

Jehovah's Witnesses

By Dr. James Bjornstad

I. Etiology

A. Historical

The founder, Charles Taze Russell, was born on February 16, 1852 in Old Allegheny, PA. His parents were members of the Allegheny City Congregational Church, where he also attended.

In 1868, when challenged by an infidel, Russell expressed doubts about eternal torment and hell. The following year, he abandoned his church and the Bible.

Russell attended a religious meeting in 1870 and heard Jonas Wendall, a Second Adventist, speak. From Wendall he learned that man does not have a soul and that the wicked are annihilated. This provided a resolve to his doubt and dislike of eternal punishment.

Russell organized a Bible class in 1872.

In 1877 he met N. H. Barbour, another Second Adventist, who differed from the Adventists in that he believed in the invisible return of Christ. Russell, who claimed he had already come to the same conclusion, now began to teach this doctrine (perhaps as a non-literal explanation for the failure of his prophecy for 1874).

Russell published *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* in 1879, and founded Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society in 1884.

B. Theological

Given Russell's dislike for eternal torment, the re-formation of his theology was probably developed in this fashion:

1. There is no torment that is eternal or place where such torment occurs [hell].
2. If, after this life, there is no torment for the unbeliever, then there must not be any conscious existence for the unbeliever either. Therefore, man does not have a soul that is immortal.
3. If, when one dies, one's existence ceases, then when Jesus Christ died, He ceased to exist. If Jesus ceased to exist when He died, then He cannot be God, for God cannot cease to exist. "One of the most mysterious things is the question of who ran the universe during the three days that Jesus was dead and in the grave . . . If Jesus was God, then during Jesus' death God was dead and in the grave." (*Let God*, 91)
4. If Jesus is not God, then God does not exist eternally in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, the Trinity is a false teaching.

II. Theology

A. God

1. His name is Jehovah.
2. His nature:
 - a. Jehovah is the "Greatest Personality in the universe, distinguished by that executive name. The Great Theocrat, The Unfailing Purposer, The True and Living God, Creator and Supreme Sovereign of the universe." (*Make Sure*, 188)
 - b. Jehovah is spirit, invisible, personal, and eternal. He is holy; a God of goodness and mercy, of grace and truth.
3. His attributes:

- a. Jehovah's principle attributes are love, wisdom, justice, and power.
- b. Jehovah is omnipotent, omniscient, and immutable, but He is not omnipresent. God "is spoken of as having location (I Kings 8:49; John 16:28; Hebrews 9:24). His throne is in heaven (Isaiah 66:1)." (*Make Sure*, 267)

B. Creation

- 1. Jehovah created all that exists ex nihilo [from nothing or non-existence].
- 2. Jehovah's first creation was Jesus Christ through whom he created all other things. "He [Jesus] is not the author of the creation of God, but after God had created Him as his firstborn son, then God used him as his working partner, in the creating of all the rest of creation." (*Let God*, 33)

C. Jesus Christ

1. His Person

- a. His pre-human state—He was the first created being, the archangel Michael, the Logos, "the second greatest personage of the universe." (*Make Sure*, 207)
- b. His human state—He was nothing more than a perfect human being.
 - (1) "The heavenly Word of God divested himself of everything as a God-like Spirit except his life force and lowered himself to become no more than a perfect man." (*The Kingdom*, 49)
 - (2) "He was not an incarnation in flesh but was flesh, a human Son of God, a perfect man, no longer a spirit, although having a spiritual or heavenly past and background." (*The Kingdom*, 49)
- c. His post-human state—He was recreated as a glorious immortal spirit creature, ascended into heaven, and is now "the head under Jehovah of God's capital organization over the entire universe." (*From Paradise*, 144)
 - (1) "Jehovah God raised him from the dead, not as a human son, but as a mighty immortal spirit son." (*Let God*, 43)
 - (2) "Jesus did not take his human body to heaven . . ." (*Let God*, 41)
 - (3) "Human eyes will not see him at his second coming, neither will he come in a fleshly body." (*The Truth*, 295)

