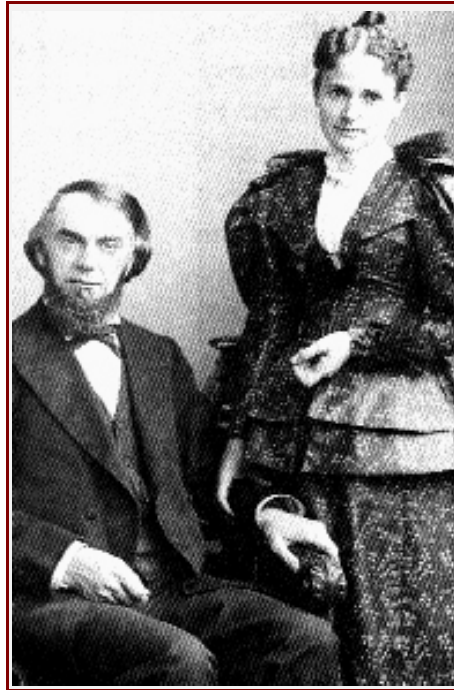


The Little 'God' of the Watchtower

Will the REAL
Jehovah, the true
God of the Bible,
be examined by
man's reason?
Jehovah's Witnesses
think so!

Charles Taze Russell (right,
with estranged wife Maria),
taught that human reason, not
divine revelation, was the
ultimate foundation of our
knowledge of God. What does
the Bible say? In how many
other ways does the
Watchtower 'Jehovah' differ
from the God of the Bible?



By DAVID ASPINALL

Why Jehovah's Witnesses cannot know the true Jehovah

... let us examine the character of the writings claimed
as inspired, to see whether their teachings correspond with
the character we have *reasonably* imputed to God ...

Charles Taze Russell *The Divine Plan of the Ages* (1886) p.41

THE *Jehovah* of Jehovah's Witnesses, all will admit, is a vastly different Deity
from the Jehovah worshipped by the historic Christian church. How did it
happen that Charles Taze Russell and his followers, reading the same King
James Version that Christians hallow, and beginning their search for the true God
with evident sincerity, ended up in so different a place?

For centuries Christians have disputed what is the ultimate ground of
authority for believers. Roman Catholics, while certainly holding the Bible to be
from God, have traditionally held to the position that the Scriptures must be
authoritatively interpreted only by the Church, such being the prerogative of the
'doctors' of the Roman Catholic Church itself. Protestants, in contrast, have
generally tended to emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in interpreting
Scripture **directly** for the believer. For both Catholic and Protestant, the Bible
is authoritative, but whether it is **ultimately** authoritative depends on just how
much weight one is willing to give to either the authority of the Church (for the
Catholic) or the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit.

For the Jehovah's Witness, however, there is unconscious confusion as to
where **ultimate** authority resides. The individual Witness, when asked from
where his teachings come, will confidently assert the Bible. Yet when pressed on
what he would do if the text of Scripture seemed to say one thing, and
Watchtower doctrine another, the typical Witness would reply that he would ask
his elders or consult the *The Watchtower* index. This quite unconscious
doublethink (to borrow Orwell's 1984 term) illustrates that Jehovah's Witnesses
are in fact much closer to the Roman Catholic position than the Protestant -- a
double authority which, in practice, since there cannot possibly be **two ultimate**
authorities inevitably results in one been given more weight than the other. For
the Witness, the choice is inevitable -- he is convinced that only the 144,000 --
that is, present Watchtower leadership -- have a direct line to God. Only the
"anointed" can interpret the Bible.

What is the real authority for Jehovah's Witnesses?

Yet even for the "anointed" **ultimate** authority does not reside in the Bible. On
this issue Charles Taze Russell, like Witnesses of today, seemed to hold 2
contradictory thoughts at the same time. In the first volume of his *Studies in the
Scriptures* (*The Divine Plan of the Ages*) Russell starts with apparent humility
(p.10), acknowledging with Isaiah that Jehovah's thoughts are not our thoughts
(Isa.55:8,9). But by the time we reach chapter 3 Russell is feeling bold enough
to test God's revelation by the light of his own powers of logic. The title of that

chapter tells it all -- *The Bible as a Divine Revelation Viewed in the Light of Reason*. Russell did not see that in submitting revelation to the test of reason he was exalting man's mind - to be precise, his own mind - above the written revelation of God's mind. In so doing Russell showed that he was very much the child of his times; since the beginning of the Enlightenment (the age of the birth of modern science, around 1700), man had begun to feel that the secrets of the universe were available to his unaided intellect. Russell, therefore, can properly be described as a *rationalist* -- one who treats reason as the ultimate authority in religion. This habit is still with Russell's spiritual descendants, Jehovah's Witnesses, who still like to preface a discussion of the Trinity or hell with the assertion that such teachings are not "reasonable". Like Russell, who had caught the spirit of the world, Witnesses quite unconsciously reveal by this approach to Scripture that they have **another** authority to which God's word must be forced to fit. Hear Russell's "reasoning":

Those who will turn away from the mere speculations of men, and devote time to searching the Scriptures, **not excluding reason, which God invites us to use** (Isa. 1:18), will find that a blessed bow of promise spans the heavens [emphasis added]¹

Thus from the beginning those who fell under the sway of Russell's teaching were conditioned to use their minds to test God's word. The inevitable end result, where 2 masters compete for one servant, is that one master prevails: for Witnesses, as for *The Watchtower's* first president, the Bible loses (look no further that the title of the Witnesses' door-to-door handbook, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*.) For the Christian, when that which is "reasonable" seems to conflict with Scriptural revelation, the choice is clear -- *all Scripture is inspired and profitable for ... correction* (2 Tim.3:16), and our thinking is in need of correction, not Scripture in need of re-interpretation.

