

Article: DJ703

## EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM: Effectively Sharing the Deity of Christ with Jehovah's Witnesses

by James R. White

This article first appeared in the Effective Evangelism column of the volume 20, number 2 (1997) issue of the *Christian Research Journal*. For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

How many times have you prepared ahead of time for a discussion with a Jehovah's Witness on certain key Bible verses, only to get bogged down arguing over John 1:1, John 10:30, and other passages in which Jesus is called "God"? "Oh," the Witness responds, "we do believe Jesus is a god. Isaiah 9:6 calls him a mighty god. But he is not *the Almighty* God." Then you hear that men are sometimes called "gods" (John 10:34) and God made Moses to be a "god" to Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1). When the encounter is over, you feel about as frustrated as the Buffalo Bills after the Super Bowl.

To avoid this problem we must learn to compellingly communicate the biblical truth of the deity of Christ and the Trinity to the mind trained in Watchtower theology. There is a way around the natural "walls" that Watchtower indoctrination places in the minds of Jehovah's Witnesses. This is one way we can be instruments in the work of the Holy Spirit.

### JEHOVAH IS GOD

Many Witnesses feel that no one outside of their own circles thinks anything about Jehovah<sup>1</sup> God. They are surprised to encounter Christians who know the name Jehovah and use the name in hymns and songs. You can agree with the Witnesses that Jehovah is God. This statement opens the door to the Witness concerning the wonderful truth about Jesus Christ.

Witnesses argue that the term "god" can be used of men and angels, and so, when used of Jesus, it does not prove His deity. They cannot consistently use that tactic against the overwhelming evidence that in the New Testament Jesus Christ is identified as Jehovah God! The Witnesses must logically recognize that if Jesus is Jehovah, all their arguments about "lesser gods" are irrelevant. Jehovah is the only true God, and if the Bible says Jesus is Jehovah, the case is closed. We can engage the thinking process of the Witnesses to bring them to the realization of this truth. Once the identity of Jesus as Jehovah is established, then the passages that call Him "God" become meaningful and understandable to Witnesses.

### PROVING YOUR CASE

I have often moved into this topic through a brief explanation of the Trinity. Most Witnesses do not have an accurate knowledge of the Trinity. (Sadly, neither do many Christians.) If I am asked why I believe in the Trinity, I normally respond,

I believe in the Trinity because the Bible teaches the doctrine. It does so not by using the specific word "Trinity," but by teaching the three pillars that make up the doctrine. First, that there is only one true God, Jehovah, Creator of all things. Surely you agree with me there. Next, that there are three divine Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I realize you do not believe the Holy Spirit is a person, but you do agree that the Father

and the Son are not the same person, correct? Finally, the third pillar, the point on which we are in direct disagreement, is the Bible's teaching of the full equality of these divine persons. This would include the deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to short-circuit the natural tendency of Witnesses to misunderstand you. We are not asserting that there are three *persons* that are one *person*, nor that there are three *beings* that are one *being*. We are differentiating between the terms *being* and *person*.

The Bible teaches that all things have being, but only God, humans, and angels are *personal*. I as a human *being* am one *person*, James White. My *being* makes me human, my *personality* differentiates me from all other human *beings*. Since my *being* is finite and limited, only one *person* can properly subsist in it, namely, me. But since God's *being* is infinite and unlimited, it can be, and is, shared by three *persons*, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Once I have differentiated between *being* and *person*, I then ask if I can illustrate this from Scripture. Since Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Trinity is a false doctrine derived from Greek philosophy, they often are willing to open the Bible, confident that you won't be able to support your position. I say, "You and I both agree that the only true God is Jehovah. I believe the term 'Jehovah' refers to the very divine being, the eternal God, who created all things. You would agree with me that the Father is Jehovah, would you not? Where we disagree is this: I believe the Bible says that Jesus Christ is Jehovah, and the Spirit is also Jehovah. Each of the three *persons* shares the one divine name, Jehovah. May I show you one of the places where the Bible teaches us that Jesus is Jehovah?"

Most Witnesses have never encountered this kind of approach. Make sure your friend has understood your meaning — you may need to clarify your position a few times before proceeding.

There is no one verse with which you should always begin. I personally favor using Hebrews 1. In any case, make sure you are thoroughly familiar not just with the verses themselves, but with the surrounding contexts. You don't want your demonstration short-circuited by your own lack of knowledge of the text.

Using the Witnesses' own translation, the New World Translation (NWT), I note some of the important verses in passing, such as Hebrews 1:3, which speaks of Christ as the "exact representation of his nature."<sup>2</sup> I follow the context down through verse 8, which begins, "But with reference to the Son..." I ask, "Now, who is being discussed all through this passage?" The answer is plainly the Son. The citation that begins in verse 8 finishes in verse 9, following which the NWT says, "And: 'You at [the] beginning, O Lord, laid the foundations of the earth itself, and the heavens are [the] works of your hands.'"

