

Reviewing the Jehovah's Witness Cult

Dub McClish

Introduction

The doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses presents a real challenge to lovers of Biblical Truth for many reasons. It is challenging because cult members are very zealous and bold in the advocacy of their doctrine. At this writing an estimated 1,500,000 Jehovah's Witnesses participate in distribution of literature every month.

The doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses is challenging because it is an intricate and confusing maze of ancient and modern heresies, strung together in an illogical and often self-contradictory manner. This anti-scriptural system of doctrine is rendered all the more confusing and challenging to many due to the abysmal ignorance of most people who answer the knock of the Jehovah's Witnesses at their door.

The doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses represents a challenge because its advocates are usually well drilled in their doctrine. A rigid schedule of classes, lectures, and demonstrations of door-to-door techniques is continually in progress in local "kingdom halls."

The doctrine of the Jehovah's Witness sect is challenging because it teaches that there will be a literal kingdom on earth. The vast majority of the Protestant denominational world holds a materialistic view of the kingdom of Christ, believing in the establishment of a literal, material kingdom on earth. This common point of doctrine disarms many denominational people, leading them to assume that Jehovah's Witness doctrine may not be so bad after all.

The doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses poses a great challenge due to the sheer number of books, pamphlets, magazines, and tracts published relentlessly by the Watchtower Society, the cult's publishing company. These are serious challenges, and they need to be met and answered by the Lord's people. Their doctrine, as with all false doctrine, can be refuted with the truth of God's Word. It is our responsibility to reprove these unfruitful works of darkness and error (Eph. 5:11).

History of the Jehovah's Witnesses Cult

One may learn the story of the beginning and progress of the Jehovah's Witness cult by studying its major leaders. Charles Taze Russell began a "Bible Study group" in Pittsburg in 1870, which evolved into this strange religious organization. Although reared a Presbyterian, by age 15 Russell had become a Congregationalist. By the age of 16, he was sick of "organized religion" and had fallen into infidelity after unsuccessfully trying to "convert" an infidel friend. A

visit on impulse to a rude Seventh Day Adventist hall prompted Russell to form his own "Bible Study group," which was the embryo of the religious empire he would later direct and control. His adherents soon came to be known as "Russellites." He admittedly borrowed some of his doctrines from Adventist theology.

At the age of 25 Russell was so boldly confident in his new religious leadership role that he sold his interests in his father's clothing stores for \$250,000 and began devoting all his time to religious activities. That same year (1877), Russell set forth in a booklet titled *Three Worlds, or Plan of Redemption*, his doctrine that Christ came invisibly in the fall of 1874. In 1879 he began a monthly publication he named *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, the predecessor of the *Watchtower* magazine. By this time Russell was convinced that he was Divinely appointed to serve as the "witness of Jehovah" to all men.

In 1886 Russell published a book titled, *The Divine Plan of the Ages*, which served as the first thorough summary and statement of his doctrinal system. The "Publishers' Foreword" of the book called it the "priceless key to the Bible" and "the text book supreme for aid in Bible Study." Russell wrote five other volumes in this *Studies in the Scriptures* series over the next 20 years, and an additional volume was published posthumously.

Scandal, opposition, and lawsuits marked the last several years of Russell's life. Some prominent followers led an unsuccessful takeover attempt in 1893. In 1897 his wife of 18 years left him and in 1903 sued him for divorce. A scandal ensued concerning improper conduct toward other women. Russell was sued for advertising "miracle wheat" in the *Watchtower*, guaranteeing that it would out-produce any other by 500%. When a Brooklyn paper exposed Russell's claim, he sued for \$100,000 libel damages, but lost the case. Russell's lack of integrity and religious errors were amply demonstrated subsequently in several other instances involving court cases and newspaper exposures.

He was neither a theologian nor a scholar. He had not the faintest idea of how to "handle aright" the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15). He was a self-ordained "pastor," masquerading as a prophet who would have better served the world as a haberdasher. His influence is attributable to egotism, singularity of purpose, determination, and gall. His bizarre interpretations of Scripture appealed to many. When he transferred these to the printed page and distributed them all over the world, thousands were swayed by them. He died in Pampa, Texas, October 31, 1916, while enroute by train from California to New York. It is no mystery that the Jehovah's Witnesses have never published a biography of their founder.

