arguments for the deity that you never raised. This can create an illusion that you stand corrected on the deity issue. For example, once I was having a discussion with the JW's who had come to my home. I asked them for Scriptures which in their opinion indicated that Jesus was created. They cited Colossians 1:15. I showed them that the word "firstborn" could not possibly mean "first created" in this passage. They responded that earlier in the same verse it says that Jesus is "the image of God," and since the *Bible* also says that we have been created in God's image I could not interpret the statement that Jesus is "the image of God" to indicate that he is God. I could have said, "Hmm. You're right." A series of those and I may end up attending their Bible study group because they answered all of my questions. However, it was not my questions that they answered, but theirs! I actually responded, "I did not say that the verse calls Jesus, God, only that it does not say that he was created as you initially indicated."

When they perceive the conversation is not going their way, they may try to detour you into other issues such as the earthly kingdom of Christ. Insist that you stay on the issue of who Jesus is, because its importance is far greater than whether eternity is spent in heaven or on a heavenly earth ruled by Christ. Belief in these other issues will not determine where one spends eternity. Where one stands on who Jesus is, however, may.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ When cornered, JW's may likewise reply that they are not interested in debate. You may reply "I'm not either. But when it comes to something as important as the eternal destiny of our soul, important questions must be asked and answered."

Your efforts can prove to be fruitful. You may be surprised at how God may work. Several years ago while visiting my wife's family in Nebraska, I was asked by one of her aunts to talk with her daughter who was a JW. I agreed and I scheduled a time to go over to her home. My wife and I had a cordial conversation with her and her husband. We left and didn't hear anything else. Four years later when my wife went out to visit her family she talked with her aunt who told her that her daughter had left the Jehovah's Witnesses as a result of our conversation four years prior and both she and her husband are now committed Christians who are active in their Baptist Church.

Another time two JW's came to my home on a Saturday morning. I usually invite them in. But this particular time I couldn't because my son was just getting over a stomach virus he had endured the day before. I explained he was fine now, but I didn't want to possibly expose them to getting the virus. I suggested we drive up to the Hardee's a few blocks away and talk there over a cup of coffee. They agreed.

We sat down at a table and began to talk. I told them that I admired them for zealously proclaiming their beliefs to anyone who would listen and that I wished more people at my church were like that. They were appreciative of the comment. I then said, "I find that we disagree on several issues, particularly one which is very important to both of us, the deity of Christ. You believe God created Jesus. I believe that he is God. So I would like to discuss this issue with you." They agreed. I continued, "Now I must admit, I don't know all the answers and I suppose I am wrong on some things. Certainly no one is 100% correct. We do our best. So why don't you show me why you believe Jesus was created and I'll respond to that. Then I'll show you why I believe Jesus is God and I'd like to hear your responses." Nothing opens a cordial dialogue better than admitting *you* could be wrong. This will encourage open-mindedness on their part as well. This is far different from the grumpy response of many Christians who gruffly say, "I'm not interested!" and then slam the door on them. Remember Peter's admonition to defend the faith "with gentleness and reverence." Another great reference which was cited earlier is 2 Timothy 2:24-26:

And the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (NASB)

Our conversation went well. I listened with great interest and patience as they presented their case. Their *Bible* texts were virtually a mirror reflection of those presented in Chapter 8. One by one, as I answered their arguments, they would simply go on to their next text, "Well, what about this one?" Our discussion continued to be cordial. I began my case for the deity of Christ. They had no answers at all to a few of the texts. The others elicited the anticipated responses discussed in the previous chapter. I answered them as well.

