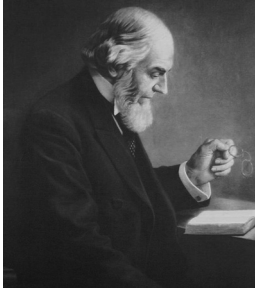


22 What Jehovah's Witnesses believe

Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, did not claim any special revelation, but he came to believe that he was God's mouthpiece. He wrote that gradually from 1870 onwards he became aware of what he believed to be the Truth.



Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Russell early rejected orthodox Protestantism, studying the Bible independently. In 1872 he organized a group devoted to biblical study. In the same year he published a small book stating that Christ would return, invisibly, in 1874 and that the world would end in 1914. Russell quickly gained a wide following, and in 1878 he established an independent church in Pittsburgh, taking the title of pastor. In 1884 he founded the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.

"Russell, Charles Taze," Copyright (c) Microsoft Corporation.

Important dates

- 1879 First issue of Watch Tower magazine
- 1884 Formation of Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, which was incorporated in 1885. Eventually, the 7 directors of this corporation became the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses.
- 1914 Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Christ returned to the earth.
- 1916 Death of C T Russell
- 1917 Judge Joseph F Rutherford elected president of the corporation, taking full control of the organisation and choosing name Jehovah's Witnesses.
- 1942 Death of J F Rutherford, election of Nathan H Knorr. Membership 108,000.
- 1950 Publication of New World Translation of Bible.
- 1970 Membership 1,384,782.
- 1975 Predicted as a special year, calculated as marking 6,000 years from creation, and the end of God's 6 'days' of work.
- 1976 Membership 2,138,537.
- 1978 Membership 2,086,698. (There was some disappointment that 1975 did not bring the expected end of the age)

What do Jehovah's Witnesses believe?

The following text comes from a Jehovah's Witnesses publication 'Reasoning from the Scriptures' (note the American spelling). As you read each one, ask yourself whether you think it reflects Bible teaching. You may like to underline points that you agree with (or disagree with).

1. **Bible:** Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God, and instead of adhering to a creed based on human tradition, they hold to the Bible as the standard for all their beliefs.
2. **God:** They worship Jehovah as the only true God and freely speak to others about his and his loving purposes toward mankind. Anyone who publicly witnesses about Jehovah is usually identified as belonging to the one group - "Jehovah's Witnesses."
3. **Jesus Christ:** They believe, not that Jesus Christ is part of a Trinity, but that, as the Bible says, he is the Son of God, the first of God's creations; that he had a prehuman existence and that his life was transferred from heaven to the womb of a virgin, Mary; that his perfect human life laid down in sacrifice makes possible salvation to eternal life for those who exercise faith; that Christ is actively ruling as King, with God-given authority over all the earth since 1914.
4. **God's Kingdom:** They believe that God's Kingdom is the only hope for mankind; that it is a real government; that it will soon destroy the present wicked system of things, including all human governments, and that it will produce a new system in which righteousness will prevail.
5. **Heavenly life:** They believe that 144,000 spirit-anointed Christians will share with Christ in his heavenly Kingdom, ruling as kings with him. They do not believe that heaven is the reward for everyone who is "good."
6. **The earth:** They believe that God's original purpose for the earth will be fulfilled; that the earth will be completely populated by worshipers of Jehovah and that these will be able to enjoy eternal life in human perfection; that even the dead will be raised to an opportunity to share in these blessings.
7. **Death:** They believe that the dead are conscious of absolutely nothing; that they are experiencing neither pain nor pleasure in some spirit realm; that they do not exist except in God's memory, so hope for their future life lies in a resurrection from the dead.
8. **Last days:** They believe that we are living now, since 1914, in the last days of this wicked system of things; that some who saw the events of 1914 will also see the complete destruction of the present wicked world; that lovers of righteousness will survive into a cleansed earth.
9. **Separate from the world:** They earnestly endeavor to be no part of the world, as Jesus said would be true of his followers. They show genuine Christian love for their neighbours, but they do not share in the politics or the wars of any nation. They provide for the material needs of their families but shun the world's avid pursuit of material things and personal fame and its excessive indulgence in pleasure
10. **Apply Bible counsel:** They believe that it is important to apply the counsel of God's Word in everyday life now - at home, in school, in business, in their congregation. Regardless of a person's past way of life, he may become one of Jehovah's Witnesses if he abandons practices condemned by God's Word and applies its godly counsel. But if anyone thereafter makes a practice of adultery, fornication, homosexuality, drug abuse, drunkenness, lying, or stealing, he will be disfellowshipped from the organization.

Reasoning from the Scriptures, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, inc.

Other notes

Apart from the quotations from Reasoning from the Scriptures, the following notes have been provided by Ivan Rollason, a Christadelphian who for many years had received instruction from Jehovah's Witnesses. Again, you may like to think whether you agree or disagree in each case:

Authority: Vested in the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Bible: Inspired, but Watchtower publications have authority also, having the backing of the Publishing Committee of the Governing Body.

Jesus: Before his birth was the archangel Michael, crucified, rose spiritually, not physically, becoming an invisible Spirit creature (Michael again), eventually to come alongside earth rather than returning to it.

