

Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

By Rick Branch

Founder: Charles Taze Russell

Founding Date: 1879

Official Publication: The Watchtower and Awake! magazines are published semi-monthly. They also publish one to two doctrinal study books each year.

Organization Structure: Headquartered in Brooklyn, New York, the organization is lead by a president and a group of men known as The Governing Body. This group oversees every aspect of the organization including the material that is written for the periodicals and the study books.

Unique Terms: The local congregation is called a *Kingdom Hall*. The Watchtower sometimes refers to itself as a *Theocratic Organization* or an organization which is directed by God.

Other Names: Jehovah's Witnesses.

HISTORY

Born in 1852, Charles Taze Russell founded the Zion's Watch Tower in 1879 and later incorporated the group under the name Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society in 1884. Because of his rejection of the doctrine of Hell, he would go on to reject nearly every other Christian doctrine as well as add many physically and spiritually dangerous doctrines of his own making. Many of these unique and bizarre teachings were to be found in his six volume series titled, **Studies in the Scriptures**.

Beginning with only a few followers in the 1880's, Russell began to spread his message to the world. In 1893 the first "national assembly" was held in Chicago. It was attended by "about 360" followers of Russell's teachings. At the conclusion of the assembly, Russell explains, "The Calvary Baptist Church of Chicago very kindly granted us the use of their baptistery; and, in all, 70 symbolized their baptism into Christ's death by immersion into water" (**Jehovah's Witnesses In The Divine Purpose**, p. 33). It was from this first national assembly that the idea for local assemblies grew into today's practice.

Russell died in 1916 and was replaced by the second president, Joseph F. Rutherford. "A process of replacing Russell's writings with Rutherford's began in 1921 with the publication of Rutherford's Harp of God. Between 1921 and 1941, Rutherford was to write twenty books and numerous pamphlets, which would slowly revise the doctrine and structure left him by Russell" (**Encyclopedia of American Religions**, G. Melton, Vol. 1, p. 485).

One of Rutherford's books that caused a great amount of controversy was the seventh volume of the **Studies in the Scriptures**. As a result of this replacing process, Rutherford had many critics. Some of the former followers of Russell's theology left the group and began their own organization. This was the beginning of groups such as the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement and later the Dawn Bible Students Association. Because of the confusion being caused by these and other new groups, the name of the organization was officially changed in 1931 to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (**Jehovah's Witnesses In the Divine Purpose**, p. 125-127).

It was under Rutherford's leadership that the organization began to experience its phenomenal growth. In 1928, the organization recorded 44,000 members and by his death in 1942, their membership had grown to over 115,000. Part of this growth can be attributed to Rutherford's insistence that the world was about to end and Armageddon was to happen any day.

The next president, Nathan H. Knorr, would streamline the organization and begin a worldwide outreach strategy that has survived into the 1990's. In 1943, he began the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead. This was to be the forerunner of the Jehovah's Witnesses teaching methods of today. It was also under Knorr's leadership that the New World Translation was published. This translation, published in six volumes between 1950-1960, supports many Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines while ignoring accepted rules of language translation. At Knorr's death in 1977, the Watchtower had over 2.2 million members (**Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses**, 1978, p. 30).

Under the leadership of Frederick W. Franz, fourth president, the Watchtower reached a total membership of over four million members. With Franz death in 1992, the current president, Milton G. Henschel, took the helm.

DOCTRINE

TRINITY: Joseph Rutherford made it quite clear that the Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. He stated, "The origin of the Trinity doctrine is traced back to the ancient Babylonians and Egyptians and other ancient mythologists. It will not be disputed by Jews and Christians that these ancient peoples worshiped demon gods and that God's typical nation of Israel was warned not to mingle with them because of this. It follows, then, that God was not the author of this doctrine. The obvious conclusion is, therefore, that Satan is the originator of the Trinity doctrine."

Nevertheless, sincere persons who want to know the true God and serve him find it a bit difficult to love and worship a complicated, freakish-looking, three-headed God. The clergy who inject such ideas will contradict themselves in the very next breath by stating that God made man in his own image; for certainly no one has ever seen a three-headed human creature" (**Let God Be True**, 2nd ed., pp. 101-102).

GOD THE FATHER: Known as Jehovah, the Watchtower considers Him to be the only true eternal God, the Almighty. They write, "There was, therefore, a time when Jehovah was all alone in universal space" (**Let God Be True**, p. 25). Being alone, the first creative act of Jehovah was to create his Son.

GOD THE SON: The Watchtower has consistently denied the deity of Christ. Under Knorr's leadership the Watchtower proclaimed, "Thus, for example, the Bible shows that there is only one God, the Most High, the Almighty. And that the Son, as the First-born, the Only-begotten and 'the creation by God,' had a beginning" (**From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained**, p. 164). They further stated, "It proves that Michael the archangel is no other than the only-begotten Son of God, now Jesus Christ. The very name Michael means 'Who is like God?' and indicates that Jehovah God is without like or equal and that Michael his archangel is his great Champion and Vindicator" (**New Heavens and a New Earth**, pp. 30-31).

