

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses is a [restorationist](#),^[1] [millenarian](#)^[2] [Christian](#) religious movement.

In the United States of America, **Restorationism**, sometimes called *Christian primitivism*, refers to the belief held by various religious movements that *pristine* or *original* Christianity should be restored, while usually claiming to be the source of that restoration. Such groups teach that this is necessary because [Catholic](#), [Orthodox](#) and [Protestant](#) Christians introduced defects into Christian faith and practice, or have lost a vital element of genuine Christianity. Specifically, *restorationism* applies to the [Restoration Movement](#) and numerous other movements that originated in the eastern [United States](#) and [Canada](#) and grew rapidly in the early and mid 19th century in the wake of the [Second Great Awakening](#). The term *restoration* is also employed by the [Latter Day Saint movement](#).

Millenarianism (also **millenarism**) is the belief by a religious, social, or political group or movement in a coming major transformation of society, after which all things will be changed in a positive (or sometimes negative or ambiguous) direction. [Millennialism](#) is a specific form of millenarianism based on a one-thousand-year cycle, especially significant for [Christianity](#).

The religion reports worldwide membership of over 7 million adherents involved in [evangelism](#),^[4] they report convention attendance of over 12 million, and annual [Memorial](#) attendance of over 17 million.^{[5][6]} They are directed by the [Governing Body](#), a group of [elders](#) which exercises authority on all doctrinal matters, based on their interpretations of the [Bible](#), with preference given to their own translation, the [New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures](#).

The group emerged from the [Bible Student movement](#),^[7] founded in the late 19th century by [Charles Taze Russell](#), with the creation of [Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society](#). Following a schism in the movement, the branch that maintained control of the Society underwent significant organizational changes, bringing its authority structure and methods of evangelism under centralized control.^{[8][9]} The name *Jehovah's witnesses* was adopted in 1931.

In 1870, [Charles Taze Russell](#) and others formed an independent group to study the Bible; in particular, Russell cited contributions by [Advent Christian Church](#) pastor George W. Stetson, and [George Storrs](#), an [Adventist](#) preacher and former [Millerite](#).^{[22][23]} In 1877 Russell jointly edited a religious journal, *Herald of the Morning*. In July 1879, Russell began publishing the magazine [Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence](#),^[24] highlighting his interpretations of biblical chronology, with particular attention to his belief that the world was in "the last days". In 1881, [Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society](#) was formed in [Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania](#), to disseminate tracts, papers, doctrinal treatises and bibles; three years later, on December 15, 1884, Russell became the president of the Society when it was legally incorporated in [Pennsylvania](#).

Governing Body

Jehovah's Witnesses are organized under a hierarchical arrangement, which their leadership calls a "theocratic government", reflecting their belief that it is God's organization on earth. The organization is headed by the [Governing Body](#) – an all-male group that varies in size, but since 2007 has comprised nine members, all of whom profess to be of the "anointed" class with a hope of heavenly life – based in the Watch Tower Society's [Brooklyn, New York](#) headquarters. There is no election for membership, with new members selected by the existing body. The Governing Body is described as the "spokesman" for God's "[Faithful and Discreet Slave](#) class" (the approximately 10,000 remaining "anointed" Jehovah's Witnesses), and is said to provide "spiritual food" for Witnesses worldwide on behalf of the "Faithful and Discreet Slave". In practice it seeks neither advice nor approval from any "anointed" Witnesses other than high-ranking members at Brooklyn Bethel when formulating policy and doctrines or when producing material for publications and conventions. The Governing Body directs several committees that are responsible for various administrative functions, including publishing, assembly programs and evangelizing activity. It directly appoints all branch committee members and District and Circuit Overseers, with traveling overseers supervising groups of congregations within their jurisdictions.

