

GENESIS AFTER THE EXODUS



RYAN AYIN

Introduction

“No one should be forced to worship in a way that he finds unacceptable or be made to choose between his beliefs and his family.” This statement appeared in the world’s second most translated and distributed magazine, the *Awake!* It echoes Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. And yet, millions of people today live in fear of losing everyone they love simply for the “sin” of leaving their religion. I am one of them.

For nearly eighteen years, I was a member of the Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah’s Witnesses. I served at Bethel, the organization’s world headquarters in New York, under a vow of poverty and obedience. My life was defined by faith, devotion, and self-sacrifice.

Each weekday began at 7:00 a.m. with “Morning Worship” alongside more than a thousand volunteers and students from around the world. We gathered in our Sunday best for “spiritual food,” followed by a solid breakfast, except for the dreaded boiled egg day. Then, like a hive of bees, we dispersed to our assigned departments, accepting any work assignment without complaint, no matter how humble. Even cleaning toilets was viewed as sacred service, work I proudly performed for nine years and valued more than a college degree. My responsibilities extended beyond Bethel. On select weeknights and weekends, I drove an hour each way to support my Spanish-language congregation. Life as a “good-for-nothing slave” was demanding, but it was also deeply formative and, in many ways, rewarding. I considered it a privilege to serve at what we called “the center of divine education on earth” and to support the global expansion of God’s Kingdom, which we believed was humanity’s only hope.

Over time, however, a series of experiences led me to question deeply cherished beliefs. What followed were seven years of inner conflict, marked by cognitive dissonance, emotional turmoil, and an increasing reliance on alcohol to numb the pain. Fear, obligation, and guilt formed an invisible cage around me. Eventually, I found the courage to break free and step into the unknown.

This memoir traces that journey from certainty to questioning, from loss to renewal, and from a predetermined life to self-determination. I have written with care and respect, hoping to open a window into a world few truly understand. To protect the privacy of those still inside, most names have been changed. Sharing this story carries real personal risk. It may cost me professional opportunities and close relationships, and I do not take this lightly. I write not from bitterness or spite, but from a place of compassion and grace.

At its heart, *Genesis After the Exodus* is about the paradise I lost and found during my journey from Bethel to “Babylon,” the world I was taught to fear. Losing my faith and community was devastating, yet something unexpected emerged from that loss: the freedom to think critically, the beauty of autonomy, and the joy of genuine friendship. If these pages help even one person feel less alone, more understood, or more confident in trusting their inner voice and personal choice, then sharing this story will have been worth the cost.

Thank you for reading, and for being part of this journey.