



A Closer Look

at Jehovah's Witnesses View of Christ

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

This is one of the most critical religious and philosophical questions ever asked. It automatically leads to other equally crucial issues. Just who was this Man historically? What did He accomplish and why? And most important, what does His life mean to an individual?

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society—also known as the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Watchtower Society—is one religious organization that claims definite answers to all questions about Jesus Christ. This unusual, century-old, religious movement led by a small committee of supposedly inspired biblical interpreters claims to have the final word about the person and work of Jesus, as well as all theological issues. Millions of Jehovah's Witnesses believe confidently that the Watchtower Society's positions indisputedly are correct and any opinions to the contrary are wrong.

The more significant issue for Jehovah's Witnesses and those outside that organization is how one's relationship to Christ is affected by Watchtower views.

JESUS' PREHUMAN EXISTENCE

The Watchtower Society teaches that Jesus Christ was the first created being of Jehovah God. Jehovah God created Jesus as a divine-like spirit at some point in ancient, pre-creation time. "This means that he was created before all the other spirit sons of God, and that he is the only one who was directly created by God" (*You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1982, p. 58).

In His preexistence, Jesus was known as "the Word" (John 1:3,10,14) because He was God's spokesman. He is also identified by Jehovah's Witnesses with Michael the archangel. "Reasonably, then, the archangel Michael is Jesus Christ. So the evidence indicates that the Son of God (Jesus) was known as Michael before he came to earth" (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1985, p. 218).

The Watchtower teaches that through the agency of the prehuman Christ, Jehovah created all other things in the universe. "He is also God's 'only-begotten' Son in that he is the only one directly created by Jehovah God; all other things came into existence through him as God's Chief Agent" (*The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, p. 47).

This Agent, however, is not to be confused as being a Co-creator with God. "The Son's share in the creative works, however, did not make him a Co-creator with the Father. Rather than a Co-creator, then, the Son was the Agent or instrumentality through whom Jehovah, the Creator worked" (*Aid to Bible Understanding*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1971, p. 918).

Christians maintain there is no scriptural evidence to equate Michael the archangel with the prehuman Christ. The Watchtower Society's assertion that they are the same person is based on their incorrect assumptions about Christ's creation and misinterpretations of Daniel 10 and 12, Jude 9, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16, none of which identify Michael as Christ. Also, Christians contend that Christ was not merely a created being, but eternally preexistent as God the Son with the Father. He was indeed the creative Agent for all things (see John 1:1-14; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Rev. 3:14).

JESUS' DIVINITY

The Watchtower Society *denies* the deity and eternal preexistence of Jesus Christ. This contrasts sharply with historic Christian beliefs that Jesus was God the Son, the second member of the eternal Trinity.

The Watchtower Society's position is similar to the fourth century Arian heresy, universally rejected by Christian churches at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. The Watchtower Society has made a number of interpretative errors and translation changes to conform Scripture to their presuppositions. For example, the Watchtower Society's Bible, *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (NWT), translates John 1:1: "In (the) beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."

The Watchtower Society asserts that since the Greek language has no indefinite articles (a or an), the article can be used where needed in translating; thus they insert "a" before god to emphasize the Word's (Christ's) inferiority to God. This biased rendering cannot be justified grammatically and has been rejected by every reputable Greek scholar.

The Watchtower Society also errs in its interpretation of Colossians 1:15-20. They interpret the word "firstborn" in verse 15 to mean "first-created." However, the firstborn (*prototokos*) principle in Hebrew culture refers to privilege and superiority, not to priority in time. Also, the Watchtower Society has presumptuously added to its translation of verses 16-20 by parenthetically inserting "other" in several places where no word appears in the Greek text. This unwarranted addition is made so the text will conform to the Watchtower Society's theological position on Christ.

"Because by means of him all (other) things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All (other) things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all (other) things and by means of him all (other) things were made to exist" (Col. 1:16-17, NWT).

Another example is the Watchtower Society's interpretation of Revelation 3:14 (NASB), "The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God." The NWT renders the clause, "the beginning of the creation by God," which the Watchtower Society says is proof that Jesus was the first created being. This interpretation errs at two points. First, the word rendered "beginning" is the Greek *arche*, which can also be translated as "source" (*New English Bible*); "ruler" (*New International Version*), or "origin" (*Good News Bible*), thus confirming the orthodox view of Christ's divinity.

As A.T. Robertson comments on this phrase: "Not the first of creatures as the Arians held and Unitarians do now, but the

originating source of creation through whom God works" (Archibald Thomas Robinson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1933, p. 321).

The other problem with the Watchtower Society's interpretation of this verse concerns their translation of the clause *tu Theou* as "by God." The genitive grammatical usage requires "of God," which further suggests that Christ is the prime source or origin of God's creation, not its beginning in time.

