

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 42, Number 3

July August September 2022

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

The Discerner

A Christian Apologetics & Counter-
Cult Ministry

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WITH THIS ISSUE

Welcome to another issue of *The Discerner!*

Turn on the television inside, and it's easy to get discouraged. Gaze outside and you may wonder, "How much crazier will this world become before Our Lord Jesus Christ comes back?!"

Some turn to yoga for internal peace and spiritual meditation. Others escape by watching old movies and wishing the world was like yesteryear. Still others do what has always worked for New Testament believers...they pick up their Bibles and reassure themselves of God's Truth and Promises no matter the times, age, or seasons.

And so in keeping with and examining Truth...

Our first featured article is by the ministry *Witnesses for Jesus* located in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Founded by Christy (Harvey) Darlington, this excellent article compares – and exposes—the false doctrines and teachings of the Watchtower Society versus Bible Truth.

Our second article is an urgent biblical response to the Biblical Roots Movement by author R. L. Solberg. Reading this article helps us appreciate the Jewish heritage of our Christian faith without compromising the great truths (and freedoms from OT Law) regarding our New Testament faith.

Once you have finished reading, take a few minutes to complete our Quarterly Quiz. For this issue, the topic is Creationism. It seems less people believe in the biblical account of creation every day, so it's good to keep our faith-sword sharp as both a defensive (apologetic) as well as an offensive (evangelistic) weapon when the need arises. How will you do?

Thank you for your continued correspondence, thoughts, words, prayers, and financial support.

On behalf of the RAS Board,

Steve Lagoon,
President

SHINING GOD'S LIGHT ON JEHOVAH'S WITNESS BELIEFS

By Melissa Blanz and Christy Darlington

RAS Note: The following content exposes the doctrinal errors of the Watchtower Society by comparing each teaching against the clear teachings of the Bible. Unless noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

I. Trinity

A. Watchtower

“Never was there a more deceptive doctrine advanced than that of the trinity. It could have originated only in one mind, and that the mind of Satan the Devil.” (*Reconciliation*, 1928, p. 101).

“Therefore, those who accept the Bible as God’s Word do not worship a Trinity consisting of three persons or gods in one. In fact, the word ‘Trinity’ does not even appear in the Bible.” (*Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life*, 1995, p. 31).

B. Bible

One God who is revealed in three persons — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; The Trinity is not Modalism — the view that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all one person; nor is it Tritheism — the view that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate Gods.

- The Father is God (Philippians 2:11).
- The Son is God (Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 1:23; John 1:1, 18 and 20:28; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1).
- The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3–4).
- Yet there are not three “Gods” but only One God (Isaiah 43:10–11; 44:6,8; 45:21–22; 46:9).
- “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

II. The Person of Jesus Christ

A. Watchtower

Jesus Christ is a created angel who, although he is divine, is only “a god,” separate from the true God.

“Jesus was a created spirit being, just as angels were spirit beings created by God. Neither the angels nor Jesus had existed before their creation.” (*Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, p. 14)

“Does John 1:1 prove that Jesus is God? ... So, the text is not saying that the Word (Jesus) was the same as the God with whom he was but, rather, that the Word was godlike, divine, a god.” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 1985, p. 212)

B. Bible

Jesus Christ has always existed and is the one true God.

- “Having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God” (Hebrews 7:3).
- “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3; compare with Isaiah 44:24).
- “We are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This the true God and eternal life...the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (1 John 1:2 and 5:20–21).
- “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17).

III. Worshipping Jesus Christ

A. Watchtower

Jesus Christ as a creature should not receive the same honor and worship that the Father receives.

“Do not erroneously conclude that Christians are to worship Christ; that is not what he taught. True, he is a god, a mighty one, but he did not worship himself and he did not teach his disciples to worship him.” (*The Watchtower*, July 15, 1959, p. 421)

“Any who use Jesus’ name in their worship but fail to give the greater honor to Jehovah do not manifest a genuine love of the light.” (*The Watchtower*, August 1, 1991, p. 9)

“Though some claim that prayer may properly be addressed to others, such as to God’s Son, the evidence is emphatically to the contrary.” (*Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 2, 1988, p. 667)

B. Bible

Jesus Christ as God receives the same honor and worship that the Father receives.

- “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever. And the four living creatures kept saying, ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshipped” (Revelation 5:13b–14).
- “And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him” (Hebrews 1:6).
- “In order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:23).
- “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:14)¹.
- “...to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours ... you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:2, 9).

IV. Jesus Christ & Michael the Archangel

A. Watchtower

Jesus Christ was the archangel Michael prior to coming to earth and becoming no more, no less than a perfect human who, when he died, left his humanity and returned back into the archangel Michael at his resurrection.

¹ The modern translations have Jesus saying “ask Me” because they are based on the best Greek manuscripts available today. This shows prayers to Jesus. See also Acts 7:59 and 2 Corinthians 12:8-9 where Jesus receives prayer and compare these verses with Exodus 23:13.

