

Jehovah's Witnesses

© 2007, Center for Interfaith Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.

Gary Leazer, Ph. D.

Introduction

Official Name: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

Common Name: Jehovah's Witnesses (adopted in 1931)

Founder: Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) in 1884

Current Leader: Don A. Adams (1925-)

Headquarters: (Bethel) Brooklyn, New York

Scripture: New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT)

Members (or "Publishers"): 1996 statistics: 5.4 million in 233 countries and territories; U.S.: 985,367. 2006 statistics: 6.7 million in 236 countries and territories; U.S.: 1,059,325.

Place of Study/Worship: Kingdom Hall. 1996: 81,908 worldwide; U.S.: 10,789. 2006: 99,660 worldwide; U.S.: 12,390.

Hours of Visitation: 2006: 1.33 billion hours worldwide; U.S.: 194,815,417 hours.

Baptisms: 1996: 366,579 worldwide; U.S.: 44,060. 2006: 248,327; U.S.: 28,915

Leaders

1. Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)

- Questioned and rejected doctrines of hell, Trinity, and conscious immortality of the soul at death.
- Organized small Bible study groups.
- Worked out a theory on Christ's second coming in 1914.

2. "Judge" Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869-1942)

- Given credit for the 1935 theory of two classes of citizenship in the Kingdom of God: 144,000 "elect" in heaven and "a great multitude" on a paradise Earth.
- Organized Jehovah's Witnesses into a well-disciplined group.

3. Nathan H. Knorr (1905-1977)

- Extended worldwide organization.
- Advocated a less abrasive door-to-door approach.
- Led in publication of the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT)

4. Frederick Franz (1893-1992)

- Served on "the translation committee" for the NWT.

5. Milton G. Henschel (1920-2003)

- Also served on "the translation committee" for the NWT.

6. Don A. Adams (1925-)

- Became president in 2000 after Watchtower reorganization.

Major Teachings of the Watchtower Society

1. One God: God is one and cannot have any being equal to Him. The doctrine of the Trinity is rejected as Satanic. The Society claims the doctrine was forced upon the early church in 325 A.D. by the pagan emperor Constantine.

The only true name for God is "Jehovah." The name is used 241 times in the NWT; only four times in the King James Version.

God is not omnipresent. "His throne is in heaven." God is the Creator, all-powerful and requires exclusive devotion, a teaching that prohibits Jehovah's Witnesses from taking oaths.

The Holy Spirit is not God; "it" is "God's invisible, impersonal active force in the world." The name "holy spirit" is not capitalized in the NWT. The personality of the Holy Spirit is denied. John 14:26 is changed in the NWT to read "that one" to reflect this Watchtower teaching.

2. Jesus Christ: Jesus was God's first created being – as Michael the Archangel. In other words, there was a time when Jesus did not exist. As

Michael, Jesus created "all [other] things" (Col. 1:16 in NWT; brackets are found in the NWT).

Jesus is not co-equal or co-eternal with God the Father. John 1:1 has been changed in the NWT to read "and the Word was a god" to reflect this teaching. Jesus is a Mighty God (Isa. 9:6), but not Almighty God. For Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus is more than man, but less than God, reflecting an early Arian heresy condemned by the Church. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses do not worship Jesus, but only Jehovah. In the NWT, the word "worship" in Heb. 1:6 is changed to "do obeisance to."

Jesus gave up his divine nature and became a perfect man on Earth – equal to Adam before Adam sinned. His virgin birth is accepted. His birth occurred on October 1, 2 B.C.E.¹ Jesus is the Son of God, having been adopted by God as His Son at Jesus' baptism.

Jesus died as a "ransom sacrifice" to prove Satan is a false god and to give his life as a ransom sacrifice to Jehovah. According to Witnesses, a perfect man (Adam) brought sin into the world, which required another perfect man as the sacrifice. By his death, Jesus canceled the sin of the world and balanced "the scales of justice."² A Watchtower illustration shows Jesus and Adam standing on balanced scales.

Jesus died on a "torture stake," not a cross. (His hands were nailed together above his head on the single pole.)

Jesus rose spiritually, not physically, from the grave. God took care of his physical body. His physical appearances before his ascension were "temporary physical manifestations."

