

# **THE SON of GOD: the UNCREATED CREATOR**

## ***A Response to Jehovah's Witnesses***

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### **PART 2**

#### **THE JW's ARGUMENT: THE SON is CREATED and ONLY an INSTRUMENT of CREATION**

In this part the reader will learn the Jehovah's Witnesses arguments for their position briefly laid out above. Where do they get such a unique position about the Son of God that seems to contradict so much of church history and Scripture? If you ask one, they will be more than happy to point you to a number of passages they say supports their position. If you were to restrict them from any rabbit trails on trinitarianism and ask them only to point you to passages that teach that the Son is a created being and that he was merely an instrument of the rest of creation, these are the passages they will point you to. Their main arguments are laid out in sections A) the Son is called "firstborn of all creation", B) the Son is called "beginning of God's creation", C) the Son is called "only begotten son", and F) wisdom sounds like it was created in Proverbs 8.

#### **2.A**

##### **THE SON is the "FIRSTBORN" of all CREATION**

Jesus is called the "firstborn" of all creation (Col 1:15, Col 1:18, Heb 1:6, and Rev 1:5). JW's take the word firstborn to so clearly mean "first created" that they read the rest of Colossians 1 in light of this word, but the question is, what does the word "firstborn" mean? The following three subpoints offer some thoughts on how to figure that out.

##### **2.A.i**

Read Colossians 1 and just cover up the word "firstborn". This exercise reveals that a straightforward reading of the passage as a whole would indicate that, whatever firstborn means, it doesn't mean created. Something else is being communicated here regarding the Son of God, the context generally is that Paul is heaping praises on the Son, including his status as Creator.

##### **2.A.ii**

Ok, but that word "firstborn" can't be ignored forever. We still ought to figure out what it means to have a full understanding of the subject at hand. If you were to look up every instance of the word in a concordance you will find that the word never means "first created"; it most often means first to be born (no surprise!) For an example of this distinction in meaning: twins are created at the same time, but only one of them is the first born. So already, this word must come with it some kind of metaphorical meaning when applied to God's Son because even JW's believe he existed before he was born and he was certainly not the first being to literally be born.

## 2.A.iii

So JWs must agree that the term is metaphorical, but would say that the metaphor means that Jesus was first created. This may be plausible when “Jesus is the firstborn” is stripped of its context and when ignoring the way the word firstborn is used when its used metaphorically in Scripture. We have other examples of this word being used metaphorically, and it is never used to imply first created; when used as a metaphor, it always indicates one’s being in a category highest in status, power, and/or inheritance (Ge 43:33, Job 18:13, Ps 89:27, Isa 14:30,<sup>1</sup> Ro 8:29, and Heb 12:22-24). If you read these cited verses and plug in the word “greatest” for “firstborn”, you will still get the general sense of what is being said.

## 2.B

**JESUS is “THE BEGINNING” of GOD’S CREATION**

Jesus is called “the beginning” of God’s creation (Rev 3:14). But Jehovah is also called “the beginning”.<sup>2</sup> There is hardly a need to argue here; the JWs argument is based on a word—there is no teaching in this passage about Jesus being the first created. All of this passage and everything said in the entire Revelation is to glorify Christ, nowhere is pause taken to temper those sentiments as needing to be unequal to our praise of Jehovah.

## 2.C

**CHRIST is JEHOVAH’S “ONLY BEGOTTEN” SON**

Christ is Jehovah’s “only begotten” son (Jo 3:16); there is a father/son relationship between Christ and Jehovah (Heb 1:5). This is of course a theme throughout all of the New Testament and completely undisputed by Christians; Christ is indeed the Son of God the Father.

## 2.C.i

The above being true, the question is, where is it taught that that means the Son was created? Likely the response from JWs would be, “well, sons are created; that’s what it means to be a son, you once were not and then you were conceived and then you existed.” But of course, the same is true of Fathers; we know that father/son describes a relationship between two people, but we need to know more to understand whether the one was created and the other wasn’t.<sup>3</sup> JWs would respond and say, “well it says the Son is *begotten*, which means he was created”. This claim is examined below.