Other Scriptures also are translated incorrectly or interpreted to fit the Jehovah's Witness' theology. John 8:58 (NASB), where Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am," is rendered in the NWT as "Before Abraham came into existence, I have been." John 14:28 (NASB), in which Jesus states, "The Father is greater than I," is interpreted in the NWT to prove Jesus' inferiority. Christian interpreters contend that the verse refers to the voluntary, temporary subordination of Jesus during His earthly life, not to His divine nature. Titus 2:13 is inaccurately translated in the NWT as "while we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of (the) Savior of us, Christ Jesus." The verse is rendered correctly by the New American Standard Bible as "looking for . . . our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

The Watchtower Society approaches its biblical translation and interpretation with a clear anti-trinitarian bias. The Jehovah's Witnesses are intent on denying the full divinity of Jesus Christ. This denial presents a radical deviation from historic Christian theology and thus places the Watchtower Society outside orthodox Christianity, establishing it as a cult.

JESUS' BIRTH

The Watchtower Society teaches that Michael the archangel disappeared from heaven and was conceived miraculously by (the Virgin) Mary. "Since actual conception took place, it appears that Jehovah God caused an ovum or egg cell in Mary's womb to become fertile, accomplishing this by the transferral of the life of his firstborn Son from the spirit realm to the earth" (*Aid*, p. 920).

"Marvelously, Jehovah transferred the life-force and the personality pattern of his first-born heavenly Son to the womb of Mary. God's own active force, his holy spirit, safeguarded the development of the child in Mary's womb so that what was born was a perfect human" (*Reasoning*, p. 255).

Christians concur with the Watchtower Society's belief in the miraculous, virgin birth (conception) of Jesus Christ. However, in addition to the unscriptural notions of Jesus' preexistence as Michael, a major disagreement by Christians relates to the Watchtower Society's depersonalization of the Holy Spirit. The Watchtower Society also contends that they have determined the exact dates for Jesus' birth, baptism, and death. "Jesus was evidently born in the month of Ethanium (September-October) of the year 2 B.C.E. (Before the Common Era), was baptized about the same time of the year in 29 C.E. (Common Era), and died about 3 p.m. on Friday, the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan (March-April), 33 C.E." (*Aid*, p. 920).

Most Bible scholars dispute the above chronology for many reasons and agree that Jesus' birth date cannot be determined precisely. For instance, most scholars disagree with the date of 2 B.C. based on archaeological evidence that indicates King Herod I, who attempted to kill the infant Jesus, died in 4 B.C.

JESUS' LIFE AND DEATH

The Watchtower Society teaches that after His birth Jesus became a perfect man who came to earth to bear witness to the

truth of Jehovah God and to defeat Satan. Jesus received His messiahship at age 30, on the day of His baptism. "By pouring out his holy spirit on Jesus, Jehovah was anointing him or appointing him to be the King of his coming kingdom. Being thus anointed with the spirit, Jesus became the 'Messiah,' or the 'Christ,' which words in the Hebrew and Greek languages mean, 'Anointed.' Therefore, he became, in fact, Jesus Christ, or Jesus the Anointed" (*Live*, p. 60).

The Watchtower Society says that, since Adam was also a perfect man who sinned, only a perfect sacrifice of another perfect man could bring salvation. "By his disobedience the perfect man Adam lost perfect life on a paradise earth for himself and all his children. Jesus Christ gave his own perfect life to buy back what Adam lost. Yes, Jesus 'gave himself a corresponding ransom for all'" (*Live*, p. 62).

Thus, the Watchtower Society teaches that Jesus' ransom death at age 33 balanced the scales of justice between Adam's sin and God's perfect requirements. "Even now Jesus' ransom sacrifice can benefit us. How? By exercising faith in it we can enjoy a clean standing before God and come under his loving and tender care. But we can freely seek forgiveness from God on the basis of the ransom, with confidence that he will hear us" (*Live*, p. 63).

The Watchtower Society teaches that Jesus was crucified on a "torture stake" instead of a cross (Matt. 27-33, NWT). The Watchtower Society specifically dates Jesus' death: "On Nisan 14 of the year 33 C.E. Jesus' enemies put him to death on a torture stake" (*The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1968, p. 51).

In general, Christians agree with the Watchtower Society on details of the life of Christ. However, the notion that Jesus became the Messiah at His baptism runs counter to biblical teaching. Jesus was hailed as the Messiah at His birth and even before (see Isa. 9:6; Matt. 1:16-18, 2:4; Luke 2:11,26).

Christians agree that Jesus did die as a sacrifice for man's sin, as He was perfect and sinless. Nonetheless, Christians maintain that linguistic and historical evidence supports the traditional view that Jesus died on a Roman cross.

JESUS' RESURRECTION

Jehovah's Witnesses deny the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is another radical departure from historic Christian teaching. The Watchtower Society maintains that the Lord's resurrection was purely spiritual and only appeared as physical.