Jesus was given immortality and divinity at his resurrection – as He was prior to his earth life – as a reward for his faithful life on earth.

3. Mankind: Adam, the first man, was created in 4026 B.C.E., "around October 1." Adam was created in the image of Jehovah God, perfect and sinless, but he willfully and deliberately disobeyed God. Because of Adam's sin, paradise was forfeited, and disease and death spread to all humans. Annihilation is the destiny of the dead.

Man is a soul; he does not have a soul. The soul is mortal and subject to death. The spirit refers to the life force in a person. The physical body plus the impersonal spirit is the soul or living being. The spirit gives life to the soul; at death, God takes back the spirit.

At death, the soul ceases to exist. Nothing of man exists between death and the resurrection, when God, who has a perfect memory, creates a new body and restores the spirit to make the soul live again.

4. Salvation: Salvation by grace through faith is necessary, but it must be completed by good works. The reward of eternal life requires hard work.³ Salvation requires:

- Baptism by immersion by a male Jehovah's Witness; infant baptism is not practiced. Baptisms are received in district conventions, not at Kingdom Halls. Portable pools are used. Couples may be baptized together while holding their arms around each other "In the name of the Father, Son and spirit-controlled organization."
- Active association with the Watchtower Society.
- Regular visitation, called work "to provide spiritual food" to those who seek the truth. Jehovah's Witnesses believe they alone have been commissioned to call people from Satan's bondage to Jehovah God.

¹ Jehovah's Witnesses use B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era), instead of B.C. and A.D.

² *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, p. 144.

³ *The Watchtower*, 15 August 1972, pp. 491-497.

- Righteous conduct, especially sexual conduct. While use of alcoholic beverages is permitted, smoking is prohibited.
- Absolute loyalty to Jehovah God, which is interpreted as meaning taking no oaths or serving in the armed forces (which requires an oath).

There is no assurance of salvation, only a hope for the resurrection. Jehovah's Witnesses have said, "I hope I will be saved in the resurrection." "It is not enough merely to start out in Jehovah's service or to endure for a short while. We are in a race, and the prize goes to those who cross the finish line. Happy will all those be who are still exerting themselves with their eyes firmly fixed on the prize when this old system crashes in ruins."⁴

5. Kingdom of God: The Kingdom of God was established on 1 October 1914 when the seven "times of the Gentiles" ended. Jesus' "presence" since 1914 rather than His Second Coming is preferred by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Russell arrived at the 1914 date from his study of the passageways inside the Great Pyramid. The Great Pyramid represents "the earth and God's plan with reference to it."⁵

Today, Jehovah's Witnesses arrive at 1914 by claiming Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C.E. (rather than 587-6 B.C. as held by Christian and Jewish scholars). They add 2,520 years or 360 days (a prophetic year is said to be 360 days) times seven "times of the Gentiles." "Exactly 2,520 years after 607 B.C.E. is 1914 C. E."⁶

Satan fought a war in heaven against Michael (the resurrected Jesus) in 1914, but was expelled from heaven. Satan is now in control of everything on Earth, including all governments and religions. Wars, food shortages, earthquakes, disease, crime, greed, etc. are said to be signs of Satan's work on Earth.

Jesus is presently judging his followers, separating the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:31-33).

The first resurrection of the 144,000 "elect" occurred early in 1918, 3 1/2 years after October 1914.

6. Two Classes of the Saved: The 144,000 elect or "anointed" are "joint rulers with Christ in God's heavenly government. Only the elect are "born again." Only those who have lived since Christ's resurrection in 33 C.E. can be a part of the elect. In April 1996, 8,757 of the elect were still living.⁷ In April 2006, the number of elect was said to have been 8,758. Since the first resurrection in 1918, the elect go immediately to heaven at death. This doctrine was announced in 1935.

The "great crowd," "great multitude," "other sheep," or "Jonadabs" (named after a man who renounced the worship of Baal [2 Kings 10:15-18]) who accept Jehovah's Witness teachings will live forever in paradise on a new earth. This "great crowd" will include Old Testament prophets and martyrs who will be redeemed to reign on Earth. A house in San Diego, California, built for Old Testament prophets in 1930, was sold in 1948. This doctrine is based on the Watchtower Society's interpretation of Revelation 7:4-10 and 14:1-5.

