

# Christian Response to the Jehovah Witnesses Rejection of the Trinity

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The purpose of this essay is to provide an introductory survey of the Jehovah's Witnesses' views of the Trinity. The length of the paper does not allow an examination of every theologian or tradition who might have influenced the subject matter. However, by examining key aspects of the Jehovah's Witnesses' thought process, one can determine the driving factors as to their belief system. By noting biblical text and the inferences obtained from the texts, the intention is to provide a Christian response to the Jehovah's Witnesses understanding of the Trinity. The response is based on a comparative analysis of historical and Scriptural data related to the Fourth Century Arians, which is reflected in the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses of the Twenty-First Century. The Witnesses on the surface utilize various elements of the Scriptures in exercising their faith, however, they neglect critical points consistent with the Trinity that would further enhance their understanding.

## **Historical View of Arianism**

In 319 A.D., Arius of Alexandria, a noted scholar and presbyter of the church of Alexandria, became the originating source of the controversial

issue which developed amongst Christian orthodox believers who affirm Jesus Christ as truly God, truly man, and the individuals identifying themselves as Arians who attest to Jesus Christ as being the first and foremost of all God's creations, being created in time and therefore elevated to the ranking of a God. A primary point of contention between the two was that of the Trinity, identifying it as the Biblical, preeminent doctrine of the Three Persons-in-one God. Arian heresy was identified with the Father, being God, giving birth to Jesus Christ, the Son being born and, therefore, having an origination point of existence. This meant that the Son was once not, and, therefore, he was also created into being. This heresy led by Arius set in motion threatening thoughts that were potentially destructive to Christianity by questioning Christian faith in the Lord with regards to Christ as God's true Son. The Arians' stringent attempts to undermine Christian theological views were a major catalyst leading to the convening of the Council of Nicaea which interceded in the controversy.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Council of Nicaea**

The Council of Nicaea was held in 325 A.D. in Bithynia during the Fourth Century. The council debated on the controversy surrounding the Trinity and developed a highly important and blissful truth which Christians have held inviolate down through many centuries. This truth boldly affirms and states there is only one God who is eternally residing in three separate and distinct Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—all in agreement, with equitable unity of substance, will and power; neither dividing the substance nor confounding the Persons.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wiles, Maurice. *Archetypal Heresy - Arianism through the Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Kaye, John. *Some Account of the Council of Nicaea in Connection with the Life of Athanasius* (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1853), 1-14.

The Trinity still remains unsolved for some even today in the twenty- first century. The issues presented during the time of Nicaea still persist today due to a rationalist thought process determined to examine God in the context of scientific methodology, and, in doing so, reject what cannot be perceived as reasonable. God is dishonored by individuals who hold to a belief that Lord Jesus the Son is identified as a god of might but not viewed as Jehovah God. Though the verbiage is slightly different, it is clearly evident that it is the same old doctrinal concepts, disguised more eloquently and identified under a new heading of The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, more commonly called the Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>3</sup>

A line was drawn in the sand by the Council of Nicaea based off of the double-talking theological beliefs of the Arians and the sound, Biblically-based pronouncements in reference to the doctrinal teachings concerning the Trinity. The Arians willfully ascribed all titles and attributes of the Father to Jesus Christ, with the exception of the primary thing that alone would entitle Jesus to be identified as a true deity: equity in the true Substance of Nature of His Father.<sup>4</sup> The Scriptures declare exactly what has been taught within the Christian Church, specifically that God is Everlasting Sovereign, Redeemer and Creator, and he has decreed that there will come a day when every knee will bend to the name of Jesus Christ and every tongue will make a confession that He is Lord, glorifying the name of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).<sup>5</sup>

Did the Council of Nicaea resolve the issue of the Trinity? Absolutely not! However, the Council of Nicaea did reveal one truth which Christians within the church have held onto through the ages. This belief faithfully affirms and states Christian beliefs in one eternal God

existing in three distinct and separate Persons: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; three Persons, yet one in unity of Substance, agreement of will and equality of power. However, today in the twenty-first century, the doctrine of the Trinity still appears to be an unresolved issue. There are those individuals who continue to be staunch advocates of the Arian views that the Son is not identified as Jehovah God, but a mighty God. It is clearly evident to Christians today that the old Arian heresy still persists. The views today are disguised by eloquent verbiage and a more aggressive approach, but it appears to be the same old doctrine which continues to create controversy for orthodox Christianity, by those individuals identifying themselves as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.<sup>6</sup>