The Watchtower Corporation unanimously elected a new president in January 1917—J.F. ("Judge") Rutherford. Rutherford had practiced law for several years when two young Watchtower girls came into his office to sell him some books in 1894, introducing him to Russell's Watchtower Society. Russell began using Rutherford's legal "skills" in some of his lawsuits and thereby he gained exposure among the Witnesses. By 1906 Rutherford was earnestly at work in the movement. He fiercely attacked the doctrines of established churches, honoring no "sacred cows," and eventually even attacked some of Russell's prophetic interpretations, causing some division among the Witnesses. The followers of Rutherford constitute the Jehovah's Witness sect of the present. They have, in fact, repudiated some of the doctrines and prophetic speculations set forth by Russell, although they still adhere to his basic tenets.

In 1918 Rutherford and seven other principals of the Society were sentenced to prison for sedition due to their rabid anti-war statements during World War I. After 9 months they were released on grounds of an illegal conviction, and Rutherford returned to his post at the Society as a martyr-hero who now had even more power than before.

Rutherford began producing a stream of books that he declared to be "new revelations from God." He wrote faster than Watchtower presses could print. Selling these books from door to door became a major emphasis by about 1930, and it continues to be the mainstay of their propaganda machine. In July 1931 at a Society convention in Columbus, Ohio, Rutherford gave the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" to the cult, hoping this would lay to rest such names as "Russellites" and "Millennial Dawn People." He is credited with great administrative ability through which he organized a tightly controlled, self-perpetuating theocratic dictatorship. He died on January 8, 1942.

The mantle of leadership next fell upon the shoulders of Nathan H. Knorr. Born in 1905, he left the Reformed Church when he was 16 and became a Jehovah's Witness. At 18 he was a full-time preacher and had been added to the staff at the Brooklyn headquarters. He had worked his way up through the ranks and was actually the principal administrator of the Brooklyn office during Rutherford's last years. Although not as flamboyant and bombastic as Russell, or Rutherford, Knorr was nevertheless a talented writer, speaker, and administrator. While continuing the relentless stream of books, magazines, and booklets, his major emphasis was on the doctrinal education of the rank and file Witnesses. Knorr changed the policy of authorship credits so that all articles and books from his time are published anonymously. This policy includes their *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, published in 1961. Said policy has

two distinct advantages to the Watchtower Society: (1) It prevents the glorification of leading personalities in the cult, which had proved divisive in previous administrations, and (2) it makes it impossible to challenge the scholarship or qualifications of the writers. Thus it is impossible to learn from the Watchtower Society who even had a part in producing their *New World Translation* (the linguistic qualifications of anonymous writers can hardly be questioned).

Knorr's administration was characterized by streamlining every part of the Society's operations. He managed to avoid the scandalous lawsuits and headlines common to both Russell and Rutherford before, allowing the Jehovah's Witnesses to gain an unprecedented degree of public acceptance. Knorr had about 115,000 disciples when he began his presidency in 1942. The 1982 *Jehovah's Witness Yearbook* says there are at this writing 172,859 full-time "pioneers" (i.e., preachers) with 2-1/2 million members in 205 nations. If nothing else does, these growth figures should underscore the seriousness of the challenge Jehovah's Witness doctrine poses to the Truth of the Gospel. Let us now consider some of the Witnesses' fundamental errors.

The Witnesses' View of Deity

It is appropriate to begin a review of some major doctrines of the Witnesses with their errors on the concept of God. If one goes astray on the nature of Deity and the Godhead he starts down a path that will lead him into the "far country" on almost every Bible doctrine. To attack the Biblical doctrine of the Triune Godhead is a major thrust of Jehovah's Witness' doctrine.

Russell wrote:

Verily, if it were not for the fact that this trinitarian nonsense was drilled into us from our earliest infancy and the fact that it is soberly taught in Theological Seminaries by gray-haired professors in many other ways apparently wise, nobody would give it a moment's serious consideration (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Series 5, p. 166).¹

Similarly, Rutherford wrote:

Another lie made and told by Satan for the purpose of reproaching God's name and turning men away from God is that of the "trinity"... That there are three gods in one: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, all equal in power, substance, eternity... finds no support whatever in the Bible, but, on the contrary, the Bible proves beyond all doubt that it is the devil's doctrine (*Riches*. pp. 185-188).

An excellent illustration of the lengths to which they have gone to strip Christ from the Godhead is seen in their rendering of John 1:1 in their *New World Translation*: "In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was **a god**" (emph. DM).

The Witnesses contend concerning the Christ that:

1. He was not co-existent and co-eternal with the Father:

Prior to coming to earth, this only-begotten Son of God did not think himself to be co-equal with Jehovah God; he did not view himself as "equal in power and glory" with Almighty God... (*Let God Be True*, p. 34).

