

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 July 2009 issue of *Awake!*, the world’s second most translated and distributed magazine. 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—and everything they know—simply for the “sin” of leaving their religion. I am one of them.

For nearly eighteen years, I was a member of the Worldwide 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” in the Bethel Dining Room, where over 1,100 Bethelites and Gilead students from some 100 countries gathered in our Sunday best for “spiritual food,” followed by an enjoyable breakfast—except for the dreaded boiled egg day.

An eight-hour work shift followed. We accepted any assignment without complaint, no matter how humble. Even cleaning toilets was praised as sacred service—work I faithfully performed for nine years and valued even more than a college degree. It was considered a privilege to serve at what we proudly 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.

My responsibilities extended beyond Bethel. On select weeknights and every weekend, I drove an hour each way to support my Spanish-language congregation, spending an average of twenty-four hours each month commuting to meetings and field service. Life as a “good-for-nothing slave” was demanding, but it was also deeply formative and, in many ways, rewarding. “There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving” is a maxim I will always subscribe to. I will always be grateful for the extraordinary people I came to love at Bethel and in my congregation.

Over time, a series of experiences led me to question deeply cherished beliefs I had once held as sacred and unquestionable. What followed were seven years of inner conflict, marked by cognitive dissonance, emotional turmoil, sleepless nights, 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 through and step into the unknown. Learning to live on my own terms felt both exhilarating and terrifying, like a bird born in captivity, attempting flight for the first time.

This memoir traces my journey—from certainty to questioning, from loss to renewal, and from a predetermined life to self-determination. I have written with care and respect, opening a window into a world few outside it truly understand. Out of consideration for privacy, the names of most family members and friends who remain active Jehovah’s Witnesses have been changed. Writing this book carries real personal risk. It will be perceived by many I love as betrayal and may result in the loss of remaining relationships and professional opportunities. I do not take this lightly, nor do I embrace the “apostate” label. I write, not from anger or spite, but from love and hope. Sharing my story feels necessary for closure, for healing, and for honoring truth, integrity, and justice.

At its heart, *Genesis After the Exodus* is a story of the paradise I lost and found—on my journey from Bethel to “Babylon,” from the “House of God” to the world I was once programmed to fear. That transition was disorienting—like arriving alone in a foreign land, without a guide or an understanding of the language and culture. Losing my faith in “The Truth” and the people closest to me was devastating. Yet from that loss, something unexpected was gained: the beauty of autonomy, the courage to live authentically, and the joy of freely chosen friendships. If these pages help even one reader feel less alone, more validated, or more confident in honoring their inner voice and freedom of choice, then sharing them will have been worth every cost.

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