

Jehovah, Jesus, and the Jehovah's Witnesses

Is Jesus Jehovah, or Yahweh (YHWH), of the Old Testament?

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." 2 John 7, NASB

Jehovah's Witnesses exhibit commendable moral characteristics, especially when set against the backdrop of our culture's moral meltdown. Members are generally "clean cut" and family oriented. In raising their children, they enforce outward standards of holiness and dress, standards which shame much of what is acceptable in today's pan-evangelical churches. Unlike many professing Christians, they also possess a missionary zeal as evidenced by their neighborhood visitations. Few after all, have not been visited by them at their front door.

But despite credible characteristics, Jehovah's Witnesses do not possess a right understanding of the doctrine of Christ. They refuse to accept the obvious New Testament assertions that Jesus is God (Colossians 2:8-9; Philippians 2:6; John 1:1; etc.). Like Unitarians, Witnesses believe that Jehovah alone is God.

The name Jehovah is the English paraphrase of the common Old Testament name for God, Yahweh (with vowels "a" and "e" added, the name Yahweh derives from the Hebrew name YHWH). About himself Yahweh states, **"Hear, O Israel! The LORD (YHWH) is our God (Elohim), the LORD (YHWH) is one!"** (Deuteronomy 6:4). In his indictment of the idolatry of Israel, Yahweh declared through Isaiah, **"Thus saith the LORD (YHWH) the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD (YHWH) of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God"** (Isaiah 44:6). In light of Old Testament texts like these, Jehovah's Witnesses rightly equate that Jehovah is singularly God as opposed to the idolatry, pantheism and polytheism of the pagans. But in their zeal to protect Jehovah's unity, they deny Jesus' deity.

So when looking at the Bible, the question arises, does the Jesus of the New Testament equate to be the personal and self-disclosed Yahweh/Jehovah of the Old? There is strong evidence which indicates that both Jesus and His disciples believed He was the incarnation of YHWH.

First, the name YHWH literally means "to be present or exist." In contrast to the pantheon of the non-existent gods of the religious world, YHWH is the self-existent and ever-present One. This is how YHWH described himself to Moses when he inquired about God's name for the purpose of explaining to Israel who, in fact, was sending him (Moses) to deliver Israel from Egypt (Exodus 3:13-16). To Moses' inquiry, God stated, **"I AM WHO I AM." And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you.'"** (Exodus 3:14). Against this backdrop, Jesus said to the Pharisees, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am"** (John 8:58; numerous other times Jesus boldly declared, **"I am . . ."**; See John 8:58; 6:48; 9:5; 10:9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1.). Jesus therefore plagiarized the common name for God in the Old Testament--**"I am"**--and applied it to Himself! On this point Jesus must either be viewed

to be God or a deluded man, an imposter or worse. It is in the sense of His being *The Ever Present One* that Jesus' promise, "**I am with you always**," should be understood. Like YHWH, Jesus is always with his people (Matthew 28:20).

Second, in his Gospel, the Apostle John referred to Isaiah's heavenly vision of YHWH, when the prophet heard the Seraphim declare, "**Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD** (YHWH or Jehovah) **of hosts . . .**" (Isaiah 6:3, 5). In that vision, who in fact did Isaiah see? The Apostle John understood that Isaiah saw the pre-incarnate and glorified Jesus, for he explained, "**These things Isaiah said, because he** (Isaiah) **saw His** (YHWH's) **glory, and he** (Isaiah) **spoke of Him** (YHWH/Jesus)" (John 12:41; Compare Luke 24:27).[1]

In arguing against the heresy of Arianism--the ancient equivalent of the modern day Jehovah's Witnesses--church theologians bluntly stated that *if Jesus Christ a created being, then Christians commit idolatry by worshipping Him*. But because He is the incarnation of YHWH, no idolatry is committed in worshipping Jesus. Like Thomas, the Christian can affirm of Jesus, "**My Lord and my God!**" (John 20:28).

ENDNOTE

[1] From the context it is plain that the personal pronoun "**Him**" in verse 41 refers to Jesus. The issue of the context is belief in Jesus. Some refused to believe in Him ("**not believing in Him**" [i.e., in Jesus], John 12:37) while others did believe in Him ("**many even of the rulers believed in Him**" [i.e., in Jesus], John 12:42). Continuity of the pronoun "**Him**" argues that the One spoken of by Isaiah was *YHWH-Jesus* (John 12:37, 41, 42).