

In the Third Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, Greg Stafford takes up the familiar defense of subjects having to do with the use and pronunciation of the divine name, the identity of the biblical God Jah and of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as issues and questions having to do with salvation, God's sovereignty and mankind's "free will." This edition also contains discussions of several controversial issues, including questions related to abortion, a person's sexual orientation, and regarding uses of blood.

Most significantly, this book puts forth not only a defense of some the biblical teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, but it also further introduces the Christian Witnesses of Jah, Jehovah's Witnesses who reject human traditions when these can be shown to contradict what is based on the best available reasons. Thus, a call is made to all Jehovah's Witnesses, to all Christians, indeed, to "every breathing thing" to bear witness to and to praise the biblical God Jah, and to acknowledge what can be shown to be true for good reasons about Jesus of Nazareth.—Psalm 150:6; Isaiah 29:13; 43:10, 12; Acts 18:24-28; Galatians 1:10; Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6.

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Murrieta, California

“This is the third time I am coming to you. ‘At the mouth of two or three witnesses what is said will be validated.’—2 Corinthians 13:1.

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The Freedom of Jah and the Free Will of Mankind

“Pilate said to him ... ‘Do you not know I have authority to release you and I have authority to impale you?’ Jesus answered him: ‘You would have no authority at all against me unless it had been granted to you from above’” (John 19:10-11, NWT). In his response to Pilate’s claim to have authority over him, Jesus did not dispute what Pilate claimed. Pilate’s use of “authority” clearly has to do with a decision or choice about whether to release Jesus or to give the order to have him executed. Jesus did point out that while Pilate may be in a position to make such a choice, he is only able to do so because God, “from above,” gives him the “authority” to determine such things.

In teaching Pilate this truth, Jesus showed very plainly that no matter what choice Pilate is allowed to make, it is Jah’s sovereign will which permits him to make any decisions in the first place. This can be used to show Jah’s freedom, in which he is able to bring about his will apart from anyone, or by means of those to whom he gives authority (as with Pilate). In both cases the decisions are Jah’s, for he either decides matters directly or he chooses to let others determine one or more possible outcomes.

These possible outcomes are, therefore, limited to the choices Jah created for us to make, or which he allows us to make (Genesis 3:11; 4:7; Deuteronomy 30:17-20). If, however, those to whom Jah grants authority choose to decide matters in ways that are contrary to or even in defiance of Jah’s will, then God will judge us in accordance with our works (Revelation 22:12). That is why Jesus told Pilate, “The man that handed me over to you has greater sin.”—John 19:11.

In this chapter¹ I will present the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses who are associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society respecting the sovereignty of God and the "free will" of man. As a Christian Witness of Jah, as one of Jehovah's Witnesses who tries to avoid 'commands of men as doctrine' and follow only what can be shown to be true for good reasons (Isaiah 29:13; Mark 7:7), I will present the biblical reasons for our beliefs about Jah's sovereignty and mankind's "free will." By "free will" I mean simply that men and women have the ability and the God-given or God-permitted opportunity to make choices. We can and often do decide certain matters on our own. Examples include our choices of what clothing we wear, how we educate ourselves, or whether we believe in and follow the teachings of a G-god, G-gods, or someone or something else.

There are many good reasons for accepting the Bible as a reliable historical guide, accurate in its presentation of the affairs of men, women, and for many nations of the earth. In terms of its presentation of the God Jah, the Bible teaches that humans have a measure of freedom to make choices within a limited sphere of existence, about a limited number of things, in a limited number of ways. Jah God created "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Then within this sphere of existence (the earth) the Bible teaches that Jah made all sorts of living things, with one creation above them all, namely, man and woman who were made in God's "image" and "likeness."—Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:4-8.

¹ Much of the content of this chapter is based on some of my earlier writings on these subjects, most of which can be read online at Elihu Books, through the main menu links for *IN MEDIO* and "Upon the Lampstand." These include: "Public Debates, the Extent of God's Knowledge, and Human Will," *IN MEDIO* 1.4 (October 2006 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-14; "The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man, Part One: Isaiah," *IN MEDIO* 1.5 (November 2006 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-19; "The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man, Part Two: Romans," *IN MEDIO* 1.6 (December 2006 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-17; "The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man, Part Three: 'The Scroll of Life ... from the Founding of the World,'" *IN MEDIO* 2.1 (January 2007 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-21; "OASIS," *IN MEDIO* 2.2 (February 2007 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-19; "Does God 'know all things' that will occur, before they actually happen?" "Upon the Lampstand" (February 7, 2007 [rev. May 4, 2008]), pages 1-5.

As I intend to show from the Bible, at any time Jah can involve himself in the affairs of any of his creatures, particularly if the freedom he gives us is not used according to this will. This can be seen in the Genesis account involving Adam, Eve, Satan, and God (Genesis 3:1-19). Here God *allowed* Satan to mislead Eve. He *allowed* Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. God *allowed* Adam to make a choice about whether to eat the fruit, also. Jah also *chose* to change the conditions of the earth, to increase woman's childbearing pain, to change Adam's ability to harvest the land, and Jah *chose* to give a prophecy about the end of the "serpent" (Genesis 3:14-19). In all things, in all such or similar ways, Jah may do according to his will and "there exists no one that can check his hand or that can say to him, 'What have you been doing?'"—Daniel 4:35.

Complicating the choices Jah permits humans to make is sin, or disobedience to God, which has been a part of human nature since Adam and Eve (Romans 5:12). Because we received a sinful nature through Adam and Eve, each of us is at times "a slave of sin" (John 8:34) and so subject to "hurtful desires" which lead to sin (Colossians 3:5; James 1:14). According to the Bible, in spite of our sin we can at times overcome our desires for what is bad, "turn in the opposite direction," and even choose the "way out" (Isaiah 50:5; 1 Corinthians 10:13). We simply cannot do this all of the time, and so we need forgiveness by God as we struggle against our own "flesh" (Romans 7:24-25). The Bible teaches that Jah the Father provided the basis for our forgiveness, namely, faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

In this chapter I will introduce the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding Jah's sovereign will, his freedom to decide matters, to permit others to decide matters, or to allow things to occur in some other way that is itself either decided on or permitted by Jah to occur. I will then address the teachings of Dr. Robert Morey and Dr. James White, two Jehovah's Witness critics and well-known apologists for what is known as "Reformed" theology. "Reformed" theologians and apologists consider their beliefs "Christian" and, thus, based soundly on the Bible. I disagree. I believe the arguments and beliefs associated with Reformed views concerning God, his sovereign will, and the

freedom of mankind are more connected with the arguments and beliefs of leaders of the Reformation, most notably, John Calvin (July 10, 1509—May 27, 1564), than they are based on the teachings of the Bible.

In this chapter I will defend the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses who are associated with the Watchtower Society, where their teachings are in harmony with the Bible. I will also present the beliefs of the Christian Witnesses of Jah as they relate to Jah's knowledge, to his sovereignty, and to his freedom, and also as they relate to the freedom Jah has given mankind. I will also present some of the beliefs of John Calvin and other "Reformed" theologians since him, as I compare them with the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses and with the beliefs of the Christian Witnesses of Jah.

The Knowledge and the Freedom of Jah

Jah's knowledge. What does God know? Many of us would no doubt answer that God knows everything. But what exactly does it mean to 'know everything'? According to Jesus, there is at least one thing "only the Father" knows, not even the Son himself, and that is the day when Jesus will come again in judgment of the earth (Matthew 24:36). But what else does the Bible teach us about Jah, about what he knows, and about *when* he knows it?

The biblical answer is that Jah knows what will happen if he chooses to know. Or he may know all possible outcomes (having made them possible in the first place), but at the same time let others make choices which he permits them to make, and so all choices made before him are subject to his sovereign will. Indeed, the Bible teaches us that Jah allows certain things to occur that he in fact *learns* from, for he determined that there would be things others would do that he would come to know as others did them, but not beforehand. In this way, the Bible teaches us that in one sense God can and does know all things that can or will occur, but in another sense he learns about things as they occur before him or as he watches from above.—Psalm 14:2; 53:2.

According to the Bible, God created humans within a sphere of existence (the earth) concerning which God knows and has determined all of the possible things humans can do. Within the earth there was a garden in Eden, and from that garden Jah God intended for mankind to “be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). Jah designed the earth, and he designed and created mankind. He knows what man can and cannot do, and he knows what can be achieved, good and bad, within the earth. Jah set the limits both for what can be done *in* earth, and what can be done *to* it.—Job Chapters 38 and 39.

Jah commanded Adam not to eat the fruit of “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.” But God also knew it was possible for Adam to disobey him and eat from this tree, in spite of being told not to do so. This is proven by the fact that, ultimately, that is exactly what Adam chose, namely, to disobey Jah and to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. God let Adam eat from it, according to Adam’s own desire, even though his desire was in defiance of God’s expressed will.—Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6, 11-12, 17-19; compare James 1:14.

Consider, too, Adam’s naming of the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). God created the animals and he created mankind. Jah knew that at some point within the sphere of his earthly creation that man would name the animals. This is clear from Jah’s calling of the animals to Adam so Adam could name them, which indicates that Jah made us with an awareness of names and with an ability and a desire to give names to others. But did Jah know the names Adam would give to the animals *before* Adam spoke them? The available evidence from the biblical record shows that Jah not only chose to allow Adam to name the animals in the earthly realm, but Jah even involved himself in the naming process by “bringing them [the animals] to the man,” for Jah wanted “to see what [Adam] would call each one” (Genesis 2:19). This shows anticipation on Jah’s part, and interest in his creatures, especially in those made in his image.

Within Adam’s linguistically expressive capacity to utter words that would become the names of various things, whether they be names of animals or even the type-name “Woman” (Genesis 2:22-23), Jah allowed Adam to *determine* the names of

the animals. However, though Adam determined the names of these creatures Jah is the one who created the entire range of possible names which Adam could speak, and so Jah knows all of the possible names which Adam might use *before* he actually uses them. But Jah God allowed Adam to select the name that would belong to the other creatures of the earth. By choosing to wait and “see what [Adam] would call each one” (Genesis 2:19), Jah shows us how he really is in ways that are no more imperfect or flawed than are true of him because he did not know the true appearance of physical “light,” that is, until he actually created it according to Genesis 1:3-5:

And God proceeded to say: “Let light come to be.” Then there came to be light. After that God saw that the light was good, and God brought about a division between the light and the darkness. And God began calling the light Day, but the darkness he called Night.