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<sup>1</sup> Both the 1984 and the 2013 version of the *NWT* use the word “firstborn” in this verse, even when some English translations do not.

<sup>2</sup> See section 3.G.viii

<sup>3</sup> Note that none of the cross-references for Heb 1:5 cited above even in the *NWT* point to instances where creation of a person or literal birth is concerned. They are all references to the bestowal of a “sonship/heir” title or status.

## 2.C.ii

“Only begotten” as the English rendered in the *King James* (and the *NWT*) is one compound Greek word made up of the word for “only” (mono-) and the word -genos. If you look this latter word up in a Greek concordance<sup>4</sup> you will find that it is used more than half the time as “kind” and less than half the time as “offspring/kindred/countrymen/stock/nation”. JW’s argue that this word means the only one created so “only begotten son” means “only created son”. You can tell from the brief concordance description I gave you that “only begotten son” would seem more likely to mean something like “unique/one of a kind son”. So which meaning is implied by John? Well, the traditional interpretation seems more likely based on the concordance. There is also the fact that it would be odd for John to be arguing that God only created one son when the entire Gospel is how man can become sons of God; this very same Greek word *genos* is used in Acts 17:28-29 to argue that all men are “begotten” of God. So something else must be meant here; not that Christ is the *only* son of God, but that he is the Son of God in a sense unique only to him. This is why half the English translations of John 3:16 don’t render this word “only begotten son” but as “one and only Son”—the aim being to better capture that meaning.

## 2.D

**THAYER’S TAKE on THESE WORDS**

An important last point related to the three above: one of the most eminent Greek scholars who wrote one of the most widely used Greek lexicons, J.H. Thayer, does not agree that any of these words mean what JW’s teach that they mean in relation to Jesus in the relevant passages. This scholar is noteworthy not only for his credentials, but also for the fact that he is not a trinitarian; he is a Unitarian. So, he is not even on the side of traditional Christianity when it comes to understanding Christ as deity. Yet even he is an honest enough scholar to not stretch these words in these contexts to have them mean something different than the obvious and traditional reading.

- Of “firstborn” (protokos), Thayer says specifically of Colossians 1:15, “this passage does not with certainty prove that Paul reckoned [the Son] in the number of created beings.”
- Of “beginning”, Thayer specifically cites Revelation 3:14, giving it the definition of “that by which anything begins to be, the origin, active cause.”
- Of “only begotten” (monogenes), Thayer says “used of Christ, denotes *the only son of God* or one who in the sense in which he himself is the son of God has no brethren.”

One would benefit from some study in Greek to fully understand Thayer’s take on these Greek words, but what is clear even to the lay reader, at least, is that he doesn’t agree these words mean what JW’s say they mean as they are applied to Jesus in the relevant passages.

## 2.E

**THE STATE of the JW’s ARGUMENT SO FAR**

The above three points boil down to the argument that there are words applied to Jesus that sometimes imply a thing begins or is created; and that therefore Christ is created. But of course, none of the three

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<sup>4</sup> The compound word “monogenes” is used very few times so it is not very helpful to look up in a concordance.

words applied to the Son in this argument are “created” or “made”; much more than “only begotten” or “firstborn”, these former words would much more clearly imply what JW’s wish to argue. And indeed, there are Greek words for these English words; the JW’s case would have some strength if we found a verse such as “in the beginning the Son was created”. Unfortunately for them, we have no such verses. The words that are used in their above arguments are words which there is very strong reason to believe do not at all imply he was created. They are understandably latched onto by those who want to argue he is created, but they do not, apart from an existing theology to read into the text, teach to the intended audience that the Son was created. But, for the sake of argument, let’s address a student of the Bible (perhaps even a new Christian) who has some lingering doubts about these words (firstborn, beginning, and begotten) being applied to the Son since they at least have the *lexical possibility* of implying a kind of generation.