2. He was himself a created being known as Michael, the archangel:

At that time [before Jesus' birth, DM], as well as subsequently, he was properly known as "a god"—a mighty one. As chief of the angels...he was known as the Archangel (highest angel messenger), whose name Michael signifies, "Who is God," or God's representative. As he was the highest of all Jehovah's creation, so also he was the first, the direct creation of God..." (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Series 5, p. 84).

3. He was a mere mortal both before and during his earthly life:

Men, angels, archangels. or even the Son of God, before and during the time he was "made flesh and dwelt among us" were not immortal...all were mortal (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Series 5, p. 389).

4. He did not differ from ordinary beasts in that his soul died:

Thus we see that the claim of religionists that man has an immortal soul, and therefore differs from the beast, is not Scriptural. He did not have an immortal soul: Jesus, the human soul, died (*Let God Be True*, pp. 59, 63).

These contentions lead them even further astray concerning the nature of our lord, but these are sufficient to show their contempt for the Biblical doctrine of the incarnation and Deity of Christ.

The Witnesses not only deny that the Holy Spirit is God, but that He is even a person:

The words translated in our Bibles *Holy Ghost* should be properly translated *holy spirit*. The holy spirit is the invisible power, energy, and influence of Jehovah. God is holy; therefore his power, energy, or influence are holy (*The Harp of God*, p. 97).

Far from teaching equality with Jehovah, the Scriptures show that the holy spirit is not even a person (*The Watchtower*, July 15, 1957, p. 431).

The man does not live who completely fathoms the exact nature of Deity, the Triune Godhead, and the way the three persons possessed of Godhood relate to one another (although both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the "Jesus only" heretics suppose they do.). We should expect such to be the case; finite minds are not equipped to fully comprehend the infinite nature. Some matters are secret to humankind; they belong not to us, but only to God (Deu. 29:29a). Some (likely many) ways and thoughts of Jehovah are far above and beyond ours (Isa. 55:8–9); in the nature of the case, it must be so. However, the things God has revealed to us about Himself are ours to believe and act upon (Deu. 29:29b). While unable to understand all of the mysteries of God and Godhood, we can most certainly understand (and we are under Divine mandate to accept) what God has revealed about Himself.

There is no argument between Christians and the Witnesses on the existence of the eternal, self-existent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent God. The points at issue are these:

1. Are there three Persons possessed of full Godhead and Godhood or is there only a single God-person?
2. Is Jesus Christ truly God or merely a created "mighty one"?
3. Is the Holy Spirit a person possessed of Deity or merely the impersonal "influence" of God?

That there is more than one member of the Godhead is apparent in even the earliest words of the Bible. The word for "God" in Genesis 1:1 is a plural term (*Elohim*), allowing for the subsequent Scriptural development of doctrine of the multi-person Godhead. It becomes immediately apparent in Genesis 1 that more than one person is identified as God since God said in verse 26, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness" (emph. DM). To whom was God talking? He was speaking to Someone or Ones Who had power to create. Other Old Testament passages likewise use the plural pronoun in reference to God (e.g., Gen. 11:7; Isa. 6:8; et al.)

The following facts and passages clearly indicate that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose the Godhead:

1. All three participated in the Creation (Gen. 1:1-2; John 1:1-3, 10, 14; Heb. 1:2, 10, et al.).
2. All three were present at the Lord's baptism (Luke 3:22).
3. When one becomes a Christian, he is baptized into the name of all three (Mat. 28:19).
4. Paul distinctly mentioned all three (Rom. 15:30; 2 Cor. 13:14).
5. The Father is called "God" (1 Cor. 8:6; Jam. 1:27, et al.).
6. The Son is called "God" (Isa. 9:6; John 1:1; 5:17-18, 23; Phi. 2:5-6, et al.).
7. The very attributes of the Father are also those of the Son (John 14:7-9).
8. The Holy Spirit is called "God" (Acts 5:3-4).
9. The Holy Spirit is referred to with the masculine singular pronoun—*he*, which could not properly refer to a mere "influence," but necessarily implies a person (John 16:13-15; et al.).
10. The attributes of the Father and the Son are credited to the Holy Spirit in numerous passages.

The Witnesses argue that since Christ is subordinate to the Father and since the Spirit is subordinate to the Son, therefore the Son and the Spirit cannot be God. While some sort of subordination among the Sacred Three is indeed observable in Scripture, such does not preclude those subordinated from possession of Godhood. A man's wife and children are to be subordinate and submissive to him (Col. 3:18-20), but this does not preclude their humanity.

