

# Reference Document

“Obey—Even When It’s Dangerous: How the Watchtower’s Language Escalated”  
Every Claim, Source, and Verification Status

## How to Use This Document

Each entry identifies a specific factual claim made in the video, the source it is based on, where to verify it, and any notes on confidence level. Claims are organized in the order they appear in the video. Every Watchtower quotation can be read in full, free, on the Watchtower's own online library at wol.jw.org.

Verification levels:

- **PRIMARY** — Sourced from court rulings, official Watchtower publications and broadcasts (including the Watchtower Online Library), or peer-reviewed research. Primary sources can stand on their own.
- **SECONDARY** — Sourced from established academic researchers, scholarly archives, or reputable reference works. Secondary sources support claims and are strongest when paired with a primary source.

## SECTION 1: The Talk

**Claim:** On its June 2026 morning-worship broadcast, the Watchtower aired a talk by Jonathan Smith titled "Faithfully Obey in What Is Least," built on Luke 16:10, urging Jehovah's Witnesses to obey the organization's instructions.

- **Source:** JW Broadcasting (tv.jw.org), Morning Worship program, June 2026 — Jonathan Smith, *Faithfully Obey in What Is Least*
- **URL:** [jw.org/broadcasting](http://www.jw.org/broadcasting)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the Watchtower's own official broadcast.

**Claim:** The talk states that obedience in small matters can determine whether a Witness survives the coming great tribulation.

- **Source:** JW Broadcasting, *Faithfully Obey in What Is Least* (June 2026), opening remarks
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the talk's own words.
- **Key quote:** “our obedience in small matters may actually affect our survival during the coming great tribulation”

**Claim:** The talk uses the Red Sea crossing to teach that Witnesses should obey even instructions that appear to put them in danger.

- **Source:** JW Broadcasting, *Faithfully Obey in What Is Least* (June 2026)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the talk's own words.
- **Key quote:** “what if instructions from Jehovah's organization seem to put us in danger, as when Israel appeared to be trapped at the Red Sea?”

## SECTION 2: The Escalation — The Watchtower's Own Words, 2007–2024

**Claim:** In 2007 the Watchtower tied surviving the great tribulation to obedience: "keeping in step" with the organization.

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, December 2007
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** “we may well receive some detailed instructions. Our safe journey through those troublesome days will depend on our keeping in step with other loyal servants of Jehovah.”

**Claim: The Simplified Edition of the April 15, 2012 Watchtower stated that Christians "will be saved only if" they obey the instructions received during the great tribulation.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Simplified English Edition), April 15, 2012, "Jehovah Knows How to Deliver His People," ¶16
- **URL:** [jw.org](http://jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** "Christians will need to obey instructions from God's Word and organization. . . . We will be saved only if we obey the instructions we receive at that time."

**Claim: The regular Study Edition of that same April 15, 2012 article worded it more softly than the Simplified Edition.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), April 15, 2012, "Jehovah Knows How to Deliver His People," ¶16
- **URL:** [jw.org](http://jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Note:** The video's point is the contrast: the plainer-language edition states the requirement most starkly.
- **Key quote:** "our deliverance will depend on obedience"

**Claim: In 2013 the Watchtower instructed members to obey any instructions "whether these appear sound from a strategic or human standpoint or not."**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, November 15, 2013
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** "All of us must be ready to obey any instructions we may receive, whether these appear sound from a strategic or human standpoint or not."

**Claim: In 2021 the Watchtower acknowledged that those taking the lead "may give direction that does not make sense to us," and said to obey anyway.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), November 2021, Study Article 47, ¶11
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** "At times, those appointed to take the lead may give direction that does not make sense to us. However, Jehovah blesses obedience."

**Claim: In March 2022 the Watchtower told members to obey survival instructions even for "a natural disaster that we think is unlikely to occur in our area."**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), March 2022
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** "we may receive specific instructions designed to prepare us to survive a natural disaster that we think is unlikely to occur in our area."

**Claim: The December 2022 Watchtower removed the last condition: obey "even if you do not fully understand why it is being given."**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), December 2022
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** "Do your best to obey the direction you receive, even if you do not fully understand why it is being given."

