

# Witnessing to Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

## A Brief History

### Charles Taze Russell (President, 1879-1916)

Russell (1852-1916), founder of this cult in 1879, was raised a Congregationalist but copied many Adventist teachings and rejected Biblical teaching of eternal torment. Russell founded *The Herald of the Morning* (1879), which developed into today’s *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah’s Kingdom*. From 6,000 initial issues, the publication has grown to 17.8 million copies per month in 106 languages. The other Watchtower periodical, *Awake!*, has a circulation of 15.6 million per month in thirty-four languages.

In 1884, “Pastor” Russell incorporated “Zion’s Watch Tower Tract Society” at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which in 1886 published the first in a series of seven books (Russell wrote six by himself), now entitled *Studies in the Scriptures* and originally published as *The Millennial Dawn*. The seventh volume, edited from his writings after his death and published in 1917, *The Finished Mystery*, caused a split in the organization, which culminated in a clean division, the larger group following J. F. Rutherford, the smaller remaining by itself. This smaller group subsequently became “The Dawn Bible Students Association.”

Russell was an egoist who schemed for advancement. Russell had sold “Miricle Wheat” claiming that it had been blessed and would bring forth 5 times more wheat; however, the wheat did not grow well. In 1912, J. J. Ross, Pastor of James Street Baptist Church, Hamilton, Ontario, publically exposed Russell as a fraud preying upon the public. Russell sued Ross for libel but lost. In the trial Russell frequently contradicted himself, claiming first to know the Greek alphabet, then claiming under pressure that he might make mistakes in identifying the letters, and then finally admitting that he could not read the alphabet at all when confronted with a copy of it, proving himself to be a perjurer.

Russell wrote that it is impossible to understand God’s plan of salvation independent of Russellite theology. Russell also said that if one studies the Bible alone, void of Russell’s interpretations, that one will walk in darkness at the end of two years. But Russell said there is a ray of hope for all those foolish enough to study God’s Word alone. If all will adopt Russellism as a guide in biblical interpretation, mankind will enter into a “new” Kingdom Age; for then, by virtue of the Russell’s expositions, true understanding of the Bible’s basic doctrines will follow.

Jehovah’s Witnesses pursue this same line of theological error to day under the title *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah’s Kingdom*.

### Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford (President, 1916-1942)

When Russell died in 1916, Rutherford declared that he was the mouthpiece of Jehovah for this age and that God had designated his words as the expression of divine mandate, and adopted the name “Jehovah’s Witnesses” (1931), partly to distinguish Rutherford’s group from the splinter groups that arose after Russell’s death.

Many of Russell’s followers left the Society as a result of this action by Rutherford, only to be threatened that they would “suffer destruction” if they did not repent and recognize Jehovah’s will as expressed through the Society.

Rutherford led the cult to be called Jehovah’s Witnesses, a name taken in 1931 at Columbus, Ohio, to differentiate between the Watchtower organization and those who remained as true followers of Russell as represented by The Dawn Bible Students and the Laymen’s Home Missionary Movement. Under Rutherford’s leadership, the “Society” became known by its present common name, “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” and its corporate name, The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, with its international office in Brooklyn, New York.

Rutherford had been a special judge of the Eighth Judicial Circuit Court of Boonville, Missouri. Rutherford also possessed a deep, powerful voice, which was capable of holding large audiences with its crescendo-like effect. Russell’s writings were distributed, some fifteen or twenty million copies of them, over a period of sixty years. Rutherford wrote over one hundred books and pamphlets, and his works as of 1941 had been translated into eighty languages.

### Na than Homer Knorr (President, 1942-1977)

#### Fred er ick W. Franz (President, 1977-1992)

Knorr was elected president immediately after Rutherford’s death of cancer in 1942. Knorr was responsible for the Gilead Missionary Training School in South Lansing, New York. He followed diligently in the footsteps of Russell and Rutherford. Knorr died in June of 1977, and Frederick W. Franz, a long time leader and then vice-president of the Society, was elected president, and piloted the Watchtower in the pattern of his predecessors. With each succeeding president, the control of the Society grows stronger.

