

World Religions, Cults, and Aberrant Beliefs

Lesson 7 – Jehovah’s Witnesses

Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

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Review

Remember, the standard evangelical definition of a Christian cult is any group that deviates from Biblical Christianity in fundamental doctrines of the faith: the source of authority, the nature of God including the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, the nature of man, and the means of salvation. In many cases, cults use the same words as true Christians, but radically redefine them.

Our Heart

When studying the cults, we may be tempted to scoff at the seeming ludicrous beliefs. We must remember that the average cultist that we will encounter is not a false teacher, but is deceived by Satan. This is someone that God loves; someone for whom Christ died.

⁴But when the kindness of God our Savior and **His love for mankind** appeared, Titus 3:4

¹⁶"For **God so loved the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16

⁸But **God demonstrates His own love toward us**, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:8

⁵and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth **To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood--** Rev 1:5

Paul’s example should be ours.

¹I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, ²that **I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.** ³**For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,** Rom 9:1-3

¹**Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.** Rom 10:1

History of the Jehovah’s Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses was begun by Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) in 1872. Russell had great difficulty in dealing with the doctrine of eternal hell fire and in his studies came to deny not only eternal punishment, but also the Trinity, and the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. When Russell was 18, he organized a Bible class in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania focusing on the second coming of Christ and biblical chronology. He published his views in several books and began lecturing in 1878. In 1879 Russell published *The Herald of the Morning* magazine and in 1884 Russell renamed it *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*, and founded Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society. The first edition of The Watchtower magazine was only 6,000 copies each month. From 1886 until his death in 1916, Russell wrote a series of books called *Studies in the Scriptures*. Russell claimed that the Bible could only be understood according to his interpretations. The contents of *Studies in the Scriptures* formed the basis of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ theology.

After the death of Russell in 1916, a lawyer named Joseph Franklin Rutherford took over the presidency of the Watch Tower Society which was known then as the International Bible Students Association. In 1931 he changed the name of the organization to "The Jehovah's Witnesses."

The Jehovah's Witnesses have several ‘book studies’ each week. The members are not required to attend, but there is an expectation to participate. It is during these ‘book studies’ that the Jehovah's Witness is constantly exposed to counter Christian teachings. The Watchtower Society statistics indicate that 740 house calls are required to recruit each of the nearly 200,000 new members who join every year.

According to Jehovah's Witness' theology, God is a single person, not a Trinity, who does not know all things and is not everywhere. He first created Michael the Archangel through whom He created all "other things," including the universe, the earth, Adam and Eve, etc. This creative work took God 42,000 years. At one point, The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society taught that God ruled the universe from somewhere in the Pleiades star system. They have since modified this to say that the "Pleiades can no longer be considered the center of the universe and it would be unwise for us to try to fix God's throne as being at a particular spot in the universe."¹ Such changes and even contradictions in teaching are frequent in the Watchtower organization and when a doctrine changes, they tell their followers that the light of truth is getting brighter.

After Adam sinned, the paradise which God had created for them, was ruined. So, God instituted a system of redemption which was revealed in the Bible and would ultimately lead to the crucifixion of Jesus the messiah. But, in the meantime, God needed to have a visible, theocratic organization on earth to accurately represent Him. Throughout history, this true organization had a remnant of faithful Jehovah's Witnesses (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc.) but it wasn't until the late 1800's that Charles Taze Russell formerly began what is now known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society which is run out of Brooklyn, New York. This organization claims to be the only true channel of God's truth on earth today and that it alone can properly interpret God's word since it is the angel directed, prophet of God on earth.

When it came time for the savior to be born, Michael the Archangel became a human, in the form of Jesus. Jesus grew and kept all the laws of God and never sinned. Finally, when Jesus died, it was not on a cross, but on a torture stake, where he bore the sins of mankind -- but this did not include Adam's sins. Jesus rose from the dead as a spirit, not physically (his body was dissolved and taken by God) and during his visitations to people on earth, he manifested a temporary physical body for them to see and touch. Thus began the true Christian church of Jehovah's followers.