### **Jehovah's Witnesses Rejection of the Trinity**

The Jehovah's Witnesses of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society was established by Charles Taze Russell, also identified as Pastor Russell, in the year 1884. Pastor Russell officially incorporated the organization utilizing the title Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Charles Taze Russell was both the first president and founder of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society and the individual who was the catalyst for the existence of the organization which is more commonly known today as the Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>7</sup>

The Jehovah's Witnesses present many points to support their irrational argument against the deeply held orthodox Christian doctrinal views of the Trinity. Two points will be presented in this paper in conjunction with the traditional Christian viewpoints in response to the Jehovah's Witnesses assertions. The first issue Jehovah's

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<sup>3</sup> Walter, Martin R. *Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> The King James Version utilized throughout paper, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> Carden, Paul. *Christianity Cults & Religions* (Torrance: Rose Publishing, 1996), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, Walter. *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 50.

Witnesses present is that the terminology concerning the Trinity is not identified in the Scriptures and no clear instruction is provided on the subject. The Witnesses assert that the terminology and teachings were developed well after the time period of Jesus Christ and His Apostles. Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Trinity to be a product created by man and therefore should not be held to because it contributes to the corruption of the Christian faith.<sup>8</sup>

In reference to the assertion that the terminology identifying the Trinity is not specifically identified in Scripture, the question that must be asked is if the concept or doctrine is contained in the Bible, not just the specific word or verbiage which identifies a doctrinal concept. Ron Rhodes provides a great example of this in his writings. Rhodes identifies the fact that the word Jehovah is not identified specifically within the Greek or Hebrew Biblical manuscripts. The word Jehovah was construed by formulating the first three vowels for the word Lord from the Hebrew word Adonai and creating the name Yahowah or Jehovah by inserting the three vowels into the constants YHWH.

In order to not accidentally violate God's third commandment a substitution for God's name was formulated by the Jewish people. Therefore, is the doctrinal concept of Jehovah in the Bible false due to the fact the word does not actually appear? Absolutely not! Although no writer of the Bible presented the doctrine of the Trinity utilizing the specified terminology, it is continuously, effortlessly and indelibly presented throughout the Bible. The doctrinal concept is so well presented that when heretics such as Arius were interrogated by the Council of Nicea, his claims were able to be refuted by the clear teachings of the Scriptures.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of the Trinity for Christians is explained in the belief of only one true God. The

Father, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are the three Persons who make up this one God. The Godhead consists of a three-in-oneness. On differing moments identified in the Bible each of the three Persons is credited with the divine attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, eternity and perfect holiness. The fact that God is a unity of persons or a compilation is the inference that should be identified. The truth of the matter is that, based on the Jehovah's Witnesses belief system that Jesus is the Jehovah incarnate, they are then unable to provide a reasonable explanation as to who was in Heaven while Jesus Christ was on the cross.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, the Jehovah's Witnesses declare that the doctrine of the Trinity must be false because it is confusing and makes no sense. The Witnesses place emphasis on the fact that things pertaining to God should be reasonable. The individuals utilize various Scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 14:33, which states that God is not the author of confusion. Therefore, since the doctrine of the Trinity is very confusing, it must not be from God but made up by mankind instead.

There are numerous areas where this thought process can be attacked. First, consideration must be given as to what, exactly, the Scriptures state concerning the matter. As noted in Isaiah 1:18, it is clearly a matter of salvation and forgiveness when God was inviting His people to come together and reason. The chapter context is about providing Israel a warning, rebuke, instructions and invitation. God desired Israel to avoid His wrath and appealed to their common sense in order to remain obedient to Him. God does indeed appeal to Christian understanding and reason. God reveals Himself in order that true believers may know and understand. If He did not enlighten Christians,

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<sup>8</sup> Department Of Christian Defense, Doctrine of the Trinity, accessed 10 October 2010, available: [http://christiandefense.org/jw\\_objecttrin.htm](http://christiandefense.org/jw_objecttrin.htm); Internet.

<sup>9</sup> Rhodes, Ron. *Ten Most Important Things You Can Say to a Jehovah's Witness* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 35.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 1.

how else would they be able to respond appropriately to Him by seeking obedience to that which He has commanded? God allows mankind to come, and be accepted, in the state he is in. God does not desire or command that mankind deeply investigate His nature and seek full comprehension of Him. He simply desires that man obey what He has commanded and in doing so magnify and glorify His name.<sup>11</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 14:33, Paul writes about the observable confusion and disorder within the church services at Corinth, due to spiritual gifts being improperly utilized. The passage is completely misconstrued by the Jehovah's Witnesses. In his divinely inspired writing Paul is not attempting to identify that any doctrinal concept which challenges Christian understanding is not of God or inherently false. It is reprehensible that the Jehovah's Witnesses would attempt to imply that mortal creatures could obtain an understanding of God the infinite Creature.

