

# HOW CULTS MISINTERPRET THE BIBLE

Mike Felker  
[apologeticfront.com](http://apologeticfront.com)



# WHAT WE'LL DISCUSS:

Defining a cult

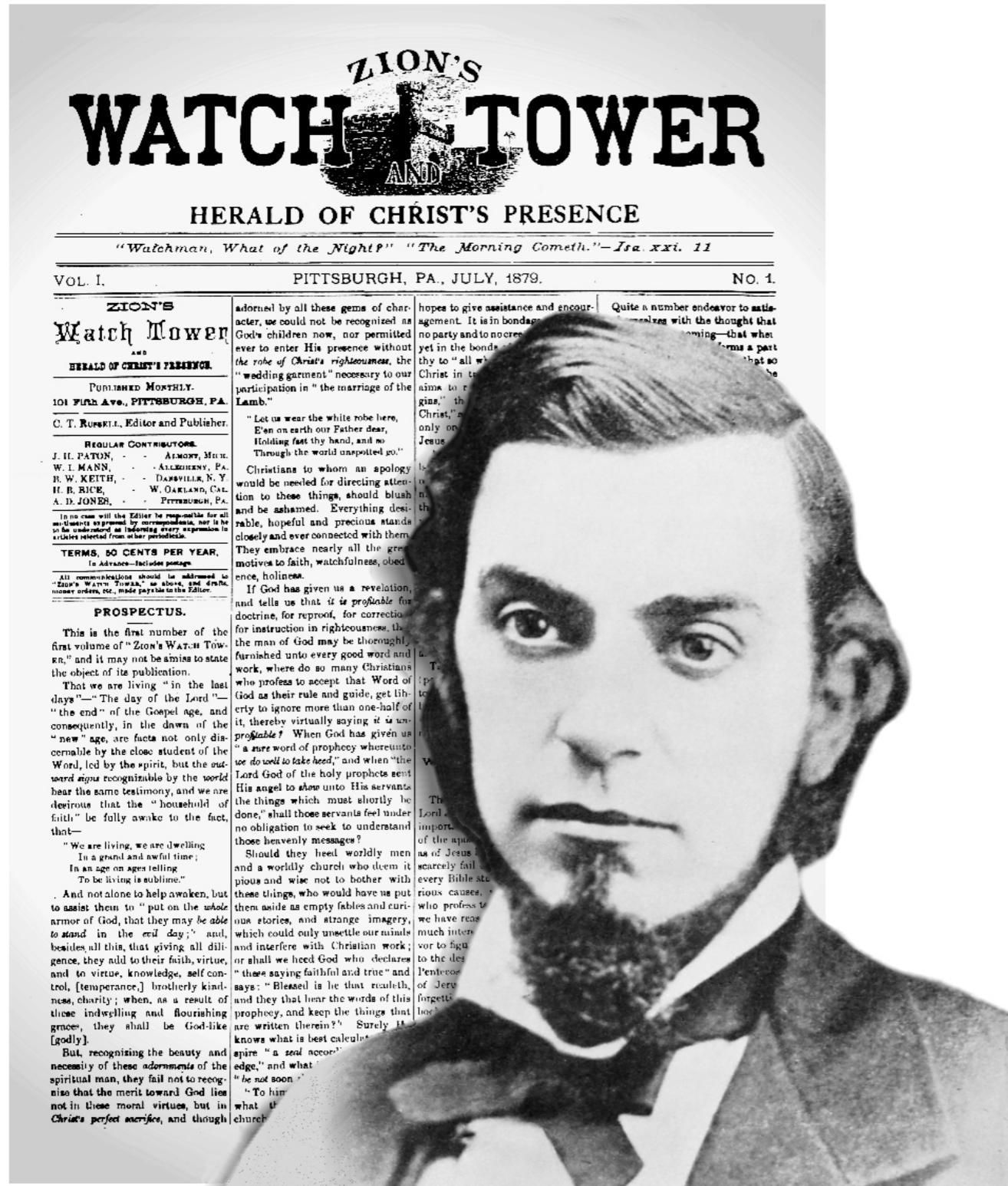
Principles of interpretations

Examples of misinterpretation

How to prepare



# WHAT IS A CULT?



A small religious group that is not part of a larger and more accepted religion and has beliefs regarded by many people as extreme or dangerous.

Merriam-Webster.com

1. A system of religious veneration and devotion directed toward a particular figure or object.
2. A relatively small group of people having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister

Oxforddictionaries.com

# SHOULD WE USE THE WORD “CULT”?



Never call a cultist a “cultist” as you will bring unnecessary offense

If you have to use the term, carefully define what you mean with a source

# HOW CULTS ANSWER

## Are Jehovah's Witnesses a Cult?

▶ 00:45 — 01:48 🔍

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No, Jehovah's Witnesses are not a cult. Rather, we are Christians who do our best to follow the example set by Jesus Christ and to live by his teachings.

### What is a cult?

The term "cult" means different things to different people. However, consider two common perceptions regarding cults and why those perceptions don't apply to us.

- **Some think of a cult as being a new or unorthodox religion.** Jehovah's Witnesses have not invented a new religion. On the contrary, we pattern our worship after that of the first-century Christians, whose example and teachings were recorded in the Bible. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) We believe that the Holy Scriptures should be the authority on what is orthodox in matters of worship.
- **Some think of a cult as being a dangerous religious sect with a human leader.** Jehovah's Witnesses do not look to any human as their leader. Rather, we adhere to the standard that Jesus set for his followers when he stated: "Your Leader is one, the Christ."—Matthew 23:10.

Far from being a dangerous cult, Jehovah's Witnesses practice a religion that benefits its members and others in the community. For example, our ministry has helped many people to overcome harmful addictions, such as the abuse of drugs and alcohol. In addition, we conduct literacy classes around the world, helping thousands [learn to read and write](#). And we are actively involved in [disaster relief](#). We work hard to have a positive impact on others, just as Jesus commanded his followers to do.—Matthew 5:13-16.



# HOW CULTS ANSWER

## THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Youth

ARTICLES / ARE YOU REALLY CHRISTIANS OR MORE LIKE A CULT?

### Are you really Christians or more like a cult?



Here is one way to answer a common question. Want more? Check out [5 Keys to Answering Tough Questions](#) and [What to Do You Do When You Have Questions](#).

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#### Are you really Christians or more like a cult?

We are Christians. We believe in Jesus Christ. When people say that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are not Christians, it's often based on a certain faulty logic: in their minds, since they're Christians and some of our teachings are so different from theirs, Mormons can't possibly be Christians. For instance, they object to our belief that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are separate beings. Some might even say we're a cult, but that's often just meant to label us and scare other people away. What really matters is this: we believe in Jesus Christ; He is our Lord and Savior who suffered, died, and rose again to overcome sin and death for us; and we follow His example and teachings. These are the common, core beliefs of all Christians, so yes, we are Christians.