The Witnesses especially emphasize two passages in their blasphemous rejection of Christ's Deity. The first passage refers to Christ as the "firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15).² This, they say, teaches that Jesus was the first thing God created and is therefore not Deity.

However, their ignorance of the word translated "firstborn" (*prototokos*) is the pivotal issue. The word does not signify first **in time**, but first in importance or preeminence. The context itself shows this to be the whole point of the passage: "All things have been created through him and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist" (vv. 16–17). It is evident that Christ could not be both **before all things** and **the first thing created** as well. This passage, when read as a whole, is a devastating blow to the Witnesses' God-denying doctrine.

The second passage speaks of Christ as "the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). Again, the Witnesses argue that this statement means that Christ was the first being created. However, the word translated "beginning" is *arche*, referring not to beginning **as to order**, but **as to cause**. This passage is simply saying that Christ is the One who caused all created things to be, as various passages affirm (cf. John 1:1; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2; et al.).

The Witnesses heap ridicule upon those who profess to believe in three Gods instead of one God. However, they miss the point altogether, for none who has any degree of Scriptural understanding of God believes any such thing. Even the Witnesses, I would suppose, can understand how a husband and wife can still be two persons yet be a unified whole when married (Gen. 2:24). Likewise, the Scriptures teach that while the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, yet they constitute a unified whole called "the Godhead" (Acts 17:29). Again, while no sane mortal would profess to understand all of the mysteries concerning the nature of God, we can understand the Biblical teaching that these three persons are God. Simply put, denial of these facts constitutes heresy.

Christ is no angel, not even an archangel. He is the Son, the Ruler, the Creator, and the eventual Destroyer of the world, whom the angels worship (Heb. 1:5–13). Indeed, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). How demonic is the doctrine of any who would make of the Son of God a mere creature hardly differing from the beast of the field.

The Witnesses' View Of Man

The aversion of C.T. Russell to the existence of an eternal place of torment called "hell" produced a terribly warped view of the nature of man. Perhaps because he was disturbed about his own eternal destiny he invented a concept of the nature of man that would conveniently relieve his anxieties. His view of the soul of man is based on a very restricted definition of the term. Probably the favorite passage of the Witnesses on this subject is Genesis 2:7: "And Jehovah God...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." From this passage they affirm: "The truth is that every man is a soul; no man has a soul" (*Deliverance*, p. 337). To the Witnesses *soul* means only animal life and breath:

The body aside from the breath does not constitute the soul; but it requires the uniting of the breath with the body to constitute the soul. And when we separate the breath from the body the soul no longer exists" (*The Harp of God*, p. 42).

Out of this very limited and perverted view of the meaning of *soul* came the doctrine sometimes called "soul-sleeping." However, this is far too mild a description of the doctrine, as the following citations reveal:

As the natural sleep, if sound, implies total unconsciousness, so with death, the figurative sleep; it is a period of absolute non-existence.... So soon as the spark of life is gone, soul or being has ceased (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Series 5, pp.329, 342).

When a man dies, he is as dead as a dead dog (*Deliverance*, p. 337).

Russell therefore taught the following concerning our Lord: "He was put to death a man, but was raised from the dead a spirit being...the man Jesus is dead, forever dead" (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Series 5, pp. 453-54). Later Watchtower publications echoed this concept: "He did not have an immortal soul: Jesus, the human soul, died" (*Let God Be True*, p. 63). It is clear that this doctrine of death is one of absolute annihilation and non-existence, rather than of mere "soul-sleeping."

While it is true that man **is** a soul and that Scripture sometimes uses *soul* to refer to his "animal" life, it is also true that he **has** a soul, and that *soul* is used to refer to a part of man's nature that is distinct from animal life and breath. God, being spirit (John 4:24), has no physical breath, yet He has a soul (Lev. 26:3; 1:14; Mat. 12:18). The soul and body of men are distinguished clearly in Matthew 10:28: Man can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; only God can destroy soul and body in hell. There is an "outward man" and an "inward man" (2 Cor. 4:16). Man has a "spirit" that is distinct from his "flesh" (Mat. 26:41; 1 Cor. 5:5). The "salvation of the soul" refers to more than preservation of physical life and breath (Heb. 10:39; 1 Pet. 1:9). John saw the **souls** of those whose **bodies** had been slain by decapitation (Rev. 20:4; cf. 6:9–10). Surely, their physical breath had ceased, but their souls were much alive.

