

Busy Christian's Guide to Jehovah's Witnesses

Robert M. Bowman, Jr.

A. Basic Facts

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Founder | Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916), former Protestant from Pittsburgh |
| Organization | Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, headquartered in Brooklyn, NY ("Bethel") |
| Names | Jehovah's Witnesses (official name since 1931); known earlier as "Bible Students" |
| Founded | 1879 (first issue of <i>The Watchtower</i>); Brooklyn corporation 1881 |
| Periodicals | <i>The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom</i> (doctrinal) <i>Awake!</i> (news, general interest, from Jehovah's Witness slant) |
| Scriptures | <i>New World Translation</i> (NWT, a doctrinally biased Bible version) |
| Key Events | Failed predictions for the years 1925 and 1975 Purge of Watchtower leadership in 1980 |
| Membership | 7+ million active JW's worldwide; over 1 million in the U.S.; about 18 million people worldwide attend the annual JW "Memorial" |
| Sects | Laymen's Home Missionary Movement; Dawn Bible Students Association; et. al. |

B. Prohibitions

| Prohibition | Biblical Response |
|---|---|
| Birthdays | The fact that Pharaoh (Gen. 40:20) and Herod Antipas (Matt. 14:6) are the only men in Scripture who observed their birthday, and both had someone killed, does not prove that God forbids birthdays; it is murder God forbids! |
| Christmas, Easter, or other holidays | Holidays should be neither required nor forbidden (Gal. 4:8-10; Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:5-6). It doesn't matter whether Jesus was really born on Dec. 25; what matters is that his birth is joyful news (Luke 2:10-11). |
| Blood transfusions | Scripture forbids eating blood taken from animals that have been killed, as a sign of respect for life (Lev. 17:10-14; Acts 15:20, 29); transfusions take blood from living humans to save life and does not involve digestion. |
| Using a cross as a symbol | Jesus died on a cross (John 20:25). A symbol is pagan only if its meaning is pagan (John 3:14-15). We ought to glory in Christ's cross (Gal. 6:14). |
| Political activity | Daniel held office in a pagan nation without betraying Israel (Dan. 2:48). Erastus was an official in Corinth (Rom. 16:23). Paul claimed privileges of Roman citizenship (Acts 23:25-29) and also claimed citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20). |
| Participation in war | God authorizes governments to use lethal force to protect its citizens (Rom. 13:4), from criminals or invaders, but not to advance God's kingdom (John 18:36). |

C. For Further Information

Bowman, Robert M., Jr. *Jehovah's Witnesses*. Zondervan Guide to Cults and Religious Movements. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Institute for Religious Research, 1340 Monroe Ave. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49341; www.irr.org

D. False Teachings

| | Jehovah's Witnesses | Biblical Christianity |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Scripture | The Bible is God's word, but it was corrupted when "Jehovah" was taken out of the NT; only the NWT is reliable | The Bible has been reliably preserved (Isa. 40:8; 55:11; Jude 3); "Jehovah" is in none of the Greek NT manuscripts |
| Authority | The JW "Governing Body" rules on all doctrinal and ethical matters; its interpretations of Scripture are needed for salvation and may not be questioned | Christ through Scripture alone, no human organization, has authority over all Christians (Acts 17:11; Gal. 1:8; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 3:2) |
| God | One "Almighty God," named Jehovah (an OT name for God that they insert into the NT), personal and (more or less) infinite, but only one person (no Trinity) | One God (Isa. 43:10; 1 Tim. 2:5) called Jehovah (Yahweh) in the OT, but not in the NT, which uses "Lord"; God exists eternally as three persons (Matt. 28:19): Father (John 17:1-3), Son (John 20:28), and Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4) |
| Christ: Before Earth | First and only direct creation of God, identified as Michael the archangel; empowered by Jehovah to create all other things; was "a god," not God | Existed eternally (John 1:1-2; 8:58; 17:5; Col. 1:17) as God (John 1:1); all things created through him (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) |
| Christ: On Earth | The spirit person of Michael annihilated, his life-force made into the human Jesus, who was a mere man, though perfect and sinless | Jesus in the flesh was still the Word or Son (John 1:14; 5:17-23); he was God (John 8:24, 28, 58; cf. Isa. 43:10, 13; John 10:28-30, cf. Deut. 6:4; 32:39) |
| Christ: In Heaven | Christ "resurrected" (i.e., recreated) as a spirit again, no physical body except on occasion to appear to men; is not to be worshipped or offered prayer | Jesus' body that died was raised (Luke 24:39; John 2:19-22); he is both man (Acts 17:31) and God (John 20:28); he receives worshipped (Matt. 28:17) and prayer (Rom. 10:12-13; 1 Cor. 1:2) |
| Holy Spirit | God's invisible active force, not a divine person | A divine person (Matt. 28:19) who is sent in Jesus' name, teaches, speaks, etc. (John 14-16; Acts 13:2; 15:28) |
| Salvation | Requires 1) faith in Christ, 2) Bible study through Watchtower "helps," 3) obedience to God's laws (no political activities, holidays or birthdays, blood transfusions, etc.), and 4) association with God's "channel," which today is the Watchtower; does not involve being born again | A gift of God's grace, not of works (Rom. 3:23-24; 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9), through faith in Christ (John 3:16-17), in which all who believe in Christ are born again (John 3:3-5), resulting in a changed life and good works (Gal. 5:6, 19-21; James 2:14-26; 1 John 2:3-11) |
| Church | Two classes of Christians: the "anointed," numbering 144,000 total, now down to about 8,000 JWs; and the "great crowd," millions of other JWs; only the JWs are true Christians, all others are apostate | Not two classes of Christians: all have same hope (Matt. 5:3-12; Eph. 4:4), all are part of the church (1 Cor. 12:12-27); no church-wide apostasy (Matt. 28:19-20; Jude 3) |
| Future | No second coming: Christ has been invisibly "present" from heaven since 1914; the wicked will be annihilated | Christ will come again to the earth to bring eternal salvation and eternal judgment (Acts 1:9-11; 3:20-21; Heb. 9:26-28; Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20:10) |