

IN MEDIO

Volume 2, Issue 8, July 2008

Christian Witnesses of Jah

Come now the Christian Witnesses of Jah. Who are we? We are Jehovah's Witnesses! We are Jehovah's Witnesses who reject traditions of men that invalidate the Word of Jah Jehovah (Isaiah 12:2; Matthew 15:6). It is our desire to serve Jesus Christ and to worship his God and Father "with spirit and truth" (John 4:24). True, this is the stated intent of many religious groups, though few of them give prominence to the name of God, to the name of "Jah." But Christian Witnesses of Jah are born out of an intense desire to worship Jah and to serve his Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, without teaching "commands of men as doctrines" (Matthew 15:9). How can this be done? How can any man or woman today keep this from happening? It is not easy, for we are all human. But if we rely on Jah and if we pray for deliverance from our error, I have reason to believe he will so deliver us.—Matthew 6:13.

In worshipping Jah apart from the necessity of men's traditions we must work at never "letting go the commandment of God" (Mark 7:8). We must have as fundamental to our Christian fellowship a desire to keep our worship of Jah free from "seeking to please men," for 'if we are yet pleasing men we would not be Christ's slave' (Galatians 1:10). Indeed, if we ever become men-pleasers we will simply become like so many others, with our 'fear toward Jah becoming men's commandments that are being taught' (Isaiah 29:13). That is why it must be our *purpose* to not serve Jah or Jesus by pleasing men. It is, in fact, for this very purpose that the Christian Witnesses of Jah now come together. With Jah's help we will remain that way, even though we know there is an enemy who wages war with those "who observe the commandments of God and have the work of bearing witness to Jesus" (Revelation 12:17). This war he wages in order to keep "the remaining ones of her seed" from being "sealed," for then will come the "judging and avenging [of] our blood"; then will come the marriage of the Lamb; then will earth's and mankind's, even God's enemy be removed—Revelation 6:9–11; 7:3; 19:6–20:3.

We know we are not perfect. We accept that we are sinners. We will fail, at times. So we will never force others to have faith in us, but to have faith *with us!* If we rely on Jah and if we follow Jesus we will never put ourselves above anyone else, nor will we require that we as individuals or as a group be followed or joined. Rather, we point to good reasons for our beliefs and we have faith that Jah himself will bring his sheep together under the one shepherd, Jesus Christ (John 10:16). If, however, we end up fearing men's commands as God's commands, if we follow other sheep and not "the fine shepherd"

(John 10:11, 14), then we will no longer be Jah's Witnesses. We will not be Jesus' Christian Witnesses. We will be witnesses of men.

No Need to Look Back, Again

For several years now, and in particular since July, 2006, when I wrote an article entitled, "Worth Another Look" (*IN MEDIO*, July 1, 2006), I have given a considerable and what I believe is a sufficient amount of time looking back again within the religious domain of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and its associated agencies. This I did because I believed, as I still do, that there is much there that can be built upon, that Jah can use, in answering those who taunt him and who deny his name and the name of his Son (Proverbs 30:4; Psalm 74:10). But there is also much within that domain that is unacceptable, that can be shown to be erroneous and without justification. However, while that Society is more than willing to speak about and to highlight what is right within it, it does not appear willing at all to openly discuss things that might be wrong, things that might be bringing reproach upon Jehovah's name and the name of his Son. That is not acceptable. That is not the way of Jesus Christ.—Matthew 18:15–17.

The wrongs I speak of are not just "minor" misinterpretations of certain prophecies that can work themselves out over time. What I am referring to are serious misrepresentations of Jah's commands and of the teachings of Jesus Christ as found in the New Testament, commands and teachings that are fundamental to Christian faith. These errors are not just harmless preferences for social behavior, but they are often fatal positions that have no basis in Scripture and in some cases no basis even in science or in medicine, though they claim to be so based. When a group has some, even many things right but at the same time also has wrongs that it tolerates or refuses to correct in spite of evidence that is provided to it that reasonably shows certain teachings are wrong, and when those false teachings are hurting people's faith, destroying families, and even causing loss of life, then Christians, Witnesses of Jah, have no business remaining part of that group unless it is to help correct such wrongs. And when it is clear that such wrongs are not or will not be corrected, then for the sake of Jah and Jesus Christ Christians must reject those who tolerate such things. That is why I am not a Trinitarian. That is why I reject Joseph Smith as a prophet of God. That is why I reject witchcraft and magic. That is why I do not worship Allah. That is why I will no longer associate myself with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. It is why I am a Christian Witness of Jah.

