

World Religions: Jehovah's Witnesses

1. Introduction

1. First, for ease of note taking, Jehovah's Witnesses will from here on be called simply JWs
2. A note about the name Jehovah
 1. Some translations of the Bible (notably the KJV) use the term “Jehovah”
 1. The KJV uses it four times
 2. The NKJV does not use it at all
 3. Young's Literal Translation uses it 5,752 times!
 4. The New World Translation uses it 7,210 times!
 2. It comes from an attempt to marry two Hebrew truths into English:
 1. In Hebrew, the name of God is יהוה (YHWH)
 1. Were you to pronounce this, it would *likely* come out something like “Yahweh”
 2. In Hebrew culture, you NEVER pronounce the name of God
 1. But in Hebrew culture, you read aloud from the scrolls of Scripture in the Temple and synagogue ... what's a reader to do?
 1. The answer? You *say* “Adonai” when you read “YHWH”
 2. How's a non-native speaker supposed to know that?
 1. The Masoretic Text includes the vowel points from the word “Adonai” with the consonants of YHWH
 2. If you're foolish enough to attempt to pronounce this mess, you get ... “Jehovah”!

1. Modern Jews avoid this altogether by referring to YHWH as “HaShem” - meaning, “the Name”
3. This does not mean, of course, that “Jehovah” is a bad name or that we shouldn't use it
4. It *does* mean that we'd be foolish to make a big deal of it
3. As you might have guessed by now, JW's make a *very* big deal out of it

1. From their own website (watchtower.org):

“In the preface to the *Revised Standard Version*, we read: "For two reasons the Committee has returned to the more familiar usage of the King James Version [that is, omitting the name of God]: (1) the word 'Jehovah' does not accurately represent any form of the Name ever used in Hebrew; and (2) the use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom he had to be distinguished, was discontinued in Judaism before the Christian era and is entirely inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church."

“As to the argument that there are no other gods from whom the true God had to be differentiated, that is simply not true. There are *millions* of gods worshiped by mankind. The apostle Paul noted: "There are many 'gods.'" Of course, there is only one *true* God, as Paul goes on to say. Hence, one great advantage of using the name of the true God is that it keeps him separate from all the false gods. Besides, if using the name of God is "entirely inappropriate," why does it appear almost 7,000 times in the original Hebrew Scriptures?”

2. JW's argue that God has a personal name, and that as such we should refer to Him with it
 1. While it might be true that YHWH is intended as God's personal name, it's at least as likely that it has to do with His existence
 1. Many scholars argue that the term YHWH stems from a Hebrew stative verb – that is, a verb of being/existence
 2. This is related to why God tells Moses to tell the people that “I Am” has sent him
 2. Also, for the record, it doesn't occur 7,000 times in the Hebrew text – it's about 5,000

3. How most translations deal with the issue
 1. Generally, when you see LORD (all caps) in a translation, that's your clue that YHWH is in the Hebrew
 2. Other translations attempt to give its most likely pronunciation: Yahweh
 3. Regardless of how you translate or transliterate the word, the essential character of your relationship with the Creator simply cannot be impugned based upon how you refer to Him, so long as your term is Biblical in nature
 1. Consider: Jesus told the Disciples to pray, “Our *Father*” - not “O Jehovah”
 2. Consider: the NT is full of examples of praying to “the Lord” - the Greek term is unambiguous: it means “lord”

2. History (from Kingdom of the Cults)

1. Charles Taze Russell – founder

1. Russell was born in 1852 and grew up in Pennsylvania
2. Somewhere early in his life he rejected the idea of eternal torment
3. When he was 18, he started a Bible study in Pittsburgh
 1. Six years into this Bible study, the group elected him their pastor
4. From 1876 – 1878 he worked at a magazine, but resigned over his rejection of the atonement of Christ
5. In 1884 Russell founded the “Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society”
 1. In 1886 they published the first of 6 books that would form the theology of JWs – called simply “Scripture Studies”
 2. Incidentally, a seventh book was published after Russell's death, and led

