

The Cults Exposed

Jehovah's Witnesses: Doctrinal Issues



Introduction: **A Two Question Exam (Mt. 16:13-17)** (*The First Question doesn't count!*)

1. **Who do PEOPLE say that the Son of Man is?**
Peter: "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."
2. **But who do YOU say that I am?**
Peter: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."
Jesus: "Blessed are you Simon Barjona..."

I. Doctrinal Survey of Witness Beliefs

A. Source of Authority

The Bible - is believed to be the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Their translation, *The New World Translation*, is considered an essential corrective to previous faulty translations. Linguistically, the *NWT* is an inferior translation designed to avoid passages that cause theological problems for Witnesses.

Scripture Studies - Russell claimed his six volume *Scripture Studies* yield more light than study of the Scriptures alone. He all but called them Scripture.

Watchtower & Awake - These publications are the prophetic voice of the movement defining Witness doctrine and making prophetic predictions (or *revising previous predictions* as needed).

Note: More than most cults the Jehovah's Witnesses are well versed in their Bible; they are trained to defend their views and to raise questions about orthodox beliefs.

B. The Trinity

Witnesses believe...

Satan is the originator of the doctrine of the Trinity, not Jesus or the early Church.

Jehovah alone is God almighty. He is greater and older than the Son.

Jesus is a created being inferior to Jehovah.

The Holy Spirit is a force and not a person.

Note: The doctrine of the Trinity (*i.e.* three persons existing as one God forever) is a synthesis of the following Biblical truths:

- [1] There is only one God;
- [2] The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are each called God; they each possess the attributes of Deity, yet ...
- [3] The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have always been distinct persons.

A precise statement of this doctrine was gradually formulated over the first three centuries in response to heretics who denied aspects of these Biblical truths.

3. Jesus

Witnesses believe...

He is a created being inferior to Jehovah.

He is the first born, the brother of Lucifer.

He (as the Logos) was Jehovah's active agent in creation.

He is the archangel Michael in the Old Testament.

His conception provided a body for his time on earth.

His resurrection shed his humanity and body to again be the archangel Michael.

[They believe Jehovah temporarily gave Jesus a body to calm Thomas' concerns].

Jesus is now a spirit creature not a human.

Note: [1] The orthodox teaching of the incarnation is that Jesus became fully God and fully man at His conception. He remains so forever. His resurrected (and glorified) body is a preview of the resurrected body of believers.

[2] The teaching that Jesus is a created being inferior to God was first taught by Arius (c. 280-336). Arius' views became quite popular, he even wrote a song to communicate his views, "There was a time when Jesus was not." Arius was condemned as a heretic by the Council of Nicea in 325AD.

"But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and Before being Born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change—these the universal church anathematizes (i.e. calls accursed)."[Council of Nicea, cited in Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, 328]

4. Man, Salvation and Hell

Witnesses believe...

Man, like the animals, does not have an immortal soul. Hell is simply the grave, not a place of conscious punishment. Gehenna is seen as a symbol of annihilation. Punishment is "eternal" only in the sense that it is final.

Man lost the right to life because of the sin of Adam. Christ's death paid a ransom to cancel death and gave man an opportunity to earn life again. This is done by faith and good works.

Only those who seek and follow Jehovah have hope beyond the grave.

Note: JW teaching on conditional immortality and annihilation mirrors the teachings of Seventh-Day Adventism and is a reflection of the early influence of the Adventists on Russell.

5. The Two Classes of Believers

The Little Flock [144,000]

gathered from 1914 to 1935
are baptized in water
receive spirit baptism
participate in the New Covenant do not
celebrate the annual Memorial meal
remnant survive Armageddon
rule with Christ from heaven in MK
spirit beings in MK and beyond
live forever with Christ in Heaven

The Great Crowd

gathered from 1935 to the end of the MK
are baptized in water
only a measure of God's spirit
do not celebrate but must attend
survive Armageddon if faithful
serve Christ on earth in the MK
human bodies in MK and beyond
live forever on an earthly Paradise

Note: This distinction is at the heart of a JW's world life view. With the passing of time the Anointed Class is becoming an endangered species. Almost all JWs alive today are members of the great crowd who must frantically labor just to barely make it through Armageddon to a new earth. This provides a strategic opportunity for reaching them.

