dition, the board of directors of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society made arrangements for an Executive Committee of three—A. I. Ritchie, W. E. Van Amburgh, and J. F. Rutherford—to have general supervision of all the work of the Society, subject to the control of the board of directors.* Who, though, would become the new president? That decision would be made at the next annual meeting of the Society, about two months later, on January 6, 1917.

At first, the Executive Committee did its best to hold things together, encouraging the Bible Students to keep active and not lose courage. The Watch Tower continued to be published, containing articles that Russell had written before his death. But as the annual meeting approached, tension began to mount. Some were even doing a little electioneering to get a man of their choice selected to be president. Others, on account of their deep respect for Brother Russell, seemed more concerned with trying to copy his qualities and develop a sort of cult around him. Most of the Bible Students, however, were primarily interested in getting on with the work into which Russell had poured himself.

As the time for the election approached, the question remained, Who would succeed Russell as president? The Watch Tower of January 15, 1917, reported the outcome of the annual meeting, explaining: “Brother Pierson, with very appropriate remarks and expressions of appreciation and love for Brother Russell, stated that he had received word as proxy-holder from friends all over the land to the effect that he cast their votes for Brother J. F. Rutherford for President, and he further stated that he was in full sympathy with this.” After Rutherford’s name was placed in nomination and seconded, there were no further nominations, so “the Secretary cast the ballot as directed, and Brother Rutherford was declared the unanimous choice of the Convention as President.”

With the election decided, how was the new president received? The Watch Tower mentioned above reported: “The friends everywhere had prayed earnestly for the Lord’s guidance and direction in the matter of the election; and when it was concluded, everyone was content and happy, believing that the Lord had directed their deliberations and answered their prayers. Perfect harmony prevailed amongst all present.”

That “perfect harmony,” however, did not last very long. The new president was warmly received by many but not by all.

* According to the charter of the Watch Tower Society, the board of directors was to be composed of seven members. The charter provided for the surviving members of the board of directors to fill a vacancy. So, two days after Russell’s death, the board of directors met and elected A. N. Pierson to be a member. The seven members of the board at that point were A. I. Ritchie, W. E. Van Amburgh, H. C. Rockwell, J. D. Wright, I. F. Hoskins, A. N. Pierson, and J. F. Rutherford. The seven-member board then elected the Executive Committee of three.
The New President Moves Ahead

Brother Rutherford was inclined, not to change the direction of the organization, but to continue in the forward-moving pattern established by Russell. Traveling representatives of the Society (known as pilgrims) were increased from 69 to 93. Distribution of the Society’s free tracts was accelerated on occasional Sundays in front of the churches and regularly in the house-to-house ministry.

The “pastoral work,” which had been started prior to Russell’s death, was now stepped up. This was a follow-up work, similar to the return-visit activity now carried on by Jehovah’s Witnesses. To further revitalize the preaching work, the Society’s new president expanded the colporteur work. Colporteurs (forerunners of today’s pioneers) were increased from 372 to 461.

“The year 1917 opened with rather a discouraging outlook,” stated The Watch Tower of December 15, 1917. Yes, following the death of C. T. Russell, there were some misgivings, some doubts, and some fears. Yet, the year-end report was encouraging; field activity had increased. Clearly, the work was moving ahead. Had the Bible Students passed another test—the death of C. T. Russell—successfully?

Efforts to Gain Control

Not everyone was supportive of the new president. C. T. Russell and J. F. Rutherford were very different men. They had different personalities and came from different backgrounds. These differences were hard for some to accept. In their minds, no one could “fill Brother Russell’s shoes.”

A few, especially at headquarters, actually resented Brother Rutherford. The fact that the work was moving ahead and that he was making every effort to follow the arrangements that had been put in place by Russell did not seem to impress them. Opposition soon mounted. Four members of the board of directors of the Society went so far as to endeavor to wrest administrative control from Rutherford’s hands. The situation came to a head in the summer of 1917, with the release of The Finished Mystery,
the seventh volume of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

Brother Russell had been unable to produce this volume during his lifetime, though he had hoped to do so. Following his death, the Executive Committee of the Society arranged for two associates, Clayton J. Woodworth and George H. Fisher, to prepare this book, which was a commentary on Revelation, The Song of Solomon, and Ezekiel. In part, it was based on what Russell had written about these Bible books, and other comments and explanations were added. The completed manuscript was approved for publication by officers of the Society and was released to the Bethel family at the dining table on Tuesday, July 17, 1917. On that same occasion, a startling announcement was made—the four opposing directors had been removed, and Brother Rutherford had appointed four others to fill the vacancies. What was the reaction?

