

Sects and Cults

Jehovah Witnesses: Theology

1. Name

What is in a name? For years the sect had been known as the Russellites, the Millennial Dawnists, the International Bible Students. In 1931, at an international assembly held in Columbus, Ohio, "Judge" Rutherford told the crowd of 15,000 that they would be henceforth called Jehovah's Witnesses. This name was taken from the 43rd chapter of Isaiah, verse 10, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." This name change was a boost to the sect. It gave the members a sense of purpose, mission and even a messianic complex.

2. The Bible

The JW, in their writing and proselytizing, constantly quote Scripture. One commentator called the JW "Bible dizzy". The sect believes the Bible to be the infallible and inspired Word of God. They claim that the Bible and the Bible alone is the sole standard and judge for religious truth. And this is not all. They also say that they are the only ones who do justice to the Bible. "Be it known," wrote Russell, "that no other system of theology even claims, or even has attempted, to harmonize in itself EVERY statement of the Bible; yet nothing short of this we claim for these views."

Is the Bible really their only source of truth? Not at all! The teachings of their founder and leaders are THE interpreters of Scripture. The notion of an infallible teacher was developed by Russell himself. According to *The Watchtower* and *Herald of Christ's Presence*, May, 1925, Russell was the angel referred to in Ezekiel 9:11, or the seventh messenger of the Church. He also charged in his *Studies in the Scriptures*, "that it would be better to leave the Bible unread and read his Studies than to read the Bible and ignore his Studies!" In one of his own teachings, Rutherford said: "These speeches do not contain my message, but do contain the expression of Jehovah's purpose which he commands must now be told to the people." This is heady stuff!

In the three main periods of the historical development of the sect, an outstanding text has served as a second Bible. Authors Wilton M. Nelson and Richard K. Smith, in *Dynamic Religious Movements*, write: "During the first period it was Russell's Studies in the Scriptures, in the second Rutherford's Harp of God, and in the third it -has been the anonymous Let God Be True."

The sect's method of Bible interpretation is bizarre. They gather as many proof-texts as possible to maintain a particular doctrine. Texts are often taken out of context or are twisted. The context of a Bible passage or texts that may challenge their doctrinal stance are ignored. The Bible they use for their theologizing is their own biased translation into modern English. Many of the sect's peculiar teachings have been worked into their version.

a. The New World Translation

The New World Translation is a version, which has some deliberate mistranslation. A number of researchers charge that the only one in the translation committee who knew Hebrew or Greek was President Franz. And even his language ability has been called questionable. The others didn't have any knowledge of the Biblical languages. An illustration of their method of translation is John 1:1; a verse, which has a clear testimony of the deity of Jesus Christ. The Revised Standard Version states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The New World Translation denies the deity of Christ with its rendering: "in (the) beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."

3. The Trinity

The JW are strict Unitarians. They claim that the doctrine of the Trinity originated with Satan. The only true God is Jehovah. He must be known by his proper name, in order that he may be distinguished from false gods. The trinity is misrepresented as three gods in one person rather than one God in three persons. Their definition as to what they think the church teaches is; "The doctrine, in brief, is that there are three gods in one; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, all three equal in power, substance and eternity."

Jesus Christ is said to have been created by Jehovah. The Holy Spirit is "the invisible force of the Almighty God which serves his servants to do his will." The New World Translation never capitalizes the word "spirit", when it refers to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is always designated as the impersonal "it," or "which" rather than "he" or "who".

4. Christ

What do the JW think of Christ? They deny His deity. He is not the eternal Son of God, Who became man. He was neither equal to Jehovah nor co-eternal with Jehovah. Before he came to earth, Jesus was really Michael the archangel. Jude 9 is said to be a reference to Jesus Christ in his pre-human state. Jesus did have a beginning. They say of Christ: "This One was not Jehovah God, but was existing in the form of God ... he was a spirit person ... he was a mighty one although not Almighty as Jehovah God is; ... he was a god, but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah."

The incarnation is denied. When Christ came to earth he was changed into a form of a man. Christ "laid aside completely his spirit existence". He was a perfect human being, the equal to Adam prior to the Fall. This teaching is a modern version of the heresy spread by Arius and challenged by Athanasius. What Athanasius said about Arius applies to JW today; "Although they use scriptural language and frequently quote Scripture, their doctrine is thoroughly unscriptural." With their heretical and even bizarre view of Christ, the JW have placed themselves outside the fold of the Christian faith.