“So the evidence indicates that the Son of God was known as Michael before he came to earth and is known also by that name since his return to heaven where he resides as the glorified spirit Son of God.” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 1985, p. 218)

“War broke out in heaven: Michael [who is the resurrected Jesus Christ] and his angels battled with the dragon....” (*You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, 1982, p. 21)

“At death he laid aside the human organism in which he ministered as a new creature for three and a half years; and in his resurrection he was no more human.” (*The Kingdom Is At Hand*, 1944, p. 258)

“...for the man Jesus is dead, forever dead....” (*The Atonement Between God And Man*, *Studies vol. 5*, p. 454)

“The human body of flesh, which Jesus Christ laid down forever as a ransom sacrifice, was disposed of by God’s power....” (*Things In Which It Is Impossible For God To Lie*, 1965, p. 354)

“...Jesus simply materialized or took on a fleshly body....In order to convince Thomas of who He was, He used a body with wound holes.” (*You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, 1982, pp. 144–14)

B. Bible

Jesus Christ, while continuing to exist as God, took on an additional nature at His Incarnation; thus, becoming the Godman. He was resurrected in a glorified human body. His believers eagerly await His Second Coming in the flesh.

- ... “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...” (Philippians 2:5–11 (NIV), compare verses 10–11 with Isaiah 45:23).
- “For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee’...But to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make thine enemies a footstool for thy feet’?...For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking...For in subjecting

all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him... (Hebrews 1:5, 13; 2:5, 8).

- “The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’...But He was speaking of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken (John 2:18–22); see also Luke 24:39 and Colossians 2:9).
- “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...” (1 Timothy 2:5).
- “...because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

V. Holy Spirit

A. Watchtower

The Holy Spirit: God’s “active force.”

“The Bible’s use of ‘holy spirit’ indicates that it is a controlled force that Jehovah God uses to accomplish a variety of his purposes...it can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations.” (*Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, p. 2)

B. Bible

- The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity who is God. He has all the attributes of personhood.
- He testifies about Christ (John 15:26).
- He intercedes for believers (Romans 8:26).
- He teaches believers (John 14:26; 1 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 2:7).
- He has a “will” and issues commands (Acts 8:29; 13:2–4; 16:6; 1 Corinthians 12:11).
- He guides believers (John 16:13; Romans 8:14).

- He has a “mind” and “searches all things” of God (Romans 8:27; 1 Corinthians 2:10–11).
- He has emotions and can “grieve” (Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30).
- He is treated as a Person and can be blasphemed (Matthew 12:31) lied to (Acts 5:3), and tempted (Acts 5:9).

VI. The Gospel

A. Watchtower

1. The Watchtower Society admits that their “gospel” is not the same gospel that has historically been preached by Christendom.

“compare...the gospel of the Kingdom done by the religious systems of Christendom during all the centuries with that done by Jehovah’s Witnesses....They are not one and the same kind.” (*The Watchtower*, May 1, 1981, p. 17)

2. The Society’s “gospel” is a gospel of faith plus works. They teach that there are four requirements for salvation (*The Watchtower*, February 15, 1983, p. 12):

- a. “...taking in knowledge...of God and of Jesus Christ.”
- b. “...obey God’s laws, yes, to conform one’s life to the moral requirements set out in the Bible.”
- c. “...be associated with God’s channel, his organization...we must identify that organization and serve God as part of it.”
- d. “...connected [to God’s organization] with loyalty.”

“And while now the witness yet includes the invitation to come to Jehovah’s organization for salvation.” (*The Watchtower*, November 15, 1981, p. 21)

“It is for the reward of eternal life that every last person on earth should now be working. Are you?” (*The Watchtower*, Aug. 15, 1972, p. 492)

“When we accept this invitation, we must be prepared to do so ‘continually,’ not because there is some special merit in self-denial, but because one moment’s indiscretion, one lapse in good judgment, may undo all that has been built up, even jeopardizing our eternal welfare. Spiritual progress is usually made at a rather slow pace, but how quickly it

can be nullified if we are not on guard constantly!" (*The Watchtower*, August 1, 1992, p. 17).

B. Bible

The free "gift" of God is eternal life (Romans 6:23) and is found in trusting Christ alone for salvation (Ephesians 2:8–10). Works are merely a response to salvation and prove whether the person has a living faith which saves or a dead faith which does not save (James 2:14, 17). Romans 10:9 reveals that the only requirements for salvation are:

1. Confess that Jesus is Lord (Jehovah).
 2. Believe that God raised Him from the dead.
- "They said therefore to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'" (John 6:28–29).
 - "Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works." (Romans 4:4–6; see also Romans 3:28; 11:6 and Galatians 5:4).
 - "And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:11–13).
 - "and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith..." (Philippians 3:9).
 - "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3; see also Zechariah 3:1–5).

