Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses

by Patrick Zukeran

Patrick Zukeran summarizes the history and rapid growth of the Watch Tower movement and its key doctrinal problems, including its teaching on Christ's resurrection, the Holy Spirit and failed prophecies, to equip Christians in speaking with Witnesses. In copyright; included with a standing offer of removal at the rights holder's request.

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Chapter 1

Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses - Understanding and Responding to False Doctrine

Written by Patrick Zukeran

Dr. Zukeran provides us with a concise summary of the key doctrinal issues in the beliefs taught by Jehovah's Witnesses. Understanding these problems held by their followers in areas such as the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and false prophecies, prepares us to be more effective witnesses for Christ to members of their faith.

History of the Watch Tower

One of the most aggressive and fastest growing cults is the Jehovah's Witnesses. Today they have a worldwide organization that numbers about 3.5 million members operating in 205 countries. Several factors account for this rapid growth. The first is their zealous door-to-door evangelism. Second, we Christians have failed to make a solid defense of our faith against their attacks when they have come to our door. The result is the Witnesses continue unchallenged in the propagation of their organization and deceive many. Third, the rise of the cults are a fulfillment of the prophetic warnings given by Jesus and the Apostles.

In this essay I want to look at the beliefs of the Witnesses and then give the reader practical witnessing strategies. The history of the Jehovah's Witnesses begins with the founder of the organization Charles Taze Russell. He was a member of the Congregational Church who came to reject the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment. In 1870, with no formal education, he began a Bible society which eventually named him pastor. In 1884, he founded Zion's Watchtower and Tract Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is now the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society headquartered in Brooklyn, New York. Since then they have mushroomed into an organization which produces more literature in one year than the Christian and Catholic churches combined. And, of all the cults, their missionary forces are the most well trained in evangelism.

Witnesses deviate from biblical Christianity in several areas. I will discuss some of their major doctrinal errors. First, like all the cults, they deny the Trinity. They believe there is one God, Jehovah. Jesus, is actually Michael the Archangel, the first of God's creation, who became flesh at the incarnation. After the resurrection, He returned to heaven as Michael the Archangel.(1) The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire.(2)

Second, Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, but instead believe He was raised as a spirit and manifested Himself several times in different materialized bodies.(3)

Third, they deny the existence of hell and eternal punishment, but believe in total annihilation after death. Only the elite ruling class, the 144,000, are allowed to go to heaven. The faithful Jehovah's Witnesses remain unconscious after death till they are resurrected in the Millennium. Those who are not in the organization are annihilated after death.(4)

Fourth, Witnesses have a works-oriented salvation. Salvation is not based upon a relationship with Christ, but found in the organization. One must serve the society, and depending on one's faithfulness and absolute obedience, one may be saved.(5)

Fifth, they believe that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914 and established His throne in heaven. At Armageddon, God will destroy all evil, and abolish all the world's governments, and establish a new Paradise on earth. Then the living and resurrected Jehovah's Witnesses will inherit Paradise earth. The 144,000 mentioned earlier will rule with Jesus. At this time all unbelievers who have died will be raised (with some exceptions) and will study under the Witnesses during the Millennium, a period of a thousand years. Studying with them will be the unbelievers who have survived Armageddon. After the thousand years, their faith will be tested because God will release Satan from the abyss. At that point all unbelievers will have to choose between Satan or Jehovah. Those who reject Jehovah will be annihilated.(6)

Clearly the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses deviate in critical ways from sound biblical principles. Next, I want to discuss approaches to evangelizing Jehovah's Witnesses.

False Prophecies of the Watch Tower

One of the most effective ways to evangelize Jehovah's Witnesses is to destroy their faith in the Society. Remember, salvation is found only in this organization. The Watch Tower Society is seen as the spokesman for God. If you can show Witnesses the serious errors of the organization, they will begin to have doubts and questions. This can sometimes lead them to leave the Society.

Attacking the Society's record of false prophecy can cause JWs to to question the organization. This approach is effective because they claim to have the true understanding of the end times. If we can show them that the organization has been constantly wrong in the area of prophecy, this will certainly make an impact. When the Jehovah's Witnesses show up at your door again, begin first by asking them, "Are you prophets of God?" Some will say, "Yes." Others may say, "We are prophets in a sense." You must make it clear there is no such thing as "a prophet in a sense." There are only true prophets and false prophets. Some may deny being prophets. If so, show them a copy of the April 1, 1972, Watch Tower article on page 197, which states clearly that they are prophets.

Second, define clearly what makes a true prophet and a false prophet using Deu 18:20-22. A true prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which come to pass. A false prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which do not come to pass. Make sure they understand this, for this is the most critical step.

