

'To prepare God's people for works of service'

WITNESSING TO THE WITNESSES



Study No. 1

JESUS AND JEHOVAH ABOUT JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

- the history of the movement
- the dangers of their teaching
- the opportunities they present

"In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

1 Peter 3:15,16

1. Jesus and Jehovah

a) John 1:1 'The Word was God'

It is not accidental that John's gospel begins with the same phrase as the book of Genesis, 'In the beginning...'. When heaven and earth were created, there was the Word of God, already existing in the closest association with God and partaking of the essence of God, for 'the Word was God'.

b) John 8:58 'Before Abraham was, I am.'

The context of Jesus' words here is his claim to be one with his Father and to have been sent by him. How could he, a man of less than 50 years, have seen Abraham? Jesus' reply to the protest repeats the affirmation 'I am he' already used twice by him in this chapter (v 24 & 28). He echoes the language of the God of Israel in Isaiah 41:4 'I Jehovah, the first with the last, I am he.'

c) John 20:28

Thomas, not having shared the other disciples' experience the week before, is sceptical about Jesus' resurrection. But even though he is slower than them to express faith in the risen Christ, when he does so he uses language that goes beyond any they have used. Both 'my Lord' and 'my God' are a divine ascription corroborating chapter 1, 'the Word was God'.

2. About the Jehovah's Witnesses

a) A little history

Charles T. Russell, a Pittsburgh draper, founded what later became known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society in 1872. Finding difficulty with the 'Reformed' teachings of his Presbyterian upbringing he became independent, publishing his own Adventist-style periodical. Russell moved internationally and before his death in 1916 he had produced six definitive volumes for his movement entitled 'Studies in the Scriptures'.

January 1917 saw Joseph 'Judge' Rutherford appointed as the organisation's second president. That year he completed the 'Studies' with a seventh volume 'The Finished Mystery'.

In 1920 members began to submit records of their 'witnessing'.

In 1931 the name 'Jehovah's Witnesses' was formally adopted.

During World War Two the JW's reaffirmed their 'conscientious objector' policy.

Rutherford died in 1942 after 25 years as president, being replaced by Nathan H. Knorr.

The Witnesses are now active all over the world and statistics of their growth are impressive:

- In 1928 membership had reached 44,080.
- By 2000 it was an extraordinary 6,035,564; this being a growth of over 5% per annum.
- By 2020 it is predicted that JW numbers worldwide will reach 12,475,115!

b) A few Witness lifestyle choices

- Non-celebration of Christmas
- Non-involvement in school assemblies and R.E. lessons
- Non-acceptance of blood transfusions.

c) JW teachings which differ from the historic Christian faith

- **The oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit** is denied in trinitarian terms.
- **Christ** is seen as a **sacred being**, his deity is denied.
- In **the work of the cross** Jesus died 'a ransom for many'. However, propitiation – averting divine anger and satisfaction – meeting divine justice, do not seem to be significant doctrines for JWs.
- **The people of God** are classed in **two categories**:
 - 144,000 – the 'anointed class' with a heavenly calling;
 - an 'unnumbered multitude' who will be earth's inhabitants.
- **Assurance of salvation** cannot be known. One simply serves as faithfully as possible; one hopes to be counted 'worthy' at the final post-millennial judgement.

3. Opportunities JW visits present to us

a) Their own needs:

At the **emotional** level they are burdened with the need to perform ... for their congregational leaders ... for the awesome 'Jehovah'.

At the **social** level JWs' lives are constrained by 'Kingdom Hall culture'. Wider social involvement is frowned upon and higher education is discouraged.

The **spiritual** needs of individuals will be evident: 'no more conscience of sins'; 'the Spirit witnessing' that they are 'children of God'; 'the favour of the Father'; the worship of the Lord Jesus – all this is denied to JWs.

b) Our own testimony

What Jesus means to us and what God has done for me personally, when shared with sensitivity, can be a significant pointer to faith.