

**JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES.** Almost everyone knows of their aggressive door-to-door proselytizing. The organization they represent, known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTB&TS), emphasizes end time prophecy and has unsuccessfully predicted the end of the world many times. The WTB&TS exercises rigid control over Jehovah's Witnesses and forbids their participation in such common activities as taking blood transfusions, celebrating birthdays or holidays (including Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day), voting, flag saluting, and military service. Through these restrictions, the WTB&TS builds a wall of isolation between Jehovah's Witnesses and the rest of society.

### Historical Background

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society boldly claims to be the only organization God is using today to teach His truth and speak for Him.<sup>1</sup> According to the WTB&TS, all non-Jehovah's Witnesses will be destroyed at Armageddon, an event of divine judgment it threatens is just around the corner. The Watchtower Society prints over 15 million copies of its magazines every week into 120 languages, and has over 5 million active Jehovah's Witnesses ("publishers") spreading its doctrines in 230 countries. What follows are some essential facts everyone should know about the history and beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

### Borrowed Beliefs and Doctrines

Charles T. Russell (1852-1916) founded the Jehovah's Witnesses movement. As a teenager he rejected his Presbyterian roots, joined a more liberal Congregational Church, then left this group as well.<sup>2</sup> He denied the deity of Christ and the biblical teachings on hell and eternal punishment. Russell had no formal Bible training, but borrowed and built upon various teachings that were popular

at the time. For example, Adventism influenced his denial of hell, and a splinter Adventist group led by N.H. Barbour aroused his interest in end time prophecies. From Barbour he borrowed the belief that Christ returned *invisibly* to the world in 1874, and that 1914 was the year the world would be destroyed and the Millennium would begin.

### Fantastic Claims

In 1879 Russell started his own magazine, *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (now known as *The Watchtower*), to promote his doctrines. People were drawn to Russell's sensational end time predictions, and the organization grew.

In spite of his lack of formal training in theology or biblical languages, Russell claimed to be the only one with the truth, and he vigorously condemned all other Christian religions. As a result, ministers of various denominations began exposing Russell's false teachings and questionable character.

### Flawed Character

Rev. J.J. Ross published a pamphlet that exposed Russell's false claims and doctrines. He revealed that Russell "never attended the higher schools of learning; knows comparatively nothing of philosophy, systematic or historical theology; and is totally ignorant of the [biblical] languages [i.e. Hebrew and Greek]."<sup>3</sup> Russell unsuccessfully tried to stop circulation of this damaging information by suing Rev. Ross for defamatory libel. However, Russell not only lost the suit, but in the process perjured himself in court when he lied under oath about his knowledge of the Greek language. In the end Russell admitted the statements about himself in the pamphlet were true.<sup>4</sup>

In 1913, Russell unsuccessfully sued *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* for libel when that paper exposed his fraudulent attempts to sell ordinary wheat at the exorbitant price of \$60 a bushel, claiming it was "Miracle Wheat."<sup>5</sup>

### Failed Prophecies

Despite these setbacks, Russell continued to attract people with his fantastic prophetic interpretations and dramatic warnings that Armageddon would strike in 1914. When 1914 came and went, he changed the date to 1915. Russell died in 1916, leaving his followers doubting and disillusioned by his predictive failures. Joseph Franklin Rutherford then took control of the organization.

### Prophecy for Profit

Rutherford (1869-1942) also used the threat of Armageddon to intimidate Jehovah's Witnesses. He published *The Finished Mystery*, a book which predicted that in 1918 God would destroy churches and millions of their members, and claimed that by 1920 every kingdom would be swallowed up in anarchy.<sup>6</sup> Rutherford taught that the only way to escape the impending judgment and destruction was to join the Watchtower organization.

