



STUDYING WITH JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Background: Recently my ex-JW friend, aka “D”, and I were finally able to “study” with Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs). Two months after I indicated an interest, they performed their “back call” on me (i.e., they returned to my house to try to engage me in a Watchtower-led study. I wondered, what methods had they used on my mother 35 years ago to indoctrinate her? I had to find out.

The JWs were always quite serious and focused. All involved parties were long-timers in the Watchtower organization: 30+ and 25+ years. One had recently put all of her children through college (at a VERY expensive engineering school in Denver) but she was quick to downplay their education and add that she was most proud of the fact that her children all worked part-time and dedicated their lives to the ministry.

We discovered first-hand how they manipulate and deceive people, or simply put off answers to important questions. Many, many times during our questions they replied, “We’ll get to that later.” Despite us sometimes asking the same question multiple times (we reinforced each other’s questions to ensure certain points were hit hard), they cleverly tried to follow their planned script. At one point after derailing them a few times, one actually said with frustration, “We’re supposed to go *in order*.”

Let’s Begin

(KEY: JWW = Jehovah Witness Woman—in the first two studies there were two JW women)

Immediately, without really engaging us in any friendly chit chat, they went right to business. The JWW asked to see D’s Bible. Before D even had time to respond, the JWW reached across and took it from D and began flipping through it. That’s when the JWW looked up a scripture and said in a terse, frank tone, “**Your Bible is incorrect because it replaced Jehovah with Lord.**” JWW explained that their New World translation was the most literal and accurate because all other Bibles removed Jehovah’s name over 7,000 times and they put it back in (patting themselves on the back with an air of smugness). “Why is that?” we asked. She replied we’d get to that later. “Well who translated your Bible?” we asked. The JWW answered, “a committee of Greek scholars who love and fear Jehovah and feel a responsibility to transmit his thoughts and declarations as accurately as possible.” She went on to say, “We do not know them by name; they have chosen not to take credit.” We asked numerous times, “You must have some record of who the translators were because you seem to have so much other material at your fingertips.” We were continually put off and even after asking them 14 times at a future study, they never answered us!

Within a few minutes of us sitting down, I brought up a Primetime special broadcast the night before about a new cult leader in the news and explained that this man is gaining followers like Jim Jones. I asked, “Don’t cults spring up from one man?” (I was referencing Charles Taze Russell, a single man who founded the International Bible Students in the late 1800’s, which later became known as Jehovah’s Witnesses.) JWW said assuringly (referring to the new cult leader in the news), “false prophet, false Christ.” I said, “This false prophet doesn’t even speak to his son because the son doesn’t agree with his father. Isn’t that awful?” The other JWW said, “That’s because *the son* has a lot of sense.” (Hmm, could it also be true then that shunned former Jehovah’s Witnesses also have some sense as compared to their JW families who shun them?) Sadly, I don’t think she even saw the correlation.



We asked another question: “Who started your religion?” The JWW said, “Jehovah’s Witnesses are the true followers of Christ throughout history.” Then the JWW said, “Charles Taze Russell was a true Christian who started studying with other Christians looking into hellfire, trinity and immortality of the soul. He didn’t have the whole truth in the beginning. The truth will become brighter and brighter in the last days.” I asked if Charles got some things wrong and she quoted a scripture in Daniel to support her “new light theory” where it says “people will go here and there.” I asked where the “here and there” was. I said, “It sounds like people can go to different places to find true knowledge.” She never responded to my question except to say, “Jesus said there are many things you won’t understand in the beginning. Knowledge will increase in the last days. The Bible says there is only one true church.”

Then I asked why people took God’s name out of the Bible. I suggested that perhaps Jehovah wasn’t the correct pronunciation. Then the JWW said that Jesus’ name was mispronounced in the Bible so why didn’t the translators take Jesus’ name out of the Bible. The other JWW said, “Our Bible is word for word just like the dead sea scrolls.” When we asked how they know this to be true, they said, “We’ll get there.”

