

Cults - Jehovah's Witnesses

What Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe About the Bible?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

From the **TeachingtheWord** Bible Knowledgebase

This is the third in a series of articles about the doctrines and practices of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Read [part two](#).

The Watchtower Society claims to believe that the Bible is the inspired and accurate Word of God. But as the old saying goes, "Don't watch what someone says - watch what he does."

Words Contradict Practice

Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings and practices demonstrate that their actual view of the Bible is just the opposite of their claims. They place man in authority over Scripture, and they twist the Scriptures like a waxed nose to suit their doctrinal positions, which have changed over time.

The Bible *Alone* Is Not Enough

Like all other cults, Jehovah's Witnesses in practice deny the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Founder Charles Taze Russell taught that man's reason has authority over Scripture. Men should "examine the character of the writings claimed as inspired (the Bible) to see whether their teachings correspond with the character we have reasonably imputed to God."¹

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that their religion is the "sole visible channel" of God in the world, and that the Bible cannot be understood except through the matrix of the pronouncements of the Watchtower Society, which they call God's "visible organization."² (It is well to note that this is essentially the same position taken by the Roman Catholic church.)

However, the Jehovah's Witnesses have no single document that embodies an official doctrinal position. Various books and publications of the Watchtower organization have been put forth as "official" at different times through the cult's history. And as we shall see, they have often taken conflicting positions.

Today, the main doctrinal publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses are three: *The Watchtower* magazine, published twice each month; *Awake!*, a monthly general-interest magazine containing commentaries on scientific issues and current events viewed through

the lens of Watchtower Society teachings; and *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (published in 2005 by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania), a 220-page book now used as the official textbook in all Bible studies conducted by the Jehovah's Witnesses. All of these publications have been translated into dozens of languages.

Your Bible is Not Enough

Until 1950, Jehovah's Witnesses generally used the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible. However, the use of this faithful translation of the Scripture presented great problems for Witnesses in their proselytizing efforts, because a straightforward reading of the text clearly contradicts every major teaching of the Watchtower Society.

In the 1940s, Nathan Knorr, then president of the Watchtower Society, proposed that Jehovah's Witnesses produce their own new translation of the Bible. Work was begun in 1947 and completed in 1960, and was undertaken by a team of men whose names the Watchtower Society has refused to reveal.

The stated reason for this new Bible version was that the language of the King James Bible had become archaic, and therefore a modern English translation was needed for understandability. This is a worthy motive for Bible translation when the work is done by faithful men in submission to the authority of Scripture (Matthew 28:18-19, 1 Corinthians 14:6). But the resulting *New World Translation* of the Bible, now the official Bible version of the Watchtower Society, reveals an entirely different agenda - to produce a "Bible" whose text would agree with Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings, no matter how much the original Hebrew and Greek text had to be ignored, twisted, or embellished. (Once again, it is well to note that the Roman Catholic church has done precisely the same thing in the Bible versions it has produced.)

Authentic Christianity in Contrast: The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture

Contrary to the Watchtower position, the Bible teaches that Scripture is not subject to the test of human reasoning, but that human reasoning is subject to the test of Scripture:

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner [in the original, a *critic*] of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

The Word of God also teaches that human reasoning which is not based on Scripture has no validity (e.g., 1 Corinthians chapters 1 and 2). We are not to substitute the traditions of men for the Word of God (Matthew 15:1-6; Mark 7:1-13; Colossians 2:8).

God pronounces severe judgment upon those who would add to, subtract from, or alter a single word of the text of His Word (Deuteronomy 4:2-3, Proverbs 30:6, Revelation 22:18-19). Tampering with even a single word of the Bible can jeopardize the sense of the whole. Such tampering hinders our ability to accurately compare Scripture with Scripture. It also hinders our ability to test what we are taught by human teachers against God's Word itself, as the Bereans did in the book of Acts (17:10-12).

Bible translators, and anyone who evaluates the trustworthiness of a translation, must always remember that no word of any man or church may be substituted for, added to, or subtracted from the Word of God. Doing so places the word of man in authority over the Word of God. (For a more in-depth discussion of these important points, see the article, [How Do We Know the Bible is God's Word When Human Beings Wrote It?](#), on this website).

Next: What do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe About Jesus Christ?

References:

1. Charles Taze Russell, *Millennial Dawn* (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1902), page 41.
2. *Watchtower Magazine* (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society) October 1, 1967, pages 587 and 590.

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