



Are there two classes of Christian?

The Jehovah's Witnesses (JW's) have for many years taught that baptized Christians in their organization fall into two classes, "anointed" (with a heavenly hope) and "other sheep" (with an earthly hope) Christians. This is explained in the following Wikipedia article:

"According to Watch Tower Society theology, salvation requires Christ's mediation as part of God's purpose to grant humans everlasting life, either in heaven (for 144,000 "anointed" Christians, or the "little flock") or on earth (for the "other sheep", the remainder of faithful humanity).^[116] For anointed Witnesses, salvation is said to be achieved through their death and subsequent resurrection to heavenly life to share with Christ as a co-ruler of God's kingdom;^[117] for others, it is gained by preservation through the Great Tribulation and the battle of Armageddon.^{[118][119]} Watch Tower Society publications state that salvation at Armageddon is also contingent on baptism, accurate knowledge of Bible truth, adherence to God's standards of conduct and morality, use of the divine name "Jehovah" in worship,^[120] membership of God's "organization",^[121] and active support of anointed Christians.^[122] Based on a literal interpretation of scriptures such as Revelation 14:1-4, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that exactly 144,000 faithful Christians go to heaven as spirit creatures to rule with Christ in the kingdom of God.^[123] They believe that most of those are already in heaven, and that the "remnant" at Revelation 12:17 (KJV) refers to those remaining alive on earth who will be immediately resurrected to heaven when they die or during the Great Tribulation. The Witnesses understand Jesus' words at John 3:3—"except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"—to apply to the 144,000 who are "born again" as "anointed" sons of

God in heaven.^[124] They associate the terms “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16), “little flock” (Luke 12:32), and “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Revelation 21:9) in the New Testament with the “anointed”.^{[125][126]} . . . Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that being anointed involves a personal revelation by God’s spirit which “gives positive assurance of adoption” to the individual alone.^[128] Only those claiming to be anointed partake of the unleavened bread and wine at the yearly commemoration of Christ’s death, or *Memorial*.”—Wikipedia, Jehovah’s Witnesses Beliefs

Jehovah’s Witnesses Explain Their View

“Countless individuals attending the churches of Christendom have been taught that they will go to heaven. This aspiration, however, is not based on the accurate teachings of the Scriptures. As with the Jews earlier, these want God’s favor only on their own terms. There have been, though, a relatively few in our time who have humbly responded to the Kingdom message, dedicated themselves to Jehovah, and come in line for his favor. This has led to their becoming “sons of the kingdom.” (Matthew 13:38) Such anointed “sons” began to be invited at Pentecost 33 C.E. Jehovah’s Witnesses have long held that the evidence of God’s dealing with his people suggests that fundamentally the members of the heavenly class have been called. Hence, those who have learned Bible truth in recent years have understood that the hope of everlasting life on a paradise earth is now being extended. These have come to outnumber the declining remnant of anointed Christians, who have the prospect of actually going to heaven. Luke 13:24 does not apply principally to those who do not expect to go to heaven, but it certainly contains wise advice for them.”—Watchtower, 6-15-1998, pages 30,31

What Is the Problem?

The JW’s have taken a symbolic number found in **Revelation 7:4-8; 14:1-3**, and made it literal number in their doctrine to limit those Christians who would go to heaven to **“144,000”**.

The Jehovah's Witnesses (and their predecessor group, the International Bible Students) have always taught that there will be only a few years, or decades, until the end of the world. They set a number of dates for this, beginning in the 1870's, that they viewed as more or less fixed by Bible prophecy. Some of these dates were 1874, 1878, 1914, 1925.

The problem that the Jehovah's Witnesses have created for themselves is that: (1) they mistakenly and unscripturally assumed there were not many Christians in the first century; (2) they did not expect the world to go on for as long as it has; and (3) they had long claimed the the number of "anointed" ones would continually decline over time.

As their literal 144,000 number for those who would go to heaven became increasingly untenable due to the advancement of time and their increasing numbers of adherents, in 1935 they came up with a seeming solution to the problem. They claimed there was another class of "non-anointed" Christians, whom they called "other sheep", with an earthly, not a heavenly, hope.

The NT Proves "Anointed"/ "Other Sheep" Doctrine False

*"A qualified elder will give a clear, respectful talk based on what the Bible says about the Lord's Evening Meal. He will explain that Christ died as a ransom so that we may live. (Read **Romans 5:8-10.**) The speaker will also talk about two hopes explained in the Bible"—Watchtower, 12-15-2013, page 25*

As we can see from this quote above, the Jehovah's Witnesses teach there is one baptism with two hopes — one for the "anointed" with the heavenly hope, and another for the "other sheep" with the earthly hope. However, the scriptures plainly contradict such an idea. Notice:

"One body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call" (Ephesians 4:4 NAB). There is not only "one baptism", there is also *"THE one hope of your call"*, not "two hopes", as the JW's teach.