It was as if a bombshell had exploded! The four ousted directors seized upon the occasion and stirred up a five-hour controversy before the Bethel family over the administration of the Society’s affairs. A number of the Bethel family sympathized with the opposers. The opposition continued for several weeks, with the disturbers threatening to “overthrow the existing tyranny,” as they put it. But Brother Rutherford had a sound basis for the action he had taken. How so?

It turned out that although the four opposing directors had been appointed by Brother Russell, these appointments had never been confirmed by vote of the corporation members at the annual meeting of the Society. Therefore, the four of them were not legal members of the board of

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**J. F. Rutherford’s Background**

Joseph Franklin Rutherford was born of Baptist parents on a farm in Morgan County, Missouri, U.S.A., on November 8, 1869. When Joseph was 16, his father consented to his attending college, provided that he pay his own way and that he pay for a hired laborer to take his place on the farm. A determined young man, Joseph secured a loan from a friend and managed to go to college while also studying law.

After completing his academy education, Rutherford spent two years under the tutelage of Judge E. L. Edwards. By the time he was 20, he became the official court reporter for the courts of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit in Missouri. On May 5, 1892, his license to practice law in Missouri was granted. Rutherford later served for four years as public prosecutor for Boonville, Missouri. Still later, he served on occasion as a special judge in the Eighth Judicial Circuit Court of Missouri. That is why he came to be known as “Judge” Rutherford.

Interestingly, to help pay his way through school, Rutherford sold encyclopedias from house to house. It was not an easy job—there were many rebuffs. On one occasion he almost died when he fell into an icy stream while calling on farms. He promised himself that when he became a lawyer, if anyone ever came to his office selling books, he would buy them. True to his word, he accepted three volumes of “Millennial Dawn” from two colporteurs who appeared at his office early in 1894. Several weeks later he read the books and promptly wrote a letter to the Watch Tower Society, in which he said: “My dear wife and myself have read these books with the keenest interest, and we consider it a God-send and a great blessing that we have had the opportunity of coming in contact with them.” In 1906, Joseph F. Rutherford was baptized, and a year later he became the Watch Tower Society’s legal counsel.
directors at all! Rutherford had been aware of this but had not mentioned it at first. Why not? He had wanted to avoid giving the impression that he was going against Brother Russell’s wishes. However, when it became evident that they would not discontinue their opposition, Rutherford acted within his authority and responsibility as president to replace them with four others whose appointments were to be confirmed at the next annual meeting, to be held in January 1918.

On August 8, the disenchanted ex-directors and their supporters left the Bethel family; they had been asked to leave because of the disturbance they had been creating. They soon began spreading their opposition by an extensive speaking and letter-writing campaign throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. As a result, after the summer of 1917, a number of congregations of Bible Students were split into two groups—those loyal to the Society and those who were easy prey to the smooth talk of the opposers.

But might the ousted directors, in an effort to gain control of the organization, try to influence those attending the annual meeting? Anticipating such a reaction, Rutherford felt it advisable to take a survey of all the congregations. The results? According to the report published in *The Watch Tower* of December 15, 1917, those voting indicated their overwhelming support of J. F. Rutherford and the directors cooperating with him! This was confirmed at the annual meeting. *The opposers’ efforts to gain control had failed!*

What became of those opposers and their supporters? After the January 1918 annual meeting, the opposing ones splintered off, even choosing to celebrate the Memorial, on March 26, 1918, on their own. Any unity they enjoyed was short-lived, and before long they broke up into various sects. In most cases their numbers dwindled and their activity diminished or ceased entirely.

Clearly, following Brother Russell’s death, the Bible Students faced a real test of loyalty. As Tarissa P. Gott, who was baptized in 1915, put it: “Many of those who had seemed so strong, so devoted to the Lord, began to turn away. . . . All of this just did not seem right, yet it was happening and it upset us. But I said to myself: ‘Was not this organization the one that Jehovah used to free us from the bonds of false religion? Have we not tasted of his goodness? If we were to leave now, where would we go? Would we not walk up following some man?’ We could not see why we

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*At the annual meeting held on January 5, 1918, the seven persons receiving the highest number of votes were J. F. Rutherford, C. H. Anderson, W. E. Van Amburgh, A. H. Macmillan, W. E. Spill, J. A. Bohnet, and G. H. Fisher. From these seven board members, the three officers were chosen—J. F. Rutherford as president, C. H. Anderson as vice president, and W. E. Van Amburgh as secretary-treasurer.*
should go with the apostates, so we stayed.”—John 6: 66-69; Heb. 6:4-6.

