

A Study Of Jehovah's Witnesses #1

Introduction. The idea that there are many different religious systems which God will accept simply cannot stand when compared to biblical teaching (Luke 11:23; 2 John 9-11; cp. 1 John 4:1). Jehovah's Witnesses appear to be zealous advocates of studying the Bible because they persistently canvass door-to-door in an effort to distribute their literature and arrange private studies. Their fluent way of quoting scriptures may give the impression that they do follow the Bible. However, their zeal is without knowledge (Romans 10:2).

The majority of Jehovah's Witnesses are victims of victims — blind followers of the blind leaders (Matthew 15:14). If you have already made an attempt, then you realize how difficult it is to talk to Jehovah's Witnesses. They will try your patience, test your Bible knowledge, and strain your endurance. However, they need to hear the gospel too. Most Jehovah's Witnesses come from a life history devoid of spirituality. Large numbers were Catholics who seldom went to church services. Many had no religious background and were living a life of materialism or sin or simply felt trapped in a humdrum routine that led nowhere — until the Witnesses knocked at the door.

We will begin our day of study by considering the background of the group and then several important facts about the New World Translation.

I. Historical Background Of The Jehovah's Witnesses

A. Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916).

1. He was born in Pennsylvania of Presbyterian parents. Russell became a skeptic at age seventeen because he could not resolve the doctrine of predestination and eternal punishment. While in this troubled attitude of mind, he came in contact with a group of Second Adventists, a splinter group from William Miller, who was the father of Seventh-Day Adventism. He obtained several distinguishing doctrines which seemed to resolve his confusion:
 - a) No hell or punishment for the wicked in a lake of fire.
 - b) No conscious existence after death.
 - c) The destiny of man is everlasting life on earth.
 - d) The end of the world is nearly here.
2. Russell founded what was known as the Bible Student Movement in the 1870s, out of which the Jehovah's Witnesses sprang. He was elected as "pastor" and introduced to the Emphatic Diaglott, a translation by Benjamin Wilson, a Christadelphian, which supported many of his cherished doctrines. This translation was widely used by Jehovah's Witnesses until their own translation was introduced in 1950. He began publication of a journal known as Zion's Watchtower and Herald of God's Presence in 1879. Later, the publication became the current paper distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses called The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom. The Bible Student Movement fractured into several different groups after Russell's death in 1916: Bible Students, International Bible Students, Associated Bible Students, Independent Bible Students, and finally the Jehovah's Witnesses.
3. In 1881 Charles Russell founded The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the publishing and governing body of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Society was

incorporated in 1884 with Russell as its president. Today, The Watchtower is based in Brooklyn, NY. It publishes two periodicals, The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom and Awake!

4. The organization rapidly grew for several reasons:
 - a) Many disillusioned Second Adventists were attracted.
 - b) Russell, who was independently wealthy, threw his money into the work.
 - c) He was a prolific writer and also traveled extensively.
 - d) Many find comfort in a no hell doctrine.
 5. Russell's character has been publicly demonstrated by numerous court cases to be very dubious. He stated under oath that he did not know anything about the Greek or Hebrew languages. Since Russell was proven long ago to be a perjurer under oath and a scholastic fraud, the Witnesses seek to avoid his influence and memory whenever possible. However, this cannot be done. Could we reliably believe a man such as this?
 6. "Pastor" Russell wrote five volumes of *Millennial Dawn* later published under the title, *Studies in the Scriptures*. He was extremely bold in his writings. He wrote in *Studies in the Scripture*, "... Furthermore, not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself but we see, also, that if anyone lays the 'Scripture Studies' aside, even after he has used them for ten years — if he then lays them aside and ignores them and turns to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand if he had merely read the 'Scripture Studies' with their reference and had not read a page of the Bible as such, he would be in the light at the end of two years because he would have the light of Scriptures."
- B. Judge Joseph F. Rutherford (1868-1942).
1. When Russell died, Rutherford became the president. He had served as the "legal counsel" of the society since 1907. Although he was called "Judge" Rutherford by many, he had officially served as judge only as a substitute when the regular judge was ill in Missouri's 4th Judicial District.
 2. Rutherford had a booming voice which held large audiences. He was a prolific writer, outstripping Russell in volume. Probably his most famous work was the book, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*. He, like Russell, set many dates regarding the coming of Christ, and consequently had to change positions when the disappointment of prophetic failure arose.
 3. His arrogance also matched Russell's. In his pamphlet, *Why Serve Jehovah?*, he declared in effect that he was the mouthpiece of Jehovah for this age and that God had designated His words as the expression of divine mandate.
 4. Under the leadership of Rutherford, the Jehovah's Witnesses took their present name in 1931. Before this they were called Millennial Dawnists, International Bible Students, and Russellites.
 5. Rutherford was brutal in his attack against Christianity. Except for a few scattered individuals who kept the faith, true Christianity vanished from the face of the earth shortly after the death of the twelve apostles — according to the Jehovah's Witnesses. It was not restored until Charles Taze Russell set up the Watchtower organization in the late 1870s. When Christ returned

- invisibly in 1914, he found Russell's group doing the work of the "faithful and wise servant" (Matthew 24:45) and appointed them over all His belongings. All other churches and professed Christians are actually tools of the devil.
- C. There have been many other leaders of the Jehovah's Witness movement, but these two form the most well-known core of leadership.
1. It matters not who the president may be, they are led to put their trust in the Watchtower Society as "God's agent" for the gospel message today. Like the Catholics toward the Pope, or the Mormons toward their prophet, Joseph Smith, it matters not what changes are made because allegiance to the Watchtower Society is pounded into the members from the beginning.
 2. The definition of a "cult" is "a religion or religious sect generally considered to be extremist or false, with its followers often living in an unconventional manner under the guidance of an authoritarian, charismatic leader." Jehovah's Witnesses classify as a "cult" because of their allegiance to Russell, Rutherford, and now the Watchtower Society which they believe is the only source of true "light" or inspired interpretation of the scriptures.