As such I have done what I am commanded by Jesus Christ to do when it comes to those with whom I formerly associated, and that is to "put to the test those who say they are apostles" (Revelation 2:2). I have followed the counsel Jesus gave to 'lay bear my fault against my brother alone,' to then 'take along one or two more,' and finally I have 'spoken to the congregation' (Matthew 18:15–17). That same courtesy, as commanded by Jesus himself, has yet to be extended to me. I have sent letters, I have written articles

and books, and I have made myself available in a number of ways and to a wide variety of people who support the Watchtower Society as God's appointed servant body, and yet the things I believe are wrong continue. In fact, they are encouraged. They are tolerated. Therefore, I can no longer work with that Society or its associated agencies in Jehovah's and in Jesus' names, unless they "bear witness concerning [my] wrong" (John 18:23) or repent of their false teachings (Revelation 2:16). I am willing to talk to them, again. But they are not willing, so it seems, to talk to me or to others about concerns we have with their teachings, their claim to authority, and their use of power and control in the congregations. Instead they shut down discussion. They prevent the congregation from hearing my complaint. They do not follow the Christian model (again, Matthew 18:15-17). So, who is the Christian? Who is the Witness of Jah?

Ultimately, Jah and Jesus will decide such things. For now each of us must individually consider the reasons, evaluate the beliefs, and then decide what is true, or most likely true, based not on fear of men but on love for truth. But there will be no group of men in control of all or most all of what the Christian Witnesses of Jah believe. There will no more be a rigid, inflexible, or in any manner unnecessary structure of worship to which others will be required to conform. There will be no schedule of meetings, no defined pattern of service, or enforced style of dress and grooming other than what we can appreciate through clear biblical teachings and principles. Christians with God's spirit will know when to meet, they will know how to preach, and we will know what we should wear when we come together or when we reach out to the world with glory to Jah and Jesus in view (1 Timothy 2:9-11). It will be each person's decision, and that person will stand before Jah and Jesus, not before any man, unless there is some very obvious lack of modesty that hurts our Christian testimony (1 Thessalonians 4:12). We will be "peaceable with one another"; we will "admonish the disorderly"; we will "speak consolingly to the depressed souls"; we will "support the weak"; we will "be long-suffering toward all"; we will see to it that "no one renders injury for injury to anyone else"; we will "always pursue what is good toward one another and to all others."—1 Thessalonians 5:13-15.

Though we will look out for each other, we are not "to make decisions on inward questionings" for others, since "to his own master he stands or falls" (Romans 14:1, 4). 'For why should it be that our freedom is judged by another person's conscience?' (Romans 10:29). We will never become 'governors' or form a body of men or women and set ourselves above the congregation. We will serve each other not "out of contentiousness or out of egotism, but with lowliness of mind considering that the others are superior" to us, but never letting ourselves be taken advantage of or giving others an occasion to abuse our kindness and charity.—Philippians 2:3; Matthew 7:6; 10:12-14.

Today, tomorrow, and each day forward as we proclaim the names of Jah and Jesus we will only remain "on the side of the truth" if in dealing with others we have the courage

to “bear witness concerning the wrong” (John 18:23, 37). We will only remain their Witnesses if we resist any desire for power and authority that was never meant to be ours in the first place. When disputes arise, we must follow the biblical model given to us (Matthew 18:15–17), not some tradition of men that allows us to deal secretly with matters so that others are not fully aware of the issues involved (compare Matthew 7:4; 18:20). Further, when we light our lights, we will set them “upon the lampstand,” not under a “basket” (Matthew 5:15). To do otherwise only promotes fear and suspicion, and adds to the darkness of the “room” in which the light is meant to shine!

