

Jehovah's Witnesses

Interfaith Evangelism

BELIEF BULLETIN

Cults, Sects, and New Religious Movements

Official Names: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., International Bible Students Association, Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania

Founder: Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)

Present Leader: Don Adams (b. 1925)

World and USA

Headquarters: "Bethel", 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, New York 11201-2483

Canadian

Headquarters: Box 4100, Halton Hills, Ontario L7G 4T4

Active

Participants: ("Publishers"), 2000 Worldwide: 6 million in 235 countries; U.S.A.: 998,166; Canada: 111,173

Key Publications: PERIODICALS: *The Watchtower* (22 million in 126 languages), *Awake!* (19 million in 81 languages) BOOKS: *Reasoning from the Scriptures (Reasoning)*—1985, *Insight on the Scriptures*—2 Volumes (*Insight*)—1988, *Mankind's Search for God*—1990, *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life (Knowledge)*—1995, *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*—(published annually) BIBLE TRANSLATIONS: *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*—1964, *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT)*—1984

This Belief Bulletin presents basic Jehovah's Witnesses' history and doctrines and provides a biblical analysis and response.

History

In 1870, Charles Taze Russell began an independent Bible study, focusing on the second coming of Christ and biblical chronology. He published his views in several books and began lecturing in 1878. In 1879, Russell founded the monthly publication *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* which were used by study groups he established.

Zion's Watch Tower and Tract Society was incorporated in 1884 with Russell as president. From 1886 until his death in 1916, Russell wrote a series of books called

Studies in the Scriptures. Their contents formed the basis of Jehovah's Witnesses' unchristian theology.

Russell was succeeded as president in 1917 by his legal assistant, Joseph Franklin Rutherford. Rutherford continued Russell's authoritarian leadership style. He was imprisoned briefly in 1918 for preaching against military service. He was a charismatic speaker who often railed against Christian churches and biblical scholars. He died in 1942.

Other Jehovah's Witnesses presidents included Nathan H. Knorr (1942-1977), Fredrick W. Franz (1977-1992), and Milton G. Henschel (1992-2000). The organization expanded worldwide under these men's leadership, from about 113,000 in 1942 to more than 6 million in 2000. The current president is Don Adams.

Jehovah's Witnesses Sources of Authority

The Bible

The Bible is considered the divinely inspired and infallible Word of God. It “contains 66 books in two sections, often called the Old Testament and the New Testament. Thirty-nine Bible books were written mainly in Hebrew and 27 in Greek. . . . A proper study of the Scriptures must include the entire Bible” (*Knowledge*, p. 13). “Though the Bible is not a science textbook, it is scientifically accurate. . . . The Bible contains many prophecies that have been fulfilled in detail” (*Knowledge*, p. 17). *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT)*, is the English Bible Version published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS). The New World Bible Translation Committee members remain anonymous. It is regarded as the best translation because “the translators held so closely to what is in the original Bible languages” (*Reasoning*, p. 279).

Response: The Bible is indeed composed of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. It is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The *NWT* reflects WBTS theology, especially its bias against the deity of Jesus Christ and the historic doctrine of the Trinity. For example, John 1:1 reads “and the Word was a god” in the *NWT*. Nearly all other standard English Bible translations say, “and the Word was God.”

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

The WBTS's Governing Body is called “the faithful and discreet slave,” a term derived from the *NWT* rendering of Matthew 24:45 (*The Watchtower*, Feb. 1, 1993, p. 16). It is therefore regarded as Jehovah God's only channel of accurate biblical interpretation in the world today. A requirement for salvation “is that we be associated with God's channel, his organization” [the WBTS] (*The Watchtower*, Feb. 15, 1993, p. 12). Thus, there is no salvation apart from the WBTS.

Response: All people who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord are saved by grace through faith and are born again (see John 3:3-16; Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-9). No single person, church, or religious organization can claim exclusive possession of the source of salvation or authority to interpret the Bible. All born-again Christians are capable of understanding and interpreting the Scriptures through the illumination of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Tim. 3:16; John 14:26; 15:26; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Doctrinal Beliefs

Jehovah Is God

The true God is not a nameless God. His name is Jehovah (Deut. 6:4; Ps. 83:18). His principal attributes

are love, wisdom, justice, and power. God is a “spirit-being,” invisible and eternal, but has a spiritual body and is not omnipresent (*Insight*, vol. 1, p. 969-970). The historic Christian doctrine of the Trinity is denied. “The dogma of the Trinity is not found in the Bible, nor is it in harmony with what the Bible teaches. It grossly misrepresents the true God” (*Reasoning*, p. 424).