In a conversation with JW’s, a reasonable response to the above is to say something like, “I understand Christ is called *firstborn* and that to you that sounds like he was created, but I know for sure that this word does not always literally mean first to be born. The question remains then, *how is this word being used here in this passage?* In order to demonstrate your interpretation of how this word is being used here, which is in the extreme minority, can you show me in Scripture where the Son is *taught* to the reader to be created?” In short, “what else ya got?”

Besides the above-mentioned passages which JW’s can make to sound in agreement with them only when their theology is laid on top of it, I know of only one argument that attempts to show from the text a teaching about the Son being created and his being only an instrumental creator of all other things. I consider the following to be the kernel of their argument from the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.F

### **PROVERBS 8: WISDOM POSSESSED/CREATED at the BEGINNING**

The kernel of the JW’s argument goes like this: Proverbs 8 (especially 8:22 and, to a lesser extent, 8:23-31) makes it sound like wisdom was created and, elsewhere, Christ is called God’s wisdom; therefore Christ was created.

If you check out a [parallel Bible for Proverbs 8:22](#) you will find a variety of translations for the key verse in the passage discussed in this section. The *ESV* reads “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.”; the *King James* is nearly identical. Some translations read “created” instead of “possessed” due to the Greek word used there in the Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the original Hebrew). The *Brenton Septuagint Translation* reads “The Lord made me the beginning of his ways for his works.” The 2013 *NWT* reads “Jehovah produced me as the beginning of his way, The earliest of his achievements of long ago.”

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, JW’s have an authority outside the Bible, the *Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society* to whom, amongst themselves or those friendly to the organization, they will appeal to demonstrate their point. They will claim, however, that their position on the Son can be demonstrated solely from Scripture; the WT derives their theology, they claim, not from direct revelation but from a spirit-guided study of Scripture. So one should expect, from JW’s, a clear teaching of what they are saying found in Scripture.

So JWs point to this and say, “Christ is called wisdom in Scripture and here it sounds like wisdom was a thing created Jehovah; therefore the Son was created by Jehovah!” The rest of this section will examine that argument and lay bare its hermeneutical assumptions.

## 2.F.i

### INTRO to the ARGUMENT

- The first thing to understand is that Christ is indeed called “wisdom” in Scripture.
  - Christ is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Co 1:24).
  - Christ “became to us wisdom from God” (1 Co 1:30).
  - Less clearly, but should still be noted, Jesus seems to apply the *feminine* personification of wisdom to himself (Matt 11:19).<sup>6</sup>
- The second thing to understand is that the Old Testament teaches all Jehovah’s works were made “in wisdom” (Ps 104:24) which is perfectly consistent with the New Testament teaching that all creation was made “in Christ” (same wording in the Greek as in Col 1:16).
- An immediate and devastating question should be asked of JWs at this point. If the Son was created, and the Son is the wisdom and power of God, when was God without power or wisdom? How could anything be created from such a being? It would seem totally at odds with the scriptural testimony that God was ever without such attributes.
  - We know that God’s power is eternal (Rom 1:20). If the Son is God’s power and God’s power is eternal, then the Son is eternal.
  - The “secret and hidden wisdom of God” was “decreed before the ages for our glory” (1 Co 2:7).

## 2.F.ii

### HERMENEUTICS of PROVERBS and RELATED WRITINGS/GENRES

- Now that we’ve understood that the Son is the wisdom of God and we’ve considered whether it makes sense that God was once without wisdom and power, let’s examine Proverbs 8 itself. Before even looking at the content of the chapter, it would be good to see where JWs stand on what they do with this chapter, Proverbs generally, and wisdom literature generally; what is their hermeneutic approach to the kind of text they are arguing from?
- Are JWs ready to take everything that is said of wisdom in Proverbs (or all of the Bible) as literally being true of Christ? Must we call him our “sister” (Pro 7:4)? The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom (Pro 1:7); so, who was there to fear Jehovah in order to create Jesus then?
  - The point is that this passage is wisdom literature with an extended personification of wisdom; the writer’s intent being to teach about the concept of wisdom not to give a clear teaching about the Son of God (of whom the writer would not have had a clear understanding of since He had not been

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the *NWT* does not include the feminine “her” here but rather reads “wisdom is proved righteous by its works” and the 2013 study notes version includes no references to Proverbs 8.

incarnate and revealed to the world yet). There do seem to be verses prophetic about the Son here, but I don't think we should build an entire theology out of a passage like this when we have much clearer teaching on the subject elsewhere, namely, in the New Testament where the divine plan is revealed fully.