More about what Christian Witnesses of Jah believe, why we believe what we believe, and how we meet together and reach out to others in the names of Jah and Jesus Christ, will be presented elsewhere. For now, let me tell you more about our name, “Christian Witnesses of Jah,” and why this name will serve as an appropriate means of distinguishing us from anyone else who may call him- or herself a “Christian,” or a “Witness” of God or of Jesus Christ. For while it is not our intent to concern ourselves with the ways of others, we know that what we believe and the reasons for our beliefs will bring us in contact with those who believe differently, with those who teach differently, because they believe different things for different reasons. We welcome this, and so we give you this name, our name, so that you know who we are when you meet with and when you speak to us.

“Christian”

The Bible book of Acts is essentially a history. It is a history of people who followed Jesus Christ and who carried his teachings throughout the known world during the first century CE, all of which events likely occurred before the Jewish temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. “Acts” is believed to have been written by the Gospel writer Luke, whose style fits most closely with the one who is in the opening verse of this history said to have also written an account “about all the things Jesus started both to do and to teach.” So it would appear that the writer of Acts was also a writer of one of the four New Testament Gospels.

The Acts of the Apostles is written for a man named “Theophilus” (Acts 1:1). It records many of the activities and claims of the earliest Christians from the time Jesus was raised up and began to appear to them on earth (1:3–8), to his being raised up to heaven (1:9–11), to the replacement of Judas Iscariot with Matthias as one of the twelve apostles (1:26), to their being “filled with holy spirit” (2:4). It also tells us about the events of these early Christians in “preaching the kingdom of God” and “teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with the greatest freeness of speech” (28:31). These Christians were free! Free to preach about the kingdom of God and teach others about Jesus Christ!

The Christian Witnesses of Jah are similarly free. We have ceased “becoming slaves of men” and we have become ‘freedmen’ and ‘freedwomen’ (1 Corinthians 7:20–23). That is, in fact, in large part what it means to be “Christian.” Indeed, in this historical book of Christian Acts these freed Christians were said to have been given the name “Christian” not from men, but “by divine providence” (Acts 11:26), meaning that it was Jah, or the risen Jesus, or the holy spirit that approved of the name “Christian.” Therefore, those of us today who trace our spiritual heritage and teachings back to the earliest followers of Jesus Christ should also be called “Christians,” and that is why we are *Christian Witnesses of Jah*.

“Witnesses”

If “Christian” tells you more about who we are, then “Witnesses” tells you more about what we do. We bear ‘witness’ to someone and to something like Jesus did, and just like the New Testament Christians are reported to have done for Jesus. Indeed, in the same historical book of Acts that we find the name “Christian” (11:26) we read Jesus’ words to his earliest followers, “You will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem and in all Ju·de´a and Sa·mar´i·a and to the most distant part of the earth” (1:8). That is why we are “Christian Witnesses,” because we bear witness to Jesus by “teaching the things concerning [him]” (Acts 28:31) in our local communities and throughout the world.

Being Witnesses of Jesus Christ necessarily means that we also “bear witness to the truth,” like he did, since “everyone that is on the side of the truth listens to [Jesus]’ voice” (John 18:37). But when we bear witness to the truth, when we bear witness to Jesus, we are ultimately bearing witness to the one who sent him forth, whose teachings Jesus taught and whose will Jesus followed:

John 5:36–37; 8:26–30 (NWT)

But I have the witness greater than that of John, for the very works that my Father assigned me to accomplish, the works themselves that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father dispatched me. Also, the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me ... he that sent me is true, and the very things I heard from him I am speaking in the world.” They did not grasp that he was talking to them about the Father. Therefore Jesus said: “When once YOU have lifted up the Son of man, then YOU will know that I am [he], and that I do nothing of my own initiative; but just as the Father taught me I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me; he did not abandon me to myself, because I always do the things pleasing to him.” As he was speaking these things, many put faith in him.

