

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**

To learn about the history, doctrine, and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses.

"We all need help to understand the Bible, and we cannot find the Scriptural guidance we need outside the 'faithful and discreet slave' organization." (*Watchtower*, Feb. 15, 1981, p. 19).

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses are a restorationist movement that stems from the 19th century *Bible Study movement*. The actual name of this cult is *The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society*. Members of this group are often referred to as *Jehovah's Witnesses*, founded by Charles Taze Russell in the 1870's. As of 2018, there were 1.3 million members in the United States, making them the 10th largest religion in the country. Worldwide, they claim 8.7 million members. Unlike other religious groups, they count their numbers extremely accurately. They can give you name and address of every person who goes out preaching door-to-door. There are currently 13,000 meeting houses around the world.

HISTORY

The group informally began in the 1870's as Bible study group led by Charles Taze Russell. Russell began questioning the validity of Christianity as early as 9, and almost completely abandoned it by the time he turned 18. Exposure to a preacher in the Seventh Day Adventist denomination, however, reformed Russell's opinions of the Bible. He began publishing Bible study publications in 1876 that relied heavily on prophecy. After splitting with Barbour over personal disputes, he began publishing a magazine called *Zion's Watch*

Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence. After several name changes, it became *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* in March of 1939.

OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*, *Awake!*, *The Time is at Hand* (1889); at least one new book and / or pamphlet is released each year for door-to-door distribution and congregational study.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Jehovah's Witnesses rely on the interpretation and teaching of the Watchtower Headquarters, now located in Warwick, New York. The interpretation of the Watchtower is central to the stability of the organization. The Watchtower once published the following warning:

"Furthermore, not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see, also, that if anyone lays the SCRIPTURE STUDIES aside, even after he has used them, after he has become familiar with them, after he has read them for ten years—if he then lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness." (*The Watch Tower*, September 15, 1910, p. 298)

Without the help of the Watchtower, one cannot end up with the interpretation that Jehovah's Witnesses believe and promote, thus the message of the Watchtower could be seen as, "a special message not readily understood from the Scriptures."

UNIQUE TERMINOLOGY

- *Faithful and Discreet Slave*
- *Anointed Class*
- *Generation of 1914*
- *Kingdom Hall*

RESTORATIONISM

Jehovah's Witnesses fall into a category known as, "restorationists." Restorationism is the belief that Christianity has been or should be restored along the lines of what is known about the apostolic early church, which restorationists see as the search for a purer and more ancient form of the religion. This movement includes: The Protestant Reformation, the First and Second Great Awakenings, The American Campbell-Stone Movement, Adventism, as well as new religious movements such as the Latter Day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

FAILED PROPHECY

- 1878 - *The end of the harvest*
- 1881 - *A revision of the end of the harvest*
- 1914 - *The end of human rulership*: It would bring the beginning of Christ's millennial reign and all his followers expected the immediate "translation of the saints" to rule with the revealed Christ that year. Following the earth's tribulation and unrest, the Jews would return to God's favor, the "nominal Church" would have fallen, the final battle between Christ and Satan would have ended, the kingdoms of the world would be overthrown, and Christ would have gathered his saints into heaven, where they would reign with him, and when the millennium would begin. The belief was unequivocal, based on his study of the Bible and the Great Pyramid, and satisfied only upon the establishment of an earthly paradise

- 1925 - *Resurrection of the patriarchs*: Rutherford's belief that the patriarchs' return would occur in 1925 was based on his calculations of the Jewish jubilee, counting forward 3500 years from 1575 BCE. As the year advanced, he wrote of the urgency of witnessing in the "few remaining months", though he also provided a caution that not all the expected events might occur. When that prediction failed, the Watch Tower Society suspended the issuing of prophecies centered on a specific date.

DOCTRINES

Jehovah's Witnesses teach a variety of doctrines that run contrary to orthodox, historical Christianity. Below is an outline of them.

- *The Bible* - They do not believe the Bible has any error in it, as long as you are reading their version of the Bible, the New World Translation.
 - The NWT has many substantial changes (and blatant misinterpretations) from the standard translations.
 - John 1:1 (NWT) - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."
 - John 8:58 (NWT) - "Jesus said to them: 'Most truly I say to you, before Abraham came into existence, I have been.'"
 - Acts 20:28 (NWT) - "Pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the holy spirit has appointed you overseers, to shepherd the congregation of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own Son."
 - Colossians 1:17 - "Also, he is before all other things, and by means of him all other things were made to exist."
 - Bruce Metzger called the NWT, "a frightful translation."
- *God* - Jehovah's Witnesses teach that God the Father is the only true God and Creator of heaven and earth. The doctrine of the Trinity is rejected.
 - Jesus Christ: According to the Jehovah's Witnesses website (www.jw.org), Jesus existed prior to His incarnation as the archangel, Michael. He was then thrown into the baby named Jesus, lived, and died, and was spiritually (not physically) resurrected, and now is again Michael.
 - They base this off of 1 Thessalonians 4:16.
 - They also base this off of Revelation 19:14-16, and the description of Jesus as an army leader.
 - The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit is seen as an impersonal force of God.
 - This is based off of the fact that the Greek word for "spirit" (pneuma) is in the neuter gender, not the masculine or feminine.
 - Also, they claim the Spirit lacks personal identification, and that the personhood of the Holy Spirit did not arise until the 4th century.
 - Again, this is provably incorrect. Ignatius (AD 30-107), Clement of Alexandria (AD 145-220), Tertullian (AD 145-220), and Origen (AD 185-254) all write of the personhood and Godhood of the Holy Spirit.
- *Eternal Life* - There are two classes of people:
 - The 144,000 members constitute the "anointed class" (also called the, "little flock") who will reign with Christ in heaven and who form the "faithful and discreet slave" who provide guidance for the organization, and the "great crowd of witnesses" whose hope is to survive Armageddon and spend eternity in a paradise on earth. They claimed 11,202 of the anointed class was alive in 2010. Interestingly, the 144,000 is said to have been filled in 1937, while the functional number continues to grow.