to a split in the group with most following J F Rutherford

6. As his printed materials and sermons attracted more and more followers, Russell found himself in control of increasing amounts of wealth
 1. For a time, Russell's Watch Tower organization sold “Miracle Wheat” for \$1.00/lb, with the claim that it would yield five times what any other wheat crop would
 2. A local newspaper reported that “Russell's religious cult is nothing more than a money-making scheme”
7. Russell's organization was constantly involved in unscrupulous matters
 1. It was alleged and later proven that Russell made wildly exaggerated claims about where and when he preached, often simply making things up entirely
 2. Russell attempted to sue a local pastor for publishing a pamphlet detailing Russell's heresies – he lost the case
 1. During this case, Russell gave false testimony about his level of education and theological training
 2. During the case he claimed to understand Biblical (Koine) Greek, but under cross examination admitted that he did not
 3. During the case, Russell claimed to have been ordained; under cross examination he admitted he had not
8. Russell followed the path of most cult leaders – total authority
 1. It was reported at his death that he held 99% of the funds of the organization, with two other men splitting the remained 1%
 2. He once said it would be better to never read the Bible and read his books than to read the Bible but neglect his books
 3. His followers were known as Russellites

4. Upon his death, another virtual dictator was selected to replace him:
Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford

9. Russell's legacy

1. As you might imagine, much of JW theology is based upon the teachings of Russell
 1. Given his complete lack of training and education, as well as his many personal scandals and ethical violations, this seems unhealthy at best
 2. Nevertheless, modern JWs follow virtually every major heresy of Russell today
2. As you also might imagine, modern JWs want to minimize their dependence upon Russell
 1. Consider how their website portrays the man that *founded their religion*: “Charles Taze Russell was the prime mover of the group”; “Printed sermons were syndicated in newspapers” [with no mention that they were *Russell's* sermons]; “the Bible student Charles Taze Russell”

2. J F Rutherford

1. Rutherford continued the tradition of denouncing most of the basic doctrines of Christianity
2. Like Russell's, Rutherford's ego grew into bona fide hubris
 1. For example, when some followers left the organization because Rutherford had dared to disagree with a particular teaching of Russell, Rutherford declared they would “suffer destruction” if they did not return to the Watchtower (now written as a single word)
 2. In his pamphlet “Why Serve Jehovah?”, Rutherford claims to be the mouthpiece of Jehovah for his age and that God had designated his words as the expression of divine mandate
3. Under Rutherford's leadership, the name Jehovah's Witnesses was officially

adopted in 1931

4. Rutherford wrote many, many more books and pamphlets than did Russell
5. Since Rutherford's death, a single leader has always been chosen to carry the mantle of the Watchtower

3. Life as a JW

1. When a current JW works to convert a new one, they encourage people to question what they've been told and search the Scriptures for truth
2. Once a person becomes a JW, all that changes
 1. You are required to attend five meetings per week at the local Kingdom Hall
 2. You are also required to do “fieldwork”
 1. Early on, you're tagging along with a more experienced JW as you go door-to-door
 2. Later, you're the one with a new guy tagging along
 3. You are required to abide by a long list of things good JWs “don't do”
 1. You can't celebrate birthdays
 2. You can't participate in the government (not even voting)
 3. You can't celebrate holidays
 4. You can't smoke
 5. You can't wear anything but plain, bland clothing
 6. You can't read any Bible but the NWT or perhaps the KJV
 7. The list goes on; the point is that you're a committed legalist/Pharisee at this point

4. You are actually commanded to *stop* questioning what you're told and must accept whatever the Watchtower says without hesitation
5. Since virtually no one in the Watchtower is paid, this schedule combined with a paying job consumes your life
 1. You are no longer to talk to your old friends, unless it's “fieldwork”
 2. You quickly discover your family and neighbors grow uncomfortable around you
 3. Your daily grind consists of work (job), followed by more work (JW)
3. Should you ever even *consider* leaving the Watchtower...
 1. You are reminded that your very soul hangs in the balance
 2. You are faced with the prospect of losing all your current relationships (remember, you lost all your old ones when you joined)
 3. Should you press on, you are disfellowshipped – no one is allowed to even acknowledge you
 4. It is believed that the suicide rate among former JW's is perhaps five to as much as ten times higher than the general population

[Appendix: The story of one former JW who found Jesus. Taken from his personal website – www.angelfire.com/pa/ExJW]

4. A sampling of JW teachings of note

1. Regarding the person of Jesus

1. Jesus was not and is not God

1. JW's reject the notion that Jesus was divine in any way
2. The most famous demonstration of this denial is found in the NWT of John 1:1, where we read "In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."
3. There are countless other Bible passages that are also twisted to fit this doctrine

2. Jesus was not resurrected bodily

1. JW's teach that he was raised as "spirit being"
2. They believe the angel Michael is the resurrected Jesus

3. Jesus did not die as an atonement for our sins

1. JW's teach that Jesus' death removed the effects of Adam's sin, but that humanity's obedience to the teachings of JW's is a necessary second part of becoming a child of God. In other words, the cross only did half the work – you do the rest.

