



What to Say to Jehovah's Witnesses ... Ch.1 About the JW's

Mike Licona

Chapter 1 About the Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs)

[Back to Contents]

1. Who are the JW's?

A. History: The movement was started by Charles Taze Russell. In 1870, at the age of 18, Russell formed a Bible class whose members eventually made him their pastor. Russell wrote, traveled, preached, and formed the Watchtower Society, the governing body for the Jehovah's Witnesses. He died in 1916 and was succeeded by Joseph F. Rutherford, who coined the term "Jehovah's Witnesses" for the group. Rutherford died in 1942 and was succeeded by Nathan H. Knorr, under whose leadership the Watchtower's own New World Translation of the Bible was produced. Knorr died in 1977 and was succeeded by Frederick W. Franz, the spokesman for the translation committee of the New World Translation. As of the writing of this book in 1998, there are approximately 5 million Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide.

B. Doctrines: The following are a few of the theological points held by the Jehovah's Witnesses which differ from orthodox Christianity.

1. *Jesus.* Originally created by God as the Archangel, Michael. Michael was later given a human body and renamed Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is not God.

2. *Holy Spirit.* Not regarded as a person, but rather God's force.

3. *Heaven.* The home of God. The majority of

believers will not spend eternity with God in Heaven, but rather with Jesus on a refurbished Earth.

4. *Soul Sleep.* Believers will not immediately be with Christ after death. They remain in a soul sleep until his second coming.

C. The People: As with Mormons, JW's are very sincere and caring. Generally, they are better students of the Bible than Mormons. In my personal experience, I have found that conversations with JW's are more likely to become adversarial than with Mormons. Therefore, extra caution is needed when talking with them.

2. What JW's tell you when they knock on your door

As with Mormons, much of what Jehovah's Witnesses initially tell you when they come to your door is in agreement with the beliefs of most Christians. *"God loves you and wants to do something special with your life. Make sure of where you stand with him because he's coming back again."* They will walk you through the Bible explaining God's good news and that Christians are commanded to be "*witnesses*" to others of this news. JW beliefs begin to differ from those of orthodox Christians when they mention that Christ is going to permanently reign on a refurbished Earth – not in Heaven. However, the major difference will surface when they claim that Jesus was created by God and is inferior to him.

3. How to answer JW's

Although Mormons believe that the text of the Bible has been corrupted over the years, JW's unquestionably believe in its preservation and inspiration by God. This provides a common ground. Therefore, your strategy should be different when talking with them than it is with Mormons. Christians and JW's may discuss doctrinal issues and go no further than the Bible. JW's, however, differ on the interpretation and translation of many verses. This is why they prefer to use their New World Translation, which has translated many verses in such a manner as to be friendly to their own theological interpretation. JW's will claim that the New World Translation is a much more accurate translation of the Bible than other English translations. They will

also claim that the consensus of scholarship has acknowledged this. However, to my knowledge, not a single credible biblical scholar has ever made such a claim much less a consensus and JW's will be hard pressed to mention the names of even a few – or one.

Learning how to refute their interpretation and translation of key verses will require more technical knowledge than for answering Mormons. In most cases, this will involve a little knowledge of the Greek language (the original language of the New Testament). A little Hebrew will be discussed as well (the original language of the Old Testament). But don't worry. We will explain these as we go.

As mentioned above, the Watchtower has several doctrines that differ from orthodox Christianity and JW's will want you to know them. These become focal points as they discuss the Bible with you. For example, JW's insist that you should call God by his name, Jehovah, rather than by his title, God. They also believe that Jesus will reign on a refurbished Earth. However, these doctrines are of secondary importance when compared to the main doctrine in contention, the deity of Christ.

'Deity' is a theological term for 'Godness'. To believe in the deity of Jesus is to believe he is God. JW's do not believe in Christ's deity but rather that he is a being created by God originally as an angel.[1] Christians believe that Jesus is God, by his very nature and essence, as is the Holy Spirit.[2] Christians also believe that although God the Son is subordinate to God the Father, they are equal in their essence. JW's, on the other hand, believe that Jesus is inferior not only in his position to God, but in his essence.[3] Therefore, the issue to discuss is "*Is Jesus God?*" The reason this issue is so important is because if I am worshipping Jesus as God, and he is not, then I am guilty of blasphemy. However, if Jesus *is* God and JW's refuse to worship him as such, then they are guilty of just as great a sin, since they refuse to worship the true God.

When talking to JW's, it is easy to get sidetracked and move from one issue to another. Many of these issues are of minor importance. So why spend a lot of time on them? Does it really matter if I spend eternity with Jesus on a "heavenly Earth"

rather than in Heaven? Stick to the single issue that really matters: the deity of Christ. This will keep the conversation on the focal point that separates JW's from Christians. Watchtower founder Charles T. Russell said in reference to one's belief about the deity issue, "*It means our salvation.*" Russell believed that where a person stands on the deity issue may mean their own salvation. Unfortunately for Russell, as we shall see, it was *he* who stood on the wrong side.

Our study of the Deity of Christ will be two-fold:

A. Biblical texts used by JW's against the Deity of Christ. We will examine the six (6) major biblical texts used by JW's for their belief that Jesus is NOT God, but rather was created. Unless indicated otherwise, the Watchtower's New World Translation (NWT) will be the translation quoted in this section, so you can meet on the same playing field when you talk to the JW who knocks on your door.

B. Biblical texts for the Deity of Christ. In this section, we will look at five (5) biblical texts that support the belief that Jesus *is* God. Many more could be given. However, for brevity's sake, we will stay away from those that are not the strongest.[4] This is not to say those texts do not support the deity of Christ. Many of them do. However, your time with JW's will be limited (usually by them). So discuss only those texts that are extremely difficult if not impossible for them to answer, because they clearly refer to Jesus as God.

[Go to Chapter 2 - Biblical texts used *against* the Deity of Christ]

References:

[1] The terms "divinity" and "deity" can be confusing. In most cases the terms have identical meanings. However, some have used "divine" to refer to an angel, since it came from God. However, an angel would not be a deity, since it is not by its nature God.

[2] This book will only be concerned with the deity of Jesus.

[3] JW's may on occasion say that Jesus is a "god." However, they do not believe that he is "God" in the fullest sense of deity. In their opinion, he is still a

created being, unequal to God in his essence.

[4] New Testament scholar, Raymond Brown, explains multiple ways of understanding Titus 2:13, “*the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*” Is Paul referring to our *great God and Savior Jesus Christ* as two persons? Or is he saying Jesus Christ is our *great God-and-Savior*? Naturally, one can see how it can be understood both ways. Brown notes that several careful scholars have understood the first option to be the more correct, while the latter is virtually the unanimous view held by grammarians and lexicographers. Raymond E. Brown. *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1994), pp.181-182.

© 1998 Mike Licona

This article is reproduced from Mike Licona's book *Behold, I Stand at the Door and Knock: What to say to Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses when they knock on your door.*

It is reproduced here from Mike Licona's website (www.risenjesus.com) by the kind permission of the author.