Fear of Armageddon motivated Witnesses to work hard selling Rutherford's books and other Watchtower Society literature. When the 1918 and 1920 predictions failed, Rutherford set a new date in his book titled *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* (1920). It taught that the millennium would start in 1925 and that Old Testament saints like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David would come back to life. The WT Society even built a luxurious Spanish mansion called Beth-Sarim (House of Princes), supposedly to house these patriarchs. In the meantime, however, Rutherford conveniently moved into the mansion. He also drove an expensive new car throughout the Great Depression, while rank and file Witnesses sold Watchtower books and pamphlets door-to-door, and worked at Bethel headquarters for \$10 - \$15 a month.<sup>7</sup> Six years after Rutherford's death in 1942, the Old Testament saints still had not arrived, so the Society quietly sold "Beth Sarim," thus closing an embarrassing chapter in their predictive history.<sup>8</sup>

### Tampering with the Bible

Under the leadership of Nathan H. Knorr (1905-1977) the WT Society put away date setting for a time and switched to a different strategy. Since many of their teachings are easily refuted by key verses in the King James Bible, Knorr set out to publish a different Bible for Jehovah's Witnesses to use. The WT Society Bible, called the *New World Translation* (NWT), blatantly alters many verses that show the errors of Watchtower teaching. The single best example of this is John 1:1, which in the King James Version clearly declares Jesus' deity — "*the Word was God.*" The WT Society denies the deity of Christ, so the NWT renders this phrase "the Word was *a god.*"<sup>9</sup>

Another example is found in the Old Testament book of Zechariah, chapter 12 verse 10. Jehovah God is speaking and says, "*they shall look upon **me** whom they have pierced,*" understood by Christians as a predictive reference to the crucifixion. Recognizing that Jesus' fulfillment of this prophecy would mean that he is Jehovah God, the Watchtower Society has changed this verse in the NWT to read "they will certainly look *to the One* whom they pierced through," thus eliminating another reference to the deity of Jesus Christ. The Society made similar changes to many other verses relating to the deity of Christ (Colossians 1:16-20; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8). They have also altered verses that expose the WT Society's false teaching on subjects like the reality of eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46), and the personality of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:14-16; 1 Timothy 4:1; Jude 19). In this way the Watchtower Society gives Jehovah's Witnesses and potential converts the illusion that the Bible supports its erroneous doctrines.

The translation committee responsible for the NWT was kept anonymous, undoubtedly to cover up their complete lack of scholarly qualifications. None of the men who worked on this project had any formal training in the biblical languages, except for Frederick Franz. He was chairman of the committee and had studied Greek for two years at the University of Cincinnati without graduating, and was only self-taught in Hebrew.<sup>9</sup> After Knorr's death, Franz became the Watchtower Society's new President.

### Intimidation and a Lack of Integrity

From 1960 to 1966 the organization's growth rate slowed considerably. At this point the WTB&TS introduced a new book and a new date for the end of the world. *Life Everlasting in the Freedom of the Sons of God* (1966) by Vice President Franz (1894-1992) concluded that the autumn of 1975 would mark the beginning of the seventh period of human history. The Society was careful to avoid printing an outright prediction, but the message was clear to Jehovah's Witnesses everywhere—Armageddon was coming soon. Some even sold their homes and property in 1974 and were praised by their leaders for doing so.<sup>10</sup>

Membership grew by the thousands until 1975 came and went. Then many Witnesses realized God was not leading the WT Society and left the organization. The leaders of the WTB&TS refused to admit they had been wrong about 1975, and instead told disillusioned members to "adjust their viewpoint."<sup>11</sup>

Exposure of the WT Society's false predictions has created doubts and concerns about the organization. The Society has responded by publishing articles and books in which they admit they have made mistakes in their historical predictions and doctrinal teaching. They excuse these errors by attributing them to human fallibility and by saying the WT Society has never claimed to be inspired by God.<sup>12</sup> This is a bold deception, since past Watchtower magazines are referred to as "God's message," and have carried instructions from Jehovah in quotation marks. A Watchtower magazine as recently as August 1, 1995 stated, "Jehovah particularly teaches his people by means of a weekly study of the Bible, using *The Watchtower* as a teaching aid."<sup>13</sup>

In 1943, WT Vice President Frederick Franz, and President Nathan H. Knorr provided the following testimony under oath in a court of law that the content of *The Watchtower* comes directly from God.

Cross-examination of Frederick W. Franz in the case of *Olin Moyle v. WTB&TS*, 1943, Sections #2596-2597, p. 866.

**Q.** At any rate, Jehovah God is now the editor of the paper [*The Watchtower*], is that right?  
**A.** He is today the editor of the paper.

