

# C. Jehovah's Witnesses

## A Brief History

The history of the Jehovah's Witnesses is conveniently divided into five periods, which coincide with the five presidents who have led the movement. Charles T. Russell (1852-1916) founded Zion's Watch Tower — now The Watchtower — in 1879 and Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society in 1884 (later renamed). In addition to his speaking and editorial work, Russell penned six volumes titled Studies in Scriptures (originally Millennial Dawn), which appeared between 1886 and 1904. By the time of his death in 1916, the legal and doctrinal foundation of the Society had been established.

"Judge" Joseph F. Rutherford (1869-1942), the second president — under whose leadership the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" was taken in 1931 — was a prolific writer. In addition to his speaking and editorial work, and the publication of dozens of booklets, he wrote an average of one new book each year. A number of doctrinal and Scriptural reinterpretations marked his administration. Rutherford became the "new oracle of God's message for this age," and Russell's writings and interpretations were often neglected or rejected as not abreast of progressive light. By 1938, the independent ecclesiae of Russell's day were brought under the "Theocratic" control — subservient to the Society's headquarters in Brooklyn.

Nathan H. Knorr officially took over the leadership of the Witnesses (a movement then slightly over 115,000) following Rutherford's death in 1942. Knorr demonstrated his organizational ability in that great growth took place under his direction in the areas of membership, outreach, buildings and publications (2.25 million members in 1977).

When Knorr died in 1977, Fred Franz was elected the Watchtower's fourth president. He continued to rule with an iron hand. Franz died on Dec. 22, 1992, at the age of 99.

Milton G. Henschel moved from Vice President to replace Franz. Possibly the last of the "Anointed" to serve as leader of the Watchtower, it may be Henschel's lot to lead 4.5 million Jehovah's Witnesses through a crisis of authority.

## How the Watchtower differs from Biblical Christianity

- Deny the Trinity.
- Deny the deity of Christ (Arian view).
- Deny the personality of the Holy Spirit (viewed as "God's active force").
- Deny man's immortal soul. (It should be noted that scripturally, "immortality" applies to man's future body. Orthodoxy uses immortality as a term to explain that man's soul or spirit continues to exist after death).
- Deny the biblical view of the Atonement. (Christ's death is viewed by the Witnesses as that of only a perfect man and as a "corresponding ransom.") Christ is the mediator only for the 144,000.

- Deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. The Witnesses teach that He rose as a spirit creature, such as Michael the archangel, and materialized bodies on various occasions in order to be seen by His disciples.
- Deny salvation by faith in Christ alone.
- A two-class system of salvation - 144,000 in heaven, and the great crowd on a paradise earth.
- Deny salvation outside their organization.
- Deny the “born again” experience for all. (This experience, they say, is just for 144,000 of the Witnesses.)
- Deny the eternal punishment of the lost (claiming annihilation is their fate).
- Deny the bodily, visible return of Christ. (They believe Christ “returned” invisibly in 1914 and there was an invisible “rapture” in 1918.)
- Deny the Bible can be understood today without the leadership of Watchtower Society.
- Deny their members blood transfusions. If a Witness receives one willingly, they teach it will result in his eternal death.
- Witnesses refuse to serve in the military and to salute the flag as an act of idolatry.
- Witnesses forbid the observation of holidays such as Christmas, Easter and birthdays as pagan in origin.

## **Jehovah Witnesses    vs.    Biblical Christianity**

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| <p>1. Jesus is the created Son of God.</p>   | <p>1. Jesus is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, through whom Jehovah created all other things.</p>        |
| <p>2. Jehovah’s Witnesses are the only people on earth with whom God deals.</p>                                | <p>2. All Christians are the children of God and He deals with each one and approves of each on a one-on-one basis.</p> |
| <p>3. The world religions, including all of Christendom, are from the Devil.</p>                               | <p>3. The Christian church is made up of the members who have been chosen by God.</p>                                   |
| <p>4. Only 144,000 faithful servants will go to heaven. The “anointed,” or “brideclass” will go to heaven.</p> | <p>4. Jesus said those “born again” would have eternal life.</p>  |