# OUR WORKING DEFINITION:

**Any religious group who claims to be Christian but denies essential and definitional Christian beliefs**



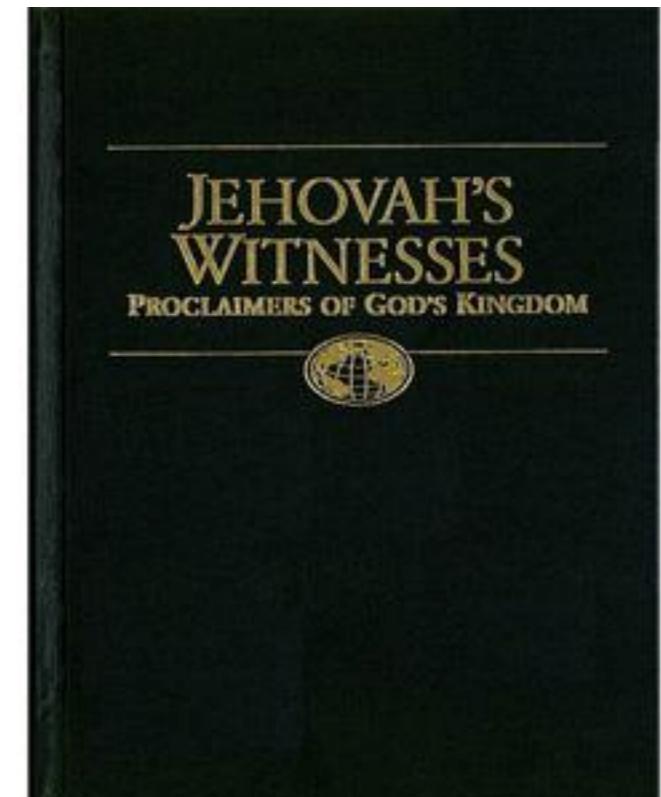
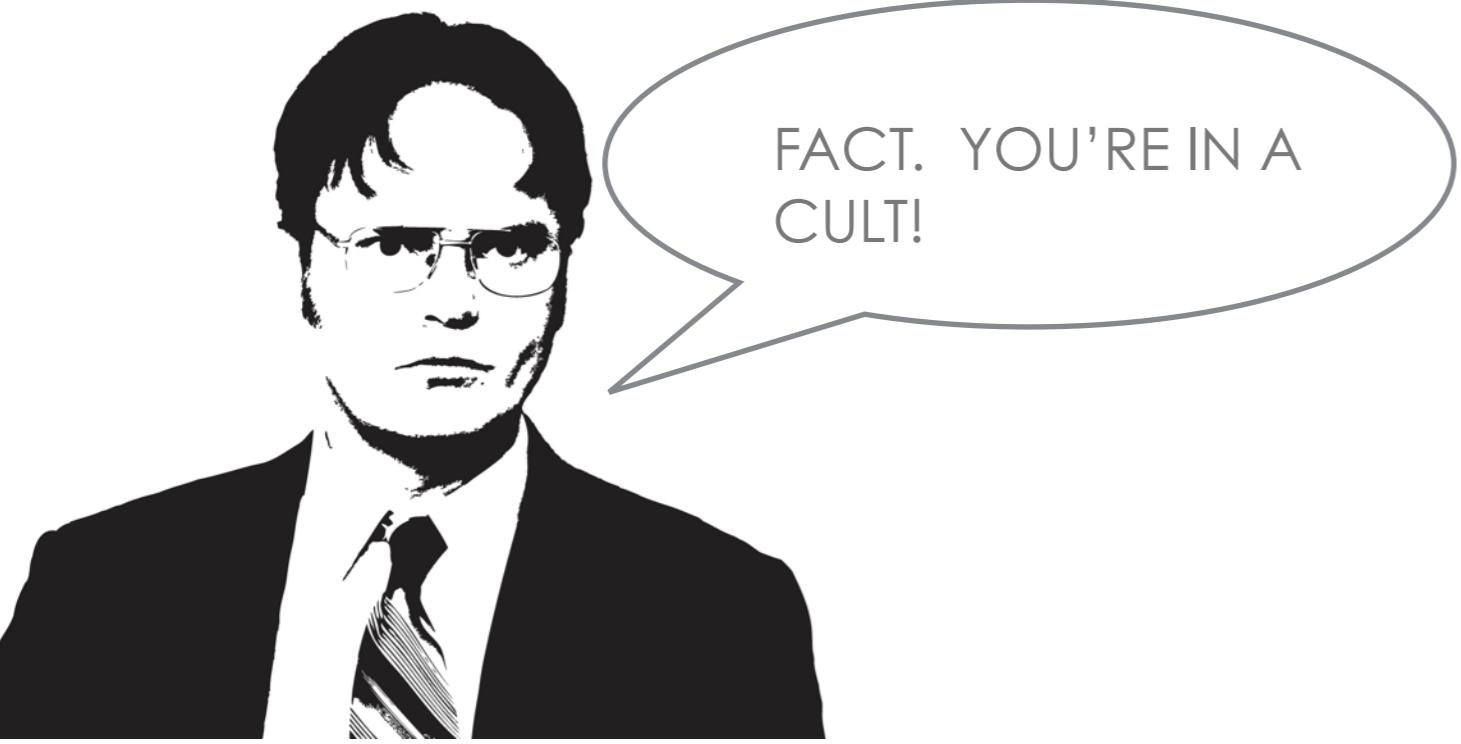
# WHO ARE THE CULTS?