"Jehovah God did not leave his Son dead in the grave, but raised him to life on the third day. He was not given human life again, because that would have meant that he was taking back the ransom price. But he was 'made alive in the spirit' (1 Pet. 3:18, NWT). During a period of forty days after his resurrection he appeared visibly to his disciples a number of times, in materialized bodies, to prove that he really had been raised from the dead" (*Truth*, p. 52).

Christians affirm the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself prophesied His physical resurrection. "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews therefore said, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?'" (John 2:19-20, NASB).

Jesus clearly indicated the physical aspect of His resurrection when He appeared to His disciples. "And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have'" (Luke 24:38-39, NASB).

The physical nature of Jesus' appearances is further substantiated by His serving and sharing a meal with the two disciples in Emmaus (see Luke 24:13-35), His conversation with Thomas (see John 20:26), His appearance to more than 500 people (see 1 Cor. 15:1-8), and His visible ascension to heaven (see Acts 1:9-11).

JESUS' SECOND COMING

The Watchtower Society teaches that following His ascension, Jesus, once again as Michael the archangel, returned to heaven and sat down at Jehovah's right to await the end of the seven "times of the Gentiles" as recorded in Daniel 4. The "times of the Gentiles" supposedly began in 607 B.C. when the Babylonians overthrew King Zedekiah of Judah (Note: Bible scholars place the above date at 587-586 B.C.). Jesus would begin His rule at the end of this period, figured by the Watchtower Society as 2,520 years (based on the "seven times" of Dan. 4:16,23).

"What was to happen at the end of these appointed times of the nations (Gentiles)? Jehovah was to give the power to rule to the One 'who has the legal right!' This One is Jesus Christ" (*Live*, p. 140).

"This means that Jesus Christ began to rule as King of God's heavenly government in 1914" (*Live*, p. 141).

The above statement would surprise most non-Jehovah's Witnesses. If Jesus returned to rule in 1914, where is He? The Watchtower Society answers that Jesus' rule is in heaven and that He will never appear physically on earth again. At the present time, Satan is in control of this world and its institutions—especially the Christian churches. However, in the near future, the world as we know it will be destroyed by Christ from heaven and the millennium, or 1,000-year judgment day, will begin. When will this take place? The Watchtower Society claims that it will take place in "this generation" (Matt. 24:14,34). "Which generation did Jesus mean? He meant the generation of people who were living in 1914. Those persons yet remaining of that generation are now very old. However, some of them will still be alive to see the end of this wicked system" (*Live*, p. 154).

The Watchtower Society says that during the 1,000-year judgment day, most people will be resurrected and judged by Christ and others of the "anointed class" of Jehovah's Witnesses. "We have certainly seen that when the dead come forth from the grave, they are not judged by their past deeds. Rather, they are judged on the basis of what they do during Judgment Day (the millennium)" (*Live*, p. 180). At the close of judgment day, those not deemed worthy will be cast into the "lake of fire," along with Satan and his demons, and annihilated from existence. The world being purified and those Jehovah judges as righteous will live in paradise on earth, and Jesus (Michael) will then turn His kingdom back over to Jehovah.

Perhaps no theological issue has fostered as much interest, debate, and disagreement among Christians as the "last things." However, several aspects of Christ's second coming commonly are held by evangelical Christians. All affirm that Jesus will return physically to earth to judge humankind and establish God's kingdom (see Matt. 6:24-27; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36). Christians reject the Watchtower Society's dating of 1914 as spurious. In fact, Jesus specifically warned that no one knows the time of His coming (see Matt. 24:4-7,36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7). Nonetheless, believers are admonished to be alert, ready, and watching at any time for the Lord's return (see Matt. 24:14, 25:13; 1 Thess. 5:1-11).

Christians contend that Jesus will judge all humankind. Those found righteous (saved Christians) will inherit eternal life in heaven and the lost will suffer eternal punishment (see Matt. 18:8-9, 25:41-

46; Mark 9:47-48; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20-22). No second chance or probationary period will be given. As Hebrews states: "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27, NASB).

CONCLUSION

The Watchtower Society's concept of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done is opposed to the historic, biblical, and Christian position.

Jesus Christ is the Lord, the second Person of the Godhead, who came to earth as a Man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, and was resurrected bodily from the dead. He ascended into heaven and will return to earth to judge all people and angels and to establish the eternal kingdom of God. Christians know that by God's grace, through faith in Christ, they are assured a place in His kingdom (1 John 5:13). Jehovah's Witnesses also can have that assurance. They first must renounce the unbiblical teaching of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Then they must repent of their sin (Acts 3:19), place their faith in Jesus alone for salvation (Eph. 2:8-9), and surrender to Him as their Lord (Rom. 10:9-10). As Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6, NASB).

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