Paul warned about those who would preach another gospel (2 Corinthians 11:3–4; Galatians 1:6–9). Jesus prophesied that His church would not become apostate (Matthew 16:18), and therefore, the Gospel would not have to be restored (Jude 3). Ephesians 3:21

states, “to Him be the glory in the church...to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” How can an apostate church give glory to God throughout “all generations”?

VII. Defining Salvation and Resurrection

A. Watchtower

The Watchtower defines salvation as “being saved from the destruction of this present wicked system of things and finally from death itself” (*Watchtower* 8/15/97, p. 5) They teach that there are two classes of believers.

1. Little Flock

The “little flock” of 144,000 Christians (who will enjoy everlasting life in heaven) have a special anointing of holy spirit upon them which enables them to correctly interpret the Bible. The New Covenant privileges of having Christ as personal mediator, being born again, adopted as a child of God, and partaking of the Lord’s evening meal belong only to this group which was filled up in 1935.

2. Other Sheep

The “other sheep” (all believers prior to Jesus’ time on earth and all Jehovah Witness (JW) believers after 1935) make up the “great multitude” of other believers whose eternal hope is the “new system of things” on a “paradise earth”. They have no heavenly hope, and since they are not in the New Covenant, they cannot partake of the New Covenant privileges referred to in the Christian Greek Scriptures.

“How many will God take to heaven to rule with Christ? According to the Bible, only 144,000. (Revelation 7:4;14:1)... By far the vast majority of those who have died will be resurrected to a paradise earth.” (*Knowledge that Leads to Eternal Life*, p. 88)

“...no man had gone to heaven for all those 4,000 years of human history down until his [Jesus’] day. David, Job and John the Baptizer will receive a resurrection to life on earth. In fact, all faithful men and women who died before Jesus died had the hope of living again on earth, not in heaven.” (*You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, p. 122)

“In 1935...it was made known that the ‘great crowd’ of Revelation 7:9–17 was a group to be recognized ‘after’ the

144,000 and whose destiny is everlasting life in a paradise earth.” (*The Watchtower*, Jan. 1, 1997, p. 1)

“Being born again involves...becoming a son of God with the prospect of sharing in the Kingdom of God (John 3:3–5). Jesus had this experience, as do the 144,000 who are heirs with him of the heavenly Kingdom.” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, p. 76)

“...the sonship of these spirit-begotten Christians is a more intimate relationship with God than that enjoyed by fleshly Israel.” (*Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 2, p. 999)

“Likewise, the Greater Moses, Jesus Christ, is not the Mediator between Jehovah God and all mankind. He is the Mediator between his heavenly Father, Jehovah God, and the nation of spiritual Israel, which is limited to only 144,000 members.” (*Worldwide Security Under the ‘Prince of Peace,’* 1986, p. 10)

“Such persons therefore would attend and observe the celebration of the Lord’s Evening Meal, but not being joint heirs with Christ and spiritual sons of God, they would not partake of the emblems as joint participants in the death of Christ, with hope of resurrection to a heavenly life with him.” (*Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 2. p. 27)

B. Bible

1. Salvation

Biblical salvation encompasses much more than merely being saved from physical destruction and death. John 17:3 states, “This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” True eternal life is found only in a relationship with Jesus Christ Himself! When a person places his total trust in Christ alone for his righteousness (1 John 1:7–9), Jesus actually comes to live within him, and it is Christ who changes that person from the inside out.

- “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith, examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).
- “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

- “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (Ezekiel 36:26–27).
- “‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’” (Jeremiah 31:33–34; cross-reference with Hebrews 8:8–12).
- “...you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts... our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:3–6).

2. Who are the “other sheep” of John 10:16?

The two “flocks” of believers mentioned in John 10:16 refer to Jews and Gentiles. The Jews traditionally viewed the Gentiles (all those who were not Jews) as being a lower and an unclean class of people (Ephesians 2:11–12). Jesus was teaching that while He came to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6), He would soon bring the Gentiles into His flock and together they (the Jews and Gentiles) would “become one flock with one shepherd.”

- “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek....Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also.” (Romans 1:16; 3:29).
- “Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by the so-called Circumcision, which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who

made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.” (Ephesians 2:11–14).

3. Are only 144,000 in the New Covenant?

With God, there is “no distinction” between believers (Romans 3:22; Colossians 3:11). God does not play favorites for He “shows no partiality” (Galatians 2:6).

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (see John 1:12). Because mankind is born spiritually dead (Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 2:14), he (in his natural state) “cannot please God” (Romans 8:8–9). Being born again is an act in which God cleanses us from all sin and implants His Spirit within us (Titus 3:5); thus, making us alive to see spiritual things. According to the Bible, everyone who desires to see God’s Kingdom come about, must be born again (John 3:3); otherwise, “he cannot please God” and he “does not belong to him” (Romans 8:8–9). Jesus states that everyone who excludes himself from the New Covenant, excludes himself from eternal life (1 John 5:1).

“Jesus therefore said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves” (John 6:53).