Throughout history there have been faithful Jehovah's witnesses who have managed to keep The Truth in spite of the "demonic" doctrine of Trinitarianism that has permeated the Christian church in "Christendom." Christendom is filled with pastors who are antichrists, in churches run by Satan, and who support the earthly governments which are all of the devil. In other words, all of Christianity is false and only the Jehovah's Witness "theocratic" organization lead by several men in Brooklyn, New York, is true.

In the late 1800's, a young man of 18 years, by the name of Charles Taze Russell, organized a Bible class in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 1879 he sought to popularize his ideas on doctrine so he co-published *The Herald of the Morning* magazine with its founder, N. H. Barbour and by 1884 Russell controlled the publication and renamed it *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*, and founded Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society (now known as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society). Russell served as the teacher and guide for the organization which taught that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914 and is now reigning in heaven. When Jesus finally returns physical to earth, which will happen at the time of the Battle of Armageddon, He will set up his earthly 1000 year kingdom. During this 1000 year period, people will be resurrected and have a second chance to receive eternal salvation by following the principles of Jehovah's Organization on earth known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. After the millennium, those who reject God and His organization will be annihilated; that is, they will cease to exist. The rest of the Jehovah's Witness who have faithfully followed God's organization on earth will be saved from eternal annihilation and reside forever on Paradise earth. Heaven, however, is a place for a special group of 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses - - the only ones who are "born again" and who alone are allowed to take communion in their annual communion service. These are the ones who have "immortal life," all other Witnesses have "everlasting life." Those with immortal life do not have resurrected bodies. They have "spirit bodies." Those on Paradise Earth have everlasting life and consists of a resurrected body that must be maintained through eating, rest, etc.

When you study with the Jehovah's Witness, you agree to attend five meetings a week where you are taught from Watchtower literature. You cannot be baptized until you have studied their material for at least six months and have answered numerous questions before a panel of elders. Men are not supposed have long hair or wear beards and women are to dress in modest apparel. They refuse to vote, salute the flag, sing the "Star Spangled Banner, celebrate birthdays or Christmas, won't take blood transfusions, and they can't join the armed forces. A schedule of door-to-door canvassing is required where you distribute the Watchtower literature, acquire donations, and forward all monies to the headquarters in Brooklyn, New York.

If you ever leave the Jehovah's Witness organization, you are considered an apostate and are to be shunned.

1. Watchtower 11/15/53, page. 703.

Prophecy Chronology (from members.aol.com/beyondjw/quikhist.htm)

- The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (the organization run by the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses) claims that it is the sole channel of information between God and humanity.
- They base this claim on a complicated, Bible-based chronology devised by the Adventist N. H. Barbour in 1875. The founder of Jehovah's Witnesses, Charles Taze Russell, obtained many of his ideas from Adventists and others who speculated in Bible prophecy. In 1884, Russell founded the Watchtower Society, which became the legal corporation used by the International Bible Students, the early name for Jehovah's Witnesses.
- The chronology stated that Jesus had invisibly returned to earth in 1874 to set up his kingdom, and that in 1914, at the end of the "Gentile Times", Jesus would come to judge the earth and annihilate the wicked.
- When nothing supernatural happened in 1874, the Watchtower Society started transferring all of the doctrines about 1874 to 1914. They explained that Christ's kingdom had been set up invisibly in 1914, and that although secular governments were still in place, their rule was no longer valid. Based on the Society's writings, Jehovah's Witnesses looked forward to momentous events in the year 1918.
- When nothing supernatural happened in 1918, the Watchtower Society looked forward to momentous events in 1925.
- When nothing supernatural happened in 1925, the Watchtower Society lost three quarters of its members.
- Charles Taze Russell had been held to be the "Faithful and Wise Servant" of Matthew 24:45-47, but by 1928 the Society applied that to its leaders. They taught that the scripture was a prophecy, and that in 1918 they had been chosen by Jesus "over all that he hath". Since they believed Jesus was ruling the world invisibly, they claimed for themselves a position as God's channel of communication with mankind.
- The Society checked its predictions and explained that all of the prophecies in Matthew 24 and 25 would take place within a "single generation" (Matthew 24:34), so the time of "the end of the world" (Matthew 24:3) could be delayed as long as 30 or 40 years. In 1929, the Society built a mansion ("Beth Sarim") to house the resurrected prophets, who were expected to arrive soon. The new definition of "generation" promised momentous events during the 1940's.
- When nothing supernatural had happened by 1945, the Society extended the meaning of "generation" to 80 years (the maximum lifespan of a typical man, as explained in Psalms 90:10). "Beth Sarim" was eventually sold.
- Although 1914 plus 80 equals 1994, in 1966 the Watchtower Society decided that the year 1975 was "significant", because they had calculated that it marked the end of six thousand years since the creation of Adam and Eve. Watchtower publications strongly hinted that "the end" would come in 1975.
- When nothing supernatural happened in 1975, the Watchtower Society lost many members. It explained that the time between Adam's creation and Eve's creation was not known, so the 1975 date was only speculative.
- In 1980, the Society suggested that the Witnesses and the publishing staff had been overly enthusiastic about the "possibility" of Armageddon in 1975. This failed to lure back thousands who had left, but regular door-to-door preaching restored the rapid growth the Witnesses had enjoyed since the "significance" of 1975 had been announced.

