

Religions in America: Jehovah's Witnesses

Our Goals in this Study

We have two goals.

1. To make the truth of God's word clear. The Bible is always warning us to avoid false teaching. We want to know what is God's truth and what is not.
2. We want to know how to better witness about our faith. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be ready to defend your confidence in God when anyone asks you to explain it. However, make your defense with gentleness and respect." If possible, we want to learn how to share our hope in Jesus with the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Who are the Jehovah's Witnesses?

Started in Pennsylvania and New York in the late 1800s by Charles Taze Russell.

How many people in the U.S. are Jehovah's Witnesses? In 1990, about 773,000. In 1999, about 980,000. Also, in 1999, JW's reported more than 174 million hours spent witnessing.

Jehovah's Witnesses are well known for: going door to door for evangelism, the Watchtower and Awake! magazines, not accepting blood transfusions, not celebrating most holidays, not pledging allegiance to the flag, not joining the military or doing anything else related to the government.

Where is their teaching from?

They say their teaching is from the Bible, but they use their own translation named the "New World Translation." They say other religions put their own teachings in the Bible and make the Bible full of errors. They also accuse people of changing the original Greek and Hebrew writings in the Bible. Sadly, the JW's are the ones who do those two things. Their Bible is full of wrong translations. When a verse goes against their teaching, they will change that verse. We will see some examples of this. Their teachings are not really from the Bible. Their teachings are from Charles T. Russell and other people who have led the "Watchtower" Society.

Major Teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses

JW's disagree with almost every major Christian teaching. They also disagree with many other smaller teachings. We don't have time to discuss every teaching, but we will focus on the main ones. The most important teaching in the Christian church is about Jesus and how He saves us. We will focus mostly on teachings about God, who Jesus is, and what His work was. We will start with a comparison between what the Bible teaches and what Jehovah's Witnesses believe.

The Bible

God's Name

The Bible lists many different names for God – God, Lord, Almighty, Everlasting Father, His special name – Yahweh, and many more. (Exodus 3:14-15, Genesis 1:1, 14:19, 17:1, 18:27, 21:33)

The Trinity

There is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4), the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). They are united as one God in a way we cannot explain or understand.

Jesus is True God

In many ways, the Bible says Jesus is true and complete God. One very clear example is in John 20:28. After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to doubting Thomas. When Thomas saw Jesus, he said to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas knew who Jesus really was.

Jesus' Resurrection

Jesus died and rose alive again from the dead with a real body (Luke 24:36-53). After 40 days, Jesus went up into heaven (Acts 1:9).

Christ's Second Coming

God warned us not to believe people who say Christ already came back (1 Thess. 2:1-2). When He comes, “every eye will see Him” (Rev. 1:7), all the nations will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds (Matthew 24:30).

People's Souls are Eternal

The Bible teaches that when our bodies die, our soul continues to live forever. (Mark 12:27, Ecclesiastes 12:7, Matthew 25:46)

Jehovah's Witnesses

JW's try to insist that the only correct name for God is “Jehovah.” They even take out other names in the Bible and put “Jehovah” in their place.

“The obvious conclusion is, therefore, that Satan is the originator of the trinity doctrine (teaching).” Because they can't understand the Trinity, they say it can't be true.

“The true scriptures speak of God's Son, the Word, as ‘a god.’ He is a ‘mighty god,’ but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah.” “In other words, he was the first and direct creation of Jehovah God.” Again, they don't understand how Jesus is true God. So they say that is impossible.

“Jehovah God raised him (Jesus) from the dead, not as a human Son, but as a mighty immortal spirit Son.” “Jesus did not take his human body to heaven to be forever a man in heaven.”

“It does not mean that he (Christ) is on the way or has promised to come, but that he has already arrived and is here.” JW's say that Christ began invisibly ruling the world from heaven in 1914.

“The serpent (the devil) is the one that originated the doctrine of the inherent immortality of human souls.” JW's believe that when your body dies, your soul dies. Your soul doesn't live forever.

Hell is Real

Hell is a real place. There are so many Bible verses about this, it is hard to believe the JW's deny that hell is real and eternal. Some Bible verses are Matthew 25:41-46, Mark 9:47-48, Revelation 20:10-15.

The Result of Adam's Sin

The Bible clearly says that because Adam sinned, everyone is guilty of sin and is spiritually dead (Romans 5:12). Spiritual death means separation from God forever.