Secondly, it must be determined by Christians if God always provides reasoning for what He may ask Christians to believe as the truth. The Sacred Scriptures are a valuable resource in many ways by providing viable explanations as to why situations in the world are perceived the way they are. However good the Scriptures are, they do not give Christians a reason for everything. One good example of this is the fact that God never identifies the rationale for the creation of Lucifer and why he was allowed to rebel by having freedom to interfere with the lives of Adam and Eve, causing them to fall into sin. The information cannot be rejected by Christians because it is deemed unreasonable to believe that God would allow such events to take place.<sup>12</sup>

Are Christians to believe what the Bible states or lean towards their own understanding? When Christians are personally stricken with tragedy are they to have an expectation that God

will personally notify them why He allowed evil to touch their life? God advises Christians in His written word, such as Romans 8:28, where He reminds them that all things work together for good. God enlightens Christians with His word so that they will know and understand that all things are conducted in accordance with His divine master plan.

When Christians cannot make sense of God's word should they refuse to believe He is God? Or should they continue to trust in God and continue the journey with Him? The Christians cannot fully comprehend nor completely understand God. There is much that God does that will never be grasped by simple created beings, similar to an infant child that is unable to comprehend all that its own father does and is. Yet the infant child trusts and loves his father anyway. The miracles of God are another example of just how good He is to His creations. Should Christians seek out or require an explanation from God concerning how He is going to work a miracle in their life before they accept it? Based on their beliefs, the Jehovah's Witnesses would not require that because they claim to believe in miracles. If they believe in miracles then how can they continually reject that which God claims to consist of within His own nature? For Jehovah's Witnesses to assume that Christians need to fully understand God before they can accept Him is in itself totally unreasonable.<sup>13</sup>

### **Christian Response to Jehovah's Witnesses Rejection of the Trinity**

The word Trinity is made up of two Latin words – *tri*, meaning three, and *unus*, meaning one. The specific word is not found in the Bible, but it is used to indicate the three Personalities of God. The point is not whether the verbiage Trinity appears in the Scriptures. The fact is that God has revealed Himself in Scriptures as God

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 8

<sup>13</sup> Reed, David A. *Jehovah's Witnesses Answered Verse by Verse* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 7-16.

the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It is not a question whether such a teaching is reasonable or understandable. Christians cannot fully understand the world around them. God is far beyond Christian reason and understanding. It is also not a question of whether the Council of Nicaea upheld the doctrine of the Trinity with the development of the Nicene Creed. Christian faith rests on divine Scriptures, not on human creeds and innuendo. Ancient pagans may have worshipped trinities of gods. Their perverted belief does not make the Trinity a pagan error. The decisive question is: What does the Bible say?<sup>14</sup>

The Bible mentions three Persons who share equally in the divinity identified of God. It is in this divine name that Christians are to be baptized: into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Over and over within the Scriptures the differentiation is made between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Scriptures identify specific works to each of the various three Persons in the Godhead, all Persons share in the workings of each other.

As identified in the Bible there is “one Lord” (Ephesians. 4:5). Jesus prayed to the “Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Matthew. 11:25). James 2:1 speaks of “Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory,” and 2 Corinthians 3:17 states, “The Lord is the Spirit.” There is “one Spirit” (Ephesians 4:4). He is “the Holy Spirit” (Matthew. 28:19), “the Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9), and “the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead” (Romans 8:11). The Spirit creates (Psalm 104:30). The Son of God is the Creator (Hebrews 1:10). The Father made all things (1 Corinthians 8:6). The Father and the Son make their home in the man of Christ (John 14:23). Although a triune God is without a shadow of a doubt presented in the Scriptures, the Jehovah’s Witnesses make it clear they do not subscribe to

the doctrine of the Trinity. In one of their publications the Jehovah’s Witnesses comment that teaching on a Triune God is Satan’s attempt to prevent God-fearing people from studying and learning the true facts surrounding Jehovah and Jesus Christ His Son. The truth of Scripture as identified is that there are three divinely distinctive Persons. The three personalities have equality within their characteristics, but they are one being. They are not identified as three separate and distinct gods, but only one eternal God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It does not matter whether collectively or separately the three are properly called God.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Arians of the Twenty-First Century**

