

Jehovah Witnesses - Part 1

by Walter Martin

Walter Martin discusses the identity of God and the doctrine of the Trinity in relation to Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs.

Duration: 27:21

Scripture: Exodus 3:11-14, John 8:51-52

Topics: "Jehovah Witnesses"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by discussing the origins of the Bible and Tract Society under Charles Taze Russell, which has become the second-largest non-Christian cult in the world. He highlights the power of the watchtower in terms of producing literature and the number of missionaries they have in the field. The speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the identity of Jesus of Nazareth and the revelation of God in the Bible. He explains the cardinal rule of interpreting the Bible, which is to interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. The speaker then focuses on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and discusses the views of the watchtower organization on this topic.

Transcript

I'd like you to turn in your Bibles, if you will, to the third chapter of Exodus, Exodus chapter 3, and I would like you to listen very carefully and follow me as we read a few passages from the Word of God. Exodus chapter 3. Of course, you're familiar with this passage. It is the great passage where Moses is summoned by God at the burning bush to return to Egypt and to lead the children of Israel to the mountain of God.

Beginning at verse 11, And Moses said unto God, Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee that I have sent thee. When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, I am that I am.

And he said, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I am hath sent me unto you. Now, the word I am here in the Hebrew, literally ahyah, asher, ahyah, is a repetition of the verb to be, and the Jews themselves translate this the Eternal One. So actually, because God's name is unpronounceable and because it transcends all human knowledge, they spoke of him as the one who always was, the one who is, and the one who always will be.

Ahya. When you hear people arguing about the true name of God is Yahweh, and the true name of God is Jehovah, and the true name of God is this, and the true name of God is that, remember that nobody knows the true name of God. It is four consonants and no vowels, and since we don't have the vowels, nobody can pronounce the name, not even the Jews themselves.

If you want to get as close as you possibly can to it, ahya is as close as you will ever get. I am, and this is his name, the Eternal. This is what he tells Moses from the burning bush.

Now, that name was translated from Hebrew into Greek by a group of seventy scholars, and this particular translation was made approximately 125 years or so before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. This translation known as the Septuagint, or the translation of the seventy scholars, was used by our Lord and quoted by him quite frequently, so we know that it was known to him and to the apostles. Now, with that thought in our mind, I want you to turn from Exodus chapter 3 to the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.

John chapter 8 in your Bible to read the words of Jesus Christ, for these are tremendously important words and speak to us with great force concerning the identity of the Son of God. John chapter 8, the words of the Lord Jesus. In conflict with the Jews, Jesus said, verse 51 of chapter 8, Truly, truly, I say to you, if a man will keep my sayings, he will never see death.

Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know you have a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets. And you are saying, If a man keeps my sayings, he will never taste of death.

Are you greater than our father Abraham, which is dead, and the prophets who are dead? Whom do you make yourself? Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing. It is my Father that honors me, of whom you say, He is your God. Yet you have not known him, but I know him.

And if I should say I do not know him, I will be a liar like you are. But I know him, and I keep his sayings. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw and was happy.

Then said the Jews unto him, You are not yet fifty years old. You have seen Abraham. Jesus said to them, I tell you truly, before Abraham sprang to existence, the word is genestai, Abraham came to existence, I am.

Now, this is a direct quotation from that Greek translation of the Hebrew which I mentioned before, and Jesus reached into a common translation, just as common as our King James Bible, and said, Do you know who I really am? I will tell you. Before Abraham sprang to life, I am the eternal God, the one who spoke to Moses out of the bush. He even used the divine title and applied it to himself.

Notice the instantaneous reaction. Verse 59, Then took they up stones to cast at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so he passed by. Why would that one phrase, I am, cause so much furor among the Jews? If you turn the page to John chapter 10, you will find the answer.

For here Christ, once again in conflict with his Jewish antagonists, answers them, I and my Father are one. Verse 30, We are in union. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father, for which of these works do you stone me? Now, notice verse 33. The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for

blasphemy, and because that thou being a man makest thyself God. The understanding is very clear.

