

# *IN MEDIO*

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## **Worth Another Look**

In 1990 I dedicated myself to Jesus Christ and committed myself to follow his teachings as the will of Jehovah. I learned to follow the teachings of Jesus in association with Jehovah's Witnesses, an organized, international group of Christians unique among other Christian groups with respect to many of their teachings and religious practices. I went from a person involved in many worldly pursuits and desires, to one desirous of only one thing: following Jesus' example and defending the truth about a God I came to know by the name of "Jehovah."

I soon came to realize that there were many who disagreed with, many who in fact despised the teachings and activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. I did not look away from these disagreements. I looked directly at them, and the more I looked at them the more I found them to be disagreements that were themselves subject to criticism. So I criticized the critics, and I defended Jehovah's Witnesses. I published two editions of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics* (first edition in 1998 and the second edition in 2000). I defended them and my beliefs as one of them publicly, in imitation of the early Christians (Acts 17:2-4). But my intent was not to become a defender of a particular group, but to defend what I believed *to be true* about that group, namely, its beliefs and practices as they related to the Bible and to large extent their history and unique world-wide ministry.

Eventually, though, the more you look at anything, your- or myself included, you will find a cause for complaint. Where this involves us personally, we accept that we have limitations, imperfections, even sin. In some cases, the complaint may be of minor import, something that can and should be overlooked for the sake of the greater good. In other cases, the cause for complaint is too loud not to be heard, too great to avoid, and too dangerous to allow it to remain, or to remain near it. So it was that I found that some of the criticisms against Jehovah's Witnesses were justified; so it was that I found the Watchtower organization, and the Jehovah's Witnesses associated with it, too dangerous to stay near. So I did what I had done before where I felt they were right: I presented what I knew concerning certain teachings and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses, both good and bad, right and wrong, and the reasons for my beliefs about them in my *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002). Shortly thereafter I stopped writing about Jehovah's Witnesses and I

withdrew from association with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, to which many who identify themselves as Jehovah's Witnesses belong.

After nearly four years of separation from the Watchtower Society, indeed, from anything having to do with Christian living, I found reasons to love Jah again. I found reasons to follow Jesus Christ and to proclaim him as the Messiah, the Savior of humankind from death, sent by Jah the Father (John 8:54; 1 John 4:14), again. But this time I found those reasons independently of any group or human organization. I found them solely where it concerns good reasons for belief in an intelligent God and in the recorded histories of his dealings with humans from the time of Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Kings David and Solomon, through to Jesus Christ and his early followers. I found good reasons in all living things, in the systems of the world, the universe, and within each of us. But most powerfully and in ways that I cannot express with words, I found good reasons for belief in Jah, in Jah himself.

So I decided to believe, again. With Jah's help I tried to live life as a Christian, again. With his spirit and in imitation of Jesus Christ, I began to defend what I believed to be the truth, again. And once again I have decided to begin doing all of these things in association with those I had come to know the most. I feel it best to start my Christian life once more with Jehovah's Witnesses, those in association with the Watchtower Society. Though it has been three and half years since I released *Three Dissertations on the Teachings Jehovah's Witnesses*, and two and half years since my last meaningful public defense of their teachings (when I debated Dr. James White in December, 2003), I believe it is time for another look at the Watchtower organization and the Jehovah's Witnesses associated with it. It is time for another look at the organization that I believe in many ways uniquely reflects the fruits of Christianity. It is time for another look at the organization that has fallen into the same injurious path that one travels when 'man dominates man to his injury' (Ecclesiastes 8:9). It is time for another look at Jehovah's Witnesses.

By "another look" I do not mean another reading of their literature, that is, to find out what they think and what they believe now as opposed to a few years ago. By "another look" I mean it is time, at least for me, to return to the congregations on a limited basis to see the things I used to love seeing, to see the things I believe are still there, and to find out if the things I could no longer look upon or hear about are there, too. Jehovah's Witnesses today are just as exposed to danger of corruption through false teachings and practices as was Jerusalem of old. Consider what is said of those living during the time of Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah 24:1-10 (NWT)**