Jehovah's Witnesses (JW's) have thus set up and maintained that there exists a two-class system of true Christians: (1) "anointed" (with a heavenly hope); and (2) "other sheep" (with an earthly hope) Christians. In contrast, Jesus Christ said, **"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16 NRSV)**. *"This phrase indicates Jesus' mission extends beyond the Jewish people, who are the initial "fold." The "other sheep" are often understood to represent the Gentiles, highlighting the inclusivity of the Gospel. This aligns with Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 49:6, which speaks of being a light to the nations. The concept of "fold" suggests a specific group or community, initially the Jewish nation, but Jesus' mission is universal"* (Bible Hub Study Bible).

The New Testament counsels **"that there be no divisions among you" (1 Corinthians 1:10), "you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28), "in which there is no distinction" (Colossians 3:11 LSB)**. Early Christians were corrected for having **"made distinctions among yourselves" (James 2:4 ESV; LSB)**.

Thus, an examination of relevant New Testament texts exposes the JW's "anointed"/"other sheep" class distinction doctrine as false.

Revelation Proves "Anointed"/ "Other Sheep" Doctrine False

How about the book of Revelation? **"The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave Him to show His slaves what must quickly take place. He sent it and made it known through symbols" (Revelation 1:1 HCSB margin)**. *"Revelation . . . abounds . . . in extravagant symbolism . . . Symbolic language . . . is one of the chief characteristics of apocalyptic literature . . . This book contains an account of visions in symbolic and allegorical language . . . A significant feature of apocalyptic writing is the use of symbolic . . . numbers"* (NAB Introduction to Revelation).

"I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of

Israel” (Revelation 7:4 NIV). *“Symbolic of the new Israel (cf. Rev 14:1-5; Gal 6:16; Jas 1:1) that embraces people from every nation, race, people and tongue” (NAB note on Revelation 7:4-9).*

“With your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9 NIV). The JW’s say these “persons” are 144,000 Christians (Revelation 7:4; 14:1,3), who have a heavenly hope of eternal life.

“There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9 NIV). The JW’s say this “great multitude” represents Christians who have an earthly hope of eternal life. If we compare these two groups, we notice that each are from the same ethnic sources, but listed in reverse order. *“The “multitude too large to count” suggests an innumerable assembly, emphasizing the vastness of those who are saved. This echoes God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5), symbolizing the fulfillment of God’s covenant” (Bible Hub Study Bible).* The JW’s claim that only the 144,000 are Abraham’s descendants, however, this, and other scriptures tell us otherwise.

“I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven” (Revelation 19:1 NIV). We notice here a key contradiction in the JW’s interpretation. The “great multitude” is not on earth, but in heaven!

“A great sign appeared . . . a woman clothed with sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant . . . She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations . . . And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne” (Revelation 12:1-5 NIV). *“The woman . . . symbolizes God’s people in the Old and the New Testament. The Israel of old gave birth to the Messiah (Rev 12:5) and then became the new Israel, the church” (NAB note).*

“The Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads” (Revelation 14:1 LSB). It is obvious from the wording that all of this is symbolic. **“And they sang a new song before the throne and before four living creatures and the elders. And no one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been purchased from the earth” (Revelation 14:3 LSB).** *“The 144,000 is a symbolic number representing a complete and perfect group of God’s people. It is derived from the 12 tribes of Israel multiplied by 12,000, indicating fullness and divine order. This group is first mentioned in Revelation 7:4, where they are sealed for protection during tribulation”* (Bible Hub Study Bible). The symbolism of being in heaven continues, explaining that the 144,000 is an exclusive group. The next verse, **verse 4**, explains the qualifications, in symbolic terms, that this group has met to be qualified for heaven. *“The parallel passages (Rev 7:3; 22:4) indicate that the 144,000 whose foreheads are sealed represent all Christian people”* (NAB note on Revelation 14:4). Whereas JW’s claim the 144,000 individuals represent only a very small portion of all true Christians, that is, only those with a heavenly hope, in reality, this number is symbolic of all Christians.

Historical and Biblical Facts Prove Counter the Witnesses’ Claims

First of all, in the 1st century, Christianity grew rapidly, starting with **“about three thousand”**, on the very first day Christianity began in 30 CE, and quickly jumping to **“about five thousand” (Acts 2:41; 4:4 LSB)**. As time went on, **“a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7 LSB)**. So, within a fairly short time, there were at least several thousand Christian Jews. Then, intense persecution broke out against Christians in Judea, which resulted in **“those who had been scattered went about, proclaiming the good news of the word”** farther afield, even to **“Samaria” (Acts 8:4,5 LSB)**.

Further **“persecution”** resulted in scattering Christians to **“Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to . . . Jews alone” (Acts 11:19 LSB)**. However, when when **“the Gentiles also had received the word of God” (Acts 11:1 LSB)**, Christianity

grew even faster, especially in major metropolitan areas such as **“Antioch” (Acts 11:26 LSB)**.