Unless Morey, White, and other “Reformed” theologians and apologists are going to claim that the physical “light” created here existed before it was created (!), then God did not ‘see the light’ and thus *know* what it looked like as a truly existing thing until he actually created it. Jah may have looked ahead in some sense to what “light” would be *like*, but until the physical light here created *actually existed*, then according to this account God had not yet ‘seen’ it so as to pronounce the light “good” (Genesis 1:4). This is a defensible, biblical teaching concerning the knowledge of God and it shows that he learns as he creates from those things he makes for the first time, which learning Jah *intends* (as in the case of Adam’s naming of the animals). This is consistent with Jah’s freedom to do what he chooses or to permit others to make choices (like Pilate, from the account quoted at the beginning of this chapter) based on the measure of “authority” he gives them.

Jah’s freedom. How, though, can Jah be “free” if humans can make their own choices? The obvious and quick answer to this question, at least for me, is that Jah is the one who gave humans the freedom to make choices in the first place. Therefore, it is by Jah’s freedom that we have authority to make any choices

at all. Jah is therefore sovereign over all choices, for he knows what is possible and what is not possible for anyone to choose or to do. Ultimately, the choices we make have consequences for us and possibly for others, but not for Jah. Because while Jah loves mankind the choices he permits us to make cannot undo or keep what he determines to do from being done. We can only make choices, for good or for bad, which is itself a great gift, though one which Jah and Jesus will judge righteously, not “by any mere appearance to his eyes, nor reprove simply according to the thing heard,” for they know our intentions.—Isaiah 11:3; Jeremiah 11:20; Revelation 2:23.

Jah God is “free” to allow others to make choices within environments he has created or that he permits others to establish. As “the only true” and “one God” (John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6), the Father can even change the course of events which he has started or that he intends to set into motion, even so the outcome is radically different from what he initially (for good reasons) desired. Consider the account in Exodus 6:6-8, where Jah says to Moses (all capitals in the NWT are for plural references):

“Therefore say to the sons of Israel, ‘I am Jehovah, and I shall certainly bring YOU out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver YOU from their slavery, and I shall indeed reclaim YOU with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I shall certainly take YOU to me as a people, and I shall indeed prove to be God to YOU; and YOU will certainly know that I am Jehovah YOUR God who is bringing YOU out from under the burdens of Egypt. And I shall certainly bring YOU into the land that I raised my hand in oath to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and I shall indeed give it to YOU as something to possess. I am Jehovah.’”

Yet, after they were delivered from Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, these same people sinned so greatly against Jah that he said to Moses as is recorded in Exodus 32:7-10:

Jehovah now said to Moses: “Go, descend, because your people whom you led up out of the land of Egypt have acted ruinously. They have turned aside in a hurry from the way I

have commanded them to go. They have made a molten statue of a calf for themselves and keep bowing down to it and sacrificing to it and saying, "This is your God, O Israel, who led you up out of the land of Egypt." And Jehovah went on to say to Moses: "I have looked at this people and here it is a stiff-necked people. So now let me be, that my anger may blaze against them and I may exterminate them, and let me make you into a great nation."

The Israelites and those with them "turned aside" from "the way Jah commanded them to go" and that is what showed Jah that they were ignoring his will. So Jah righteously decreed that he would "exterminate" those who had sinned against him in this account, and then 'make Moses into a great nation.' This was a radical change from what Jah had decreed would occur in Exodus 6:6-8, and it shows that Jah's freedom is such that he can, and does, adjust or change his decrees if he chooses to do so in accordance with his sovereign freedom.

In the case of the nation of Israel in regards to the Exodus accounts cited above, Jah's freedom to promise deliverance to them (Exodus 6:6-8), then his freedom to change his mind and decree that they should be 'exterminated' (Exodus 32:7-10), and then ultimately Jah's freedom in allowing the Israelites to live are all clearly expressed. According to the Bible, Jah even felt "regret over the evil that he had spoken." Though the "evil" in this case was entirely justified under the circumstances, Jah still felt "regret" as the account in Exodus 32:11-14 makes plain:

And Moses proceeded to soften the face of Jehovah his God and to say: "Why, O Jehovah, should your anger blaze against your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent he brought them out in order to kill them among the mountains and to exterminate them from the surface of the ground'? Turn from your burning anger and feel regret over the evil against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel your servants, to whom you swore by yourself, in that you said to them, 'I shall multiply YOUR seed like the stars of the heavens, and all this land that I have designated I shall give to YOUR seed, that

they may indeed take possession of it to time indefinite.” And Jehovah began to feel regret over the evil that he had spoken of doing to his people.

The above account tells us a great deal about Jah’s personality and about his love for others. Jah was merciful and just in deciding to change his decree, to consider and even accept the words of Moses who spoke out of love and concern for Jah’s reputation, and for the sake of the Israelites at Sinai. Had Jah followed through with his initial decree to “exterminate” the Israelites who sinned against him, and to then raise up another people through Moses, then Jah’s decree that a nation of people through which the promised “seed” would come is still true (Genesis 3:15; 22:18). But the individuals who would make up this nation could change, as we can see clearly from Jah’s decrees in the above biblical accounts.

“Reformed” Theology and the Bible

God’s “Reformed” foreknowledge. Reformed theologians from John Calvin to Robert Morey use the Bible in support of their view of God’s knowledge and sovereignty. I do not believe it supports their teachings on these subjects. For good reasons which I will present in this chapter, I believe Reformed theology dishonors Jah in at least two ways: 1) It misrepresents the teachings of his written Word and 2) it misrepresents Jah himself.

On September 27, 2006, I was a guest on “The Narrow Mind” show with its host, Pastor Gene Cook. Dr. Morey was also on the program with Pastor Cook, and the discussion turned from the deity of Jesus to the subject of what God can or does know according to Morey’s “Reformed” view and against my own view as one Jehovah’s Witnesses.² In presenting the Reformed view of God’s foreknowledge and sovereignty (specifically, Calvin’s view), historian Philip Schaff writes:

² The audio for this discussion can be heard through the Elihu Books’ web site. See the link at the beginning of my *IN MEDIO* article, “Public Debates, the Extent of God’s Knowledge, and Human Will,” referenced in note 1 above.

Predestination, according to Calvin, is the eternal and unchangeable decree of God by which he foreordained, for his own glory and the display of his attributes of mercy and justice, a part of the human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation, and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation. "Predestination," he [John Calvin] says, "we call the eternal decree of God, by which he has determined in himself the destiny of every man. For they are not all created in the same condition, but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say, he is predestined either to life or to death."³

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that by "decree" God "has determined in himself the destiny of every man," or that God "foreordained ... eternal damnation" for anyone. We believe the Bible teaches that God puts "life and death" before us and that he wants all of us to "choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Of course, anyone can *say* his or her beliefs are based on the Bible, even as Reformed believers consider their teachings biblical. The only way to find out is to do as the earliest Christians did, and as I have endeavored to do thus far in this book, namely, cite and discuss the evidence to see what are the best available reasons, and which beliefs they support.—Acts 17:3.

Therefore, consider the following excerpt from my September 27, 2006, radio discussion with Dr. Morey, which took place starting at minute 24:34 of the show. I will number the exchange in order to make clearer the sequence of information as it was given. This will also make referencing each part of the transcript easier in the discussion which follows it:

[1]Morey: Did God in fact know ahead of time, let's say, that Judas would choose to betray Christ and does Scripture indicate that God's foreknowledge was complete and he knew everything everybody would do concerning the crucifixion?

³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 [1910]), pages 549-550.

[2]Stafford: He knew that it would happen but “woe to the one through whom it comes.”

[3]Morey: So in other words ...

[4]Stafford: That’s Jesus’ words.

[5]Morey: ...even though Judas’ betrayal was fully understood from all eternity, so Luke 22:22 “it had been determined.”

[6]Stafford: Well, I wouldn’t say that.

[7]Morey: Well, Luke 22:22, “he went to betray Christ as it had been determined.” At the same time...

[8]Stafford: But that doesn’t say “determined from all eternity.”

[9]Morey: Well that...yes...yes it does. Because as you take a word study of that word and you go over to Acts 2 and Acts 4, you find that the crucifixion of Christ was foreordained from the foundation of the world.

[10]Stafford: Well, that’s not “eternity,” that’s the “foundation of the world.”

[11]Morey: “*Before* the foundation of the world.” From all eternity.

[12]Stafford: Yes, “*Before*” Adam and Eve had children, “before the throwing down of seed” God determined after Adam rebelled that there would be...that the serpent would bruise Jesus in the heel and that, thus, foretold his betrayal at the hands of one who eventually was named “Judas.”

It is clear from the above that Dr. Morey believes that Luke 22:22, Acts 2, and Acts 4 teach that “Judas’ betrayal was fully understood from all eternity.” Therefore, I will here consider each of these texts and accounts (as translated in the NWT) to determine whether any of them teach what Morey claims:

Luke 22:22 (with verse 21):

But, look! the hand of my betrayer is with me at the table. Because the Son of man is going his way according to what is marked out; all the same, woe to that man through whom he is betrayed! [Underlining added.]

The Greek for “marked out” in the above text is *horismenon*, which is a form of the Greek verb *horizo* meaning to “determine, appoint, fix, set.”⁴ It is in this same sense I understand NWT’s “marked out” and, thus, I believe for good reasons the betrayal of Jesus was “determined” or “marked out” before it happened. However, as I told Morey ([8]Stafford), Luke 22:22 “doesn’t say ‘determined from all eternity.’” Morey’s reply was, “... yes it does” ([9]Morey). Morey referred to Acts 2 and to Acts 4 as bases for interpreting Luke 22:22 as if “the crucifixion of Christ was foreordained from the foundation of the world.” However, again, for Morey “from the foundation of the world” means “from all eternity” ([5]Morey).

The only verses in Acts 2 which speak to this issue in any way similar to Morey’s claims are Acts 2:22, 23. The only verses in Acts 4 which in any way relate to what Morey spoke about are Acts 4:24-28. Consider them in their order of occurrence:

Acts 2:22-23

[Peter said,] “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus the Naz·a·rene´, a man publicly shown by God to YOU through powerful works and portents and signs that God did through him in YOUR midst, just as YOU yourselves know, this [man], as one delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, YOU fastened to a stake by the hand of lawless men and did away with. [Underlining added.]

The Greek for “the determined counsel and foreknowledge” is *tei horismenei boulei kai prognosei*. Peter does not immediately associate his assertion with an OT text, as he does with the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2:24-28). Later he associates what was “announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets” with the acts of the Jewish people and their rulers when they ‘disowned’ and ‘killed’ the Christ (Acts 3:13-18). Thus, it appears “the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God”

⁴ A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., edited and revised by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 515.

concerning the suffering and killing of the Christ was “announced beforehand” by God himself, *not* “from all eternity.”

