

Jehovah's Witnesses

Coming to a door near you.

Origin of name: **Jehovah**, an English translation of the name for God in the Hebrew Scriptures. **Witnesses** which is taken from Isaiah 43:10: "'You are my *witnesses*," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me."

Membership claims: ~ 6 Million (US: ~1 Million), known as *publishers* and *pioneers*; 75,000 congregation in 200 countries.

Famous JWs:¹ **Dwight D. Eisenhower** - U.S. President (raised JW) **Venus and Serena Williams**, **Michael Jackson (X)**, **Prince**, **Janet Jackson (X)**, **La Toya Jackson (X)**, **Geri Halliwell** - (Spice Girls), **Selena**, **Evelyn Mandela** (first wife of South African president Nelson Mandela), **Wayans Brothers (X?)**, **Mickey Spillane** (best-selling crime novelist; convert to JWs in 1952.)

History: **Original name:** **Zion's Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society**. **Founded by Charles Taze 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 intense examination of the Bible caused them to reject traditional Christian teachings on the nature of deity, and the immortality of the soul. After Russell's death in 1916, the WTS's lawyer, **Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford** took over the presidency. Under Rutherford's leadership, the Society became more centrally controlled. Perhaps his best known phrase was "*Millions now living will never die.*" In 1931, the organization became known as *Jehovah's Witnesses*. After Rutherford's death in 1942, **Nathan Homer Knorr** was elected president. Under his leadership, the WTS greatly increased its publication efforts and published (1961) a new translation of the Bible that is used mainly by Jehovah's Witnesses (*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*).²

Publications: **WATCHTOWER** which has a circulation in excess of 22 million world-wide, in 129 languages. They also distribute the non-theologically based periodical *Awake* with a circulation of almost 20 million, in 81 languages. **Kingdom Ministry** is a monthly publication for use within the organization.

Organizational Structure

- **Governing Body:** 11 member group of anointed volunteers -- all men; Headquarters: Brooklyn, NY.
- **Publishers and Pioneers.** Members go from door to door, attempting to share the Bible with the public in their communities. Full-time preachers are given the title *Regular Pioneer*; commit to preach for 840 hours per year. *Auxiliary Pioneers* do 50 hours a month. *Publishers* typically go door-to-door once per week, often on Saturdays.
- **Congregations:** Appointed members, called **Overseers** or **Elders** are each given a specific role. The **Presiding Overseer** leads the elder meetings. The **Service Overseer** handles ministry issues within the congregation. **Ministerial Servants** handle administrative duties and assist the Elders. A Kingdom Hall is a building where one or more congregations hold meetings.
- **Circuits** are groups of about 20 congregations, served by a **Circuit Overseer**. **Districts** are made up from many circuits; (US: 22 districts) The **District Overseer** runs district conventions once a year. A number of districts form a **Branch**. A number of branches form a **Zone**.

Beliefs

- **Jehovah** is the Supreme Being. No concept of a trinity (monotheistic).
- **Jesus** is the son of God, a created being. 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. Was crucified on a "torture stick" not a cross. After the crucifixion, Christ died and was resurrected as an invisible, *non-material*, glorious spirit creature. His 2nd coming was invisible, not physical and it already happened in 1914.
- **Holy Spirit** is not a separate entity, but is a force: the method by which *Jehovah* interacts with the world.
- **Salvation:** Achieved by accepting Witness beliefs, being baptized, and following certain activities specified by the group. The saved will have everlasting life on earth. Believe there are 144,000 "elect Christians"; ~ 9000 alive today.
- **Hell:** a fictitious place invented by Satan to turn people away from Jehovah. Unbelievers: People who die before Armageddon actually cease to exist. They expire and their body deteriorates and returns to dust.
- **Disfellowship:** Elders have the power to excommunicate members and deny them salvation.
- Very conservative morals: opposition to divorce, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, and abortion. Believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus, the purpose of His death, and the reality of Satan (devil).
- JWs are prevented from celebrating holidays, except for Jesus' resurrection.

What does the Bible say?

- **The nature of God:**
 - **Genesis 1:26** - Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;
 - **John 1:1-2** - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.
- **Salvation:**
 - **Ephesians 2:8-10** - For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
- **Power to save:**
 - **Acts 4:12** - Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
- **Holy Spirit:** **John 14:26** - But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.
- **Heaven/Hell:** **Revelation 21:1**, **Revelation 20:15**

¹ http://www.adherents.com/largecom/fam_jw.html

² www.religioustolerance.org

The **Heavenly Kingdom** took effect 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. All were selected after Christ's ascension into heaven at Pentecost (33 CE) and during subsequent centuries. The selection of the full complement of 144,000 was completed in 1935. Some 8,600 are still living on earth. They will spend eternity with God and Christ as spirit creatures. The latter number increases slightly from time to time as anointed but unfaithful members are replaced. They reject the traditional symbol of Christianity, the cross, as being of pagan origin. They translate the Greek word from the Christian Scriptures "*stauros*" as "*torture stake*", and believe that Jesus was crucified on a single upright wooden stake with no cross beam.