**Q.** How long has He been editor of the paper?  
**A.** Since its inception he has been guiding it.

Cross-examination of Nathan Homer Knorr in the case of *Olin Moyle v. WTB&TS*, 1943, Section #4421, p. 1474.

**Q.** In fact, it [*The Watchtower*] is set forth directly as God's Word, isn't it?  
**A.** Yes, as His word.  
**Q.** Without any qualification whatsoever?  
**A.** That is right.

Many people remain unaware of these damaging facts, and the Witnesses continue to grow in number, distributing massive amounts of deceptive literature. In spite of its past failures and recent claims to not be inspired, the WT Society still demands complete loyalty and continues to predict Armageddon is coming soon with sure annihilation for anyone who does not join the organization or leaves its ranks. Even with a history marred by manipulation and false prophecies, the WT Society still claims to be the only one teaching the truth.

### Doctrinal Beliefs

When an organization like the WTB&TS claims to be the only true religion and the sole source of correct Bible teaching, we must carefully examine its beliefs. If its doctrines are true, they will be found in the Bible, and its teachings will be consistent and unchanging year after year. Jehovah's Witnesses, however, deny or twist many of the Bible's basic teachings, and their beliefs conflict with those held by orthodox Christians down through the centuries. Consider the following comparisons.

**The Nature of God.** The Bible teaches that there is only one true God (Isa. 43:10-11; 44:6,8). Father, Son and Holy Spirit are identified as distinct Persons within the one Triune Godhead (Matt. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 13:14). Throughout the New Testament the Son and the Holy Spirit, as well as the Father are separately identified as God. The attributes and prerogatives of Deity are ascribed to each (Son: Mark 2:5-12; John 20:28; Heb. 1:8; *Holy Spirit*: Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

**By contrast,** the WTB&TS denies the triune nature of God and teaches that such a belief is inspired by Satan.<sup>14</sup> It teaches that Jehovah, the name of the one true God, corresponds only to God the Father. The Society also denies that Jesus is God (see next point). They deny the Holy Spirit is a person, and instead teach he is merely God's active force, analogous to electricity.<sup>15</sup>



**Jesus Christ.** The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, and is the Creator of **all** things (John 1:1-3,14; Col. 1:16). While never less than God, at the appointed time He laid aside the glory He shared with the Father and took on a human nature (John 17:3-5; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 2:9). Following his death, Jesus Christ rose bodily from the grave, appeared to and was recognized in his body by over 500 people. This fact was crucial to both the preaching and faith of the early church (Luke 24:39; John 2:19-21; 1 Cor. 15:6, 14).

**By contrast, the WTB&TS denies the deity of Jesus Christ and teaches that Jesus is a created being. He first existed as Michael the archangel then later was born as a perfect man. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that after Jesus was buried, God disposed of his physical body. Jesus was raised a spirit creature and "materialized" a fleshly body to make himself visible. Now in heaven he is again known as Michael the archangel.<sup>16</sup>**

**Salvation.** The Bible teaches that the atoning work of Christ alone provides the solution for man's sin problem. Jesus Christ took the personal sins of all men—past, present and future—in his own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24), and as perfect God and perfect man he fully met the demands of Divine justice for us (Rom. 3:22-26). Therefore, any and all who receive him by simple faith (John 1:12; Acts 16:31), can be forgiven, declared righteous and restored to fellowship with God (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:24-26).

**By contrast, the WTB&TS teaches that only an elite group of Witnesses, known as "the 144,000," or the "anointed ones" are presently credited with Christ's righteousness. Only the 144,000 are born again and expect to reign with Christ in heaven. For the vast majority of remaining Jehovah's Witnesses, known as the "other sheep" or the "great crowd," the atoning sacrifice of Christ only provides a chance at eternal life on earth.<sup>17</sup>**

The Bible also teaches that we are saved by grace alone apart from any self-righteous works; salvation is God's gift. There is nothing we can do to contribute to our salvation because apart from Jesus Christ we are "dead in our sins" (Eph. 2:1-9).

**By contrast, the WTB&TS teaches that we must earn our own salvation; salvation will "depend on one's works." A person must first "come to Jehovah's organization for**

salvation"<sup>18</sup> and then comply with everything they teach. In this way, a relationship with the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, rather than a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, is presented as the basis of salvation.

