

# **JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**

**a pseudo-Christian cult**

by

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

1. A cult may be defined as a religious sect embracing and propagating counterfeit (or false) Christianity.
2. The Bible foretells a terrible apostasy or falling away from the truth of the Gospel in the last days (see Matt. 24:4, 5, 11; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1).
3. The sect known as 'Jehovah's Witnesses' has a theological prehistory. There are similarities between them and the ancient Jewish sect known as the 'Essenes' (associated with the Dead Sea scrolls). Their views were also anticipated by the teachings of Arius of Alexandria (early 4th century) who established a long tradition within Christendom for questioning the Deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. Arianism, Unitarianism and JW theology have much in common.

## ***HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT***

The movement only adopted the name 'Jehovah's Witnesses' as recently as 1931 at Columbus, Ohio in the USA. This was occasioned by a split between the followers of the founder and the new body called the 'Watch Tower Society'. The founder of the movement was Charles Taze Russell of Pittsburg (1852-1916).

Brought up within American Congregationalism, Russell became opposed to the doctrine of eternal torment. At the age of 18, he organised a Bible class in Pittsburg which, in 1876, elected him as 'pastor'. In 1879, Russell founded *Zion's Watch Tower*, a magazine which started with a circulation of 6000, climbing to an astonishing 64 million in 1963. Russell's major work was a seven-volume *Studies in the Scriptures*, published between 1896 and 1917. The last volume created a division within the movement. The minority group were known as 'The Dawn Bible Students'.

Russell was a person without integrity. After his wife left him in 1906, he refused to pay alimony to her when the divorce was finalised. He avoided payment by transferring all his property - worth \$60 million - to himself under the name 'The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society'. In 1912, a Canadian Baptist pastor named J. J. Ross exposed Russell's life and teachings. Ross was sued for libel and a court case ensued. During the trial, the proceedings completely vindicated Ross. During cross-questioning, Russell was found guilty of perjury. After initially admitting that he was a Greek scholar, he later was forced to admit that he was unfamiliar with the Greek language.

After Russell's death in 1916, one 'Judge' J. F. Rutherford became the leader of the movement. Although he was a lawyer, he was never actually a judge. Like Russell, Rutherford was a sworn antagonist of main-line Christianity,

believing that only the JW's taught God's truth. He died in 1942 of cancer at his palatial residence in San Diego, California, aged 72. Rutherford spent some time in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary for violating the US Espionage Act of 1918. Opposition to civil authority became a feature of JW teaching and they gloried in being persecuted for their views. Their anti-social mentality is seen in their rejection of blood transfusion, based on an absurd misunderstanding of the Bible. (The Old Testament prohibition of feeding on blood (Lev. 7:26-7) has no possible connection with blood transfusion).

On Rutherford's death, Nathan H. Knorr became the leader. Like his predecessors, Knorr (d. 1977) was a victim of prophetic delusion. All three men prophesied events which have proved them false prophets (see Deut. 18:22). Russell said that Christ's second advent took place in 1874 and that the world would end in 1914. Rutherford said that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the faithful prophets of old would return in 1925. In 1941, JW publications spoke of 'the remaining months before Armageddon'. In 1966, Knorr declared that 1975 would mark the end of 6000 years of human history since Adam's creation. When he died two years later, he was reported to have been greatly disappointed that nothing had happened. He was succeeded by Fred W. Franz. He too has been guilty of wilful deception on several occasions.

One cannot but admire the zeal and dedication of the average JW and the phenomenal growth of the movement. However, the followers are gullible people and quite subservient to the movement's authoritarian and hierarchical structure. The governmental structure is tight indeed. At the movement's head is the all-powerful Board of Directors. Then come the 'Religious Servants', followed by the 'Zone Servants'. The latter have the responsibility for the local groups called 'Companies' and these meet in the 'Kingdom Hall'. At the head of each company is the 'Service Director' who is immediately responsible to the Zone Servant.

### ***THE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY***

The real source of authority for the JW is not the Bible but their version of the Bible interpreted by Russell's *Studies in the Scriptures* and expressed in their literature as expounded by the leadership.

The JW *New World Translation* of the Bible (NT 1950, revised 1951) involves a hotch-potch of textual alterations. They claim to possess a version more accurate than the *Authorized Version* (1611) which they are anxious to prove is based on corrupt MSS. The JW's glory in having the same textual basis for their Bible as all the other modern versions of the Scriptures (NIV, GNB, etc). The similarities between all these versions is an uncomfortable discovery for those professed Evangelicals who reject the textual tradition on which the AV and RAV/NKJV (1982) are based.

## **THE TEACHINGS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**

Like other non-Evangelical organisations, the JW movement has become skilled in using language which is familiar to evangelical Christians. However, their tenets are so obviously wide of the mark. Let us make a brief survey:

### **God and the Trinity**

JWs emphatically deny this, attributing it to the devil. They are therefore 'unitarian' in their beliefs. Jehovah alone is God, they assert. Jesus is only Jehovah's son and created by Him. After all, they say, if Jesus is God, how can he be his own father? As for the Holy Spirit, 'he' is not a person - only God's 'active force'.