Witnesses have no formal clergy-laity division. Each congregation has a body of appointed male elders and ministerial servants. Elders maintain general responsibility for congregational governance, setting meeting times, selecting speakers and conducting meetings, directing the public preaching work, and creating "judicial committees" to investigate and decide disciplinary action for cases that are seen as breaching scriptural or organizational laws. New elders are appointed by branch offices after recommendation by the existing body of elders. Ministerial servants – appointed in a similar fashion to elders – fulfill clerical and attendant duties, but may also teach and conduct meetings.^[80]

Once appointed to the Governing Body, members have in almost all cases remained until their death, although two – Ewart Chitty and Leo Greenlees – resigned or were dismissed, reportedly for improper sexual conduct while [Raymond Franz](#) was forced to resign in 1980 over accusations that he had been promoting "wrong teachings" as "new understandings" in private conversations with other Witnesses. Governing Body meetings are held weekly in closed session, and [Watch Tower Society](#) publications provide no details of the agenda or decisions of meetings. Decisions from 1971 were required to be unanimous; since 1975 a two-thirds majority of the total active membership (regardless of the number present at any meeting) has been sufficient to allow proposals to be carried.

Since its inception, the Watch Tower Society has taught that humanity is experiencing the [last days](#) of the present world order. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that after the current world order is destroyed, righteous survivors and [resurrected](#) dead individuals will have the opportunity to live forever on a [paradisaical](#) earth, ruled by Christ and 144,000 people raised to [heaven](#). In the years leading up to 1914, 1925 and 1975, the Society's publications expressed strong expectations of [Armageddon](#) occurring in those years. The

Watch Tower Society has since changed its stance and teaches that it is impossible to know precisely when Armageddon will occur.

Jehovah's Witnesses are best known for their door-to-door preaching, distribution of literature such as [The Watchtower](#) and [Awake!](#), and for their refusal of [military service](#) and [blood transfusions](#) even in life-threatening situations. They consider use of the biblical name of God, [Jehovah](#), vital to proper worship; they reject [Trinitarianism](#), immortality of the [soul](#), and [hellfire](#), which they consider to be unscriptural; they do not observe celebrations such as [Christmas](#), [Easter](#) or [birthdays](#), which they believe to have [pagan](#) origins, or national holidays, such as [Independence Day](#). Members commonly refer to their body of beliefs as "the Truth", and adherents consider themselves to be "in the Truth".

The religion's positions regarding [conscientious objection](#) to military service and refusal to [salute](#) national [flags](#) has brought it into conflict with governments, particularly those that [conscript](#) citizens for military service; activities of Jehovah's Witnesses have been consequently banned or restricted in some countries. Persistent legal challenges by Jehovah's Witnesses' to such civic duties have had considerable influence on [legislation](#) and legal practice concerning [civil liberties](#) and conscientious objection to military service in several countries including the [United States](#).

Jehovah's Witnesses regard secular [society](#) as a place of moral contamination and under the control of [Satan](#), and limit their social contact with non-Witnesses. Members who violate the organization's fundamental moral principles or who dispute doctrinal matters are subject to [disciplinary](#) action, the most severe being a form of [shunning](#) they call *disfellowshipping*.

Doctrinal changes

At an international convention held at [Cedar Point](#), in September 1922, a new emphasis was made on house-to-house preaching. Significant changes in doctrine were made under Rutherford's leadership, including the 1918 announcement that Jewish patriarchs (such as [Abraham](#) and [Isaac](#)) would be resurrected in 1925, marking the beginning of [Christ's](#) thousand-year reign. The failed expectations for 1925, coupled with other doctrinal changes, resulted in a dramatic reduction in attendance at their yearly [Memorial](#), from 90,434 in 1925 to 17,380 in 1928. By 1933, the timing of the beginning of Christ's presence (Greek: *parousía*), his enthronement as king, and the start of the "[last days](#)", were each moved to 1944. From 1935, it was considered that converts to the movement, if worthy, would survive [Armageddon](#) and live on a paradise earth. Membership before this time was generally composed of those who believed they would be resurrected to live in heaven to rule over the earth with Christ.

As their interpretations of Scripture continued to develop, Witness publications taught that saluting the flag and standing for the national anthem are forms of idolatry. They were also instructed to refuse alternative service provided for [conscientious objectors](#). (Objection to alternative civilian service was maintained until 1996, when it was deemed

a 'conscience matter'.) In Germany, Jehovah's Witnesses came under persecution, with as many as 5000 imprisoned in [concentration camps](#). Witnesses also experienced mob violence in the United States, and their activities were banned in Canada and Australia because of their refusal to accept military service.