Some who withdrew from the organization later repented and associated with the Bible Students in worship once again. By far the majority, like Sister Gott, continued to cooperate with the Watch Tower Society and Brother Rutherford. The love and unity that bound them together had been built up through years of association together at meetings and conventions. They would allow nothing to break up that bond of union.—Col. 3:14.

By 1918 the Bible Students had survived testing from within. What, though, if opposition arose from those on the outside?

**Objects of Attack**

Through the close of 1917 and into 1918, the Bible Students energetically distributed the new book, *The Finished Mystery*. By the end of 1917, the printers were busy on the 850,000 edition. *The Watch Tower* of December 15, 1917, reported: “The sale of the Seventh Volume is unparalleled by the sale of any other book known, in the same length of time, excepting the Bible.”

But not everyone was thrilled with the success of *The Finished Mystery*. The book contained some references to the clergy of Christendom that were very cutting. This so angered the clergy that they urged the government to suppress the publications of the Bible Students. As a result of this clergy-inspired opposition, early in 1918, *The Finished Mystery* was banned in Canada. Opposition soon mounted against the Bible Students in the United States.

To expose this clergy-inspired pressure, on March 15, 1918, the Watch Tower Society released the tract *Kingdom News* No. 1. Its message? The six-column-wide headline read: “Religious Intolerance —Pastor Russell’s Followers Persecuted Because They Tell the People the Truth.” Below the heading “Treatment of Bible Students Smacks of the ‘Dark Ages’” were set forth the facts of the persecution and the ban that had begun in

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*No Men on Earth More Highly Favored*

On June 21, 1918, J. F. Rutherford and several of his close associates were sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment, having been falsely convicted of conspiracy. Their feelings? In a handwritten letter dated June 22-23 (shown below), from the Raymond Street jail in Brooklyn, New York, Brother Rutherford wrote: “There are probably no men on earth today more highly favored and who are happier than the seven brethren now in prison. They are conscious of their entire innocence of intentional wrongdoing, and rejoice to be suffering with Christ for loyally serving Him.”

The Raymond Street jail, in Brooklyn, New York, where Brother Rutherford and several of his close associates were held for seven days immediately following their sentencing.
resisted what was provided by the organization. Others simply gave in to the desire to exercise greater personal influence. They sought to get others to follow them, or, as the apostle Paul put it, “to draw away the disciples after themselves.” (Acts 20:29, 30) Of course, this tested the motives and spiritual stability of those whom they endeavored to entice. Consider some examples:

Special letters to the Bible Students in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, invited them to a meeting on April 5, 1894. Brother and Sister Russell were not invited and did not attend, but about 40 others were present. The letter, signed by E. Bryan, S. D. Rogers, J. B. Adamson, and O. von Zech, said that the meeting would involve things concerning their “highest welfare.” It turned out to be a malicious effort on the part of these conspirators to poison the minds of others by divulging what they surmised to be evil in Brother Russell’s business affairs (though the facts were to the contrary), by arguing that Brother Russell had too much authority (which they wanted for themselves), and by complaining because he favored use of the printed page to spread the gospel and Bible-class meetings instead of only giving discourses (in which they might more readily expound personal views). The congregation was greatly disturbed by what occurred, and many were stumbled. But those who turned aside did not as a result become more spiritual persons or more zealous in the Lord’s work.

Over 20 years later, prior to his death, Brother Russell expressed his intention to send Paul S. L. Johnson, a very capable speaker, to Britain to strengthen the Bible Students there. Out of respect for Brother Russell’s wish, the Society dispatched Johnson to Britain in November 1916. However, once he was in Britain, he dismissed two of the Society’s managers. Seeing himself as an important personage, he argued in speeches and correspondence that what he was doing was foreshadowed in the Scriptures by Ezra, Nehemiah, and Mordecai. He claimed to be the steward (or, man in charge) referred to by Jesus in his parable at Matthew 20:8. He tried to take control of the Society’s money, and he instituted a suit in the High Court of London to achieve his aims.

Thwarted in his endeavors, he returned to New York. There he sought to elicit support from certain ones who were serving on the Society’s board of directors. Those who were persuaded to side with him endeavored to achieve their aims by trying to pass a resolution to repeal bylaws of the Society that authorized the president to manage its affairs. They wanted authority for all decisions to rest with them. Legal action was taken by Brother Rutherford to safeguard the interests of the Society, and those who were seeking to disrupt its work were asked to leave the Bethel Home. At the annual meeting of the Society’s shareholders early the following year, when the board of directors and its officers were elected for the year to come,
those who had been agitators were overwhelmingly rejected. Perhaps some of them thought that they were in the right, but the vast majority of their spiritual brothers made it clear that they did not agree. Would they accept that reproof?