The weight of Scriptural evidence showing that the invisible, spiritual soul of man is immortal is conclusive to any reasonable and reverential mind. Man is made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26), but since God is not a flesh and blood creature, man's mortal, physical nature is obviously not that likeness. It follows that the immortal, spiritual nature of man is that which is after the likeness of God. When man dies his body returns to the dust, but his spirit returns to **God who gave it** (Ecc. 12:7). Matthew 10:28 not only emphasizes the distinction between man's soul and body; as already noted, it also clearly affirms that the soul of man cannot be killed like his body can be. That which cannot be killed is immortal—it goes on living indefinitely, and such is the case with the soul of a man. Moses and Elijah continued to

live centuries after their bodies had died and decayed; God caused them to reappear (Mat. 17:3–4). Jesus declared that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still living (22:32). Although our bodies will perish, our spirits or souls will not (Mat. 25:46; John 5:28–29; 2 Cor. 4:16–5:10).

A fair test of the Witnesses' doctrine of the soul is to substitute *breath* for *soul* in a few passages. If *soul* means only *breath*, then either word will make equal sense. If any of the passages are made nonsensical by such substitution, it will be obvious that their definition of the human soul is absurd and palpably false.

- Psalms 19:7: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the **breath**."
- Ezekiel 18:4: "The **breath** that sinneth, it shall die" (reward for severe halitosis, perhaps).
- Luke 12:19: "I will say to my **breath, breath**, thou hast much goods laid up for many years."
- Acts 2:41: "There were added unto them in that day about 3,000 **breaths**."
- Acts 2:43: "Fear came on every **breath**."
- Hebrews 13:17: "Obey them that have the rule over you...they watch in behalf of your **breaths**."
- 1 Peter 1:22: "Seeing ye have purified your **breaths** in your obedience to the truth..." (the Scriptural mouthwash for that terrible halitosis).

By every Scriptural test the Witnesses' doctrine of the soul of man and its immortality is totally false, but beyond that, its practical implications are monstrous and horrendously evil.

The Witnesses' View of Sin and Salvation

As with other doctrines propagated by the Witnesses, their doctrines relating to sin and salvation are a deadly mixture of some truth and much error. While they correctly define sin as disobedience to God and admit the free agency of man to obey or disobey God, they err grievously on other matters closely related. They hold the Augustinian-Calvinistic views of inherited Adamic sin and total depravity: "Just as parents today often pass sicknesses on to their children, so Adam and Eve passed sin and death on to theirs. Their children were unclean in God's eyes" (*Paradise*, p. 35). One of Russellism's grossest errors relates to the consequence of sin. As previously indicated, to them "death," which is caused by "sin," equals annihilation, a state of non-existence: "When a human creature dies nothing survives—no soul—no body" (*Make Sure of All Things*, p. 241). When a person dies, he "...would become as when he had not been" (*Paradise*, p. 28).

The Witnesses make rather typical denominational errors in their teachings on the plan of salvation. They rest one's salvation on faith alone: "The only ground of salvation mentioned in the Scriptures is faith in Christ as our Redeemer and lord" (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Series 1, p. 100). While teaching the necessity of repentance before baptism and rejecting sprinkling, pouring and infant "baptism," they also deny the necessity of baptism for salvation. They state

that "...repentance must precede, but sins are not washed away by baptism" (*Make Sure of All Things*, p. 30). They reveal the function of baptism in their doctrine as follows:

"...water baptism is an outward symbol, as a testimony before witnesses, of the baptized one's complete, unreserved, and unconditional dedication and agreement to do the will of Jehovah..." (*ibid*, p. 27).

Their plan of salvation" includes the necessity of Holy Spirit baptism for those who will be in the heavenly kingdom. One "...will never enter the kingdom of the heavens to reign with Christ..." nor "...become a member of the body of t..." who are not baptized with the Holy Spirit (*New Heavens and a New Earth*, p. 306). Further, those bound for the heavenly kingdom are limited to only 144,000. Any over that number who wish to be saved will have to be content with being a part of the kingdom on a renovated, perfected earth:

These [144,000, DM] are the only ones whom Jehovah God takes to heaven with his Son. All others who gain life in His new world will live in a paradise restored here on earth (*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, p. 153).

Now join me in briefly examining their errors as set forth above. The Bible explicitly teaches that sin is not inherited, passed down from generation to generation; each person is accountable to God for one's own sins:

The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him (Eze. 18:20).