2. His work

- a. His primary purpose was to "vindicate Jehovah's name."
 - "The primary purpose of the Son of God in coming to earth was to meet and decisively answer Satan's charge that God cannot put on earth a creature who will keep his integrity and abide faithful till death under the test of persecution from the Devil and his demons.... By keeping his integrity under the most fiery tests Christ Jesus would vindicate His Father's name and would prove his worthiness to be the Seed or King of God's capital organization, Zion." (*What Has Religion*, 240-255)**
- b. His secondary purpose was to die and cancel death's condemnation.
 - "John showed (John 1:29, 36) the secondary purpose for which the Son of God came to earth, namely, to die as a holy sacrifice to Jehovah God in order to cancel death's condemnation, that they might gain eternal life in the righteous new world which God has promised to create." (*What Has Religion*, 240-255)**
- c. The death of Christ provided an exact payment for that which was lost [perfect human life].
 - "Yet we know that Jesus came to earth to provide a corresponding ransom by His perfect human life. The ransom, therefore, must be equal to the thing lost, namely, perfect human life as Adam had it in Eden." (*What Has Religion*, 105)**

D. Salvation

1. A person has “to do more than merely accept the Kingdom message in order to be saved.” (*From Paradise*, 249) He must take in knowledge, believe in Jesus Christ, repent, dedicate himself to Jehovah, recognize the Watchtower Society as God’s organization, conduct his life in harmony with the teachings and activities of the Watchtower Society, maintaining integrity to Jehovah and to his earthly organization, and endure faithfully to the end. (*From Paradise*, 242-246)

2. In Watchtower soteriology, there are two classes of the saved:

a. “The Congregation of God” [“144,000,” “Anointed,” “Remnant”]. These are the “little flock” of Luke 12:32 and the “faithful and discreet slave” of Matthew 24:45. They have a heavenly calling; their hope is to live and reign with Christ in heaven. They may partake of the bread and the wine at the Memorial [communion].

b. The “Great Crowd” [“Great Multitude,” “Other Sheep”]. These are the “other sheep” of John 10:16 and the “great crowd” of Revelation 7:9. They have an earthly hope; their hope is to live on a restored paradise earth. At the Memorial, they are merely observers.

III. Witnessing

A. Some helpful hints:

1. 2 John 9-11 does *not* forbid your witnessing to those who have a different understanding of Jesus nor does it prohibit your inviting a Jehovah’s Witness into your home for the purpose of witnessing to him or her. [You should not, however, invite Jehovah’s Witnesses to your house to have them teach you their false doctrines].

a. 2 John was probably written to a church that met in the “elect lady’s” house.

b. “Bring not this doctrine” probably indicates false teachers coming to teach their false understanding of Jesus to those in this church.

2. Your approach must be marked by love, integrity, and non-argumentation (2 Timothy 2:24-26; 1 Peter 3:15-16).

3. You should use your translation (KJV, NKJV, NASV, or NIV). Try to avoid letting Jehovah’s Witnesses use their *New World Translation*, if at all possible. Scholars and translators have shown beyond any doubt that it is a biased text.

B. Focus on the Deity of Jesus Christ.

1. Avoid peripheral issues, such as blood transfusions, Christmas and Easter, participation in war, the cross, etc. These can always be discussed later.

2. If you can demonstrate from Scripture that Jesus is God, Jehovah’s Witnesses will have to reconsider their understanding of God [they will now have two Persons that are God—Father and Son] and of salvation [Jesus, Who is God, provides salvation, not just a perfect man].

3. Consider using passages that are clear (grammatically and/or contextually) in stating Jesus’ deity. Know the passages reasonably well so you can explain them to Jehovah’s Witnesses. For example:

a. Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6. Note that the Messiah would be “Immanuel” [“God with us”] and called “the Mighty God” (the same name used for Jehovah in 10:21).

b. John 1:1 “The Word [Jesus] was God.” The Greek construction here emphasizes that the Word had all the essence and attributes of deity.

c. John 20:28 “Thomas answered and said to Him [Jesus], ‘My Lord and my God.’”