The doctrinal concept that the Son was made out of nothing, not born of God the Father, and identified as a created being based on the scientific language of the times, is the fundamental tenet of Arianism. It instructed that Jesus Christ, being made at the good pleasure of God prior to the worlds, possessed only a super angelic nature, patterned after the Wisdom or Logos attribute, created before time as an entity existing in the Divine Mind and gifted with the illumination of it. He was called into the world and wisdom based on the consequences, thus, at length, uniting with a human body and in the place of the soul, becoming the person of Jesus Christ and inheriting the title of God. Jesus Christ’s personal existence was dated based on the time period of His manifestation by the followers of Arianism.<sup>16</sup>

The Arians during the fourth century believed in this rationalist point of view. They also reasoned that Jesus Christ, as the begotten Son, could not be identified as the eternal Son of God because there was only one true God. Jesus was the being first created by God the Father. The

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<sup>14</sup> Robert M. Bowman. *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 22-23.

<sup>15</sup> Ankerberg Institute. “Jehovah’s Witnesses Teachings”, accessed 13 Nov 2010,

<http://www.johnankerberg.org/Articles/apologetics.htm>, Internet.

<sup>16</sup> John H. Newman. *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1908), 201.

Arians continued to base their assertions on various references of Scripture identifying the Son's begetting, stressing that it refers to His original creation.<sup>17</sup>

The issue came to an impasse at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., the church reaffirmed that the Son, rather than being solely of a similar substance with man, with a beginning in time, was of the similar substance with God the Father, thereby being eternal. The one Person of the Son of God had both a complete human and a complete divine nature in the incarnation. That is, He presented an expression of His personhood on earth to as great a degree as human nature would allow. Basically, the Person of the Son added to himself a complete human nature.<sup>18</sup>

Are the Jehovah's Witnesses basically Arians of the twenty-first century? The Watchtower organization basically maintains the same viewpoints of Jesus Christ as those that were condemned by the early church at Nicea 325 A.D., when the importation of Greek philosophical presuppositions were repudiated from being introduced into the world view of Christians. A filtering of the word of God should not be conducted via a humanistic strainer of rationalist assumptions reflective of paganism.<sup>19</sup>

The Arians applied doctrine in a complex manner that altered virtually everything the Bible teaches in reference to the Trinity and numerous other areas of the Scriptures, such as the bodily resurrection, justification by faith alone, and eternal punishment. The Watchtower, similar to the Arian doctrine, denies the Gospel of Christ and many teachings of significance. Therefore, the Jehovah Witnesses based on their own doctrinal teachings appear to be on one accord with Arianism of the past.<sup>20</sup>

A biblical perspective on the relationship between the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian orthodoxy is necessary to draw their relevance and implications for today. On one hand, to deny the deity of Jesus Christ is to undermine the basis for eternal salvation and the true meaningfulness of Christianity. The pastoral implications are significant in the fact that Christian faithfulness and effective witnessing can be corrupted by the unorthodox Arian doctrine espoused by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The question for those seeking salvation is, what must be done to be saved? This is life's crucial question. The apostle Paul responds to the question in the Scriptures when he comments that those who believe in the Lord will be saved (Acts 16:31). The Bible also identifies the fact that the Lord loved the world so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ and who shall believe in Him shall not perish but obtain eternal life through Him. (John 3:16).

The Sacred Scriptures clearly teach that Christians are saved from dying without being forgiven for their sins and receive eternal life by placing complete trust in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom the Father provided as a sacrifice in their place.

Jehovah's Witnesses stress to others that salvation cannot be obtained outside of their organizational membership guidelines. The teachings stress three avenues to obtain eternity. First is the Heavenly Kingdom Class – Limited to 144,000 individuals and also called the John Class. The group consists of selected Jehovah's Witnesses and the number started in 1893 upon execution of the organizations first official baptism ceremony. The second is Earth – the group consist of all other members and makeup the great multitude identified in Revelation 7:9

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 1-7

<sup>19</sup> McGregor, R. K. *Darkness to Light*. "Jesus is Jehovah," accessed 12 November 2010,

<http://www.dtl.org/trinity/article/jehovah.htm> ; Internet.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 69-81

the chosen to live forever in a restored earth. The third is Soul Sleep and Annihilation – the remainder of society, all who are not members of the organization.<sup>21</sup>