At one point I asked if a person were on an island alone, could he/she understand the Bible. They basically said yes and no (their typical doublespeak). First they said you can learn the truth from any Bible any time if you have a *sincere heart*, but then they referred to their books as a study aid that helps them see things clearly. They pointed to the scripture in Acts 8:26 where the Eunuch needed to explain prophecies to Phillip. That’s how they justified the organization explaining things to them. So then I asked, “If your organization is needed to learn things from the Bible, then who taught your founder, Charles Taze Russell? He didn’t have all your literature to read, did he?” They replied that Jehovah spoke to him and because he was a Christian and Jehovah knew his heart. (But wouldn’t Jehovah’s Witnesses frown on this type of communication today? Can you imagine if Brother Smith went to Brother Brown and said, “Jehovah just spoke to me!” What would they think? “Ewww..evil spirits!”)

The JWW got irritated that we were asking so many questions and told us we needed to go in order and follow the book they had, using the questions at the bottom of each page rather than our own. We both balked and said, “You know, when we went to college we asked our own questions so we’d prefer to do that. No college ever gave us the questions. That’s not how people learn, is it?” (This is how a cult utilizes mind control—they provide not only the answers but the questions as well. There is no thinking outside the box using this method of “learning.”)

This was about the end of our 1-1/2 hour session, and we left on good terms with them ready to prepare materials for the next week’s “Bible” study.

Continuation of our studies with Jehovah’s Witnesses

(KEY: JWW = Jehovah Witness Woman; D = my ex-JW friend)

JWW arrived with her ‘Elder’ (religious leader) husband. The exchange felt like a one-way lecture rather than a small, intimate conversation between four people.

The first half hour the Elder took command with an authoritative style and fired 9 scriptures at us within 36 min (we counted). It reminded me of the machine that fires tennis balls; only these were coming at lightning speed and it was hard to even get a swing in between balls. It felt like the equivalent of a spiritual disco where the neon lights above are spinning wildly and you are in the dark just struggling to stay oriented.

D and I asked the Elder 14 times (yes, we counted!) during this first 30 min who translated their bible. Repeatedly he either (a) ignored our question and referred us to another scripture or (b) told us he brought the information and would share it with us later that day. He kept patting the stack of papers on the table, as though



the information was there and we'd just have to bide our time to get it. It was almost laughable and many times we did laugh and say, "Are you going to answer our question?" At one point D said, "I don't want to look up any more scriptures. I just want to know who translated your Bible. Can you tell us that?" He ignored her and directed me to read another scripture. I reinforced what she said, "I will only look up one more scripture, and then you have to agree to answer our questions after that, OK?"

The Elder could have been completely deaf and it would have resulted in the same outcome. He only provided one quote as proof—from a Dr. Jason BeDuhn, a "trained scholar of the bible" (who taught at the religious studies department at the University of Indiana) who allegedly praised them for their accuracy. BeDuhn supposedly said, "It is the best interlinear new testament available." (We challenged them later on this point after we did some research ourselves and realized that the quote was taken out of context.)

At one point D read a scripture about the thief hanging on the cross with Jesus getting into heaven and remarked, "So all you need to come to Christ is an open heart and understanding; not have works behind you" and they nodded their heads. (We assume they were oblivious to the second part of her statement because Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in salvation by grace alone; works are required.)

The Elder stated how important it was not to add or take away from the Bible nor lie. I asked about John 1:1 and why they put "a god" in the scriptures and they said that they weren't the only group to do this; it was in **other bibles this way as well**. I asked him twice to tell me which other bibles reflected this entry and he ignored my question completely. (I used to do childcare, and I swear it is easier to extract information from a 1 year old with a vocabulary of 8 words!)

We began discussing vaccinations and blood transfusions. I mentioned their old literature stated smallpox never existed and that their leader instructed their members not to get vaccinated as it was a "devilish practice." I shared briefly some of their quotes, including the fact that they used to segregate blacks (which really seemed to infuriate JWW). She said it was a bunch of lies from the internet and apostates. I restated that it was from their 1914 *Watchtower*. We gave her the page number and asked if she could verify from the actual magazine in their library if these quotes were a lie or not. Initially they denied that the Zion's Watchtower and Golden Age even belonged to their organization. They wanted to have absolutely NO association with their old literature. This is the hallmark of a cult—using deception to attract members.