Morey’s understanding appears to be connected with his view of “before/from the foundation of the world,” which I will consider further in the next section. But Morey’s view that being handed over for death by his own people means Jesus’ death was “fully understood from all eternity,” is not supported by Acts 2:22-23. This leaves us with Morey’s final reference:

Acts 4:24-28

Upon hearing this they with one accord raised their voices to God and said: “Sovereign Lord, you are the One who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things in them, and who through holy spirit said by the mouth of our forefather David, your servant, ‘Why did nations become tumultuous and peoples meditate upon empty things? The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers massed together as one against Jehovah and against his anointed one.’ Even so, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with [men of] nations and with peoples of Israel were in actuality gathered together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, in order to do what things your hand and counsel had foreordained to occur. [Underlining added.]

Again we read that God’s “counsel had foreordained [Greek: form of *pro’orizo*]” the things which were to occur against his “servant,” his Son. Specifically, in this context the things which were “to occur” involved the actions of Herod and Pilate (Mark 3:6; 8:15; 12:13; Luke 13:31; 23:8-12; John 19:16). These “things” were prophesied about, not “from all eternity,” but in Psalm 2:1-2. All of these prophecies concerning the suffering of the Christ relate back to what was prophesied by Jah about the ‘bruising of the heel’ of the promised “seed,” the Messiah (Genesis 3:15), not to an “eternal” plan of God’s in place before the events recorded in Genesis Chapter 3.

Morey has misread all three of the above referenced Bible accounts. A correct reading and interpretation of these accounts, according to their grammar and their historical context, does not support the Reformed understanding of the time from which

Jesus' betrayal was foreknown (namely, "from all eternity"). As it is presented to us in the Bible, had Adam and Eve not sinned by disobeying Jah there would have been no need for this "counsel" regarding the death of the Messiah to have been "foreordained to occur." That is why God foretold what would occur in connection with the promised seed after Adam sinned. It is Jah's freedom to act as the "one" and "only true God."—John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6.

The Potter's "Reformed" freedom. The Bible teaches that the biblical God Jah decreed the personally expressive, decision-making capacities of spirits and of humans made in his image (Genesis 1:26). Jah is the one who created the spheres of existence in which we live, namely, "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 10:6). In these areas of existence beings made in God's image (like Pilate) can make choices within the authority each of us has "from above" (John 19:11). Therefore, each and every single decision which can be made is one that has already been decreed as possible by Jah, though this does not mean that Jah is the one who otherwise 'predestines' the choices that are actually made by those to whom he gives such authority.

As a Reformed theologian, Dr. White has a different view of God's freedom and of his sovereign decrees. In the next subsection under "OASIS," I will present and evaluate White's use the traditional acronym "TULIP," which represents five points of White's Reformed beliefs about God's "doctrines of grace."⁵ White also adds a "sixth point" to TULIP, namely, the "freedom of God."⁶ For White, these 'six points' of belief together with White's view of God's Creatorship result "in the doctrine of God's decrees."⁷ White further describes this as "the soul-comforting truth that God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe."⁸

⁵ James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler's Chosen But Free* (Merrick, NY: Calvary Press, 2000), page 38.

⁶ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 41.

⁷ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 45.

⁸ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 45 (underlining added).

White isolates “three scriptural witnesses” in order to “testify to this truth.”⁹ I will consider each of White’s three “witnesses” to try and determine if they support his views. Like White, I will here use the New American Standard Bible (1995) in presenting the three accounts cited by White:

1) Isaiah 10:5-7; Isaiah 10:12-17 (following comment):

Isaiah 10:5-7: Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
 And the staff in whose hands is My indignation,
 I send it against a godless nation
 And commission it against the people of My fury
 To capture booty and to seize plunder,
 And to trample them down like mud in the streets.
 Yet it does not so intend,
 Nor does it plan so in its heart,
 But rather it is its purpose to destroy
 And to cut off many nations.

According to Dr. White, this is “one of the most striking evidences of God’s sovereign control over the affairs of men.”¹⁰ In one sense, I could not agree more. But White’s overall assessment is unsupported by this account. Dr. White is correct in noting that God is “sending Assyria.” That is, in fact, what the account says explicitly (“I send it” [verse 6]).¹¹ The account also shows us that Jah is actively causing something to occur that does not appear would have happened had he not become involved at this particular time. But White misses completely the true nature of Assyria’s use by God when he writes:

God is clear: the woe He is announcing is on the very instrument He is using to punish Israel! Assyria is not a willing party to the punishment of Israel: they do not intend to be involved in doing God’s work, “but rather it is its purpose to destroy and to cut off many nations [Isaiah 10:7].” Assyria had one purpose, God another, and all in the same historical

⁹ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 45.

¹⁰ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 46.

¹¹ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 46.

events. While God says He is using Assyria, He likewise says He will punish them for their *intentions*.¹²

It is very important to note White's qualification of Assyria's 'will' and 'intentions' by his writing that they are not "involved in doing God's work." This is White's way of preserving the basis for God's judgment against the very ones whom he sends to accomplish his will, but it falls short of capturing what Jah is doing according to this account. When Jah involves himself with others in this way and causes them to do his will, Jah is the one who will govern to what extent a person or a nation will be a part of his purpose. The actual reasons or intentions that the people or nations accepted as a basis for acting are not from Jah and, thus, the intentions or desires they have or act upon are punishable by him.

The first part of White's first 'witness' to his belief about God's decrees shows God can direct people to do his will, even if they are not at first inclined to do so. Jah will cause them to do his will by making them think they are following their own desire, in this case, by means of Assyria's "purpose to destroy ... and to cut off many nations" (Isaiah 10:7). In this way Jah uses the Assyrian's disposition to incite their nation against Jerusalem. There are *two* wills here, *two* intentions (Jah's and Assyria's), with God causing his will to be done by means of Assyria's desire which is also, at the same time, punishable by him because their desire is sinful regardless of what it ends up accomplishing according to Jah's freedom.

While Assyria may not have been a "willing party" in terms of doing what it did for the purpose of being "involved in doing God's work," Assyria was most certainly a "willing party" in that it had the desire to "destroy and to cut off many nations." Jah simply used Assyria's desire and intentions to bring about his will for Jerusalem. Jah did not *cause* Assyria to be arrogant, nor did Jah give Assyria the desire to "cut off many nations," that is, other than Israel. Jah used what was already "in his [the Assyrian's] heart" (Isaiah 10:7), for Jah knew of the Assyrians'

¹² White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 46.

attitude toward other nations (Isaiah 10:8-10) and also that he would feel the same way toward Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:11). In this way, Jah turned the Assyrian's heart toward Jerusalem.— Compare 1 Chronicles 29:18; Proverbs 21:1.

The rest of White's first 'witness' (Isaiah 10:12-17) also does not support his claims. Consider:

Isaiah 10:12-17: So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *He will say*, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness." For he has said,
 "By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did *this*,
 For I have understanding;
 And I removed the boundaries of the peoples
 And plundered their treasures,
 And like a mighty man I brought down *their* inhabitants,
 And my hand reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest,
 And as one gathers abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth;
 And there was not one that flapped its wing or opened *its*
 beak or chirped."
 Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it?
 Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it?
That would be like a club wielding those who lift it,
Or like a rod lifting *him who* is not wood.
 Therefore the Lord, the GOD of hosts, will send
 a wasting disease among his stout warriors;
 And under his glory a fire will be kindled like
 a burning flame.
 And the light of Israel will become a fire and his Holy One
 a flame,
 And it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in
 a single day.

Here it is clear that the Assyrian developed a sinful desire on its own ("For he [the Assyrian] has said" [verse 13]), not because Jah decreed that he should sin in this way. That is why the Assyrian was punished justly by God for his desire, since the Assyrian was responsible for what occurred toward Jerusalem in ways that merited punishment (Isaiah 10:12-14). White is correct in noting that this was God's work.¹³ Indeed, if White simply

¹³ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 47.

accepted the biblical teachings that outside of this “work” the Assyrian developed and acted in response to his own sinful desire, and that Jah was able to use this to incite the Assyrian against Jerusalem, then Dr. White’s conflict with the Bible on this issue would not be so apparent.

In this account the Assyrian’s “staff” is his desire to “cut off many nations” and this is “*his own staff*” (Isaiah 10:24), a staff Jah ‘picks up’ and uses against Jerusalem. In this way Jah can and does use the desires of others to accomplish his own will, which at times includes punishing others who have incurred his righteous indignation. This argues against White’s claim that “God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe.”¹⁴ According to the Bible, Jah wisely and perfectly decrees what will and what may come to pass. But Jah does *not* always decree what he permits others to decide, that is, other than to decree what it is that others may have the opportunity to decide in the first place! In fact, Jah may and has in the past used the disposition of others to accomplish his will, as is clear from the biblical account involving Assyria and Jerusalem.

2) Genesis 50:19-21:

But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? “As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. “So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

According to Dr. White, by his words in the above account Joseph “saw the over-riding hand of God, guiding, directing, and ultimately meaning *in the same action* to bring about good” through the intentions of his brothers.¹⁵ In so far as this is a true reflection of the Bible’s teaching that God saw what was happening and then involved himself in the affairs of Joseph and his brothers in order to actively bring about his will, White is correct: “the over-riding hand of God” does actively change the

¹⁴ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 45.

¹⁵ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 48.

course of events and Jah does ‘guide’ and ‘direct’ them according to his own decree, that is, when he *determines* to do so. As White rightly points out, in the above account God “intervened” to keep Joseph from being killed by his brothers. This is an example of how Jah may keep something from happening which he knows will happen, if left alone without his further involvement.

However, Jah also knew in ways unique to him (compare Psalm 7:9) that though Joseph’s brothers were jealous to the point of wanting to kill him (Genesis 37:18), they could be brought back to a point where they could *choose* to love their brother. In this way the love of God is seen, though the desires of our heart cannot always be turned. Consider Genesis 4:3-13 according to the NWT (with underlining added):

And it came about at the expiration of some time that Cain proceeded to bring some fruits of the ground as an offering to Jehovah. But as for Abel, he too brought some firstlings of his flock, even their fatty pieces. Now while Jehovah was looking with favor upon Abel and his offering, he did not look with any favor upon Cain and upon his offering. And Cain grew hot with great anger, and his countenance began to fall. At this Jehovah said to Cain: “Why are you hot with anger and why has your countenance fallen? If you turn to doing good, will there not be an exaltation? But if you do not turn to doing good, there is sin crouching at the entrance, and for you is its craving; and will you, for your part, get the mastery over it?” After that Cain said to Abel his brother: [“Let us go over into the field.”] So it came about that while they were in the field Cain proceeded to assault Abel his brother and kill him. Later on Jehovah said to Cain: “Where is Abel your brother?” and he said: “I do not know. Am I my brother’s guardian?” At this he said: “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground. And now you are cursed in banishment from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood at your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will not give you back its power. A wanderer and a fugitive you will become in the earth.” At this Cain said to Jehovah: “My punishment for error is too great to carry.”

