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Dear Friend,

Most of us like to have visitors, now and then. When friends ring our doorbell, it's generally a sign of a pleasant evening ahead for us. But that's not always the case.

Sometimes the people on your doorstep are not dropping by for friendly chat, but rather for a theological confrontation. When we see two nicely dressed people on the porch with their *Watchtower Magazines* in hand, the temptation is strong to simply find a place to hide.

One of the reasons that we avoid conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses is because we just do not know what to say to them. In this month's *Solid Ground* we solve that problem for you. Stand to Reason speaker, Tim Barnett, weighs in with an effective approach that will help you be prepared the next time a Jehovah's Witness couple knocks on your door.

Tim spells out a sound strategy focusing on the single issue most important to engage. He then gives one of the most effective tactics—using the Jehovah's Witness's own Bible, no less—to get them thinking about the most important question they could ponder: Who is Jesus?

Solving problems for you – like how to engage with tact and truth when a Jehovah's Witness comes to your door – is what your generosity makes possible.

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Faithful to the Truth,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Koukl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Gregory Koukl

## Ready for the Knock on Your Door

Tim Barnett

Most of us have answered a knock on our door, only to discover a smiling, well-dressed couple—*Watchtower* publication in hand—standing on the other side, waiting to talk with us about the gospel according to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

I used to dread these encounters. In fact, while they were introducing themselves, I'd be frantically thinking up excuses to get them off of my porch and out of my life.

I came to realize, though, that I avoided these conversations because I was not equipped to engage the Witnesses in a thoughtful way. They seemed to know their stuff. I didn't. They trained for hours prior to our conversation. I hadn't trained at all. I only knew *what* I believed. I had no idea *why* I believed it.

For instance, I'd try to make the case that Jesus is God (a doctrine they reject), yet had few good reasons to offer them to support my belief. To make matters worse, they had quick responses to my points they could recite at will. As a result, I'd leave the discussion feeling bested by the couple at my door and unsure about my own convictions. Many Christians have had the same experience, maybe even you.

Those awkward encounters are a thing of the past, though, because I have since learned some things that tip the scales in my favor, and I want to pass those ideas on to you so you don't have to run for cover the next time Jehovah's Witnesses knock on your door.

I want to give you some tools to help you make the greatest impact possible in your conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses. To simplify the process, we'll focus on a single issue, on one vital question: *Who is Jesus?*

### Quote Their Bible, Not Yours

To start with, I want you to make a strategic move that will save you a lot of trouble in your conversations. Answering the question, "Who is Jesus?," involves using straightforward passages of Scripture to make our case. Even though the Jehovah's Witness Bible, the New World Translation (NWT), is actually *mistranslated* in a number of places to support their doctrines, it can still be used by us to effectively make our points.

Have the Jehovah's Witness open their NWT and read aloud the passages you suggest to them. There are three reasons why this strategy works so well.

First, by using the translation they trust, it completely sidesteps unhelpful disputes about what the Bible says. Second, your argument will have a greater impact since you're using a translation they're comfortable with. I know I'm skeptical when I read a work from a competing religious group. Jehovah's Witnesses are no different. They'll have their guards up if you cite your translation, but not if you use their NWT. Third, Jehovah's Witnesses won't likely take literature that you offer them, but they will always have their NWT with them. If you show them the real Jesus using their own book, then they'll never be without the truth.

### Only One Question

A host of issues can get you sidetracked with Jehovah's Witnesses if you're not careful—soul sleep, celebrating birthdays or Christmas, blood transfusions, Heaven, Hell, war, even the Holy Spirit. Don't go there. None of these are the *most* important issue. The goal of your conversation is to answer only one question: *Who is Jesus?* How you answer this question changes everything.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the archangel Michael was the very first being in the universe created by Jehovah-God. Michael was then used by God to create the rest of the universe. Later, at the appointed time, Michael was born to the virgin Mary as a human being, thus ceasing to be an angel. Then after His *spiritual* resurrection, Jesus resumes His identity as Michael. That is the Jehovah's Witness answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" Jesus, is the archangel Michael incarnate.<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, Christians hold that Jesus is the eternal, second Person of the Trinity. Jesus wasn't *created by* Jehovah-God; He *is* Jehovah-God. Christianity stands or falls on its view of Christ. If we can demonstrate that Jesus *is* Jehovah, then the high tower of the Jehovah's Witness doctrine comes crashing down.

The salvation of anyone, including Jehovah's Witnesses, depends on an accurate understanding of and belief in God the Son. Jesus said, "I told you that you would die in your sins, for *unless you believe that I am He* you will die in your sins" (Jn. 8:24).<sup>2</sup> Here Jesus is claiming to be the "I AM" recorded in Isa. 43. The irony is that Isa. 43 is the chapter where Jehovah's Witnesses derive their name. Isaiah writes, "You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He" (Isa. 43:10).

