

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (The Watchtower Society or Jehovah's Witnesses)

History, Beliefs and Practices

Identity

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, a religious organization, believes its governing body is God's only channel of communication on earth today. Its members, Jehovah's Witnesses, call themselves Christians and use their own translation of the Bible, *The New World Translation*. The organization denies major historical doctrines of the Christian faith. It is not part of the Body of Christ. It is a cult.

The Founder/The History

Charles T. Russell (1852—1916) was the founder of the organization and its first president. Russell was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1852. As a child he attended Presbyterian and Congregational churches. By the time he was sixteen years old he was a skeptic. He did not believe in the doctrine of hell. Later he rejected and denied other Biblical teachings. He denied the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the physical resurrection of Christ, eternal punishment, the eternal existence of the soul and the validity of the Atonement of Christ. In 1870, at the age of 18, Russell organized a Bible class in Pittsburgh. In 1876 the participants of the group elected him "pastor." Russell had no training or education to justify his interpretation of Scripture. The title "pastor" was assumed, not earned.

He founded *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* in 1879. In 1886 he published the first in a series of seven books, now referred to as *Studies in the Scriptures*. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was founded in 1884. In 1908 the headquarters moved to Brooklyn, New York. The international headquarters is still located there today. Russell died in 1916. He controlled the organizations, owning 990 of the 1,000 shares of stock. He controlled the entire financial empire of the Society and was accountable to no one.

When Russell died, Judge Joseph Rutherford became the leader of the organization (1869—1942). Rutherford attacked 'organized religion' as false. He promoted and expanded the organization through radio talks, phonograph recordings, and books. Rutherford died in January of 1942.

Nathan Knorr (1905—1977) became the third president. He was responsible for the establishment of the Gilead Missionary Training School in Lansing, New York. He died in 1977. Frederick Franz (1893-1992) was elected the fourth president in 1977. He was the main theologian during Knorr's presidency. He died in 1992. Milton G. Henschel was president from 1992--2000. Don Adams became president in 2000.

Normative Texts and/or Authorities

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and its governing body are the ultimate authority in the organization. Jehovah's Witnesses cannot question the authority of the organization. Those that question the organization's authority or theological teachings are disfellowshipped.

The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, the Watchtower Society's Bible, is an unrecognized version. The organization refuses to give the names and credentials of those who translated it. For additional information about this Bible translation request *The World's Most Dangerous Book!* by Personal Freedom Outreach.

The Watchtower and *The Awake* magazines are distributed weekly to members, reviewed at their church services at the Kingdom Halls along with other Watchtower publications, and distributed door-to-door.

Beliefs and Practices

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society teaches its member, Jehovah's Witnesses, a false Christ and a false Gospel. Congregations are called Kingdom Halls. There are no ordained pastors. Members are required to attend five training sessions and meetings each week. The organization is not a Christian denomination, although its members call themselves Christians and use the Bible. Their Bible, *The New World Translation*, is unrecognized by any Greek or Hebrew scholar.

Jehovah's Witnesses demonstrate the five basic characteristics of a cult:

- 1) They deny the deity of Christ.
- 2) They have an authority as the head and interpreter of Scripture. This authority is the Watchtower Society.
- 3) They preach salvation by faith PLUS works.
- 4) They offer secret knowledge to their members and proclaim that they are the only true religion.
- 5) They use mind controlling evangelism techniques.

Jehovah's Witnesses can be called a religion of denials. They DENY:

- 1) Jesus' deity
- 2) The personage of the Holy Spirit
- 3) The Trinity
- 4) The Second Coming of Christ
- 5) The existence of hell
- 6) That the soul lives on beyond death
- 7) The oneness of the Body of Christ
- 8) That Jesus Christ's suffering, death and resurrection are sufficient for all men

The organization controls its members. It is law-oriented. Members must work hard to prove their faith in Jehovah God. Jehovah's Witnesses:

- Must go door-to-door
- Are required to attend five meetings a week
- Cannot celebrate: birthdays, Christmas, Easter
- Cannot salute the flag
- Cannot smoke or drink
- Cannot have blood transfusions
- Are discouraged from voting or serving on a jury
- Are discouraged from having friends outside of the Watchtower Society
- Will be disfellowshipped for questioning the authority of the organization or breaking their rules and regulations.

