

God called the Jews to be his witnesses to the world, but they could only be earthly witnesses. They saw the kingdom of Israel, but they could not see the kingdom of God. They knew nothing about the new birth or (except for a few prophets and special people) the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus, the Messiah, came, everything changed. He came from the Father and lived his earthly life in continuous communion with his Father. When he addressed God, he used the Greek word Πατηρ (Pater) or the Hebrew word Abba, both of which mean Father. The name of YHWH entirely disappeared from view. In all his teachings Jesus never even mentioned it. Neither did Peter, nor Paul, nor John, nor any other New Testament writer. Jesus told his followers they would be witnesses to him.

True witnesses tell what they have seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears. What they have learnt from other people or read in books is not valid testimony. No judge would accept that in court.

The first followers of Jesus saw him in person and witnessed his death and resurrection with their own physical eyes. They immediately became powerful witnesses of what they had seen and heard. But beyond this and more importantly, they experienced the new birth and began to see the kingdom of heaven. They experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and this was the secret of their power. Like Jesus they became heavenly witnesses.

Many things have changed since Jesus walked this earth. Multitudes of churches, sects and denominations have sprung up and many make exclusive claims to having the truth. But one thing remains the same. The true witnesses of Jesus are those who have been born again and seen the kingdom of heaven and received the power of the Holy Spirit to tell others what they have seen and heard.

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# **Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus' Witnesses**

## **Ancient & Modern**

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## Modern Jehovah's Witnesses and Others

What about the many sects and denominations that make up modern Christianity. What have they seen and heard? Are they earthly witnesses or heavenly witnesses? Are they witnesses at all?

Can they say, “What we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1: 1, 3)? Or ought they to say, “What we have learnt from our teachers and read in our books we declare to you, so that you can join our sect?” Can they tell you about their experience of Jesus Christ? Or can they only tell you how they interpret the Bible?

Let me repeat, real witnesses tell what they have seen and heard; not what they have learnt at Bible class or Bible College; not what they have been told at church; not what they have read in books; not even what the Bible says. All these things can be valuable in their place, but they are not testimony. Real witnesses tell what they have personally seen and heard.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Real Jesus' witnesses have been born again and are able to see the kingdom of God. What they have seen and heard they can declare to others.

## Conclusion

We have thought about Jesus' Witnesses and Jehovah's Witnesses, heavenly witnesses and earthly witnesses, true witnesses and false witnesses, ancient witnesses and modern witnesses, and witnesses who are not witnesses. What have we learnt?

We have focussed on two main subjects: we have contrasted the name of YHWH and the name of Jesus; and we have considered the meaning of the word *witness*.

God gave the name of YHWH to Moses when Moses enquired his name, and this name became precious to the Jewish people - so precious that it even became unspeakable. It has remained so to this day.

Early in the book of Acts we find clear statements: “God has raised this Jesus. We are all witnesses of this” (Acts 2:32). “With great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4:33). They had witnessed this amazing event with their physical eyes and they had to tell everybody else. But time passed and many people came to believe in Jesus who had never seen him in the flesh.

Paul saw Jesus in a vision, but he never saw Jesus in the flesh. He wrote, “From now on we know no man according to the flesh: yes, though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet from now on we know him in this way no more” (2 Cor 5: 16). So, did Paul pass on to others what he had learnt from the twelve apostles? Not at all. In fact he spent surprisingly little time with them. He witnessed to what his own eyes had seen and his own ears had heard; not his natural eyes and ears, but his spiritual eyes and ears.

John, as I have said, wrote, “What we have seen and heard we also declare to you” (1 John 1: 3) and soon after that he wrote, “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1: 5). That is what John saw with his spiritual eyes.

Did Peter and John fill their letters and teachings with quotations from the Sermon on the Mount and the parables Jesus had told them? Did they teach others what their great teacher had taught them? No; is the surprising answer. They told others what they themselves had seen with their **own** eyes - their spiritual eyes.

Peter, Paul and John and the other disciples no doubt began by telling others what their natural eyes had seen; but after they had spent much time in communion with God they were able to tell what their spiritual eyes had seen. They progressed from being earthly witnesses to being heavenly witnesses. They became like Jesus.

## Ancient Jehovah's Witnesses

My ancestors were Jehovah's Witnesses! God spoke to them 3 times through the prophet Isaiah:

“You are my witnesses,” says YHWH (Jehovah) (Is 43:10)

“You are my witnesses,” says YHWH (Is 43:12)

“You are my witnesses” (Is 44: 8).

So they became Jehovah's Witnesses! (The original Hebrew name was only the 4 letters יהוה - YHVH or YHWH with no vowels written. Vowels were added much later and the Y changed to J to make the name Jehovah in English.)

700 years after Isaiah Jesus came into the world and lived and died and rose from the dead. His last words to his disciples before he left were, “You will be My witnesses” (Acts 1: 8). The disciples could hardly believe their ears! Was he hijacking the very words of Jehovah? For 7 centuries the Jews had been Jehovah's witnesses. Was Jesus taking the place of Jehovah?