- When the year 1994 arrived (1914 plus 80 years), nothing supernatural happened. The Society had not ascribed any special significance to 1994, but the "generation" issue was becoming awkward. The ranks of the Society's special members (the 144,000 who were "anointed", based on an interpretation of Revelation) were dying out. The claim that Jesus had appointed the Watchtower Society special status in 1918 was becoming hard to defend.
- In 1995, the Watchtower Society decided that "generation" did not mean a physical generation (i.e. 80 years) but meant "age", as in "era". This extended the "end times" indefinitely, although when the last of the 144,000 special members die out, the Society will have to be run by regular members.
- A close inspection of Matthew 24:34 in context makes the "age" interpretation hard to understand, since Jesus speaks of the generation "passing away" (which sounds like a physical event). The Watchtower Society states that it alone understands that "generation" means "age" because it has special status, which was granted to it in 1918.
- The Watchtower magazine, published by the Society, has said the end is "soon", in every issue since it was first printed ... in 1879.

Source of Authority

The Jehovah Witnesses view the Bible as the divinely inspired and infallible Word of God. They believe that a "...proper study of the Scriptures must include the entire Bible". They also teach that "Though the Bible is not a science textbook, it is scientifically accurate. ... The Bible contains many prophecies that have been fulfilled in detail."

The Jehovah Witnesses' use the "New World Translation" (NWT) of the Scriptures. They view this translation as the best translation because "the translators held so closely to what is in the original Bible languages".

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society is regarded as Jehovah God's only channel of accurate biblical interpretation in the world today. Jehovah Witnesses believe there is no salvation apart from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society .

Nature of God

Jehovah Witnesses believe the true god is named Jehovah. One God, properly called Jehovah. He is a spirit-being, invisible and eternal, but has a spiritual body and is not omnipresent. The doctrine of the Trinity is rejected. His Holy Spirit is an impersonal force.

The Person and Work of Jesus

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is God's only direct creation, that everything else was created by means of Christ, and that the initial unassisted act of creation uniquely identifies Jesus as God's "only-begotten Son". They believe that Jesus is a created being with stages of existence: 1) Archangel Michael or the Word; 2) Jesus, perfect man, became Messiah at his baptism; and 3) after his spiritual resurrection, became Michael again but retains the name Jesus. Jesus served as a redeemer and a ransom sacrifice to pay for the sins of humankind. They believe Jesus died on a single upright torture stake rather than the traditional cross. They believe that references in the Bible to the Archangel Michael, Apollyon, and the Word all refer to Jesus. Jesus is considered to be the only intercessor and high priest between God and humankind, and appointed by God as the king and judge of his kingdom.

The Nature of Man

Jehovah Witnesses believe that the spirit, or life-force, that God gives at our birth departs at death. There is no conscious existence at death. They believe that there is no consciousness after death.

