

Jehovah Witnesses

History: The history of the Jehovah Witnesses centers on the five presidents of this organization.

Charles Taze Russell founder born in 1852 in Pennsylvania. He got caught up in a movement called Second Adventism; the 7th day Adventists were a part of that movement. This movement had a heavy emphasis on the soon return of Christ. In 1876 Russell came into contact with N.H. Barbour of Rochester NY and jointly published the magazine *The Herald of the Morning*. This is important because we will see that printing became one of the major means of advocating their religion. Russell broke away from Barbour and started the periodical *Zion's Watchtower*. Zion's Watchtower and Tract Society was established Dec 13, 1884 which can be seen as the official beginning of the Jehovah's Witness movement. As is quite often true of cult leaders, Russell has his skeletons in the closet. He advertised miracle wheat in his periodical for a dollar a pound that would grow five times as fast as other wheat; the government investigated and found it to be slightly inferior to ordinary wheat. His wife divorced him on grounds of "his conceit, egotism, domination, and improper conduct in relation to other women."¹ His pride is seen in his belief that no one could adequately interpret Scripture without his books. He was also proved in court to be a perjurer when he lied about knowing Greek. Russell died Oct 31, 1916.

What can we learn about cults from Russell's life? 1. Quite often cults are born when too much focus is placed on end times to the neglect of the rest of Scripture. 2. Pride is the opposite of Biblical Christianity and often leads to false doctrine. It's ok to be skeptical of new theologies. No one in 2000 years of Christianity discovered the supposed truth he discovered? The "new truth" idea reflects an impotent god who was not able to reveal it to anyone until Russell came along and helped him. 3. His rejection of historic Christianity is a result of his pride. Never think you can't learn from past Christians, even from different denominational backgrounds. Study church history.

Judge Rutherford (1916) took over by a coup, running out the other board members and reforming the organization into a dictatorship. He also shifted the focus to witnessing and gave the movement the name, Jehovah's Witnesses.

Nathan Homer Knorr (1942): He was an administrator par excellence improving the training program, bringing the New World Translation, and expanding rapidly into other countries.

Frederick Franz (1977): he was the one who changed the spiritual return of Jesus from 1874 to 1914. He also predicted 1975 as Christ's return. When that prophecy failed the numbers began to dwindle for the first time.

Milton Henschel took over at age 72 in 1992. They are in a state of crisis now. According to their beliefs the leader has to be a male that was baptized before 1935 because that is when Judge Rutherford ended the "heavenly calling" of the 144,000.

¹ As quoted in *Jehovah Witnesses*, by Anthony Hoekema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 13.

They only baptize believers as adults or teens so anyone born after the 20's cannot be a leader. Unless they change their prophecies and rules again the movement will die, but the new leader is a conservative, not open to innovation. See p.5 *Whither the Watchtower?*

Beliefs:

1. They deny the Trinity, the deity of Christ and the deity and personality of the Spirit.
2. They deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus and believe he came back spiritually in 1914.
3. They are pacifists who don't vote, salute the flag, observe holidays, birthdays and are opposed to blood transfusions.
4. They take the Lord's Supper once a year but only the 144,000 that go to heaven take part in the Supper; the rest who are destined to an earthly existence just observe.
5. The Zion's Watchtower and Tract Society is a false prophet and has repeatedly predicted falsely the return of Jesus. 1874, 1914, and 1975 where many of them sold their homes waiting for his return. They believe that the generation that saw his spiritual coming in 1914 will not pass away until his final return to set up his millennial kingdom.
6. They have two classes of believers: the anointed class and the other sheep class.
7. Their gospel of salvation consists of: faith, repentance, dedication, baptism and works.
8. They hold to annihilationism.

How do we witness to them?

1. Show them love.
2. Talk about your personal, intimate relationship with Christ a lot and the difference he has made in your life.
3. Be open to power evangelism.
4. Know what you believe and witness to them: 1 Pe 3:15

We have to have the right God and the right gospel so you should be an expert on these doctrines.

Trinity: There is one eternal God who is made up of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Explain then show the deity of Christ, personality of Spirit and Mt 28.

Gospel: What passage would you turn to reveal salvation is by grace alone, not works? Gal 1:8-9; Eph 2:8-10; Ro 4:1-5; 9:30-33; 11:6

Hell: J.W. belief is a case of placing one's limited ability to reason over the Scriptures. If we are finite and sinful then we are not superior to God in our ability to decide what is fair. Is 66:24 says the worm shall not die. Mt 8:11-12 says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Lk 16:19-31 rich man and Lazarus – if the reality is cruel then why would Jesus use this as an analogy? Rev 14:9-11 tormented day and night forever; **20:10** same, where the antichrist and false prophet "are." God is a loving God to those who will accept his love, but he is a just God to those who won't.

Three pet Scriptures:

Jn 14:28 “The father is greater than I.” Walter Martin answers: “The verse says that the Father is greater, not better. Better implies a difference in nature or essence. Greater implies a difference in rank. As the humble Son (Phil. 2:5-11), Jesus Christ was of a lower rank than the first Person of the Trinity, the Father.” Economic subordination but ontological equality. Husband is the head of the wife and the wife submits to the husband, but in Gal 3:28 “neither male nor female...” In God’s economy there are roles, but in being we are equal. Jn 17:5

Col 1:15 “the firstborn of all creation.” Ps 89:27; Jn 1:3. Firstborn in the Bible means preeminent one. They add “other” to their translation because the original Greek proves their belief to be wrong.

Rev 3:14 beginning of God’s creation, they translate it “the beginning of the creation by God.” Arche is beginning, source, or ruler – see NIV for best translation. Rev 21:6 calls God the beginning, arche.