



Reachout Subject Guide

The Watchtower God

In his *Theological Word Book of the Bible* (an essential on every Bible scholar's shelf) Alan Richardson points out:

'The knowledge of God is not reached by abstract speculation as in Gk. philosophy, but in the actual everyday business of living, or social relationships and of current historical events. God is not known by thinking out ideas about him, but by seeking and doing his will as made known to us by prophetic men and by our own consciousness of right and wrong. (cf. John 7:17, Jas.1:27, 1 John 4:7,.f 12)'

He cites in particular Jeremiah 22:15-16,

"Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him.

He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me?' declares the LORD."

The error upon error of the Watchtower Society is mainly the product of their having sought God in books. This arises from the laudable 19th century preoccupation with universal education, the peculiarly American preoccupation with Adventism and the careful searching the Bible for signs.

It is truly then that Jehovah's Witnesses have always been discouraged from further and higher education, yet they have made book publication and book study their main activity. Since they have long rejected education as a legitimate route for their lives, they have been robbed of what might truly inform their thinking and ended with an ugly literalism in all they publish, read, and say. This is no better illustrated than by their 'translation' of Jesus' prayer in John 17:

*'This means everlasting life, **their taking in knowledge of you**, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ.'* (John 17:3, NWT, Revised, 1984, emphasis added)

The wording in the newer version is slightly different but brings across the same sense of progressive learning:

*'This means everlasting life, **their coming to know you**, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.'* (NWT, 2013)

In a modern Bible translation this reads:

'Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.'
(NIV, 1984)

'And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.'
(ESV, 2001)

To know God, in the biblical sense, is not knowledge of abstract principles. It is not thoughts about an eternal being or idea but recognition of, relationship with, and obedience to, the God who acts purposefully in the world. Knowledge of this kind comes from personal experience of God in every day life, not from collecting data about an abstract and distant figure.

The KJV gives the same sense of relational knowledge:

'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.'

This is not anti-intellectualism, but Christ came to reveal God, to make him known, not to deliver a three point sermon, pass out a tract, or give a lecture about God (whom he never called Jehovah by the way). Jehovah's Witnesses do not know God, they know the Society and its peculiar rules and teachings. Through them, Jehovah's Witnesses know about a strange and unbiblical being they think is God and call Jehovah. Like a devout Muslim, they know which foot to put forward first, when to be here, go there, do that, avoid this, speak in these terms, obey. But they don't know God.

The True God Jehovah

Under this title, in *Insight on the Scriptures Vol.1* (Watchtower Society, 1988), the Society begin to unpack their understanding of God. They begin, inevitably, with his name.

In so many ways they get it right, saying God is spirit, infinite and approachable, even recognising the figurative nature of passages that speak of God's 'arm' (Ex.6:6) 'eyes' and 'ears' (Ps.34:15). Yet their literalism breaks into the narrative, locating God in one specific place and insisting, 'The true God is not omnipresent, for he is spoken of as having a location, (1 Ki.8:49; Joh.16:28; Heb.9:24) His throne is in heaven (Isa.66:1)'

Remarkably, they recognise that God doesn't literally have arms, eyes, and ears, even though the Bible says he has, yet they insist God has a location, a base of operations, and a throne, because the Bible says he has. This immediately brings God within the compass of the created order, since time and place are the products of creation; yet they clearly think of God as Infinite. Infinite means being subject to or having no limitations or boundaries in time, space, numbers, etc. Location robs the infinite of the infinite.

The Psalmist wrote:

Where can I go from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of dawn, If I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is light with you. (Ps.139:7-12)

How is this achieved if God is located in one place and not omnipresent? If there is no getting away from his presence how can that be if he is present in only one place? Why would Jehovah's Witnesses want to limit the infinity of God?

It is true that God's transcendent and infinite nature means man, a creature, cannot conceive of what it would be like to be God. Yet we all carry a picture in our minds of what God's life is like, poor and inadequate as this picture would surely be. Some picture God as an old man, with a white beard, sitting on a cloud and 'looking down on us.'

This illustrates very well the problem. Once you pin God to a location this has a bearing on how you see God operating, working out his plans, relating to his creation. Insight on the Scriptures states:

'[God] is all-powerful, being the Almighty God. (Ge.17:1; Re.16:14) 'All things are naked and openly exposed to the eyes of him,' and he is, 'the One telling from the beginning the finale.' (Heb.4:13; Isa.46:10,11; 1 Sa.2:3) His power and knowledge extend everywhere, reaching every part of the universe. -2Ch 16:9; Ps.139:7-12; Am 9:2-4'

How! How are these things so if God is in one place?