The name of this Michael occurs only five times in the Bible. The glorious spirit person who bears the name is referred to as "one of the chief princes," "the great prince who has charge of your [Daniel's] people," and as "the archangel." (Dan 10:13; 12:1; Jude 9, Revised Standard Version) Michael means "Who is like God?" The name evidently designates Michael as the one who takes the lead in upholding Jehovah's sovereignty and destroying God's enemies.

At 1 Thessalonians 4:16 (RSV), the command of Jesus Christ for the resurrection to begin is described as "the archangel's call," and Jude 9 says that the archangel is Michael. Would it be appropriate to liken Jesus' commanding call to that of someone lesser in authority? Reasonably, then, the archangel Michael is Jesus Christ. (Interestingly, the expression "archangel" is never found in the plural in the Scriptures, thus implying that there is only one.)

In what sense will 'every eye see him'? They will discern from events on earth that he is invisibly present. Also referring to sight that is not physical, John 9:41 reports: "Jesus said to [the Pharisees]: 'If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now you say, "We see." Your sin remains.'" (Compare Romans 1:20) Following Christ's return, some persons show faith; they recognise the sign of his presence. Others reject the evidence, but when Christ goes into action as God's executioner of the wicked, even they will discern from the manifestation of his power that the destruction is not from men but from heaven. They will know what is happening because they were warned in advance. Because of what is overtaking them, they will "beat themselves in grief."

Reasoning from the Scriptures, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, inc.

The kingdom of God: They believe in the kingdom of God on earth after Armageddon, populated by Jehovah's Witnesses, ruled from heaven by God, Jesus and his elite 'little flock' of 144,000 who are sometimes described as a separate kingdom of heaven in heaven.

The Return of Christ: They believe that Christ has already returned, in an invisible form, and is only seen by the effects of his presence. They translate the Greek word *parousia* (as in 1 Corinthians 15:23) as 'presence' rather than 'coming'

Death: The soul is believed to be part of the body, not separated at death. In the case

of the 144,000, they are held to be translated to heavenly glory immediately on death while everyone else returns to the dust awaiting resurrection. Abraham and his family are servant to the 144,000.

Fighting: Jehovah's Witnesses do not take part in military service.

Devil: Held to be Satan, a supernatural tempter, currently ruling the earth by means of demons, having been cast out of heaven in 1914.

Blood: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that receiving transfusion is sinful.

The Jews: No longer God's people, nor his witnesses.

Baptism: Immersion in water of a believing adult (though exceptionally as young as 6 has been recorded). Baptisms follow a period of formal instruction and 3 separate interviews. Usually baptisms are 'saved up' and take place at large annual assemblies. In the UK, a typical number of baptisms at a regional assembly would be 30-40.

Holy Days: Strongly against celebrating Christmas, Easter, Birthdays, etc.

Last Days: Understood to relate both to 33-70 AD, end of Jewish system, and to 1914 onwards, the last days of the present system.

Angels: Not immortal, as Satan (a fallen angel) will be destroyed.

Prophecy: This has always been an important part of the Jehovah's Witnesses faith, with 1914 as a pivotal date. They hold that:

- in 1914, Jesus became present but invisible, his active rulership and the last days both began.
- the generation then living will not pass away till all things (including the destruction of existing systems) have been fulfilled.
- three and a half years later in 1918 the resurrection of believers began.
- his followers went into captivity in Babylon the Great in 1918 being released in 1919 being then acknowledged by Jesus as his 'good and discreet slave' his only channel of communication with his servant worldwide.
- the final harvest has been in progress ever since, with all people being divided into sheep and goats with salvation or destruction as their destiny.

The 1914 date was calculated by adding 2,520 years (7 times 360, based upon Daniel 4) to 607 BC which is taken to be the date of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. (The 607 BC date is not supported by historical evidence).

Although it is not now widely known, even by Jehovah's Witnesses, Watchtower taught for over 50 years that the invisible reign of Christ began in 1874, before it adopted 1914. Up to 1922, Watchtower taught that the last days began in 1799, but this was then also revised to 1914. Similarly, the date of the beginning of the resurrection was originally held to be 1881, but this was later revised to the presently accepted date of 1918. The harvest was originally to begin in 1878 with all human institutions being destroyed in October 1914, but this is now believed to have begun in 1914 and to be continuing, though there was great expectation that it would end in 1975.

The Jehovah's Witnesses place a particular emphasis on the apocalyptic prophecy of the 144,000, holding it to be a literal number of the top class of the redeemed who will

rule the earth with Christ from heaven. As time has gone by, this number has been made up and a second class of salvation has been introduced.

Organisation

The Governing body is based in Brooklyn, New York, and has many subcommittees. There is an authoritative chain of command right down to local congregations, with all members being expected to take part in regular door-to-door canvassing, the sect's main method of preaching. They used to sell their magazines on the doorstep, but now they give them away. Their meeting places are called Kingdom Halls.

Think about what you have read.

Good and bad?

What can we learn from Jehovah's witnesses?



Right and wrong?

Where do you think they have misunderstood what the Bible teaches? Try to be specific, and to give examples of passages that clearly state the Bible teaching.



Parousia

Use a concordance or online Bible to explore the New Testament use and meaning of parousia and establish whether the Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of the second coming stands up to scrutiny. (Look up 'coming' or Strong's number 3952).

Michael

Look up the references to Michael the archangel, and see what you can learn about him.