

# Reference Document

## “The Great Rebrand: Everything Watchtower Quietly Reversed in Three Years”

*Every Claim, Source, and Verification Status*

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### 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.

#### Verification levels:

- **PRIMARY** — sourced from court filings, official Watchtower publications and broadcasts (including the internal elders’ manual *Shepherd the Flock of God*), government or regulatory records, official statements, or established research such as the Pew Research Center. Primary sources can stand on their own.
- **SECONDARY** — sourced from reputable investigative journalism or established legal and advocacy resource sites. Secondary sources support a claim and are strongest when paired with a primary or another independent source.

Where the video offers interpretation or opinion rather than a hard fact — for example, the argument that these changes are *driven* by legal and demographic pressure — that is my analysis of the documented timeline, and I’ve noted it as such. The underlying facts (what changed, when, and the lawsuits and figures involved) are each sourced below.

**About the list:** This video responds to a list of changes that an ex-Witness compiled and posted on the r/exjw community. That post is where I started — it is the starting point, not a source on its own. Every change below is verified against Watchtower’s own publications and broadcasts. You can read the original post here: [reddit.com — r/exjw](https://www.reddit.com/r/exjw/), “Watchtower is Rebranding, here is the list of changes”.

## SECTION 1: The Core Admission

**Claim: Watchtower’s current flagship study book states that the organization adjusts its beliefs.**

- **Source:** *Enjoy Life Forever!—An Interactive Bible Course* (book), page 82, “Did You Know?” box.
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1102021219>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the organization’s own current teaching publication.
- **Key quote:** “although the Bible does not change, we adjust our beliefs as our understanding of the Bible improves”

**Claim: Jehovah’s Witnesses report roughly nine million members worldwide.**

- **Source:** 2024 Service Year Report of Jehovah’s Witnesses Worldwide (Watchtower’s own annual report): 9,043,460 peak publishers; 8,828,124 average.
- **jw.org:** <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2024-Service-Year-Report-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses-Worldwide/2024-Grand-Totals/>
- **Watchtower Online Library:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1102024815>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower’s own published figure.

*Note:* I use Watchtower’s own number; their counting method only includes those who turn in a preaching report.

## SECTION 2: Reporting, Beards, and Education

**Claim: At the October 2023 Annual Meeting, Governing Body member Samuel Herd announced that rank-and-file publishers would no longer report a count of their hours, effective November 1, 2023.**

- **Source:** *JW Broadcasting—November 2023: Annual Meeting 2023, Part 1* (segment: “The History of Reporting Field Service Activity”), [jw.org](http://jw.org).
- **Verify:** [https://www.jw.org/en/library/videos/?item=pub-jwb-108\\_3\\_VIDEO](https://www.jw.org/en/library/videos/?item=pub-jwb-108_3_VIDEO)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower broadcast.
- **Key quote:** “beginning November 1, 2023, congregation publishers will no longer be asked to report the amount of time they spend in the ministry”

**Claim: Publishers had been asked to report their field-service activity since 1920 — making this the first time in 103 years that the requirement was lifted.**

- **Source:** Same broadcast, “The History of Reporting Field Service Activity” (states the practice began in 1920).
- **Verify:** [https://www.jw.org/en/library/videos/?item=pub-jwb-108\\_3\\_VIDEO](https://www.jw.org/en/library/videos/?item=pub-jwb-108_3_VIDEO)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower broadcast.