By the late 50's, it was reported that **“many ten thousands there are among the Jews who have believed” (Acts 21:20 LSB)**. These “tens of thousands” do not even include non-Jews. Thus, by the early 60's it was reported that, **“the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world” (Colossians 1:6 NIV)**, that is, all over the Roman Empire. By the end of the 1st century, there likely would at least have been 50,000 Christians.

The Numbers Prove the JW's Views False

“ . . . even by the end of the first century, the number of believers must have been far fewer than 144,000. At that time, Jehovah was selecting men and women to be heirs of the heavenly Kingdom, but the majority of the anointed have been chosen in modern times.”
—Watchtower (Study) 2020, April, p 7

As we can see, the Jehovah's Witnesses teach that all 1st century Christians were “anointed”. Taking into account the higher mortality rates among early Christians due to being killed due to persecution in the 1st century, and their rapid rate of increase, there must have been at least 50,00 to 100,000 Christians at some time during the 1st century. This would account for perhaps half of the supposed total number of 144,000 “anointed” Christians for all time (144,000 - 72,000 = 72,000).

From the 2nd through the 19th centuries, there must have been at least a few genuine Christians on earth at any given time. So, during all these 1800 years, there must have been at least a few thousand faithful Christians.

Jehovah's Witnesses have have kept meticulous records of their numbers.

In the year 1939, there 39,000 of Jehovah's Witnesses who publicly proclaimed they were "of the anointed" by "partaking" of the wine and bread at the Lord's Supper. This number gradually dropped through the years, until by the early 1990's, it was down to only about 8,000 "partakers". Once again, if we take into account a higher mortality rate due to deaths resulting from persecution, and a moderate rate of increase, during the 20th century, there must have been at least 50,000 to 80,000 "anointed" Jehovah's Witnesses.

If we estimate perhaps 5,000 faithful Christians from the 2nd through the 19th centuries, and perhaps 65,000 "anointed" Jehovah's Witnesses during the 20th century, that adds up to about 70,000 (5,000 + 65,000 = 70,000). Already, we can see a big problem for the Jehovah's Witnesses in these estimates (72,000 + 5,000 + 65,000 =142,000).

The Increasing "Anointed" Problem Acknowledged In JW Publications

But the real problem for the Jehovah's Witnesses in this area didn't begin until the early 2000's when the number of "anointed" "partakers" began to grow. By 2024, the number of "anointed" "partakers" had grown to about 23,000. Notice how this problem is acknowledged by the Jehovah's Witnesses:

" Why should we not worry about the number of those who eat the bread and drink the wine at the Memorial? In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of those partaking at the Memorial of Christ's death."-- The Watchtower (Study)—2016, January, pp. 22-27

Blame For Worsening "Anointed" Problem Shifted To Members

But things have continually gotten worse for the Jehovah's Witnesses as the years have gone by. Their explanations reveal their worsening problem:

"For many years, the number of those partaking at the Memorial kept going down. But in recent years, that number has been going up every year. Do we need to worry about this?"

No. Let us consider some key factors to keep in mind.

"Jehovah knows those who belong to him." (2 Tim. 2:19) Unlike Jehovah, the brothers who count the number of those partaking at the Memorial do not know who truly is anointed. So the number includes those who think that they are anointed but are not. For example, some who used to partake later stopped. Others may have mental or emotional problems that make them believe that they will rule with Christ in heaven. Clearly, we do not know exactly how many anointed ones are left on earth."—Watchtower 2020. Jan. p 29,30

The problem of the increasing number of "anointed" Jehovah's Witnesses is explained in 2020 by saying that some of the "anointed": (1) "who think that they are anointed but are not", that is, they don't know what they're doing; and/or (2) "May have mental or emotional problems that make them believe that they will rule with Christ in heaven".

Thus, the Jehovah's Witnesses, rather than admit their teaching has been unscriptural for many years, instead, shift the blame for the problem to their membership, some of whom are said to be mixed up, confused, and mentally unsound. But it is the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses who continue to perpetuate the problem.

Governing Body Selections Undermine JW's Position & Exacerbate the Problem

The JW's Governing Body usually has about 10-12 men on it, all of whom they claim are "anointed". Notice:

"Similarly, today a limited number of anointed men have the responsibility of representing the slave class. They make up the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. These spirit-anointed men oversee the Kingdom work and the spiritual feeding program."—Watchtower, 6-15-2009, page 24

In the October 2025 Watchtower two new governing body members were announced who appear to be no older than their early 50's. These men would have had to become "anointed"

sometime in recent years. The problem for the JW's is that their rank and file members are given an example to follow in these leading men. This would naturally tend to encourage some among them to think, "Why can't I be anointed"; or "perhaps I am anointed". This only continues to exacerbate the problem for the future, the longer time goes by in this world, as more and more JW's become "anointed", and the literal 144,000 number becomes increasingly untenable.

At some point in the future, it will likely become obvious to the JW's rank and file members that the literal 144,000 of "anointed" Christians is unscriptural.