

World Religions Study

*Jehovah Witnesses: Translating the Bible
however they like.*

Importance of this Study

- The Jehovah's Witnesses have over 6 million followers in 234 Countries.
- Their "door to door" witnessing accounts for nearly 1.1 billion man-hours of labor annually.

Importance of this Study

- They have aggressive and extensive training programs for all their members.
- They are absolutely convinced that they are "The Only True Church."

Background of the Group

- Their services are conducted in "Kingdom Halls" generally three times a week.
- They have no official pastors.
- Their Headquarters is in Brooklyn, New York.

Background of the Group

- Their Official name is the *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society*.
- They publish an enormous amount of material including two magazines *AWAKE!* and *The Watchtower*.
- They have produced their own version of the Bible: *The New World Translation*.

History of the Jehovah Witnesses

- Began as a "Bible Study" led by Charles Taze Russell in Allegheny, Pennsylvania (USA) in 1870.
- Officially organized In 1884 as the *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society* with Russell as the President.

History of the Jehovah Witnesses

- Since 1884 there have been only six Presidents:
 - Charles Taze Russell (1884-1916)
 - Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1916-42)
 - Nathan H. Knorr (1942-77)
 - Frederick William Franz (1977-92)
 - Milton G. Henschel (1992-2002)
 - Don Alden Adams (2002 to present)
- Russell and Rutherford are the most important of the six.

Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)

- Russell came from a wealthy family, was a member of the Presbyterian Church, and himself a successful businessman and writer.
- He began the group in 1884.
- He was not trained in either theology or biblical studies.



Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)

- His personal life was littered with controversies.
- His theology was largely contained in his six volume work: *Studies in the Scriptures*.
- A significant portion of his teachings have either been modified or abandoned by subsequent leaders.

“Judge” Rutherford (1869-1942)

- Joseph Rutherford was able to become the President of the *Watchtower Society* after the death of Russell.
- There was a significant schism between Rutherford and others in the group.
- Rutherford named his group *Jehovah's Witnesses* in 1931.

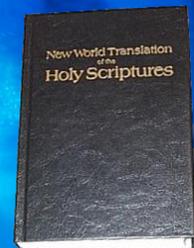


“Judge” Rutherford (1869-1942)

- He was a successful attorney and a “substitute Judge” in the US Circuit Court.
- He continued to practice law, arguing 14 cases before the Supreme Court until just before he died.
- Most of the foundational principles of the group were formulated by Rutherford, including the “door to door” witnessing, and the publication of the *AWAKE!* magazine.

New World Translation of the Bible

- Published in serial form in the 1950's and as a single volume in 1961.
- The translators names have never been released and no one has ever admitted to being involved in the project. However, it is known that three of the Watchtower presidents were instrumental in the “translation.”



New World Translation of the Bible

- None of those known to have worked on the NWT had any training in the Biblical languages, and none of the presidents had a college degree in any subject.
- In a court hearing Franz was forced to admit that he could not translate a simple passage (Gen 2:4) from Hebrew into English.

New World Translation of the Bible

- In English, the style is often turgid and forced. The translation of important passages is trumped by their doctrinal considerations.
- Bruce Metzger, one of the outstanding New Testament scholars of this generation stated that they "incorporated several quite erroneous renderings of the Greek" into their version.

What Do They Believe?

- It is perhaps simpler to begin with what the Jehovah's Witnesses DO NOT believe:
 - They reject the Doctrine of the Trinity.
 - They reject the Deity of Christ and affirm the early heretic Arius, as a "Great Christian Leader" and place him in their line of teachers.

What Do They Believe?

- They reject the bodily resurrection of Christ.
- They reject the personality of The Holy Spirit. He is viewed as a "force" or "activating power," not an individual member of the Trinity.
- They reject the idea of eternal punishment.

Jehovah Witnesses and Salvation

- The KEY issue with the Jehovah's Witnesses, or any cult, after their view of God and Christ, is their position on the doctrine of salvation.
- Jehovah Witnesses teach salvation by works:
 - "It is for the reward of eternal life that every last person on earth should be working for" (*Watchtower 15 Oct 1972*, p. 492).

Jehovah Witnesses and Salvation

- Salvation by Works:
 - "Jehovah God will justify, declare righteous, on the basis of their own merit all perfected humans who have withstood that final, decisive test of mankind [the release of Satan from bondage after the 1,000-year reign of Christ]" (*Life Everlasting-In Freedom of the Sons of God*, 1966, p. 400).

Some Oddities of Jehovah Witnesses' Theology

- The Jehovah Witnesses have more than a few oddities in their theology. Items which do not matter as far as salvation is concerned, but are interesting:
 - Only the best 144,000 Jehovah Witnesses Go to Heaven, the rest remain in a "millennial" earth.
 - When Jesus went to heaven He became who He had previously been, The Archangel Michael.

Some Oddities of Jehovah Witnesses' Theology

- While begun as a "Bible study" the Witnesses believe that only the organization can correctly interpret the Bible. "the Bible...belongs to the Christian congregation as an organization, not to individuals, regardless of how sincerely they may believe they can interpret the Bible" (*Watchtower*, 1 Oct 1967, p. 587).
- They teach that Christ returned in 1914. He is currently administering His "still invisible kingdom" from Watchtower headquarters in Brooklyn.

Some Oddities of Jehovah Witnesses' Theology

- They teach that to accept a blood transfusion would cause one to lose their salvation.
- They reject all holidays regardless of the type. Do not vote, hold political office, serve in the military, salute a national flag.

Some Oddities of Jehovah Witnesses' Theology

- In the first edition of the *New World Translation*, a note explains why a particularly Greek phrase *egw eimi* (John 8:58) as "I have been" on the basis of the word being in the "Perfect Indefinite Tense." The problem is, there is no such tense in any language. The phrase is universally translated as "I Am."

Witnessing to Witnesses

- It must be remembered that Jehovah's Witnesses are highly trained in their doctrines before they go out.
- They are well versed in their *New World Translation* and will use Greek and Hebrew grammatical terminology although none that I have ever encountered are trained in either language.

Witnessing to Witnesses

- It also must be remembered that this group is not Christian. A person *cannot* believe the Witness' doctrines and be saved.
- It is vital to Major on Major Issues!
- The Major Issues to emphasize are the Deity of Christ and Justification by Faith.

Witnessing to Witnesses

- Demonstrating that you know your Bible is important.
- Do not allow yourself to be side tracked by unimportant issues.
- Be polite and courteous (they are taught that unbelievers will persecute and ridicule them).
- Make a deal with them: Allow them to speak for 15 minutes, uninterrupted; as long as they will allow you do the same.