They understood the language, they understood the culture, they understood the context, and they understood Jesus very clearly. Why do I take the time to begin reading the scripture and to explain this important thing? Because we will be discussing the doctrine which Jehovah's Witnesses attack most successfully and most consistently, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. And I want you to understand very clearly from the beginning, as we read our scripture, just exactly the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, so no one will have doubts about it.

Now, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society came into existence under Charles Taze Russell, and today it is the second largest of all non-Christian cults operating in the world. I spoke last evening in giving some statistics about their development and growth, and I pointed out at that particular time the enormous power of the Watchtower in terms of turning out literature. That their presses turn out more literature in six months than the combined forces of Christendom are able to turn out in one year.

That they have more full and part-time missionaries in the field than all of the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox missionaries combined. I pointed out their tremendous coverage of literature and multiplicity of language distribution, and their fantastic zeal being able to canvas city after city, house after house, and to carry the gospel of the Watchtower throughout the world. But the Watchtower organization has definite theological views, and obviously we're not going to be able to cover all of them this evening.

Our main concern ought to be the centrality of the Christian faith, and that is the doctrine of God. If you are right in every area of your theology and you are wrong on the doctrine of God, you are wrong enough to lose your soul for all eternity. Therefore, we confine ourselves to this primary teaching, and it is of primary importance.

What does the Watchtower have to say about the doctrine of the Holy Trinity? This, I think, is very important. Listen to them. Let them speak for themselves.

The doctrine in brief is that there are three gods in one, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit is not a person and is therefore not one of the gods of Trinity. The Trinity doctrine was not conceived by Jesus or the early Christians.

The obvious conclusion, therefore, is that Satan is the originator of the Trinity doctrine. Now, I don't think you have to have any blackboard pictures or flannel graphs to get the message. If you can understand plain English, you understand what the Watchtower believes.

The founder of the Watchtower said of the Trinity, "...this view suited well the dark ages it helped to produce." This theory is as unscriptural as it is unreasonable. If it were not for the fact that this Trinitarian nonsense was drilled into us from earliest infancy, and the fact that it is so soberly taught in theological seminaries by gray-haired professors, nobody would give it a moment's serious consideration. How the great adversary, Satan, ever succeeded in fostering the Trinity upon the Lord's people to bewilder and mystify them and render much of the word of God of none effect is a real mystery.

The Watchtower does not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. It does not believe that Jesus Christ is true God, and it does not believe in the personality of the Holy Spirit. Our interest tonight is to discover what the Bible has to say about it.

Now, after years of dealing with Jehovah's Witnesses on this subject, may I make this rather startling and, I hope, provocative statement. You cannot prove the doctrine of the Trinity to a Jehovah's Witness by rattling off a list of texts to him from the Old Testament or from the New Testament that are generally found in doctrinal books. You cannot convince him that there is a Trinity by quoting the Great Commission or by mentioning the fact that three persons, or apparently three persons, are mentioned in the same verse of the Bible.

You will have no effect whatsoever upon Watchtower people with this line of reasoning. But there is one line of reasoning that does affect them, that forces them to think and to probe and to study the Scripture, for they do recognize the Bible as the word of God, infallible and inerrant. Therefore, they will listen to it even over the authority of the Watchtower.

There is the opportunity we have to communicate with Jehovah's Witnesses. Now, I have found, and I pass this on to you for your edification, that the only way to quote, prove, close quote, Trinitarian theology is, first of all, to begin at the beginning, to assume absolutely nothing, and to start just as you would from scratch. And so, I believe we should begin at exactly that point.

We should begin by defining our terms. What do we mean when we say the doctrine of the Holy Trinity? Jehovah's Witnesses mean three gods in one. What does the Christian church mean? Well, very simply, the doctrine of the Trinity is defined in these terms, and I believe that it's a very simple definition.

Within the nature of the one God, there are three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and these three share the same attributes. In effect, the three Persons are the one God. All we are saying, very simply, is that within God's unity or nature, we can discern three distinct Persons, so far as you and I are able to understand Person.

And these three Persons are, in effect, the one God. That's the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. I admit that Trinitarian theology is difficult.