What kind of God did Isaiah worship?

Ever since Russell's day *The Watchtower* has attempted to combine the ideas of men with the revelation of God. In Isaiah's day too Israel attempted a similar folly. The deities of Israel's neighbours were the inventions of men's minds, or worse, demonic visions (1 Cor.10:20). Yet most Israelites preferred these inferior deities, crafted and constricted by men's imaginations as they inevitably were, to the true God. Isaiah contrasted these limited deities with the God of Israel. Let us look at some of the ways Jehovah differed from the gods of the surrounding peoples in attributes and character:

JEHOVAH, THE UNLIMITED AND SOVEREIGN GOD

Pagans tended to create gods after their own image. Therefore just as all created things occupy space and time, so did the deities created by human devising. So paganism naturally gravitated to polytheism, the worship of many gods, because men with only their own imaginations to

help them could only conceive of deities with similar limitations of time and space; therefore each god has its own domain and responsibilities, just as in any human society. The God of Israel, Isaiah insisted, was not subject to the restrictions of created things. As to time, Jehovah is "declaring the end from the beginning", in contrast to false gods who the True God invites to do the same thing (46:10; 41:4, 21-24; 42:8,9; 43:10-13; 44:6-8). This ability to know the future -- **infallibly** -- is thus the test of the true servant of Jehovah (44:24-26). Jehovah cannot be confined to space any more than He can to time:

Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? (66:1)

Israel had to learn that God will not be contained or confined -- not by a temple, not by a land, not to a single people. Jehovah's Witnesses, though they talk a lot about the "Sovereign Lord Jehovah", actually exhibit an attitude like the Jews of Isaiah's day. In the first decades of Witness history *The Watchtower* actually taught that Jehovah lived within the physical universe -- to be precise, in the constellation Pleiades²! Though Witnesses no longer teach this, they still think of God as occupying space, in "heaven"³. And like those Jews of old, they believe Jehovah can only associate with those whom *The Watchtower* approves. But **Sovereign** means that God makes the rules. In the above text from Isaiah, having inquired of Israel where the house is in which they thought to contain Him, Jehovah adds He will look to the one "who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word" (66:2). Surely Jehovah's Witnesses do not think that they can read hearts well enough to determine who those humble, contrite individuals are? Claiming the attributes of God -- and one of these is the ability to read hearts -- is what the Bible calls **blasphemy**⁴. Reducing Jehovah to human or any other likeness is what the Bible calls **idolatry** (40:25).

JEHOVAH, GOD OF GRACE AND MERCY

The pagan gods were cruel, exacting taskmasters, and their devotees stood at best in the relation of suppliants and servants. These deities demanded great and inhumane sacrifices of their followers -- even to the revolting extreme of the offering of living infants to the fire of Molech. Manasseh, king of Judah, even imported these pagan notions of 'true worship' into the city of Jerusalem. It should not surprise us that Jewish tradition connects the reference to saints sawn asunder to Isaiah's martyrdom by Manasseh (Heb.11:37). Isaiah had preached a God who could and would not be appeased even by the best that humans can offer; who will be approached only on the basis of faith and trust -- particularly trust in His mercy and forgiveness. In fact it is in Isaiah 55, in the context of Jehovah's offer of *free* bread and *free* water, that the famous statement that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways" is heard (55:8). This God would "abundantly pardon" (v.7), but not because Israel had *purchased* His pardon with their

own lives, or the lives of their children! It is the sacrifice of God's Son, not ours', that is the basis of forgiveness (see ch.53; also 1:10-18).

JEHOVAH, GOD OF FAITHFUL, COVENANT LOVE

Though Israel in Isaiah's day was blind and deaf to the True God, Jehovah **still** called them His "witnesses" (43:7-12). They, despite continual revolt and backslidings against their God, were actually even *better qualified* to be His witnesses than a faithful Israel could have been. That because it was precisely Jehovah's ability and **willingness** to save an unfaithful and disloyal people that made him distinct from the pagan deities, who held their worshippers in permanent slavery simply because they **would not forgive** any deflections. Therefore the God of Israel was distinguished from His rivals precisely in that *His* holiness included grace as its outstanding attribute, whereas the service of pagan gods was abject, slavish -- the terror of disobeying a master, rather than the fear of hurting a father (63:8-10).

In that very verse from which Jehovah's Witnesses obtain their name, Jehovah says "I am the same One" (43:10, NWT; *I am He*, ASV, NAS). In this famous passage it is a declaration of His **faithful, covenant love for Israel** that is the evidence of Jehovah being "the same One". Here, as in all the I AM passages of Isaiah, it is Jehovah's faithfulness to the unfaithful, His loyalty to the disloyal, His **eternal unchangeableness** that set Him apart from the 'contract' gods like Baal, who were as fickle as their followers. Jehovah was a faithful husband to Israel, even if she proved a continually unfaithful wife:

... you will not be forgotten on my part ... I -- I am the One that is wiping out your transgressions **for my own sake**, and your sins I shall not remember ... (44:21; 43:25; 54:7, NWT -- emphasis added)

The false gods were faithful too: they dependably failed to make good on promises or fulfill their prophets' predictions. And they were fickle in their affections even to those who had faithfully served them for decades.

Which God does the god of *The Watchtower* more closely resemble -- Jehovah of the Bible, or the little gods of paganism?

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1. *Studies in the Scriptures* vol.1 (1886) p.20
 2. *Studies in the Scriptures* vol.3 (1891) p.327; *Reconciliation* (1928) p.14
 3. *The Watchtower* Feb.15, 1981 p.6
 4. *Insight on the Scriptures* vol.1 p.339