

Jehovah's Witnesses

Basic Facts

Founded

1879, when Charles Taze Russell began publishing *Zion's Watch Tower*. The Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society (later renamed the Watchtower Society) was founded in 1881 and remains the legal entity of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Key Figures

Charles Taze Russell (1852 - 1916): Founder of the Jehovah's Witness movement and initial publisher of *Zion's Watch Tower*. First President of the Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society.

Joseph "Judge" Rutherford (1869 - 1942): Second President of the Watchtower Society. In 1931, officially began using the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" to describe the movement.

Geography

Headquartered in Brooklyn, NY. Adherents are scattered throughout the world, with United States, Mexico, and Brazil home to the most.

Adherents

Jehovah's Witnesses distinguish between people who accept their teachings and those who are actively engaged in missionary ("door to door") work, called "Publishers". About 16 million people attend Jehovah's Witnesses services worldwide, while 6 to 7 million of them are Publishers.

Basic Beliefs

God and Jesus

Jehovah's Witnesses reject the idea of the Trinity, and believe that "Jehovah" is the proper name to be used for God. Jesus is considered to be the son of Jehovah and the archangel Michael, but is not considered equal with Jehovah. The Holy Spirit is not a person of the Trinity, but rather an impersonal force. They view Jesus' death on a stake (not a cross) to be necessary for salvation, in addition to certain required works for believers.

The End Times and Heaven

Jehovah's Witnesses began as an Adventist group (meaning they looked forward to the Second Coming, or "Advent," of Jesus), and they have predicted the return of Christ on several occasions and in several variations. Currently, they teach that Christ returned invisibly in 1914 and currently reigns as King. However, his reign will not become visible until the Battle of Armageddon, which they anticipate at any time. Afterwards, Christ will rule on Earth for 1,000 years before handing authority back to Jehovah.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that heaven is only open to 144,000 "Anointed" believers. They also believe that this number of believers has already been filled. Instead, current Jehovah's Witnesses anticipate their resurrection and eternal life in an Earthly Paradise, separate from

heaven. Jehovah's Witnesses reject the idea of hell, instead teaching that sinners will be destroyed after the final judgment.

Practices

The Watchtower and other publications of the Watchtower Society are the only authoritative interpretations of Scripture accepted by Jehovah's Witnesses. Kingdom Hall services are based around study guides provided by the Watchtower Society.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that door-to-door missionary work is a required work of true Christians, in order to gain the Earthly Paradise. Adherents who are engaged in door-to-door work are called "Publishers."

Based on the command in Leviticus not to "eat blood," Jehovah's Witnesses consider it sinful to receive blood transfusions. Some Jehovah's Witnesses have been known to store their own blood for use in future operations.

Once a year, Jehovah's Witnesses gather for the Memorial of Christ's Death, on Nisan 14 of the Jewish calendar (the day they believe Christ was killed). This is often a time of more intense door-to-door mission work, and outsiders are invited to observe the occasion. Communion is passed, but only members of the 144,000 Anointed are permitted to take it. Thus, in most Kingdom Halls, no one takes Communion.