

The Second Coming

With this session we conclude our exploration of the major doctrines of the JW's. There are a number of issues we could explore, including church authority, the details of the millennium, refusal to observe birthdays and holidays, refusal to accept blood transfusions and so on, but these are peripheral issues having at best little to do with the gospel. They have been covered well by other authors in much more detailed works.

Our task is to review the resurrection of Christ, and the effects of the JW refusal to allow scripture to speak on the issue. We saw earlier that the JW hermeneutical circle states that Jesus is not God, because God cannot die. This makes Jesus into a spirit being who became man, died and was resurrected. But, since his life as a man was the payment for Adam's sin, his physical life could not be taken up again. Instead, he was resurrected as a spirit being. This spirit being was seen only by the disciples, and was taken up into heaven. Because of his nature as a spirit, the second coming was spiritual, and happened in 1914. The translation of the Bible used by the JW's has been done to avoid allowing any "scriptural" contradiction to this logical construct. As we will see, even in the NWT, this construct falls apart when examined.

One peripheral issue is that of the physical cross. JW's teach that Jesus died on a torture stake where both hands are stretched overhead and secured with a single nail. While this seems a trivial issue, it serves as a JW distinctive, allowing them to have another item that they "have right" contrary to the rest of the world. Cults grasp such straws to ensure their identity. Historically, it is clear that the cross has been taught throughout history, and a torture stake is a modern invention theologically. But, since the Greek does allow this translation, appeals to it fail. However, even in the NWT, the issue is clear, since Thomas asks to see the prints of the nails (plural) in Jesus' hands (Q1). A cross would use a separate nail for each hand, while the torture stake used a single nail for both.

To support the JW idea that Jesus was resurrected as a spirit, they point to supernatural abilities he had after the resurrection. He appeared behind locked doors, vanished and reappeared. This is confirmed as evidence of being a spirit by 1 Peter 3:18 where Jesus is reported to have been "raised in the spirit." Such a facile "proof" of his spirit nature fails when we consider other events in scripture. Before the cross, Jesus walked on water (Q2). We may also note that after the ascension, Philip was miraculously transported from the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch to the town of Azotus. These miracles point out that God is able to do the same sort of miracles with men that were performed with Christ. The nature of the man is not at issue, but the power of God is.

Jesus made direct statements before the cross of how he would be resurrected (Q3). Referring to his body, he said that if it were destroyed, in three days he would raise it up again. In the NWT quote (John 10:17-18), we find that Jesus has authority to receive his soul again. Since the JW's correctly understand the state of the dead, this can only mean his life, intact with his body. Finally, (Q4) we see that the NT clearly states that Jesus was resurrected as a man. Jesus himself tells the disciples that "a spirit does not have flesh and bones just as YOU behold that I have." (NWT) Attempting to translate away all evidence contrary to their doctrines is impossible. When we follow this line of inquiry to its logical end (Q5), we find that Jesus is a man in heaven. The Lord swore to David that the fruit of body would sit on God's throne. Paul confirms that "in him the fullness of divine quality dwells bodily." (Col 2:9, NWT) Our intercessor is a man.

We now turn our attention from specifics of Jesus' resurrection to specifics of our resurrection. Because Revelation is written in symbolic language, it is ready territory for those who would seek to support their own interpretation. All that is required is an audience that doesn't look carefully at details. Thus, when Russell looked at the 144,000 of Rev 7, he saw a small group of specially favored saints (Q6). These were declared to be the saints of the early church and a few specific "elect," of which he was one. These would reign forever with Jesus in heaven. Unfortunately, when details are ignored, they come back to bite the unwary interpreter. Rev 7 places the 144,000 on earth, not in heaven. Further, when the passage is examined carefully, we find that John "heard" the number 144,000, with specific details as to which tribes they were drawn, but when he turned around, he "saw" that they were actually a great multitude (great crowd, NWT) (Q7). Thus, the two descriptions, which might appear to be separate groups to the unwary, turn out to be different ways of describing the saints. The tribes are listed because of various specific historical characteristics of those tribes which correspond to certain characteristics of

some saints. (We note that the list is different from any other Biblical list, denying the incorrect idea of them being the saved from among the Jews [an error also rejected by the JW's].)