Jesus' Salvation Work

The Bible says that Jesus' death and resurrection are to fully save people (John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:19, Colossians 1:13-14, Romans 5:9-11)

Salvation is Free

Jesus' salvation is a gift, free! We don't have to work to earn any part of our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

All Believers in Jesus Go to Heaven

There are many, many Bible verses that promise eternal life in heaven for every person who believes in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:1-2, Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Peter 1:3-5, Colossians 1:3-6). In Revelation 14, the Bible does mention 144,000 people in heaven. But that number is a symbol, meaning all of God's people.

"The doctrine (teaching) of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death cannot be true." JW's will say the Bible does not say hell is real, but the true reason they don't believe in hell is that they don't want to accept that it is real.

JW's will say we inherit sin from Adam. But they will say when Adam sinned, he (and we) lost "the right to live." In other words, because Adam sinned, our body and soul will die and disappear.

"The human life that Jesus Christ laid down in sacrifice must be exactly equal to that life which Adam forfeited for all his offspring... no more, no less." In other words, Adam lost the right for us to live. Jesus' death gives us the right to live again. But it doesn't give us actual life.

"No man can gain life... unless he believes God and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and asks for salvation by making an unconditional agreement to do the will of God." Jesus won the right to life. Now if you want to live, you must work to earn that life.

"Who and how many are able to enter it (the Kingdom)? The Revelation limits to 144,000 the number that become a part of the Kingdom and stand on heavenly Mount Zion." JW's believe only 144,000 people will have eternal souls and live and rule in heaven with Jesus. They say everyone else who earns life will live on earth forever.

The Bible

Jehovah's Witnesses know many, many Bible verses. We should know that many! Discussing our faith with them can be difficult because they will use so many Bible verses. We don't always know how to answer them. In the next study, we will learn more how to answer them when we meet them and talk.

It is good to know many Bible verses. Sadly, the JW's don't use the Bible correctly. They will sometimes say a verse means one thing, but it really means something else. As we said earlier, the JW's have their own Bible translation. The people who translated their Bible translated some of the verses wrong. Why? They want the Bible to agree with their own teachings. We will see two examples here. We will use the New International Version (NIV). The JW's Bible is the New World Translation (NWT).

- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1 (NIV)
- In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god. John 1:1 (NWT)

This verse talks about Jesus and calls Him the Word. Notice the JW translation says Jesus was "a god," and not "God." That is because they say Jesus is not true God.

- He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created... Colossians 1:15-16 (NIV)
- He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; because by means of him all [other] things were created... Colossians 1:15-16 (NWT)

Paul wrote this to emphasize that Jesus is God over everything. Jesus is God and was active in creating everything. The JW's say God created Jesus. So they add the word [other] to make it look like God created Jesus first, then made all the "other" things through Jesus.

Conclusion

In looking at the Jehovah Witnesses' teachings, we have only scratched the surface. There is much more we could compare and learn, but we have limited time. This short study should have shown you that many JW teachings are not from the Bible. They are from people's own ideas and not from God's word. In Deuteronomy 18:14-22, God warns us not to follow people who speak for themselves and not for God. How can we know if someone doesn't speak for God? God says they will prophesy something and it will not come true. In the past, the JW's said the world will end in 1914, 1918, 1920, 1925, 1941, and 1975. They finally gave up, because they were always wrong.

It is important for us to understand their teachings are wrong. We need to announce God's truth and correct the lies and errors that other people preach. Next time, we will learn how to lovingly speak the truth and hopefully lead the JW's to the gospel, the true good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

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How You Can Witness to the JW's

Always be ready to defend your confidence in God when anyone asks you to explain it. However, make your defense with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:15

Last time, we learned some of what the Jehovah's Witnesses believe. We saw how they spend many hours studying their teachings and many hours witnessing. They are very faithful in doing work to make their church grow. But they do not have the truth of God's word. They do not believe Jesus died on a cross to completely forgive them and bring them to heaven. The Bible teaches we are saved only because Jesus died for us and rose again. All people who believe in Jesus will have eternal life.

The question is, how can we share this good news with the Jehovah's Witnesses? These are some guidelines to remember if a JW comes to your door.