So what did the disciples do? Did they keep to the words of Isaiah and continue to be Jehovah's witnesses? Or did they obey the words of Jesus and become his witnesses? We will come back to that question, but first we will think about Jesus.

## Was Jesus a Jehovah's Witness?

Was Jesus a Jehovah's Witness?

He talked about his Father's name. He taught his disciples to pray “Hallowed be your name”. In his last recorded prayer to his Father he said, “I have manifested your name” and “I made Your name known to them and will make it known” (John 17: 6 & 26).

This sounds as if Jesus had been telling everybody what God's name was; but is that really what it means? Read through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In all his recorded teaching did Jesus ever tell people that his Father's name was YHWH? Did he need to tell them? The 4 Hebrew letters

יהוה - YHWH - that made up that name were on almost every page of their scriptures.

So what did Jesus mean by “making God’s name known” and “manifesting God’s name”? God’s name didn’t mean the 4 letters YHWH. It meant his nature and his character. Jesus made God’s character known. Everything Jesus said and did was a manifestation of God’s nature. His birth, his life, his teaching, his death and his resurrection were all a revelation of God. Jesus was “God manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim 3: 16). This was how he made known and manifested the name of God.

## Were Peter and Paul Jehovah’s Witnesses?

What about Peter and Paul? Were they Jehovah’s Witnesses? We must read through the Book of Acts and the letters of Peter and Paul to find the answer. Did Peter tell people about YHWH? We do not find the name YHWH appearing even once in all Peter’s teachings and letters. Even when he quoted the Old Testament in his speeches he would have followed Jewish tradition and not pronounced the name.

Was Peter a Jesus’ Witness? Just read the following quotations from Peter:

- “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2: 38).
- “In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!” (Acts 3: 6).
- “And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong” (Acts 3: 16).
- “By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well” (Acts 4: 10).
- “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 12).

Particularly read that last verse again:

- “And there is salvation in no one else, for **there is no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”.

## Jesus, the Faithful and True Witness

Jesus is described as “the faithful and true witness” in Revelation 3:14. He said: “We speak what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen and you do not receive our witness” (John 3: 11). What did he know and what had he seen? He gave the answer in John 8: 38: “I speak of what I have seen with my Father”. Jesus knew God; he came from God; and he could speak of God. Just as you and I can speak of our earthly fathers with first-hand knowledge and complete certainty, so Jesus could speak of and be a witness to his heavenly Father.

Jesus could have travelled around Israel telling people about all the marvellous miracles he had seen in his ministry. He had seen water turned into wine, storms stilled at his command, water supporting his feet when he walked on the sea, all kinds of diseases healed and even the dead raised. But these were all earthly things which earthly eyes could see. He chose to bear witness to what he had seen in heaven and not to what he had experienced on earth.

Jesus was a heavenly witness.

(For more on this subject read *Understanding Jesus*.)

## Jesus’ Witnesses

Jesus said to his disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be witnesses to me”. What sort of witnesses would they be? Would they be earthly witnesses like their ancestors? Or would they be heavenly witnesses like Jesus?

They had seen wonderful things with their natural eyes. They had seen Jesus turn water into wine, walk on the water, heal the sick and raise the dead. They had even seen him alive after he had been crucified and buried in the tomb. They had heard wonderful things with their ears. They had heard the words of Jesus and listened to his teachings daily for 3 years.

Did they spend the rest of their lives bearing witness to these wonderful things that their natural eyes had seen and their natural ears had heard? We must look carefully to find the answer.

afterlife. Some of their teachings, I believe, are right. Some of them, I believe, are definitely and seriously wrong. Many websites and books explain these differences and I will not discuss them here.

## What is a Witness?

We now come to a most important question: “What is a Witness?” The apostle John gives us the perfect answer in his first letter: “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life. ... What we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1: 1, 3). The essence of witness is declaring what we have seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears.

We have discussed different kinds of witnesses. What did these different witnesses see and hear? We will find that some saw earthly things with their natural eyes. Others saw heavenly things with spiritual eyes. Others, it appears, have seen nothing at all! We will consider each in turn.

## Ancient Jehovah’s Witnesses

Firstly, the Ancient Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Jews: what did they see and hear? To what could they bear witness? They have had a history, from the birth of their forefather Abraham right down to the present day, which has been different from that of any other people on earth. God, whom they have known as YHWH, has repeatedly and visibly intervened in their national life. As a race they have seen his hand in action. They have seen wonderful deliverances and blessings and they have seen severe judgments. Their scriptures, which record God’s dealings with them, have been translated into every major language on earth.

But one point I must emphasise: all these wonderful acts of God have been visible to the natural eye. Miracles are supernatural acts of God, but they are visible on earth. The ancient Jewish people were God’s earthly witnesses.

What about the name of YHWH? Didn’t God reveal that name to Moses? Was the name of Jesus more important than the name of God? Did Peter not know the Scriptures?

