



Jehovah's Witnesses

All material taken from Josh McDowell & Don Stewart's Handbook of Today's Religions, Fritz Ridenour's So What's the Difference?, & the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention's *Interfaith Evangelism Belief Bulletin*

History

- 2000: Worldwide: 6 million in 235 countries; U.S.A.: 998,166
- Charles Taze Russell (b. Feb 16, 1852 near Pittsburgh, PA)
 - 1870, w/o formalized theological education, organized Bible class. Members eventually made him “pastor.”
 - 1879, founded magazine, *Zion’s Watchtower*, in which he published own unique interp. of Bible
 - 1886, first vol. of *The Millennial Dawn* published
 - d. 1916, after extensive travel, preaching, writing

History

- Joseph F. Rutherford (2nd President; 1916-1942)
 - Name “Jehovah’s Witnesses” adopted
 - Moved toward “theocratic” control w/power to make all policy decisions
- Nathan Knorr (3rd President; 1942-1977)
 - Increase from 115,000 to 2,000,000+ members
 - 1961, *The New World Translation of Holy Scriptures*
- Frederick W. Franz (4th President; 1977 to 1992)
- Milton G. Henschel (5th President; 1992 to 2000)
- 2000: Organizational restructuring
- Don A. Adams (6th President; 2000 to current)

Claims of JW's

- Bible is their only authority
- Christian denomination
- Yet, denial of the Essential Tenets of Christianity, including the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, His bodily resurrection, salvation by grace through faith, & eternal punishment of the wicked

Claims of JW's

- Charles Taze: “Be it known that no other system of theology [i.e. other Christian claims] even claims, or has ever attempted to harmonize in itself every statement of the Bible, yet nothing short of this can we claim.”
- Watchtower claims it is the sole organization that speaks for God in today's world, even more so than the Bible

Source of Authority

- Authoritative doctrinal statements found in *The Watchtower & Awake*, along w/other publications
- Contention that Bible is ultimate authority
- Yet obvious proof-texting to support errant theology
- For all practical purposes, their publications take precedence over Bible

Trinity

- Outright denial of the Trinity
- “The trinity doctrine was not conceived by Jesus or the early Christians.”
- “The plain truth is that this is another of Satan’s attempts to keep the God-fearing person from learning the truth of Jehovah and his Son Jesus Christ.”
- Neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit are seen as being God

God: JW Claims

- The true God is named Jehovah (Deut. 6:4; Ps. 83:18).
- His principal attributes are love, wisdom, justice, and power.
- God is a “spirit being,” invisible and eternal, but has a spiritual body and is not omnipresent

God: Response

- God is Spirit
- God has many Names by which He identifies Himself, not just one
- Jehovah is an acceptable term for God, yet it is not a Biblical name, per se; it's a combination of YHWH and Adonai
- God is most definitely omnipresent

Jesus Christ: JW Claims

- Not God incarnate (in flesh), but a created being
 - “Jesus, the Christ, a created individual, is the second greatest personage of the Universe. Jehovah God and Jesus together constitute the superior authorities.”
 - “...He was a god, but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah.”
 - “If Jesus were God, then during Jesus’ death God was dead in the grave.”

Jesus Christ

- Denial of Christ's Deity a revival of the ancient heresy of Arianism
 - 4th c. A.D. Arius; the Son of a different substance than the Father; created being
 - *homousios vs. homoiousios*

Jesus Christ: JW Claims

- Jesus was Michael the Archangel in his preexistent state, with a brother named Lucifer. Lucifer rebelled; Michael remained obedient
- During earthly life, Michael transformed into a man
- Became Messiah at baptism
- Killed not on a cross, but on a torture stake, as a “ransom sacrifice” (perfect man only)
- After resurrection (which was spiritual in nature only), He went back to former state as invisible spirit w/no body

Jesus Christ: Response

- Jesus was not created, but was Deity from all eternity and coequal with the Father.
- He came to earth in bodily form to reveal God's nature and character to mankind.
- He now reigns with the Father in heaven and will return some day to close the age and judge all people.
- Sacrificial, substitutionary atonement of God Himself

Jesus Christ & John 14:28

- Used to support the notion that Christ is a lesser being than the Father
- Proper interp: Christ voluntarily submitted Himself to His father during His earthly ministry
- Refers to earthly position, not His Person

Jesus Christ & Revelation 3:14

- Used to support the notion that Christ was created (“the beginning of the creation of God”)
- “...not that he was the author of creation, but that he was the first one whom God made and whom God made without the co-operation of anyone else.”
- Made Jesus first, then cooperated with Him in making everything else
- Proper interp: Jesus is the source of creation

Other Passages

- Proverbs 8:22
 - Royal birth
 - Preeminence of Christ
- Colossians 1:15
 - Preeminence & Sovereignty of Christ
 - vv. 16 & 17: Christ as Creator

The Holy Spirit: JW Claims

- Not a part of the Godhead
- “...the holy spirit is the active force of God. It is not a person but is a powerful force that God causes to emanate from himself to accomplish his holy will.”
- Always “spirit” in the *New World Translation*

The Holy Spirit: Response

- Mistranslations of Eph. 4:30 & Jn. 14:26
 - How can one grieve an impersonal force, or how can such a force teach all things?
- The Personhood of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk. 12:12; Acts 5:3-10; 13:2-4; 1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 3:7)
- His Deity demonstrated by His divine attributes as revealed in Scripture.
- The Holy Spirit convicts the lost of sin & He indwells believers at conversion, empowering them to live the Christian life (cf. Matt. 28:19; Mk. 3:29; Rom. 8:4,26-27)

Salvation: JW Claims

- Requirements for salvation, in addition to faith, include baptism by immersion, active association with the WBTS, righteous conduct, & absolute loyalty to Jehovah.
- No assurance of salvation, only hope for a resurrection.
- Those who fail to live up to the above requirements or who are disfellowshipped by the WBTS have no hope of salvation.