Jehovah says His true witnesses will believe of Him that "*I am He.*" Yet, Jesus says true believers must believe of *Him* that "*I am He.*" In fact, this claim, coupled with Jn. 8:58 ("...before Abraham was, I am"), was the reason the Jews tried to stone Jesus (Jn. 8:59). His point was clear: Rejecting Jesus' deity is rejecting salvation itself. That's why our question, "Who is Jesus?," is the only question we should focus on.

### What's in a Name?

There are many convincing arguments for the deity of Christ in the Bible. You want to be as strategic as possible, though, when a Jehovah's Witness is standing at your door. Our general goal is to get them thinking—to put a stone in their shoe, so to speak. We want them walking away pondering an important point we've made. That won't work if we trot out standard verses for Christ's deity like Jn. 1:1 and Jn. 20:28. Jehovah's Witnesses have heard those verses countless times. They'll be waiting for you with well-rehearsed responses. They're trained to answer these challenges *without even thinking.*

We need a different strategy. I'm not saying to never use Jn. 1:1 or Jn. 20:28. They offer clear support for Jesus' deity and should be used. Just don't start with them. Make your visitors think through some other passages first, verses they probably haven't considered and haven't been trained to respond to.

<sup>1</sup> Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witness* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 173-174.

<sup>2</sup> All Bible passages are taken from the ESV unless otherwise stated

Our basic strategy is to demonstrate that Jesus is identified as Jehovah. If we can show that Jesus is Jehovah, then the Jehovah's Witness belief system comes crashing down. So here's the question: *Is Jesus ever identified with Jehovah?*

The simple answer to this question is, yes. You may be thinking, "What is so special about Jesus being recognized as Jehovah? Well, this requires some background information. The proper name for God in the Hebrew Bible is *YHWH*. This divine name is called the *tetragrammaton*, which means "four-letters." The *tetragrammaton* was so sacred to ancient Jews that the name was never written in full, or even spoken. In fact, Jews for centuries would substitute the divine name with the name *Adonai*. This led to confusion over exactly how the divine name should be pronounced.

Eventually, Jews began to place the vowels from Adonai (a-o-a) between the consonants YHWH. The result was Yahowah, or Jehovah. So the name Jehovah turns out to be a man-made construction, rather than a biblical term.<sup>3</sup>

### Jesus Is Jehovah

With these preliminary issues out of the way, let's dive into a persuasive argument showing Jesus is Jehovah. It involves two straightforward passages of Scripture, one from the New Testament, and one from the Old Testament. All you have to do is connect these passages together.

Ask your visitors to take out their NWT and turn to Ps. 102:25-27. The psalmist writes,

Long ago you laid the foundations of the earth,  
And the heavens are the work of your hands.  
They will perish, but you will remain.  
Just like a garment they will all wear out.  
Just like clothing you will replace them, and they will pass away.  
But you are the same, and your years will never end. (NWT)

There are two key questions you need to ask about this passage. First, *who* is this text about, that is, who does the "you" in the passage refer to? Make sure you get a clear answer. If they are paying attention to the context, they'll recognize that this text is about Jehovah. The first verse of the Psalm declares, "O Jehovah, hear my prayer. Let my cry for help reach you...." This entire Psalm is actually a short prayer to Jehovah. Indeed, David uses Jehovah's name seven times in the Psalm. Clearly, the *who* in the passage is Jehovah.

Second, *how* is Jehovah described in this text? We are told Jehovah created the heavens and the earth (v. 25), that He does not change—Jehovah is immutable (v. 26-27)—and that Jehovah is eternal (v. 27). He is, therefore, the unique, eternal, changeless, creator God.

Once you have agreement on these points (which should not be at all controversial for the Jehovah's Witness), kindly ask your guests to turn in their NWT

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<sup>3</sup> Ron Rhodes, 50-51.

to Heb. 1:10-12. Before you jump right in, though, it's important to first establish the context. Apologist Ron Rhodes writes:

You might want to point out that the whole focus of Hebrews 1-3 is to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus Christ—including His superiority over the prophets (1:1-4), the angels (1:5-2:18), and Moses (3:1-6). How is this superiority demonstrated? Christ is shown to be God's ultimate revelation (1:1); He is affirmed as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe (1:2-3); and He is said to have the very nature of God (1:3).<sup>4</sup>

In verse 5, we read, "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'?" The obvious answer to this hypothetical question is that God never said that to *any* angel. Rather, in Mark 1:11, God says to *Jesus*, "You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased." This rules out the false doctrine taught by the Watchtower that Jesus is the archangel Michael. Heb. 1 has more to say, though, in v. 6-8:

But when he again brings his Firstborn into the inhabited earth, he says: "And let all of God's angels do obeisance to him." Also, he says about the angels: "He makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." *But about the Son*, he says: "God is your throne forever and ever, and the scepter of your Kingdom is the scepter of uprightness." (NWT)

Clearly, these verses are speaking about the Son. It's tempting at this juncture to point out that with other translations in verse 8 the Father says to the Son, "Your throne, *O God*" (ESV), instead of the NWT's, "God is your throne." Also, in verse 6 every modern translation says the angels *worship* the Son. The NWT translates that word *obeisance* to preserve their anti-Trinitarian doctrine.

