

It was during a neighborhood garage sale last Spring that a sharp looking fellow stopped by our house. He noticed the "for-sale" sign in a car we were trying to sell, and inquired about it. I noticed he had Florida tags on his car, as we started talking, and was impressed by his polite, yet confident demeanor. He told me his name was Aaron, and that he was in Wheelersburg to talk to people about the Bible. He said he believed in Jesus, and was concerned about the moral condition of our country. It didn't take long for our discussion to turn to the issue of the Trinity, and Aaron told me bluntly that the Bible didn't teach that Jesus was God. He believed that Jesus was merely a created being, and that those who believed that Jesus was indeed God were mistaken.

Without further information, can you tell me the name of the religious group with which Aaron was associated? If you said "Jehovah's Witnesses," you are right.

Proposition: Tonight, our aim is to provide a biblical response to Jehovah's Witnesses. To accomplish this, we will seek to answer three important questions.

I. What is the History of Jehovah's Witnesses?

A. How did the Jehovah's Witnesses begin?

1. Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)
 - 1879--Watchtower Magazine began
 - 1884--Incorporated Society
 - 1909--Moved to Brooklyn, New York
2. Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869-1942)
 - 1917--Became President
 - 1931--Changed name to Jehovah's Witnesses
3. Nathan Homer Knorr (1905-1977)
 - 1942--Became President
 - 1950--New World Translation
4. Frederick Franz (1894-1992)
 - 1977--Became President
5. Milton G. Henschel (1920-)
 - 1992--Became President¹

B. What are the publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses?

1. *Watchtower* magazine
 - 14 million copies published every two weeks
 - In 108 languages
2. *Awake* magazine
 - 12 million copies published every two weeks
 - In 62 languages²

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹Ron Carlson, class notes from "Confronting a New Age of Cults," 1/9/96

²Ron Carlsons, Fast Facts on False Teachings, p. 117.

C. What are the Jehovah's Witnesses doing today?

1. They are active in 212 countries.
2. They did 900 million hours of door to door evangelism last year.
3. Their calling was done by 4.5 million members.
4. Their goal is to contact every home in the USA once or twice a year.³

II. What are the Beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses? How do they differ from biblical Christianity?

A. The Doctrine of the Trinity

1. God is one, not three.
2. Jesus is not God, nor is the Holy Spirit.
3. The doctrine of the Trinity is pagan in origin.

Biblical Response: God exists as three eternal, co-equal persons.

1. The Father is called God (2 Pet 1:17).
2. The Son is called God (Phil 2:5-11; John 8:56-58; 10:30).
3. The Holy Spirit is called God (Acts 5:3-4; 13:21 Cor 6:19).

B. The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

1. He is the first-born Son of God, a Spirit (also the archangel Michael).
2. He was born as a human Son of God.
3. At baptism, Jesus was anointed to become the Messiah.
4. He died on a stake, not a cross.
5. He was raised, not as a human son, but as a spirit Son.
6. He returned to earth invisibly in 1914 as a spirit.

Biblical Response: Jesus is the God-man (Col 2:9).

C. The Doctrine of Salvation

1. Jesus laid down in sacrifice a perfect HUMAN life, equal to that which Adam forfeited.

2. Salvation is found only through the Organization.
3. Hell is simply the grave. They believe in annihilation.

Biblical Response: A person is saved by faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:36).

Summary: "The easiest way to describe the theology of Jehovah's Witnesses is that it is a theology of denial. Jehovah's Witnesses deny the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the immortality of the soul, the atonement, the finished work of Christ, and the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment." (Ron Carlson)⁴

III. How should we respond to Jehovah's Witnesses?

A. Address the issue of the Trinity.

1. Turn to Revelation 1:8.

Question: Who is Alpha and Omega?

Answer: It's Jehovah God.

2. Turn to Revelation 22:13.

Question: Who is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End?

Answer: It's Jehovah God.