4. Did Jesus have to be “born again”?

Jesus (who is fully God and yet fully man) was born without a sinful nature (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26). Thus, He was never spiritually dead, and therefore, He never needed to be made alive spiritually by being “born again.” Christ is the Redeemer who possesses eternal life in Himself (John 5:26) and provides that life to everyone who comes to Him (John 10:28).

5. Are only the 144,000 going to heaven?

A look at the context of Revelation 7:4–9 and 14:1–5, which discusses the 144,000, reveals that these people are Jewish men who have been sealed from all the tribes of Israel. A contextual study of Revelation 7:9–11 clearly shows that the “great multitude” of believers are also “in heaven” serving God “day and night” in His temple (verse 15). Therefore, they also have a heavenly hope. (Context [further] reveals that this “great multitude” of people are those believers who died during the Tribulation (verses 13–14)). Not only do the Scriptures reveal that all the believers who lived after Christ are in heaven, but

also all the Old Testament believers are included in the kingdom of heaven as well. (See also 2 Kings 2:1–11).

“And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven....” (Matthew 8:11; see also Luke 13:28).

“All these [Old Testament saints] died in faith....But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one...He has prepared a city for them.” (Hebrews 11:13–16).

VIII. The Soul

A. Watchtower

The Soul (Life Force) ceases to exist at death/Hell equals annihilation.

“The Bible speaks of ‘the force of life’ that is active in earthly living creatures...The ‘spirit’ that departs from humans at death is the life force that originated with our Creator... This life force does not have any of the characteristics of the creature it animates...When the life force stops sustaining the human body, man—the soul—dies...Where do the dead go? To Sheol (Hebrew, she-ohl’), the common grave of mankind. Our dead ones are not conscious of anything. They are not suffering...Surely, then, our almighty Creator can record the details of any individual and resurrect the same person, giving him or her a newly formed body... All those in Jehovah’s memory will be resurrected and instructed in his ways...

The apostle John received a thrilling vision of resurrected ones standing before God’s throne. John then wrote: ‘... And death and Hades were hurled into the lake of fire. This means the second death, the lake of fire.’ (Revelation 20:12–14) Think of that! All the dead who are in God’s memory have the prospect of release from Hades... mankind’s common grave...They will have an opportunity to demonstrate by their deeds whether they will serve God. Then ‘death and Hades’ will be hurled into what is called ‘the lake of fire,’ symbolizing complete destruction, as does the term ‘Gehenna.’...How comforting it is to learn from the Bible that God does not torture anyone!” (*Knowledge that Leads to Eternal Life*, 1995, pp. 81–83, 85, 87–88)

“At Revelation 14:9–11 (KJ) worshipers of the symbolic ‘beast and his image’ are said to be ‘tormented with fire and

brimstone.’ This cannot refer to conscious torment after death...The smoke, associated with their fiery destruction, ascends forever because the destruction will be eternal and will never be forgotten.” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pp. 172–173)

B. Bible

1. The Soul exists after death because it is not annihilated

The Soul (and Spirit) is the part of man that continues to exist after death, eternally residing either with God in Heaven or with Satan in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10; 13–15).

- “...I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God...and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” (Revelation 6:9–10).
- “Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord...we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6, 8).
- “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain...But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better” (Philippians 1:21–23).
- *Death cannot separate us from the Love of God*; “neither death... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus...” (Romans 8:38–39).
- “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones” (Psalm 116:15)².
- “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep...even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus... and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them...” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–17).

² If we take the [Watchtower] Society's definition of death, this verse would read...“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the non-existent state of His godly ones.”

2. The Soul equals The *inner part*³ of Man

“...For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street...then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:5, 7; see also Luke 23:46 and Acts 7:59).

“...it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43–44).

“And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28; see also Luke 12:4–5).

“Then He will also say to those on His left, Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire...and these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:41, 46; see also Isaiah 66:24; Revelation 14:1).

“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

3. Conclusion

Matthew 10:15 and 11:21–24 indicate that there will be degrees of punishment. How can there be degrees of [eternal] punishment [if there is] annihilation?

“How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God...” (Hebrews 10:29).

IX. Conclusion

“Though a religion claims to have God’s approval and its ministers read passages from the Bible, that does not mean that it is a form of worship pleasing to God. Its leaders might even do impressive things that make it seem as if God were working through them. Nevertheless, the religion could still be false, not producing fruitage acceptable to God.” (The Watchtower Sept 15, 1996, p 4)

“If you find that a doctrine or teaching is a lie, you should quickly forsake it, regardless of who teaches it or how long you have believed that teaching to be true.” (Riches, 1936, p. 17)⁴

³RAS comment: Perhaps it is easiest to think of one’s soul as “the seat of all human emotions”.

Witnesses for Jesus is a ministry exposing the false teachings of cults, especially the Watchtower (Jehovah's Witnesses) and the Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). In doing so, Witnesses for Jesus highlights the Truth of Christianity and presents the one hope of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. Visit <https://www.4witness.org> for more information; for newsletters (<https://www.4witness.org/home/newsletters>).