- We are not to be wise in our own eyes (Pro 26:12).
  - ❖ So we are not to consider ourselves to have wisdom. Substitute Christ for the word wisdom in that teaching. Are we not supposed to consider ourselves to have Christ? Far from it! So again, the point is that not everything that's said of wisdom can be a literal substitute for Christ. You can't just replace the word wisdom with Christ and be sure you are getting a literal teaching about our Lord.
- Christ is called a lot of things, that doesn't mean everything applied to that thing in other passages of Scripture equally apply to Christ. It would be like saying "Christ is man" and elsewhere in Scripture it teaches that "man is sinful" and therefore Christ is sinful. That's not how proper exegesis of a text is done.
- Proverbs, and other wisdom literature teach in *generalities*, not inviolable absolutes. For example, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Pro 22:6)." Is this always true, every time, without fail? Does a child who was trained up in the way he should go who then departs from that way when he's old nullify the word of God? Far from it! The point is, Proverbs is not the book one ought to go to when seeking the firm foundation of biblical teaching on a subject. These are practical, poetic, hyperbolic, practical, ethical maxims. Another red flag should rise that this is the kind of writing we are being brought to for the one and only supposedly foundational passage teaching the JW's view on this subject.

### 2.F.iii

#### LEVIATHAN, the FIRST of the WORKS of GOD

- The primary way to address the JW's eisegesis of Proverbs 8 is from within the chapter and book of Proverbs itself (as laid out above). But a secondary point is that the book of Job includes a verse that sounds very much like the way Proverbs 8 refers to Wisdom but references another subject entirely—the Behemoth. This latter beast is referred to in Job as "the first of the works of God" (Job 40:19).<sup>7</sup>
  - The Hebrew word for "first" is *resit*, the same as is translated "beginning" in Proverbs 8:22.
  - The parallels are striking. Both Proverbs 8 and Job 40 seem to say that a different being is the first being. The non-JW can be consistent and say that both passages are wisdom literature, wherein there is often hyperbole, metaphor, and claims that are true generally, but not always and necessarily so; therefore,

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<sup>7</sup> Some Christian translations render it more as a rank or status: *NIV*: "it ranks first among the works", *KJV/ASV*: "He is the chief of the ways". The JW translations are as follows: *Bible in Living English*: "First of Deity's undertakings", *Emphasized Bible*: "He is the beginning of the ways of God", *NWT 2013*: "It ranks first among the works", *NWT 1984*: "It is the beginning of the ways of God".

neither passage is to be taken as intending to give some sort of teaching on the order of creation.

- ❖ JWs, however, are left with having to explain why they take Proverbs 8 to be literally true and Job 40 to not be literally true. The only explanation I can think of is that the former fits their theology whereas the latter does not.