Christ's Second Coming was not a physical return to earth. It was an invisible event in 1914 in which Satan and Christ engaged in a heavenly battle. Afterwards, Christ began to rule the Heavenly Kingdom as King of Kings. Satan was expelled to Earth. World War I was a visible sign of Satan's earthly and the beginning of the woes that would accompany the "*last days of this system of things*."

In the very near future, the battle of **Armageddon** will begin. Jesus, under Jehovah's divine rage, will execute vengeance upon the rest of Christendom and followers of other religions. The Witnesses refer to other religions as **Babylon the Great**, the world empire of false religion (Revelation 17). After much suffering, massive human extermination and many upheavals, the world will be purified. **God's Kingdom**, a theocracy, will be established on earth for 1000 years. This is known as the **millennium** or **the New System of things**. The "**other sheep**" (those who survive Armageddon, will live in peace in the newly created utopia. They will be joined by the worthy dead who have been resurrected.

After the 1000 years of God's Kingdom, Satan and his demons will be released for a short time. They, and their human followers, will then be destroyed.

People who die before Armageddon actually cease to exist. They expire and their body deteriorates and returns to dust. At the time of resurrection, God will create a new body for each believer. It will be similar to their former shell, but without the imperfections. They will resume life with their original personality and memories.

They totally deny the existence of the traditional Christian view of **Hell**. Satan is regarded as having created the concept of Hellfire in order to turn people against God. They believe that hell is the "*common grave of mankind*" where people go when they die. They are not conscious there.

Unbelievers simply cease to exist at death.

Salvation requires that one must accept doctrines as interpreted by the Governing Body from the Bible, be baptized as a Jehovah's Witness **and** follow the program of works as laid out by the Governing Body. (Evangelical Christians deny the necessity of "works" which is implicit in the third requirement).

A brief comparison of Jehovah's Witnesses to historical Christian beliefs:

Teaching	Jehovah's Witnesses	Historical Christianity
Nature of Jehovah	The Supreme Being, indivisible	A personality in the Trinity.
Nature of Jesus	Son of God; a spirit, separate from Jehovah	A personality in the Trinity.
Nature of the Holy Spirit	A force used by God to interact with the world	A personality in the Trinity.
Method of Jesus' execution	By a torture stake, with no cross-beam.	By a cross: a vertical stake with a cross-beam.
Christ's Second Coming	Invisible, not physical. It happened in 1914	Visible and physical. Will happen in the future.
Hell	Concept created by Satan to turn people against Jehovah	A place or state of being involving eternal torture
Salvation	Achieved by accepting Witness beliefs, being baptized, and following certain activities specified by the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Roman Catholics: via sacraments; ■ Many Protestants: by a single act of trusting Jesus as Lord & Savior

Practices: During the year 2000, 6 million Jehovah's Witnesses spent 1.1 billion hours in various evangelistic activities in 235 countries, including the distribution of over 700 million pieces of printed material, and thousands of audio and video cassettes. ¹ They recognize only one day of celebration: the **Memorial of Christ's Death** at the time of Passover. Although they estimate that Jesus was born on October 2, this date is not celebrated. Members who are found celebrating "worldly" or "Pagan" holidays, like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Independence Day, Canada Day, Halloween, etc.) may be disfellowshipped (excommunicated) Its members are expected to not celebrate their birthdays. They do not have a Sabbath; they regard all days as holy. There are five meetings each week: **Public Talk** usually each Sunday, when an Elder (or rarely a Ministerial Servant) will deliver a talk about a specific topic **Watchtower Study** usually follows the public talk; it is a lesson based on a study article in the current Watchtower **Theocratic Ministry School** usually occurs on a weekday evening. Speakers practice giving talks and witnessing **Service Meeting** usually follows the Theocratic Ministry School. This includes training for various ministry activities. At times, elders will address specific items and concerns for the congregation **Book Study** held sometime during the week where a portion of a Watchtower publication is studied in depth. There is a great deal of misinformation about limitations on members' access to the Bible. In reality, they are free to use Bible translations, commentaries, dictionaries etc. which are produced by non-Watchtower publishers. They are encouraged to read the Bible. Each Witness is given a goal of reading

of the entire Bible in one year. They encourage Bible study through using of WTS publications as guides. They only observe two sacraments:
Baptism: this is done by full immersion of an believer who has reached the age of responsibility, has accepted the faith, has repented of their sins, and has dedicated their life to God.

Lord's Supper: this is done once a year at the Memorial of Christ's death. Only the approximately 8600 Jehovah's Witnesses who are part of the 144,000 Anointed Class actually partake in the meal; the general membership (formerly called the Jonadab Class and now called the Great Crowd) are present and observe. They regard the world and its governments as being under the control of Satan. For this reason they do not run for public office, salute the flag, join the Armed Forces, or vote in elections.

Members may be reproved in private during a meeting with the elders. A public announcement may be later made to the congregation that they had been reproved and found to be repentant. Members who are found guilty of serious violations of teachings and practices, and who refuse to repent are disfellowshipped. Fellow members are then required to shun him/her completely, having no contact. If the disfellowshipped person is a family member, the group's official position is that they are to be treated normally within the family. However, they are made to understand that their actions are disapproved of. There is no discussion about WTS matters in their presence. Many families do not follow the official policy and totally shun the disfellowshipped member.