

We've probably all had visits from them. A nice looking young man knocks on your door looking for an opportunity to witness his faith to you. Maybe he has an invitation to the upcoming Memorial. Either way, Jehovah's Witnesses are known for their signature door-to-door proselytizing. With more than 7,000,000 Witnesses worldwide, this pseudo-Christian religion comes into contact with all of us.

HISTORY

The Jehovah's Witness movement traces its roots to 1869 and a young man named Charles Russell. Influenced by Adventist and Millennial teachings, Russell formed a small-group Bible study and began teaching his unique view of the Bible. By joining forces with another Adventist, Nelson Barbour, Russell continued to gain a following.

In 1870 Russell published a tract saying Jesus would return to the world invisibly and that it would signal the beginning of the end for the world.

Russell and Barbour soon parted ways over a theological disagreement and Russell then began to publish *Zion's Watch Tower* and *Herald of Christ's Presence*, later named *The Watchtower*. Using this publication, Russell spread his teachings. He taught that in 1799 the end times had begun; that Christ had returned in 1874; that Christ was crowned in heaven in 1878; and that the Battle of Armageddon would begin in 1914.

By this time Russell and his growing number of followers were known as the Bible Students. His group formed the *Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society* in 1881 and began to publish more and more tracts and pamphlets.

By the early 20th century, the Bible Students had grown to considerable numbers and were able to send missionaries to countries overseas, establishing centers of operation in Great Britain and other parts of Europe.

Upon Russell's death in 1916, the Bible Students were a self-sufficient and healthy organization. However, a power struggle ensued over who would be Russell's successor. The eventual winner was Joseph Rutherford. Rutherford's leadership drastically changed the face of the Bible Students.

Rutherford used his power to dissolve the board of directors of the organization after publishing a 'surprise' book called *The Finished Mystery*, which purported to be the final testament of Russell. Twenty percent of the Bible Students left over his action.

Rutherford eventually set up what he declared to be a theocratic authority. By dissolving almost every authoritative body, including the publishing board of the *Watchtower*, Rutherford exerted absolute power over the organization. He unilaterally changed the name from Bible Students to

Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931.

Rutherford presided over one of the biggest Witness-related debacles in 1925. Through pronouncements in the *Watchtower*, books, and other public statements, Rutherford and the Witnesses convinced most of their followers that the world was going to end in 1925. Leading up to 1925, the Witnesses made great numeric gains due to the sensational predictions. Many did not sow their fields that year. Many quit their jobs. Many sold all their possessions. 1925 came and went. The world didn't end.

The massive disappointment caused many to leave the Witnesses, but the organization survived. Rutherford never admitted any error in the matter, instead citing some interpretational discrepancies in getting the year wrong. He still maintained that everyone in the then-current generation would see the battle of Armageddon begin. The Witnesses have since changed that stance to say the time is "indeterminate" and cannot be ascertained with any real accuracy.

After Rutherford's death in 1942, Nathan Knorr became the president of the Witnesses and restored order and sanity to the organizational polity. Knorr is responsible for bringing the group to where it is today: Relatively strong, active, and very capable at printing tracts and materials.

BASIC BELIEFS

While Jehovah's Witnesses arose from a Biblically-educated man, but his exotic beliefs quickly spread to his Bible study group and eventually to the world. The teachings of the Witnesses carry a Christian veneer but are actually anti-Christian.

1. Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Bible is the true, inerrant word of God and is historically and scientifically accurate. However, they also accept a "progressive revelation" that changes over time and is primarily informed by the writings in the *Watchtower*.
2. They also teach that Jehovah is the one supreme deity and is in essence one. There is no Trinity.
3. They teach Jesus Christ was Jehovah's first creation but is not himself God. They teach Jesus' death paid for humanity's sin, but only opened the door for salvation. It didn't actually save us. They also teach that Jesus is the same as the Archangel Michael.
4. Regarding salvation they teach that only 144,000 will be in heaven with Jesus, while the rest of the saved will

live on a new and better earth. They teach that those who survive the Armageddon will be determined by Jehovah and Jesus. Those who serve Jehovah can reasonably assume they will survive the Armageddon and have a chance to live on the new earth.

PRACTICES

Jehovah's Witnesses are noted for several peculiar practices. First of all, they do not display crosses since they believe they are a pagan symbol. They teach Jesus was executed on a stake, not a cross. Witnesses are also known for their refusal of blood transfusions, even if it means death. Witnesses do not celebrate birthdays, Easter, or Christmas. Most holidays are viewed as pagan. The biggest religious festival the Witnesses have each year is the Memorial. The Memorial is held the same day as the Jewish Passover. Witnesses celebrate the sacrifice of Christ and consecrate elements of bread and wine, which they view as "emblems" of Christ's suffering. Only those who profess to be members of the 144,000 may partake. Each year Witnesses invite hundreds of thousands of people to a Memorial. It is their Easter.

RESPONDING TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Thankfully, we have a strong footing with Witnesses due to a mutual respect for God's word. Confessing our faith to Jehovah's Witnesses can bear abundant fruit. However, Witnesses are trained to respond to Christian arguments and confessions, so preparation is important.

Examine how the claims of Jehovah's Witnesses below contradict what the Bible clearly states:

1. Christ was sacrificed only as a human being. **Colossians 2:9; 1 Peter 2:24.**
2. Christ sacrificed his human body only for Adam. **Romans 6:8-11.**
3. One is saved through his or her own works. **Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:24; 1 John 1:7.**
4. One can never be certain of his or her salvation. **John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:13.**

It is always best to focus our confession on Christ and the work he has done for us.