*Answer:* Of course, the term 'trinity' is not found in the Bible but the evidence for the concept is there in abundance (see Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). JWs misunderstand the meaning of the Trinity and fly in the face of Scripture. Jesus is 'God the Son' not 'God the Father'. They are distinct persons who share the same divine nature. Hence Jesus is the 'only-begotten of the Father' and not a created being (Jn. 1:18). By denying the Trinity, they produce two gods, thus opposing the First Commandment. Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for calling Him 'God' (Jn. 20:28). They distort John 1:1 by translating the Greek as 'the Word was a god' (even though there is no indefinite article in Greek). However, see Jn. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 9:5; 2 Cor. 5:19; Heb. 1:8; 1 Jn. 5:20, and all the references in John's Gospel which speak of the 'only-begotten Son', e.g. Jn. 1:14, 18. In the eyes of the Jews, Christ's claim to divine sonship made Him guilty of claiming to be God! They saw the very point missed by JWs! See Jn. 5:18 and 10:33. For the personality of the Holy Spirit, see Christ's description of Him in Jn. 15:26; 16:13. The Apostle Paul warns against 'grieving' Him in Eph. 4:30. One cannot grieve an impersonal influence.

The truth of the Trinity is clearly in the Bible. Unlike JWs, it may be asserted that true Christians believe in Jehovah the Father, Jehovah the Son and Jehovah the Holy Spirit! Thus true Christians are true witnesses to Jehovah three times over!

### **Human nature**

The JWs deny that human beings have souls, affirming that our spirits die when the body dies. 'Soul' simply means 'life' according to them. Thus the soul cannot exist apart from the body.

*Answer:* The Bible assumes a distinction between soul and body. Otherwise, what of Christ's promise to the thief on the cross (Lk. 23:43), Paul's expectation of being with Christ after death (Philip. 1:21-3; 2 Cor. 5:6-8) and the souls of the saints in God's presence (Heb. 12:23; Rev. 6:9)?

### **Christ's resurrection**

The JW's deny that our Lord rose physically from the dead. It was a 'spiritual resurrection' they argue.

*Answer:* JW teaching is perfectly anticipated in Lk. 24:37-43. See also Jn. 20:27; Acts 10:41.

### **God's punishment of sin**

The JW's deny the doctrine of eternal punishment and the reality of hell as a realm of perpetual torment.

*Answer:* If the JW teaching is correct, then those who reject Christ have nothing to fear but annihilation (a very popular teaching tragically embraced by some modern Evangelicals). However, as everlasting bliss for the Christian is taught in the Bible, so everlasting misery for the unbeliever is equally taught in the Bible. See Matt. 25:46; Mk. 9:44-46; Lk. 16:23-4; Jn. 3:18, 36; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:10, 15.

### **Salvation by Grace**

The JW's teach that our Lord's atoning death - 'the ransom sacrifice' - simply recovers us from temporal death, giving us a 'second chance'. Thus we really save ourselves by obediently proving ourselves worthy of salvation by good works.

*Answer:* The entire drift of New Testament teaching is that God saves us by His grace alone, received by faith in Christ alone. Like the Roman Catholic Church and other non-Protestant bodies, the JW's hold to salvation by 'works-righteousness'. See Rom. 5:1-10; Matt. 3:7; Eph. 2:8-10.

### **The Church**

The JW's say that God rejected 'the Church' in 1878! Their organisation has effectively replaced it. Thus they are utterly opposed to all Christian denominations.

*Answer:* True, there has been, and is, apostasy within 'Christendom'. But God's true people are still 'His Church'. See Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:6; Eph. 3:21; 5:25.

## **Earthly governments**

The JW's are opposed to human governments. They are unpatriotic and pacifist in outlook. In their view, all earthly government is of the devil.

*Answer:* See Rom. 13:1-7 for a refutation of the JW view. See also Christ's own view of the civil government and our obligations to it in Lk. 20:25. Significantly, the Roman centurion Cornelius was never told to leave the army (Acts 10:1ff)!

## **The second coming of Christ**

The JW's say this has happened already! Christ returned first in 1874 according to Russell. He came to cleanse the Temple in 1918. They say Christ's appearance was spiritual not physical!

*Answer:* This teaching is clearly absurd. Christ's return will obviously be visible to the naked eye. See Acts 1:11 and Rev. 1:7.

## **CONCLUSION**

JW's are clearly at odds with historic, orthodox, Bible-based Christianity. For all their zeal and good intentions they are simply not Christians. Since they usually disclaim the knowledge of the new birth (Jn. 3), they cannot be true believers in Christ. They have no assurance of salvation. Their false teaching blinds them to the truth of the Word of God. However, when JW's are converted to the truth, they usually have wonderful testimonies. So, the message for Reformed, Evangelical Christians is, "Know the truth yourselves; debate the issues with confidence in God's Word; pray that the Holy Spirit will convict JW's of their errors and bring them to Christ."