A Lutheran Response

Keep the message centered on Jesus Christ. Jehovah's Witnesses preach a counterfeit Jesus. Since Jesus Christ, our Savior, is the very sum and substance of our hope for this life and for the next, the critical doctrine of His substitution of pain, suffering and death for the world's sins should be your focal point. Share key passages with them that point to Christ's deity and His God-man character, the true Christ of the Bible.

Show love, be caring, and build a relationship with them, when possible.

Share the Law and Gospel. The Christian witness should be very simple and straightforward (1 Cor. 15:1-7).

- 1) Sin separates us from God (Rom. 6:23; Is. 59:2).
- 2) God, being perfectly just and righteous, must punish sin (Lam. 4:22).
- 3) God loves us and doesn't want us to be separated from Him for eternity in hell (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10).
- 4) His solution to the problem of sin is Jesus. God's Son, Jesus Christ, became a man, lived a perfect life for us, suffered in our place on the cross and rose again from the dead (1 Cor. 15: 1-7).
- 5) When we believe in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we have eternal life now (Acts 4:12; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 John 5:12)!

Share the power of the Gospel in your life through your personal testimony. Jehovah's Witnesses are difficult conversationalists--they tend to dominate discussions and to interrupt continually. But there's a distinct advantage in speaking personally about your faith--they can't really interrupt or dispute what you say. Sharing how God answered your prayers or worked within your life is something they can't argue with.

Pray. Witnesses who leave the organization often discover afterwards that Christians faithfully prayed for them. Prayer works (Matt. 7:7)! If you feel you can't witness to the Jehovah's Witness at your door, then pray for him. God promises to answer our prayers (Mark 11: 24).

Know and understand their basic teachings. You can't fight what you don't know. Only by understanding their basic doctrines can you find the Scripture passages to refute those doctrines and to prepare yourself to witness properly.

Point out to them that they're using an unrecognized version of the Bible. The New World Translation, the Watchtower Society's own Bible, is not recognized by any Hebrew or Greek scholar.

The men who translated their Bible had no proper credentials or qualifications, and the Watchtower Society will not even publish their names. In fact, one translator, Frederick Franz, a former Watchtower Society President, was unable to translate even the most simple Hebrew passage during a 1954 court trial in the Scottish Court Sessions. (Pursuer's Proof, Page 7).

Have on hand some chain-reference Bibles or other translations. Use John 1:1 as a key passage. Show them that their version says, "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was a god." Their version adds the word "a" and lower-cases the word God. No other authorized translation does this.

Know and use your Bible to win them. Compare what they believe to what the Bible teaches. Often we don't know what effect scattering the seed of God's Word will have, but we don't need to know. God knows. And we have to trust that He will work faith within a person's heart through the power of His Word (1 Cor. 1:18).

Realize that they don't have the Holy Spirit and are blinded by Satan to the truth of the Bible. Don't despair if your witness appears to fall on deaf ears. Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe that the Holy Spirit can guide them in all truth (John 14:26). And, so, the Holy Spirit is not living within them (Romans 8: 9).

They've been taught special tactics to control a conversation. Jumping from one verse to a completely different subject is a technique Jehovah Witnesses use when you show them a verse contrary to what the Watchtower Society teaches or when they don't know the answer to your question.

Make conversation a two-way street. Agree on a subject to discuss and continue to go back to it when they get off the subject.

Often, a person gains control of a conversation by asking questions, so they'll ask you questions. When they try to change the subject, say, "Let's write that question down. When we finish this discussion, we'll go back to that question. Is that all right with you?" In this way, you can lovingly keep them on the subject at hand.

Check out the context. Jehovah's Witnesses often take verses out of context, making the verse say something it doesn't. Ask questions, "Who is the author speaking to?" Put the words back into their original context and check words before and after the verse to get the whole picture. Ask, "What did the author mean to communicate? What's the main idea of the chapter?"

Don't get caught up in minor doctrines and forget the importance of the Scripture you wish to share about major doctrines. Jehovah's Witnesses call Christmas, Easter, birthdays, and other celebrations pagan festivals and don't celebrate them. They will not wear crosses. They will not vote or sit on a jury. They refuse to pledge allegiance to the flag or to go off to war. They refuse blood transfusions. Explain that Mark 7:15 states: "There is nothing that can go into you that can make you unclean."

