

Jehovah's Witnesses

Theological Equipping Class

June 7, 2020

History and Key Players of the Jehovah's Witness Movement

The Movement under Charles Russell (1870-1916)

Charles Taze Russell

- Born in 1852 in Allegheny, Pennsylvania
- Raised in Reformed/Calvinistic Presbyterian Church
- "Wavered" from the faith from 1868-1870

The Russellite Movement

- Found a faith he could agree with after hearing a preacher who denied the Trinity and the existence of hell.

"Though his Scripture exposition was not entirely clear... it was sufficient, under God, to reestablish my wavering faith in the Divine inspiration of the Bible, and to show that the records of the Apostles and the Prophets are indissolubly linked. What I heard sent me to my Bible to study with more zeal and care than ever before, and I shall ever thank the Lord for the leading; ...it did help me greatly in the unlearning of errors, and thus prepared me for the Truth." - *Zion's Watch Tower*, June 1, 1916 pg 170

- Began publishing *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (known today as The Watchtower)—which is where the Jehovah's Witnesses' organization gets its name: the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.
- Russell was highly unqualified to be publishing his interpretations of the Scriptures
 - Dropped out of school at 14

- He had no understanding of the biblical languages.
- He couldn't even identify the letters of the Greek alphabet
- Russell had several failed prophecies regarding the end of the world
 - His final guess was 1918
 - He died in 1916, before he could learn whether or not his prophecy came true

The Movement under Joseph Rutherford (1916-1948)

Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford

- Centralized the Watchtower Organization's Control
- There were many in the movement who rejected Rutherford's leadership
- Watchtower Magazine evolved into a guide in how to prove you were a real "witness for Jehovah" (a label used to contrast Rutherford's followers from the dissenters).
- This is where "Jehovah's Witnesses" got their name

The "Theocracy" of the Watch Tower Organization

- Rutherford transformed the Watchtower Society from just an association of common faith, to a theocracy. Meaning, a governing institution, which rules in the place of God.
- This is still how Jehovah's Witnesses view the organization

"We acknowledge as the visible organization of Jehovah on earth the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, and recognize the Society as the channel or instrument through which Jehovah and Christ Jesus give instruction and meat in due season to the household of faith." *The Watchtower*, (April 15, 1939): 125.

"Make haste to identify the visible theocratic organization of God that represents his king, Jesus Christ. It is essential for life. Doing so, be

complete in accepting its every aspect." *The Watchtower*, (October 1, 1967): 591.

"They [Jehovah's Witnesses] must adhere absolutely to the decisions and scriptural understanding of the Society because God has given it this authority over his people." *The Watchtower*, (May 1, 1972): 272.

"[Jehovah] does not impart his holy spirit and understanding and appreciation of his Word apart from his visible organization." *The Watchtower*, (July 1, 1965): 391.

"To receive everlasting life in the earthly Paradise we must identify that organization and serve God as part of it." *The Watchtower*, (February 15, 1983): 12.

- The Organization is "the faithful and discreet slave" from Matthew 24:45

Matthew 24:45 - "Who then is the faithful and wise servant [Jehovah's Witnesses translate this as "faithful and discreet slave], whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?"

"All who want to understand the Bible should appreciate that the 'greatly diversified wisdom of God' can become known only through Jehovah's channel of communication, the faithful and discreet slave," (Watchtower, Oct. 1, 1994, p. 8).

The Movement under Nathan Knorr (1948-1977)

The New World Translation

- New Testament was completed in 1950, and the Old Testament was published in 1961
- Jehovah's Witnesses used the King James Version translation of the Bible, but struggled with the disconnect between their theology, and what was written in the KJV.

"...not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see, also, that if anyone lays the

Scripture Studies (Russell's published commentaries) aside, even after he has used them, after he has become familiar with them, after he has read them for ten years—if he lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he had merely read the Scripture Studies with their references, and had not read a page of the Bible, as such, he would be in the light at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures." *The Watchtower*, (September 15, 1910), 298.

- Jehovah's Witnesses use this translation today
 - They are told that it's the best translation since it's the only translation that translates "God the Father" in the NT to, "Jehovah" (what they believe to be God's "true name"). It's helpful to mention: not a single Greek manuscript ever uses the name "Jehovah."
 - All other translations are "demonic"
- Translation Committee made up of 5 men
 - 4 of the men only had a high school education
 - 1 of the men went to college (but he dropped out his sophomore year)
 - None of the translators had any education in the biblical languages
 - 1 of the men claimed to know the biblical languages, but was unable to translate a single sentence when put under examination in court
- Qualified linguists and translators universally condemn the New World Translation

Bruce Metzger, the late NT professor from Princeton said that the NWT was a "frightful mistranslation", "erroneous", "pernicious", and "apprehensible."

Dr. Robert Countess, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Greek translation of the NT in the NWT, concluded: "the NWT must be viewed as a radically biased piece of work. At some points it is actually dishonest. At others, it is neither modern nor scholarly."

A British scholar named H.H. Rowley said: "from beginning to end this volume is a shining example of how the bible should not be translated."

- The translation is incredibly biased
 - Remove and add words to make the text suggest that Jesus is not God
 - Jesus = God, Jesus = "a God"
 - Translate words incorrectly to insert their presuppositions into the biblical text
 - προσκυνέω (*proskuneo*) = worship, but NWT translates *proskuneo* as "to show honor or obeisance" when it is directed toward Jesus (since they believe that Jesus is not God)

The Jehovah's Witnesses' Problematic Theology

Theology (Proper)

- Deny the Trinity

"Ask the student, 'How many Jehovah's are there?' Let him answer. The answer is obvious that there is only one Jehovah . . . If he is one Jehovah, then could he be three gods, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, as the Trinitarians teach?" *Watchtower*, (April 1, 1970), 210

- Deny the existence of God the Holy Spirit

- The Spirit is an impersonal force

Christology

- Christians believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man
- Jehovah's Witnesses are Arian
 - They teach that Jesus is the angel Michael
 - They also teach that Jesus, while on earth, was no more than a man.
 - Jesus ceased to exist when he died, Jehovah disposed of Jesus's body, and recreated Michael the angel to come out of the tomb ("the resurrection")

"[Michael]...appeared to his disciples on different occasions in various fleshly bodies, just as angels had appeared to men of ancient times. Like those angels, he had the power to construct and to disintegrate those fleshly bodies at will, for the purpose of proving visibly that he had been resurrected." *Aid to Bible Understanding*, (Brooklyn: Watchtower, 1971), 1395.

- Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses are dead in their sins

1 Corinthians 15:17-19 - And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Soteriology

- Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that Jesus's sacrifice is sufficient for present or future sins.

"...to get one's name written in that Book of Life will depend on one's works." *Watchtower*, (April 1, 1947), 204.

- Salvation is not by grace, but rather by Jesus canceling your debt, and then you maintaining a good relationship with the Watchtower Organization

Resurrection

- Deny that there is an intermediate state

“When a person is dead he is completely out of existence.” *You Can Live Forever In Paradise On Earth*, (1982), 88.

- Jehovah keeps a perfect memory of you in his mind. And he recreates you, just as he remembers you
- Jehovah’s Witnesses have no hope of resurrection, because, when they die (according to their beliefs)—that’s it! And then, some new person is created, and they inherit the salvation you worked for. Or they get punished for all of the bad stuff you did.

Hell

- “Hell” is a euphemism for “death” or “the Grave”
- Punishment for the wicked = annihilation