5. The Resurrection of Christ.

For the Christian, the physical, bodily resurrection of Christ is a foundation doctrine. (1 Cor. 15:17). However, the JW deny this truth. They believe that Jehovah raised Christ as a spirit. What happened to the body is not quite clear. Russell believed that it might have been dissolved into gasses. The spirit Christ is said to have received again the name Michael. There appears, therefore, three stages in Christ's existence-angel-man-angel.

6. Satan

Satan is a created spirit son of God whose name was Lucifer. He was given charge over this world, but he became jealous of Jehovah and seduced Adam and Eve. Satan will be completely annihilated by Jehovah.

7. The Church.

The JW are sectarian to the extreme. They consider themselves as the sole guardians of the truth. They identify their movement with the kingdom of God. The Watchtower Society is strictly authoritarian. No differences of opinions are tolerated within the ranks. The attitude of the JW towards the established churches is totally negative. "Judge" Rutherford, in particular, directly attacked both Protestants and Roman Catholics in his radiobroadcasts and through his pamphlets. He taught they are part of "Satan's organization." He encouraged his followers to picket Roman Catholic churches, with signs saying: "Religion is a snare and a racket." They announced that God's "inspired Word compares the world empire of false religion to a grossly immoral woman named 'Babylon the Great'. She is 'richly adorned,' living in 'shameless luxury.' In her is found the 'blood of all earth's slaughtered.' God sentences her to be 'burned with fire', completely destroyed. (See Revelation chapters 17 and 18). This destruction will come from the very political powers that she had dominated for so long. What does this mean for you?" ("Has Religion Betrayed God and Man?").

The JW teach that the church is divided into two classes. According to Ephesians 5:32, the mystical body consists of Jesus as the head with the 144,000 of Revelation 7:4 as the body. The latter are "the anointed" or "the elite." Those who are now joining the JW are the "Jonadabs" or the "great multitude" of Revelation 7:9.

The 144,000 are to reign as spiritual beings in heaven. The Jonadabs will be raised with physical bodies. They will spend eternity on the new earth, ruled by the spiritual elite.

8. Christ's Second Coming.

Will there be a visible return of Christ? No! This is not possible since Christ has only an angelic existence. Christ has already returned in 1914. He took his place at the right hand of God and began to rule over his kingdom from heaven.

Date setting has been a prominent feature in the theology of the JW. Through complicated calculations based on Daniel and Revelation, the JW pointed to 1975 as the possible date for the Armageddon. (There have been other dates set in previous years). An August, 1968, edition of the *Watchtower* prophesied: "What about all this talk concerning the year 1975? ... Their (serious Bible students) interest has been kindled by the belief that 1975 will mark the end of 6,000 years of human history since Adam's creation `.. One thing is absolutely certain, Bible chronology reinforced with fulfilled Bible prophecy shows that six thousand years of man's existence will soon be up, yes,, within this generation!" Former JW member James Penton said that many JW sold their homes and neglected medical attention because of the approaching date. Naturally, many JW were deeply disturbed when the end of times didn't come as announced. The March 15, 1980, edition of the *Watchtower* discussed the disappointment experienced by so many of the Society's members. And it encouraged the faithful to keep steadfast. "Nevertheless, there is no reason for us to be shaken in faith ... Rather, as a consequence, we are all moved to make a closer examination of the Scriptures regarding this matter of a day of judgment."

9. Salvation by Works

The JW teach salvation by works. A Christian asked a JW: "What must I do to be saved?" The reply was: "Go out two by two and preach the Gospel." It is not Christ's finished work that counts. The believer has to do it all. Christ only paid a ransom on the cross to give man the opportunity to earn life again.

The JW teach that Christ's death "does not give or guarantee everlasting life or blessing to any man." Even in salvation there are two classes. The "anointed class" are selected on the basis of their worthiness. They must continue to serve God, demonstrating their faithfulness to Jehovah until their death. The Jonadabs may be delivered at Armageddon by being faithful members of the Watchtower Society, canvass door-to-door and distribute literature. "Judge" Rutherford said: "If Jehovah's Witnesses should fail or refuse to deliver the message, they would be unfaithful to God and would suffer destruction." All this is a perversion of the Biblical doctrine of salvation by grace. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us ..." (Titus 3:5).