³Ron Carlson, class notes from "Confronting a New Age of Cults," 1/9/96

⁴Ron Carlson, class notes from "Confronting a New Age of Cults," 1/9/96

3. Turn to Revelation 1:17-18.

Question: Who is the First and the Last in verse 17?

Answer: It's Jehovah God.

Question: When did Jehovah God die, as verse 18 says?⁵

B. Remember they are not the enemy, but victims of the enemy.

I. What is the History of Jehovah's Witnesses?

Jehovah's Witnesses are, by their own definition, "servants of Jehovah, the Almighty God, the active witnesses to his sovereign supremacy."⁶ They claim to be followers of "Christ their Leader," and reject any association with the "religious hypocrites of organized Christendom."

They believe that God's sovereignty was threatened when Adam and Eve rebelled. The major issue then is the vindication of the name and sovereignty of Jehovah. This is more important than the salvation of men, and will be settled at the coming battle of Armageddon.⁷

A. How did the Jehovah's Witnesses begin?

Jehovah's Witnesses derive their name from the Hebrew name of God found frequently in the Old Testament, "Jehovah." This Hebrew word is based on four Hebrew consonants (YHWH), and since there are no vowels, the exact pronunciation is unclear (perhaps "Yahweh," or "Yahveh").

To understand the origin of Jehovah's Witnesses, we must consider the following individuals and dates.

1. Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)

The organization known as Jehovah's Witnesses was legally incorporated in 1884 by Charles Taze Russell. It was then known as The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.

Charles Russell was raised in a Protestant church in Pennsylvania, but as he grew up, he said there were things he did not like in the Bible. He said the trinity was not rational and he couldn't understand it. He disapproved of the teaching of hell and eternal judgment.⁸

He began to develop his own theology, and in 1879, he began to publish the *Watchtower* magazine.

- 1879--Watchtower Magazine began
- 1884--Incorporated Society
- 1909--Moved to Brooklyn, New York

Russell was famous for making many prophecies. He predicted that Christ would return visibly to the earth in 1874, but when He failed to show, Russell changed his calculations to the year 1914. When Christ didn't come in 1914, Russell redefined the second coming of Christ to mean that Jesus Christ had returned invisibly as a ghost, in

⁵Ron Carlson, Fast Facts on False Teachings, pp. 130-1.

⁶Irvine Robertson, What the Cults Believe, p. 56.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Carlson, Fast Facts, p. 118.

1914, in order to help set up his organization. Russell died in 1916, having been proven to be a false prophet.

2. *Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869-1942)*

- 1917--Became President
- 1931--Changed name to Jehovah's Witnesses

The name change was based on Isaiah 43:10 which reads, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD [Jehovah]." Prior to this they were known as "Russellites," etc. It was under Rutherford's dynamic leadership that the organization was built into the powerful group that it is today.

Rutherford taught that the members of the Watchtower society are the theocratic kingdom of God on earth. Even today, Jehovah's Witnesses believe they are God's government on the earth. For this reason, they will not salute the flag, recite the Pledge of Allegiance, or serve in the armed forces. They believe all governments are satanic except the true government of God, headquartered in Brooklyn, New York.

Rutherford also made some outlandish prophecies. He predicted that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would return visibly to the earth to help promote the kingdom of God between 1925-1929. He even built a mansion for them in San Diego, but when they didn't show up, Rutherford moved into the mansion.

3. *Nathan Homer Knorr (1905-1977)*

- 1942--Became President
- 1950--New World Translation

Under Knorr's leadership, the movement developed a strong missionary outreach program. Knorr also demonstrated himself to be a false prophet. He predicted the year 1975 was going to end the age with Armageddon. Interestingly, as the result of his false prophecy, in 1976 and 1977, over one million Jehovah's Witnesses left the Watchtower, deeply disillusioned with the organization.⁹

Their most recent leaders are the following two men.