**Claim: In December 2023 the Governing Body announced on camera that whether a brother wears a beard is now a personal decision — including at Bethel and for circuit overseers.**

- **Source:** *2023 Governing Body Update #8*, [jw.org](http://jw.org).
- **Verify:** <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/global/2023-Governing-Body-Update-8/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower broadcast.
- **Key quote:** “whether a brother wears a beard is a personal decision ... based on his spirituality, not on whether he chooses to wear a beard”

**Claim: Watchtower renamed “higher education” to “additional education” and reframed it as a personal decision no one should be judged for.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), May 2026, “Make Wise Decisions Regarding Additional Education”; and *2025 Governing Body Update #5* (August 2025).
- **Article:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2026402>
- **Broadcast:** <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/global/2025-Governing-Body-Update-5/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication and broadcast.
- **Key quote:** “no Christian—including the elders—should judge a fellow Christian’s personal decision on this matter”

## SECTION 3: Shunning

**Claim: As recently as September 2017, the congregation meeting workbook had members study a video titled “Loyally Uphold Jehovah’s Judgments—Shun Unrepentant Wrongdoers.”**

- **Source:** *Our Christian Life and Ministry—Meeting Workbook*, September 2017, page 8 (segment “Be Loyal When a Relative Is Disfellowshipped”).
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/202017329>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.

**Claim: In 2024 Watchtower replaced “disfellowshipped” with “removed” and said some members may feel comfortable greeting or welcoming an expelled person at the meeting.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), August 2024, “Help for Those Who Are Removed From the Congregation.”
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2024534>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** “Some may feel comfortable with greeting or welcoming the person to the meeting”

**Claim: Elders were directed to meet with a wrongdoer more than once to give him time to repent.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), August 2024 study edition.
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2024534>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** “the elders may meet with a wrongdoer more than once in order to give him time to repent”

**Claim: The elders’ manual now directs two elders to reach out to a removed person every six months.**

- **Source:** *Shepherd the Flock of God* (2025 edition), the organization’s confidential manual for elders, reinstatement chapter.
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the organization’s internal elders’ manual.
- **Key quote:** “two elders will endeavor to reach out to him every six months thereafter”

*Note:* This is an internal manual not posted publicly by the organization; the same softening direction is reflected in the public August 2024 Watchtower cited above.

**Claim: Watchtower softened its shunning language in 2024 while fighting a Norwegian case over its exclusion practices — losing in the lower courts (2024 and early 2025) before winning a narrow ruling at Norway’s Supreme Court in 2026.**

- **Source:** Norwegian Supreme Court ruling (April 2026), reported ~3–2 in the organization’s favor; dispute over state registration/funding tied to exclusion of members, including minors.
- **Official statement (PRIMARY):** <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/norway/Norwegian-Supreme-Court-Is-sues-Significant-Ruling-in-Favor-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses/>
- **Coverage (SECONDARY):** <https://www.friendlyatheist.com/p/norways-highest-court-upholds-state>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY (official statement of the ruling) + SECONDARY (independent coverage of the 3–2 split and lower-court history).

*Note:* To be clear, the organization ultimately WON the Norway case. The point in the video is the timing of the language change, not the final outcome — that connection is my analysis.

## SECTION 4: Dismantling the Urgency

**Claim: Watchtower reversed its long-standing teaching that the door to salvation closes when the Great Tribulation begins, now saying people may respond until just before Armageddon.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), August 2025, “Questions From Readers” (When will the current preaching work end?).
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2025527>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication; the article states it is adjusting its own prior understanding.
- **Key quote:** “This adjusts our earlier understanding. Previously, we understood that we would stop preaching the good news when the great tribulation began”

**Claim: Jehovah’s Witnesses have the lowest retention of any major U.S. religious group — only about a third of those raised in it remain (roughly two in three leave as adults).**

- **Source:** Pew Research Center, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey.
- **Verify:** <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2008/02/01/u-s-religious-landscape-survey-religious-affiliation/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — established demographic research.
- **Key quote:** “Only 37% of all those who say they were raised as Jehovah’s Witnesses still identify themselves as Jehovah’s Witnesses”

**Claim: The same August 2025 article also adjusted the long-taught “hailstone” judgment message (Revelation 16:21), folding it into a longer timeline.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), August 2025, “Questions From Readers.”
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2025527>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.