As with Joseph's brothers, God "had it in mind for good" for Cain and Abel (Genesis 50:20). Though Jah did not "intervene" to the same extent that he did with Cain, God determined that whether Cain listened Cain would be left on his own to act in accordance with his desire. After admonishing Cain, Jah left him and Abel alone to see what would happen. As it turns out, Cain did not listen to Jah's voice, just as Adam did not listen to Jah. Cain killed his brother, and he was justly 'punished for his error.' By contrast with the account of Cain and Abel, in the case of Joseph and his brothers Jah determined to be involved to a different extent. Yet, Jah still provided both Cain and Joseph's brothers with opportunities to determine their outcome according to the desires of their hearts.—Compare Jeremiah 11:8, 20; 13:10, 22; 16:12; 17:10; 18:12; 23:16-17; 29:13.

This shows clearly that while the extent of Jah's initial or ultimate involvement is according to his own decree and desire, he had and may further make adjustments for the glory of his name. As the Bible teaches, at times this may even involve Jah God permitting others to have and to cultivate desires to a point where decisions are made which might even contradict God's will. But Jah is always sovereign and free to permit or to quash any such things, in his own time. In permitting anything against his will Jah shows his greatness even for those who have become darkened in their hearts toward him (compare Matthew 5:43-48; John 3:20-21). Jah always determines both what he *will* do and what anyone else *can* do, as we can see clearly in the biblical accounts of Cain and Abel and of Joseph and his brothers.

This brings us to White's third biblical 'witness' for the belief that "God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe":

(3) Acts 4:27-30:

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to

heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.

According to White, in this account “we find one single act, freely engaged in by evil men for evil motives, yet, at the same time, eternally predestined for good by God.”¹⁶ In this, we have one of the more critical flaws of the Reformed position stated explicitly, “eternally predestined ... by God.” It is not enough for White or for other Reformed theologians to accept that God is revealed in the Bible as the one who decrees all of the things which *can* occur. It is not enough for Reformed believers to accept that Jah does actively decide what he will let take place and that he may change, alter, or adjust his will and purpose for his glory. As White writes, the decrees of God must be “eternally predestined.” However, the word “eternally” does not appear anywhere in the above account. But is White’s belief otherwise supported by this account?

According to Acts 4:27-30, the things that are said to have been “predestined to occur” were the things that were prophesied about, not “eternally,” but in Psalm 2:1-2. Indeed, all such prophecies concerning the suffering of the Christ relate in some sense back to what was prophesied about the ‘bruising of the heel’ of the promised “seed,” the Messiah (Genesis 3:15). The evidence from the Bible shows that had Adam and Eve not sinned then there would have been no need for any such “counsel” to have been “foreordained to occur.” Adam and Eve would not have died and they would have continued to ‘cultivate and to take care of’ the garden of Eden, rather than being ‘driven out’ it as they were after they disobeyed Jah.—Genesis 2:15; 3:24.

In spite of having no good reasons to disobey Jah, and every good reason to listen to him, both Adam and Eve followed their own desires and in the process they rejected Jah’s sovereignty, in favor of their own. Jah permitted but did not endorse their disobedience, and he also decreed the means by which his purpose for mankind would come to pass. Since then, Jah searches the whole earth for “anyone having insight,” for anyone ‘seeking Jah’ (Psalm 14:2; compare 2 Chronicles 16:9; Zechariah

¹⁶ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 49.

3:8-9; 4:10). Both Jah and Jesus know the desires of our hearts (Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10; Revelation 2:23). Indeed, the Bible teaches that Jah actively involves himself with humans on the earth. Jah does this at times by explicit admonition (Genesis 4:6-7), and also by intervening more directly in order to bring about his desire, regardless of what others may think or be prepared to do.—Compare Genesis 50:20.

However, it is not always by ‘wisely and perfectly decreeing whatsoever comes to pass in this universe’ that Jah shows he is sovereign and free.¹⁷ Jah God is the Creator and the Determiner of what can happen in any created existence which he chooses to make (see Isaiah 40:27-28; 42:5; 45:18; compare 1 Corinthians 8:6). Jah wisely and perfectly causes some things to occur apart from and/or at times even in contradiction to the will and desire of others, as in the case of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37:18; 50:19-21). Jah wisely and perfectly decides what will come to pass in association with the desire of others, as with the Assyrian and Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:5-7; 12-17). Jah also wisely decrees what others can decide, apart from and at times even in direct opposition to his expressed desire, this because we are truly made in his image.—Genesis 1:27; 2:16-17; 3:6, 11, 17; 4:3-13.

The true freedom of God is seen in all of these biblical examples, and it is revealed most outstandingly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. But Jah does not need to ‘get permission from anyone’¹⁸ before he does anything, though he may decree beforehand the limits of what can take place (Job 2:6). Jah is at all times sovereign and free to change or to adjust his will and purpose for his own glory. He does this also because he takes ‘delight’ in those who love what is true for good reasons (Isaiah 46:10; Job 36:11; Jeremiah 7:23; John 4:24; Romans 2:6-11; 1 Corinthians 2:9). Nowhere does the Bible teach that Jah “eternally predestined” any of these things. The biblical God Jah, therefore, does not resemble the God of “Reformed” theology in a very critical respect.

¹⁷ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 45.

¹⁸ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 41.

With this in mind, consider Dr. White's comments here: "Surely no one can suggest that the cross was an after-thought, a desperate attempt to 'fix' things after all had gone awry."¹⁹ If White is here asking whether anyone is truly claiming that Jah freely decrees those made in his image will be allowed to decide certain matters on their own, but with God always prepared and willing to make adjustments for his glory (as he did after Adam sinned by prophesying about the future "seed" [Genesis 3:15]), then the answer is an emphatic, Yes! Jehovah's Witnesses believe these things! We believe them because the Bible teaches them, and we have good reasons for believing the Bible is accurate in presenting the history and the will of Jah God.

OASIS. Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society have rejected the "Reformed" teachings concerning God's knowledge and the free will of mankind. As a Christian Witness of Jah I, too, reject Reformed theology. Jehovah's Witnesses of both types, then, reject the belief that Jah has by "eternal decree" predestined the salvation and condemnation of "every man" (from the Schaff quote on page 456). As representative of the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses, the following is accurate in large part where it involves Jah's foreknowledge:

Foreknowledge, Foreordination

Does God know in advance everything that people will do?

The question then arises: Is his exercise of foreknowledge infinite, without limit? Does he foresee and foreknow all future actions of all his creatures, spirit and human? And does he foreordain such actions or even predestinate what shall be the final destiny of all his creatures, even doing so before they have come into existence?

Or, is God's exercise of foreknowledge selective and discretionary, so that whatever he chooses to foresee and foreknow, he does, but what he does not choose to foresee or foreknow, he does not? And, instead of preceding their existence, does God's determination of his creatures' eternal

¹⁹ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 48.

destiny await his judgment of their course of life and of their proved attitude under test? ...

In contrast with the theory of predestinarianism, a number of texts point to an examination by God of a situation then current and a decision made on the basis of such examination.²⁰

The Watchtower Society's *Insight* book goes on to cite the accounts in the Bible about God's 'learning' about what was happening at "Babel" (Genesis 11:5-8), about God's 'coming to know' the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20-22 and 19:1), and about God's "becoming acquainted with Abraham" after Jah learned that Abraham would not withhold his only son from him (Genesis 18:19; 22:11-12). Based on the good reasons found in these Bible accounts, the Society's *Insight* book concludes, "Selective foreknowledge means that God could choose *not* to foreknow indiscriminately all the future acts of his creatures."²¹

I agree with most of what is said in the above quote from the Society's *insight* book concerning God's foreknowledge. Jehovah's Witnesses believe God, for good reasons, permits certain things to take place and that he can and even *intends to learn* from them, as we saw in the case of Adam naming the creatures which Jah brought to him (Genesis 2:19). Yet, all possible outcomes are known at all times by Jah, so nothing catches him unprepared. He is always able to deal with anything he allows, and so he is never caught unprepared. Biblical accounts such as Genesis 2:19 (Adam's naming of animals) or Genesis 22:12 (where Jah learned about Abraham's love for him) show that Jah does indeed watch our actions, to see what we will do in matters not yet foretold or determined definitively by him beforehand.

Previously, I presented and discussed Dr. White's "sixth point" of belief concerning the "doctrine of God's decrees." In this section I will present and discuss the other, more traditional "Five Points of Calvinism" using the acronym "TULIP," as

²⁰ *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), pages 852, 853.

²¹ *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 1, page 853.

presented by Dr. White.²² I will then provide a critique of these “Five Points,” followed by what I have good reasons to believe are five key points of biblical teaching concerning the grace and sovereignty of Jah God. I will use my own acronym, “OASIS,” in order to make the presentation and the understanding of the issues easier to differentiate from and to appreciate in relation to Reformed theology’s use of “TULIP”:

T = Total Depravity:

Man is dead in sin, completely and radically impacted by the Fall, the enemy of God, incapable of saving himself. This does not mean that man is as evil as he could be. Nor does it mean that the image of God is destroyed, or that the will is done away with. Instead, it refers to the *all pervasiveness of the effects of sin*, and the fact that man is, outside of Christ, the enemy of God [emphasis original].²³

U = Unconditional Election:

God elects a specific people unto Himself without reference to *anything they do*. This means the basis of God’s choice of the elect is *solely* within Himself: His grace, His mercy, His will. It is not man’s actions, works, *or even foreseen faith*, that “draws” God’s choice. God’s election is unconditional *and final* [emphasis original].²⁴

L = Limited Atonement:

Since it is God’s purpose to save a special people for Himself, and He has chosen to do so *only* through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Christ came to give His life “a ransom for many” so as to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The *intention* of Christ in His cross-work was to save His people *specifically*. Therefore, Christ’s sacrifice is *perfect and complete*, for it actually *accomplishes* perfect redemption [emphasis original].²⁵

²² White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, pages 38-41. In addition to White’s *The Potter’s Freedom* referenced in this chapter, for additional information about his views on the subjects of God’s grace and sovereignty, see White’s *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2001), and Dave Hunt and James White, *Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004). For additional information about my and Jehovah’s Witnesses beliefs concerning God’s purpose, his sovereignty, and the salvation of humankind, see the items referenced in note 1 to this chapter, as well as Chapter 8 in this book.