The remarkable thing about this conversation was that about thirty minutes into it a stranger walked up to us, politely apologized for interrupting and said, "I've been overhearing your conversation. Would you mind if I sat in and listened?" We invited him to join us. He listened attentively for a good forty-five minutes, injecting a comment here and there. Approximately fifteen minutes after he had joined us, I noticed two others trying their best to listen in without appearing obvious. One was an employee on break. When he saw that I noticed them listening, he looked somewhat embarrassed and said, "Can we listen too?" We now had three strangers listening. After about another fifteen minutes, the employee stood up and said, "My break is over. Thanks for allowing me to sit in. I learned a lot!" Then he looked right at me and asked, "Would you pray for me?" I said I'd be happy to. Then he walked away. Shortly after, our first stranger thanked us and left.

The JW's and I continued to talk a little longer. In summing up, I said, "We've talked a while (3 hours and 15 minutes!) and here's how I see our conversation. You haven't provided a single good reason from Scripture why I should believe Jesus was created. On the other hand, I have provided several texts that strongly indicate Jesus *is* God. You have been unable to provide a plausible alternate explanation for these texts.

"I appreciate your zeal and recognize your sincerity about your beliefs. I hope you appreciate mine as well. It's unfortunate that one of us is wrong. The apostle Paul and Nicodemus were very sincere about their Jewish beliefs. When they were faced with the truth, however, they inquired further and changed, even though it cost them their fortunes, their status, and in Paul's case his life. The deity

issue is worth an independent investigation on your part, isn't it?" They nodded in agreement. "I encourage you to consult scholarly works outside of the Watchtower. Think through this on your own. If you come to see the Scriptures teach that Jesus is part of the Godhead, it will cost you as well because your Kingdom Hall will not tolerate it. I pray you will have the courage of Paul and Nicodemus and make that change."

Your knowledge may overwhelm some JW's, because some of the information you now have is technical. I once had a JW tell me that there was no way for her to get into the languages as I could, so she could never know if what I said was correct. She also said that God is not the author of confusion and that we should be able to read our English translations and understand his Word. These are valid points. Maybe some readers are feeling as she did. So let's spend a moment with each of her points.

1. *"I don't know the languages. So I can't know what's right."*

You may not desire to invest the time to learn Greek and Hebrew. However, you do have the same sources available to you for word studies that scholars use. Although your local library probably will not carry these books on their shelves, you can obtain them by using inter-library loan. Your local library will borrow the book(s) from another library. You may have to pay a small fee for the service (usually less than \$10). If there is a seminary or Bible college nearby, you will probably be able to locate them there. Your local bookstore will also be happy to sell them to you. (They are a worthwhile investment if you enjoy in-depth *Bible* study.) For New Testament Greek words, a few good sources are Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 volumes). This is the most exhaustive source available. Colin Brown's *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 volumes), is also a great source and is much more friendly to the non-Greek reader. The fourth volume is an index which keys the Greek words to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance Of The Bible* (a book most Bible students have). Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich's *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* is a good source, but not at all friendly to the non-Greek reader. If you want to see how a Greek word is used throughout the New Testament, Wigram and Winter have a *Word Study Concordance*. They will list the Greek word and then every verse where it appears. For Old Testament Hebrew words, a great source is Willem VanGemeren's *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (5 volumes). Like its New Testament sister, the fifth volume is an index which keys the Hebrew words to *Strong's* in order to make it easy for the non-Hebrew reader to find. Harris, Archer, Waltke have produced the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 volumes). This is an excellent source and is friendly to the non-Hebrew reader since it is likewise keyed to *Strong's*.

Finally, when you study the *Bible* in-depth, a simple system will be of great help.

1. Study the *word*. First look up the definition in one of the references listed above to see how it is used throughout the ancient world.
2. Study the *verse*. Now that you know the meaning(s) of the word, what is the verse saying?
3. Study the *chapter*. Now that you have a good idea of what the verse is saying, how does it fit in the overall chapter or context? Sometimes a verse may have a few different possible meanings. Many times the context will allow you to determine its correct meaning.
4. Study the *Bible*. As we saw in Revelation 3:14, sometimes the chapter doesn't tell you what the author is saying about a particular verse or word. In times like this, look to see if the same author touches on the subject in other parts of his writings. For example, the author of Revelation, John, has much to say about the deity of Christ (Jn. 1:1; 20:28; 1 John 5:20; Rev. 22:6, 16; Alpha and Omega, First and Last, Beginning and End passages). John's writings indicate he believed Jesus was God. In light of these teachings, an interpretation of Rev. 3:14 saying God created Jesus is unwarranted.