4. Jesus will not return physically

1. Since he did not raise physically, he'll not return physically either
2. JW's teach that Jesus "spiritually" returned in 1914

2. Regarding the Holy Spirit

1. JW's teach that the Holy Spirit is not a distinct member of the Trinity – in fact, they deny the Trinity entirely
2. To them, the HS is "God's active force", not a person

3. Regarding life on earth

1. JW's teach that you cannot be beholden to human authority

1. As a result, you never participate in government in any way
2. You may not be patriotic
3. You may not acknowledge national holidays

2. JW's teach that life on earth is to be strict and simple

1. No birthdays
2. No outspoken-ness
3. No fancy attire
4. No time-consuming hobbies

4. Regarding our future state

1. JW's teach that Hell is not a place of eternal torment

1. Rather than tormenting them forever, God simply annihilates the souls of those that reject the teachings of JW's
2. They, like so many others, use the "how could a loving God send people to eternal Hell" argument

2. JW's teach that only those 144,000 born prior to 1914 and found faithful to JW teachings actually go to Heaven

1. The rest of them will live in a paradise on earth
2. Interestingly, 100 years ago there were those that taught a similar dichotomy between the Christian Jews and the Christian Gentiles

5. The JW Bible – the New World Translation

1. Much has been made about the seemingly crazy translations often found in the NWT
 1. Although many denominations have a particular translation of the Bible they *prefer*, few maintain that you *must use* one particular version; none have gone to the trouble of making their own translation.
2. According to JWs, the NWT is a literal translation of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible
 1. A note about transitional methodology: there are two primary ways to translate the Bible
 1. Literal translation: These translations attempt to translate the original texts word-by-word
 1. The upside: very little interpretation is done for you
 2. The downside: often clunky, hard to read translations
 2. Dynamic equivalence translation: These translations attempt to translate the original texts phrase-by-phrase
 1. The upside: easy to read
 2. The downside: a fair bit of interpretation is done for you
 2. The biggest problem with the NWT: it's creators knew very little Greek or Hebrew!
 1. The panel of “scholars” that created the original (in 1950) contained not one man with a degree or any kind of certification in Greek or Hebrew
 2. It appears they had a passing understanding of the languages - enough to use the tools of translation, but not enough to actually do the work of exegesis
 1. Essentially they asked the equivalent of a panel of first-year Greek and Hebrew students to create their own translation of the Bible.

2. One panel member (who was later the JW's fourth president) admitted under oath that he could not translate even a simple verse from Genesis (2:4)

1. אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת יְהוָה
אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וּשְׁמַיִם:

2. For the record, I was able to translate this fairly readily when I looked it up in Hebrew: “This is the account of the heavens and earth when they were made, the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens”
3. It stands to reason then that I have better Hebrew credentials than the translators of the NWT, but there's **no chance** I'd ever take on that task – I know my skills are not even close to adequate to the task! Yet these men are convinced they've crafted a superior translation...

3. Obvious distortions from the NWT

1. Col 1:15-20

1. [NWT] – 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 because 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. All [other] things have been created through him and for him. 17 Also, he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist, 18 and he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that he might become the one who is first in all things; 19 because [God] saw good for all fullness to dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile again to himself all [other] things by making peace through the blood [he shed] on the torture stake, no matter whether they are the things upon the earth or the things in the heavens.
2. [NIV] - ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or

powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

2. Zech 12:10

1. [NWT] And I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of favor and entreaties, **and they will certainly look to the One** whom they pierced through, and they will certainly wail over Him as in the wailing over an only [son]; and there will be a bitter lamentation over him as when there is bitter lamentation over the firstborn [son].
2. [NIV] And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. **They will look on me**, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

3. Heb 1:8

1. [NWT] But with reference to the Son: “**God is your throne** forever and ever, and [the] scepter of your kingdom is the scepter of uprightness.
2. [NIV] But about the Son he says, “**Your throne, O God**, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.”
3. Note that this verse is a quote from Psalm 45:6, so the NWT changed it there, too – butchering Greek *and* Hebrew in one act!
4. John 1:1 - see above discussion, wherein Jesus is “a god” according to the NWT