

# The life and death of Jesus - Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs 22

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## Aim of lesson

One of the communities that we are most likely to encounter in everyday life is the Jehovah's Witnesses, because to their credit they make a practice of regularly visiting all the houses in a neighbourhood. The aim of this topic is to prepare the young people for such a meeting by exploring the faith, doctrine, history and practice of an active group of sincere and dedicated but apparently misguided believers, establishing points in common, and facing up to differences. We are often perceived as being like them and it is important for us to know a bit about them.

## Bible background

Revelation 7:1-4

## Preparation required

Read through the notes and the questions in the Students' Notes making sure you know the answers and why we believe what we do. Decide how you are going to organise the lesson.

You will need to provide concordances for the young people to use.

## Suggested outline of lesson

The students could read through the information provided quietly or together and then discuss the questions before filling in an answer. Or you may prefer to look at the questions and read through the notes asking them to spot the answers as they go.

Jehovah's Witnesses are much more numerous and therefore better known than Christadelphians. Although their faith does have points of contact with ours, there are huge areas of difference stemming largely from their acceptance of the authority of the hierarchy of their organisation. Although our own understanding of prophecy has been modified over the years and still varies from person to person, we have never claimed inspiration or authority, and acknowledging a better interpretation is no great embarrassment to us. For the Jehovah's Witnesses it is a major problem.

Of necessity, this lesson consists largely of conveying to the class information which will mostly be new to them.

## Christadelphian Connection

Strangely, the Jehovah's Witnesses understanding of the second coming has a Christadelphian connection. The Emphatic Diaglott, a literal word for word (and generally unintelligible) translation of the New Testament by Benjamin Wilson who was once a Christadelphian uses the word presence instead of coming to translate the Greek word parousia when it refers to the second coming of Jesus. Following the disappointing failure of their prediction of the second coming in 1874, Russell and his mentor, N H Barbour, were persuaded that an invisible presence of Jesus had begun in that year, later changed to 1914. Other new Testament uses of parousia and New Testament use of other words for the second coming of Jesus make this a difficult position to sustain.

## New Testament use and meaning of parousia

The word occurs in Matthew 24:3,27,37,39; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:6,7; 10:10; Philippians 1:26; 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1,8,9; James 5:7,8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4,12; and 1 John 2:28.

There is no justification at all for the Jehovah's Witnesses interpretation of these passages. It is clear that the real return of Christ will be a highly visible event: 'every eye shall see him' (Revelation 1:7). See also Matthew 24:27. 2 Peter 1:16 speaks of being 'eyewitnesses of his majesty'.

## Michael the archangel

Michael is referred to in Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1, Jude 1:9, and Revelation 12:7. The link between the passage in 1 Thessalonians and the Lord Jesus Christ is tenuous. The belief that Christ was created by God before any of the rest of the creation is based on Colossians 1:15. However, verse 18 implies that the apostle is describing Jesus as the firstborn from the dead.

They also believe that Jesus then brought about the rest of the creation (Colossians 1:16). This is a difficult passage, but the word 'by' is nearly always translated 'in' in the AV, and the same phrase is translated 'in him' in (for example) Colossians 1:19 and 2:6, 7, 9, 10 and 11 (in the AV; verses 9 and 10 have 'in Christ' in the NIV).

## **Relevance to our lives**

It is very important to understand the sincerely held beliefs of others to strengthen our own beliefs and to be knowledgeable and sympathetic if we are required to defend our views.

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, we see around us many who seem to have misunderstood the meaning of your word. Teach us the humility to recognise that we may not have perfect understanding either; give us perception to learn more of your truth, and grant us gentleness so that we may help others in their understanding. Amen

## **Other suggestions for activities**

The class might like to discuss any of the Jehovah's Witness beliefs in more detail, e.g. their refusal to receive blood transfusions.