The Means of Salvation

Salvation is obtained from allegiance to Jehovah plus works (baptism by emersion; active association with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society; faithfulness in Kingdom Hall work; and righteous conduct).

There is no assurance of salvation, only hope for a resurrection. Those who fail to live up to the requirements for salvation or who are disfellowshipped by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society have no hope of salvation.

Only 144,000 faithful elect Jehovah's Witnesses, known as the "Anointed Class" will reign with Christ in Kingdom of God (heaven). Only those born since 33 AD can be part of that number. Most Jehovah's Witnesses hope to be among "other sheep" or "great crowd" who will not go to heaven, but, after Armageddon and the millennium, will live forever in Paradise on earth.

Those who have disobeyed Jehovah and his law will be annihilated out of existence with Satan and his demons. This is the "second death." The doctrine of eternal hell is regarded as unscriptural, unreasonable, contrary to God's love, and unjust.

The path to Jesus as Jehovah with the Jehovah's Witness

1. Ask the Jehovah Witness to show the Scriptures that refer to Jesus as Michael the Archangel.

- 1) "one of the foremost princes" (Dan 10:13, NWT)
- 2) "the prince of [Daniel's] people" (Dan 10:21, NWT)
- 3) "the great prince who is standing in behalf of the sons of [Daniel's] people" (Dan 12:1, NWT)
- 4) "the archangel" who "had a difference with the devil and was disputing about Moses' body" but "did not dare to bring a judgment against him in abusive terms" (Jude 9, NWT)
- 5) a participant in heavenly conflict when "Michael and his angels battled with the dragon" (Rev 12:7, NWT).

Jesus is instead referred to as: "Lord of lords and King of kings" (Rev 17:14, NWT) and unlike Michael did rebuke Satan: "Go away, Satan!" (Matt 4:10, NWT).

Refer to Hebrews 1 to show that Jesus is superior to all angels.

⁵For to which of the angels did He ever say, YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"? ⁶And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM." Heb 1:5-6

Show that angels refuse worship (Rev 22:8-9), but the Father's command is that all the angels worship His Son (Heb 1:6).

Note: The NWT was changed here in 1970 from "worship" "do obeisance" (to express homage by bowing).

Show Hebrews 1:10-12. The important thing to stick to here is that the "Son" is the one being referred to in the entire context of Heb 1. Then go to Psa 102. The NWT is the best because "Jehovah" is referred to throughout. Then Psa 102:25-27 is quoted in Heb 1:10-12 which talks about the "Son" as being "Jehovah".

2. Start in Rev 1:8 and ask who is the “Alpha and Omega”.

⁸“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” Rev 1:8

Read Rev 1:17-18 and see who calls Himself the “First and Last”.

¹⁷When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Rev1:17-18

Finally, read Rev 22:13 with verse 16.

¹²“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” ¹⁴Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. ¹⁵Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. ¹⁶“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” Rev 22:12-16

Witnessing Strategies for Jehovah’s Witnesses:

Let’s remember some of our general strategies:

1. Sanctify your heart. (1 Pet 3:15)
2. Pray – this is a spiritual battle for the truth. (2 Cor 10:3-5)
3. Be ready with a good understanding of the Scriptures.
4. Do not argue. Do not attack the person. (2 Tim 2:24-26)
5. Make sure you define words.
6. Do not get off on tangents. The important points are the source of authority, the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus, the nature of man, and the means of salvation.
7. Avoid Christian jargon – it has no meaning for the unchurched.
8. Share your testimony and your assurance of eternal life through Christ.

Some Specifics:

1. Show the multiple ways in which the Watchtower has changed over the years (i.e. has lied to its followers).
2. Present evidence of the Watchtower’s false prophecies.
3. Most Witnesses will not accept material from you so you should be able to provide evidence from within the Bible that Jesus is God. Present Biblical material they have not been given pat answers for. (ex Acts 2:26 that shows that Jesus was resurrected physically)
4. Allow the Witness to save face. (Reasoning from the Scriptures... page 406)