4. *Frederick Franz (1894-1992)*

- 1977--Became President

5. *Milton G. Henschel (1920-)*

- 1992--Became President¹⁰

B. What are the publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses?

The Jehovah's Witnesses are known for their massive distribution of literature. One source has observed that they print more literature in six months than all of Christendom does in a year. This material includes the following:

1. *Watchtower magazine*

- 14 million copies published every two weeks
- In 108 languages

2. *Awake magazine*

- 12 million copies published every two weeks
- In 62 languages¹¹

⁹Carlson, *Fast Facts*, p. 121.

¹⁰Ron Carlson, class notes from "Confronting a New Age of Cults," 1/9/96

¹¹Ron Carlsons, *Fast Facts on False Teachings*, p. 117.

C. What are the Jehovah's Witnesses doing today?

The Jehovah's Witnesses are an influential, aggressive organization, as is revealed by the following data.

1. *They are active in 212 countries.*
2. *They did 900 million hours of door to door evangelism last year.*
3. *Their calling was done by 4.5 million members.*
4. *Their goal is to contact every home in the USA once or twice a year.*¹²

Why are the Jehovah's Witnesses so zealous in evangelism? As we'll observe in a moment, it has to do to a great degree with their view of salvation. Salvation is attained by works, such as baptism into the Watchtower society, through study in Kingdom Halls, and through door to door witnessing. Often, their motivation in going door to door is not a love for people, but to earn favor with God.

II. What are the Beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses? How do they differ from biblical Christianity?

Let's examine three significant areas of doctrine in which the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses digress from Scripture.

A. The Doctrine of the Trinity

What does the Watchtower teach about God?

1. *God is one, not three.*
2. *Jesus is not God, nor is the Holy Spirit.*

Jehovah's Witnesses don't celebrate Christmas for this reason. They deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ. They teach that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force, an "it."

3. *The doctrine of the Trinity is pagan in origin.*

The Trinity is not rational, according to Jehovah's Witnesses. I told you earlier about "Aaron," the man who stopped by my house last Spring. Before he left, he gave me a pamphlet entitled, "Should You Believe in the Trinity?" It is well-written and subtle. It states the following:

"The testimony of history is clear: The Trinity teaching is a deviation from the truth, an apostatizing from it (p. 12)." Elsewhere, the booklet tries to associate the doctrine of the Trinity with ancient pagan beliefs. It reads, "Throughout the ancient world, as far back as Babylonia, the worship of pagan gods grouped in threes, or triads, was common. That influence was also prevalent in Egypt, Greece, and Rome in the centuries before, during, and after Christ. And after the death of the apostles, such pagan beliefs began to invade Christianity (p. 11)."

Biblical Response: God exists as three eternal, co-equal persons.

There is an axiom in geometry that says that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. God is One, yet in the Bible, He reveals Himself as three distinct, equal persons. Notice how the Bible refers to each of the three persons as God:

1. *The Father is called God (2 Pet 1:17).*
2. *The Son is called God (Phil 2:5-11; John 8:56-58; 10:30).*
3. *The Holy Spirit is called God (Acts 5:3-4; 13:21 Cor 6:19).*

¹²Ron Carlson, class notes from "Confronting a New Age of Cults," 1/9/96

We'll come back to the issue of the Trinity again a little later.

B. The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Allow me to quote again from the Jehovah's Witnesses own publication referenced earlier. It states (p. 14), "Jesus had an existence in heaven before coming to the earth. But was it as one of the persons in an almighty, eternal triune Godhead? No, for the Bible plainly states that in his pre-human existence, Jesus was a created spirit being, just as the angels were spirit beings created by God. Neither the angels nor Jesus had existed before their creation."

The following six statements summarize what the Jehovah's Witnesses believe about the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

1. *He is the first-born Son of God, a Spirit (also the archangel Michael).*
2. *He was born as a human Son of God.*
3. *At baptism, Jesus was anointed to become the Messiah.*
4. *He died on a stake, not a cross.*
5. *He was raised, not as a human son, but as a spirit Son.*
6. *He returned to earth invisibly in 1914 as a spirit.*

Biblical Response: Jesus is the God-man (Col 2:9).