#### 2.F.iv

##### DOES PROVERBS 8 TEACH that the SON was CREATED?

- Whatever “wisdom” is, does Proverbs 8 teach that it is created? That it didn’t exist and then it was created by God? This seems doubtful. Just plug in the term “x” for wherever it reads wisdom and ask yourself whether “x” is being directly taught as something that was created to exist. When you do this exercise, you can see that the point of Proverbs 8 merely seems to be that “x” is highly exalted and intimate with God; the purpose of the passage is not to give a creation account. I’m not saying one couldn’t read the text as teaching that wisdom was created, but that reading is certainly doubtful.
  - Let’s give JWs the most possible benefit of the doubt on Proverbs 8 for a moment. Let’s suppose this passage is 1) teaching that wisdom was created and 2) that the passage is about the Son. Does supposing those two things give their conclusion the victory? Think again! Let’s think slowly and carefully here.
    - ❖ The passage is, even with these suppositions in JWs favor, a) primarily a passage intending to teach or inspire the reader about wisdom itself; Solomon did not have the Son in mind and b) a passage *prophetically* about Son, a secondary subject beneath the full consciousness of the author.
    - ❖ The question is this: how do we take passages that speak of one subject explicitly and a second subject prophetically? Do we always take every part of that passage and apply each part literally to the second prophetic subject? Hardly! Take 2 Samuel 7:16 out of the 2013 *NWT*, for example, which references Hebrews 1:8.<sup>8</sup> The passage in 2 Samuel, hundreds of years prior, is taught by the author of Hebrews as being a prophetic passage about Christ’s throne being established forever. Do we then take everything in the relevant passage of relevant passage of 2 Samuel 7 as being directly about Jesus? Far from it! For surely neither JWs nor the Christian would say of Jesus that “he commits iniquity” (2 Samuel 7:14). The passage in 2 Samuel is *primarily and directly*, in the mind of the speaker, a passage about the “offspring after [David]”. We can trust that there is something of the prophetic here about Jesus because we trust the author of Hebrews. But the author of Hebrews does not say that this entire passage is prophetic of Jesus. Likewise, we can trust that the Son is the wisdom of God because Scripture says so. But that does not mean that we must conclude that every verse in every

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<sup>8</sup> Other non-JW sources such as the [Treasury of Scripture Knowledge](#) make this reference as well.

passage about wisdom directly applies to the Son. That is foul hermeneutics.<sup>9</sup>

- ❖ One last note here that no inspired writer references Proverbs 8 as being a passage that prophesies about the Son.

## 2.F.v

IS “CREATED BEING who INSTRUMENTALLY CREATED all other THINGS” a CATEGORY in CONTEMPORARY EXTRA-BIBLICAL LITERATURE?

- I don’t see that Proverbs 8, or any other biblical passage, establishes that there was a category in the minds of the authors of a “created thing which was prior to all creation”. Nor was there a category of a “created thing which created all things”. But what about in the minds of contemporary writers outside the Bible? To discover such a category existing in the mind of an extra-biblical writer would be a very small point in favor of the JWs position, but one I wanted to investigate nonetheless for the sake of a complete study.<sup>10</sup>
  - I have searched extra-biblical contemporary and near-contemporary literature as well to see if a created thing was ever said to create “all things” or “heaven and earth”.
  - I did not find anything in Sirach or the Wisdom of Solomon besides language similar to Proverbs 8; in fact, in those sources it seems that “wisdom” is identified even more closely with God Himself. These apocryphal writings certainly did not clearly establish a category of a “created thing which created all things”.
  - The last place I checked was Philo of Alexandria<sup>11</sup>, who is sometimes used to support the claim that such a category existed in the minds of the biblical writers.
  - I did locate a brief mention of the Proverbs 8:22-23 in Philo’s writings. Philo writes not of Jesus (who he did not seem to be aware of) but of “the Word” in the Old Testament sense (informed by Platonic philosophy). He says this, “the

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<sup>9</sup> Everything said in section 2.F regarding hermeneutics could also be applied to Micah 5:2 which gives prophesy about Jesus including that his “origin is from ancient times, from the days of long ago (NWT)” or “whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days (ESV)” or “whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting (KJV)”.

<sup>10</sup> Even if one could find an extra-biblical writer contemporary with the New Testament writings claiming something similar to what JWs are claiming, this would be of note but would still not overturn a sound exegesis of Scripture should that reveal a contradictory position to the JWs. Imagine I write a letter about how my wife is the best, no other women compare to her; and someone a thousand years later finds my letter and also someone else’s who writes that they love another woman more than his wife. Would his letter prove that I couldn’t have loved my wife more than any other women because there were other contemporary writers who didn’t love their wives best? Hardly! It just means someone else at the time had a different idea.

<sup>11</sup> Philo was a 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Jew who syncretized Judaism and Greek philosophy, claiming to reject neither, but rather sought to find ways that they could explain each other. He is remembered for his allegorical interpretation method which, in laymen’s terms, is a method by which one can read into the Bible any meaning they like. His philosophy was therefore uninformed by the plain meaning of the text of Scripture.