²³ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 39.

²⁴ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 39.

²⁵ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, pages 39-40.

I = Irresistible Grace:

This is the belief that God is able to raise the spiritually dead sinner to life. This is an act of *efficient* grace. When God chooses to bring one of His elect to spiritual life, it is an act similar to when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead: just as Lazarus was incapable of resisting the power of Christ in raising him from the dead, so too the dead sinner is incapable of resisting the power of God that raises him to spiritual life. This is *not* to say that men have not resisted God's grace. This doctrine speaks specifically to the grace that brings regeneration, not to individual acts of sin committed by believers or unbelievers [emphasis original].²⁶

P = Perseverance of the Saints:

Some prefer saying "the preservation of the saints" to emphasize that this is the work of God: others use the phrase "eternal security" to emphasize the impossibility of God's perfect work of salvation being undone. But whatever one calls it, it is the belief that when Christ saves one of His elect, He will not fail to keep that saved person throughout life and bring them safely into His presence. It is, in short, the belief that Christ is able to save perfectly [emphasis original].²⁷

Now I will compare and consider the above "Five Points of Calvinism" against five biblical points of belief which I believe are based on the best biblical reasons. An "oasis" is "something that provides refuge, relief, or pleasant contrast" (*Merriam-Webster*, www.merriam-webster.com, under "Oasis"). In the remainder of this section I will use the acronym "OASIS" to show the contrast between the teachings of the Bible and the "Five Points of Calvinism" advocated by White and others, who go so far as to claim that Calvinism is "but a nickname for biblical Christianity."²⁸

I contend that the teachings represented by "TULIP" are, to one degree or another, traditions of men which are unscriptural (compare Matthew 15:6). By "pleasant contrast," I will argue the five points associated with the acronym "OASIS" rightly express some of the more important biblical teachings concerning God's sovereignty and the salvation he offers to mankind. Here is my

²⁶ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 40.

²⁷ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 40.

²⁸ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 16.

comparison of “OASIS” with “TULIP” relative to these teachings:

O = Original Purpose:

Whatever Jah purposes ‘proves to be’; it ‘will not return to him without results’ (Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 55:11). Therefore, his purpose will always come to pass in a meaningful way that is acceptable to him. The Five Points of Calvinism begin with the “Total Depravity” of man after his fall into sin through disobedience to Jah in Genesis. But this “fall” into sin by disobedience is not what God had originally intended for mankind, according to the Bible. Indeed, such a “fall” is (in the Bible) *against* God’s expressed, original purpose for mankind and for the earth (see Genesis 1:27-31; 2:15-17). To accurately understand God’s will and purpose as found in the Bible, we must start with what it teaches “from the beginning” (Genesis 1:1) and from there consider what it teaches us about God, man, and about what Jah purposed to do after Adam’s fall. Thus, the very ‘First Point of Calvinism’ starts off on the wrong track by ignoring God’s original purpose and by focusing instead on *the consequences of rebellion* against Jah, which rebellion is viewed by White as part of God’s “eternal” will and purpose.

The Bible begins with God’s creation and with his purpose for mankind as found in Genesis Chapters 1 and 2. Then it presents events which changed the course of life for mankind from one that would fulfill Jah’s expressed desire, to Adam’s, to Eve’s, and to Satan’s judgment (Genesis Chapter 3). In association with his righteous judgments, Jah revealed the means of salvation for those born through Adam, namely, a promised “seed” who will bring an end to the “serpent” (Genesis 3:15). The rest of the Bible moves forward to the coming of that “seed,” to his life on earth and to his teachings about God, and ultimately to the formation of a new nation of people who will proclaim “good news” until God’s final judgment on the world.—Matthew 24:14; Revelation 21:1-4.

A = Adjustments for the Glory of His Name:

Jah is free to (and does at times) adjust the means of bringing about what he desires for the glory of his name (Revelation 15:3-4). This can be necessary if as a result of what else Jah permits some choose to disobey his expressed will (Genesis 3:15). For example, Jah wanted Adam and Eve to “fill the earth and subdue it” and to “cultivate [the garden of Eden] and to take care of it” (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). At this time, Jah God did not want Adam to eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad” (Genesis 2:16-17). But Adam ate

from it anyway. Jah permitted Adam's disobedience, but he also adjusted his will for his own glory by prophesying about that which would 'restore all things' (Acts 3:21), the "seed" of Genesis 3:15.

Consider, too, the life of Jah's servant, king Hezekiah. Though Jah decreed Hezekiah would "indeed die and will not live," Hezekiah's tears moved Jah to reconsider his original decree about how long Hezekiah would live (Isaiah 38:1-5). The end result of Jah's original decree did not change (Hezekiah did eventually die), only the time he decreed Hezekiah would live changed according to Jah's freedom and sovereignty, and for his glory: "For it is not She'ol that can laud you; death itself cannot praise you ... The living, the living, he is the one that can laud you, Just as I can this day" (Isaiah 38:18-19). While Jah may adjust his will for his glory and "for those who love him" and for those who reject him (1 Corinthians 2:9; Hebrews 6:4-6), no one can keep him from doing what he chooses to do (compare Job 35:6-7), which is always "righteous and true."—Revelation 15:3-4.

S = Salvation for All Who Believe:

As I will discuss further in the next chapter, Jah provides salvation for "everyone who believes" (Acts 13:39) or who has faith by trusting in beliefs about Jesus that are based on the best available reasons. The work Jesus "accomplished" (John 19:28-30) is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, which Jah did not decree "from all eternity" but only *after* it was necessary, or because of good reason, which in this case involved resistance by Satan and disobedience by Adam and by Eve. Jah allowed the rebellion to occur, even though the Bible shows clearly that he did not want it to happen (Genesis 3:11, 13, 14-19). Jah's prophecy was an 'adjustment for his glory' which shows he will give life to those who please him by trusting in beliefs for good reasons, the primary one of which concerns the redeeming power of Jesus' death.—John 3:16; Hebrews 11:1, 6.

However, according to the Bible "believing" or having "faith" must be accompanied by works or it is "dead." According to the Bible, "faith alone" is a "dead faith" and, thus, it cannot save anyone, but neither can "works" that are not according to a living faith save anyone, that is, unless Jah and Jesus so determine it based on the 'law that a person is to him- or to herself' (Romans 2:13-16; 27, 28; 3:28; James 2:24, 26). No one can please Jah God merely by executing a list of 'good deeds.' There is no quantity of "works" we can perform that will *earn* us life. Instead we must have faith based on good reasons in that which God provides both for a good life now and for an endless life with Jah God to come (Romans 2:6-11; James 2:20; Revelation 21:1-4). But it *is* our "works" that will serve as the basis for our judgment by God, as it is our *works* which show whether we

in fact have a living or a dead faith.—Romans 2:6-11; Revelation 20:11-13.

I = Impossible to Save Yourself:

“One there is that is lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy” (James 4:12). There is no amount of good works anyone can do to merit salvation. Jah God does not *owe* life to any of us. It is a gift! It is *his* gift! It is given to each of us based on whether we please Jah by trusting in the good reasons he provides us for belief in him and in his Son’s life and death. If we trust in the best available reasons, then we will believe in the good things Jah has done, and that he asks us to do for him, for others, and for ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). This is Jah’s will for mankind! But even if we have a saving faith, shown by our work, salvation is still a gift only for those who ‘endure in work that is good’ (Romans 2:7, 10). If we do not “endure to the end” (Mark 13:13), or if we decide to “disobey the truth” by “turning in the opposite direction” (Isaiah 50:5), then “there will be wrath and anger” from God for good reasons (Romans 2:8). Jah has decreed that each of us can choose to do good or practice what is bad, and if good then he will help us (compare Genesis 4:7). We are not alone in this struggle, for Jah, Jesus, and the holy spirit do help even “beyond what is normal,” that is, if we work at doing good in Jesus’ name.—John 14:13; 2 Corinthians 4:7.

God the Father will never fail us and he is always “able to save” us (James 4:12). Jesus will never fail us either, as he guides us to “fountains of waters of life” in this world and in the one that is to come (Revelation 7:17). Jah is the one who chooses those who will come to his Son for life (John 6:37-38). After having been chosen and then brought by the Father to the Son, we must “individually” believe and act based on the best available reasons (Revelation 2:23; 20:13). For Christians, “believing” in Jesus involves feeding off of his life-giving, figurative “flesh” and “blood” by accepting and working hard at trusting in Jesus and in Jah the Father (John 6:47, 53-58, 65). However, just because the Father brings someone to the Son this does not mean that same person will *choose to stay* with Jesus, and follow him “no matter where he goes” (compare Hebrews 6:4-6; Revelation 14:1-4). Such a person obviously does not *continue* to believe, though this does not mean the Son ‘lost’ or ‘drove the person away’ (John 6:37-39). We might follow another teaching or person. Indeed, though the Father brought people to Jesus when he was on the earth, “many of his disciples went off to the things behind and would no longer walk with him” (John 6:66). If we are brought to Jesus and if we stay with him by trusting in him based on the best available reasons, then we will not *lose ourselves* to the “things

behind” and “no longer walk” with Jesus.—Romans Chapters 12, 13, 14, and 15.

The freedom of Jah has decreed that we may choose to believe in Jesus or not, even after being allowed by the Father to come to him. Dr. White compares the regenerating power of God for salvation to the act of raising the dead. White writes, “[J]ust as Lazarus was incapable of resisting the power of Christ in raising him from the dead, so too the dead sinner is incapable of resisting the power of God that raises him to spiritual life.”²⁹ The Bible certainly does not teach that Christians resurrect or regenerate themselves. But the basis for each is the same, namely, the “affection” God and his Son have for people because of their living faith (John 11:3). Indeed, “[T]he hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear [Jesus’] voice and come out, those who did good things to a resurrection of life, those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgment.”—John 5:28-29 (underlining added).