This one who is called “the Father” is the one whom Jesus “always” sought to please by what he did, by doing only what the Father “taught [him].” And so Jesus bore witness to the teachings of the Father by speaking ‘the very things he heard from him in the world’ and by doing “nothing of his own initiative.” Because of this, the Father always remained

with Jesus, and many put faith in him because of his loyalty to the Father. Who, though, is this “Father”?

“Jah”

In John Chapter 8 we read of Jesus’ conversation with a group of Jews. The conversation reached a point where the Jews asked Jesus, “Who do you claim to be?” (John 8:53). Jesus answered them in part with the following (underline added):

John 8:54–55 (NWT)

Jesus answered: “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father that glorifies me, he who YOU say is YOUR God; and yet YOU have not known him. But I know him. And if I said I do not know him I should be like YOU, a liar. But I do know him and am observing his word.

The one whom the Jews ‘said was their God’ was the God of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament [OT]) there is a name of this God consisting of four Hebrew letters (known as the tetragrammaton) that occurs 6,828 times. Additionally, the name “Jah” (Hebrew: hy) occurs as a stand-alone name 49 times in the Hebrew text. So standing alone as a separate word the divine name as represented by both of these forms occurs a total of 6,877 times in the Hebrew OT. It also occurs in its two-letter form “Jah” and in a three-letter form (why) as part of proper names in- and outside of the Bible.

The three-letter form of the name (why, which we might pronounce in English today as “Jaho”) also stands on its own (that is, apart from its occurrence as a part of other proper names) outside of the Bible in pre-New Testament Aramaic papyri. It is also found transliterated (represented in another language’s characters) into Greek (law) in one of the best and most ancient fragments of the Greek translation of the OT (4QLev^bLXX), and this three-letter form of the divine name is referenced in several classical sources as well as in other early and later Jewish and Christian literature (see my *Jehovah Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 3rd Edition [Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2008], pages 25–43).

While there are good reasons to pronounce God’s name in English as either “Jehovah” or “Jaho” based on the four-letter and the three-letter forms, respectively (and even good reasons to believe that the four-letter form represents the same pronunciation as the three-letter form [see *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, 3rd Edition, pages 48–52]), “Jah” (hy) is the least disputed of all of the forms of the divine name that have come down to us, with the Hebrew pronunciation almost universally considered to be *YaH*. This form and pronunciation of the divine name is contrasted with one of the few potential pieces of evidence supporting a form and pronunciation of the divine name such as the modern “Yahweh.” In his ‘Questions in the Octateuch’ (15.17–18) Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–c. 468) wrote the following concerning the divine name, “The Samaritans pronounce it

[the tetragrammaton mentioned in 15.15] ‘labe’ [ee-ah-bay, corresponding to ‘Yahweh’] but the Jews pronounce it ‘la’ [ee-ah, corresponding to ‘Yah’].” Additionally, in the final book of the Christian Bible, Revelation, after God ‘executes judgment upon the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication’ and after he ‘avenges the blood of his slaves at her hand,’ we read of the name of the God that is to be praised twice by a “great crowd in heaven,” by the “twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, and then by what appears to be another “great crowd”:

Revelation 19:1–8 (NWT)

After these things I heard what was as a loud voice of a great crowd in heaven. They said: “Praise Jah, YOU people! The salvation and the glory and the power belong to our God, because his judgments are true and righteous. For he has executed judgment upon the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged the blood of his slaves at her hand.” And right away for the second time they said: “Praise Jah, YOU people! And the smoke from her goes on ascending forever and ever.” And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God seated upon the throne, and said: “Amen! Praise Jah, YOU people!” Also, a voice issued forth from the throne and said: “Be praising our God, all YOU his slaves, who fear him, the small ones and the great.” And I heard what was as a voice of a great crowd and as a sound of many waters and as a sound of heavy thunders. They said: “Praise Jah, YOU people, because Jehovah our God, the Almighty, has begun to rule as king. Let us rejoice and be overjoyed, and let us give him the glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has arrived and his wife has prepared herself. Yes, it has been granted to her to be arrayed in bright, clean, fine linen, for the fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the holy ones.”