**The Human Spirit and Eternal Punishment.** The Bible teaches that the human spirit continues to exist consciously after death (Luke 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8; Philippians 1:23-24; Rev. 6:9-11). Those who have rejected God's gift of eternal life will suffer conscious eternal punishment (Matt. 25:41,46; Rev. 14:10,11; 20:10,15).

**By contrast, the WTB&TS denies eternal punishment and teaches that man does not have a spirit that survives the death of the body. Witnesses believe that death ends all conscious existence. Hell refers to the grave, and those who are ultimately judged by God will be annihilated and simply cease to exist.<sup>19</sup>**

**The Bible.** The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit's anointing enables individual Christians to understand God's Word and properly apply it to their lives (John 16:13; 1 John 2:27).

**By contrast, the WTB&TS teaches that the Bible can only be interpreted by the Watchtower Society, and no individual can learn the truth apart from them.<sup>20</sup>**

## Contradictions and Flip-Flops

The WT Society claims to be Jehovah's organization and God's only channel of spiritual instruction for today.<sup>21</sup> It stresses that the Bible is an "organizational book" and cannot be understood by individuals no matter how sincere they are. But how can we trust our eternal destiny to an organization that during its brief time in existence has accumulated such a woeful history of doctrinal contradictions and flip-flops? Consider the following examples of ever-changing Watchtower theology.

In 1975 the WTB&TS taught that the man who sows the seed in the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13) is Satan. Later that same year the WT Society taught that this sower was Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

A similar incident occurred in 1978, when the WTB&TS identified the "Alpha and Omega" of Revelation 22:12-13 as

Jehovah (that is, God the Father), and then five weeks later taught these verses referred to Jesus.<sup>23</sup>

The Watchtower Society's failure to correctly interpret the Bible is most clearly seen in their doctrinal flip-flops. First they teach position **A**, then they change to position **B**, claiming God has given them "new light." Later on, however, they revert back to their old teaching (position **A**) and in some cases change once again to position **B**. Here are some examples.

### Resurrection of the Men of Sodom

1879 - They will be resurrected.  
1952 - They will not be resurrected.  
1965 - They will be resurrected.  
1988 - They will not be resurrected.

### The 'Lord' in Romans 10:12-16

1903 - 'Lord' refers to Jesus.  
1940 - 'Lord' refers to Jehovah.  
1978 - 'Lord' refers to Jesus.  
1980 - 'Lord' refers to Jehovah.

### 'Higher Powers' of Romans 13:1

1916 - 'Higher powers' refers to governments.  
1943 - 'Higher powers' refers to Jehovah God & Jesus Christ.  
1964 - 'Higher powers' refers to governments.

### Separating 'sheep and goats' (Matt. 25:31-46)

1919 - will take place after the time of tribulation.  
1923 - is taking place now, before the tribulation.  
1995 - will take place after the tribulation.

## Conclusion

In light of the preceding facts, do we dare trust the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society? It has falsely prophesied the end of the world at least 6 times and used these predictions to intimidate its followers. The Bible warns us that many false prophets will come claiming to speak for God (Matthew 7:15; 1 John 4:1). Thankfully, it also provides a practical test for identifying false prophets. In Deuteronomy 18:21-22 we are told that anyone who

claims to speak as a prophet of God and predicts something that does not come true is a false prophet.

You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD *does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken.* That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him. (NIV)

According to the Bible, one false prophecy makes the speaker a false prophet. By this test, the Watchtower Society's failed prophecies concerning 1914, 1915, 1918, 1920, 1925 and 1975 prove beyond a doubt it is a false prophet.

This group has also repeatedly changed its doctrines and contradicted previously held beliefs, all while claiming that it alone has the truth. Is this consistent with God's perfection and holiness?

We do not intend to ridicule or belittle individual Jehovah's Witnesses; they are generally sincere, dedicated people. In one sense they are more like lost sheep than ravenous wolves, for they have been deceived by an organization with a history of false prophecies and false doctrines. Jehovah's Witnesses truly believe that if they leave the Watchtower Society they will be destroyed at Armageddon. They need our love and compassion. Our desire for them, as for everyone else, is that they come to a true knowledge of what the Bible teaches, and the understanding that salvation is God's gift to us. Only by entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will any of us be guaranteed forgiveness and eternal life.