**Claim: The same December 2022 article instructs members not to reveal information about fellow Witnesses or congregation activities "to those who are not entitled to it," and (in the next paragraph) frames the era as one in which "Satan wages war against God's people."**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), December 2022
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Note:** The video raises the open question of who the Watchtower regards as “not entitled” to such information; the article does not specify. The interpretation offered is editorial.
- **Key quote:** “Also, never reveal information about our brothers and sisters or about congregation activities to those who are not entitled to it.”

**Claim: A senior Watchtower attorney was sanctioned by a U.S. federal court for submitting a misleading sworn affidavit, and the sanction was upheld on appeal.**

- **Source:** *Caekaert/Mapley v. Watch Tower* (D. Mont.), sanctions order (Apr. 14, 2023); affirmed, *U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit* (July 7, 2025)
- **URL:** [Ninth Circuit opinion \(PDF\)](#)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — federal court rulings.
- **Note:** Watch Tower General Counsel Philip Brumley was sanctioned under 28 U.S.C. §1927 for an affidavit the court found showed “a reckless disregard for providing an accurate and truthful accounting.” The precise amount was \$154,448.11 (the video rounds to ~\$150,000); the Ninth Circuit affirmed it on July 7, 2025. “Lied under oath” is the creator’s characterization of the court’s reckless-disregard finding. See also the case summary at [jwchildabuse.org](http://jwchildabuse.org) (SECONDARY).

**Claim: In late 2023 the Watchtower described members' obedience during the COVID-19 shutdown as preparation that leaves them "better prepared to obey any instructions we receive during the great tribulation," adding "Our lives may depend on it!"**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), October 2023, “Are You Ready to Obey?”
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** “your obedience protected you, united you with fellow believers, and pleased Jehovah. All of us are now better prepared to obey any instructions we receive during the great tribulation. Our lives may depend on it!”

**Claim: During the early COVID-19 pandemic (2020) the organization directed Witnesses to stop meeting at Kingdom Halls and to suspend the house-to-house ministry.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), October 2023 (recounting the 2020 direction)
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.

**Claim: In 2024 the Watchtower acknowledged its guidance is "conveyed by imperfect men," and framed a member's feeling that direction "is unwise" and "must not be from Jehovah" as a temptation to overcome.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), February 2024
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** “we might occasionally find it a challenge to follow Jehovah’s guidance, especially when it is conveyed by imperfect men. . . . we might feel that the direction we receive is unwise and conclude that the counsel must not be from Jehovah.”

**Claim: The Governing Body has stated of itself that it is "neither inspired nor infallible" and can "err in doctrinal matters or in organizational direction."**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), February 2017, "Who Is Leading God's People Today?", ¶12
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** "The Governing Body is neither inspired nor infallible. Therefore, it can err in doctrinal matters or in organizational direction."

### SECTION 3: "Dangerous" Is a New Word in This Teaching

**Claim: Across decades of Watchtower literature, the framing of an instruction one should obey as one that "seems to put us in danger" is new to this 2026 talk; in the context of obeying the organization, that danger framing had not appeared before.**

- **Source:** Creator analysis — full-text review of the Watchtower Online Library ([wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org))
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org) ([searchable library](#))
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the underlying library is the Watchtower's own and is publicly searchable, so any reader can repeat the search.
- **Note:** This is the creator's own search finding, offered so viewers can verify it themselves; the prior appearances of the word in unrelated older magazines (e.g., articles on accidents or chemicals) are not in the obey-the-organization context.

### SECTION 4: How Compliance Is Built (The Mechanism)

**Claim: "Faithful in what is least" (Luke 16:10) describes the foot-in-the-door technique: a small initial compliance makes a larger later compliance more likely.**

- **Source:** Freedman, J. L., & Fraser, S. C. (1966), "Compliance Without Pressure: The Foot-in-the-Door Technique," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4(2), 195–202
- **URL:** [doi.org](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.4.2.195)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — peer-reviewed psychology research.

**Claim: Coercive thought reform works incrementally — the person is changed "a step at a time" without it being obviously visible to them.**

- **Source:** Margaret Thaler Singer, Ph.D., "Thought Reform Today"
- **URL:** [cultrecovery101.com](http://cultrecovery101.com)
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — a leading clinical authority on coercive persuasion.
- **Note:** This exact wording is Margaret Singer's; the underlying gradualism concept builds on Robert Jay Lifton's *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (W. W. Norton, 1961) — see [the book](#).
- **Key quote:** "The changes occur incrementally without it being patently visible to those undergoing the process that their attitudes and behavior are being changed a step at a time according to the plan of those directing the program."