THE CHURCH OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS



# WHO ARE THE CULTS?

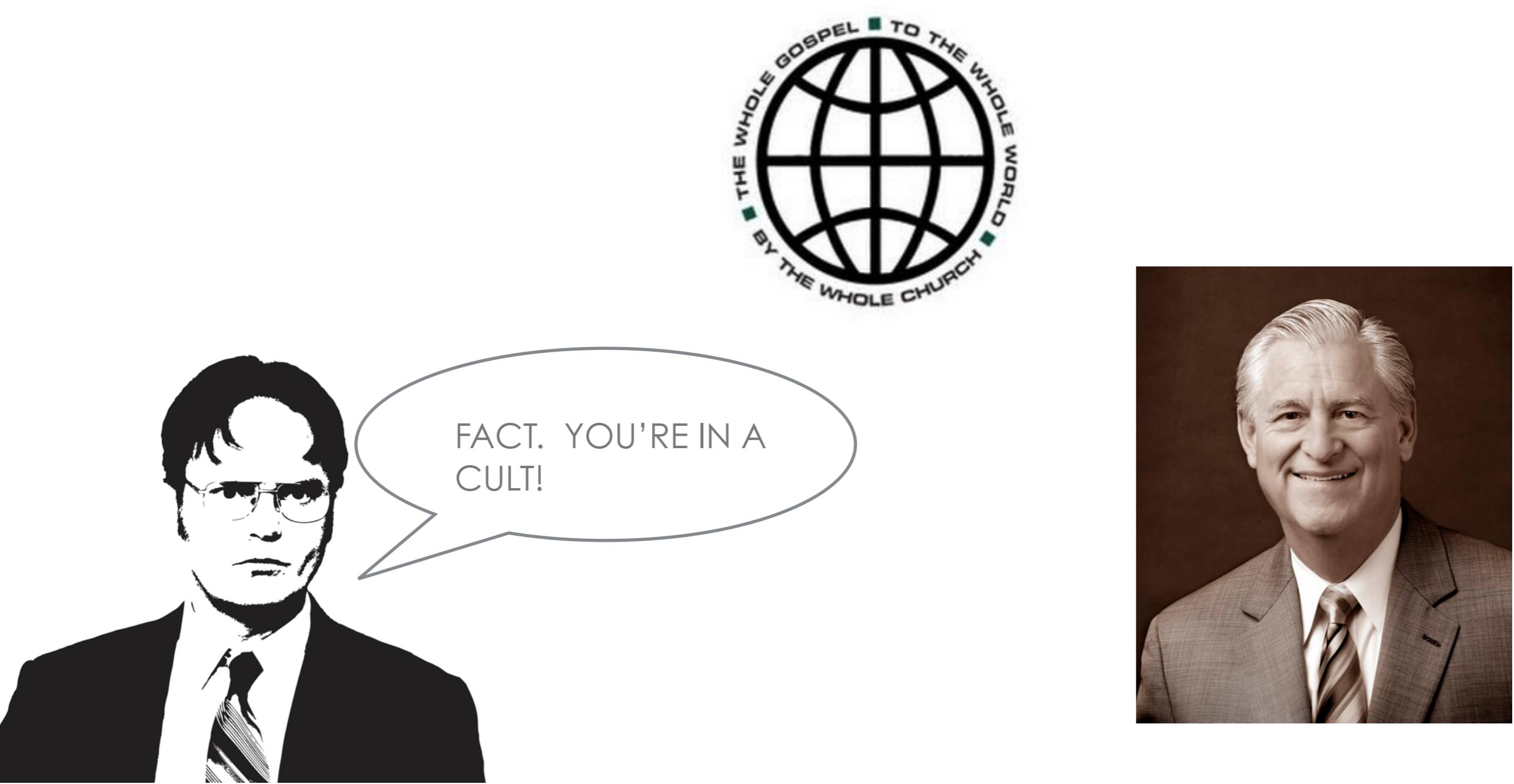


# WHO ARE THE CULTS?



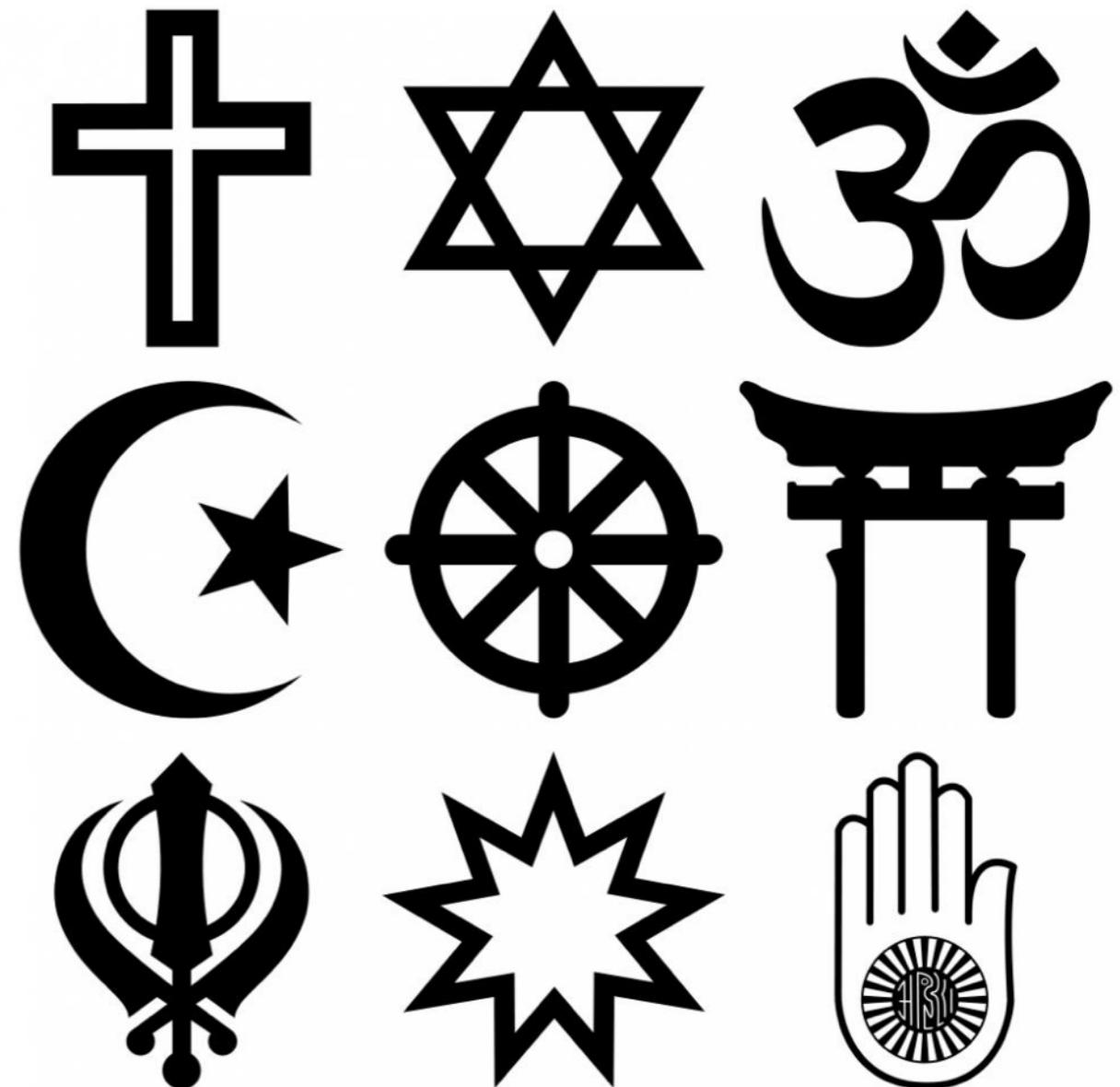
# WHO ARE THE CULTS?

