

MOUNT SINAI MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

BIBLE STUDY

THE CORE BELIEFS OF OTHER RELIGIONS

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

What are Jehovah's Witnesses and their core beliefs?

1. Historical Origin and Development

Jehovah's Witnesses trace their roots to the late 19th century. Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) was a central figure in their early formation, producing publications under what became known as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Originally part of a wider "Bible Student" movement, Russell's teachings took shape through various "Studies in the Scriptures" volumes, which discussed biblical prophecy and end-times expectations.

Following Russell's death, Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869-1942) rose to prominence. He popularized the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" in 1931, drawing upon [Isaiah 43:10-12](#): "You are My witnesses," declares the LORD. Under Rutherford's leadership, the group's organizational structure tightened, emphasizing centralized oversight through the Watch Tower headquarters. Over the decades, Jehovah's Witnesses have established a worldwide presence through consistent door-to-door evangelism and literature distribution.

2. Notable Organizational Structure

Jehovah's Witnesses are coordinated globally under the Governing Body, a small group based at their headquarters. The Governing Body sets official doctrines, interprets Scripture, and oversees what is published in their magazines, books, and study aids, primarily The Watchtower and Awake!.

Local congregations meet in Kingdom Halls, typically for weekly gatherings. There is no class-based clergy; instead, elders (and ministerial servants) volunteer to meet pastoral and administrative needs.

3. Core Beliefs and Distinctives

Jehovah's Witnesses hold a number of beliefs that set them apart from most mainstream Christian denominations:

1. View of God and Jesus

They teach that "Jehovah" is the only true God. They do not affirm the traditional Christian understanding of the Trinity, viewing the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force. They regard Jesus not as equal to God in the sense historically confessed but as the first and highest creation of Almighty God, at times associating Him with the archangel Michael. This perspective contrasts with biblical passages traditionally interpreted to affirm Jesus's divine nature, such as [John 1:1-3](#), [John 8:58](#), and [Philippians 2:6-8](#).

2. Scriptural Authority and the New World Translation

Jehovah's Witnesses rely on the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT). They believe it more accurately restores the name "Jehovah" and presents what they consider a faithful rendering of biblical texts. However, other manuscript scholars raise questions regarding certain renderings in the NWT that differ from more widely used translations.

3. Prophetic Emphasis and the Last Days

From their earliest teachings, Jehovah's Witnesses have placed significant emphasis on end-times prophecy. They cite passages like [Matthew 24](#) and Revelation to suggest impending global tribulation, followed by the establishment of God's Kingdom. Over time, they have adjusted dates and expectations surrounding these end-time events.

4. Salvation and the 144,000

They teach that only 144,000 (the "anointed class") will receive a heavenly reward, referencing [Revelation 14:1-5](#). The "great crowd" of other believers are taught to inherit eternal life on a restored paradise earth. This belief diverges from the broader Christian view that all believers share in the hope of heaven ([John 14:2-3](#); [2 Corinthians 5:1-2](#)).

5. Practices Regarding Holidays and Allegiances

Based on their interpretation of passages like [John 15:19](#) and [1 John 2:15-17](#), Jehovah's Witnesses avoid many holidays and civic practices, such as celebrating birthdays, Christmas, or national allegiances. They maintain political neutrality and refuse military service, believing only God's Kingdom can address humanity's problems.

4. Scripture and Translation Considerations

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the Bible, originally given by God, is the absolute guide for faith and conduct. Their New World Translation introduces linguistic choices (e.g., inserting "Jehovah" in the New Testament, even in passages where extant Greek manuscripts do not contain the Tetragrammaton). This has prompted extensive dialogue among biblical scholars regarding the best possible approach to textual transmission and the consistency of ancient manuscripts.

Archaeological discoveries-such as the Dead Sea Scrolls-have bolstered confidence in the integrity of the Old Testament texts, showing remarkable consistency. Scholars looking to the thousands of extant Greek manuscripts of the New Testament also stress how faithfully the text has been preserved. While Jehovah's Witnesses accept many of these findings, they interpret certain passages differently based on their doctrinal framework.

5. Evangelistic Practices

Jehovah's Witnesses are well known for their door-to-door ministry. Each member is encouraged to participate by sharing their literature and engaging people in conversations about the Bible. Publications like *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* typically feature articles on Scripture interpretation, family matters, societal issues, and prophecy.

Their Kingdom Hall services involve a combination of Bible study, lectures, and group discussions. All adherents are expected to spend time in "the field," which is their terminology for public and personal outreach, believing this fulfills Jesus's words in [Matthew 24:14](#): "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world... and then the end will come."

6. Distinctions from Mainstream Christian Interpretations

1. Denial of the Trinity

Traditional Christian confessions affirm that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all persons within the one eternal Being of God (see [Matthew 28:19](#)). Jehovah's Witnesses reject this, stating that Jesus is a created being, and the Holy Spirit is not personal.

2. The Nature of Christ's Resurrection

Historic Christian doctrine teaches Jesus's bodily resurrection ([Luke 24:36-43](#), [John 20:27-28](#)). Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was raised as a spirit creature, and His earthly body was not preserved.

3. Authority of the Watch Tower Organization

Jehovah's Witnesses emphasize obedience to the direction of the Governing Body as God's "channel of communication." Mainstream Christians may appreciate structures of church authority yet typically hold that each individual and local church is directly accountable to God's Word, with a broader acceptance of scholarly and historical Christian teachings.

4. Celebration of Key Christian Festivals

While traditional Christian communities observe holidays like Christmas and Easter to commemorate Jesus's birth and resurrection, Jehovah's Witnesses see such events as nonbiblical customs. They do, however, memorialize Christ's death annually around the time of Passover, following their particular understanding of [Luke 22:19-20](#).

7. Relationship to Broader Christian Discourse

Many in mainstream Christian circles consider Jehovah's Witnesses as having diverged from core biblical doctrines, including the historic deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit. Yet, Jehovah's Witnesses see themselves as having returned to "pure worship," based on their own interpretations of Scripture-interpretations that they contend have been obscured in other denominational traditions.

Cross-examination of the earliest available manuscripts and patristic writings often underscores the continuity of core Christian beliefs about Christ's divine nature and the Holy Spirit's personhood. For instance, the earliest church fathers consistently referred to Jesus as divine, echoing [John 1:1](#): "In the beginning was

the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jehovah’s Witnesses bring alternate renditions to such verses, leading to ongoing debates in theological and textual circles.

8. Concluding Observations

Jehovah’s Witnesses are a distinct religious group with a complex system of beliefs shaped by their interpretations of Scripture and governed by the Watch Tower organization. Their history began in the 19th century and has expanded globally, characterized by the rigorous distribution of literature and ongoing evangelistic efforts.

While they align with many biblical moral teachings, they differ significantly from traditional Christian doctrine on key issues, such as the Trinity, the deity and resurrection of Christ, and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. For those examining the broader Christian perspective, biblical testimony—such as [Luke 24:39](#) containing Jesus’s words “Touch Me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have”—has historically upheld the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as central to Christian hope.

Regardless of one’s view, understanding Jehovah’s Witnesses’ background, beliefs, and organizational structure provides insight into one of the most recognizable yet distinct movements that cite Scripture as their authority, while remaining outside of the traditional Nicene-based Christian creeds. Their presence worldwide stands as a testimony of their commitment to share their interpretation of biblical promises, prompting thorough discussions among scholars, missionaries, and everyday readers of Scripture.