Creator of the universe is also the father of his creation; and that the mother was the knowledge of the Creator with whom God uniting, not as a man unites, became the father of creation. And this knowledge having received the seed of God, when the day of her travail arrived, brought forth her only and well-beloved son...the world. Accordingly wisdom is represented by some one of the beings of the divine company as speaking of herself in this manner: 'God created me as the first of his works, and before the beginning of time did he establish me.' For it was necessary that all the things which came under the head of the creation must be younger than the mother and nurse of the whole universe."<sup>12</sup> It seems as though wisdom is not really be spoken of here by Philo as an actual being, but as a philosophical concept; and, even at that, that wisdom was before all creation/the universe was. It is admittedly difficult to figure out what exactly he *is* saying. This simply seems to be Philo's preference, for in looking for a plain account from him on whether he considers the "Word" a created being, he is plain only in his contradiction: for he says the Word is "neither uncreate[d] as God, nor yet created as you".<sup>13</sup> His unapologetic contradiction is a familiar (though vain) refuge used by those who practice "philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition."<sup>14</sup> Philo's claim about the Word is not, of course, what JW's are claiming; they claim emphatically that the Word was created. Even if Philo is used as a poster child for the idea of a created being who created "all things", he is not one I think the JW's would want to stand behind since he is led to affirming a contradiction by taking that position.

## 2.F.vi

### CONCLUSION on PROVERBS 8

- Proverbs 8, as with the JW's arguments in **2.A-C**, boils down to "it's plausible if all we know is what they're telling us".<sup>15</sup> Imagine if all we knew about the subject is that 1) the Son is wisdom and 2) there's a passage that makes it sound like wisdom may have been created by God. If that were all we had to go on, they might have a case. However, as was shown above, there is much reason to suspect that they are mishandling the texts they are using; additionally there is indeed so much more scriptural testimony on this subject, as this study goes on to show.

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<sup>12</sup> *On Drunkenness*, VIII. (30-31)

<sup>13</sup> *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*, XLII. (206)

<sup>14</sup> Colossians 2:8, *ESV*

<sup>15</sup> The Christian, of course, ought to heed the Apostle Paul's warning about those who "may delude you with plausible arguments" (Col 2:4, *ESV*).

## 2.G

### **CONCLUSION on the JWs ARGUMENT**

The entire JWs argument boils down to: if you read these passages with their theology in mind it could sound like what they're saying (which is true). What hasn't been shown is a didactic passage where the author is intending to teach about of the Son's status as created or uncreated or in what sense he is creator (instrumental only or not). So after being presented with a biblical argument like that, it is wise to respond with—"I'd like to see what else Scripture has to say on this subject; I'd like the whole testimony of Scripture to inform my opinion, and if there is more solid footing than what you have provided me I want to first understand those foundational passages and let that guide how I interpret these relevant, but clearly secondarily or tertiarily relevant, passages from which you have argued your position. Almost everyone in history has read these passages and concluded opposite of you, including myself; so I'm wondering if you're reading something into the text that isn't there. So let's explore together what the rest of Scripture has to say about this subject and see if it can shed some light on these passages that we are in question about. Let's see if we can find some passages more crystal clear on this subject, build off of that, and how these passages you have argued from end up being understood in light of what we find. I'd like to read the plausible, but minority view, the uncertain, secondary/tertiary texts, and the arguments that rely on Greek or extra-biblical sources in light of the clear, plain, foundational passages that are obviously setting out to teach the readers about this subject."

By going on and studying what else Scripture says on this subject, this is the most weight I can give their arguments. I have gone as far as I have in this study because I was meeting with one of JWs in person and I wanted to honor him and our discussion; I hoped fruit would come out of going deeper. For the average Christian, if you come across above arguments online and you have better things to do, it's perfectly reasonable to simply respond in your head, "those are bad arguments/bad hermeneutics, moving on". But if you're a new Christian who is wondering about some of those things that sound plausible above, an ex-JW who was taught the arguments above and now want to know the whole counsel of Scripture, or someone (like me) meeting regularly with one of JWs, the following study should help you with that next step.