Third, ask them, "Is there an organization that fits the character of a false prophet?" That's when you say, "Let's take a look at the Watch Tower Organization." Have handy copies of the articles mentioned here. The 1889 issue, "The Time is at Hand," page 101 states, "The battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev 16:14), which will end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." This 1914 prediction of Christ's return never came true.

Then the Watch Tower predicted that Christ would return in 1925. The 1918 issue of, "Millions Now Living Will Never Die," p. 89 states, "Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the apostle in Heb 11:1-40 to the condition of human perfection." This proved to be another false prophecy.

The Watch Tower made a third prophecy of the return of Christ; this one was to occur in 1975. The August 15, 1968, issue of, Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?, p. 494, predicted the return of Christ in 1975. Once again the Witnesses were shown to be false prophets. If the Witnesses don't believe these articles are real, tell them to look them up in their church's library.

Another interesting prophecy is found on page 154 of their book You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth. Here they state, "Some of the generation living in 1914 will see the end of the system of things and survive it." Most of the 1914 generation are dead, and the few remaining are very old. In just a few years, the Watch Tower will again have another false prophecy. When presented clearly, the record of the Watch Tower'sfalse prophecies is a very effective tool in witnessing to JWs.

(A free PDF file of copies of these false prophecies, as well as helpful information on the invention of the word "Jehovah," is available HERE.)

The Name of God

Another effective avenue of witnessing to the Witnesses is in the name of God. Jehovah's Witnesses state that God's true name is "Jehovah." They say the term "God," is merely a title, and that the real name for God is "Jehovah." In fact they go so far as to say that unless one calls on the true name of God, "Jehovah," one cannot be saved.(7)

Let's take a real close look at the name "Jehovah" and see if it is in fact the true name of God. The term "Jehovah" is actually a false reading of the Hebrew pronunciation of God, or YAHWEH. Allow me to explain where the word "Jehovah" comes from. The words in the Hebrew Old Testament contained no vowels. The words were constructed of consonant letters only. The Scribes knew what vowels to use in the pronunciation of the words by the construction of the consonants, the context, and memory. It was written this way until the fifth century when the Masoretes added the vowels under the consonants in their version of the Old Testament known as the Masoretic Text.

The name of God in the Old Testament spelled YHWH, was considered holy, and was not to be read aloud. Instead, when the Hebrews came upon YHWH, they would say ADONAY, which means "Lord." In order to indicate this substitution, the Massoretes placed the vowels of ADONAY or the English equivalent of e, o, and a underneath the consonants of YHWH. Later some Christian translators mistakenly combined the vowels of ADONAY with the consonants of YHWH producing the word "Jehovah." Now the term is recognized to be a late hybrid form never used by the Jews. That's the origin of the word "Jehovah." Let's now look at what other scholars say about the name "Jehovah."

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: "Jehovah" -- False reading of the Hebrew YAHWEH.(8)

Encyclopedia Americana: "Jehovah" -- erroneous form of the name of the God of Israel.(9)

Encyclopedia Britannica: The Masoretes who from the 6th to the 10th century worked to reproduce the original text of the Hebrew Bible replaced the vowels of the name YHWH with the vowel signs of Adonai or Elohim. Thus the artificial name Jehovah came into being.(10)

The Jewish Encyclopedia: "Jehovah" -- a mispronunciation of the Hebrew YHWH the name of God. This pronunciation is grammatically impossible.(11)

The New Jewish Encyclopedia: It is clear that the word Jehovah is an artificial composite.(12)

According to the Encyclopedia Judaica, p. 680, vol. 7, "the true pronunciation of the tetragrammaton YHWH was never lost. The name was pronounced Yahweh. It was regularly pronounced this way at least until 586 B.C., as is clear from the Lachish Letters written shortly before this date."

Therefore, for Jehovah's Witnesses to insist Jehovah is the true name of God and that one is saved only if he calls on that name, is an error. When Witnesses appear at your door explain to them the name "Jehovah" and read what the scholars say about Jehovah. Also remember, God uses many names for Himself such as, King of Kings, the Lion of Judah, the Alpha and the Omega, and others. When JWs realize what the authoritative sources have to say, especially the encyclopedia references, they will begin to realize the need to take a serious look at this error in the organization.

The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

A third subject area for effective witnessing to Witnesses is the bodily resurrection of Christ. Witnesses believe that Christ's crucified body was disintegrated by Jehovah never to exist again. Accordingly, Jesus was raised as a spirit who then materialized and appeared in several different fleshly bodies as the angels had done. Indeed, it was in this form that He appeared to His disciples; i.e., He wasn't in a human body; He just appeared to be human. He ascended into heaven as a spirit and once again became Michael the Archangel.(13) This doctrine can be easily disproved.