So D point blank stated in a very convincing, innocent voice, "Well, this sounds like your literature...Zion's *Watchtower*. Isn't that your literature?" Finally when cornered they admitted that the literature was theirs. I reassured them I wanted to set straight the person who gave me this scandalous information, if indeed the information was inaccurate. JWW said she didn't need to read their old literature. Her husband went as far as to say (twice), "We don't need to read that **junk**. You need to learn the bible from what we teach today." I said with a quizzical look, "Are you calling your older publications junk?" (No response. He looked utterly shell shocked that I wouldn't let that comment slide.)

Then I stated that if you build a house, you want to make sure the foundation is solid. I said, "It seems to me you want us to build the walls with you before we even know if your foundation is solid." He said they have adjusted their views over the years—like they used to celebrate Christmas but don't anymore. I said something like, "Yes, but in this case—vaccinations—wow, that's serious. I wonder how many people in your church contracted a disease and died because they followed this policy?" The JWW adamantly stated it wasn't true and they (JWs) never read the old publications. We asked, "Why not? Are you forbidden to read them?" JWW replied defensively, "I'm not forbidden to read anything. I just choose not to." (This is an example of "Bounded Choice" as described by Janja Lalich in her book with the same name.)



Then she mentioned that they don't take blood but do accept their own because it doesn't actually leave the body because it's pumped right back into it (we assumed she was referring to cell saver technology). (Now think about that—"back into it" implies very clearly it had to leave the body to return to it.) We acted surprised and said, "Well has your blood policy ever changed through the years?" She replied it had not. (We knew this was a lie.) Then she went on to state that "You ask doctors and they will tell you that they would never accept a blood transfusion because they know how dangerous it is. No doctors accept them." (We knew this was another lie) I challenged her statement and said, "Well, I don't know if I agree with that. With all the new technology and ability to test and filter out impurities, I imagine blood transfusions are relatively safe now."

At one point the Elder started talking about how humans use a fraction of their brain power. (Ever see those animals that zig-zag to evade a predator? That was *him*.) He then asked, "Why did Jehovah God give us a brain with such capacity?" I replied, "Because he wants us to THINK for ourselves." He then asked, "How much of our brain are we using?" I replied with a smile, "Some of us, not very much." My comment went over his head like water off a duck's back.

JWW mentioned towards the end of the study that all of her sons had gone to a college in-town so they could stay at home, rather than going off to a dormitory. She asked, hoping I would give her an affirmative response: "Brenda, would you allow your son to go out of state to college the way the world is?" I replied, "Yes, I would. I've taught my son well and I trust him to make the right decisions. You can't box your children in."

JWW got very frustrated and at one point said, "We're done. I've been a JW for over 30 years and I know how to read people. You are making accusations and it is obvious that you just want to disagree with us. I've met people like you before." D replied, "No, we have questions. You said questions are good in the first chapter of your study book, didn't you? We just want you to answer our questions. That's how we learn things, isn't it?" The JWW replied, "You are trying to teach US. You don't want to learn anything; you have to have a sincere heart...."

D then offered an alternative to help get them to calm down, "Well, I agree that this has been confusing. Why don't Brenda and I just write down 1-2 questions and you answer them next time. We can just focus on those 1-2 questions, OK?" Neither JW acknowledged our request but rather gave us a blank stare. It was apparent that JWW was fed up with us and didn't want to meet us again but her Elder husband offered, "If you want to study next week about us living in the last days, we will study that with you." (Boy, we obviously had NO input here about what was on the "study" agenda!)

Afterwards, I told D that I surmised the reason he wanted to jump right to Armageddon was to instill FEAR in us. Fear is, after all, the best tool to hasten conformity.

Conclusion

Using techniques from Wilbur Lingle's, "How to Use the 2005 Watchtower Publication 'What Does the Bible Really Teach?' to Witness Effectively to a Jehovah's Witness," I came with papers in-hand to show them that the word "Jehovah" is listed as a "misrendering" in at least two encyclopedias: Wikipedia and New Catholic

Encyclopedia, and that the word was originally used by Pope Leo X's confessor Peter Galatin prior to the 1600's, laying to waste their deed and claim on the name. Then I asked why they didn't just call themselves YHWH's Witnesses, since scholars dispute the correct interpretation of God's name. Wouldn't God be offended if they got it wrong? At least then they'd be more accurate. They replied that Jehovah *was* the accepted English rendering. I asked why they would use God's name so much when Jesus said, "Our *father* who art in heaven" as an example of how to pray. Wouldn't Jesus have used "Our **Jehovah** who art in heaven" instead? They replied that God would want us to use his name and that Jesus DID use Jehovah's personal name in the new testament. D and I countered with, "Well, we wouldn't call our dad, 'Joe,' we'd call him 'father.'"