Further, the Bible teaches clearly that a person can “believe” or “not believe” (Matthew 21:25-32) in ways that are our own responsibility. For example, notice that in Matthew 21:25-32 Jesus makes the Jews responsible for belief because “although [they] saw [the witness that came through John, they] did not feel regret afterwards so as to believe” (underlining added). The Bible also teaches that God can ‘open a person’s eyes’ so they turn from darkness to light ... in order for them to receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:18). But God will also ‘blind’ certain people whom he now does not want to have a living faith (John 12:36-40). Jah has decreed that such ones will not “get the thought with their hearts and turn around and [be healed]” (John 12:40). If, however, the person whose eyes God chooses to “blind” and whose heart he decides to “harden” was already incapable of belief on his or her own, then why would Jah “blind” anyone or ‘harden their heart’ in order to keep them from believing? Indeed, according to Jesus it is the Father who *keeps some people from believing* by ‘blinding’ them to his witness. Thus, the “T” in “TULIP” is again shown to be false, that is, it is not representative of what the Bible truly teaches.

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe God is “dependent upon man’s help for success in this work.”³⁰ Rather, it is a question of our accepting what God continues to work out or complete in us. We

²⁹ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 40.

³⁰ David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2nd edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterians and Reformed, 2004), page 55.

must *choose* to “keep on doing these things” in order to “make the calling and choosing ... sure” (2 Peter 1:10; compare Matthew 7:21). Further, having a living faith does not “help” God save us. It *moves* Jah to save us because he loves those who show faith. Similarly, any rejection of the Father or the Son moves Jah *not* “to revive them again to repentance” (Hebrews 6:6 [underlining added]). Thus, sinners can be “enlightened” by God and ‘partake of the holy spirit’ by believing in Jesus. But “we actually become partakers of the Christ only if we make fast our hold on the confidence we had at the beginning firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:14). God’s decree in this respect is with reference to the works we do according to a living faith, since “God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.”—Acts 10:34-35 (underlining added).

S = Sovereignty of God:

“My own counsel will stand, and everything that is my delight I shall do” (Isaiah 46:10 [underlining added]). Jehovah’s Witnesses believe Jah God *has* decreed all of the possible choices which others can make. These choices may either be in harmony with or apart from Jah’s will, but he is the one who decides whether anyone can choose to disobey him. Thus, Jah God is not responsible for the choices he permits us to make. *We* are responsible for the choices which lead to death, and for the choices which lead us to life by gaining God’s approval from him alone, not because we *earned* it.

The Bible teaches us that Jah is the Creator of all things (Isaiah 40:27-28; 42:5; 45:18; 1 Corinthians 8:6). It is he who decreed the capacities of individuals (spirits and humans [Genesis 1:26]) who were made in his image. It is he who created the spheres of existence (the heavens and the earth [Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 10:6]) in which the personally expressive capacities of those made in his image can make choices. Each and every single choice that has, is, or ever will be made is one that Jah God has decreed to be possible. In this sense, it can be said that Jah has ‘decreed all things’ and still remain consistent with what the Bible teaches.

Though Jah has decreed all that can be done, and though he desires for certain things to be done, there are things which “delight” him (Isaiah 46:10). Conversely, there are also things in which he takes no delight. For example, using again the example of Adam, Jah created Adam with the capacity to make some decisions on his own, including the possibility of disobedience. While Jah may permit something against his will to occur, he will also enforce the consequences of disobedience in accordance with his will (Genesis

3:19). For example, though Jah decreed death as the punishment for Adam he went further by actively 'driving the man out of the garden of Eden' and keeping him from returning to it (Genesis 3:24). Under these conditions Jah brought forth the promised "seed" (Genesis 3:15) who will return all things to Jah God for his glory (Isaiah 11:1-3; Acts 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, 28). This is the biblical God's true sovereignty: perfect, loving, and just!

Just as "TULIP" is but a helpful means of remembering key points informing the Reformed understanding of God's sovereign will as it relates to his grace, I offer "OASIS" as a helpful way of remembering the essential points of my and of Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of the biblical teaching about the salvation offered by God according to his sovereign decree. Jah God has sovereignly decreed that those made in his image can make decisions within the spheres of heavenly and earthly existence which he has made. At the same time, Jah has made known his own desires for what is to occur, as well as the basis for his judgment.—Hebrews 4:7-13.

Reformed theology is false. It misrepresents the Bible; it misrepresents the biblical God Jah; and it misrepresents the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. The Reformed position teaches "there can be no clash of wills between the Potter and the pots."³¹ But it fails to consider that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is in large part all about a "clash of wills between the Potter and the pots"! From Adam (Genesis Chapter 3) to Satan (Revelation 12:7-17), there have been and there continue to be those who oppose Jah and who "clash" their wills against his, as if we know better than the one who made us.—Revelation 20:1-2, 7-15.

The Bible's "Scroll of Life"

"Before the foundation of the world." Reformed theologians base a great deal of their belief about God's knowledge and his decrees on the meaning of Ephesians 1:3-4:

³¹ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 44.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ, just as he chose us in union with him before the founding of the world. [Underlining added.]

With the above clearly in mind, consider a related excerpt from my September 27, 2006, radio discussion with Dr. Morey referenced earlier in this chapter. The following does not occur immediately after the previous excerpt (see page 456). It begins in minute 40 of the radio interview. I will, however, number the following excerpt in sequence from the previous excerpt, for ease of reference. Here is the excerpt:

[13]Morey: We know that we are to go to the New Testament for the final revelation of God. There, for example, we are told in terms that are explicitly clear in the Greek, in Ephesians 1:4. It's *pro kataboles kosmo*, "Before the creation of the world."

[14]Stafford: No, it doesn't say that.

[15]Morey: God's plan of redemption had already ...

[16]Stafford: It's says, "before the throwing down..." You just misquoted the scripture.

[17]Morey: "Before." *Pro kataboles kosmos*.

[18]Stafford: *Kataboles* [means (signal interruption)] the "laying down."

[19]Morey: And there the word, if you look in any lexicon...

[20]Stafford: You said, "creation." That is not accurate. Now let me respond to what you said.

[21]Morey: Oh, really? You mean the lexicons are wrong? I have the lexicons in front of me.

[22]Stafford: I'm telling you that you are wrong in saying that *kataboles kosmos* means the creation of the world inclusive of Adam and Eve.

[23]Morey: Yes it does.

The transcription of [11]Morey and [13]Morey clearly show that Dr. Morey believes the Greek expression *pro kataboles kosmou* means “before the foundation/creation of the world,” which for Morey also means “from all eternity.” During our discussion of this point I expressed my disagreement, and I explained my belief that “before the foundation of the world” means “before the throwing down of seed,” or before the time when Adam and Eve “founded” the world with their “seed” or “offspring.” “Before” that time, and not necessarily “from all eternity,” is when Jah chose those who would belong to his Son, namely, when he promised a “seed” which would include them all.—Genesis 3:15; Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 1:4.

“Before the founding of the world” in Ephesians 1:4 and in other New Testament (NT) texts uses a common preposition for “before” (Greek: *pro*) followed by *kataboles kosmou*, forms of the Greek nouns *katabole* (“foundation”) and *kosmos* (“world”). Consider how the NT uses the expression, “before the foundation of the world,” and how it uses *katabole* (“foundation”) by itself. Since Morey referred to “the lexicons” as support for his use of “creation,” as a starting point I will provide a definition for *katabole*:

[*Katabole*:] (1) the act of laying someth. down, with implication of providing a base for someth., *foundation* ... (2) ... *sowing* of seed, used of begetting.³²

There is no explicit mention of “creation” here. However, what I object to is Morey’s use of “creation” in the expression, “creation of the world,” which Morey understands as “the creation of the world inclusive of Adam and Eve,” not as the world of mankind which came into being through and *after* them. Since I believe there are good reasons for understanding the act of begetting or of conceiving children as a type of “creation,” if Morey had used “before the creation of the world” ([13]Morey) to refer to the time “before” the “creation” of Adam and Eve’s

³² *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., edited and revised by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 515.

children, but after Adam and Eve, then we would not be debating whether the time in question is “from all eternity.” But there is disagreement between Jehovah’s Witnesses and Reformed thinkers over this issue, in large part *precisely* because Reformed believers like Morey understand “before the creation/foundation of the world” to mean “from all eternity (see above transcript, next to [11]Morey, on page 457). Therefore, I will now examine each use of *katabole* in the NT.

All but one of the eleven occurrences of *katabole* that are found in the NT are also listed in the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (see note 32) entry for this word, under definition (1), that is, except for Hebrews 11:11, which this lexicon references under definition (2). Nine of the eleven times *katabole* occurs in the NT it is a part of the expression *kataboles kosmou* (“foundation of the world”). The two exceptions are Matthew 13:35 and Hebrews 11:11. This lexicon also gives eight separate entries for *kosmos*, of which I believe the following meanings are possible where it concerns the use of *kosmos* when a part of the expression *kataboles kosmou*:

[**Kosmos:**] (3) the sum total of everything here and now, *the world, the (orderly) universe* ... (4) the sum total of all beings above the level of the animals, *the world* ... (5) planet earth as a place of inhabitation, *the world* ... (6) humanity in general, *the world* ... (7) the system of human existence in its many aspects, *the world*.³³

The present discussion concerns the kind of “foundation” that is meant in the expression “before the foundation of the world.” Once this has been identified, it will help identify the period of time with which it is associated. Therefore, I will consider the use of *katabole* (“foundation,” or “sowing seed,” “begetting”) in the NT in order to determine what sense should be associated with the use of the same word in Ephesians 1:4. I will also further consider how the word for “world” (Greek: *kosmos*) can be

³³ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., pages 561-563.

understood, since it is also a part of the dispute involving the meaning of the expression, “before the foundation of the world.”

According to Morey, “before the foundation/creation of the world” means “from all eternity” ([11]Morey). I believe, as I said to him during the September 27, 2006, radio show referenced earlier, that this expression means “‘before’ Adam and Eve had children,” and so also “before the throwing down of seed” ([12]Stafford). To better understand the meaning of the eleven NT uses of *katabole* (“foundation”), and especially the meaning of the expression *kataboles kosmou* (“foundation of the world”), I will present each of these texts according to the NWT and then I will highlight the word or expression under consideration. I will then discuss the meaning of the text in its historical context:

(1) Matthew 13:35 (with verse 34):

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds by illustrations. Indeed, without an illustration he would not speak to them; that there might be fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet who said: “I will open my mouth with illustrations, I will publish things hidden since the founding.”