First, in Luk 24:36-43, Jesus clearly states in Luk 24:39 that He is not a spirit but a man of flesh and bone. He even ate food to prove that He was not a spirit but had a physical body. In Joh 20:24-27, Jesus shows Thomas His wounds. Jesus is clearly demonstrating to His disciples that the body previously on the cross had been resurrected. If Jesus had a different body than the one on the cross, He would have been deliberately deceiving the disciples. Ask the Witness, "Would Jesus deliberately deceive His disciples into believing something that was not true?"

Next, turn to some passages where Jesus predicts the resurrection of His body. In Joh 2:19-21 Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." See Act 2:26-27, another prophecy of the Messiah's bodily resurrection. Clearly the prophecies and Jesus' appearances prove a bodily resurrection.

Witnesses cite 1Pe 3:18 and 1Co 15:44-50 to back up their belief. In 1Pe 3:18 we read, "Christ died once and for all... he being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the spirit." This verse does not prove Jesus is a spirit. This verse says that Jesus was raised in the Spirit and by the Spirit of God who gives life. Rom 8:11 states that the Holy Spirit was involved in raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus was not raised as a spirit but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

According to 1Co 15:50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Since Jesus is in heaven, Witnesses say He must be a spirit.(14) They are correct in saying that the earthly body cannot enter heaven. However, when Jesus rose, He had a glorified body (Luk 24:39). Therefore, He can dwell in heaven because of His glorified state. According to 1Co 15:39, "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another.... There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies." Christ's glorified body allows Him to travel in the earthly and heavenly dimensions. Some verses indicate that Christ exists in heaven in bodily form. "For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" Col 2:9. The verb "dwells" in the Greek is katoikei, and is in the present tense. In other words, Jesus has a glorified body in heaven, the one that was resurrected. Note also 1Ti 2:5, "There is one God and one mediator, the man Christ Jesus." The verb "is," is a present tense verb also. How can Jesus be a man if He is Michael the Archangel? Seeing these errors may prompt them to seek the truth.

The Holy Spirit

A fourth avenue of effective evangelism with Jehovah's Witnesses is the subject of the deity of the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned earlier, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person because they see the Holy Spirit as a force--much like electricity or fire. Here is what Jehovah's Witnesses say about the Holy Spirit.

In their book You Can Live Forever In Paradise on Earth, they state, "As for the `Holy Spirit,' the so-called third person of the Trinity, we have already seen that this is not a person but God's active force."(15)

In their magazine Why Should You Believe in the Trinity? they state, "To a certain extent it (Holy Spirit) can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations."(16)

Here are some verses that are effective in proving the deity of the Holy Spirit. In Act 5:1-42 Ananaias and Sapphira lied to the church about the amount they sold their land for and the amount they gave to the church. Peter confronts them on this issue and states in Act 5:3, "Ananaias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...?" Peter later states in the next verse, "You have not lied to men but to God." Here the Holy Spirit is called "God" with a capital G both in our Bibles and in the Witnesses' Bible. Another interesting question to ask Witnesses is, "Can you lie to a force like fire or electricity?" The answer is "No." You can only lie to an intelligence, a person.

In Act 13:2 the Holy Spirit speaks, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, `Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Ask the Witness, "When was the last time electricity or fire spoke to you?" It is obvious only an intelligent person can communicate in language.

Eph 4:30 states, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Any logical person should realize you can only grieve a living being. Ask a Jehovah's Witness, "How can you grieve or bring sorrow to an impersonal force like electricity?"

When you put all these facts together, the fact that the Holy Spirit is called God, He can be lied to, He speaks, and He can be grieved, the evidence shows that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an inanimate force. When presented clearly, I have not met any Jehovah's Witness who have been able to refute these verses.

God bless and good Witnessing!

Notes

1. You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1982), p. 39.

2. Ibid., p. 40.

3. Reasoning From the Scriptures (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1985), pp.333-36.

4. Ibid., pp. 76-80.

5. Live Forever, pp. 350-55.

6. Ibid., pp. 170-84.

7. Ibid., pp. 41-44.

8. "Jehovah," Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1973 ed.

9. Encyclopedia Americana, vol. 16., 1972 ed.

10. "Yahweh," The New Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. 12, 1993 ed.

11. "Jehovah," The Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 7, 1904 ed.

12. "Jehovah," The New Jewish Encyclopedia, 1962 ed.

13. Live Forever, pp. 143-45.

14. Ibid., pp. 143-46.

15. Ibid., p. 40.

16. Should You Believe in the Trinity? (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), p. 20.

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