UNITED PENTECOSTAL CHURCH INTERNATIONAL

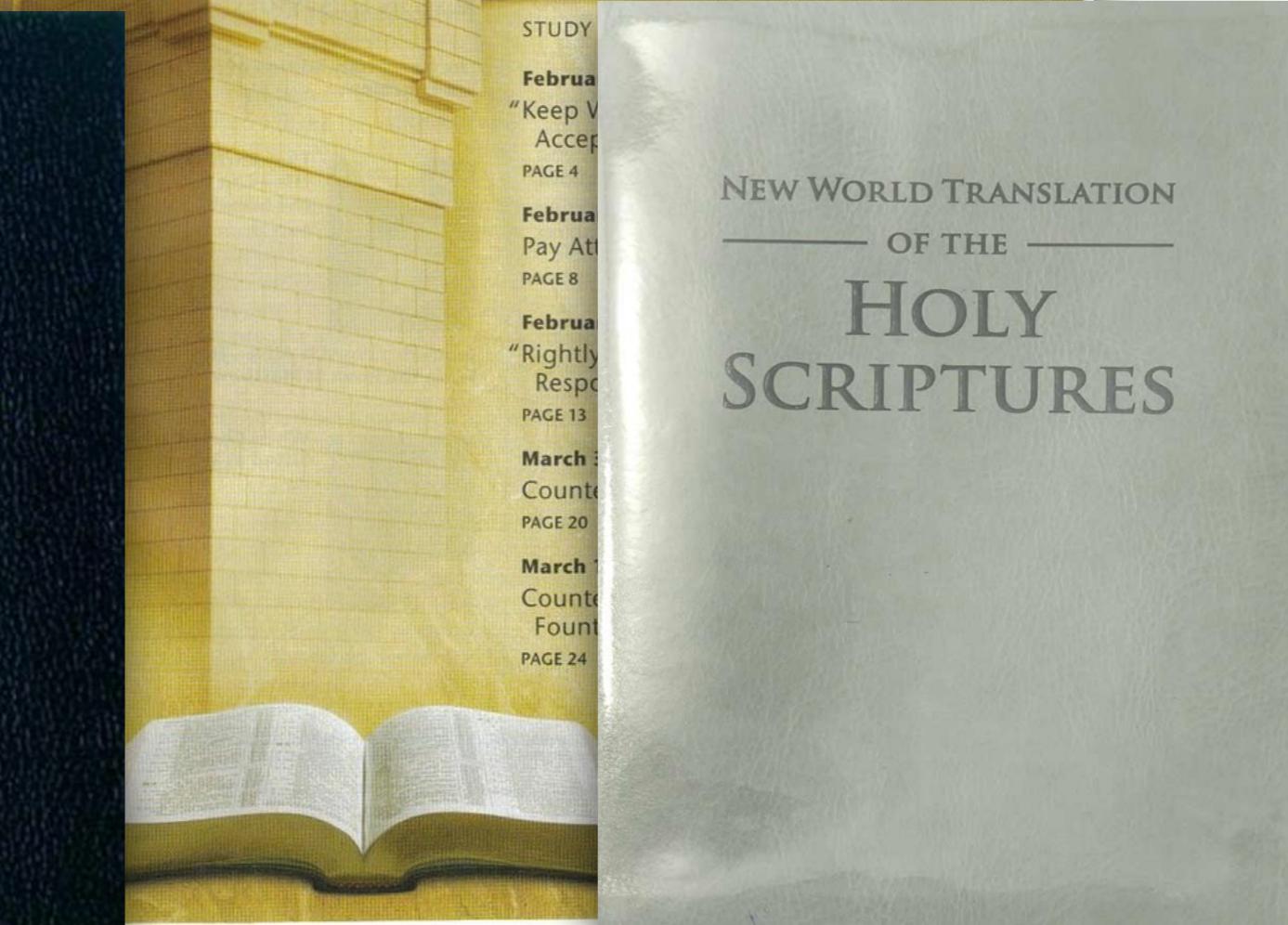
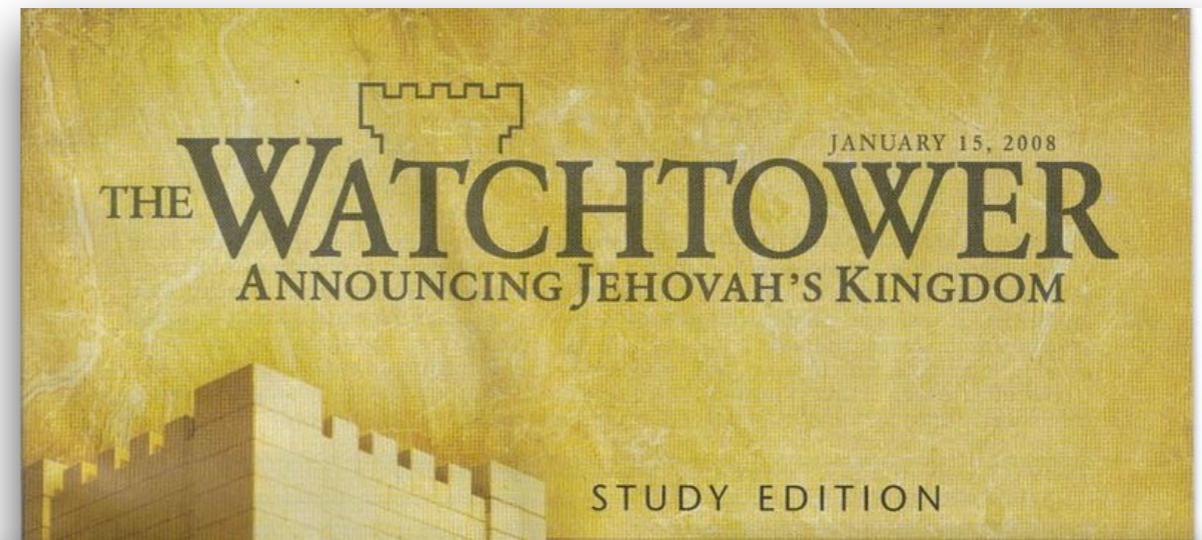
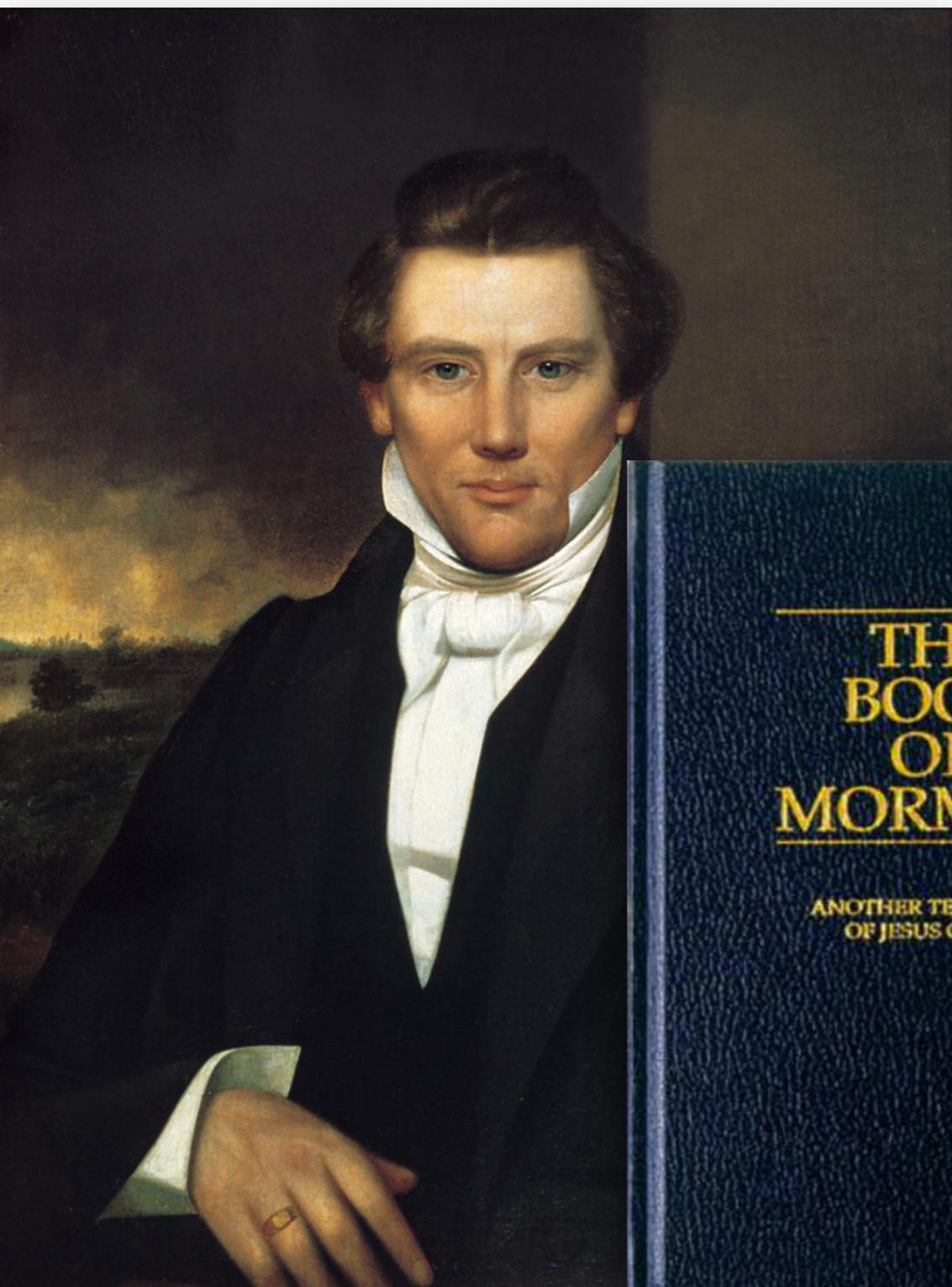


# WHO SHOULD BE OUR FOCUS?

How in the world  
can I learn  
everything about  
all these groups?



