



## Reachout Subject Guide

### *5 Familiar Watchtower Ideas You Won't Find in the Bible*

The Jehovah's Witnesses make much of the symbols and customs of what they call 'Christendom' that they say won't be found in Scripture. It is true to say that people in glasshouses shouldn't throw stones and Witnesses certainly need to have a care, *"for with the judgement you are judging, you will be judged, and with the measure that you are measuring out, they will measure out to you."* (Mt.7:1, NWT, 2013)

Lets start with the big one.

#### ***Jehovah***

This will surprise some but that name isn't in the Bible. In ancient Hebrew God's name was written without vowels and it translates into English as YHWH (or YHVH). This is called the tetragrammaton. from Greek meaning "made of four letters." YHWH means 'I Am what I Am' or variants thereof. For most Jews it was, and is, forbidden to pronounce the sacred name, which explains why there is now uncertainty about how it is pronounced.

In its place in our Bibles we find the word 'LORD' in capitals, a practice that goes back to the first Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint. 'Jehovah' was popularised by Tyndale (1494-1536) and those that followed him, but has fallen out of use in modern Bibles.

The most likely pronunciation is Yawheh and if you do want to use God's name 'Jehovah' is probably the worst of all possible choices. "Jehovah" is a Latinization of a made up name combining the vowels of YHVH and the vowels of Adonai (LORD in Greek) thus YAHOVAH. You can [read more here](#).

#### ***Kingdom Hall***

On their website, the Watchtower Society explains:

*Why the name Kingdom Hall? Public gatherings at a Kingdom Hall focus primarily on the teachings of the Bible and its central message about "the kingdom of God," the theme of Jesus' ministry. (Luke 4:43) So the name Kingdom Hall, which was coined in the 1930's, appropriately describes the purpose of these buildings—to promote true worship and serve as a hub for the preaching of the "good news of the kingdom." (Matthew 24:14)*

There are no Kingdom Halls in the Bible. It may be argued that the earliest Christians had no public buildings of their own, instead meeting in homes and in the temple courts, and sometimes having to meet in secret. There is, therefore, no comparison to be made. However, Witnesses are quick enough to point out that 'church' derived from the Greek *Kuriakon* 'the Lord's house' (Scottish *kirk*, Dutch *kerk*, German *Kirckhe*) doesn't appear in the New Testament. Well, neither does Kingdom Hall.

### ***Jehovah's Witnesses***

Perhaps that surprised you, but there are no Jehovah's Witnesses in the Bible. It might be argued that Israel were 'witnesses of Jehovah' (or Yahweh (Isaiah 43:10)), but the text makes clear that they are witnesses of his unique person and character (the only God and Saviour) not his nomenclature. What should concern us here, however, is what the new community of God's people in the New Testament are to be witnesses of. Jesus left us in no doubt when he said:

*But you will receive power when the holy spirit comes upon you, and you will be witnesses of me in Jerusalem, in all Ju-de'a and Sa-mar'i-a, and to the most distant part of the earth."* (Acts 1:8, NWT, 2013)

When Peter and the other apostles stood before the Sanhedrin they declared themselves witnesses of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation (Acts 5:29-32) Jesus told them, '*You will be brought before kings and governors for the sake of my name.*' (Lk.21:12, NWT, 2013)

So, wherever this new community went, even to the distant parts of the earth, even before kings and governors, they were to be witnesses of Jesus.

A familiar argument made by Jehovah's Witnesses is from the prayer Jesus taught his disciples (Mt.6:9-13). They point to the words, '*hallowed be your name,*' and insist that Jesus' mission was to make known, or 'hallow,' (venerate) the name of God (which isn't Jehovah). But how does the prayer begin? Does it say, as Witnesses often do when praying, '*Jehovah/God...? It begins...**Our Father, in the heavens...***' (Mt.6:9, NWT, 2013)

### ***Memorial Meal***

Jehovah's Witnesses, unlike most Christians communities, observe the Lord's Supper, or Communion, once a year, and then most don't actually partake. This year (2016) it will be on March 23. Christians have various names for it but communion is a common title. The word comes from the idea of having a share as community in God's gifts, from *koinonia*, a participation in. We share in God's gift of grace (Phil.1:7); the gospel (1 Cor.9:23; the promise (Eph.3:6); the glory that shall be revealed (1 Peter 5:1); the Holy Spirit (2 Cor.13:14); the Divine nature (2 Pet.1:4); the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ (Heb.3:14, and the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor.10:16)

Jehovah's Witnesses, rather than modelling this New Testament model of communion, divide their community and exclude the great majority from most of the blessings promised to those in *koinonia*. You can [read a good article on the subject here](#).