### Mil ton G. Henschel (1992-?)

Vice-President Milton G. Henschel became president when Franz died in 1992. Henschel is even more “team-oriented” than was Franz regarding the high authority in the Watchtower, the Governing Body. Under the corporate leadership of the Governing Body, the Watchtower publications and meetings have fewer antagonistic denouncements of the less popular Jehovah’s Witness distinctives, such as the rejection of birthday celebrations and higher education. The Governing Body has also encouraged a strong evangelistic outreach overseas, the source of the vast majority of the converts. The Governing Body had continued the unbroken autocracy of the Society,

consistently condemning any dissension, any criticism, and any doubt on the part of members. Some observers speculate that whoever succeeds Henschel will complete the transition from the sole domination leadership of Russell to the anonymous string-pulling of the Governing Body.

## Today

Total membership in the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society as of the end of 1996 was 5,413,769. Of that number, 975,829 are members in the United States. During 1996, United States Witnesses baptized only 43,663 converts, while worldwide the convert baptisms numbered 366,579.

Door-to-door “preaching” is an essential part of the works necessary for Witnesses to be saved, and Witnesses in the United States spent 178,325,740 hours “preaching,” with the worldwide total in 1996 of more than 1.4 billion hours. “Bible” studies, which are actually *book* studies for Witnesses and potential converts to learn distinctive Watchtower doctrines and practices, are also essential for spiritual progress in this system. In 1996 American Jehovah’s Witnesses reported conducting 530,200 “Bible” studies, while Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide accumulated more than 4.8 million “Bible” studies. The annual “Memorial” service of Jehovah’s Witnesses is their unbiblical version of the “Lord’s Supper,” and only a minute fraction of the members, the “spiritual class,” or “anointed,” partake, but *all* Jehovah’s Witnesses and as many friends, relatives, and prospective members as possible are encouraged to attend. In 1996, almost 13 million people attended the Memorial service. This is a prime recruiting tool, exemplifying the supposed “unity” of the Watchtower Society to a watching world.

## Literature

One of the most distressing traits of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is their complete disregard for historical facts and dependable literary. Jehovah’s Witnesses’ now deny theological connection whatsoever with “Pastor” Charles T. Russell, their admitted founder and first president of The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Since Russell was long ago proven to be a perjurer under oath, a sworn adversary of historical Christianity, and a scholastic fraud, it is obvious why the Witnesses seek to avoid his influence and memory whenever possible.

Today, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society is clearly the legacy of Charles Taze Russell and Judge Joseph F. Rutherford. Magazine publications of about 832 million combined is sue copies per year, and new book titles each year enjoying publication runs of 3 to 5 million copies each, indicate that the written word is well exploited by the Society.

The Watchtower publishes a variety of Bible translations in various languages, as well as its own translation (carefully changed from the originals to support peculiar

Watchtower doctrine) in English, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. Greek interlinear New Testament publications include *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* (1969, revised in 1985). This interlinear uses the Westcott and Hort Greek text. One of their most important booklets is *Reasoning From the Scriptures* (1985, revised in 1989), which answers the most commonly challenged Watchtower interpretations and teachings from Scripture.

Since Rutherford’s death, all Society publications are issued without any author credit or anonymously. The Society position is that this preserves the humility of the contributors and focuses attention on God’s Word and will rather than on the human agency used to communicate that divine truth. Detractors point out that concealing the identity of the authors makes it impossible for any one to evaluate the authors’ qualifications, expertise, or authority in the areas in which they write.

The two signature magazines of the Society, *The Watchtower*, published in 125 languages, and *Awake!*, published in eighty-one languages, are published semi-monthly. Figures available for each of the January 1996 issues of *The Watchtower* (18.9 million copies) and *Awake!* (15.7 million copies) indicate the widespread influence of the Society.