II. The New World Translation

- A. Jehovah's Witnesses claim to use the Bible alone as the standard by which to judge religious truth. They certainly use a lot of scriptures, but instead of following the scriptures, they impose their own notions on people by the use of their translation.
1. The Jehovah's Witness leadership issued their followers copies of the King James Version (later the American Standard Version because it features the name "Jehovah" throughout the Old Testament), along with detailed instructions on how to make the scriptures appear to teach different doctrines.
 2. However, there were some doctrines that were very difficult to derive from the King James and American Standard Versions, no matter how much twisting was applied to the text. So in 1950, Watchtower leaders went beyond interpretation by producing their own version of the Bible, with hundreds of verses changed to fit Watchtower doctrine. The New World Translation continues to be rewritten every few years, with additional changes made to bring God's word into closer agreement with what the organization teaches.
- B. It is so easy to deceive by subtly changing the word of God. The failure to discern between translations can be dangerous. The Bible does not promise that every version or translation will be reliable in every place (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:25), and people need to be aware of versions they use because the New World Translation poses a serious threat to unsuspecting readers.
- C. With this in mind, there are some important questions to ask about different versions and translations.
1. Is the scholarship in the translation produced by an individual or a group?
 - a) Generally speaking, translations produced by committee are more accurate to the ancient texts than those produced by individuals. This is because several experts in the field of linguistics bring their scholarship and expertise to bear on the manuscripts and their variants.

- b) However, none of the members on the New World Translation Committee (there were only five men) had recognized degrees in Greek or Hebrew exegesis or translation. In fact, Frederick W. Franz, then representing the translation committee and later the Watchtower Society's fourth president, admitted under oath that he could not translate a simple Old Testament verse from the Hebrew.
2. Is it a version or a paraphrase? There are two basic approaches:
- a) "Formal Equivalence" attempts to translate the words and nuances of the original as literally as possible, provided that no actual violence is done to English usage.
 - b) "Dynamic Equivalence" attempts to convey the meaning of the text in free and idiomatic English with less regard for the exact wording of the original. Many passages thus become commentaries.
 - c) The NWT is so extremely biased and perverted, it is nothing more than a sectarian paraphrase, not a translation. Only Jehovah's Witnesses use the translation, and they will not use anything else. No serious Bible scholar considers it credible. That is not the case with the KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, ESV, etc.
3. Does it teach doctrinal error?
- a) The examples of dogmatic twisting and perverting of the scriptures in the NWT to suit their theological interpretations is incredible.
 - (1) They dogmatically insert the word "Jehovah" into the text of the New Testament by claiming that copyists changed the wording in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). However, thousands of manuscripts exist which prove them wrong. There is nothing wrong with the word "Jehovah," but to dogmatically settle on it is straining the bounds of good linguistics.
 - (2) Colossians 1:16 — "By means of him all {other} things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities" (NWT). They insert the word "other" into the text in a vain attempt to make Christ a creature and one of the "things" Jehovah is spoken of as having created. They deny the entire context of Colossians 1:15-22 which is filled with references to the Lord as Creator.
 - (3) John 1:1 — "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god" (NWT). This translation, which tries to undermine the deity of Christ, is again another example of incorrect grammar and poor knowledge of the Greek language. They must discredit this passage because if Jesus and Jehovah are "one" in nature, their theology cannot stand.
 - (4) Matthew 27:50 — "Again Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and yielded up his breath" (NWT). Jehovah's Witnesses must change the word "spirit" because they do not believe in this eternal, immaterial nature that was made in the image of God. Having forced this word into the text, they make it appear that the Lord merely stopped breathing

instead of yielding up His spirit. However, they get caught in Luke 23:46 where the Lord commends His spirit to God. It would not make sense to commend His breath to God! If they are consistent, they must render parallel accounts the same.

- (5) Matthew 24:3 — “While he was sitting upon the mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately, saying: ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?’” (NWT). Jehovah’s Witnesses have tenaciously clung to Russell’s belief that the Lord came in 1914. For Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christ is not coming; He is here! He has expelled Satan from heaven and is proceeding to overthrow Satan’s organization, establish the Theocratic Millennial Kingdom, and vindicate the name of Jehovah God. He did not return in a physical form and is invisible as the Logos. They have found 24 occurrences of this Greek word and translated it “presence.” In some contexts, that is allowable, but in others, it is completely impermissible because of the context. Paul nor John never believed in an invisible return (1 Thessalonians 4:15-16; Revelation 1:7). The Greek word which is used in this passage is not the same one used in passages like Matthew 24:3. This devastates the argument.
- b) Though it is impossible for an inspired interpretation to be wrong, the Jehovah’s Witnesses freely admit mistakes have been taught. However, this does not bother them (Galatians 1:6-8). They are more interested in what they can make the scriptures say and not in what the Holy Spirit has already revealed. If you cannot pull a Jehovah’s Witness away from the NWT, you will not make progress with them.

Conclusion. Jehovah’s Witnesses are not the church of the New Testament. They had a definite beginning from false doctrine and they perpetuate that false doctrine, which we will see tonight. They stand on a mistranslation of ancient texts and claim that their leadership has had continued revelation from God.

In contrast, truth will set you free (John 8:32). The truth of the properly translated New Testament teaches a honest heart how to experience the new birth. It’s those same instructions that we ask people to obey today.