# WHO SHOULD BE OUR FOCUS?





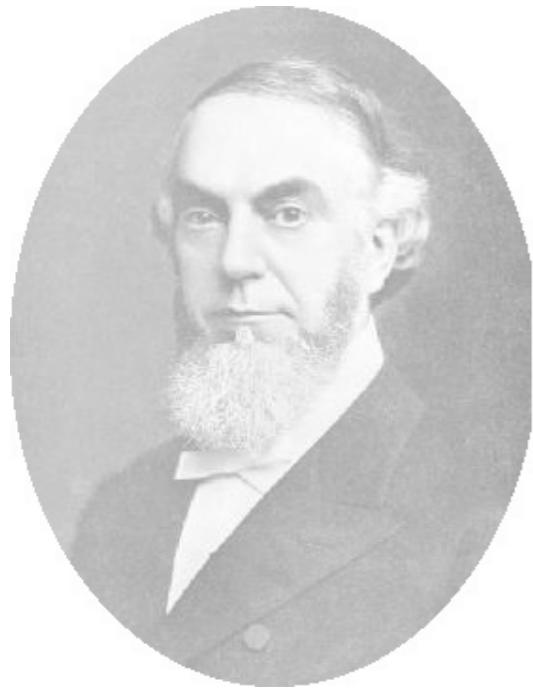
# JUST A MATTER OF MISINTERPRETATION?



The spiritual component

**But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.**

**1 Timothy 4:1-2**



# JUST A MATTER OF MISINTERPRETATION?



## The authority component

**The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?” And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophecy of you hypocrites, as it is written:**

**‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’**

**Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men... thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition...”**

**Mark 7:5-8, 13**

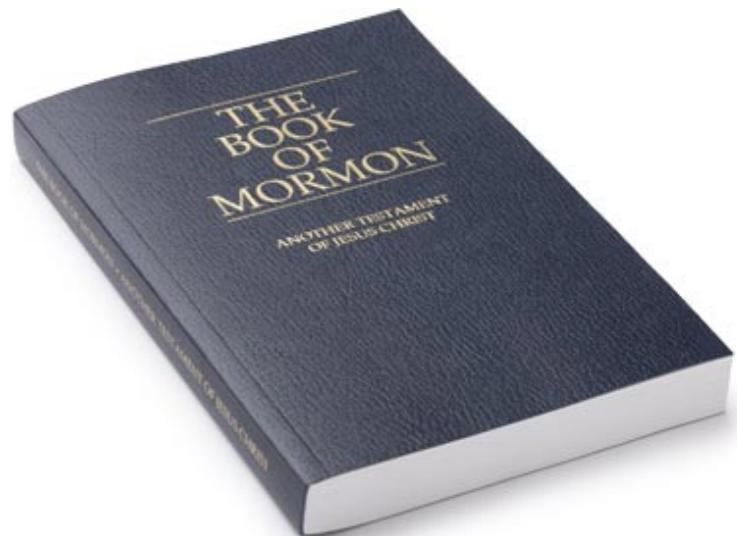


# JUST A MATTER OF MISINTERPRETATION?



The authority component

**Cults generally hold that the Bible cannot be properly understood apart from their leaders or special revelation**



# PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

Authorial intent

**Get the author's context historically, grammatically, culturally, and literarily**

Context

**Never read a Bible verse**

Interpret as literature

**According to its literary type: law, wisdom literature, poetry, history, parables, apocalypse**

Interpret Scripture with Scripture

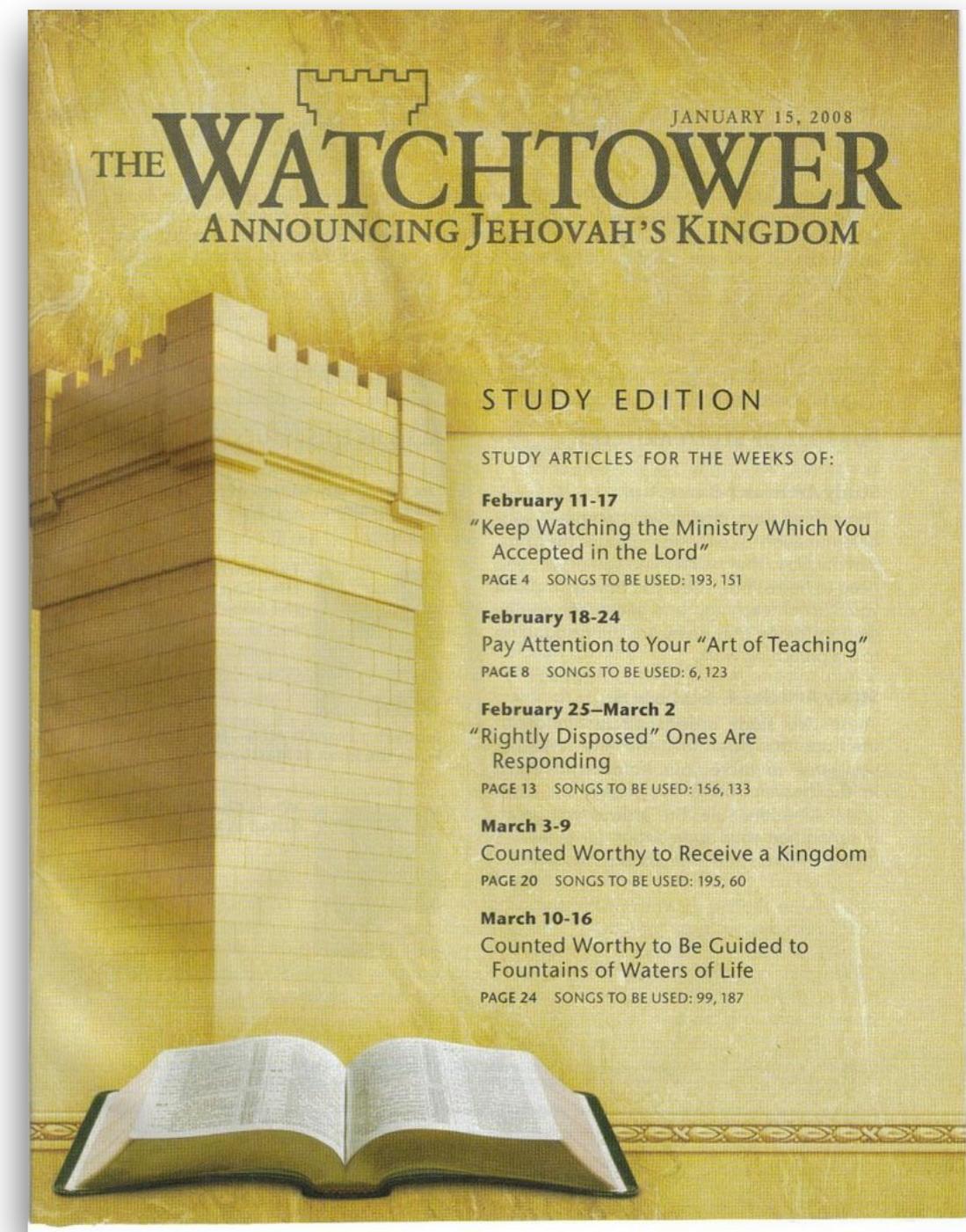
**Interpret unclear in light of the clear**

