

Jehovah Witnesses

The name Jehovah Witnesses was adopted in 1931 by the movement founded by Charles Taze Russell in the 1870s. Russell was born in 1852 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His family was Congregationalists but Russell reacted strongly against his religious upbringing. Russell was unable to reconcile God's mercy with the idea of hell. Influenced by the Adventists, he adopted a doctrine of millennialism. He founded the International Bible Students Association in 1872 (renamed Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931) which grew into a major cult.

At the age of eighteen he started a Bible class in Pittsburgh, and this group grew into the organization which we now know as the Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1876 Russell became the group's pastor, and in 1879 he started a magazine, Zion's Watchtower, the forerunner of today's Watchtower. Russell's organization became the Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society in 1884.

In 1908 Russell moved the headquarters of his organization to Brooklyn, New York. The organization has been based in Brooklyn ever since. Russell focused his mission on the students of New York which he used as the launching pad for his worldwide mission. He pioneered the door-to-door evangelistic scheme to promote his teachings and recruit members.

In 1886 Russell published the first of a series of seven books entitled Studies in the Scriptures. Volume 6 appeared in 1904 and the seventh volume in 1917, a year after Russell's death. The publication of Volume 7 of Studies in the Scriptures led to a schism in the organization. The majority of members followed J. F. Rutherford, while a smaller group formed itself into the Dawn Bible Student's Association.

This group is still in existence and publishes the Dawn magazine, which has a circulation of about 30,000 copies. The larger group following Rutherford became today's Jehovah's Witnesses. Their magazine, The Watchtower, has a circulation of over 64 million worldwide.

Following Russell's death in 1916 Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford became the leader of the organization. An able organizer, he developed the group into its present organization. Rutherford wrote over a hundred books and fundamentally shaped the group's theology.

He increased its hostility toward organized religion and developed a variety of highly successful missionary methods. Rutherford, who was born in 1869, died in 1942, leaving behind an organization which has continued to grow at a remarkable rate.

In 1981 the Jehovah's Witnesses were shaken by a series of schisms which led to a large number leaving the organization. The leader of the opposition to the Brooklyn headquarters group was Professor James Penton, a Canadian, whose family had been among Russell early converts, who left the group because of leadership, financial and doctrinal disagreement.

Penton and those who sided with him sought to reemphasize the doctrine of justification by faith and return the group to its original interest in Bible study. The intention of Penton and other Witnesses who shared his ideas appears to have been to reform the group from within.

The Brooklyn leadership strongly rejected their arguments and expelled anyone who supported their views. Although this division was a serious one, it appears that the majority of Witnesses remained within the official organization, which retained control over all of the group's assets.

As a religious organization, the Jehovah's Witnesses are typical of many nineteenth century groups. Although their theology bears some resemblance to that of the Arians in early church history, they are essentially a modern group strongly influenced by rationalism. Like many other new religions in the nineteenth century the Witnesses represent a strong reaction to the scientific world view.

The rationalism of the group can be seen in their rejection of Trinitarian doctrines and traditional teachings about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Their rationalistic attitude toward the Bible comes out in their literal interpretation of prophecy and failure to appreciate the symbolic character of biblical language.

Their rejection of blood transfusions reflects this rejection of modern science as well as the extreme literalism of their exegesis.

In attempting to justify their interpretation of Christianity and rejection of orthodoxy, the Witnesses produced their own translation of the Bible, The New World Translation.

The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures and The New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, in 1950. Although this work claims to be a translation, the Witnesses have yet to name the translators or prove their credentials as competent scholars. What one finds in fact is a rendering of the Bible in terms of the theology of the organization.

Probably the best introduction to the theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses is their book Let God Be True. In addition to their rejection of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity they teach a number of distinct doctrines.

In their view the atonement is a ransom paid to the God Jehovah by Jesus Christ which removes the effects of Adam's sin, laying the foundation for a new righteousness and enabling men to save themselves by their good works.

