

Responding to Jehovah's Witnesses

a.k.a. the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society

Who Are They? ...the Society at a Glance

"The Jehovah's Witnesses are persons who are members of the organization known as the 'Watchtower Bible and Tract Society,' headquartered in Brooklyn, N.Y. It is very important for Christians to understand that the Watchtower Society is un-Christian. In fact, it is decidedly anti-Christian. The Jehovah's Witnesses are definitely not merely a different Christian denomination."

— Dr. Al Barry (1931-2001), 10th president of the LC-MS

Founder: Charles Taize Russell

Founding Date: 1879

Official Publications: The Watchtower and Awake! magazines are published semi-monthly. They also publish one to two doctrinal study books each year.

Organization Structure: Headquartered in New York, the organization is lead by a president and a group of men known as The Governing Body. This group oversees every aspect of the organization including the material that is written for the periodicals and the study books.

Unique Terms: The local congregation is called a Kingdom Hall. The Watchtower sometimes refers to itself as a Theocratic Organization or an organization which is directed by God.

Common Name: Jehovah's Witnesses.

Formal Name: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

History

Born in 1852, Charles Taize Russell founded the Zion's Watch Tower in 1879 and later incorporated the group under the name Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society in 1884 (twelve years later the word "Zion" was dropped). Russell had come to the conclusion that Christianity was not the correct way to understand the Bible. From early on, he rejected the doctrine of Hell, which fact would go on to reject nearly every other Christian doctrine as well as add many physically and spiritually dangerous doctrines of his own making.

Russell also made contact with groups (known as Adventists) who emphasized the immediate return of Christ. Russell began a series of Bible studies and started to gather followers. Russell agreed with the Adventists' predictions that Christ would return during 1873–1874. When that did not happen, Russell predicted more dates for the return of Jesus.

After Russell's death in 1916, leadership of the Watchtower Society passed to Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford. Rutherford was largely responsible for the rapid growth of the Watchtower Society. In 1928, the organization recorded 44,000 members and by his death in 1942, their membership had grown to over 115,000. Part of this growth can be attributed to Rutherford's insistence that the world was about to end and Armageddon was to happen any day!

Rutherford spread the Jehovah's Witnesses' message via phonograph machines, which he used to play his recorded sermons. These sermons were often harsh attacks against denominational Christianity, particularly against the Roman Catholic Church, with vivid descriptions of the judgment to come against anyone who did not embrace Jehovah's Witnesses' views.

Rutherford also worked at increasing his control over the Watchtower Society and devised what he termed the "theocratically controlled" organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses movement. In 1931, the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" was officially adopted to distinguish the followers of Rutherford from those who had left to form their own organizations.

When Rutherford died in 1942, Nathan Knorr took over (1905–1977). Knorr worked tirelessly to create a better image of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the public mind, spearheading a massive printing effort, which continues to this day. The two magazines that the Jehovah's Witnesses are most known for are *Awake!* and *The Watchtower*.

Also, under Knorr, in 1944, the Watchtower Society switched from media campaigns to personal visits, marked by (now-familiar) aggressive techniques to gain entry into homes in order to share their message. Under Knorr's leadership, the Jehovah's Witnesses produced their own Bible translation, The New World Translation. This translation, published in six volumes between 1950-1960, supports many Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines while ignoring many accepted rules of language translation.

At Knorr's death in 1977, the Society had 2.2 million members. Today? Over 4 million.

Doctrine

KEY TEACHING:

The Jehovah's Witnesses' movement's primary concern is the end-time (eschatological) renewal of human society. They believe that Jesus Christ will return to establish a new kingdom, which they call a "theocracy," in which Jehovah God will bring total tranquility to the earth. They believe this utopia will come only after the Battle of Armageddon, in which the present world order will be destroyed. The Jehovah's Witnesses view all earthly institutions, organizations and governments as evil. They believe that only the Watchtower Society is capable of speaking truthfully about God in the world today.

TRINITY:

Joseph Rutherford made it quite clear that the Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. He stated, "The origin of the Trinity doctrine is traced back to the ancient Babylonians and Egyptians and other ancient mythologists. It will not be disputed by Jews and Christians that these ancient peoples worshiped demon gods and that God's typical nation of Israel was warned not to mingle with them because of this. It follows, then, that God was not the author of this doctrine. The obvious conclusion is, therefore, that Satan is the originator of the Trinity doctrine. Nevertheless, sincere persons who want to know the true God and serve him find it a bit difficult to love and worship a complicated, freakish-looking, three-headed God. The clergy who inject such ideas will contradict themselves in the very next breath by stating that God made man in his own image; for certainly no one has ever seen a three-headed human creature."

GOD THE FATHER:

Known as Jehovah, the Watchtower considers Him to be the only true eternal God, the Almighty. They write, "There was, therefore, a time when Jehovah was all alone in universal space. Being alone, the first creative act of Jehovah was to create his Son.

GOD THE SON:

The Watchtower has consistently denied the deity of Christ. Under Knorr's leadership the Watchtower proclaimed, "Thus, for example, the Bible shows that there is only one God, the Most High, the Almighty. And that the Son, as the First-born, the Only-begotten and 'the creation by God,' had a beginning."

They further stated, "It proves that Michael the archangel is no other than the only-begotten Son of God, now Jesus Christ. The very name Michael means 'Who is like God?' and indicates that Jehovah God is without like or equal and that Michael his archangel is his great Champion and

Vindicator."

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT:

Similar to many other cults, Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of the Holy Spirit. They have written, "But the holy spirit has no personal name. The reason for this is that the holy spirit is not an intelligent person. It is the impersonal, invisible active force that finds its source and reservoir in Jehovah God and that he uses to accomplish his will even at great distances, over light years of space."

MAN'S DESTINY:

According to Jehovah's Witness theology, a person has one of three possible destinies. The Anointed (144,000) will be in heaven to reign with Jehovah God. The rest of the faithful Jehovah's Witnesses (not of the 144,000) will live forever on a paradise Earth. Both of these classifications are determined to a great extent on membership in the Watchtower organization as well as going door-to-door spreading the message of the Watchtower. Those people who are not members of the Watchtower organization will be destroyed by Jehovah God and cease to exist. There is no concept of eternal punishment or hell in Watchtower theology.

OTHER DOCTRINES

1) Since its very inception, the Watchtower has made false prophecies about the end of the world. Predicting the end in one form or another for the years 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975 and 1989 has caused its membership to maintain a steady upward trend.

2) Rejecting the medical practices of vaccinations, organ transplants and blood transfusions, the Watchtower has caused the deaths of many of its members throughout its history. Interestingly, vaccinations and organ transplants have now been acknowledged by the Watchtower as acceptable practices, contradicting their previous doctrinal position.

3) The Watchtower has maintained a long standing policy of denying its members any involvement in political causes or service in the Armed Forces.

4) Believing many customs in traditional families to be pagan in nature, the Watchtower rejects the practices of celebrating personal birthdays, Christmas, Easter, Mothers' and Fathers' day as well as most other holidays.