And Jehovah showed me, and, look! two baskets of figs set before the temple of Jehovah, after Nebuchadrez'zar the king of Babylon had carried into exile Jeconiah the son of Jehoi'akim, the king of Judah, and the princes of Judah and the craftsmen and the

builders of bulwarks, from Jerusalem that he might bring them to Babylon. As for the one basket, the figs were very good, like early figs; and as for the other basket, the figs were very bad, so that they could not be eaten for badness. And Jehovah proceeded to say to me: "What are you seeing, Jeremiah?" So I said: "Figs, the good figs being very good, and the bad ones being very bad, so that they cannot be eaten for badness." Then the word of Jehovah occurred to me, saying: "This is what Jehovah the God of Israel has said, 'Like these good figs, so I shall regard the exiles of Judah, whom I will send away from this place to the land of the Chalde'ans, in a good way. And I will set my eye upon them in a good way, and I shall certainly cause them to return to this land. And I will build them up, and I shall not tear down; and I will plant them, and I shall not uproot. And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am Jehovah; and they must become my people, and I myself shall become their God, for they will return to me with all their heart. "'And like the bad figs that cannot be eaten for badness, this in fact is what Jehovah has said: "So I shall give Zedeki'ah the king of Judah and his princes and the remnant of Jerusalem who are remaining over in this land and those who are dwelling in the land of Egypt—I will also give them over for quaking, for calamity, in all the kingdoms of the earth, for reproach and for a proverbial saying, for a taunt and for a malediction, in all the places to which I shall disperse them. And I will send against them the sword, the famine and the pestilence, until they come to their finish off the ground that I gave to them and to their forefathers.'""

Nor are Jehovah's Witnesses today immune from Jesus' prophecy of what he would find in his earthly kingdom:

**Matthew 13:40–43 (NWT)**

Therefore, just as the weeds are collected and burned with fire, so it will be in the conclusion of the system of things. The Son of man will send forth his angels, and they will collect out from his kingdom all things that cause stumbling and persons who are doing lawlessness, and they will pitch them into the fiery furnace. There is where [their] weeping and the gnashing of [their] teeth will be. At that time the righteous ones will shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

I believe there is good and bad in the Watchtower organization, just as both were among Jehovah's people of old and in Jesus' illustration of the harvest during the end. I left the Watchtower organization before because of the "bad"; I am returning now for the sake of the "good." I do not expect that either will be missing, but I want to see them both again so that "at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be established"—Matthew 18:16.

By returning on a "limited basis" I mean that I have met with local Witness elders and I have made known to them my intentions of setting aside, for a time, my disagreements for the sake of our agreements. I will attend, with my family, meetings on a limited basis as I complete my third edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics* (see "The Third Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*," in the August 1, 2006, article for IN MEDIO for details on the content and the release of this publication). For now, I have said all I need or want to say about the things that disturb me about the

Watchtower organization, but before I speak too strongly in their defense again I want to take another look at what they are doing, what they are teaching, and then make a decision based on good reasons about whether or not I can continue working with them in praise of Jah and while teaching about Jesus Christ.

*Three Dissertations* will remain available so that I can speak freely and remain true to myself about what I believe, though I have no desire to add anything further to what I have said, there. *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended* will return with more reasons than ever for why I believe what I do about Jehovah, Jehovah's Witnesses, and those who oppose him and the work that anyone who professes to be his witnesses does in honor of his great and holy name.

I will trust in Jehovah, trust that he will take this act of faith on my part as a sign either to correct me and show me where I can find peace in the Watchtower organization and teach what is true apart from that which can, for good reasons, be shown to be false, or to find another way approved by him to speak and to teach about him and his Son to others. Though I will trust in Jehovah that he will correct whomever needs correction and that he will adjust whomever needs adjusting, I will not ever again become inactive in my faith because of lacking direction on how to go about doing what I know in my heart and for good reasons it right (James 4:17). I will do all that I can, not for me, and not for any organization of men, but for the sake of Jah and his holy and glorious name:

**Exodus 9:16 (NWT)**

But, in fact, for this cause I have kept you in existence, for the sake of showing you my power and in order to have my name declared in all the earth.

Greg Stafford

(REVISED March 22, 2008)\*

**\*This article was re-written in large part on the date indicated, but the substance of the first article remains. This article represents my attitude and feelings as of July, 2006, only now they are presented with further reflection on my part and with adjustments to the style and presentation of what I wrote at that time.**