# EXAMPLE OF MISINTERPRETATION

Ignoring the author's historical context

**Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time?**

Matthew 24:45, New World Translation



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**Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time?**

Matthew 24:45, New World Translation

**The Jehovah's Witness answer:**



**The JW Leaders**

# EXAMPLE OF MISINTERPRETATION

Ignoring the author's historical context

## **Why it can't be the modern day JW leaders**

- In Luke 12:42, Jesus gives the same parable to Peter
- Peter asks if the parable is for “us” or “everyone else as well”? (12:41)
- Jesus does not go on to describe a group of men who reside in Brooklyn, New York thousands of years later. Instead, he describes what makes a slave faithful or unfaithful and directly applies to Peter and all listening to Jesus
- Conclusion: by ignoring Peter’s historical context, the JW’s create their own context and apply it exclusively to the modern day governing body

# EXAMPLE OF MISINTERPRETATION

Contradicting the context

**I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.**

John 10:16

**The Jehovah's Witness answer:**



**Two classes of Christians**

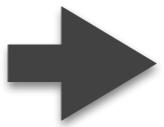
# EXAMPLE OF MISINTERPRETATION

Contradicting the context

Why the “other sheep” are not an “earthly class”

I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

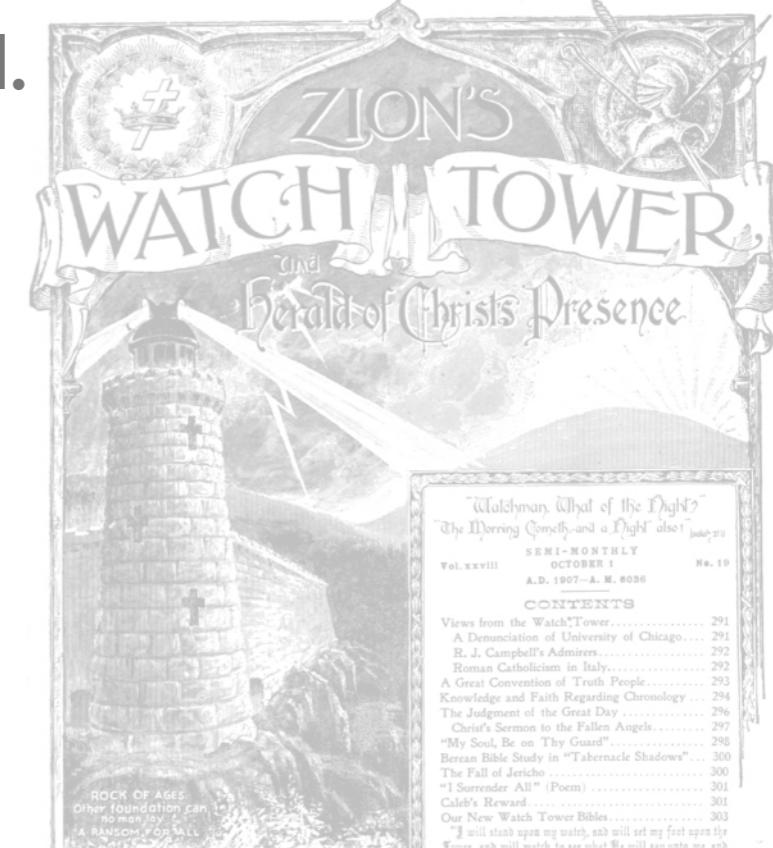
John 10:16



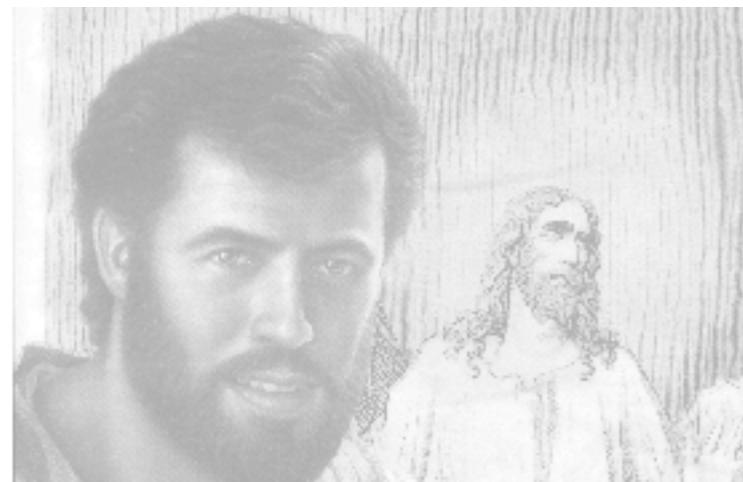
For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.

Ephesians 2:14

**OTHER SHEEP = GENTILES**



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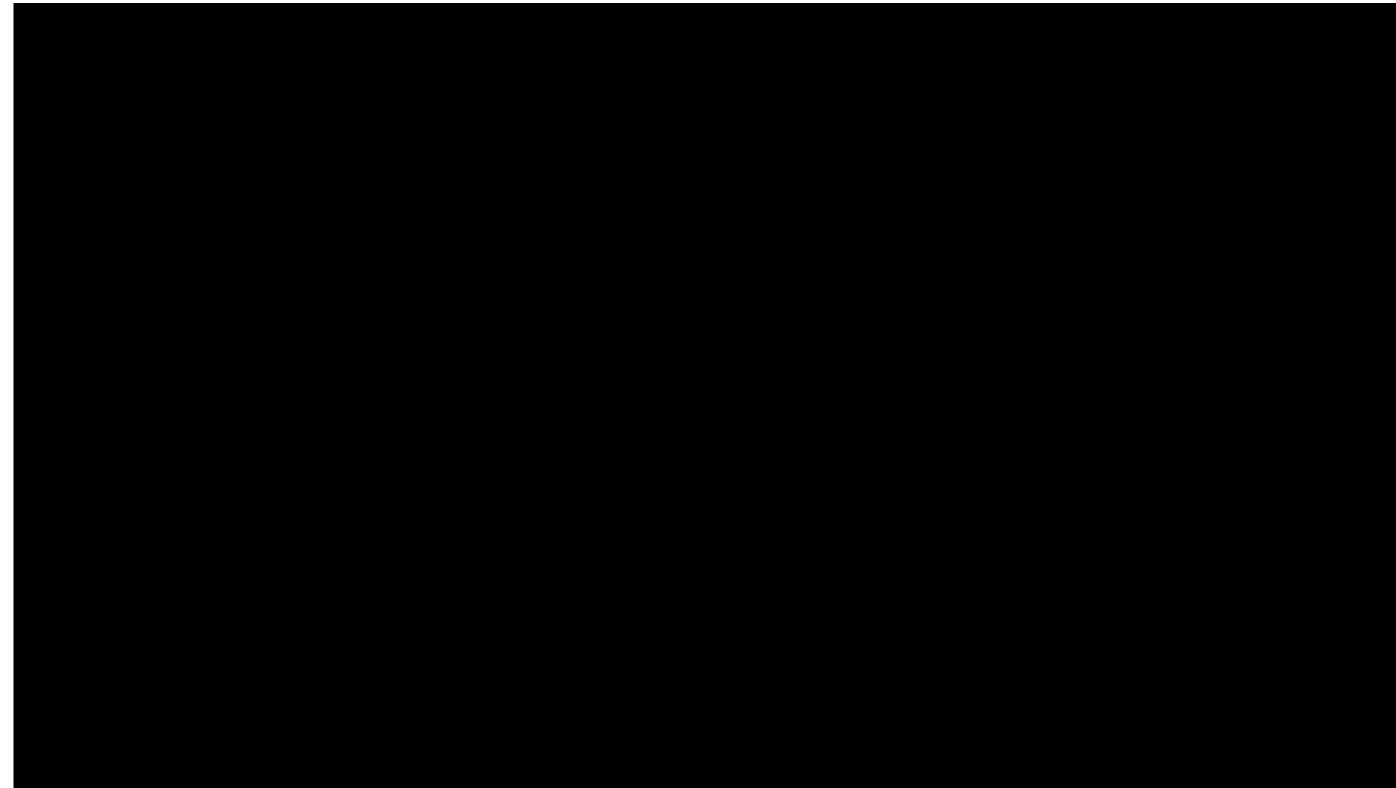