The point here is the use of the term 'Memorial Meal.' It is true that:

*'the Lord Jesus on the night on which he was going to be betrayed took a loaf, and after giving thanks, he broke it and said: "This means my body, which is in your behalf. Keep doing this **in remembrance** of me." He did the same with the cup also, after they had the evening meal, saying: "This cup means the new covenant by virtue of my blood. Keep doing this, whenever you drink it, **in remembrance** of me.'* (1 Cor.11:23-25, NWT, 2013)

But while Jesus spoke of remembrance, nowhere does the Bible refer to a 'memorial meal.' Rather, it is referred to in terms of sharing in that remembrance - communion. Paul, writing to Corinth, said:

*'The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not **a sharing** [koinonia] in the blood of the Christ? The loaf that we break, is it not **a sharing** [koinonia] in the body of the Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, although many, are one body, for we are all partaking of that one loaf.'* (1 Cor.10:15-17, NWT, 2013)

The earliest terms for this are 'Breaking of Bread' (Acts 20:7. [Don't forget this was originally a meal]); 'the Lord's Supper' (1 Cor.11:20); 'Communion' (1 Cor. 10:16, even 'love feast' (Jude 12). What it isn't called is a Memorial Meal.

### **Watchtower Society**

There are, of course, watchtowers in the Bible. They are found in the Old Testament and are mentioned in 2 Kings 17:9; 18:8; 2 Chronicles 20:24; Isaiah 5:2; 21:8; 32:14. The New Bible Dictionary describes the function of watchtowers:

*Watchtowers were built for two different reasons in biblical times: (1) Towers were built from the earliest times (Gen.35:21) in the pastures to protect cattle and sheep against wild animals and thieves (2 Chron.26:10; Micah 4:8). It is possible that watchtowers were erected in vineyards and cornfields for protection against thieves (Isaiah 27:3).*

*Towers of a more complex structure were built in the defence works of larger cities...In the watchtowers were watchmen on the alert for hostile action against the city. They were also there to give word to the king of any person approaching the city wall. (NBD, 2004, p.1231, IVP)*

Watchtowers are defensive and, whilst it is true that the New Testament has plentiful warnings to Christians to guard our hearts against sin (Lk.12:15), to '*guard the deposit entrusted to you*' (1 Tim.6:20), assurances that the Lord '*is faithful and will guard you against the evil one*' (2 Thess.3:3) the whole spirit of the New Testament is not hiding behind walls but going out. The imperative is to 'go' into the world, rather than build walls to guard ourselves from the world is clear. Indeed, one of the challenges facing churches in the west today is the temptation to hide behind church walls rather than 'go into all the world.' The call to go is right there in the great commission (Mt.28:16-20) and again in Luke's record of the early church (Acts 1:7-8). Paul's frenetic 10 year mission to the Gentiles epitomises this call to go.

Jehovah's Witnesses, of course, do go out but to bring people under the 'protection' of, and into submission to this Watchtower Society. However, nowhere in the New Testament community of Christians is there any notion of building an organisation, a society, inside which we hide from the world. Church is a community of the saved, not a city under siege! It is the body of Christ in the world, not a bulwark of defence from the world. We are not of the world, but we are most certainly in the world.



## 5 Watchtower Ideas

When Jesus declared, *'I will build my church...'* he wasn't speaking of a people in purdah but of a people on the offensive. Jesus went on to declare, *'and the gates of hell will not prevail against it,'* (Mt.16:18) It is significant that Gates, like watchtowers, are defensive, and it is the defences of hell Jesus has in mind, and it is the church that is on the offensive.

A cult can be described as an organisation that draws a circle around itself and then regards everyone inside the circle as a friend and everyone outside as an enemy; a watchtower mentality. There is no Watchtower Society in the Bible.

Keep in touch with us. Reachout is always ready to come and speak to groups and churches, ready to sit down with cult-members prepared at last to listen, ready to advise those who have finally taken that step away from error and don't know, perhaps, what comes next.



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