

Godhead Class

November/December 2018

December 9: The Jehovah's Witnesses

Formed in the late 1880s by Charles Taze Russell, the religious group called the Jehovah's Witnesses take an uncommon view of deity. Though they are a noticeably zealous group, their unique views on deity and the godhead bring them into conflict with the Scriptures.

One defining characteristic of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious movement (hereafter *JW*) is their belief that *Jehovah* is the the personal name of the One we would recognize as the Father.¹ This is problematic, though, as we see the Father referenced by a variety of names through Scripture. Beyond this, in one of the commonly cited passages to establish a personal name for God (Exodus 6.3), God self-identifies Himself with the term *Elohim* just four verses later. God's people throughout Scripture approached Him using a number of different designations that were acceptable to Him.

Coincidentally (or perhaps not), the JW religious organization has their own translation of the Scriptures, the New World Translation. Scholars have been quick to point out the bias present in this translation, leading Robert Countess to note that the translation "must be viewed as a radically biased piece of work."² It should always catch an interested party's attention when a religious group concocts their own translation of the Scriptures. In many instances, the New World Translation alters the wording of passages without any evidence to do so and against the

¹ <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/gods-name/>

² Robert Countess, *The Jehovah's Witness' New Testament, A Critical Analysis of the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* pp. 91–93

practice of every other standard translation (cf. Genesis 1.2; 1 Corinthians 10.4; Philippians 2.6; Titus 2.13).

Another hallmark of JW theology is the belief that Jesus is not divine.³ According to JW instruction, Jesus is a created person, not eternally-extant God.⁴ As you can imagine, this problem is solved in JW theology by altering the biblical text. The NWT calls Jesus “a god” in John 1.1, a covert reference to John 10.34f and an attempt to rob Jesus of His divinity. Likewise, the NWT inserts the word “son” into Acts 20.28 without any textual evidence, stripping away the deity from the One who purchased the church “with His own blood.”

The Jehovah’s Witnesses, while zealous, find themselves in much the same place as the Jews of Paul’s day – their passion does not remedy their lack of knowledge (Romans 10.2). Our goal should be to help our JW friends come to a knowledge of the truth – we can accomplish that by familiarizing ourselves with the Scriptures and with the teachings that we must combat.

- 1) Find a prayer in the Old Testament addressed to the Father – what designation is given to the Father in that prayer? _____
- 2) Compare Hebrews 1.8 in the NWT to the Bible you use – what difference do you note and why is that significant? _____

- 3) Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to believe in the concept of resurrection; how do they define the concept of resurrection?⁵ _____

³ <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/is-jesus-almighty/>

⁴ <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/wp20110301/who-is-jesus-christ/>

⁵ <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/what-is-the-resurrection/>