Where you see the words “Praise Jah” in the above citation from Revelation the Greek text contains the expression *allelouiah*, which transliterates or corresponds in Greek letters that are appropriate to the same expression in Hebrew, which is *haleluiah*. The only differences between the Hebrew and Greek forms of this expression are the use of an “h” sound in Hebrew and a doubled “l” in Greek. But both expressions are combinations of two words: Hebrew, *halelu* (“praise”) and *yah* (“Jah”), and in Greek a representation of the same, *allelou* (“praise”) and *ia* (“Jah”).

The Greek form of the divine name used in this expression of praise is the same Greek form of the divine name represented by Theodoret as that which was pronounced by the Jews in contrast to the Samaritan pronunciation of “labe.” Yet, today many scholars associate “Yahweh” with Jewish usage, ignoring completely what the evidence says about who may have preferred such a pronunciation and ignoring the pronunciation that is actually associated with Jewish usage by such writers, again, in Greek, *la*, from the Hebrew *YaH*, which is in English, “Jah” (see my *Jehovah Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 3rd Edition, pages 43–48, and my *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses* [Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002], pages 164–166, for further discussion of the Samaritan pronunciation of God’s name).

It is *Yah* (Hebrew), *Ia* (Greek), or “Jah” (English) who will ultimately be praised! So, though we use “Jehovah” and “Jaho” as appropriate Anglicized forms of the Hebrew and Greek forms of the divine name of the Judeo-Christian (biblical) God, we also use the name that is used in the Hebrew Bible, the name that is referenced by early writers as that pronounced by the Jews, the only form of the divine name that is clearly represented in the New Testament, and the name that is to be praised by all creation after Babylon the Great is destroyed and the “marriage of the Lamb,” Jah’s Son, arrives. We use other names for our God, but we take the name of “Jah,” together with “Christian,” for ourselves, since we are witnesses of both Jah and Jesus Christ. We are the Christian Witnesses of Jah!

Conclusion

This article merely introduces the Christian Witnesses of Jah. In the coming days I will also present good reasons for why and how Christian Witnesses of Jah around the world should meet together in homes in worship of Jah, how we can effectively teach others publicly and privately, defend our faith, and proclaim the good news of Jah and Christ Jesus while praising their names as their Witnesses. My desire, as a Christian Witness of Jah, is to help as many people as may be possible to have faith in Jah and in Jesus but without causing them to feel like they have to depend on any man or woman before they can do what they have good reason to believe is right (James 4:17). All that Christians need are Jah, the Father, Jesus, the Son, and the holy spirit that it sent by both of them (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). If we have them, then we will also have each other when we meet, wherever we meet, and however often we may meet.—Matthew 18:20.

In the coming months and henceforth I will present the teachings of Jah and Jesus Christ based on the best available reasons, and I will do my best with Jah’s and Jesus’ help to give others comfort and hope from the Bible, not by adding to the great list of religions and to their traditions, but by taking away from them the things that simply are not important in comparison to things that matter most, the things with the best reasons to believe. I will not try to “figure out” prophecy, or to tell others how to live their lives. Instead I will try to give people reasons to believe, and I will try to teach them how to look to Jah and to Jesus Christ by relying on the power of the holy spirit so that each person may ‘approach with freeness of speech the throne of undeserved kindness’ and ‘obtain mercy and find undeserved kindness for help at the right time’ (Hebrews 4:16). I cannot give that to them. No man can. And no man ever should get in the way of those who want what is God’s gift to give.

If you want to learn more about how to begin or how to continue your relationship with Jah and with Jesus Christ and to discuss with other Christian Witnesses of Jah how we can all work together to strengthen our families, reach out to our communities, and “make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit” (Matthew 28:19), email me

(gregstafford@verizon.net), or write to me using the public Chat forum found here: <http://elihubooks.com/contact-us/>. I want to work with all those who love Jah and who believe in Jesus Christ. I want to, with Jah's and Jesus' help, do my part in helping set their names apart from anything that might take away from the glory and the honor that they both deserve.—Revelation 5:13.

Greg Stafford

(REVISED April 20, 2008)*

***This article was revised only with respect to its formatting. No changes were made to the content of the original article.**