True, the Bible teaches that death is the consequence of sin (Gen. 2:17; Eze. 18:4; Rom. 6:23, et al.). However, the monstrous error made by the Witnesses on these passages is to force their arbitrary meaning of annihilation upon the Word *death* in every case. If *death* always means total destruction or annihilation, we should be able to substitute *annihilation* for *death* in any text without changing the sense. This will hardly be the case, as a few examples will demonstrate:

- Matthew 8:22: "Leave the **annihilated** to bury their own **annihilated**."
- Luke 15:32: "For this thy brother was **non-existent**, and is alive again."
- Romans 6:7–8: "For he that hath **been utterly destroyed** is justified from sin. But if we **were annihilated** with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him."
- Philippians 1:21: "For to me to live is Christ, and to **be totally obliterated**, is gain."

Death actually means loss or absence of life, and the context must determine what kind of life is under consideration. From the account of the rich man and Lazarus it is obvious that when men cease to live physically they do not cease to live in every way or become non-existent (Luke 16:22–23). All men die physically, but their souls remain conscious in the realm of Hades while awaiting the Day of Judgment (Luke 16:22–31; Heb. 9:27).

Men are saved by faith (as the Bible consistently teaches), but not by faith as the "only ground" of salvation. The kind of faith that saves is that which lovingly works (Gal. 5:6). It is insufficient merely to say, "Lord, Lord" (indicating faith), even if one is sincere in that profession. Men must **obey** God's will (Mat. 7:21). Christ is the author of eternal salvation, not to those who merely believe, but to all those who obey Him (Heb. 5:9). It is no wonder that James clearly wrote that faith apart from works is barren and dead and that by works a man is justified, and **not only by faith** (Jam. 2:20–26, emph. DM).

The Witnesses say, "...Sins are not washed away by baptism," but Scripture says, "... be baptized, and wash away thy sins..." (Acts 22:16). If all the Witnesses mean is that the **water** of baptism does not cleanse men of, sin, they would receive a hearty "amen" from faithful saints. I have made such a statement hundreds of times over the years in sermons and in writing. It is the blood of Christ alone that cleanses (Rev. 1:5) and redeems (1 Pet. 1:18–19). However, their doctrine is that the **act of baptism** has nothing to do with forgiveness of sins. This is a blatant denial of New Testament teaching. While it is Christ's blood that cleanses, a host of passages, including Acts 22:16, demonstrate unmistakably that **the act in which the cleansing takes place is baptism in water** (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; 8:35–39; 10:47–48; 22:16; Rom. 3–4; 6:17–18; 1 Pet. 3:21, et al.). Baptism may in some sense be a "sign" of one's complete dedication to Christ, but it is far more than merely that. God does not forgive one's sins before one submits to the command of Christ to be baptized.

The Witnesses are amazingly inventive on the Holy Spirit. First, as earlier discussed, they deny His existence, except as sort of a righteous influence of God. Then they say that one must be baptized in this One Who does not even exist in order to go to Heaven. In the two (and only two) recorded cases of Holy Spirit baptism in the Bible, neither case was related to the forgiveness of sins or hope of Heaven to their recipients (Acts 2:1–47; 10:44–46; 11:15–18). Although perhaps 8 to 10 years had elapsed since the apostles had been baptized in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Peter, in recounting the Spirit's falling on Cornelius and those at his house, had to go all the way back to that beginning day of the church to find a comparable phenomenon (Acts 11:15). This indicates that it was a most uncommon occurrence, which certainly would not be the case if it were a requirement for going to Heaven.

Although I have barely introduced only a few of the Witnesses' heresies relating to sin and salvation, surely I have demonstrated how far they miss the mark of Truth in these fundamental matters. I will address their concept of eternal salvation in the following section.

The Witnesses' View of the Church, the Kingdom

The Witnesses teach that only the 144,000 who will go to Heaven make up the church, the body of Christ: "The church of Christ consists of Jesus Christ the head and the 144,000 members of his body.... Those composing this special class are otherwise designated saints" (*The Harp of God*, p. 279). They base their number on a literal interpretation of Revelation 7:4–8; 14:1, 3. As previously indicated, all others who will be "saved" or given life in the "New World" will live on the restored earth. Thus they teach the existence of two distinct spiritual classes in the kingdom: The "Heavenly Class" and the "Earthly Class," respectively. Rutherford proclaimed that all of the Heavenly Class had been filled by 1931 (the total church membership of 144,000 at the time). At this writing, there are still a few thousand Witnesses on earth who claim to be a part of that number, in spite of Russell's proclamation that before the end of 1914 "...the last members of the church of Christ will have been 'changed,' glorified" (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Series 2, pp. 104–105).