THE DANGERS OF THE HEBREW ROOTS MOVEMENT

By R. L. Solberg

There is a theological movement called *Torahism*—you might know it as Torah-observant Christianity or the Hebrew Roots Movement. Torahism teaches that Christians today should be “keeping Torah,” by which they mean we should be keeping the Law of Moses (aka The Old Testament “Law”).

The New Testament teaches that keeping these Mosaic traditions are permitted for Christians, but they are not required. So naturally, people have asked why I spend so much time mounting arguments against this lesser-known belief system.

What’s the big deal with the Hebrew Roots Movement and other groups that want to practice some Old Testament traditions? Don’t you say all the time that those things are “permitted but not required?” How is it hurting anyone if some Christians want to keep the Saturday Sabbath, celebrate Passover, or not eat pork?

These are fair questions. Although the motivation behind Torahism may include some noble ambitions—such as wanting to better understand the Christian faith in its original cultural context and wanting to do our best to live in obedience to God—the theology itself contains some dangerous ideas. Let me share with you some real stories about how these teachings can affect families, friendships, and even churches as we examine what I see are the three biggest dangers of this belief system.

Salvation vs. Obedience

Before we get to the reasons and the stories, it’s important to define what Torahism is and isn’t. Otherwise, things can get confusing.

The defining element in the theology of *Torahism* is the teaching that the Torah—specifically the Law of Moses—must be kept by those who profess faith in Jesus. A minority of Torahists teach that “keeping Torah” is a matter of salvation. Most, however, agree with mainstream Christianity that salvation comes only through grace by faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8–9). They believe that “keeping Torah” isn’t what saves us, but it is how we show our love for God. It is the way we are commanded to live our lives as Christians. In other words, they view Torah-keeping as a matter of obedience, not salvation.

But here's the catch. All Torahists—even those who profess salvation through Christ alone—teach that *not* keeping Torah is sinful. They view disobedience of the Law of Moses (such as not observing Saturday Sabbath, kosher food laws, annual feasts, circumcision, etc.) as living in sin and lawlessness. So despite the claim that keeping the Mosaic Law is not a requirement for salvation, Torahism considers it a confirming sign of a truly-saved, obedient Christian.

The bottom line is this. Anyone who teaches that believers in Jesus are *required* to keep the Mosaic Law—whether as a matter of salvation or obedience—is teaching Torahism. With that, let's move on to the three most significant dangers of this belief system.

A. Torahism is Unbiblical

Despite what these groups teach, the Bible does not support a Hebrew Roots worldview. We will look at a few specific examples of this below. (And I have many other videos, blogs, and a couple of books that go into greater detail on the issue.) That said, there is a challenge in recognizing and resisting Torahism's theology. If a Christian group was to teach, for example, that adultery or greed was okay, we could point to numerous verses in the Bible that directly contradict their teachings. In the case of Torahism, however, no one verse in the Bible specifically says, "Christians are not required to keep Torah." At the same, no verse says explicitly, "Christians *are* required to keep Torah."

The relationship of Christians to the Law of Moses is something that we have to dig into Scripture to understand. God wants us to eat His Word, to ingest it every day because through reading His Word, we get to know His heart. It's about having a real relationship with our heavenly Father. And His Word—the Bible—is how He most often speaks to us. But God doesn't always give us a nice, tidy list of directions and instructions. I don't know about you, but I'm a list guy. (Ask my wife!) If God gave me a to-do list, I would be off to the races working on the list and forgetting all about spending time with God. Instead, our heavenly Father wants us to pull up a chair and sit with Him daily. He wants us to spend time with Him, so He can feed us His truth.

The more we get to know the Truth of the Word, the easier it is to spot counterfeit teachings.

This is what we find in many of the claims of our Hebrew Roots friends. These teachers claim Torahism is biblical, and I'm sure many of them believe it. But the proof is in the pudding. And at the end of

the day, the Bible teaches that Christians are *not* required to keep the Law of Moses. Let's look at the Scriptural data.

In Exodus 19 and following, we learn that the Law of Moses was given as part of the Covenant at Mount Sinai. It was given to “the house of Jacob” (Exodus 19:3). In Scripture, the phrase “the house of” is a way of referring to the family or physical descendants of someone. So even though there may have been a “mixed multitude” (Exodus 12:38) traveling with Israel when they were rescued out of Egypt, the covenant God made at Mount Sinai was solely with the “house” or descendants of Jacob, who was also named Israel (Genesis 32:28). These were the Jews. No other nation or people group was part of the covenant. In fact, many of the Mosaic laws were given specifically to set the Jewish people *apart* from the Gentile nations around them. God uniquely chose the Israelites, telling them “you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:5)

The New Testament later reveals that under Jesus and the New Covenant, things changed. For one thing, it was revealed that the Law of Moses was given as a guardian until Christ came. And now that He has come, God's people are no longer under that Law (Galatians 3:24–25). It's also revealed that the nature of the *People of God* has changed. Under the Sinai covenant, the People of God were the Jews (aka the nation of Israel, the House of Jacob). They were designated through ethnicity and lineage. Under the New Covenant, however:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Galatians 3:28–29)

That's right. Believers in Jesus—both Jews *and* Gentiles—are now considered Abraham's offspring and the heirs of God's promises. (I'll unpack this a bit more below. But spoiler alert: this has nothing to do with the erroneous concept of “replacement theology,” which teaches that the Church has replaced Israel.) And since Jews and Gentiles who are in Christ are now one people, the laws previously given to set Israel apart from the Gentiles are no longer needed.