Never mind. Let that all go for now. Instead, look closely at the beginning of verse 8, "But about the Son, He says...." So, God is talking about the Son in verses 8 and 9. Now, *still talking about the Son*, the author continues in Heb. 1:10-12:

And: "At the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; and just like a garment, they will all wear out, and you will wrap them up just as a cloak, as a garment, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never come to an end," (NWT)

Do you recognize these words? They are taken directly from Ps. 102:25-27. Remember that our Jehovah's Witness friend has *already agreed* that the description in the Psalm is of the eternal, changeless, creator Jehovah. The "you" in the Psalm is God. Yet, the author of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 178.

clearly attributes *these same attributes* to the Son. The “you” in Heb. 1:10-12 is Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is being identified with Jehovah. So, is Ps. 102:25-27 about Jesus, or is it about Jehovah? The answer is, yes, because Jesus *is* Jehovah.

### Responding to Rejoinders

I’ve used this argument on Jehovah’s Witnesses and have yet to receive a *reasonable* response. In many instances, my guests had no answer to the argument at all. Of course, that doesn’t mean they had nothing to say. There are three basic responses you will likely hear after presenting this argument: a dodge, a downplay, or a distortion.

The first and most common response is to *dodge* the argument by citing other passages they think teach that Jesus is the first created being. It may be helpful at this point to narrate the discussion. Graciously point out that they have not adequately responded to your specific argument. You might want to say something like this:

I’d love to talk about the interpretation of some of these *other passages* with you, but before we move forward, I want to get your thoughts on the argument I’ve already presented. If you don’t have a response or need some time to think about it, I’m fine with that. But as it stands right now it looks like the author of Hebrews provides a powerful argument for Jesus being identified as Jehovah.

If your guests need more time, then give it to them. Don’t be a unpleasant and act like you’ve got them in a corner. Our aim is to get them thinking. We’re putting a stone in their shoe. When they agree to think about it, you’ve accomplished your goal. This might be a good time to schedule another visit so you can follow up on this argument.

The second response I’ve encountered is to *downplay* the attributes in Heb. 1 to fit the description of a created creature. But this simply will not work because the *same attributes* in this passage are used to describe Jehovah. Are we to believe that the infinite God of the universe is being described in the same terms as a mere creature? Ps. 102 is not the description of a created, finite, changing creature; rather, it is a description of the eternal, unchanging Creator. The only honest way to make sense of these two passages is to affirm that Jesus and Jehovah are the same.

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe the archangel Michael changed from an angel into a human named Jesus. Then, after Jesus’ death and resurrection, he changed back to Michael again. This is a *substantial* alteration of one’s being, to say the least. This certainly is not the immutable Being described in Ps. 102 or Heb. 1. The Christian view is not vulnerable to this charge, since we teach that the Second Person of the Godhead *added* a human nature without altering His immutable divine nature.

Third, sometimes a Jehovah’s Witness will resort to *distorting* the argument. I’ve had a few take me back to Hebrews 1:8-9.

But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” (ESV)

The Jehovah’s Witness might point out that this quote from Psalm 45:6-7 is about Solomon. The author of Hebrews takes a passage about Solomon and applies it to Jesus. Does this prove, then, they ask, that Jesus is Solomon? If not, then the application of Psalm 102 to Jesus does not prove He is Jehovah.

This response, though, *distorts* our argument. Psalm 45 shows that, since Solomon was a *type* of Christ, then some things true of Solomon will also be true of Christ. Ps. 102 also teaches that some things true of Jehovah are likewise true of Christ. But that is not because Jehovah is a type of Christ. It is because Jehovah *is* Christ, evidenced by the unique, divine characteristics they both share—eternality, immutability, etc. *That’s* the point being distorted.

The approach I’ve outlined for you can have a powerful impact on your guests.<sup>5</sup> Don’t be surprised, though, if they don’t convert right there on your doorstep. These things take time. Plus, it’s not our job to convict or to convert, but to speak with grace and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. Only God can lift the Watchtower’s veil of darkness that obscures the truth from Jehovah’s Witnesses. Your job is to communicate the truth as clearly and persuasively as possible, then let God use His truth to set people free.

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<sup>5</sup> This same approach can be used with a number of passages from the Old testament referring to Jehovah that are applied in the New Testament to Jesus. For example: Gen. 1:1, Is. 45:18 vs. Jn. 1:1-3; Is. 45:23 vs. Phil. 2:9-11; Is. 45:21 vs. Acts 4:10-12, Jn 4:14; Is. 44:6 vs. Rev. 1:17; and many others like this.