Salvation: Response

- Contrast with Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5: By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone
- No amount of works or membership in any organization guarantees salvation.
- Good works are the natural response to salvation already received, not its cause (cf. Eph. 2:10).
- Salvation is eternally assured for those who have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior (see John 1:12; 5:24; 1 John 5:13).

Everlasting Punishment: JW Claims & Response

- Denial of the existence of hell
- “The doctrine of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death cannot be true mainly for four reasons: (1) It is wholly unscriptural; (2) it is unreasonable; (3) it is contrary to God’s love; and (4) it is repugnant to justice.”
- Contrast with Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:7-9
- Everlasting punishment is in accord with Divine justice

Two Classes of Saved People: JW Claims

- Only 144,000 faithful elect Jehovah's Witnesses, known as the "Anointed Class" will go to heaven at death to rule with Jesus.
- Only those born since 33 A.D. can be part of that number (based on Rev. 14:1-3).
- Most Jehovah's Witnesses hope to be among the "other sheep" or "great crowd" who will not go to heaven, but, after Armageddon and the millennium, will live forever in Paradise on earth (based on John 10:16; Rev. 7:9).

Two Classes of Saved People: Response

- The WBTS' doctrine of a duality of saved people is not supported by a careful study of the Scriptures (cf. Matt. 5:12; Phil. 3:20).
- In Revelation 7 and 14, both the 144,000 and the “great crowd” or “multitude” are “before the throne” in heaven.
- All born-again Christians will live forever in the consummated Kingdom (cf. John 3:16; 14:3).

Final Judgment & Paradise on Earth: JW Claims

- After the millennium, Satan and his allies will be destroyed.
- Faithful Jehovah's Witnesses will inherit everlasting life on perfect Paradise 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."

False Prophecies: Second Coming & Kingdom of God

- Regarding Jesus' Second Coming
 - Not a promise of a return in the visible flesh
 - Rather, in the form of God's Kingdom set up fully in heaven as of 1914
- Second Coming in heaven not always their teaching
- Former prophecy that Kingdom would be on earth
- 1914 = the end of "the times of the Gentiles"
- Contrast w/visible, unmistakable return of Christ (Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7)
- Warning against false teaching concerning His return (Matt. 24:26, 27; cf. Deut. 18:21, 22)

Final Judgment & Paradise on Earth: Response

- All people will face the final judgment of God.
- The righteous saved people will have eternal life in heaven but the wicked lost will suffer eternal punishment in hell (cf. Matt. 18:8-9; 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48; 2 Thess. 1:9).

Key Misinterpretations: John 8:58

- *NWT*: “...I have been.”
- ego eimi = present, active, indicative = I Am
- From Jn. 8:42-9:12, “to be” occurs 22x in indicative mood, and *NWT* correctly translates it 21x, only mistranslating in 8:58
- Dr. A. T. Robertson, renowned Greek scholar, after translating ego eimi as “I AM” in Jn. 8:58: “Undoubtedly here Jesus claims eternal existence with the absolute phrase used of God.”

Key Misinterpretations: John 1:1

- “The word was a god.”
- *NO* reputable translation agrees with this rendering. The Greek grammar simply will not allow this translation.
- Definite article and indefinite article in Greek
- *theos* (God) appears 6x w/o def. article (vv. 1, 6, 12, 13, & 2x in 18), yet rendered God (meaning Jehovah) in every instance except when it refers to Jesus in v. 1!
- JW’s will not call Jesus a false god, nor the true God. Belief in polytheism, which is a sin (Ex. 20:3; Is. 43:10; Jn. 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:4-6)

Key Misinterpretations: Colossians 1

- *NWT* denies the Deity & Lordship of Christ:
 - “Because by means of Him all [other] things were created in the Heavens and upon the earth” (v. 16).
 - “All [other] things have been created through Him and for Him” (v. 16).
 - “Also, He is before all [other] things and by means of Him all [other] things were made to exist” [v. 17].
 - “And through Him to reconcile again to Himself all [other] things” (v. 20).
- No basis for adding the word “other” other than to attempt to make Jesus Christ a created being.

Evangelism

- Call JW's to abide by their own teaching in *The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life*, p. 13:
 - “We need to examine, not only what we personally believe, but also what is taught by any religious organization with which we may be associated. Are its teachings in full harmony with God’s Word, or are they based on the traditions of men? If we are lovers of the Truth, there is nothing to fear from such an examination.”

Evangelism

- Have a clear understanding of your faith & the Bible.
- Acquire a basic knowledge of JW beliefs & practices.
- Make a definite plan for the witnessing encounter & take the initiative.
- Be sincere, caring for the individual as one created in God's image, and not only out to convert them.
- Gradually move on to a discussion of theological issues.

Evangelism

- Be prepared to cite & explain specific biblical passages supporting Christian doctrines.
- Define your terms clearly & ask the JW to do so, as well.
- Focus the discussion on the primary issue of the person & work of Christ, stressing the need for a personal relationship with Him.

Evangelism

- Share your personal testimony of God's grace & your faith in Jesus as Savior & Lord.
- Present the basic plan of salvation & encourage the JW to make a decision.
- Pray & trust the Holy Spirit to lead you.