**Claim: In February 2026 Watchtower reconsidered the order of end-times events — suggesting the world’s “peace and security” declaration may come after the destruction of false religion, not before.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), February 2026, “Questions From Readers.”
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2026285>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** “that is possible, but we cannot be certain”

**Claim: In May 2024 Watchtower reopened its long-held teaching that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah will not be resurrected, raising the possibility that at least some may be.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), May 2024, “Trust in the Merciful ‘Judge of All the Earth’!”
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2024404>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** “there is no hope of a future resurrection. But further prayerful study has raised the question, Can we really say that with certainty?”

**Claim: In November 2025 Watchtower told its elderly members not to be saddened if the end does not come in their lifetime.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), November 2025, “Maintain Your Joy in Old Age.”
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2025640>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- **Key quote:** “Perhaps you are saddened by the possibility that the end of this system will not come in your lifetime”

**Claim: Watchtower encouraged expectations centered on the year 1975, then later acknowledged that its own publications contributed to the buildup of those expectations.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1980, “Choosing the Best Way of Life.”
- **Verify:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1980207>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower’s own later statement.
- **Key quote:** “there were other statements published that implied that such realization of hopes by that year was more of a probability ... It is to be regretted that these latter statements ... contributed to a buildup of the expectation”

## SECTION 5: Blood

**Claim: In March 2026, Governing Body member Gerrit Lösch stated on camera that the Bible does not comment on the use of a person’s own blood.**

- **Source:** *2026 Governing Body Update #2* (March 20, 2026), jw.org.
- **Verify:** <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/global/2026-Governing-Body-Update-2/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower broadcast.
- **Key quote:** “the Bible does not comment on the use of a person’s own blood”

## SECTION 6: The Pattern and the Pressure

**Claim: In late 2024, Governing Body member Geoffrey Jackson gave a talk titled “Don’t Be Surprised by Sudden Changes.”**

- **Source:** Annual Meeting 2024 talk by Geoffrey W. Jackson, in *JW Broadcasting—December 2024: Annual Meeting 2024, Part 1*, jw.org.
- **Verify:** [https://www.jw.org/en/library/videos/?item=pub-jwb-117\\_1\\_VIDEO](https://www.jw.org/en/library/videos/?item=pub-jwb-117_1_VIDEO)
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — official Watchtower broadcast.

**Claim: In November 2025 a lawsuit was filed in New York naming the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses as a defendant, alleging childhood sexual abuse and an institutional cover-up, and seeking at least \$100 million.**

- **Source:** *Gomes De Souza v. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, Inc., et al.*, U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, No. 1:25-cv-09458 (filed Nov. 12, 2025).
- **Court docket (PRIMARY):** <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/71905206/gomes-de-souza-v-watchtower-bible-and-tract-society-of-pennsylvania-inc/>
- **Complaint (PDF):** <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.nysd.652986/gov.uscourts.nysd.652986.1.0.pdf>
- **Coverage (SECONDARY):** <https://avoidjw.org/news/millions-claim-lawsuit-newyork-watchtower-csa/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the filed federal court complaint.

*Note:* These are allegations in a pending lawsuit, not proven findings. The complaint names the plaintiff and the parties; the abuse is alleged to have begun when she was twelve, in Brazil, by a circuit overseer.

## SECTION 7: The Precedent for a Name Change

**Claim: In 2018 the leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints asked that the terms “Mormon” and “LDS” be set aside in favor of the church’s full name.**

- **Source:** Newsroom of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, statement of August 16, 2018.
- **Statement:** <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/name-of-the-church>
- **Style guide:** <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/style-guide>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — the organization’s own official statement.

*Note:* Cited as a parallel/precedent. Whether Watchtower follows a similar path is my prediction, not an established fact.

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Primary documents shown on screen in this video (Watchtower publications, broadcasts, and the court filing) are reproduced from the sources linked above so you can read them in full context. Where a date or figure is Watchtower’s own, the link goes to Watchtower’s own library.