Throne Room Calling

In the second volume of Insights, under the heading 'Spirit,' the Holy Spirit is compared to 'radio waves that can transmit a message from a person speaking into a microphone and cause his voice to be heard by person a distance away, in effect, 'speaking' the message by a radio loudspeaker. God, by his spirit, transmits his messages and communicates his will to the minds and hearts of his servants on earth, who, in turn, may convey that message to yet others.'

Remarkably, having understood symbolism in the Bibles' reference to God's eyes and ears, then moved to an awkward literalism to rob God of his omnipresence, Jehovah's Witnesses suddenly discover the power of symbolism again. Referring to the seven spirits of the seven churches in Revelation Insights gives:

'Seven being used as representative of completeness in other prophetic texts, it appears that these seven spirits symbolize the full active capacity of observation, discernment, or detection of the glorified Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, enabling him to inspect the earth.'

God, in the Jehovah's Witness mind, sits on a throne 'in heaven' issuing his edicts via his spirit broadcasting system. Jesus, sitting at the right hand of the majesty on high (Heb.1:3), is able to 'inspect the earth' by means of this same spirit. This sounds very clunky and mechanical, not at all like the personal God of the Bible. Indeed, more like a governing body handing down rules and edicts via a chain of command. For a Jehovah's Witness, God is channelled through a system of government, a hierarchy. What is puzzling, however, is that the Spirit is apparently omnipresent, something God is not.

Abba, Father

The Bible presents a very different picture of a God who enters into personal relationship with those who trust and worship him. Indeed, so intimate is this relationship that he does not demand we call him by a name, or title, but he invites us to call him Father (Mt.6:9). This Fatherhood is expressed in different ways throughout Scripture:

Theocratic Fatherhood describes God's relationship to his covenant people, Israel. Moses was told to say to Pharaoh, *'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my first-born son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so that he may worship me.' (Ex.4:22-23)*

Generative Fatherhood refers to God's being the exclusive Father of his 'only-begotten Son' Jesus. *'And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' (Mt.3:17)*

Adoptive Fatherhood describes the redeeming relationship that belongs to all believers. They are adopted sons because of their standing in Christ, the new Adam, (1 Cor.15:45) and because they are born-again through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in them. *'...those who are led by the Spirit of God are called the sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father,' (Ro.8:13-15)*

This Fatherhood is both intimate and immanent. In the Old Testament God dwelt among his people in the tabernacle in the desert. In the gospels Jesus said of his relationship with the Father, *'I and the Father are one,' and, 'understand that the Father is in me.'* (John 10:30,38)



Jesus said of the believer, *'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'* (John 14:23)

This is not a remote God, broadcasting messages via his impersonal spirit, what Witnesses call 'God's active force.' How could such a God keep this promise to come and make his home with every believer who loves and obeys Jesus?

Romans 8 gives us a picture of how this all works. In this chapter the Spirit is described as *'the Spirit of life,'* an interesting phrase and echoing John's description of Jesus as one who has life in himself (John 1:4). Surely only God is self-existent, having life in himself, being the giver of life?

'Those who live in accordance with the Spirit,' Paul writes, *'have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.'* (Ro.8:5) Paul goes on to describe believers as, *'controlled...by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ...And if the Spirit of of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.'* (vv. 9-11)

The Spirit is *'the Spirit of sonship.'*

The Spirit is *'the Spirit of life.'*

The Spirit is *'the Spirit of God.'*

The Spirit is *'the Spirit of Christ.'*

The Spirit, *'lives in you.'*

The Spirit gives life, the Spirit of God and of Christ. The Spirit indwells believers, it is by the same Spirit we cry, *'Abba, Father.'* It is by the Spirit that the Father and the Son come and dwell with every obedient believer, because the Spirit is God, as the Son is God, as the Father is God. Just as to see the Son is to see the Father (John 14:9) so to enjoy the companionship of the Spirit is to enjoy the companionship of the Father and the Son.

This is why Jesus goes on in John's gospel to say, *'I will ask the Father to send you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever-the Spirit of truth.'* (14:16-17) 'Another' here means another of the same kind, that is, another person but with the same role of advocate. The word translated 'Counsellor' is the same as used in John's first letter, *'If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to our Father in our defence-Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.'* (1 John 2:1) To have the Spirit as Counsellor is to have the Son, just as to see the Son is to see the Father.

The truth is, we can accept what the Bible tells us, or we can make every effort to tame God, locate and limit him, until he sits comfortably with our world view. The early church stuck faithfully to the Bible's message, accepting on faith what they could not fully comprehend, because God is God, his word is his word, and man is to be faithful to God's word.

The Watchtower God

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.



Reachout Trust

Website: www.reachouttrust.org

Office

Email: office@reachouttrust.org

Tel: 0203 196 2391

Michael Thomas

Email: reachouttrust1@gmail.com

Tel: 01792 709 470