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT: Similar to many other cults, Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of the Holy Spirit. They have written, "But the holy spirit has no personal name. The reason for this is that the holy spirit is not an intelligent person. It is the impersonal, invisible active force that finds its source and reservoir in Jehovah God and that he uses to accomplish his will even at great distances, over light years of space" (**Let Your Name Be Sanctified**, p. 269).

MAN'S DESTINY: According to Jehovah's Witness theology, a person has one of three possible destinies. The Anointed (144,000) will be in heaven to reign with Jehovah God. The rest of the faithful Jehovah's Witnesses (not of the 144,000) will live forever on a paradise Earth. Both of these classifications are determined to a great extent on membership in the Watchtower organization as well as going door-to-door spreading the message of the Watchtower. Those people who are not members of the Watchtower organization will be destroyed by Jehovah God and cease to exist. There is no concept of eternal punishment or hell in Watchtower theology (**Let God Be True**, pp. 90-95, 289).

Other Doctrines

- 1) Since its very inception, the Watchtower has made false prophecies about the end of the world. Predicting the end in one form or another for the years 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975 and 1989 has caused its membership to maintain a steady upward trend.
- 2) Rejecting the medical practices of vaccinations, organ transplants and blood transfusions, the Watchtower has caused the deaths of many of its members throughout its history. Interestingly, vaccinations and organ transplants have now been acknowledged by the Watchtower as acceptable practices, contradicting their previous doctrinal position.
- 3) The Watchtower has maintained a long standing policy of denying its members any involvement in political causes or service in the Armed Forces.
- 4) Believing many customs in traditional families to be pagan in nature, the Watchtower rejects the practices of celebrating personal birthdays, Christmas, Easter, Mothers' and Fathers' day as well as most other holidays.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

- 1) While the Jehovah's Witnesses believe there is only one true God, they deny the biblical concept of the Trinity which teaches that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. One God: Isa. 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5-6, 18, 22; 1 Cor. 8:4. Father is God: 2 Peter 1:17; Phil. 2:11. Son is God: John 1:1; John 8:58; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6-9; Heb. 1:8. Holy Spirit is God: Acts 5:3-4.
- 2) Contrary to Watchtower theology, Jesus is not a created being or an angel, but rather is the Creator. John 1:2-3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 22:8-9.
- 3) The Holy Spirit is not only God but also clearly has personality according to the Bible. John 16:13-14; Acts 8:29, 13:2.
- 4) A person does not gain favor with God by being a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses and going door-to-door. Rather, salvation is dependent upon one's relationship with Jesus Christ. John 3:3, 16-20; Acts 4:12; Rom. 3:24-26; 1 John 1:7-10.
- 5) The Bible is clear that everyone will exist eternally, either in a place known as heaven or in a place of eternal torment. Heaven: John 14:1-3; Rev. 6:9. Hell: Matt. 23:33, 25:41, 45; Rev. 20:14.

RESOURCES

Watchman Fellowship Witnessing Tape and Study Manuals

- 1) **Jehovah's Witnesses and the Dating Game**, documents many of the false prophecies of the Watchtower. Photocopies of actual Watchtower documents. \$8.
- 2) **Doctrines Unto Destruction**, looks at the changes in doctrinal issues including their medical prohibitions. Photocopies of actual Watchtower documents. \$8.
- 3) **New World Translation: Is It The Word Of God?**, examines photocopies of the Watchtower's translation of the Bible and unmasks the many errors in this poor translation. \$8.
- 4) **The Watchtower Strikes Again!**, exposes through use of photocopies the deceptive practices of the Jehovah's Witnesses as they attempt to deny the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. \$8.

Christian Books

- 1) **Index of Watchtower Errors**, David Reed, editor. This 138 page book, organized in a topical format, summarized what Jehovah's Witness leaders have taught on numerous topics from hundreds of sources. \$8.
- 2) **Jehovah's Witnesses: Answered Verse by Verse**, David Reed. After demonstrating how Jehovah's Witnesses twist the scriptures, this 139 page book helps Christians answer the Witnesses' unbiblical arguments with clear and concise scriptural responses. \$6.
- 3) **Crisis of Conscience**, Raymond Franz. Nephew to the fourth president of the Watchtower and former Governing Body member, Franz provides fascinating insights on the inner workings of the organization. 396 pages. \$11.
- 4) **Why You Should Believe in the Trinity**, Robert Bowman, Jr. Written largely as a response to the Watchtower's 32 page booklet, *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, this much-needed reply gives helpful biblical and historical Christian defense of the Triune nature of God. 157 pages including indexes. \$8.
- 5) **The Watchtower Files**, Duane Magnani. This helpful book contains full-page reproductions of over 150 Watchtower publications. The accompanying dialogue provides suggested discussion formats for Christians witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses. 303 pages including indexes. \$8.

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