If Peter didn’t know the Scriptures, Paul certainly knew them. How often did Paul talk about the name of YHWH? Same answer as for Peter. Not once in all his talks or writings. What did he say about the name of Jesus? “For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow — of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil 2: 9, 10).

Peter and Paul, like many others from that day to this, were definitely not Jehovah’s Witnesses. They were wholeheartedly “Jesus’ Witnesses”!

## What Happened to the name of Jehovah?

So what happened to the name of YHWH? Why does it not appear even once in the whole New Testament? Here is a simple, but extraordinary fact: the Greek language – the language of the New Testament – has no letter Y, no letter H and no letter W (or V). English, like Hebrew, has all of these letters. Many other languages, like French, lack some or all of the sounds represented by these letters. So when the New Testament came to be written, God found he had a problem! It was impossible to write his name in Greek! Does God have problems? No! The Creator of heaven and earth also designed the Greek language!

So how do we explain this? Let’s have a fresh look at Exodus chapter 3 where God gave the name YHWH to Moses. God introduced himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex 3:6). Moses grew up in Egypt which was a country of many gods. To avoid confusion each god had to have a name! Otherwise how would you know which one you were worshipping? So Moses, putting God on the same level as the gods of Egypt, asked God what his name was. His words were: “If I go to the Israelites and say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what should I tell them?” (Ex 3:13).

God didn’t give Moses a direct answer. He simply replied, “I AM WHO I AM”. That is not a name. In fact I believe it is a denial of a name.

God then made allowance for Moses' situation and the ignorance of the times and allowed Moses to use the name YHWH. These 4 letters come from the Hebrew word יהוה (ehyey) meaning AM. In reality the one and only true God has no name. And who is there in heaven or earth who could call God by his name? His own son, like any other son, called him "Father".

For more on this read *"The Name of God and the Name of Jesus"*.

## What Happened Next?

What did my ancestors do? Sadly, the majority rejected Jesus. They regarded his teaching as blasphemous. How could a man make himself equal with God? They remained "Jehovah's witnesses". A minority accepted Jesus and became "Jesus' Witnesses".

The words of Jesus and God's words through Isaiah had one big difference: Jesus told his disciples, **"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be witnesses to me"**. These words were wonderfully fulfilled. The Holy Spirit came upon these witnesses and they received power. Signs and miracles followed them everywhere they went and they spread the name of Jesus across the entire Roman Empire.

Isaiah's words, unlike the words of Jesus, contained no mention of the Holy Spirit and no mention of power. In consequence the old "Jehovah's Witnesses" (the Jews) failed to be good witnesses to YHWH. They had not received the Holy Spirit and they lacked power. When Jesus, the Faithful and true Witness, came into the world the majority of the Jews rejected him and went on to persecute his Witnesses. The Romans also persecuted these Jesus' Witnesses, and many of them gave their lives for their faith.

After a few centuries the Roman emperor Constantine experienced some kind of conversion to the Christian faith. He made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, and direct persecution of Jesus' Witnesses ceased. Centuries more passed and step by step the church became more and more corrupt. False "Jesus' Witnesses" took control, and they began to persecute both the old Jehovah's Witnesses and the true Jesus' Witnesses. Many centuries of terrible bloodshed followed and it is hard to say who suffered most. Large numbers of Jews were given the choice of baptism,

expulsion from their country or death. Millions of true Jesus' Witnesses were tortured and put to death. We actually find this prophesied in the book of Revelation: **"Mystery: Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and abominations of the earth.' Then I saw that the woman was drunk on the blood of the saints and on the blood of the witnesses to Jesus"** (Rev 17: 5, 6). Babylon represents the false Jesus' Witnesses – the false church.

## Modern Jehovah's Witnesses

We must now consider the modern sect that has taken the name "Jehovah's Witnesses". This sect was founded in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by an American named Charles Taze Russell. He studied the Bible and looked at the doctrines and practices of the various churches and denominations of his day, and he saw many things that were wrong. He and his followers began to believe that they, and only they, had received the truth. They saw all other churches and religions as "Babylon", and in many ways they were right! They found the verses in Isaiah that say: **"You are my witnesses," says YHWH**; and those verses fitted with their belief that they alone were witnesses to the truth. Hence they took the name "Jehovah's Witnesses". They have now spread over most of the world and number about 8 million.

The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that only they are right and only they have the truth. They teach that all other religions, including all Christians, are under the control of Satan. They describe their teachings as "The Truth". Jesus said, **"I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me"**. JW's say, "We have the truth; no one comes to God except through us". Who is right? The JW's or Jesus? If the JW's are right then I am wrong, you are wrong (unless you're one of them) and millions of other people who have believed in Jesus have believed in vain. JW's believe that they are faithful servants of God and that we are all under the control of Satan. If you have come to the Father through Jesus Christ and experienced his love and power in your life, you know from your own experience that these claims of the Jehovah's Witnesses must be totally false.

Jehovah's Witnesses have different beliefs from traditional Christians on some major teachings and on many minor ones. Most importantly they have very different teachings on Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation and the