### SECTION 5: The Comparison (Mechanism, Not Prediction)

**Claim: At Jonestown, Jim Jones ran drills called "White Nights" that included simulated mass suicides — members drank a liquid they were told was poison — presented afterward as loyalty tests.**

- **Source:** Ann Kristin Svendsen, "White Nights in Guyana: Leadership, Conformity and Persuasion in Jonestown and Peoples Temple," *Alternative Considerations of Jonestown & Peoples Temple* (San Diego State University)
- **URL:** [jonestown.sdsu.edu](http://jonestown.sdsu.edu)
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — university scholarly archive (corroborated by Temple defector Deborah Layton's sworn affidavit).

**Claim: These rehearsals functioned to build behavioral commitment, making members more likely to repeat the act — so that the final, real mass death was largely a repetition of previously practiced behavior.**

- **Source:** Ann Kristin Svendsen, "White Nights in Guyana" (San Diego State University)
- **URL:** [jonestown.sdsu.edu](http://jonestown.sdsu.edu)
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — university scholarly archive.
- **Note:** The video's phrase "prepared members first to accept, and then commit, even more extreme acts" is a paraphrase of this scholarly finding, not a verbatim quotation.
- **Key quote:** "the White Nights functioned to build up a form of behavioral commitment that increased the chances of repeating this behavior at a later stage, should it be necessary to do so."

**Claim: Heaven's Gate ended in the 1997 deaths of 39 members who took their own lives on the leadership's instruction.**

- **Source:** Encyclopædia Britannica, "Heaven's Gate"
- **URL:** [britannica.com](http://britannica.com)
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — reputable reference work.

**Claim: The Order of the Solar Temple ended in a series of member deaths across 1994–1997 carried out on the leadership's direction.**

- **Source:** Encyclopædia Britannica, "Order of the Solar Temple"
- **URL:** [britannica.com](http://britannica.com)
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — reputable reference work.

**Claim: The comparison drawn in the video is to the conditioning mechanism (escalating, rehearsed obedience), and is explicitly not a prediction that Jehovah's Witnesses will do what these groups did.**

- **Source:** Creator analysis / editorial — stated as such in the video
- **Verification:** Editorial framing — not a factual claim requiring external verification.

## SECTION 6: The Rebuttal — The Exodus Argument

**Claim: The talk argues from the Exodus — the Israelites obeyed strange instructions (the Passover lamb, asking the Egyptians for gold, camping at the Red Sea) — and applies that to obeying the organization today.**

- **Source:** JW Broadcasting, *Faithfully Obey in What Is Least* (June 2026); cf. Exodus chs. 11–14
- **URL:** [Exodus 12 \(jw.org\)](http://Exodus 12 (jw.org))
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the talk's own words and the Bible text it cites.

**Claim: The talk itself notes that God authenticated Moses publicly: "with each plague, Jehovah repeatedly showed he was using Moses," then applies the lesson to "Jehovah's organization, the faithful and discreet slave."**

- **Source:** JW Broadcasting, *Faithfully Obey in What Is Least* (June 2026)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the talk's own words.
- **Key quote:** "With each plague, Jehovah repeatedly showed he was using Moses and Aaron. And has he not done so today? . . . we have repeatedly been guided by wise direction from Jehovah's organization, "the faithful and discreet slave.""

**Claim: The Israelites in the Exodus obeyed after God had proven the source with public, verifiable signs, whereas the organization asks for the same obedience without comparable proof — so the analogy does not hold.**

- **Source:** Creator analysis / editorial opinion
- **Verification:** Editorial argument — not a factual claim requiring external verification.

## SECTION 7: Additional Supporting Sources

**Claim: Watchtower Online Library (the organization's own full-text publication archive)**

- **Source:** Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society
- **URL:** [wol.jw.org](http://wol.jw.org)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY
- **Note:** Every Watchtower quotation in this video can be read in full context here.

**Claim: Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals — companion opinion in the related sanctions appeal**

- **Source:** U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit (July 7, 2025)
- **URL:** [ca9.uscourts.gov](https://ca9.uscourts.gov) (PDF)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY
- **Note:** Background on the related Watch Tower sanctions litigation.