Encourage them to set aside Watchtower publications and to study the Bible alone. Let them know that God's Holy Spirit will help them understand God's Word. Encourage them, like the Bereans, to check out God's Word. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for . . . correction."

View them as people for whom Christ died. They're sincere people who firmly believe that their organization, The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, is God's only true organization on earth today. They believe that they alone understand the truth.

The Watchtower Society has convinced them that their false doctrines and teachings are true. The Watchtower Society has called Christendom "Babylon the Great" (Rev. 14:8;17:5) in order to prevent Jehovah's Witnesses from hearing or believing any Christian witness.

Many practices within the Watchtower Society are unloving. The break-up of families through disfellowshipping. When a Witness decides to leave the Society to become a Christian believer, he or she is disfellowshipped from the Society. Disfellowshipping means that Jehovah's Witnesses must shun this individual and that they may no longer speak or even acknowledge the existence of a former Jehovah's Witness. Jehovah's Witnesses can be disfellowshipped if they commit a serious sin such as sexual immorality. A Witness also can be disfellowshipped if he or she starts asking questions or inquiring about certain beliefs. If an active Witness talks to an ex-Witness (now called an apostate), they too may be disfellowshipped. This causes immense heartache and pain, especially within families.

The Watchtower Society also lays a heavy burden of work requirements on the Jehovah's Witnesses. They must attend five meetings a week, and spend one-night training for door-to-door witnessing. They are required to witness door-to-door a certain number of hours per month (usually 10 hours). A "Pioneer" invests 90 hours a month in door-to-door witnessing. Numerous problems occur within families when individual Jehovah's Witnesses cannot keep up with the work requirements. Many adults, married couples, teenagers and young people give up in despair. Such ones usually leave the organization out of tiredness or mental pressure, which also results in shunning.

Point out that the Watchtower Society has printed many false predictions throughout its history. The Watchtower Society has deceived its members and predicted events that never occurred. It then simply terms these predictions "mistakes" and tries to hide them from its followers.

Here are just a few of the Society's false predictions:

- 1) The return of Jesus in 1874.

- 2) Charles T. Russell, the founder of Jehovah's Witnesses, said the world would end in 1914 "with the complete overthrow of the earth's present rulership." When this didn't happen, he changed his story to say that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914.

Read Matthew 24:27, 30-31. Jesus Christ Himself said that we will see the "sign of the Son of Man," that we will see Him "coming on the clouds" and that He will send His angels with "a loud trumpet call." The Bible promises that we will both see and hear Jesus' Second Coming. How could such an event be invisible?

- 3) Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were to have been resurrected and living on earth by 1925, an event the Society claimed was definitely marked in Scripture.
- 4) In August 1968, The Watchtower began predicting that the end of the world would occur no later than autumn 1975.

Deut. 18:21-22 tells us not to follow or to give attention to prophets whose predictions don't come true or who make even one mistake.

The Watchtower Society claimed it was a prophet in its April 1, 1972 issue of The Watchtower: "They shall know A Prophet Was Among Them" . . . Today, God's prophet is known as Jehovah's Christian Witnesses" (p. 197). In All Scripture Is Inspired By God and Beneficial, another book, they call themselves, "God's prophet on earth" (p.9).

Jehovah's Witnesses often know nothing about these false prophecies and become upset or disillusioned by this knowledge. William Cetnar made a point of photocopying all the false prophecies for his book. He believes that sharing these is one of the strongest witnesses a Christian can make against the false "prophet" of the Watchtower Society.

In Matthew 7:15-16, Jesus tells us that a bad tree bears bad fruit. He also warns us to "take heed that you be not misled; for many will come in My name, saying 'I am He' and, 'The time is at hand'; do not go after them" (Luke 21:8). Ironically, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Charles T. Russell, published a book entitled The Time is At Hand.

If a Jehovah's Witness continues following a false prophet, he will die, and his spiritual destination will be Hell (Matt. 10:28; 2 Peter 3:7). Remind them we cannot be saved by an organization. If we love them, we will tell them. Let's do it in love (Prov. 10:12)!

Witnesses really do believe that the Bible is God's Word. If we can open their eyes to show them that the Bible teaches doctrines the Watchtower Society denies, we've begun to witness to them effectively. By growing in God's Word, we will be blessed by Him as we do His will. Remember, simply share in love what God's Word really teaches.

For Further Reading...

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Links and Websites

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