2. *"God is not the author of confusion. We should be able to read our English Bible and understand it."*

I agree. God is not the author of confusion, man and Satan are. What do you do when confusion exists between opposing views? You can retreat by saying, "My pastor (church leaders, denomination) believes it, so it must be true." This is fine if your pastor is right. But what if he isn't?

It may be helpful to bring them back to your least technical points such as Watchtower misinterpretations of certain verses outlined in Chapter 8. For example, ask them: "What do you think of the Watchtower's interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 now?" Many times they will say, "I'm not sure." Take

them through the context, chapter, and book again. Then ask, “Given Solomon’s purpose in writing Proverbs, his style of writing, and what he is saying in Chapters 7-9, what do you personally think he means by wisdom? — and why?” Make them think. Put yourself in their place. What would you be thinking if someone showed you something that seriously challenged your beliefs? Invite them to go home and look at the issue with an open mind and come back next week to discuss it again.

Finally, remember that your only responsibility is to plant the seed. It is the Holy Spirit who works the change (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). The purpose of your discussions with the Jehovah’s Witnesses should be to reveal the truth with love, patience, and compassion. That is the role, which God has given every Christian (2 Timothy 2:24-26; 1 Peter 3:15-16). The person who does not care about the truth will not change. The person who does care about it will think about what you have to say and engage in further study. But ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who brings a person to the truth.

We have come to the end of our study on how to answer Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. If you are a Mormon or Jehovah’s Witness, I pray you will prayerfully consider what has been discussed. Run the information by the leaders of your Ward or Kingdom Hall. Get their response and think through it. Ask yourself, “Did they *really* answer my questions?” It’s your own soul and no one else’s. Don’t let someone else’s error cost them their soul *and yours*. Eternity is a long time to feel regret. Have the courage of Paul and Nicodemus! Remember, you never have to be afraid of the truth.

If you are *not* a Mormon or Jehovah’s Witness, I hope this book has been helpful. Master the information, make sure your attitude is pure, and go for it! I am proud of you for choosing this book and I wish you God’s best!

APPENDIX 1

More on John 1:1

There are a *total* of four (4) occurrences in the New Testament where the singular predicate, *theos*, precedes the verb and does not have the article.¹⁰⁹ Let's look at each of these verses to see how the *New World Translation* has translated them.

1. Luke 20:38. "He is a God, not of the dead, but of the living" (*NWT*)

theos de ouk estin nekron
a God - not he is of the dead
or
He is not a God of the dead

In this verse, we have *theos* appearing as a singular predicate before the verb, "is," and is not preceded by the article. "He" is implied and is the subject. "A God" is the predicate because it describes the subject. "He [subject] is [verb] a God [predicate] . . ." Although indefinite [i.e., without the greek article], the *NWT* rightly translates *theos* as "a God" with a big "G," meaning Jehovah.

2. John 8:54. "It is my Father that glorifies me, he who you say is your God." (*NWT*)

theos hemon estin
God of you he is
or
He is your God.

Theos again is a singular predicate occurring before the verb, "is," and is not preceded by the article. "He [subject] is [verb] your [pronoun] God [predicate]." Yet, the *NWT* again correctly translates "God" with a big "G."

3. Philippians 2:13. "For God is the one that, for the sake of [his] good pleasure, is acting within you." (*NWT*)

theos gar estin ho energon en hymin
God for is the one working in you
or
For God is the one working in you

Theos is a singular predicate occurring before the verb, "is," and is not preceded by the article. "The one working" has the article (*ho*) and is considered to be the subject. The predicate, "God," further describes who the subject is, "The one working [subject] in you [prepositional phrase] is [verb] God [predicate]." "God" appears first in the sentence for emphasis. Again, the *NWT* correctly renders "God" with a big "G."