7. Armageddon: Armageddon (mentioned only in Rev. 16:16) is the final battle when Jehovah's heavenly armies, under Jesus' leadership,

⁴ *Survival*, p. 182

⁵ *The Divine Plan of the Ages as Shown in the Great Pyramid*, 1888 ed., p. 18.

The theory fell out of favor in 1928 and diagrams used by Russell have been removed from more recent editions of the book. Interest in the pyramids was widespread in the mid- and late-1800s. Some Christians also believed God's plan could be found within the pyramids.

⁶ *Babylon the Great Has Fallen*, pp. 179-80.

⁷ Only those who believe they are a part of the elect may partake of the wine and unleavened bread at the annual Memorial Meal. In April 1996, nearly 13 million people attended the Memorial Meal, most of whom were not Jehovah's Witnesses, of which 8,757 took the elements. The people doing so are counted as among the "elect." In April 2006, 16.6 million attended the Memorial Meal and 8,758 partook of the wine and unleavened bread. The Memorial Meal is held once each year to commemorate the night Jesus took Passover with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion.

destroyed Satan and his earthly forces.

The Watchtower Society has announced a number of dates for Armageddon, including 1874, 1914, 1925, and 1975. Recent Watchtower literature had stated that Armageddon is very near, but without giving another date.

Jehovah's Witnesses will not fight in the battle. Jehovah will use natural events in the battle: floods, earthquakes, hail, fire, and plagues. Birds will eat the bodies of those killed. All "Christendom" will be destroyed. The world's political system will be wiped out.

8. Millennium: A 1,000 years of peace on earth will begin after Armageddon while Christ and the 144,000 rule from heaven.

Two resurrections will occur at the beginning of the millennium:

- "Jonadabs" or Jehovah's Witnesses who will live forever on paradise Earth will be resurrected as teachers.
- Those who died before learning about Jehovah's plan will be resurrected for an opportunity to learn the truth from the Jonadabs. Russell called this the "Second Probation Theory."

Some people will not be resurrected during the millennium:

- Adam, Cain, and Judas
- Ex-Jehovah's Witnesses
- Non-Jehovah's Witnesses killed during Armageddon.

9. New Paradise Earth: Satan will be released for a brief time at the end of the millennium. He will tempt people, some of whom will turn to him and be annihilated. After a final battle with Jehovah, Satan will be destroyed. A new paradise Earth will be ushered in by Jehovah. Peace and bliss with no disease or death will reign forever.

10. Destiny of the Lost: The doctrine of hell is rejected. All those who reject Jehovah will cease to exist (annihilation).

11. Blood Transfusions: Jehovah's Witnesses' refusal to accept blood transfusions is based on Lev. 17:10-13.

12. Watchtower Meetings: Five meetings are scheduled each week in Kingdom Halls. Other local, district, and occasional national and international assemblies may be held.

13. Outreach: *The Watchtower: Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* is the basic, doctrinal magazine in 158 languages. *Awake!* is a family-oriented magazine published in 81 languages.

Each year, a new or revised book is issued. Minimum printing is 1,000,000 copies.

All Jehovah's Witnesses (publishers) are expected to visit door-to-door to publish the truth about Jehovah; no home should be missed. Jehovah's Witnesses may be named pioneers by agreeing to work 60, 90 or more hours per month in door-to-door visitation. All of this is in addition to the five hours of meetings in Kingdom Halls.

14. Seven-Step Program to Win Converts: The Watchtower Society uses a seven-step program to win converts:

- "Place" literature or books in an individual's home.
- Visit again ("back-call") to encourage interest in the literature.
- Hold weekly Bible study with the individual in his/her home. A Watchtower book, not the Bible, is studied.
- Invite the individual to a neighborhood Bible study.
- Invite the individual to a meeting at the Kingdom Hall.
- Take the individual witnessing door-to-door with a publisher. One of the two "Witnesses" visiting your home may not yet be a baptized Jehovah's Witness.
- Baptize the individual after he/she has shown knowledge of Jehovah's Witness doctrines (This involves a quiz before elders in the congregation.).

The Watchtower Society claims it is God's "sole collective channel for the flow of Biblical truth to men on earth."⁸

⁸ *The Watchtower*, 15 July 1960, p. 439.