
Jehovah's Witnesses

Origins

The Jehovah's Witnesses began with the work of Charles Taze Russell. He was born in Pittsburgh, USA in 1852. His family were Presbyterian, but at the age of seventeen he became interested in Adventist doctrines. In 1875 he came to believe that Christ had returned to earth, invisibly, the previous year. He set up Bible study groups and formed a company to publish religious material. In 1879 he began producing a magazine called *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. Congregations sprang up throughout the United States. In 1881 the Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society was formed, being later changed to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. They called themselves Bible Students at this time, the term Witnesses not being commonly used until 1931.

In 1909 the society moved its headquarters to Brooklyn, New York. Sermons were syndicated to newspapers, and by 1913 they were covering 3,000 newspapers in four languages. Russell died in 1916 and Joseph Franklin Rutherford became the new leader. He emphasised Jehovah as the true God and emphasised the status of His witnesses. He developed a more centralised and, as he regarded it, more theocratic approach to the organisation. He also placed greater emphasis on missionary work.

Today

Door-to-door preaching remains a key practice. The *Watchtower* magazine is printed, roughly every month, in around 150 languages, and runs to over 25 million copies. In 2000 three new nonprofit corporations were set up: the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses looks after religion and education; the Religious Order of Jehovah's Witnesses deals with full-time workers; the Kingdom Support Services deals with buildings and vehicles.

What the mainstream says

- The Bible is God's infallible, inspired Word.
- Jehovah is the name of the only true God, the Creator of all things.
- Jesus is the Son of God and came to earth from heaven and was a ransom sacrifice.
- Jesus is now ruling as King of God's heavenly Kingdom which will bring peace.
- Death is a result of sin inherited from the first man, Adam.
- The dead are conscious of nothing and God through Jesus will resurrect the dead.
- God's Kingdom, the heavenly Kingdom, will be the one government over all the earth.
- Jesus is God's appointed Judge.
- The righteous will be given everlasting life on earth and the unrighteous will die.
- Baptism symbolises dedication to God and is taken by those of responsible age who have made an informed decision and is by complete water immersion.
- Blood transfusions should be refused.
- The earth will never be destroyed, but will become a peaceful paradise.

(Source: <http://www.jw-media.org>)

Suggested initial Scriptural approach

A helpful verse to begin with is Isaiah 43:10: "Ye are My witnesses, saith the LORD . . .". That this refers to Israel should be clearly shown. Paul's argument in Romans 11 that Israel will "be grafted into their own olive tree" (v. 24) is also an important point to make. That Christ will reign in Jerusalem should be emphasised, and details such as the earthquake in Zechariah 14 should be used to show that the prophecies which speak about Israel and the future Kingdom speak plainly of what is to happen.