## Activities

The followers of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society are managed in a closely-controlled, tightly knit or ganizational structure that is dictated from the Governing Body in Brooklyn, New York, and is not open to any adaptation or revision from any other authority. The Governing Body is a group of “heavenly class” or “anointed” men (currently numbering twelve) presided over by President Henschel.

Prospective members are encouraged to commit themselves to the Society as quickly as possible and become members through baptism by immersion at the local congregational level. New members must immediately begin training for field work by spending time with older members as they conduct their own field work. *Publishers* are Witnesses who commit an average of 1,200 hours per year in “fieldwork,” including door-to-door recruitment, sidewalk soliciting, and “book” studies with prospective and new members. Those who dedicate a significantly greater amount of time than 1,200 hours earn the title *Pioneer*, to distinguish them from mere publishers.

Groups meeting together are called *congregations*, but the places where they meet are called *Kingdom Halls*, not churches. Members appointed from higher-up for leadership are called *Overseers* or *Elders*. The person who leads the elder meetings is called the *Presiding Overseer* of the congregation. The *Service Overseer* handles service business within the congregation. *Ministerial Servants* are delegated administrative responsibilities as assistants to the elders.

Circuits are associations of around twenty congregations, supervised by a Circuit Overseer. Circuits organize twice-a-year conventions for their member congregations. Districts are geographical collections of circuits (twenty-two are in the United States). The District Overseer organizes the annual district convention, at which all new teachings and rules from the Governing Body are announced to the members, and at which new publications are presented. Collections of districts are called Branches, collections of branches are Zones, and the Brooklyn Society of fice is called the Headquarters.

Jehovah’s Witnesses have only one day of ceremony each year, the Memorial of Christ’s Death at Pass over. At this ceremony, held in large auditoriums, all members are expected to be present along with family, friends, and prospective members. The elements of the Lord’s Supper are passed through the audience, but only those of the anointed or heavenly class are allowed to partake. (That number is now fewer than 9,000 worldwide since no one born after 1914 is considered eligible for the class.) Jehovah’s Witnesses reject celebration of any other religious, national, or cultural holidays (Christmas, Easter, birthdays, Sabbath or Sunday ceremonies, etc.) as pagan and idolatrous. Those members who are caught participating in such holidays can be disfellowshipped.

Each Kingdom Hall has five meetings per week, which all congregation members are expected to attend. The Public Talk is usually held each Sunday, and the Watchtower Study normally follows, while the Theocratic Ministry School is usually a weekday evening meeting, followed by the Service Meeting. Each Witness is also required to attend a weekly Book Study in addition to his or her own field work, and these book studies may be conducted by the Witness. The field work can not be neglected, since “every one of the Witnesses, whether serving at the world headquarters, in branches, or in congregations, does this field-work of person ally telling others about God’s Kingdom

## Doctrinal Error

### Trinity

Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the trinity, claiming that it is not logical to believe that there are three Gods in One. However, Bible believing Christians do not believe that there are “three gods in one” (*Let God Be True*, 100), but *do* believe that there are three Persons all of the same Being or Substance—coequal, coexistent, and coeternal.

For example, God said in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness,” not in *my* image, after *my* likeness. Here plurality is seen, God speaking to His coeternal Son (Christ) and addressing *Him* as an *equal*. Genesis 11:7, with reference to the Tower of Babel, also supports the Triune God doctrine. Here God, speaking as an *equal* to His Son, declares, “Let *us* go down and there confound their language”—again, plurality and *equal* dis-

course. In the face of all these texts, the Watchtower is strangely silent. Still, they declare that “there is no basis for concluding that the Holy Spirit is a person.”

The fact that the Holy Spirit is described as possessing an active *will* (“If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you,” John 16:7), which is the most concrete trait of a distinct personality, and that He is said to exercise the characteristics of a *teacher* (John 16:8), apparently all falls on deaf ears where the Watchtower is concerned.