B. Torahism is Divisive

The second big danger is that Torahism causes division in the body of Christ. I've seen it damage marriages, friendships, families, and even churches. Torah-observant Christians often make keeping the

Law of Moses a test of fellowship. Because they view these Mosaic traditions as required of Christians, not optional, they look down on Christians who don't keep the Saturday Sabbath or the kosher food laws or celebrate Easter or Christmas. Those Christians are often reprimanded as *lawless sinners*. (I'm not exaggerating. If you've got a Hebrew Roots person in your life, you know what I'm talking about.)

But here's the thing. Although many Hebrew Roots believers profess with their lips that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone, I've yet to come across any Torah-keeper willing to take the peacemaking attitude that says, "Hey, we can agree to disagree on this issue and still be brothers and sisters in Christ." The overwhelming majority of Torah-observant Christians I have interacted with take a prideful and judgmental attitude toward Christians who don't "keep Torah." In fact, that's how I stumbled across this movement in the first place. A few years back, an old friend from church began publicly accusing me of partaking in pagan rituals. Why? Because I celebrate Christmas. (The conversation that grew out of that encounter eventually turned into my book, *Torahism*.)

To be fair, no belief system, including Torahism, should be judged by those who abuse it. There are no Torah-observant tenets that *require* its adherents to cause division in their families and communities. But there is a virulent strain of distrust—sometimes even outright rebellion—against the mainstream Christian church in many Torah-observant communities.

Romans 14 addresses the in-fighting in the Roman church on the issue of kosher food. Paul admonished his readers that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...so then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." (Romans 14:17, 19) And when we look at the common fruits of Torahism, we find the opposite of what Paul taught. Rather than peace and mutual upbuilding, Torahism is prone to cause disunity in the body of Christ. And it has done needless damage to families, friendships, and churches.

Often the average Christian senses something is wrong with the idea of Torah-observant Christianity—but the same Christian has a hard time articulating exactly why it's wrong. So the mainstream Christian and the Torah-observant Christian end up talking past one another, quarreling and arguing without any resolution. The old friend I mentioned who took me to task over Christmas is a perfect example. He and his wife were causing so much turmoil in their family and neighborhood that the people who loved them were at their wit's end and didn't know what to do.

In another instance, a woman from Minneapolis reached out to me because her husband has been thinking about leaving the family to move to Israel. He believes it is part of his duty as a believer to make the three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem required in the Torah. I sat with him for almost two hours and found him to be a soft-spoken, intelligent man who knows his Bible. But he was unwilling or unable to see that those Mosaic traditions are not required of Christians under the New Covenant. I remember him being really upset that he was being “forced” by mainstream Christianity to worship God on Sunday rather than the *true Saturday Sabbath*.

And interestingly, like every Hebrew Roots believer I’ve ever encountered, he is not Jewish. He is a Gentile, which means he has never been part of the Sinai Covenant God made with Israel. And he has never been under the Law of Moses, including the Sabbath requirements. And here he is, ready to walk away from his wife and kids in service to Torahism. That’s scary stuff.

But that’s not all. Let me share a few other stories with you. These are actual comments I’ve received:

1. A man from Kansas wrote, “Thank you so much for your biblical and logical teaching in your book and on YouTube. With one of my best friends falling into the Hebrew Roots Movement (I partially blame 119 Ministries), I have been struggling to find answers to the questions he raises.” This man later told me that this friend ended up causing so much disruption and arguing within their church small group that they finally had to ask him to leave. (Which he wanted to do anyway because he thought they were all deceived.)

2. A man from Tennessee wrote, “I like your videos. My son married a girl recently that her family had been strongly involved in the Hebrew Roots Movement. So, I am researching for myself. I do not believe in the movement myself, nor does my son but, we have to get along with the in-laws. They are starting to come out of it but cling to some of the food laws and feast ideas.”

3. A pastor from Connecticut wrote: “My elder brother just sent me this link [to a Hebrew Roots article]. Is this what your book on Torahism is about and do you deal with this subject? I want to learn more just in case my brother is going down a wrong path. By the way, I’ve been a pastor for over 32 years and have an M.Div....Please, any help you can offer is greatly appreciated.”

4. A woman from Mexico wrote, “I’ve recently come across this movement you mentioned in your book. I’ve dealt with harsh

comments and teachings towards Christians...I've been a Baptist all my life, and I am concerned about this situation...My husband isn't a Christian, yet; he's friends with a gentleman who is involved in Hebrew Roots, they've known each other even longer than my husband and I have. I'd love to get your book. Is it available from Mexico?"