Response: The Bible teaches there is only one God. He was called by several names in the Scripture. Christians acknowledge that the term “Trinity” is not found in the Bible. Nonetheless, the doctrine is clearly taught in Scripture. The Bible teaches that the One God exists in the three persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2).

Jesus Christ—Jehovah's First Created Being

Jesus had three periods of existence. In his pre-human existence he was called “God's ‘only-begotten Son’ because Jehovah created him directly. As the ‘first-born of all creation’, Jesus was used by God to create all other things (Col. 1:15; Rev. 3:14) . . . After Jehovah brought him into existence, the Word [Jesus] spent ages with God in heaven before becoming a man on earth” (*Knowledge*, p. 39). “John 1:1 says that ‘the Word’ (Jesus in his pre-human existence) was with God ‘in the beginning’. So the word was with Jehovah when ‘the heavens and earth’ were created” (*Knowledge*, p. 39). He also had the personal name Michael (the archangel) (*Insight*, vol. 2, p. 394).

“The Second Stage of Jesus' life course was here on earth. He willingly submitted as God transferred his life from heaven to the womb of a faithful Jewish virgin named Mary” (*Knowledge*, p. 40). He became the Messiah at his baptism, who was executed on a torture stake, and rose again spiritually “Though the Bible reports on Jesus' death, he is now alive! He is a mighty reigning King! And very soon now, he will manifest his rulership over our troubled earth” (*Knowledge*, p. 41).

Response: The Bible teaches that Jesus was not created but was deity from all eternity and coequal with the Father. He came to earth in bodily form to reveal God's nature and character to mankind. He now reigns with the Father in heaven and will return some day to close the age and judge all people. The Jehovah's Witnesses *NWT* translation of John 1:1, John 8:58, and Revelation 3:14 are biased against Jesus' deity. There is no biblical basis for identifying Jesus with Michael the archangel (see John 1:1-14; 5:17-18; 8:56-59; 10:30-33; Col. 1:15-20; 2:9). See also *A Closer Look at the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

The Holy Spirit—God's Active Force

The personality and deity of the Holy Spirit is denied. Holy Spirit is not capitalized in the *NWT*. “With this viewpoint, it is logical to conclude that the holy spirit is

the active force of God. It is not a person but is a powerful force that God causes to emanate from himself to accomplish his holy will” (*Reasoning*, p. 381).

Response: The personality of the Holy Spirit is evidenced in numerous New Testament Scriptures (see Luke 12:12; John 15:26; Acts 5:3-10; 13:2-4; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 3:7). His deity is demonstrated by His divine attributes as revealed in Scripture. The Holy Spirit convicts the lost of sin and He indwells believers at conversion and empowers them to live the Christian life. (See Matt. 12:31-32; 28:19; Mark 3:29; John 14—16; Rom. 8:4,26-27; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 2:18-19; 5:14-33.)

Mankind’s Sin Brought Death

God created man in His own image, but Adam and Eve willfully and deliberately disobeyed God. “In the day that our first parents ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, they were sentenced by God and died from his standpoint. Then they were expelled from Paradise and began their descent into physical death” (*Knowledge*, p. 58). The spirit, or life force, that God gives us at our birth departs at death. There is no conscious existence at death. “Where do the dead go? To Sheol, the common grave of mankind. Our dead loved ones are not conscious of anything. They are not suffering, and they cannot affect us in any way” (*Knowledge*, p. 83).

Response: Adam and Eve’s sin indeed brought evil and death into the world. Thus, we are dead spiritually and separated from God. However, at death, believers in Christ maintain a conscious relationship with Him while awaiting the resurrection. (See Matt. 22:32; Luke 16:22-23; 23:43; John 11:26; 1 Cor. 5:8; 12:2-4; Phil. 1:23-24; 1 Thess. 4:14—5:10; 2 Pet. 2:9.)

Jesus Paid a Ransom Sacrifice

Due to Adam’s sin, it was necessary that an atonement be made to restore what he had lost. “Only a man with perfect human life could offer up the equivalent of what Adam lost. After Adam, the only perfect man born on earth was Jesus Christ” (*Knowledge*, p. 65). “The Roman governor Pontius Pilate sentenced him to death on a torture stake. He was nailed to a wooden pole and hung there upright . . . Thus, it was on Nisan 14, 33 C.E. [A.D.], that Jesus gave his life as a ‘ransom in exchange for many’” (*Knowledge*, p. 66). “He slept in death for parts of three days, and then Jehovah God resurrected him to life as a mighty spirit being” (*Knowledge*, p. 68).