The Witnesses teach that the church and the kingdom are the same—and yet are not the same. According to them, the church began when John baptized Christ (*The Harp of God*, p. 279). While admitting that in some respects, the church and kingdom are the same (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Series 1, p. 283), Russell also wrote: "The Church at present, therefore, is not the Kingdom of God set up in power and glory, but its incipient, embryo condition" (*ibid.*, p. 284). In their view, therefore, all who are in the church are in the kingdom, but not all who are in the kingdom are in the church.

The **present** doctrine of the Witnesses is that Christ came October 1, 1914, and with his coming the kingdom began. (They have also taught that Jesus returned in 1874, as earlier indicated). Both the coming of the Lord and of the kingdom were secret, visible only to the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, their doctrine on the **coming** of Christ's kingdom poses a serious practical problem for them, for it also demands the **going** or destruction of earthly kingdoms:

We consider it an established truth that the final end of the kingdom of this world, and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God, will be accomplished at the end of A.D. 1914 (*The Time Is at Hand*, p. 99).

As 1914 waned, Russell's "established truth" had cooled to a *nearly* and a *we did not say positively* (*The Watchtower*, Nov. 11, 1914).

This great destruction of the worldly kingdoms is to usher in and become the Witnesses' "Armageddon," which only they are supposed to survive. They keep saying it is coming "soon," and every international conflict since World War I (which Russell at one time was cocksure was

the fulfillment of his dating scheme) has been heralded as its arrival. At the conclusion of Armageddon the millennium will begin, marked by the translation of the remaining 144,000 to Heaven, the binding of Satan, the earth's being made a paradise, the Old Testament worthies' being raised to rule this new order, most of the dead's being raised (actually recreated from their non-existence) and given a second chance, and a 1,000-year period of "Judgment." When this millennium is over, Satan is to be loosed for one final test upon those reconstituted in the millennium. Those who fail the test among the "reactivated" will be "deactivated" forever by God, and the Devil and his demons will be annihilated with them. Then eternity dawns, wherein the 144,000 (i.e., the "little flock") will rule with Jesus from heaven over "the billions of perfect people" who compose the "other sheep" on an everlasting earth.

Admittedly, the Scriptures sometimes use *kingdom* in reference to the heavenly glorified state of God's people (Mat. 8:11; 2 Tim. 4:18; et al.), as well as to the church, the Lord's people on earth (Mat. 16:18–19; Mark 9:1; Col. 1:13; et al.). However, the most frequent use of *kingdom* in the New Testament is in reference to the church. Indeed, the terms are used interchangeably except the few contexts obviously referring to the glorified state. Thus Jesus promised to build His church and give the keys to the kingdom in the same breath (Mat. 16:18–19). The church is called the "kingdom" (Heb. 12:23, 28). The members of the body, the church, were in the kingdom in Colossae (Col. 1:13, 18; 3:15).

There are no special or separate "classes" in the church regarding salvation (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14–18). There is no limitation of 144,000 or any other number placed on those who will inherit Heaven, but "he that will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). One cannot logically take literally the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14 without taking literally the fact that they are all exclusively Israelites. Further, Revelation 14:9 places a numberless multitude (whose robes had been washed white in the blood of the lamb) in Heaven with and in addition to the 144,000 (cf. vv. 13–14). **All** of those who are in the church and who live faithfully will be in the heavenly, glorified kingdom (1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Tim. 4:7–8; 1 Pet. 1:3–5).

To blunt the force of his miserable failure as a prophet of when Christ would come, Russell made up his "invisible return" doctrine. It is based on a totally inaccurate and indefensible "argument" on the Greek word, *parousia*. Witnesses say that this word, used in reference to the second coming, means a mere "presence" and thus refers to the "invisible presence of the Lord." However, other Greek words referring to the Second Coming reveal the nature of the Lord's coming to be both visible and audible.

The *parousia* is to occur with a shout, the voice of the archangel (distinguished from that of the Lord, notice), and a blast from the trumpet of God (1 The. 4:15–16). When the Lord comes He will be "**revealed**" (*apokalupsis*) rather than concealed (2 The. 1:7). The Lord's coming will be an *epiphaneia*, that is, an "**appearing**," not an invisible disappearing or non-appearing (1 Tim. 6:14). At his coming the Lord will be "**manifested**" (1 John, 2:28) so that "every eye shall see him" (Rev. 1:7). A more anti-scriptural doctrine than an invisible and secret coming of Christ is hardly imaginable. If the Witnesses had an ounce of respect for the Lord's own words they would know better than to predict the time of His coming (Mat. 24:36, 42, 44).