5. An author from Spain wrote, "I just recently bought and read your book Torahism (great job, BTW). I would be interested in chatting with you about the Hebrew Roots Movement. We have this problem in Spain, too." He and I ended up having a video chat, and he explained to me how the Hebrew Roots teachings are growing, especially among the Gypsy population in Spain, who identify themselves with the lost tribes of Israel. He told me that four prominent Christian leaders in Spain had recently stepped down from their positions in the church to pursue Torahism.

Torahism is real, and it seems to be growing. Thankfully it's nowhere near as big as other Christian cults, like Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormonism. At least not yet. And one of the reasons I do what I do is to help make sure Torahism never gets that big.

C. Torahism Undermines Jesus

The third big danger is that the theological concept at the foundation of Torahism undermines both the Gospel of Jesus and the sufficiency of His work in making us right with God. For one thing, by trying to point Christians toward Moses, these teachings take our focus off Jesus. By emphasizing a works-based lifestyle, Hebrew Roots' teachings de-emphasize the "abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness" (Romans 5:17) that is ours through Jesus. But the danger of Torahism is even bigger than what it does to our focus.

The theology of Torahism contradicts and undermines the accomplishments of Jesus through His life, death, and resurrection. Think about it. If Torahism is correct and the Law of Moses is still binding, then what did Jesus accomplish during His earthly ministry? What was the point of His death and resurrection?

Here are seven biblical examples that show how the teachings of Torahism are incompatible with the work of Jesus:

1. Under the Law of Moses/Old Covenant

Continual animal sacrifices are required for sin.

(Exodus 29:10–14, 35–37, 30:10; Leviticus 4:1–5:13; Numbers 6:10–14)

Under Jesus/New Covenant

We learn “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). They were only a reminder of [and covering for] sin. Jesus, however, was our atoning sacrifice (1 John 2:1), which was given once for all (Hebrews 10:10). *Since Jesus was our sacrifice once for all, why do we need to continue with the repeated sacrifices required under the Law of Moses?*

2. Under the Law of Moses/Old Covenant

All priests must come from the tribe of Levi.

(Exodus 29:1–8; Deuteronomy 18:1–8; Numbers 18:1–32)

Under Jesus/New Covenant

Jesus is now our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14–15), and He came from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14), not Levi. We’re further taught that “when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well” (Hebrews 7:12). *How can the Law of Moses still be in effect if Our High Priest is not from the tribe of Levi?*

3. Under the Law of Moses/Old Covenant

God told the Jewish nation of Israel, “you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:6)

Under Jesus/New Covenant

All believers in Jesus—whether Jew or Gentile—are described as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9). *Contrary to the Law of Moses, every believer in Jesus—whether Jew or Gentile—now qualifies as a member of God’s chosen people.*

4. Under the Law of Moses/Old Covenant

God’s presence or spirit resides in the Tabernacle in the Holy of Holies, behind a veil where only the high priest can enter once a year. (Exodus 26:1–37, Exodus 30:10)

Under Jesus/New Covenant

The moment Jesus died on the cross, God tore the temple veil in two, symbolizing that we now have direct access to God (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38). We, the body of Christ, are now God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16–17, 1 Corinthians 6:14–20; Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:5). If believers in Jesus are now the temple of God's spirit, how does it make sense to keep a Law that requires a physical Temple where the Holy of Holies is veiled off and only accessible by priests directly descended from Aaron (Numbers 18:1–7)? *Are we to sew back together the Temple veil that God ripped apart?*

5. Under the Law of Moses/Old Covenant

Kosher food laws were given to set Israel apart from the Gentile nations around her. (Leviticus 11:1–47)

Under Jesus/New Covenant

All food is now clean. (Mark 7:1–23; Acts 10:9–16; Romans 11:11–24; Romans 14:1–15:13). In Mark 7 Jesus said to His disciples, “Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.)” (Mark 7:18b–19) *How does it make sense to require the keeping of kosher food regulations when Jesus and the apostles taught us that all food is clean?*

6. Under the Law of Moses/Old Covenant

Israel was required to circumcise all males at eight days old. (Leviticus 12:3).

Under Jesus/New Covenant

For those who place their faith in Jesus, “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” (Galatians 5:6; see also Acts 15:1–29; Galatians 6:15; Colossians 2:11; 1 Corinthians 7:19) *How does it make sense for Christians to keep the Mosaic requirements for circumcision when the New Testament tells us that now, under Jesus, circumcision counts for nothing?*

7. Under the Law of Moses/Old Covenant

No commandments shall be added to or taken away from the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 4:2, Deuteronomy 12:32).