—Joel B. Groat

### Notes

- 1 Consider the following quotes from Watchtower literature: "Jehovah is using only one organization today to accomplish his will. To receive everlasting life in the earthly Paradise we must identify that organization and serve God as part of it." (*The Watchtower*, February 15, 1983, p. 12) "Thus, when direction comes from Jehovah's organization, we can wisely submit to it, knowing full well that Jehovah will only lead us in a way that will be to our everlasting benefit." (*The Watchtower*, November 1, 1990, p. 30.)
- 2 Fritz Springmeier, *The Watchtower & The Masons* (Portland: A Christian Ministry, 1993, 2nd ed.), p. 11.
- 3 J.J. Ross, *Some Facts About the Self-Styled "Pastor" Charles T. Russell*, reprint by Witness Inc., n.d., pp. 3, 4.
- 4 J.J. Ross, p. 16-19. In Russell's denial of the pamphlet, he did admit, "The item about the miracle wheat might be said to have a particle of truth, just one grain of truth in it, in a sense."
- 5 Ross, p. 6, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 29, 1913, p. 16. Average market price for wheat during that time was \$1.00 a bushel. Phone call from Michigan State University Kent County Extension Service (October, 1991).
- 6 *The Finished Mystery*, Peoples Pulpit Association, 1917, p. 485, 258.

- 7 Rev. Edward Lodge Curran, Ph.D., *Judge - "for four days"* - Rutherford, n.d., Witness, Inc. reprint, p. 7.; *Literary Digest* for May 2, 1936, cited by Charles P. Windle, *The Rutherford Racket*, reprint, n.d., p. 11.
- 8 Fred Franz, a past president of the WTB&TS, quoted Rutherford as saying regarding his own predictions: "I know I made an ass of myself." Cited by Raymond Franz in *Crisis of Conscience*, p. 137.
- 9 Raymond Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, footnote p. 50.
- 10 Kingdom Ministry, May 1974, p. 3.
- 11 *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1976, p. 441. Four years later the Society admitted they were responsible for "the buildup of hopes centered on that date" (*The Watchtower*, March 15, 1980, pp. 17-18; see also *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, WTB&TS, 1993, pp. 633, "time calculations and the expectations that they associated with these gave rise to serious disappointments."
- 12 See, for example, *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, WTB&TS, 1993, pp. 626, 632-635, 709; *Awake!*, March 22, 1993, pp. 3-4.
- 13 *The Watchtower*, July 1, 1943, p. 206; August 15, 1943, p. 256; August 1, 1995, p. 17.
- 14 *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, p. 31.
- 15 *Reasoning From the Scriptures*, p. 381; *Aid to Bible Understanding*, p. 1544.
- 16 *The Watchtower*, November 1, 1995, p. 8; *Reasoning*, pp. 217, 218.
- 17 *Reasoning*, p. 309.
- 18 *The Watchtower*, July 1, 1947, p. 204; November 15, 1981, p. 21.
- 19 *Reasoning*, pp. 100, 175.
- 20 *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1967, p. 587; December 1, 1990, p. 19.
- 21 *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1967, p. 590.
- 22 *Man's Salvation Out Of World Distress...* (1975), p. 208; *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1975, p. 600.
- 23 *Awake!* August 22, 1978, p. 28; *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1978, p. 15.
- 24 *Zion's Watch Tower Reprints*, July 1879, p. 7; *The Watchtower*, June 1, 1932, p. 338; August 1, 1965, p. 479; June 1, 1988, pp. 30-31.
- 25 *Zion's Watch Tower Reprints*, December 1, 1903, p. 3282; *The Watchtower*, July 1, 1940, p. 200; May 1, 1978, p. 12; February 1, 1980, p. 16.
- 26 *Watch Tower Reprints*, September 1, 1916, p. 5952; *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, [1943 ed.], p. 312; *The Watchtower*, June 15, 1964, p. 20. The WT Society admitted this change in doctrine cost many Jehovah's Witnesses their lives (*The Watchtower*, November 15, 1950, p. 441).
- 27 *The Watchtower*, August 1, 1919, p. 238; *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 1993, pp. 163-164; *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1995, p. 19, 22-23.

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# Facts About the JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