The church did not begin at the baptism of Christ. It was yet in the future a good while after Jesus' baptism (Mat. 16:18). The building of the church and the establishment of the kingdom were not separate events separated by almost 19 centuries, but they began simultaneously—because (as earlier noted) they are the same entity. *The kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Mat. 4:17) and *I will build my church* (Mat. 16:18) refer to one and the same thing. Jesus said the kingdom would come with power in the lifetime of his contemporaries (Mark 9:1). To the apostles he said, "But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit came (and with him the demonstration of great power) on the apostles (Jesus' contemporaries) on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–36). The thrust of the sermon they preached was to prove that Jesus, the resurrected Christ, had ascended to the throne of His kingdom, demanding that the time had arrived for the kingdom's establishment. Yet, when we read of the 3,000 who obeyed the Gospel that day, we find that the Lord added these to his church (Acts 2:47, KJV). Therefore, when Peter used the "keys to the kingdom" (Mat. 16:19) on Pentecost they just exactly fit the entrance to the church. Russell was a false prophet extraordinaire when he wrote in 1886 that the kingdom was **yet** to come with power.

Destruction of the kingdoms of the world did **not** occur by the end of 1914 (as their kingdom theory demanded). Rutherford's pathetic prophetic patch on Russell's colossal error had the patriarchs being resurrected in 1925 to reign over this perfected earth after all worldly kingdoms had been subdued. He even built them a mansion in San Diego, California, in 1929 to encourage their coming—but Rutherford was the only "patriarch" who ever lived in it (the Witnesses sold it after his death in 1942). Once more the Witnesses doctored their predictions on "the end" and "Armageddon" and reset the date for September 5, 1975. Since that date has long since failed them, now about all they say is that it will come "soon." Remember that all these events (i.e., the coming of Christ, setting up the kingdom, Armageddon, destruction of all worldly rule, beginning of the millennium) are to accompany each other. Therefore, since

Armageddon and the destruction of world-rule have **not** taken place, by their own doctrine, neither has Christ come, the kingdom been set up, nor the millennium begun.

Their doctrine of a “second chance” is truly a damnable doctrine, holding out false hopes to sinful men and playing on the heartstrings of survivors of ungodly persons. Jesus said that those who die in sin could not go to Heaven (John 8:21). There is no room for the false hope of a “second chance” in Hebrews 9:27: "And inasmuch as it is appointed unto man once to die, and after this cometh judgment." Although the Witnesses teach that the Devil and his servants will be annihilated, their own "New World Translation" reads:

And the Devil who was misleading them was hurled into the lake of fire and sulphur, where both the wild beast and the false prophet already were; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

It might be interesting to hear them explain by what means those who **do not exist** can suffer torment for one moment, much less “forever and ever.”

The Witnesses' doctrine is materialistic from beginning to end. It not only denies all men (including our Lord) an immortal soul, its greatest hope is life on a restored material earth. However, when the Lord comes, that day will be marked by the destruction of the heavens, the earth, and all things therein (2 Pet. 3:4, 10–12). The hope of all who will be saved is not earthly, but heavenly. Jesus was not talking about a jaunt to Jericho when he promised, "I go to prepare a place for you" and "I will come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). We will not stay on earth for our eternal reward, but we will be "caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and **so shall we ever be** with the Lord" (1 The. 4:17, emph. DM). Our eternal inheritance will not take place on a rebuilt earth, but it is "reserved in heaven" for us (1 Pet. 1:4).

Conclusion

It is amazing that men such as Russell and Rutherford could be so morally, spiritually, and Biblically bankrupt and still attract the following and exert the influence they have obtained. It is even more amazing that a doctrinal system that is built upon multiplied Scriptural blunders of major proportions—perhaps unsurpassed by any other cult or sect—could attract so many adherents. Such amazing results are attributable to man's gullibility, to his ignorance of the Bible, and to the appeal to man's fleshly lusts of certain Jehovah's Witness doctrines. J.F. Rutherford wrote:

We should not permit ourselves to be beguiled or misled by sophistry or theories, but should follow the plain teachings of the Bible and then reach a conclusion in the light of that revealed word after a full examination (*The Harp of God*, p. 102).

Dedicated Bible students could not agree more with this splendid advice. When one fairly and logically studies the Bible, he will be forced to reject the doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses because it is overflowing with human sophistry and theories. It is a hodgepodge of damnable doctrines and fatal errors.

Endnotes

1. All subsequent quotations from Jehovah's Witnesses sources are from their publishing company, The Watchtower Society, including various books, tracts, and the *Watchtower* magazine.
2. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

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