Nor would we say to the president, “Hey, George.” Sometimes using a title is actually more respectful. (Keep in mind we’re planting seeds here, not harvesting crops, so we never expected to “win” any of our arguments or see “new light” go off in their closed minds.)

When I asked who translated their Bible....again, they said they didn’t identify the translators because they didn’t want to give glory to man. I said, “I wouldn’t go to a doctor without knowing his credentials (would you?), so how can you know your Bible was translated by someone equipped to do so?” Then I requested a homework assignment from them: “Please go back to your church and find out who translated your Bible and get back to us the following week.” After seeing the look of angst in their faces, I restated this request several times. Then one of the ladies remarked with a tired expression and sigh, “Oh my, that would require research.” I remarked, “Yes, and research is good!”

They went on to say that they trusted the organization, likening it to a shepherd that watches over the flock out of love vs. getting paid. They drove home the point that their organization didn’t collect money and no one gets paid (we subsequently challenge this point in Study #4). The JWW also mentioned that her husband (an elder who visits us later) is *not* gullible and conducts studies with students at a local college in my hometown. She assured us that he knew what he was doing because he was so well educated and had done so much research.

JWW then got onto the topic of hellfire and said that when she was a young girl in Greece her sister’s baby was born very sick and her sister wanted the baby to be baptized or the Greek Orthodox Church taught the baby would burn in hell forever. She replied, “What kind of God is *that*?” We were thinking and wanted to say, “The same God that would destroy 100,000 newborns at Armageddon because their parents didn’t subscribe to your organization’s beliefs?” but we were trying to keep them from getting too defensive too quickly.

We asked them if they considered themselves prophets and they said they were not prophets but serious Bible students and their organization acknowledges when an error occurs. She kept using the analogy that you don’t feed a baby a steak at first, you start it out gradually on baby food and they do the same thing. (I seem to recall them saying that very same thing to my mother 35 years ago! They need to get some new material!)

Our Observations

The first study started out with them in the driver’s seat. We saw a preprogrammed, well-oiled, well-rehearsed machine spewing out propaganda that had proven successful for them time and again. A sense of power and the look of being elite (i.e., we are the teacher, you are the pupil) exuded from them as they attempted to lecture, not “study,” with us. Oh, they were confident!

By the second study, they were getting visibly frustrated, but tried to control their emotions. I think the fact that we couldn’t find some of the bible chapters quickly—and they had to help us—masked the fact that we knew so much about them.

By the third study, the JWW brought in reinforcements with her Elder husband, obviously hoping to gain a foothold on us. He was pretty successful at steamrolling right over us because he literally ignored our questions, spoke in a louder voice to try to silence us, or kept looking up scriptures as he repeatedly referred us to the bible. Typical bully/authoritarian tactics.

By the fourth study, we weren’t playing by their rules anymore. When the Elder asked us to look up a scripture, we outright refused...several times. We stated that we wanted to stay on topic and receive an answer to our questions without using the Bible or their publications to evade the question by jumping to another subject. They clearly became frightened. You could see it in their eyes. The information we presented no longer just irritated but rather spooked them and invoked the ‘flee’ (vs. fight) response. The perceived “apostate” material, even their old literature (which they openly referred to as “junk”) was too much for them. When no longer able to maintain a sound offensive, they went on the defensive, and then bolted.



Afterwards, D pointed out to me that “New Light” is a convenient loophole. Imagine your partner saying to you, “I’ll be faithful to you because that’s God’s law, that is, until I get new light.” Or perhaps a legally binding business agreement stating, “You’ll own this property until I get new light, then it’s all mine again.” These people are signing over their lives, relationships and emotional health to an organization that routinely rewrites the contract in a way that adversely impacts their lives!

It was an amazing lesson. We saw first-hand how Jehovah’s Witnesses are able to manipulate, deceive and bully to gain converts. Jehovah’s meek sheep turned quite wolf-like and predatory after just a few hours with us.

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