I admit that you can't put it on a blackboard and spell it out to everybody's satisfaction, but neither is it unfathomable, nor can it be dismissed as beyond the mind of man. We can understand what God has revealed. The difficulty is that most Christians are unaware of what he has revealed, and we have to begin at the beginning to search and find out what that revelation is.

Now, one of the cardinal rules of interpreting the Bible is this. You always interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, never the reverse. The New Testament completes the Old Testament, and you go backwards from the completion to the beginning to interpret, for the Scriptures are completed in the New Testament revelation.

Now, if we can demonstrate from the New Testament that there are really three Persons, and if we can demonstrate that the three Persons are all called God, and if we can demonstrate that there is only one God, then we are driven to only one possible conclusion. Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, and the three Persons are the one God. You don't have to be a great logician, you don't have to be a great theologian, you don't have to go to college, you don't even have to have graduated from high school to think that one through.

Think about it for a moment. If you can show that there are three Persons in the New Testament, and if you can show that these three Persons are called God, or Jehovah, to accommodate the witnesses, and if

we can show that there is only one God, then the three Persons are the one God, and the argument ends at that point. You may say, that sounds very simple.

Well, you'd be surprised how many difficult problems have simple solutions. For years we have been hitting Jehovah's Witnesses over the head with standard textbook explanations of the Trinity, and they have bounced off the watchtower like BBs off the side of the Rock of Gibraltar. I think it's about time that, as Dr. Barnhouse used to say, we got the hay down out of the loft and onto the floor of the barn where the cows could eat it.

In other words, put things in terms that people will understand. So, let's us begin just as if we were talking to a Jehovah's Witness and say to him what I said. Look, if the New Testament, let's not argue the Old Testament, if the New Testament says that there are three Persons, and if the New Testament says that these three Persons are all called Jehovah, and if there's only one Jehovah, then the three Persons are the one God, and the doctrine of the Trinity is true.

Now, I have made that proposition to hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses. I have gone over it painstakingly with them, sometimes stating it ten different ways in order to communicate it, and never have I failed once to have them assent to it as a valid proposition. They are willing because they are so sure that you can't prove it.

Let us begin scientifically, inductively, simply to see whether or not it can be proved. First of all, is there a person called the Father in the New Testament, and is he called God? A legitimate question to which we ought to have a legitimate answer. 2 Peter 1, verse 17.

This should be marked in your Bibles, and I think it should be clearly indicated why you are marking it there. You are identifying someone. 2 Peter 1, verse 17.

For he, the Lord Jesus, received from God the Father, honor and glory. When there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Now, we have proven two specific things from this text.

One, there is a person called the Father, and he is identified as God. Verse 17, he received from God the Father. Identification.

The Father is Jehovah. No possible way out. The Jehovah's Witnesses will agree with you right down the line.

Secondly, there is a person called the Son. They will agree with that. Now the question is, is the Son identified as Jehovah? We have already shown, and that's why I deliberately began in Exodus chapter 3, to point out that Jesus Christ suffered from the hallucination that he was Jehovah.

For there was no hallucination, and he really was who he thought he was. You don't have any other way out of the dilemma. He took the divine name and applied it to himself.

Exodus chapter 3, John chapter 8, John chapter 10. Either he was deluded, one, two, he was hallucinating, three, he was classically insane, four, he deliberately deceived, or five, he really was who he said he was. Since the Jehovah's Witnesses will reject the first four, they are left with only one possible conclusion.

He was who he said he was, and he used the divine name and applied it to himself. I tell you before Abraham was, I am the eternal God, and you. Now, you might mark those verses down in your Bible.

There was a person called the Son, and he declares himself to be Jehovah. He even uses the divine name. I don't want to forget, in 1950, when Jehovah's Witnesses released their New World Translation.

I noticed a copy on your shelf in the pastor's study. They released the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures, and in it they had translated the Bible and mangled it in such a way as to make the text that taught the Trinity and the Deity of Christ read differently in English. And so I formulated a whole list of questions based upon the Greeks and sent them to the Watchtower by registered mail.