By its use of quotation marks in the text, the NWT clearly indicates that we are dealing here with a citation of the Old Testament. I finish reading through verse 12, and immediately ask, "Now, who is being described here?" The only possible answer is "the Son." The Witness may say something about how Jesus, as the first creation of Jehovah, was the one *through whom* all the rest of creation was made. I allow the Witness to say whatever he or she wishes, as long as we agree on the fact that Hebrews 1:10-12 is still making reference to the Son.<sup>3</sup> Then I ask if my friend knows what passage the writer to the Hebrews is quoting. The passage being cited, according to the cross references found in NWT reference editions, is Psalm 102:25-27. *It is very important that you get to Psalm 102 quickly to provide the proper context.*

Invite the Witness to begin at verse 1 of Psalm 102 and to identify the individual being addressed in the passage. The NWT begins, "O Jehovah, do hear my prayer." Skip down to verse 12 and show that Jehovah remains the subject of the psalm. Point out that Jehovah continues to appear in verses 19 and 20. This is important because once you get to verse 25 the significance of the words will be manifest. Jehovah is addressed in the very same words that the writer to the Hebrews uses of the Son, Jesus Christ!

It is vital that you make it clear that there is no reason to think that anyone other than Jehovah is being addressed by the psalmist in Psalm 102:25-27.<sup>4</sup> You have shown the first of many passages in which the New Testament writers take an Old Testament passage originally about Jehovah Himself and apply it to

the Lord Jesus Christ. This passage is exceptionally strong, for the psalmist is speaking of the immutability, eternal nature, and creative power of Jehovah God, yet the writer to the Hebrews is willing to predicate all these things of Jesus Christ.

### THE ADVANTAGE OF THIS METHOD

Don't expect Witnesses to give in the first time you show this passage. Most will beat a hasty retreat for the door and try to find someone who can answer all these questions. When you show a Witness a divine truth *from the pages of his own NWT*, that truth follows him wherever he goes. He's not going to throw his Bible out, so whenever he opens it up and encounters these passages, the Spirit of God will remind him of what he cannot answer. Witnesses won't take literature from you, so turn their Bibles into tracts that will go with them when they walk out your door.

**James R. White** is the director of Alpha and Omega Ministries, a Christian apologetics organization based in Phoenix, Arizona. He is the author of more than a dozen books, a professor, an accomplished debater, and an elder of the Phoenix Reformed Baptist Church.

### NOTES

1. The pronunciation "Jehovah," while important to the Witnesses, is *not* the proper pronunciation. The Hebrew Tetragrammaton (YHWH) was probably pronounced "Yahweh." A good Bible dictionary will furnish the meaning and background of the term, information that is both enriching and useful in witnessing.
2. Don't get bogged down. Press toward demonstrating that Jesus is Jehovah. If you get into a discussion of NWT passages specifically designed to hide the deity of Christ (Hebrews 1:6 and 1:8), you will never get around to what you are trying to accomplish.
3. Should the Witness attempt to say otherwise, note that the NWT begins verse 8 in the same way it begins verse 10, with a colon followed by a quotation. Verse 8 is about the Son. Verse 10 continues the citation of passages about the Son from the Old Testament. Even the NWT gives no indication of any kind of break between verses 9 and 10.
4. The close reader will recognize an inconsistency in the NWT at this point. It inserts the name "Jehovah" in the New Testament 237 times, even though the term appears in no Greek New Testament manuscripts at all. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the *Septuagint* or LXX, used the Greek term "Lord" (*Kurios*) for the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. The New Testament writers, when citing the Old Testament passages in which the name Jehovah appeared, likewise used the Greek term *Kurios* or "Lord." The Watchtower reasons that when citing the Old Testament (and in many other instances) the name Jehovah should be retained. Hence, when they translate Hebrews 2:13, which contains a citation of Isaiah 8:18, they insert the name "Jehovah" in the translation. But they also often insert the name when there is no direct Old Testament reference at all, such as in Revelation 1:8. And most importantly for our use of Hebrews 1:10-12, in other passages they change the Greek *Kurios* to "Jehovah" in citations of the Old Testament that are *about* Jehovah, even if the name does not appear in the specifically cited text. Why didn't the NWT translators remain consistent and render the Greek term *Kurios* as "Jehovah" in Hebrews 1:10? There is only one reason: it would make the passage teach a doctrine that is contrary to Watchtower theology. Hence their Bible translation is determined by their beliefs, not by the text.