The Jehovah's Witnesses identify the fact that they do not preach salvation based on grace and state that one's destiny will be determined based upon their works. They claim that individuals who join and are baptized gain eternal life, however their destiny is still contingent on works. The Jehovah's Witnesses need to heed the words of Norman L. Geisler when he commented in his warning to biblical scholars that any methodology that is inconsistent with Biblical guidance or good common reason should be rejected. In addition, he advised to always choose Lordship over scholarship. What stands true for philosophical arguments should in essence also stand true for historical arguments. The concept for biblical exegetes is similar. The adoptions of invalid, faulty methodology such as Arianism will more than likely lead to the execution of improper theology.<sup>22</sup>

It is clearly evident that although Jehovah's Witnesses vocalize Jesus as the Savior and of salvation as the free gift of God, the organization believes that Jesus death was nothing more than a human sacrifice for the original sin only and that salvation is dependent in part on the works of a man. While true believers in Jesus are certain of their salvation in this present life, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that salvation offers only an opportunity after the resurrection to receive eternal life. In short, Jehovah's Witnesses dishonor Christ, denying His deity, and thus deprive themselves of the eternal salvation He came to provide.<sup>23</sup>

The Bible, which was preserved and inspired down through the centuries by Jehovah, should be accepted with His word intact by those who consider themselves to be true witnesses. The New World Translation should be rejected by true witnesses, because of its additives that alter the word of God by erroneous teachings that Jehovah is not disturbed by improper utilization of His name and many other alterations of doctrinal significance of His sacred word. The meaning of Jehovah's name should be honored by true witnesses who know that He is the sovereign and absolute Lord of all. True witnesses do not diminish His greatness by denying that He was able to incarnate Himself in Jesus Christ and that He knows all things, or denying that He transcends space and time. True witnesses of Jehovah follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and are considered faithful and true witnesses for Christ, who instructed His disciples to witness for Him. The true witnesses wholeheartedly accept the teachings of the New Testament that identify Jesus Himself as Jehovah. Therefore, purely based on their own volitions the Jehovah's Witnesses do not appear to be true faithful witnesses at all!<sup>24</sup>

Jehovah's Witnesses, by their name alone, present an image of faithfulness and appear to be very proud of being able to utilize the name Jehovah in such a manner. A sense of irony is created based on the Biblical passage which the name Jehovah is based. In fact, the passage reveals that the Jehovah's Witnesses doctrine is incorrect and that they are not faithful at all. The passage, Isaiah 43:10-11, reveals the truth which is to be testified to: that Jehovah is the only God and the only Savior. An examination of the Jehovah's Witnesses from a Biblical basis reveals

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<sup>21</sup> Kern, Herbert. *How to Respond to The Jehovah's Witnesses* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1973), 27-32.

<sup>22</sup>Geisler, Norman L. "Beware Of Philosophy", accessed 3 October 2010, <http://www.ses.edu/Portals/0/journal/article.pdf>; Internet

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 73

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 69-109

that they are not on the side of Jehovah. The Witnesses diminish His greatness, deny His incarnation in the Lord Jesus Christ and distort His word. The Jehovah's Witnesses mouth His name; their interpretation of the Bible is clear proof that they are unfaithful to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup>

Jehovah's Witnesses stringently confess the fact that the Sacred Scriptures are the inerrant word of the Lord. Yet, the confession is effectively nullified by the manner in which they interpret and apply Scripture. The Jehovah's Witnesses have a desire to comprehend mankind's existence and how God deals with man, but, in doing so, they twist the Scriptures in a manner that creates a favorable approach to the agenda desired. The Bible, supposedly inerrant to them, is overshadowed by the Jehovah's Witnesses strong desire to make the Watchtower

Himself. This is clearly visible in the fact that the Watchtower Society deems it necessary to reinforce the organization's doctrinal policy, in virtually all publications, that the Jehovah's Witnesses must remain uncritically accepting and trustful of all aspects of the teachings provided by the faithful and discreet slave.<sup>26</sup>

It is the hope of all Christians that Jehovah's Witnesses will be challenged to abandon the unstable foundation of the Watchtower Organization and build their own personal faith on the solid foundation of the Sacred Scriptures. In the word of God alone is found unerring truth about God that is both reasonable and beyond the ability of human reason to comprehend. The hope and prayer of Christians is that the Jehovah's Witnesses by God's grace will come to know this incomparable and infinitely amazing God.

Society the primary focus rather than Jehovah

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<sup>25</sup> Bowman, Robert M. *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 119 - 123.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 72-73



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