The idea of two groups of saints is further denied when we examine the location of the great crowd in Rev 19 (Q8). Here the saints which Russell placed on the earth are pictured in heaven. His justification for the 144,000 being in heaven ("purchased from the earth" Q9) falls apart when we see that the "purchase price" is the propitiation John tells us is for the entire earth. That is, all saints have been purchased, not just 144,000. "Purchased from the earth" is a metaphor for the fact that Jesus paid the price to rescue us from the death due to all on the earth. It says nothing about where the saints will live.

Other lines of evidence show that there is only one group of saints. John 10:16, which JW's read to say that there are two groups of saints (other sheep), ends by saying that all sheep would become one flock (Q10). The greater blessings alleged to accrue to the 144,000 (Q11) turn out to be a bad dream, because while JW's place the 144,000 in heaven forever, God will dwell with men on the earth. This would give the great crowd a greater blessing than the 144,000. When we examine the Sermon on the Mount (Q12) and Paul's teachings, we find only one group of saints in view. Yes, there are two groups of people, but they are the saints and the wicked. All believers are members of one body. As for the JW belief that only the 144,000 are "born again", even the NWT tells us that only those who are born again will enter the kingdom at all (Q13). And every believer is born of God, not just a favored few.

Our final step on this trip is to examine the JW doctrine of the second coming. This is said to be a spiritual "presence" only, since Jesus was resurrected as a spirit. We have already dealt with that issue, so we have no need to revisit it now. It is said that the "*parousia*" (Greek "presence/revealing") was the time when Jesus received his kingdom. Then he was able to come here in an invisible presence to begin reigning. This was to come at the end of the "times of the nations." Space does not permit a full discussion of this error, but certain facts about it can be explored.

The first is the way that 1914 came to be determined to be the date. JW's identify 607 BC as the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. We may note that from the outset, this time is in error. Archeological evidence is absolutely conclusive that Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon in September of 605 BC, a full two years after the JW chronology identifies the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. That happened in 586 BC, twenty-one years after the time the JW's identify for it. As we will see shortly, the JW's are off by far more than twenty-one years.

In each of Daniel's prophecies, there is a clear indication of the fact that it is a prophecy for the future, except for this one, which is specifically for Nebuchadnezzar. Rather than having any indication of an application to the future (Q14), the interpretation of the dream of Dan 4 states "Your kingdom will be sure to you after you know that the heavens are ruling." (Dan 4:26 NWT) Yet the JW's take the seven years of madness to refer to 2,520 years of rule of the earth by Satan, with Jesus assuming rule of the kingdom at the end of this time period. The way they calculate this time is by taking the 3 1/2 years of Dan 7:25 and Rev 12:6, then combining it with the 1,260 days or 42 months of Rev 11:2-3. They are not alone in this arithmetic. The bulk of modern prophetic interpreters do this arithmetic to allow them to "deduce" that in prophecy a year is 360 days long. Unfortunately for these interpreters, the Jews never had a year 360 days long. Not only that, there is no evidence that the Jews maintained a separate "prophetic calendar" with 360 day years. The Jewish year was 353-355 days long, with leap years thrown in to keep the months in sync with the seasons. This made leap years 383-385 days long.

Interpreters who propose 360 day years also ignore the fact that there is evidence in the book of Daniel that indicates that the length of the year was to be understood with the information available to Daniel (Q15). In Dan 9:25, Daniel is told that he is to "know and discern" the length of a prophetic time span. Since the only year Daniel knew was the ordinary Jewish year, that is the length of the year in prophecy. The entire schema of 360 day years depends on scriptural arithmetic which was not possible until Revelation was written about AD 94, some 60 years after the prophecy in Dan 9:25 ended.

