

World Religions and False Cults

Part 7 – Jehovah’s Witnesses

The History of Jehovah’s Witnesses

In 1870, Charles Taze Russell, at the age of 18, started a Bible club in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Though he was opposed to many teachings of historical Christianity, he gained followers and was elected their “pastor.” They became known as the Zion’s Watch Tower and Tract Society, eventually establishing headquarters in Brooklyn, New York (1909). Russell was married, but his wife divorced him after he was charged with fraud and perjury. He claimed Christ would return in 1914, though the date was later changed to 1918, 1920, 1925, 1941 and then 1975. After Russell’s death, Joseph Franklin Rutherford took over (1916). Upset with his leadership, many groups branched off, leading Rutherford to distinguish the primary group with a new name, the “Jehovah’s Witnesses.” Literature distribution and door-to-door promotion of the group was emphasized, resulting in a worldwide following today of around 7 million, with well over a million in the US.

Core Beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses

The Bible is their source of authority, but only their translation is used (New World Translation). Their leaders and publications (*Watchtower* and *Awake!*) direct their doctrine, which members discuss when they gather at their Kingdom Halls. They do not celebrate Christmas, Easter or birthdays, as they are believed to have pagan origins. Military service and pledging to the flag is forbidden as their loyalty is only to God’s Kingdom. Key views:

- God: There is one God (Jehovah). Jesus Christ was His first creation. “The Word was a god” (John 1:1, NWT). The Holy Spirit is an active force, not a person. There is no Trinity.
- Mankind: Adam’s sin caused the fall of mankind, but Jesus cancelled the effects out with His human sacrifice. The focus is to earn the right to live in God’s future Kingdom.
- Salvation: Calvary makes our resurrection possible (there is no hell); obedience makes it a reality. Only 144,000 faithful JW’s go to Heaven; the others will live in Paradise on earth.

Keys for Evangelism

- JW’s are programmed with responses to your questions. Control the conversation by focusing on just a few key texts.
- The NWT tweaks verses about Christ. Be prepared to defend passages such as [John 1:1](#); [Col. 1:15-17](#); [John 10:30-34](#).