They teach that Jesus was resurrected a divine spirit after offering this ransom to God. At death humans either sleep until the resurrection or, if they are evil, suffer annihilation. In their view Jesus Christ returned to earth spiritually in 1914 and is now proceeding to overthrow Satan's worldly organization and to establish a theocratic millennial kingdom.

This kingdom will arrive in the near future with the battle of Armageddon. After Armageddon true believers will be resurrected to a life on earth while a select group of 144,000 will rule in heaven with Christ. In addition, the Jehovah's Witnesses reject the professional ministry and, until recently, the idea of church buildings. They are pacifists and call upon their members to have nothing to do with worldly politics, which they regarded as the organized evil.

Today there are over three million Witnesses worldwide. They have an extensive missionary network throughout the world and operate in most countries. In some places, particularly in Africa, the Witnesses have suffered severe persecution.

In others, especially North America, they are rapidly coming to resemble a reasonably sized religious denomination. The Witnesses rejects the following Christian doctrines:

The doctrine of Trinity: the Triune God [One in essence, three in Persons], (Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19, Genesis 1:26, 11:7).

Christ is truly God: the Deity of Christ (John 1:1, 56:18, 23, 8:58, 17:5, 20:28, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6, Philippians 2:8-11, Hebrews 1:1-4,13:8, Romans 9:5, 1 John 5:20).

The physical, bodily resurrection of Christ, (Luke 24:39-44, John 20:27-28, Mark 16:14, 1 Corinthians 15:15)

The physical return of Christ (Revelation 1:7, Matthew 24:30, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, Zechariah 12:10)

The existence of Hell and eternal punishment, (Revelation 20:15, 14:9-11, Matthew 5:22, 8:11-12, 13:42, 50) The final state of Satan (Revelation 20:10, Matthew 25:41)

Human government is ordained by God (Romans 13:1-7), the divine establishment (institution) of government is created for protection of the citizenry.

The existence of the human soul (Isaiah 53:3, 1 Corinthians 6:20, 11:7, Acts 7:59, Job 32:8), and man created in the image of God, (Genesis 1:26, Matthew 26:38)

The complete satisfaction of Christ's work at the cross (Romans 5:10, 11, 17, 19, John 1:29, 6:44, Revelation 13:8, Hebrews 9:22, 1 Peter 2:24, Colossians 1:20, 2 Corinthians 5:21)

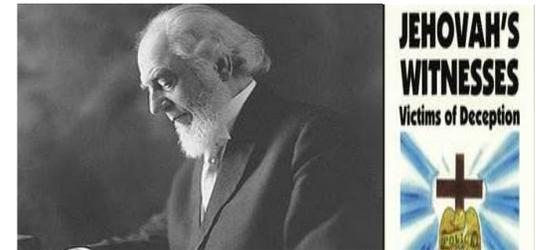
The Witnesses are post millennialists whose beliefs are distortedly based primarily on the apocalyptic sections of the Bible, notably Daniel and the Book of Revelation. They refuse to perform military service or salute the flag, actions which have brought them into direct conflict with governments around the world.

They are famous for their door-to-door evangelizing and for refusing blood transfusions; they claimed there is scriptural justification for all their actions and beliefs.

The Witnesses openly violates and defy the divine institution of government and reject any form of legitimate submission. They regarded every human government and politics in general as evil.

The goal of the Witnesses is the establishment of "God's kingdom" on earth, rule by "144, 000 Jehovah Witnesses" in heaven. The teachings of the Witnesses are combination of several cultic doctrines bounded with distorted interpretation of biblical prophecy.

Numerous unfulfilled prophecies resulted to successful schisms which they covered up with religious reasoning. The Witnesses advocates human good works motivated by pseudo-righteousness, religious ethics and morality that is admirable before men but regarded by God as evil. The Jehovah Witness is a cult of good works.



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