

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Overview: Jehovah's Witnesses derive their name from Jehovah, an English translation of the name of God in the Hebrew Scriptures and Witnesses which is taken from the passage in Isaiah 43:10 "You are my witnesses, says the LORD...". They believe they have been organized to announce the establishment of God's rule on earth, which is coming soon. They recognize only one day of celebration: the Memorial of Christ's death at the time of the Passover. Although they estimate Christ's birth on Oct 2, it is not celebrated. Any members found celebrating "worldly" or "pagan" holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Independence Day, Halloween, etc may be disfellowshipped. They regard all days as holy and have five meetings per week: 1)Public Talk, where Elders deliver a talk on a specific topic on Sunday, 2)Watchtower Study usually following Public Talk, 3)Theocratic Ministry School usually occurs on a weekday evening where they practice giving talks and witnessing, 4)Service Meeting usually follows the Theocratic Ministry School, and 5)Book study held sometime during the week where a portion of a Watchtower publication is studied in depth. One of the great problems they have is that they predicted Armageddon would occur in 1914, 1918, 1920, 1925 and 1941; each failed prophecy has caused some disillusioned members to leave the organization.

History:

The WTS (Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, Jehovah's Witnesses) is established by Charles T. Russell (1852-1916). After periods of being a Presbyterian, Congregationalist, skeptic and Adventist he organized a bible study group in Pennsylvania in 1870. The group's studies led them to reject traditional Christian teachings on the nature of deity, and the immortality of the soul. By 1880 30 congregations had formed in 7 states. After Russell's death in 1916 the WTS's lawyer, Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford took over the presidency. Under his leadership the WTS became more centrally controlled. His best known phrase was "Millions now living will never die".

A split occurred in 1917 over the direction and leadership of the WTS. One of the largest groups to split away was known as The Dawn Bible Students Association of East Rutherford NJ.

In 1931 the WTS became officially known as Jehovah's Witnesses to avoid being confused with other Bible Student groups.

In 1942, after Rutherford's death, Nathan Homer Knorr was elected president. Under his leadership the WTS greatly increased their publishing efforts and published their own translation of the Bible called the *New World Translation*.

Prior to WWI the WTS recommended that Witnesses abstain from entering the armed forces, but if drafted, they should go but work only in non-combative roles such as medical service. Later the WTS opposed all support of the Armed Services. This stance and their refusal to salute the flag, or support the government in any war effort brought intense persecution during WWII. A very large percentage of German Witnesses were exterminated during the Nazi Holocaust. The religion was banned in Canada in 1940 one year after their entry into WWII. Their children were often expelled from school or placed in foster homes, their members were jailed and men who refused entry in the Armed Forces were sent to work camps. They remain banned in some countries and heavily persecuted in many others.

Organizational Structure:

Governing Body: A group of anointed men in the Brooklyn NY head office. It currently consists of 11 members (2000)

Publishers and Pioneers: These are members of both genders and all ages who actively go from door to door attempting to convert the public.

Congregations (called Kingdom Halls): Appointed members, called Overseers or Elders are given a specific role. The Presiding Elder leads the Elders meetings, The Service Elder handles ministry issues within the congregation, Ministerial Servants handle administrative duties and assist the Elders.

Circuits: Groups of about 20 congregations served by a Circuit Overseer.

Districts: Districts are made up of many circuits. There are 22 districts in the U.S.

Branch: A number of Districts

Zone: A number of Branches

Headquarters: In Brooklyn, NY.

Views of God:

Jehovah is the Supreme Being.

Jesus is the created Son of God. Christ is believed to have originally existed in a pre-human state as the Archangel Michael. He later took human form as a man like any other person, except that he was sinless at birth and remained so through life. After the crucifixion, Christ died and was resurrected as an invisible, non-material, glorious spirit creature.

Holy Spirit is not a separate being, but is simply the method by which God interacts with the world.

Views of God's Kingdom:

The Heavenly Kingdom of God began in 1914 with the invisible enthronement of Christ as King. It is currently occupied by a little flock or Anointed Class of about 135,400 people. They were all selected after Christ's ascension into heaven (33AD) and during

subsequent centuries. The selection of the 144,000 was completed in 1935, Some 8,600 are still living on earth. This class will spend eternity with God and Christ as spirit creatures.

Christ's Second Coming was not a physical return to earth. It was a heavenly battle between Christ and Satan in 1914. Afterward Christ began to rule the Heavenly Kingdom as King of Kings and Satan was expelled to earth. WWI was a visible sign of Satan's woes that would accompany the last days of this system of things.

In the near future Armageddon will begin. Jesus, under Jehovah's divine rage, will execute vengeance upon the rest of Christendom and followers of other false religions. The WTS refers to other religions as Babylon the Great. After much suffering, human extermination, and many upheavals, the world will be purified and God's Kingdom (a theocracy), will be established on earth for 1000 years. The "other sheep" (those who survive Armageddon and the worthy dead who are resurrected), will live in peace in the newly created utopia.

Views of Scripture:

They believe the Bible is the infallible, revealed word of God. They generally only accept their own translation the *New World Translation*.

Views of Salvation:

Salvation requires that one must accept doctrines as formulated and taught by the Governing Body, be baptized as a Jehovah's Witness, and follow the program of works as laid out by the Governing Body.

Views of Messiah:

They believe Jesus is the Christ or Messiah.

Views of Life After Death:

A literal 144,000 people will live on in spiritual form with Jesus and Jehovah. For the rest of the people life ceases to exist when they die. There is no Hell or eternal punishment. God will create a new, perfect physical body for the worthy dead who are resurrected and they will live in a new physical world to be like the Garden of Eden was originally intended.

Approaching Jehovah's Witnesses With The Gospel:

They are very hard to study with when they are active. When you study with them, they will change study topics consistently to prevent you from being comfortable and to keep themselves from being influenced by you. They believe if they listen to you or are influenced by you that they will be following the devil's influence.

Works Consulted

Nummela, Tom: Editor, One God Many Gods, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House,

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www.religioustolerance.org,