It is curious that the JW's get the year-for-a-day principle right, but apply it incorrectly and inconsistently. First, they use 360 day years to figure out the number of years from the destruction of Jerusalem to Jesus' "presence." If they were consistent, they would use 360 day years for the 2,520 years, but they do not, using instead standard solar years of 365 1/4 days. This places the "presence" in 1914, based on a 607 BC date for the destruction of Jerusalem. If they were to use 360 day years, the "presence" would begin in 1878. On the other hand, if they used solar years to calculate the length of the delay, they would get 2,557 years, which would then end in 1951. Of course, if they got the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) correct, they would get 1899 for consistent 360 day years, 1935 for the mixed arithmetic they use, and 1972 if they used consistent solar years. When we look at all of these

possibilities, then look at the world around us, we find that there is absolutely no discernible difference in the world as to the presence or absence of sin at these dates. Put bluntly, there is no conceivable reason to identify any of these years as the fulfillment of any prophecy. There is no scriptural basis for choosing the end points they do, and there is no scriptural basis for the arithmetic they choose.

Length of "Prophecy" in Years	
360 Day Years (supposed "Jewish")	2,520 Total Years
365 1/4 Day Years (standard solar)	2,557 Total Years

Ending Date of Daniel 4 "Prophecy"			
Length of Prophetic Year	Length of Actual Year	Starting Year	Ending Year
360 Days	360 Days	607 B.C.	1878
		586 B.C.	1899
360 Days	365 1/4 Days	607 B.C.	1914
		586 B.C.	1935
365 1/4 Days	365 1/4 Days	607 B.C.	1951
		586 B.C.	1972

As a final note, we should consider the JW typological argument. Essentially this relies on the concept of types and antitypes, where the "type" is a foreshadowing of the "antitype" to come. In this respect, the Passover lamb was killed signifying the release of the Jews from the bondage of Egypt (Ex 12). This lamb was the type of Jesus who was the antitype of the Passover (1 Cor 5:7). In other words, the type pointed forward to the antitype. There is a tight correspondence between type and antitype. The Passover lamb was to be spotless, without blemish of any kind. Similarly, Christ was our perfect Passover lamb. Looking to the JW use of Nebuchadnezzar's madness, we see the story of a heathen king being cut off and later restored. JW's try to make this into the type for the cutting off of the kingdom of God from the earth and its later restoration. This violates every principle of typology. First, God's kingdom was never removed from the earth. As long as there were faithful people such as Daniel, God's kingdom was always present, although not necessarily with physical theocratic rule. But much more important, the rule of an oppressor of the Jews is not the type to which the ruler of the liberator of spiritual Judah corresponds. He is the exact opposite. Thus it is impossible to properly apply Dan 4 to identify the time when the kingdom of God would be restored. Of course, one final point dooms this attempt to identify the time of Jesus' coming. The prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's madness was given some fifteen or so years after the destruction of Jerusalem. No Biblical prophecy which defines a specific time period was given after the period has begun.

When we look at the JW schema, we are struck by the fact that the "presence" is far different from what Jesus told us to expect (Q16). Jesus told us that his coming would shine from the east to the west like lightning. An invisible presence doesn't match that description. And as Jesus said while specifically answering when his kingdom would be inaugurated, we are not to know the times or epochs. This statement stands as a specific contradiction of the JW schema. We should note that the NWT does not change this passage.

The only idea which allows the JW schema to work at all is the idea that Jesus was resurrected as a spirit. Once again, they twist the scripture to suit their purposes. In John 14, Jesus told the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit after he left. He then pointed out that there would come a time when the world would not see him, but that the disciples would see him (Q18). At that time they would clearly understand his divinity. This was clearly fulfilled in the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension. This is repeated in John 16.

After the fulfillment of Jesus' statement, he was taken up in the clouds (Q19). JW's insist that the

clouds denote invisibility, since he eventually was lost to view. Once again, the JW's stretch to twist the scripture to their ends. The text notes that the disciples "watched" Jesus ascend. This requires that when Jesus will return, we will "watch" him descend. Again, in Rev 1:7, the JW's are forced to ignore the plain language of scripture by making "seeing" into a purely spiritual "discernment" (Q20). Multiple passages, including the NWT versions, state very clearly that the second coming will be a very obvious, visible physical event. It will be so obvious, that the wicked will call for the rocks to fall on them. Nothing in 1914 comes remotely close.