1942-present: Knorr, Franz, Henschel & Adams

[Nathan Knorr](#) was named the third president of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society following Rutherford's death in January 1942. Knorr instituted major new training programs – the *Theocratic Ministry School* for all congregation members, and the [Gilead School](#) for missionaries. He also organized large-scale conventions, which attracted as many as 253,000 Witnesses to sports stadiums in the United States, Canada and Germany, and began a campaign of [real estate](#) acquisition in Brooklyn to expand the organisation's world headquarters. He commissioned a new translation of the Bible, which was released progressively from 1950 before being published as the complete [New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures](#) in 1961. Knorr's vice-president, [Frederick William Franz](#), became the religion's leading [theologian](#), and helped shape the further development of explicit rules of conduct among members, with a greater emphasis on [disfellowshipping](#) as a disciplinary measure.☐

Jehovah's Witnesses are known for their preaching from house to house. From 1938 to 1955 the Witnesses launched a series of cases in the US Supreme Court to defend their right to worship and proselytize, winning 36 out of 45 cases.

Doctrinal positions are gained by what Witness publications describe as "progressive revelation". The term is not explicitly defined in Watch Tower literature, but is commonly construed as the application of reason and study as well as the undefined guidance of the [Holy Spirit](#). The *Watchtower* has also suggested the organization has received direct, latter-day revelations, including messages from "invisible angels".

Bible

The entire Protestant [canon of scripture](#) is considered the inspired, inerrant word of God. The Witnesses accept the Bible as scientifically and historically accurate and reliable, and interpret much of it literally, while also accepting it is rich in symbolism. They claim to use the Bible as the basis for all of their beliefs, although studies of the religion show that the traditional teachings of Russell, as well as the pronouncements of the Governing Body, through Watch Tower publications, carry as much or more weight than the Bible. The leadership of Jehovah's Witnesses claims to be the sole visible channel of Jehovah and asserts that the Bible cannot be understood without its assistance.

Jehovah

The [Tetragrammaton](#) name of God. Jehovah's Witnesses consider its use vital in proper worship and they prefer the form "Jehovah" for it's being the traditional and most usual in English.

Emphasis is given to the use of [God's](#) biblical [name](#), the [Tetragrammaton](#), and in English they prefer to use the name, [Jehovah](#). Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jehovah is the only true God, the creator of all things, and give him the title "Universal Sovereign". They believe that all worship should be directed toward him.

Jesus Christ

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that [Jesus](#) was Jehovah's first creation, that Jehovah then created everything else by means of him, and that the initial unassisted act of creation uniquely identifies Jesus as God's 'only-begotten Son'. Jesus served as a ransom sacrifice to pay for the sins of humankind. They believe that Jesus died on a single upright [torture stake](#) rather than the traditional [cross](#). They believe that references in the Bible to the [Archangel Michael](#), [Apollyon](#) and [Abaddon](#), and [the Word](#) all refer to Jesus.

Satan

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that [Satan](#) is the invisible ruler of the world. He was at one time a perfect [angel](#) but developed feelings of self-importance, and craved worship that belonged to God. Satan persuaded Adam and Eve to obey him rather than God, and humanity subsequently become participants in a challenge involving the competing claims of Jehovah and Satan to universal sovereignty. Other angels who also sided with Satan in rebelling against God became [demons](#). They teach that Satan and his demons were cast down to earth from heaven after October 1, 1914, at which point the [end times](#) began. Satan continues to mislead people and he and the demons are said to be the cause of much pain and suffering.

Salvation

Witness publications teach that all humanity is in a [sinful](#) state. Release from this is possible because Jesus' shed blood provided a payment, or [atonement](#) for the sins of humankind. Witnesses believe there are two destinations for those saved by God. They say the number of Christians going to heaven is limited to precisely 144,000, who will rule with Jesus as kings and priests over earth. The remainder have the hope of living forever in an earthly paradise. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the only scriptural hope of surviving Armageddon comes through adherence to the biblical teachings, including faith in Jesus' shed blood. Those who do not show such faith and become part of God's "organization" face destruction at Armageddon. After Armageddon, most people will be resurrected with the prospect of living forever.