4. John 1:1. "the Word was a god." (*NWT*)

theos en ho logos
God was the Word

¹⁰⁹ There are actually 2 others but these are not readily apparent: Romans 8:33 reads *theos ho dikaios* ("God is the one who justifies") and John 10:34 that reads *theoi este* ("gods you are" or "You are gods." In Greek the subject is often contained in the verb as in this phrase.)

Theos is a singular predicate occurring before the verb, “was,” and is not preceded by the article. “The Word [subject] was [verb] God [predicate].” The inconsistency of the *New World Translation* here is clear. Of the four occurrences in the New Testament where the Greek *theos* is a predicate occurring before the verb and is not preceded by the article, this is the only time the *NWT* has not translated it “God” with a capital “G.” John uses the term, “God,” to describe the Word. Deity is the certain character or quality described of the subject!¹¹⁰

In conclusion, when we conduct a study of the reason provided by the Watchtower Translation Committee of the *New World Translation* why John 1:1 should be translated, “the Word was a god,” we find a gross inconsistency. We saw that there is a total of four (4) instances in the New Testament where predicate *theos* precedes the verb and does not have the article. In three of the four instances, the *NWT* has translated it “God” in conflict with their own rule.

¹¹⁰The Greek Grammarians Dana and Mantey say that this statement “emphasizes Christ’s participation in the essence of the divine nature” (*A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 140). “. . . and the word was deity. The article points out the subject in these examples . . . nor was *the word* all of God, as it would mean if the article were also used with *theos*. As it stands, the other persons of the Trinity may be implied in *theos*” (Ibid., pp. 148-149).

APPENDIX 2

Should You Let Them In?

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 John 10-11)

Do these verses prohibit you from inviting Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses into your home? At first look, it would seem so. However, an understanding of the social setting in which John wrote is very beneficial.

During the first century, when Christianity was getting off the ground, it was customary for traveling teachers of Christianity to receive hospitality in the form of room and board at someone's home. A first century Christian document named *The Didache* (meaning The Teaching [of the Twelve Disciples]), and written prior to 2 John, spells out how the church was to receive and support these traveling teachers (Chapters 11-13).

The majority of New Testament scholars agree that John is saying one of two things in 2 John 10. When John said, "do not receive him into your house," he may have meant that false teachers were not to be given the typical hospitalities of room and board extended to traveling teachers. The term "greeting" would mean to greet him as a brother in the Lord. A second possible interpretation is based on a more literal translation, "do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting."¹¹¹ "[T]he house" may be understood as the house where Christians met and worshipped. During the first century, there were no church buildings as we have today. Christians met in a person's home. A false teacher should not be received by "the house-church" and given the opportunity to spread false doctrine. The term "greeting" would mean to welcome the false teacher into the congregation and encourage him.

Therefore, the command not to receive the false teacher into your home means one of two things:

- 1) Do not extend the hospitalities of room and board, as was customary to do for traveling Christian teachers, to a false teacher. (or)
- 2) Do not welcome the false teacher into a house-church congregation and allow him to teach.

The "greeting" John refers to is more of a welcome and encouragement than the mere cordiality that it is today. As the late New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce says: "The injunction not to receive any one who does not bring 'the teaching of Christ' means that no such person must be accepted as a Christian teacher or as one entitled to the fellowship of the church. It does not mean that (say) one of Jehovah's Witnesses should not be invited into the house for a cup of tea in order to be shown the way of God more perfectly in the sitting-room than would be convenient on the doorstep."¹¹²

¹¹¹As the *New Revised Standard Version* translates it.

¹¹²F. F. Bruce. *The Epistles Of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 142.