# EXAMPLE OF MISINTERPRETATION

## The Biblical hook

**But if any of you lacks wisdom,  
let him ask of God, who gives to  
all generously and without  
reproach, and it will be given to  
him.**

James 1:5



Source: <http://bcove.me/bm0z6m7v>

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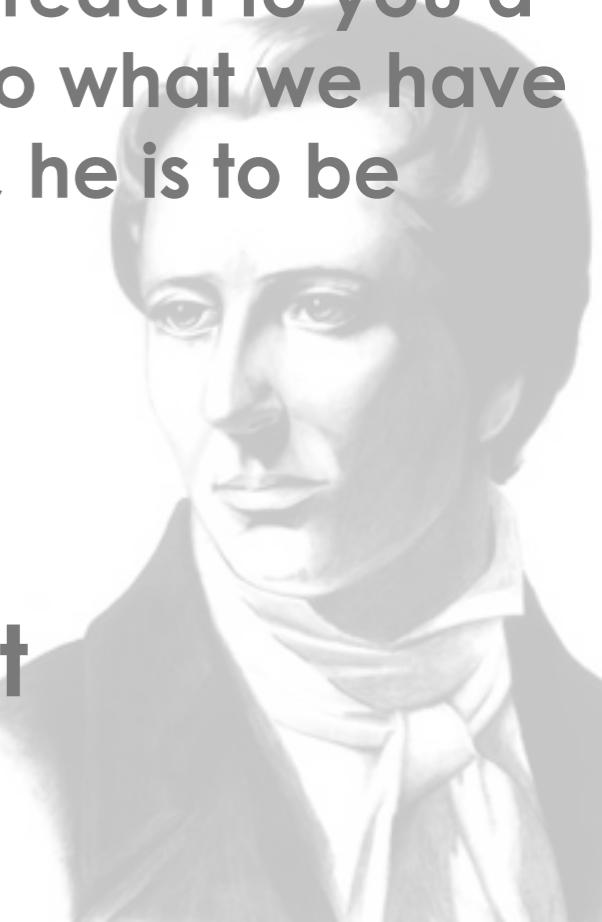
James 1:5



**But even if we, or an angel from  
heaven, should preach to you a  
gospel contrary to what we have  
preached to you, he is to be  
accursed!**