1. Always focus on Jesus. You could talk about many things – the Trinity, blood transfusions, celebrating holidays, the end of the world, and so on. Don't talk about those. No matter what they bring up, always take the conversation back to Jesus as your Savior. That is the most important thing.
2. Say "I believe in Jesus." Don't say, "I am a Lutheran." Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Lutheran Church, the Catholics, Baptists, and every other church belongs to the devil. Don't emphasize the church you belong to. You should emphasize your relationship with Jesus.
3. When you see a Jehovah's Witness come to your door, pray. Before you open the door, before you talk to the person, say a short prayer and ask God to help you. Ask God to give you the right words to say. Ask God to help you share your faith in Jesus.
4. Smile. Tell them "Jesus loves me and forgives me. That gives me hope for the future."
5. Tell them you could never do enough good works to be saved. But you trust God saves you through Jesus, His free gift. You do good works to thank God. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

6. Ask the person for his or her name. Tell them you will pray for them to know the same peace and joy you have in Jesus. Then after they leave, pray for them often!
7. Jehovah's Witnesses will often believe you can't know the truth and you can't be a Christian unless you read the *Watchtower*. Ask them if they can set aside their *Watchtower* and *Awake* magazines and only read the Bible for a week or a month. Ask them to let God speak to them directly through the Bible.
8. The Jehovah's Witnesses are often skilled at talking about different teachings, especially the *Watchtower* teachings. Tell them you only want to talk about what the Bible says. (Your best preparation for this? Every day, you study for yourself what the Bible says!) Don't argue about verses and teachings. Remember to talk about verses and share the hope you have in Jesus.
9. If you don't feel comfortable talking with them, or if you feel like you don't know enough about the Bible to talk with them, then don't. Keep the conversation very short, or don't invite them in at all.
10. If you do talk with them and they will come back again, make sure you invite another Christian over. When you talk the second time, make sure you have another Christian with you who knows a lot about the Bible and can share their faith.
11. Again, remember to always focus on Jesus and how He saves you. Remember to tell them about the hope and peace and joy you have because of Jesus.

Suggestions adapted from How to Respond to Jehovah's Witnesses, by Herbert Kern, copyright Concordia Publishing House, 1995.

Bible Verses to Share with Jehovah's Witnesses

John saw Jesus coming toward him the next day and said, "Look! This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John 1:29

- You can emphasize that Jesus takes away the sins of the whole world, including yours and mine.

God loved the world this way: He gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world. Those who believe in him won't be condemned. But those who don't believe are already condemned because they don't believe in God's only Son. John 3:16-18

- God showed His love for us, how? He sent Jesus to die for us.
- How do we have eternal life? Believe in Jesus.
- People don't get condemned (judged) because they didn't do enough good works. People get judged only because they don't believe in Jesus.

Jesus said, "I can guarantee this truth: Those who listen to what I say and believe in the one who sent me will have eternal life. They won't be judged because they have already passed from death to life." John 5:24

- The moment you believe in Jesus, you have eternal life.

Martha told Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask him." Jesus told Martha, "Your brother will come back to life." Martha answered Jesus, "I know that he'll come back to life on the last day, when everyone will come back to life." Jesus said to her, "I am the one who brings people back to life, and I am life itself. Those who believe in me will live even if they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe that?" John 11:21-26

- Only Jesus is the resurrection and the life for us.
- Martha thought her brother was dead until the last day. Jesus corrected her. He said if a believer dies, they really continue to live. Every person who believes in Jesus will never die.
- Do you believe that?

Jesus answered him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one goes to the Father except through me. If you have known me, you will also know my Father."
John 14:6-7

- The only way to know God the Father is to know Jesus. If you know Jesus, you also know the Father.

Now that we have God's approval because of faith, we have peace with God because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done. Romans 5:1

- Our good works can't give us peace. When we believe in Jesus and His good works for us, then we have peace with God.

If you declare that Jesus is Lord, and believe that God brought him back to life, you will be saved. By believing you receive God's approval, and by declaring your faith you are saved. Romans 10:9-10

- Again, believe Jesus is Lord, believe He rose alive from the dead, and you are saved.

God saved you through faith as an act of kindness. You had nothing to do with it. Being saved is a gift from God. It's not the result of anything you've done, so no one can brag about it. God has made us what we are. He has created us in Christ Jesus to live lives filled with good works that he has prepared for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10

- Our works cannot save us. Nothing we do can save us.
- Salvation is a free gift from God, only because He is kind and full of mercy.
- Why do we do good works? Only to thank God for His gift of salvation.

From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures. They have the power to give you wisdom so that you can be saved through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:15

- God's word is enough to teach you about salvation.
- God's word shows us Jesus Christ, our only Savior.

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