6. Armageddon, the Kingdom & Beyond

JW theology has three dispensations:

The World that Was	The World that Is	The World that is to Come
creation	flood	1914 {Millennium}{Ages Beyond}

JW time sequence:

1874 - Christ returned to the upper air where he is invisible Lord
1914 - Christ returned to his temple as King of this World ruling through his people
1918 - Christ begins to judge the Nations, separating sheep and goats
1935 - Christ completes the 144,000 who will rule with him in the millennium

Still future...

Armageddon - Christ will soon vanquish his enemies on earth in this decisive battle.
Millennium - Christ with the 144,000 rule over the great crowd.
Annihilation - A final rebellion at the end results in annihilation of the rebels and Satan.
Ages Beyond - Both groups live forever: the little flock in heaven sustained by Christ's presence; the millennial believers sustained by the food of the new earth.

II. Central Issues: Talking Points

The Deity of Christ

1. Jesus received worship without giving rebuke.

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:27-29)

Only God is to be worshiped, other gods are prohibited. (Ex. 20:3-5).

Yet, Jesus allows Thomas to call Him God without rebuke!

[Other examples where Jesus allows worship: a leper (Mt. 8:2); disciples (Mt.9:18); a man born blind (Jn. 9:35, 38); women post resurrection (Mt. 28:9, 17).

On the other hand...

Peter refuses worship.

As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." (Acts 10:2-26)

Paul with Barnabas refuse worship.

*When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" **Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes** because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: "Men, why are you doing this? **We too are only men, human like you.**(Acts 14:11-15)*

Angels refuse worship.

*I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I **fell down to worship at the feet of the angel** who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "**Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you** and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. **Worship God!**" (Rev. 22:8-9)*

Jesus refuses to worship Satan.

*"All this I (Satan) will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "**Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'**" (Mt. 4:9-10)*

Conclusion: *If Jesus is not really God... Either...*

[1] Jesus wrongly thought he was God and accepted worship. [He's Deluded]

[2] Jesus knew he wasn't God and wrongly accepted worship. [He's a Deceiver]

In either case: Peter, Paul and angels should be regarded above Jesus!

2. **Jewish Leaders wanted to stone Jesus for the blasphemy of claiming to be God.**

"I and the Father are one." Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." (John 10:30-31)

*"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." The Jews therefore said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." Therefore **they picked up stones to throw at Him**; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple. (Jn. 8:56-59) Also: Lk. 5:21; Mt. 26:65*

Note: Often it is said that Jesus never claimed to be God. Obviously the religious leaders of His day ("the Jews") understood His words as a blasphemous claim to deity. They were there, they heard Him, they were trained theologically and therefore their assessment of the theological implications of Jesus' claims was accurate.

Also, the Old Testament teaches that Messiah is God:

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him **Immanuel**. (Isa. 7:14)*

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God, Everlasting Father**, Prince of Peace. (Isa. 9:6)*

To claim Jesus is the promised Messiah or to assign Messianic titles to Him (i.e. *the Christ*, or the *Son of Man*) is to affirm His deity.

3. **Key Principle:**
Absolute equality is not incompatible with **relational submission!**

Jesus and the Father possess the same essence and attributes, yet the Son willingly submits to the Father! *Many of the verses the JWs quote to prove inequality are simply statements of relational subordination.* (Ex: Jesus says "I always do the will of the Father" or "The Father is greater than I." -- These are acknowledgments of relationship not descriptions of essence or attributes).

Other illustrations of the same principle:

Marriage: Men and women are joint heirs of grace (1 Pet. 3:7) and are equals before God.
Yet a wife is to submit to her husband in their relationship in marriage (Eph. 5:22).

Church: All believers have an identical position in Christ (Gal. 3:28) and are equals before God.
Yet believers are to submit to the leadership of the elders (1 Pet. 5:5).

The Place of Good Works and Salvation

“Jehovah God will justify, will declare righteous, on the basis of their own merit, all perfected humans who have withstood the final, decisive test of mankind. He will adopt and acknowledge them as His sons through Jesus Christ.” (Life Everlasting, Watchtower, 1966).

1. **Good Works are not the Basis for Salvation.**

*“For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**--and this not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God--not by works**, so that **no one can boast**.”
(Eph. 2:8-9)*

Salvation is a gift not a reward.

Grace eliminates human pride.

2. **Good Works are the Result of Salvation.**

*“For **we** are God's workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
(Eph. 2:10)*

Good Works are not unimportant for a believer.

Good Works are not optional for a believer.

Conclusion: Are YOU ready?

*“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...**” (1 Pet. 3:15)*