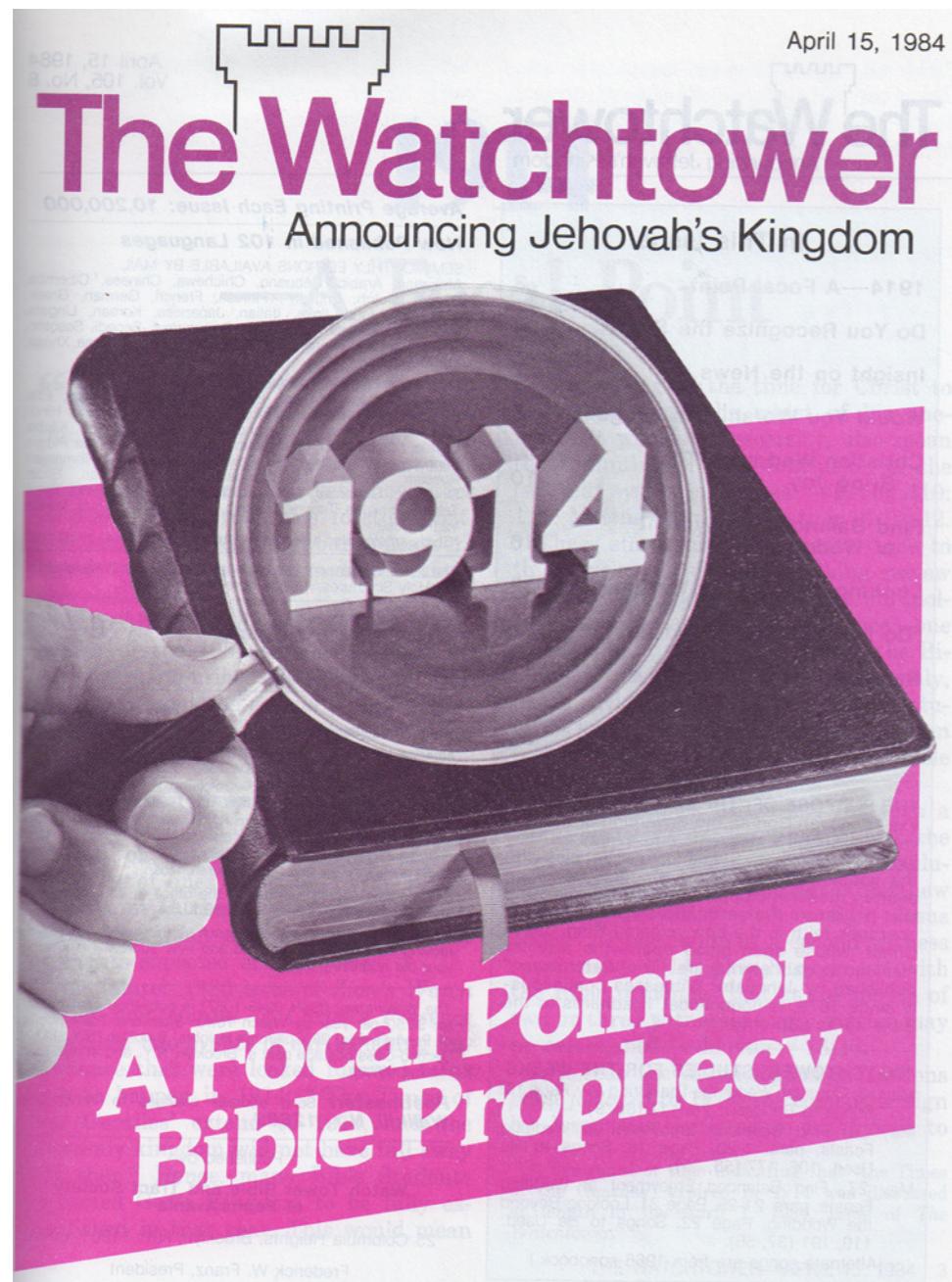
Galatians 1:8

**Asking God for wisdom cannot bring about  
contradictory revelation**



# EXAMPLE OF MISINTERPRETATION

## Misapplying prophecy



## What happened in 1914?

- Luke 21:24 - How long would Jerusalem be “trampled” by the Gentiles?
- The trampling happened in 607 B.C.E when Jerusalem was destroyed
- Daniel 4 tells us the Kingdom (i.e. the “tree”) would be chopped down for a period of “seven times”
- Revelation 12:6, 14 tells us “three and a half times” equal 1,260 days. Therefore, the “seven times” of Daniel 4 equals 2,520 days
- In Numbers 14:34/Ezekiel 4:6, “day” means “year”
- 607 B.C.E. plus 2,520 years equals 1914
- Christ began to rule as king in 1914 with the re-establishment of the Kingdom

# EXAMPLE OF MISINTERPRETATION

## Misapplying prophecy

### **Explaining Our Beliefs About 1914**

The Scriptures encourage us to be “ready to make a defense” of our beliefs, “doing so with a mild temper and deep respect.” (1 Pet. 3:15) Realistically, we may find it challenging to explain deep Bible truths, such as how we know that the Kingdom started ruling in 1914.

Source: <http://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/202014365>

## Problems with 1914?

- Unfounded and speculative connections between unrelated Scriptures
- Daniel 4 has nothing to do with the Kingdom being overthrown in 607 B.C.E.
- Daniel 4 explicitly explains the application of the prophecy:
  - “All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.” (4:28)
  - “The word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled.” (4:33)
- The Watchtower requires a dual fulfillment of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream
  - No indication in the context or anywhere in Scripture which even hints at a dual fulfillment
- If the dream applies to Nebuchadnezzar alone, 1914 completely falls apart

# EXAMPLE OF MISINTERPRETATION

Supplementing or rejecting biblical authority

**To establish doctrine and to understand the biblical text, Latter-day Saints turn to living prophets and to additional books of scripture—the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price.**

Source: <https://www.lds.org/topics/christians?lang=eng>

**As the Bible was compiled, organized, translated, and transcribed, many errors entered the text. The existence of such errors becomes apparent when one considers the numerous and often conflicting translations of the Bible in existence today. Careful students of the Bible are often puzzled by apparent contradictions and omissions.**

Source: <https://www.lds.org/topics/bible-inerrancy-of?lang=eng>

# EXAMPLE OF MISINTERPRETATION

Supplementing or rejecting biblical authority

Leads to false, obscure doctrines:

- God has a body of flesh and bones
- Jesus is Jehovah and the Father is Elohim
- Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer
- The Father has not always been God
- Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood can apply to 19 year old Mormon elders
- Men can become Gods

# HOW CAN I PREPARE?

Pray unceasingly for courage, alertness, and protection

Spend time learning theology

Be intimately involved with a community of believers

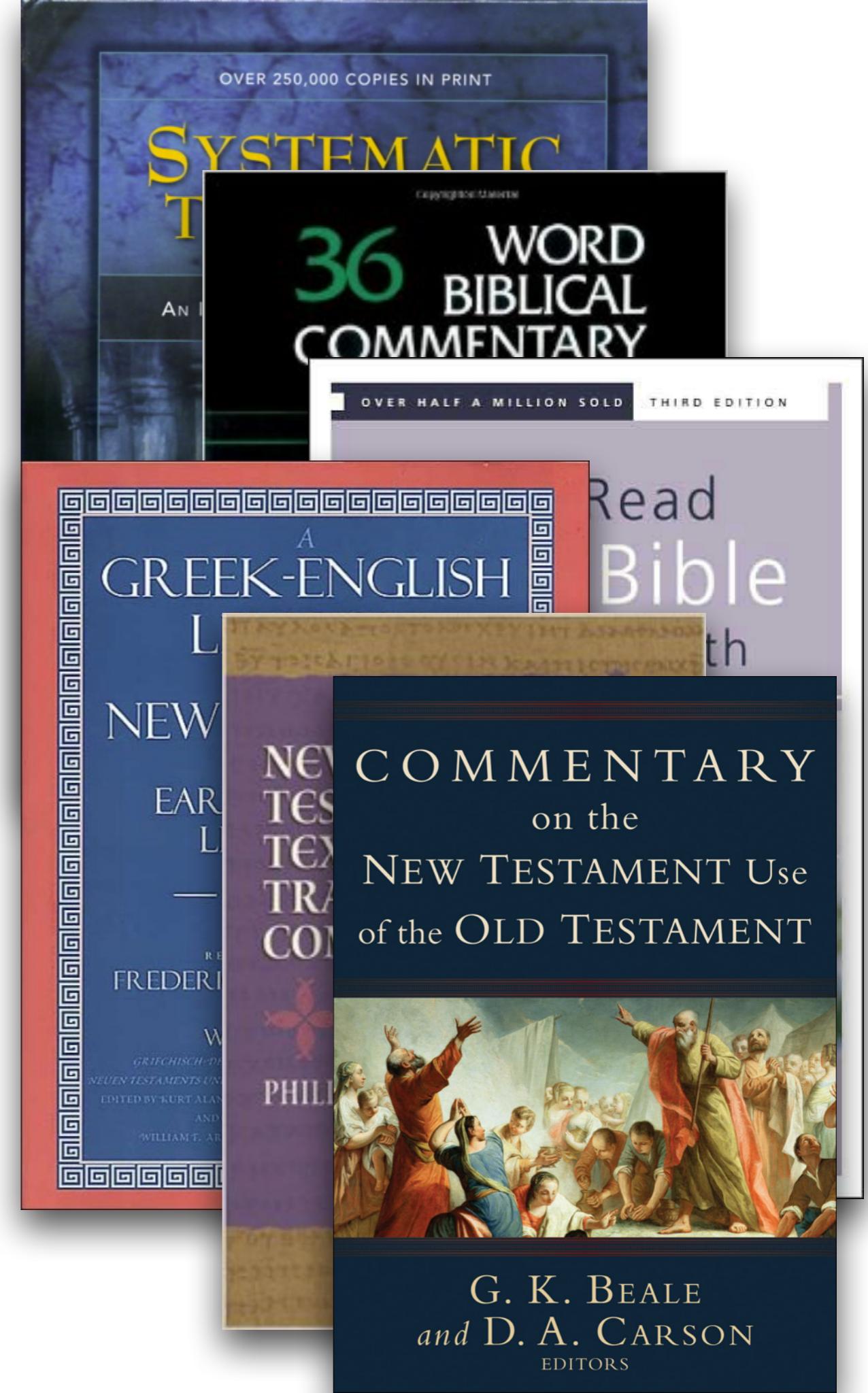


# WHY SHOULD I PREPARE?

Because we're commanded  
to (1 Peter 3:15)

You will learn more about  
God and His Word, which  
means spiritual growth

**Everyone is likely to  
encounter cultists at least  
several times a year. Perfect  
witnessing opportunity for  
introverts!**



-Question-



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