Thomas not only believed that Christ was risen physically from the dead, but he also realized that His resurrection indicated His deity. Thomas' confession that Jesus is "God" functions here as the fitting capstone of John's purpose (see verses 29-31).

d. Romans 9:5 "Christ . . . the eternally blessed God." Here Paul affirms not only the sovereignty of Christ, but His deity as well.

e. Titus 2:13 "Our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ." The Greek construction here attributes both God and Savior to Jesus Christ.

f. Hebrews 1:8 "To the Son He says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.'" Here the declaration of the Son's deity is presented in the words of the Father Himself.

4. Consider using a series of passages to demonstrate Christ's deity. For example

a. "Alpha and Omega" and the "First and the Last" in Revelation 1:8; 22:12-13; 1:17-18; 2:8.

(1) Read Revelation 1:8 and ask, "Who is speaking?" "Who is the 'Alpha and Omega?'" The response by Jehovah's Witnesses is usually "Almighty God" or "Jehovah."

(2) Read Revelation 22:12-13 and ask, "Who is speaking?"

(a) The response frequently given by Jehovah's Witnesses is "in Verse 12 it is Jesus, but in Verse 13 it is Jehovah."

(b) Ask if you can at least both agree that the "Alpha and Omega" is also the "First and Last?" Jehovah's Witnesses will usually say "yes."

(3) Read Revelation 1:17-18; 2:8 and ask, "Who is speaking?" "Who is 'the First and the Last?'"

(a) The response will usually be [and should be] "Jesus."

(b) If Jesus is the "First and Last" (1:17), then He must be the "Alpha and Omega" (22:13). If He is the "Alpha and Omega," then He must be Almighty God [Jehovah] (1:8).

b. "I Am," the name of God in Exodus 3:13-15, which Jesus uses of Himself in John 8:23-24, 58-59; 13:18-19; and Matthew 26:63-66.

(1) Jehovah says He is "I Am" (Exodus 3:13-15).

(2) Jesus claims to be "I Am" in John 8:23-24, 58-59; 13:18-19; and Matthew 26:63-66, thus equating Himself with Jehovah.

(a) Stress points and/or raise questions regarding these passages. For example, Who can forgive sins (John 8:23-24)? Why did the Jews seek to stone Jesus (John 8:58-59)? Who knows the future (John 13:18-19)? What did the high priest understand Jesus to say? (Matthew 26:63-66)?

(b) Regarding John 8:58-59 and Matthew 26:63-66, in Hebrew law, stoning was legal and permissible in only five cases:

i. A person with a familiar spirit (Leviticus 20:27).

ii. One who blasphemes God (Leviticus 24:10-23).

iii. A false prophet leading people into idolatry (Deuteronomy 13:5-10).

iv. A stubborn son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

v. One who commits adultery or rape (Deuteronomy 22:21-24; Leviticus 20:10).

The Jews interpreted ii. above (regarding blasphemy) to include equating oneself with God or claiming to be God (see John 10:34). They understood what Jesus said to indicate both of the above [deity] and sought to kill Him. (see John 5:18; 10:33, 31)

C. Focus on salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The following questions may provide you with some opportunities to share the truth about Jesus.

1. Read Acts 26:17-18. Ask, are you a child of God?
 - a. If the answer is no, you might ask, "then whose child are you?"
 - b. If the answer is yes, ask "how did you become one?"
2. Read John 3:3-6; 1 John 5:13. Are you "born-again"?
 - a. If the answer is yes, he or she must be one of the 144,000.
 - (1) Ask him if he were to stand before Jehovah, on what basis would Jehovah accept him? By works?
 - (2) If necessary, ask him to show you one verse in the Bible that says only the 144,000 is born again.
 - b. If the answer is no, ask why he is not.
3. Read 1 John 5:1, 11-13. Do you have eternal life?
 - a. Ask him how he can believe in Jesus Christ and not have eternal life?
 - b. Something must be wrong with his or her understanding of Jesus and/or salvation.

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