The underlined words are translated from the Greek words *apo* (“from”) and *kataboles* (again, “founding” or “foundation”). Here *kataboles* is not associated with *kosmos* (“world”). Rather, it is said to be “from” (*apo*) a time in which things have been “hidden,” specifically, those “things” Jesus is here making known by means of illustrations. The ‘hidden things’ Jesus taught by illustration in Matthew 13 all have to do with “the sacred secrets of the kingdom of the heavens” (Matthew 13:11), as Jesus’ illustration in Matthew 13:3-9 included “the word of the kingdom” (13:19). Further, his illustrations in Matthew 13:24-30, 31-32, and verse 33 are all about the “kingdom of the heavens.” The next NT text gives us additional indication as to the time that is meant by “the founding” mentioned in Matthew 13:35:

(2) Matthew 25:34:

“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, YOU who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom

prepared for YOU from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*].”

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, in Genesis 3:15 Jah prophesied or ‘foreknew’ (Greek: form of *proginosko*) Jesus’ sacrifice “before the founding of the world” (1 Peter 1:19-20 [discussed further below]). Since Jah is God and sovereign over all things, his purpose will come to pass as he decreed (Isaiah 55:11). According to Genesis 3:15, Jah’s decree since Adam’s sin involves a “seed” who will ‘crush Satan in the head.’ It is the “seed” of the woman (Genesis 3:15), who is also the “seed” of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), who will be given “rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and languages should all serve even him.”—Daniel 7:14.

But this “kingdom” has also been prepared for those who “belong to Christ,” who are also literally and figuratively “Abraham’s seed” (Genesis 13:14-16; Romans 1:16; Galatians 3:29). These ‘take possession of the kingdom itself,’ and “all the rulerships will serve and obey even them” (Daniel 7:22, 27). According to the Bible, the ‘preparations’ for this kingdom have been taking place “from the founding of the world,” which began *after* Adam’s disobedience.

Here is the third example:

(3) Luke 11:50 (with verses 49 and 51):

On this account the wisdom of God [Jesus (Matthew 23:34)] also said, ‘I will send forth to them prophets and apostles, and they will kill and persecute some of them, so that the blood of all the prophets spilled from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*] may be required from this generation, from the blood of Abel down to the blood of Zech·a·ri’ah, who was slain between the altar and the house.

In this account Jesus himself defines the “founding of the world” when he says that “*from* the founding of the world” is “*from* ... Abel” (italics added to both), for Abel was one of the first two children begotten by Adam and Eve. But Abel is the one who is named (not Cain) as he was the first “prophet” whose

“blood [was] spilled from the founding of the world.” From this time,” Abel was the first “prophet” whose blood was “spilled.”

(4) John 17:24 (with verse 25):

Father, as to what you have given me, I wish that, where I am, they also may be with me, in order to behold my glory that you have given me, because you loved me before the founding of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*]. Righteous Father, the world has, indeed, not come to know you; but I have come to know you, and these have come to know that you sent me forth.

Jesus here refers to his pre-human existence with the Father in the heavens (John 3:13; 6:38 [see Chapter 3]), and the love the Father had for him “before” he was ‘sent forth,’ “before” even the “founding of the world.” I understand this “founding” to be the same “founding” or “foundation” referred to in the examples considered to this point. This means the Father loved the Son “before” the time when Adam and Eve began to have children, and their children came to be the “world” that God “so loved” (John 3:16), though he loved the Son “before” he loved us.—John 3:35.

(5) Ephesians 1:4 (with verses 3 and 5):

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ, just as he chose us in union with him before the founding of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*], that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love. For he foreordained us to the adoption through Jesus Christ as sons to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

“Before the founding of the world” God chose people in connection with his prophecy concerning the promised “seed,” either specifically due to the defined personality that would be born through the families of the earth, or as a general type or class of people in whom he takes delight (Psalm 147:11; Isaiah 46:10; Romans 2:10-11; 1 Corinthians 2:9). These are the ones whom Jah chose “according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians

1:5). Then he molds those whom he chooses like clay so they “walk in” the works he has prepared for them (Romans 8:28-29; 9:21-23; Ephesians 2:10), just as he did for his Son.—John 12:49; 14:10.

There is nothing in Ephesians 1:4 or in its context or in the greater context of the NT as a whole which defines God’s choice of people for adoption as his “sons” as “from all eternity.” There are instead good reasons for understanding God’s choices as occurring in association with his prophecy of the promised “seed,” whom he also chose “before the founding of the world” (Genesis 3:15). Just as God has ‘prepared a kingdom from the founding of the world’ (Matthew 25:34), he has also ‘chosen’ those who will be adopted as his sons, “and if a son, also an heir through God” (Galatians 4:7). Just as he “foreordained” that his Son would “bruise” the head of the “serpent” (Satan), Jah also “foreordained” or “defined beforehand” (Greek: *pro’orisis*) those who “belong” to the promised “seed.”—Galatians 3:29.

Jah knows “beforehand” those whom he “patterned after the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29), because he made them (compare Psalm 139:16; Jeremiah 1:5). Jah ‘defined them beforehand’ even as he defined his Son according to his own image (John 14:9; Colossians 1:15). But even though they are so defined or “patterned” beforehand, these ‘adopted sons’ must still do the Father’s will (Matthew 7:21; 12:50; 1 John 2:17). God prepares people and their works. But *we* “walk in them,” though without any basis for boasting, as if we did something more than what we should have done or could have done at all without God, on whom we all depend.—Romans 9:16; Ephesians 2:8-10.

(6) Hebrews 4:3 (with verses 4 and 5):

For we who have exercised faith do enter into the rest, just as he has said: “So I swore in my anger, ‘They shall not enter into my rest,’” although his works were finished from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*]. For in one place he has said of the seventh day as follows: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works,” and again in this place: “They shall not enter into my rest.”

Here the 'finishing of his works' is said to have taken place "from the founding of the world," which is tied to the time of the "seventh day" of Genesis 2:2. It is on this same seventh day that Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel "with the aid of Jehovah" (Genesis 4:1-2). With the background of Genesis 2:2 here in view, and based on the definitions for "world" given earlier, "founding of the world" in Hebrews 3:4 likely refers to the time from Cain and Abel, as in Luke 11:50-51.

(7) Hebrews 9:26 (with verse 25):

Neither is it in order that he [Jesus Christ] should offer himself often, as indeed the high priest enters into the holy place from year to year with blood not his own. Otherwise, he would have to suffer often from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*]. But now he has manifested himself once for all time at the conclusion of the systems of things to put sin away through the sacrifice of himself.

The 'suffering' of Jesus here again has to do with the prophecy about the "seed" according to Genesis 3:15, where Jah prophesied that Satan would "bruise" the "seed ... in the heel." Redeemable sins began first with those committed by Adam and Eve's children, for they sinned as sinners (Psalm 51:5) while Adam and Eve sinned while sinless. When Jesus came to the earth he offered himself "once for all time" for those who have trusted in God through Jesus "from the founding of the world." Jesus did not "offer himself often," as was the case with the sacrifices offered according to the laws given through Moses.

The time referred to as the "founding of the world" in Hebrews 9:26 appears to be during the seventh day of God's rest. The "offering" Jesus made would have to take effect starting at least with the first persons for whom such an offering could be made. Unless a person believes for good reasons that Adam's and Eve's sins were redeemable by Jesus' sacrifice, then the first redeemable people were "from the founding of the world" were Cain and Abel.

(8) Hebrews 11:11 (with verse 12):

By faith also Sarah herself received power to conceive [*katabolen*] seed, even when she was past the age limit, since she esteemed him faithful who had promised. Hence also from one [man], and him as good as dead, there were born [children] just as the stars of heaven for multitude and as the sands that are by the seaside, innumerable.

This account uses *katabole* explicitly for conception, or “(2) ... *sowing* of seed.” Therefore, no further comment on this text is needed. Here is the ninth example:

(9) 1 Peter 1:20 (with verses 17-19):

Furthermore, if YOU are calling upon the Father who judges impartially according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves with fear during the time of YOUR alien residence. For YOU know that it was not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, that YOU were delivered from YOUR fruitless form of conduct received by tradition from YOUR forefathers. But it was with precious blood, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, even Christ’s. True, he was foreknown before the founding of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*], but he was made manifest at the end of the times for the sake of YOU.

Here the use of “before the founding of the world” reminds me of the usage in Ephesians 1:4, in that it speaks of that which was “foreknown” but not actually made manifest until long after the time when it was foreknown. In this case, as with Ephesians 1:4, Jesus’ sacrificial “blood” was foreknown from the time of Genesis 3:15, regarding the ‘bruising’ of the “seed’s” “heel.” In this prophecy, Jah ‘foreknew’ the death of the Christ “before the foundation of the world,” which death was necessary only after Adam and Even sinned by disobeying God.

(10) Revelation 13:8:

And all those who dwell on the earth will worship it [the “wild beast”]; the name of not one of them stands written in the scroll of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered, from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*].

Here we have basically the same teaching as in 1 Peter 1:20, namely, that Jesus' death was "foreknown before the founding of the world, but he was made manifest at the end of the times." Revelation 13:8 speaks about this death with such certainty that it is as if it actually happened "from the founding of the world." But according to Hebrews 9:26 this was not necessary since Jesus offered "himself once for all time at the conclusion of the systems of things" (underlining added). The 'slaughtering' of the "Lamb" mentioned in the above example is again a reference to the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, about the 'bruising of the seed's heel,' a prophecy that was given "before the founding of the world."

(11) Revelation 17:8:

The wild beast that you saw was, but is not, and yet is about to ascend out of the abyss, and it is to go off into destruction. And when they see how the wild beast was, but is not, and yet will be present, those who dwell on the earth will wonder admiringly, but their names have not been written upon the scroll of life from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*].

"The scroll of life." It is not said to have names written in it "from all eternity," or even "*before* the founding of the world," but rather "from the founding of the world." Since "death" did not even 'enter into the world' until Adam's sin (Romans 5:12), a "scroll of life" like this one would not have been needed before that time. After death resulted from sin through Adam and Eve, then "from" the time of their children the "world" of mankind that "God so loved" (John 3:16), the "scroll of life" has been open with names written in (Revelation 17:8) and names 'wiped out' of it (Exodus 32:33; Psalm 69:28). But what exactly is this "scroll of life" and, more importantly, on what basis are the names of people "written upon" or "wiped out" of it?

"The Scroll of Life." Jah never intended for humankind to die (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:3). He gave Adam and Eve life (Genesis 2:7), and Jah gave them the earth and all that is in it, along with his great love and blessing (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:6-8). Indeed, as noted in the texts in Genesis 2:16-17 and 3:3, the first time

death is mentioned in the Bible is in connection with mankind's disobedience to the one who made us. Jah made humans in his image (Genesis 1:26) and he gave us the authority and the ability to make certain choices on our own, within our created sphere of existence. This is "free will." It is because of this "free will" that apart from any enslavement to sin Adam and Eve were able to disobey Jah God, even for no good reason.—Genesis 3:6.