A further attempt to get around this wealth of testimony to the visible nature of the return is to change "appearing" in various texts into "manifestation." Thus, the "manifestation" can be made out as a spiritual event, not a physical one. However (Q21), when the evidence is gathered, we find that Jesus was "manifested" to mankind during his ministry. This was not a primarily spiritual event, but was a physical appearing. Thus, there is no basis for treating "manifestation" as anything other than simple physical presence.

Continuing tenaciously along their erroneous path, the JW's state that the spiritual presence of Jesus began in 1914 when he received his kingdom. Once again (Q22), Jesus' own words show their error. He promised the disciples that he would always be present (Matt 28:19-20). If his presence only came in 1914, then Jesus lied to his disciples.

One final item of proof comes before us. The kingdom of God will be with men on earth (Q23). The entire schema of two groups and different earthly/heavenly kingdoms is simply a product of the fertile imagination of Charles Taze Russel. God will dwell with men forever on earth. There will only be two groups of people, the saved and the lost. There will not be two groups of saints.

We must ponder (Q24) just what it is that JW's have done to the hope of the cross. I find myself at a loss for words to describe the mishmash they have served up as salvation stew. Instead of a marvelous gift of love given to all the faithful, Jesus' sacrifice becomes a simple financial transaction, where a debt is paid. Each claimant then must work to elevate himself in the kingdom. But this marvelous kingdom, with no more tears, is turned into some invisible "presence" which can be seen to have no substantial effect on sin. Is this a Savior worth serving?

Because of the insistence on placing man's logic above God's infinite knowledge and grace, JW's have made God into man's image, just as have every group of pagans and apostate Christians.

Greek issues regarding the language of the second coming.

"Epiphaneia" translates as "manifestation" or "appearing." It is found in 2 Thess 2:8, 1 Tim 6:14, 2 Tim 4:1, and Titus 2:13. It was commonly used by the pagan Greeks to describe the visible form of a divine being.

"Phaneroo" is related to *epiphaneia*, and means to show or reveal oneself. It is found in Col 3:4, 1 Peter 5:4, 1 John 2:28 and 1 John 3:2. For comparison see John 1:30-31, Heb 9 26, and 1 Pet 1:20.

"*Erchomai*" is the common Greek word for "to come." It is found in Matt 16:27-28; 24:30, 42, 44; 25:13, 31; 26:64, Mark 13:26; 14:62, Luke 9:26; 12:40; 21:27, Acts 1:11, 1 Cor 4:5; 11:26, 2 Thess 1:10, Rev 1:7; 22:7, 12, 20.

1) Christians wait and hope for the *apokalupsis* (1 Cor 1:7, 1 Peter 1:13) and the *epiphaneia* (Titus 2:13) and must be patient until the *parousia* (James 5:7-8)

2) Both the *apokalupsis* and the *parousia* are equated with "the day of the Lord (Jesus Christ)" (1 Cor 1:7, 2 Thess 2:1, 2 Peter 3:4, 9-12)

3) The words *apokalupsis*, *epiphaneia*, *erchomai*, and *parousia* are all used of Christ's coming to judge the wicked (Matt 24:50-51; 25:31-46, 2 Thess 1:7-10; 2:8).

4) Christ's "coming" (*erchomai*), his *parousia*, and the day of the Lord, all refer to that future judgment that will "come like a thief" on the wicked (Matt 24:42-44, Luke 12:38-40, 1 Thess 5:1-4, 2 Peter 3:10, Rev 16:15).

5) Christians are exhorted to pursue blamelessness and holiness in expectation of the *epiphaneia* and *parousia* of Christ (1 Thess 3:13; 5:23, 1 Tim 6:11-14, 2 Tim 4:1-5, 2 Peter 3:9-12, 1 John 2:28).

6) Believers will be gathered together to be with Christ when he comes (*erchomai*) and at his *parousia* (Matt 24:31, 1 Thess 4:16-17, 2 Thess 2:1).

The inauguration of Christ's kingdom.

Acts 4:25-27; 13:32-33, Heb 1:3-5; 5:5 all explicitly apply Psalm 2 to identify Jesus exaltation to the throne at His ascension.

Matt 28:18-20, Rev 2:26-27 explicitly state that Jesus already had all authority of the kingdom.