God's Messianic Kingdom

Witness publications teach that God's Kingdom is a government in heaven, ruled by Jesus Christ and 144,000 Christians drawn from the earth. The kingdom is viewed as the means by which God will accomplish his original purpose for the earth, bringing about a world free of crime, sickness, death and poverty, ultimately transforming earth into a paradise. The kingdom is said to have been the focal point of Jesus' ministry on earth and established in heaven in 1914.

Death

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that death is a state of non-existence with no consciousness. They do not believe in any [Hell](#) of fiery torment. [Hades](#) and [Sheol](#) are understood to refer to the condition of death, termed the *common grave*. They consider the body and the [soul](#) to be the same living being that expires. Their hope for life after death involves being resurrected by God, either with a new body on earth after Armageddon, or to heaven for the limited number of 144,000.

Worship

Meetings for worship and study are held at [Kingdom Halls](#). Witnesses are assigned to a congregation in whose "territory" they reside and are expected to attend weekly meetings as scheduled by congregation elders. The meetings are largely devoted to study of the Bible and Witness doctrines. The form and content of the meetings is established by the religion's Brooklyn headquarters, with the content of meetings in any week largely identical around the world. The week's two meetings are divided into a total of five distinct sections, lasting a total of about four hours, with meetings opened and closed with [hymns](#) and brief prayers delivered from the platform. The Kingdom Halls are typically functional in character, and do not contain religious symbols. Each year, Witnesses from a number of congregations that form a "circuit" gather for one-day and two-day assemblies. Several circuits meet once a year for a three-day "district convention", usually at rented stadiums or auditoriums. Their most important and solemn event is the celebration of the "Lord's Evening Meal", or "Memorial of Christ's Death".

Evangelism

Jehovah's Witnesses are perhaps best known for their efforts to spread their beliefs, most notably by visiting people from house to house. Free home Bible studies are offered to people who show interest in their beliefs, which they present with the aid of their publications, such as *The Watchtower*. Literature is published in many languages through a wide variety of [books](#), [magazines](#) and other publications, with a small selection available in over 440 languages. Witnesses are instructed to devote as much time as possible to preaching activities, and are required to provide a monthly report to their congregation on their 'witnessing' activity.

Ethics and morality

Jehovah's Witnesses meet in buildings called [Kingdom Halls](#). Their view of morality reflects conservative Christian values. All sexual relations outside of marriage are grounds for expulsion ([disfellowshipping](#)) if the accused is not deemed repentant. Abortion is considered [murder](#). Modesty in dress and grooming is frequently emphasized. [Gambling](#), drunkenness, illegal drugs, and tobacco use are forbidden. Drinking of [alcoholic beverages](#) is permitted in moderation.

The family structure is [patriarchal](#). The husband is considered the final authority on family decisions, but is encouraged to solicit his wife's thoughts and feelings, as well as those of his children. Marriages are required to be [monogamous](#). Abuse, willful non-support of one's family, and what the religion terms "absolute endangerment of spirituality" are considered grounds for legal separation and legal divorce.

Discipline

Formal discipline is administered by congregation elders. When an accusation of serious sin is made concerning a baptized member, a tribunal or judicial committee is formed to determine guilt, administer help and possibly apply sanctions. *Disfellowshipping* is the most severe form of discipline administered, which requires the person to be shunned by all baptized members. Exceptions to this would include cases where a member was forced to have commercial dealings with a member who is disfellowshipped, or if the disfellowshipped member is living with family members who are baptized. The stated purpose of disfellowshipping is to keep the congregation free from immoral influence and to shame wrong-doers into repentance, but the threat of shunning also serves to deter other members from dissident behavior. *Reproof* involves sins that could lead to disfellowshipping. Ones considered "truly repentant" are reproved rather than disfellowshipped. *Marking* is practiced if a person's course of action is regarded as a violation of Bible principles, reflecting badly on the congregation, but is not a disfellowshipping offense. An announcement is made stating that the actions in question are wrong, without naming the individual involved. Congregation members limit social contact with that person. The purpose of this is to shame the person into correcting their actions.