Response: Jesus was not just a perfect man, but also God incarnate (see Col. 2:9). Thus, His death on a Roman cross was the self-sacrificial atonement of God Himself for mankind’s sin (see 1 Cor. 1:17-24; 2:2; 15:3-4). He rose again from the dead physically, not just spiritually (see Luke 24:14-39; John 2:19-21; 20:26-29; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

Salvation—Faith and Obedience

“Therefore, let us show our gratitude for the love displayed by God and Christ by exercising faith in Jesus’ ransom sacrifice” (*Knowledge*, p. 69). Requirements for salvation, in addition to faith, include baptism by immersion, active association with the WBTS, righteous conduct, and absolute loyalty to Jehovah. There is no assurance of salvation, only hope for a resurrection. Those who fail to live up to the above requirements or who are disfellowshipped by the WBTS have no hope of salvation.

Response: Salvation is “by grace through faith” in Jesus Christ alone. No amount of works or membership in any organization guarantees salvation. It is totally through faith in Christ (see Rom. 4:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Good works are the natural response to salvation already received, not its cause (see Eph. 2:10). Salvation is eternally assured for those who have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior (see John 1:12; 5:24; 1 John 5:13).

Two Classes of Saved People

Only 144,000 faithful elect Jehovah’s Witnesses, known as the “Anointed Class” will go to heaven at death to rule with Jesus. Only those born since 33 C.E. (A.D.) can be part of that number (based on Rev. 14:1-3). Most Jehovah’s Witnesses hope to be among the “other sheep” or “great crowd” who will not go to heaven, but, after Armageddon and the millennium, will live forever in Paradise on earth (based on John 10:16; Rev. 7:9).

Response: The WBTS’ doctrine of a duality of saved people is not supported by a careful study of the Scriptures. The Bible makes no distinction of two classes of saved people (see Matt. 5:12; Phil. 3:20). In Revelation 7 and 14, both the 144,000 and the “great crowd” or “multitude” are “before the throne” in heaven. All born-again Christians will live forever in heaven (see John 3:16; 14:3).

Armageddon Is Coming Soon!

“This name [Armageddon or Har-Magedon] is directly associated with ‘the war of the great day of God the Almighty.’ The term applies specifically to the condition, or situation, to which ‘the kings of the entire inhabited earth’ are gathered in opposition to Jehovah and his Kingdom by Jesus Christ” (*Insight*, vol. 1, p. 1037.)

Armageddon will mark the destruction by God of this present evil system, including apostate “Christendom,” and the binding of Satan. Afterward, Jehovah’s surviving people will rebuild the world in a perfect environment under his rule for 1,000 years in the millennium. After the millennium, Satan will be released for a short time to test those resurrected, or born during the millennium. (See *Knowledge*, pp. 182-190.)

Response: The Bible teaches that Jesus will return physically to judge mankind and usher in the kingdom of God. Christians may respectfully disagree over the details of biblical interpretation about the events of the last days and the millennium. Setting dates, however, is strictly

forbidden and Jesus warned of false signs of His return. Nonetheless, believers are to be ready at any time for His coming (see Matt. 16:24-27; 24:14-51; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-16; John 5:28-29; 14:2-3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 5:1-11).

Final Judgment and Paradise on Earth

After the millennium, Satan and his allies will be destroyed. Faithful Jehovah's Witnesses will inherit everlasting life on perfect Paradise earth. Those who have disobeyed Jehovah and his law will be annihilated out of existence with Satan and his demons. This is the "second death." Hell is the grave and not a place of eternal punishment. The doctrine of eternal hell is regarded as unscriptural, unreasonable, contrary to God's love, and unjust.

Response: All people will face the final judgment of God. The doctrine of eternal hell is based on a number of biblical texts and the teachings of Jesus Himself. He taught that righteous saved people will have eternal life in heaven but the wicked lost will suffer eternal punishment in hell (see Matt. 18:8-9; 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48; 2 Thess. 1:9).

Witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses

1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and the Bible.
2. Acquire a basic knowledge of Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs and practices.
3. Make a definite plan for the witnessing encounter and take the initiative.
4. Initially, talk about personal concerns to establish a friendly, courteous, and sincere relationship with the Jehovah's Witness. Gradually move on to a discussion of theological issues.
5. Be prepared to cite and explain specific biblical passages supporting Christian doctrines.
6. Define your terms clearly and ask the Jehovah's Witness to do so also.
7. Focus the discussion on the primary issue of the person and work of Christ. Stress the need for a personal relationship with Him.
8. Share your personal testimony of God's grace and your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.
9. Present the basic plan of salvation and encourage the Jehovah's Witness to make a decision.
10. Pray and trust the Holy Spirit to lead you.

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