### Diety of Jesus Christ

The diety of Christ is a prime answer to Jehovah’s Witnesses, for since the Trinity is a reality and Jesus and Jehovah are “One” and the same, then the whole framework of the cult collapses.

1.(a) *Isaiah 7:14*. “There fore the Lord [Jehovah] himself shall give you a sign; Be hold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (liter ally, “God” or “Jehovah with us,” since Jehovah is the only God).

(b) *Isaiah 9:6*. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The ever lasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

(c) *Micah 5:2*. “But thou, Beth lehem Ephratah, though thou be lit tle among the thou sands of Ju dah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

2. *John 1:1*. “In the beginning [or “origin,” Greek, *arche*] was the Word, [*Logos*] and the Word was with God, and the Word was God [*theos*].”

3. *John 5:18*. “[He] said also that God was his Father, making him self equal with God.”

4. *John 20:28*. “Thomas answered and said unto him, [Jesus] My Lord and my God.”

We see, then, that our Lord was equal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit in His divinity nature, though inferior (as a man), by choice, in His humanity as the last Adam (John 14:28; 1 Corinthians 15:45–47).

### The Resurrection of Christ

Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and claim that He was raised a “divine spirit being” or as an “invisible spirit creature.” They state that Jesus simply took human forms as He needed them, which enabled Him to be seen, for as the *Word [Logos]* He would have been in visible to the human eye. In short, Jesus did not appear in the *same* form that hung upon the cross since that body either “dissolved into gases or ... is preserved somewhere as the grand memorial of God’s love.” This, in spite of Paul’s direct refutation in 1 Timothy 2:5, where he calls “the man Christ Jesus” our only mediator—some thirty years after the resurrection! Christ himself prophesied His own bodily resurrection, and John tells us

“He spake of the temple of His body” (John 2:21).

### The Physical Return of Christ

Jehovah’s Witnesses declare that Christ returned to the temple in 1914 and cleansed it by 1918 for judgment upon sinful men and Satan’s organizations. They affirm that since He did not rise physically, neither will He return physically.

The physicallyal return of Christ is the “blessed hope” of Bible believing Christians (Titus 2:13), and the language used to portray its visible certainty is most explicit. In Titus The language is self-explanatory. When the Lord returns with His saints, “every eye shall see Him” (Matthew 24:30, cf. Revelation 1:7). How then can Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that He has already returned but is invisible? The answer is they can not and still remain honest scripturally. To further establish these great truths, the apostle Paul writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:14 clearly states that the Lord Jesus will appear physically. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 the Lord’s return is revealed as being visible and audible, not invisible as Jehovah’s Witnesses affirm. The doctrine of the physicallyal return of Christ can not be denied without also denying God’s Word.

### Hell and Eternal Punishment

Jehovah’s Witness teach that hell (sheol) is literally “the grave,” the place where mortals await the resurrection. Jehovah’s Witnesses describe death as being unconsciousness or extinction. Death in the biblical sense always means separation and never means extinction or annihilation. “The soul that sinneth ... it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4) is a reference to the time when Adam sinned and his soul became *separated* from God in the sense of fellowship—and consequently, as a result of sin, all men die or are separated from God by Adam’s as well as their own sins. But God has provided a reconciliation for us in the person of His Son, and we are “born again,” regenerated and reconciled to God by the sacrifice of His Son “in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14, cf. John 3:3–7, 15–16; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21). So then death is not extinction but consciousness existence, as is demonstrated in Matthew 17:1–3, when Moses and Elijah talked with Christ. Moses’ body was dead but Moses as a living soul spoke to Christ, and he was alive and conscious! Substantiating all this is Christ’s own declaration, “I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And who so ever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26). Therefore, death is only the separation between, not the extinction of, personalities (Isaiah 59:1–2; see also 2 Corinthians 5:8).

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better. Philippians 1:21-23*

# Witnessing

to

## Jehovah’s Witnesses

and the

## Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

*Galatians 1:8-9*

By Dr. Gail E. Terrell

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