Avoidance of interfaith activity

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Bible condemns the mixing of religions on the basis that there can only be one truth from God. They believe that only their religion represents true Christianity, and that all other religions fail to meet all the requirements set by God and will be destroyed, and therefore reject interfaith and ecumenical movements.

Separateness

Jehovah's Witnesses believe their highest allegiance belongs to [God's Kingdom](#), which is viewed as an actual government in heaven, hence they remain politically neutral, do not seek public office and are discouraged from voting, though individual members may

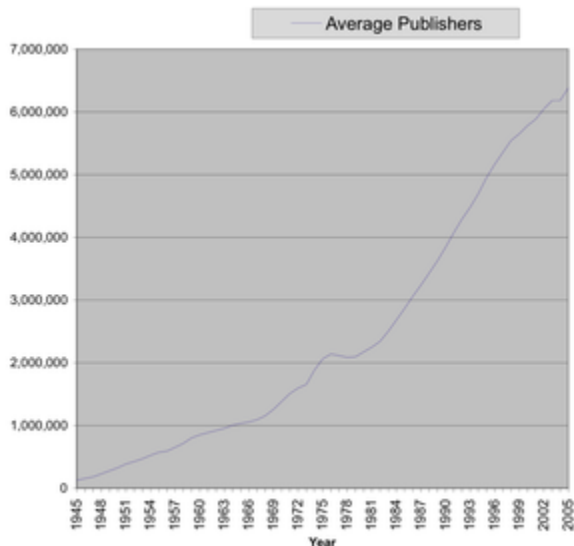
participate in uncontroversial community improvement issues. They abstain from celebrating religious holidays and birthdays and reject many customs they claim have pagan origins. They do not work in industries associated with the military, do not serve in the armed services and refuse national military service, which in some countries may result in their arrest and imprisonment. They do not salute or pledge allegiance to flags or sing national anthems and patriotic songs. Jehovah's Witnesses are taught it is vital they remain "separate from the world." Watch Tower publications define the "world" as "the mass of mankind apart from Jehovah's approved servants" and teach that it is ruled by Satan and a place of danger and moral contamination. Because of perceived dangers from "worldly" association, Witnesses are advised to minimize social contact with non-members to better maintain their own standards of morality.

Blood

Jehovah's Witnesses officially reject transfusions of whole [allogeneic](#) blood. Jehovah's Witnesses are directed to refuse [blood transfusions](#). In 1961, accepting a blood transfusion became grounds for expulsion from the religion. They do not accept the threat of death as sufficient to dissuade them from rejecting blood transfusions for themselves or their children. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Bible prohibits blood transfusions based on their interpretation of [Acts 15:28-29](#).

Jehovah's Witnesses are not permitted to accept [red cells](#), [white cells](#), [platelets](#) or [plasma](#), though they may accept fractions made from these components at their own discretion. The Watch Tower Society provides members with [Power of Attorney](#) documents to indicate which optional fractions they accept, with preformatted wording prohibiting major components. If a fraction "makes up a significant portion of that component" or "carries out the key function of a primary component", it may be objectionable to some but is permissible.

Demographics



Average Publishers, 1945–2005

Main article: [Demographics of Jehovah's Witnesses](#)

Jehovah's Witnesses have an active presence in most countries, though they do not form a large part of the population of any country. As of February 2008, Jehovah's Witnesses have an average of 7.2 million "publishers", the term they use for members actively involved in preaching. In 2007, these reports indicated a total of over 1.3 billion hours spent in preaching and Bible study activity. Since the mid-1990s, the number of peak publishers has increased from 4.5 million to 7.2 million, though there has been a decline in growth rates, from over 8% per annum in the mid 1970s, to 5% per annum in the mid 1990s, to about 2%–3% per annum since 1999. The official published membership statistics only include those who have reported preaching activity, and do not include "inactive" and disfellowshipped members, and any who have either not been involved in preaching or have not submitted reports. Jehovah's Witnesses have the lowest retention rate of all religious traditions in the United States. Only about one-third of American children among Jehovah's Witnesses still identify themselves with the religion as adults.