Since "sin entered into the world and death through sin" (Romans 5:12), humans have been unable to completely satisfy Jah God to the point where he will let us live forever before him without redemption. No one has earned his or her own salvation, or that of another (Psalm 3:8; 37:9; 49:7; 2 Timothy 1:9), except for Jesus of Nazareth (Hebrews 4:15; 5:8-10). But Jah God takes delight in many who choose to love him, who trust him, who put faith in him and in his Son. To such ones, Jah chooses to give salvation and life everlasting apart from sin and death.—Psalm 18:19; James 2:5.

In the previous section I presented Revelation 17:8, which speaks in part about those who "wonder admiringly" at the "wild beast," and how "their names have not been written upon the scroll of life from the founding of the world." From this NT text it is clear that a "scroll of life" has been prepared "from the founding of the world." Some names are not written in this "scroll" (such as those who 'admire' the "wild beast") while other names are "written down in the book" (Daniel 12:1). Some names can even be "blotted" or "wiped" out of this "scroll," which means of course that the "blotted" or "wiped" out names were once in the "scroll of life," but then removed from it.—Exodus 32:33; Psalm 69:28; Revelation 3:5.

In association with what has been presented in this chapter, I believe there are sufficient good reasons for understanding "the scroll of life from the founding of the world" as an ongoing record of names of people who have been "bought" by Jah, or given life by means of Jesus' blood, "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9; 7:13-14). Those who are not written in the "scroll of life," as well as those who are "wiped out" of it, will not receive this life. Jah 'pays attention and listens' to the affairs of men and women, and he keeps "a

book of remembrance ... for those in fear of Jehovah and for those thinking upon his name.”—Malachi 3:16.

Jesus Christ also has authority over this “scroll” or “book” of life, for he promises not to “blot out” any of the names of those who “conquer” (Revelation 3:5). Conquering in this way means ‘observing [Jesus] deeds down to the end’ (Revelation 2:26). Those who ‘carry on a disgusting thing and a lie’ (Revelation 21:27) will not be written in it. But ‘conquering’ in this way does not mean that those who do so are responsible for their own salvation. Was the evil-doer who died alongside Jesus, but who asked Jesus to ‘remember [him] when [Jesus] gets into [his] kingdom,’ responsible for his own salvation because of that one act of faith (Luke 23:42)? Consider the entire account:

Luke 23:39-43

But one of the hung evildoers began to say abusively to him: “You are the Christ, are you not? Save yourself and us.” In reply the other rebuked him and said: “Do you not fear God at all, now that you are in the same judgment? And we, indeed, justly so, for we are receiving in full what we deserve for things we did; but this [man] did nothing out of the way.” And he went on to say: “Jesus, remember me when you get into your kingdom.” And he said to him: “Truly I tell you today, You will be with me in Paradise.”³⁴ [Underlining added.]

The evil-doer “rebuked” his fellow criminal. He admitted that he was deserving of death. And he expressed his faith in Jesus by asking him to “remember” him. By means of these things, this one showed that he ‘feared God’ unlike the other criminal. During this time, perhaps more so than any other time in this history of the earth (with the Son’s death before him), Jah the Father was “paying attention and listening” (Malachi 3:16). Indeed:

³⁴ For a discussion about the punctuation and translation of Jesus’ words in Lu 23:43 according to the NWT and other NT translations, see my Appendix A in the Second Edition of this book (2002), pages 545-560. A revised version of this Appendix will be made available online through *IN MEDIO* at www.elihubooks.com.

Romans 2:6-10

And he will render to each one according to his works: everlasting life to those who are seeking glory and honor and incorruptibleness by endurance in work that is good; however, for those who are contentious and who disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness there will be wrath and anger, tribulation and distress, upon the soul of every man who works what is injurious, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory and honor and peace for everyone who works what is good. [Underlining added.]

Jah and Jesus understand that we are sinners, who at times fail to do what is right and who instead do what is wrong. But there is a clear difference between failing at times while trying to do what is right and being “contentious” while ‘disobeying the truth and obeying unrighteousness.’ While we must let God judge such things ultimately, when we do fail we must be strong, and we must have hope. For Jah has given those who believe and those who trust in him, in spite of our sin, the means for a peaceful life with him:

1 John 2:1-6

My little children, I am writing YOU these things that YOU may not commit a sin. And yet, if anyone does commit a sin, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one. And he is a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, yet not for ours only but also for the whole world’s. And by this we have the knowledge that we have come to know him, namely, if we continue observing his commandments. He that says: “I have come to know him,” and yet is not observing his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this [person]. [Underlining added.]

Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Christian Witnesses of Jah, must never let the salvation God offers through Jesus become a burden (compare Matthew 11:30). Lovers of Jah and Jesus do not cause others to think less of themselves and about their relationship with God because they have not “done enough,” according to human standards. We can *never* ‘do enough,’ if by “enough” it is

meant that we can earn a righteous standing before God on our own. Those who try to do so or who create a false hope in others by having them believe that loyalty to men is the same thing as loyalty to God, have put themselves “in opposition” to and have lifted themselves “up over everyone who is called ‘god’ or an object of reverence.”—2 Thessalonians 2:4.

If we instead continue “observing *his* commandments,” we can be assured that if we do sin then we can trust that we will be forgiven. But Christians should do everything possible to avoid falling into the trap of pleasing men, as if man’s commands are God’s commands (compare Isaiah 29:13). *Listen to Jah! Listen to Jesus.* Question *mankind*. By this I do not mean we cannot learn from each other, or listen to the teachings of those who are “working hard ... in [the] Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5:12). As Christians, we are also told to “be in subjection to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except by God” (Romans 13:1). Listening to or subjecting ourselves to others does not mean we “believe every inspired expression.” If our beliefs are based on good reasons, then we can “test the inspired expressions to see whether they originate with God, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world.”—1 John 4:1.

Each of us knows what is right and what is wrong once we reach a certain age (Isaiah 7:15-16). It is our responsibility, therefore, to do what we can to show with good reasons that the ways of Jah are “righteous and true” (Revelation 15:3-4), even as he judges us ‘individually according to our deeds’:

Revelation 20:11-13

And I saw a great white throne and the one seated on it. From before him the earth and the heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and scrolls were opened. But another scroll was opened; it is the scroll of life. And the dead were judged out of those things written in the scrolls according to their deeds. And the sea gave up those dead in it, and death and Ha´des gave up those dead in them, and they were judged individually according to their deeds. [Underlining added.]

Chapter Summary

Though we are judged according to our “deeds,” no one can earn salvation. It is a gift! It is given to those who did not earn it, who cannot earn it, and who should be ever thankful and gracious by showing respect and honor “to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Revelation 7:10). It is the freedom of Jah that allowed Adam to choose life or death in Eden, and it is Jah’s freedom which permits us to believe in him now and to live “with everlasting life in view through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Romans 5:21.

Some today believe Jah determined all things “from eternity,” and that he therefore cannot learn from what he creates. But the Bible does not support either of these teachings, and in fact what the Bible does teach about the foreknowledge of Jah contradicts Reformed theology. Jah God can and has changed some of his decrees, and he even ‘felt regret’ and allowed others made in his image to “soften” him with good reasons.—Exodus 32:11-14.

The “scroll of life from the founding of the world” may have names written in (Revelation 17:8) and names ‘wiped’ or ‘blotted out’ (Exodus 32:33; Psalm 69:28; Revelation 3:5). None of us can earn salvation. It is God’s gift (Ephesians 2:8). Though life is a gift from the Father, the choices we make will in large part determine whether God chooses to find us “acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35). As we rely on Jesus’ sacrifice for forgiveness, we can make choices which show our faith and love for what is right while we fight with ourselves against doing what is bad (Romans 7:16-20). This way we can fight against slavery to sin and use our “free will” to do good, as Joseph did:

Genesis 39:7-9

Now after these things it came about that the wife of his master began to raise her eyes toward Joseph and say: “Lie down with me.” But he would refuse and would say to his master’s wife: “Here my master does not know what is with me in the house, and everything he has he has given into my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I am, and he has not withheld from me anything at all except you, because you are his wife. So

how could I commit this great badness and actually sin against God?" [Underlining added.]

Being a slave of sin by being a child born through Adam and Eve did not force Joseph to sin in this instance. He *chose* to resist his sinful nature and to reject Potiphar's wife. This illustrates the biblical teaching concerning the free will of mankind, as did the criminal who believed just as he was about to die alongside Jesus. *Then*, after *his* belief, Jesus gave him the promise of life, not because he earned it at the end of his life, but because he believed and trusted that Jesus would "remember" him (Luke 23:42-43). That trust is all one needs to receive the "free gift of God."—John 4:10.

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Christian Witnesses of Jah reject Reformed theology, for we believe it to be a contradiction to the biblical teachings concerning Jah's sovereignty, his decrees, and the "free will" of mankind. Reformed theology, like many other unbiblical theologies, uses biblical words and it will cite and quote the Bible as if it supports what it teaches. I, too, have used biblical words, cited scripture, and quoted it where appropriate to support my claims and to defend the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses. Now each person must take up the challenge of evaluating each side to see who has presented the best available reasons for belief.

While I have defended Jehovah's Witnesses on the subjects considered in this chapter, this must be understood within the context of the present separation of Jehovah's Witnesses into those who are loyal to the men who control the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, and those Jehovah's Witnesses who reject traditions of men that can be shown to contradict the best available reasons for belief found in the Bible. Many of these latter ones, including myself, make this separation clear to all by bearing witness to Jah and to Jesus as Christian Witnesses (see Chapter 10).

While these two groups of Witnesses agree on many biblical teachings, the loyalty of the former group to the Watchtower Society means that they refuse in large part to stand up publicly and to debate false teachers by "overturning reasonings and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God," as well as by "bringing every thought into captivity to make it obedient to the

Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). The Christian Witnesses of Jah will not follow the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society in allowing “deceivers of the mind” to continue ‘disrespecting’ Jah’s name to the extent they have done (Psalm 74:10, 18; Titus 1:10). True, we depend on Jah and on Jesus for strength and for hope, but our hope and our trust in them are for good reasons. Thus, if we are only “two or three,” or more, Jah’s Christian Witnesses are ready to help others and to teach what is true for good reasons in Jesus’ name, and for Jah’s name, for his glory, and for his praise!—Matthew 18:20; John 7:18; Romans 10:10; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6.