What does the Bible teach about the person and work of Christ? Colossians 2:9 reveals, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." John 1:1 declares that Jesus is God. In John 2:19-21, Jesus predicted He would raise His BODY, not merely His "ghost."

What about texts like John 14:28, where Jesus says, "My Father is greater than I"? Does that mean that Jesus is subservient to God? No, Jesus is referring to His position, not His nature, there. During His incarnation, God the Son voluntarily laid aside the independent use of His attributes (see Phil 2:5ff).

C. The Doctrine of Salvation

What do they believe about salvation? How are we saved?

1. *Jesus laid down in sacrifice a perfect HUMAN life, equal to that which Adam forfeited.*

They teach that all who by reason of faith in Jehovah God and in Christ Jesus dedicate themselves to do God's will and then faithfully carry out their dedication will be rewarded with everlasting life (from Let God Be True, p. 298).

2. *Salvation is found only through the Organization.*

Originally, Jehovah's Witnesses talked about 144,000 being saved. They ran into a problem when their group passed the 144,000 mark, and the end of the world had not yet occurred! Since then, they've revised their understanding.

Rutherford taught that everyone who became a Jehovah's Witness before 1935 would go to heaven (as the 144,000), while everyone who did so after 1935 would live in paradise on earth.

3. *Hell is simply the grave. They believe in annihilation.*

The doctrine of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death is denied (see Let God Be True, p. 99). What does the Bible teach?

Biblical Response: A person is saved by faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:36). There are two categories of people: those who believe in Christ (who will receive eternal

life) and those who do not believe in Christ (who will experience the wrath of God eternally). Those who reject Christ will experience eternal torment (Rev 20:13-15).

Summary: "The easiest way to describe the theology of Jehovah's Witnesses is that it is a theology of denial. Jehovah's Witnesses deny the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the immortality of the soul, the atonement, the finished work of Christ, and the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment." (Ron Carlson)¹³

III. How should we respond to Jehovah's Witnesses?

Realize that the Jehovah's Witnesses are well-trained in how to communicate what they believe. There are no windows in Kingdom Halls, or they are up high, because they role-play how to put people on the defensive.

It's interesting that 65% of Jehovah's Witnesses are former Roman Catholics. Why is that? In part, the answer is because many Catholics know the "words" but not the meanings. Another reason is because Catholics find it easy to replace one centralized authority (the Roman Catholic Church) with another centralized authority (the Watchtower Organization).

The Jehovah's Witness is taught that everything not Jehovah's Witness is satanic. That's why it's hard for one to come to church with you. It's hard to leave the organization. To do so is to be shunned with nowhere to go.

How can we help a Jehovah's Witness to come to the truth?

A. Address the issue of the Trinity.

Jehovah's Witnesses love the book of Revelation, so it is helpful to use that book when dealing with the Trinity. The following three texts are helpful in a question-answer format (it's possible to use their own translation to make the point).

1. *Turn to Revelation 1:8.*

Question: Who is Alpha and Omega?

Answer: It's Jehovah God.

2. *Turn to Revelation 22:13.*

Question: Who is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End?

Answer: It's Jehovah God.

3. *Turn to Revelation 1:17-18.*

Question: Who is the First and the Last in verse 17?

Answer: It's Jehovah God. (note: In the New World Translation, "First and Last" is capitalized)

Question: When did Jehovah God die, as verse 18 says?¹⁴

That is a very difficult question for a Jehovah's Witness. When did God die? We know that God indeed did die when the God-man, Christ Jesus, gave His life at Calvary.

B. Remember they are not the enemy, but victims of the enemy.

¹³Ron Carlson, class notes from "Confronting a New Age of Cults," 1/9/96

¹⁴Ron Carlson, Fast Facts on False Teachings, pp. 130-1.

We must have compassion as we seek to reach those blinded by false teaching.
But for the grace of God, where would we be today?