Thereafter, P. S. L. Johnson appeared at meetings of the Bible Students and made it seem that he was in agreement with their beliefs and activity. But after gaining the confidence of some, he would sow seeds of doubt. If anyone suggested a break with the Society, he hypocritically discouraged this—until the loyalty of the group had been thoroughly undermined. By correspondence and even by personal trips, he endeavored to influence the brothers not only in the United States but also in Canada, Jamaica, Europe, and Australia. Was this successful?

Perhaps it seemed so when the majority in a congregation voted to sever ties with the Society. But they were like a branch cut from a tree—green for a while, then withered and lifeless. When the opposers held a convention in 1918, differences surfaced, and a split occurred. Further disintegration followed. Some functioned for a while as small sects with a leader that they admired. None of them devoted themselves to the work of giving a public witness in all the inhabited earth concerning God’s Kingdom, which is the work that Jesus assigned to his followers.

As these things took place, the brothers reminded themselves of what was recorded at 1 Peter 4:12: "Beloved ones, do not be puzzled at the burning among you, which is happening to you for a trial, as though a strange thing were befalling you."

Those mentioned above were not the only ones who allowed pride to undermine their faith. Others also did so, including Alexandre Freytag, the manager of the Society’s office in Geneva, Switzerland. He liked to attract attention to himself, would add his own ideas when translating the Society’s publications into French, and even used the Society’s facilities to publish his own material. In Canada, there was W. F. Salter, a branch manager of the Society who began to disagree with the Society’s publications, let it be known that he expected to be the next president of the Watch Tower Society, and, after he was dismissed, dishonestly used the Society’s letterhead to instruct congregations in Canada and abroad to study material that he personally had written. In Nigeria, there was, among others, G. M. Ukoli, who at first showed zeal for the truth but then began to see it as a means of material gain and personal prominence. Afterward, when thwarted in his aims, he turned to roasting faithful brothers in the public press. And there were others.

Even in recent years, some individuals who occupied prominent positions of oversight displayed a similar spirit.
Of course, these people certainly had the freedom to believe what they chose. But anyone who publicly or privately advocates views that are divergent from what appears in the publications of an organization, and who does so while claiming to represent that organization, causes division. How did Jehovah's Witnesses deal with these situations?

They did not launch a campaign of persecution against such persons (though the defectors often indulged in abuse of their former spiritual brothers), nor did they seek to do physical harm to them (as was practiced by the Catholic Church by means of the Inquisition). Rather, they followed the inspired advice of the apostle Paul, who wrote: “Keep your eye on those who cause divisions and occasions for stumbling contrary to the teaching that you have learned, and avoid them. For men of that sort are slaves, not of our Lord Christ . . . By smooth talk and complimentary speech they seduce the hearts of guileless ones.”—Rom. 16:17, 18.

As others observed what was taking place, they too were given opportunity to manifest what was in their hearts.

Doctrinal Views in Need of Refinement

Jehovah's Witnesses freely acknowledge that their understanding of God's purpose has undergone many adjustments over the years. The fact that knowledge of God's purpose is progressive means that there must be change. It is not that God's purpose changes, but the enlightenment that he continuously grants to his servants calls for adjustments in their viewpoint.

From the Bible the Witnesses point out that this was also true of God's faithful servants in the past. Abraham had a close relationship with Jehovah; but when he left Ur, that man of faith did not know the land to which God was leading him, and for many years he was not at all sure how God would fulfill his promise to make a great nation out of him. (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:3; 17:15-21; Heb. 11:8) God revealed many truths to the prophets, but there were other things that they did not then understand. (Dan. 12:8, 9; 1 Pet. 1:10-12) Likewise, Jesus explained much to his apostles, but even at the end of his earthly life he told them that there were yet many things for them to learn. (John 16:12) Some of these things, such as God's purpose to bring Gentiles into the congregation, were not understood until the apostles saw what was actually occurring in fulfillment of prophecy.—Acts 11:1-18.

As might be expected, when changes have required the setting aside of formerly cherished views, that has been a test for some. Furthermore, not all adjustments in understanding have come simply, in one step. Because of imperfection, there is at times a tendency to go to one extreme or another