Under Jesus/New Covenant

Jesus gave us new commands not found in the Torah (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; John 13:34). For example, nowhere in the Torah will we find anything like this command: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I [Jesus] have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). *If the Law of Moses is still in effect, how could Jesus give us new commandments?*

I mentioned earlier that we don’t have a verse we can look at that directly teaches that “Christians are not required to keep the law of Moses.” However, you can see how the bulk of evidence in the NT teaches this very point. Not only that, we have a verse we can point to that reveals that the Sinai Covenant, the Old Covenant, has ended. The book of Hebrews teaches that Jesus is our High Priest and that the New Covenant is a better covenant. And, “In speaking of a new covenant, [God] makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” (Hebrews 8:13)

This text was written in the first century when most of the apostles were still alive. And a few years later, in the year AD 70, the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. From that day until now, it has been impossible for anyone to live a truly Torah-observant lifestyle. The Jerusalem Temple is gone, the [Aaronic-Levitical] priesthood is gone, the sacrifices have ended. In other words, the Old Covenant has become obsolete and vanished.

Wrap it Up, Solberg

Look, I get it. This idea that Christians ought to keep the Law of Moses can sound appealing, even beautiful. It seeks to connect us to our spiritual roots in ancient Israel and give us a framework to live out our faith today. This is what draws people into Torahism. But the bottom line is that Torah-observant Christianity is flat-out unbiblical. And anyone who spreads this false teaching is well advised to soberly reconsider what they’re doing. There are many ways to acknowledge and honor the true Jewish roots of the Christian faith without resorting to unbiblical teachings.

The three biggest dangers of Torahism are that their teachings (1) are unbiblical, (2) cause division and disunity, and (3) undermine the work and sufficiency of Jesus. These false Hebrew Roots teachings put an unnecessary burden on believers. They add requirements to living out the Christian faith that were never intended. This is a dangerous stumbling block that promotes the false idea that putting one’s faith

in Jesus commits them to keeping all sorts of regulations—about food and days and so on—that aren’t actually required of Christians.

In the book of Galatians, the apostle Paul spends Chapters Three and Four making his case that ‘Believers in Jesus have been liberated from the law.’ I’ll close with his summary of that argument: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1). Shalom.

R. L. Solberg is an author, apologist, and a professor of theology. He is based in Nashville, TN where he lives with his wife of thirty years, Debra. Solberg is a leading Christian apologist against Torahism (aka Hebrew Roots or Torah-observant Christianity). This heresy teaches that followers of Jesus are required to keep the Old Testament Law. He has a Masters Degree in Theological Studies from Williamson College, where he is now an adjunct professor of theology and philosophy. He also studied Biblical Hebrew at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Mr. Solberg’s blog is available for review at <https://rlsolberg.com>. The RAS editorial team reformatted this article and added some clarifications without making major changes to the author’s original work.

CREATION QUIZ

1. In the Genesis Chapter One account of Creation, a day means:
 - a. A literal 24-hour period
 - b. stands for 1000 years.
 - c. a metaphor for an age or epoch (day/age theory)
 - d. a Sanskrit term meaning Pieces
2. The Gap Theory means:
 - a. Between each creation day there was a gap of indeterminate length
 - b. There was a gap in God's Creation between Day 6 and Day 7
 - c. There is a gap in our understanding of ancient science
 - d. There is a long-time-period gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2
3. Reconstruction theory suggests:
 - a. That after Day 6 of the original creation, God destroyed the world and recreated it
 - b. Genesis 1:1 described the original creation; Genesis 1:2 described a re-creation
 - c. Noah's flood occurred between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2
 - d. Adam was reconstructed from a previously existing apelike creature
4. Which is *not* true of Young-Earth Creationism?
 - a. It takes the creation account of Genesis Chapter One literally
 - b. Universe age should be measured in thousands rather than millions/billions of years
 - c. It believes the Bible is scientifically accurate
 - d. It believes Adam was originally from another planet
5. Which scientific theory has not been proven a fraud?
 - a. Piltdown man
 - b. Nebraska man
 - c. Archaeoraptor
 - d. Biblical Creationism
6. Which is true of Noah's flood?
 - a. Noah's basement got flooded
 - b. It was a major flood in the region of the Black Sea

- c. It was a universal flood covering the entire earth
 - d. It was a mythological flood borrowed from the Babylonians
7. Which is *not* true of Charles Darwin?
- a. He popularized the theory of Evolution
 - b. He lost faith in God after the death of a child
 - c. As a young man he was impressed with Paley's Creationist argument from Design
 - d. He was an atheist
8. Which origins account is biblically correct?
- a. The Big-Bang theory
 - b. Creation ex-Nihilo
 - c. The Steady-State model
 - d. The Universe resulted from a Quantum fluctuation
9. Which scientist was *not* a devout Christian?
- a. Blaise Pascal
 - b. Isaac Newton
 - c. Frederick Flintstonarini
 - d. Rene Descartes
10. Why should you believe in the Biblical account of Creation?
- a. Because it is scientifically accurate
 - b. Because evolution is a weak scientific theory
 - c. Because Jesus believed it
 - d. All of the above

Answers:

1a; 2d; 3b; 4d; 5d; 6c; 7d; 8b; 9c; 10d.

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