I received a letter which I still have, and the letter says, all the answers to your questions are found in the appendix of the book. I went to the appendix of the book, and there's nothing in the appendix of the book that has anything remotely to do with the questions which I asked. So I addressed the second letter to them, and I suggested that they answer the questions point to point, and if they couldn't answer the questions, that they would give me the names of the Greek scholars who translate their Bible so that I might come in and talk with them and find out where they got their translation from.

I was informed that the Watchtower Society does not identify any of its Greek scholars publicly for the sake of preserving humility. Thirdly, I challenged their Greek scholars to debate on national radio, coast to coast, on NBC, and offered them four hours of prime time to debate what their translation said and whether it was true. I did it on radio, and I did it on television, and I have crisscrossed the country for twenty years and made the same offer publicly from hundreds of pulpits in churches, seminaries, and even at Watchtower conventions, and in registered letters to which I have never received replies.

I therefore deduce that the Watchtower does not want to talk about its translation, and it does not want to talk about John chapter 8, verse 58, particularly because in the first edition they had a footnote which was terribly interesting. The footnote said, should be translated, I have been, not I am, as in Exodus 3.14, a clear reference to who Jesus referred himself to be. And then they added this little grammatical footnote, which I'm sure will interest the pastor as well as yourselves, but him more than you, that this was due to the usage of the perfect indefinite tense of the Greek verb.

It may come as some shock to you to find out that there is no perfect indefinite tense in the Greek language. It came as a shock to the Watchtower because I wrote them a letter and informed them of that. And in the new printing of the book, that's missing.

The perfect indefinite tense was invented to get away from John 8, 58, and it was withdrawn when it was pointed out that they couldn't get away with it. But if you take the 1950 edition, you will see the lie at the bottom of the page, and if you look at the new edition, you will see the lie has been removed. But it lied for 15 years.

Why? Because they are determined to deny that Jesus Christ is who he said he was. And it's essential for us to understand that we are dealing with people who are so dedicated to what they believe, so sincere and so honest in their conviction, that they believe implicitly what the Watchtower tells them. There is only one way to penetrate that shell, and that is with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and by prayer, and by showing the facts of the Bible as they really are.

And you've got to begin, as I am doing right now, at the beginning. Now, there is more evidence that you can use, and I want to show you how this can be done. Not only did the Lord Jesus claim to be Jehovah, but the witnesses loved the book of Revelation.

We have already established that there is one person called God the Father, and we have shown a second person who calls himself God. Let us see if there is additional evidence. Now, I can give you 20 texts right now, but they are texts that the Watchtower has worked out answers for.

The answers are no good, but I prefer to deal with the texts that they don't have answers for. They're better, and Revelation 1 is a very clear example. Verse 8, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, which is, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Now, Jehovah's Witnesses admit in their own translation that this is Jehovah God, and they translate it this way. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says Jehovah God, which is, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. They have established the premise.

Revelation 1.8, Alpha and Omega is Jehovah God, so mark that in your Bible. Right next to it, Alpha and Omega equals Jehovah God. That's according to the Watchtower, and I concur with them heartily.

Now, as you are looking at that particular passage, I suggest that you go a little bit further to the end of the book of Revelation, Revelation chapter 22. The person speaking says, Behold, I come quickly. Verse 7, and as you go on reading Revelation 22, there's a repetition.

Verse 12, Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be. Verse 13, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

I think that's pretty clear. The Alpha and the Omega is speaking again, and the Alpha and the Omega is, by Jehovah's Witnesses' own definition, Jehovah God. So Revelation 22, verse 13 can be cross-referenced with Revelation 1, verse 8, and you have a perfect identification of Jehovah God in both places.

Nobody will argue. Now, as you keep reading, you will come to verse 16 of Revelation 22, and we find out who the Alpha and the Omega is. I, Jesus, have sent my angels to testify to you these things in all the churches.

I am the root and the offspring of David, and the morning star. So, Jesus Christ identifies himself personally as Alpha and Omega, and if there's even a smidgen of doubt, let it.

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