

WORLD RELIGIONS

MADE EASY



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Paul Carden, General Editor



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CONTENTS

Biblical Christianity	4
Jehovah's Witnesses	8
Mormonism	14
Mind Sciences/New Thought	20
Branhamism	22
World Mission Society Church of God	24
Judaism	26
Kabbalah Centre	28
Islam	30
Bahá'í	36
Nation of Islam	38
Hinduism	42
Hare Krishna	48
Transcendental Meditation	50
Sikhism	52
Buddhism	54
Shinto	62
Confucianism	64
Taoism	66
The "New Age" and Today's Pop Spirituality	68
Scientology	74
Eckankar	76
Theosophy	78
Anthroposophy	80
Neopaganism and Wicca	82
Freemasonry	84
Rosicrucianism	86
The Church of Satan/Satanism	88
Voodoo	90
Santería	92

BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY

KEY PERSON/FOUNDER, DATE, LOCATION

Jesus Christ. Founded about AD 30–33, in Judea (present-day Israel), under the Roman Empire. Followers of Jesus Christ became known as Christians.

WHO IS GOD?

The one God is Triune (one God in three persons, not three gods): Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is a spiritual being without a physical body. He is personal and involved with people. He created the universe out of nothing. He is eternal, changeless, holy, loving, and perfect. The title “God” is often used to designate God the Father, the first person of the Trinity.

WHO IS JESUS?

Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity. As God the Son, he was never created and has always existed. He is fully God and fully man (the two natures joined, not mixed). As the second person of the Trinity, he is coequal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. In becoming man (the Incarnation), he was begotten through the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Jesus is the only way to the Father, salvation, and eternal life. He died on a cross according to God’s plan, as the full



sacrifice and payment for our sins. He rose from the dead on the third day, spiritually and physically immortal. For the next 40 days he was seen by more than 500 eyewitnesses. His wounds were tangible, and he ate meals. He physically ascended to heaven. Jesus will come again visibly and physically at the end of time to establish God's kingdom and judge the world.

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force or energy field. He comforts, grieves, reproves, convicts, guides, teaches, and fills Christians. He is not the Father, nor is he the Son (Jesus Christ).

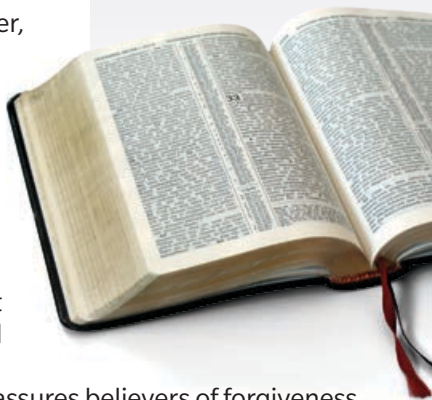
HOW TO BE SAVED

Salvation is by God's grace, not earned by an individual's good works. Salvation must be received by faith—that is, people must trust sincerely that Jesus died to pay for their sins and then physically rose again, which assures believers of forgiveness and resurrection of the body. This is God's loving plan to forgive sinful people.

Key Writings

The Holy Bible, divided into

- the Old Testament: 39 books written mainly in Hebrew and Aramaic
- the New Testament: 27 books written in Greek





Major Celebrations

- Easter, commemorating Jesus' resurrection (annual; dates vary)
- Christmas, commemorating Jesus' birth (annual; December 25)

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

Believers go to be with Jesus, where they await the final judgment. Both saved and lost people will be resurrected. Those who are saved will live forever with Jesus in heaven. Those who are lost will suffer the torment of eternal separation from God (hell). Jesus' bodily resurrection guarantees believers that they, too, will be resurrected and receive new, immortal bodies.

OTHER FACTS, BELIEFS, OR PRACTICES

Group worship, usually held in churches. No secret rites or doctrines. Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion).

Active voluntary missionary efforts. Aid to those in need: the poor, widows, orphans, and downtrodden.

Christians believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah promised to Israel in the Old Testament (*Tanakh*). Jesus said that his followers would be known by their love for one another. Basic teachings are summarized in the ancient statements of Christian belief, especially the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon.



THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and born of the Virgin Mary;
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and buried.

He descended into hell;

On the third day he rose from the dead;
He ascended into heaven and is seated
at the right hand of the Father;

From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,

The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Main Branches

Roman Catholicism—worldwide church governed by the Pope (also called the Bishop of Rome) from the Holy See in Vatican City

Eastern Orthodoxy—national churches (Armenian, Greek, Russian, etc.) governed by local bishops under the leadership of patriarchs; the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey) has primacy of honor

Protestantism—no centralized organization or leadership; liturgical denominations include Lutheran, Anglican, and Presbyterian churches; non-liturgical denominations include Baptist, Congregational, and Pentecostal churches

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY)

KEY PERSON/FOUNDER, DATE, LOCATION

Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916), succeeded as president by Joseph F. Rutherford (1869–1942). Began 1879 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Headquarters in Warwick, New York.

Key Writings

All current Watchtower publications, including

- the Bible (*New World Translation* only)
- *What Can the Bible Teach Us?*
- *How to Remain in God's Love*
- *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines



WHO IS GOD?

Witnesses believe in a one-person God, called Jehovah. No Trinity. Jesus is the first thing Jehovah created. Calling God by his personal name—"Jehovah"—is of utmost importance. God's true followers can be identified by their use of "Jehovah" in their prayers, congregational singing, preaching, and Bible study.

(Many Witnesses believe that if "Jehovah" is not invoked in prayer, the prayer may go to some other "god.")

WHO IS JESUS?

Witnesses claim that Jesus is not God. Instead, the Father (Jehovah) and his Son (Jesus) are two separate "gods"—Jesus is an inferior "god" serving



under Jehovah (who is the “only true God”).

Before he lived on earth, Jesus was Michael, the archangel. He was the first one created, and Jehovah made the universe through him. When Jesus came to earth, he ceased to exist as Michael and became merely a perfect human. After Jesus died on a torture stake (not a cross), his human body was “disposed” of by God’s power; he rose spiritually (not bodily) from the dead as the “resurrected Jesus Christ.”

Since angels are invisible, Jesus fabricated physical bodies resembling his original body to convince his disciples that he had risen from the dead. Since 1914, when Jesus’ “invisible presence” on earth began, he has been reigning from heaven, awaiting the battle of Armageddon in which he will rid the earth of human governments and set up “Paradise” under “Jehovah’s Kingdom government arrangement.”

Misunderstanding the Trinity

The Watchtower Society erroneously claims that the Christian doctrine of three persons in one God is a pagan concept comparable to the triadic “gods” of Babylonian and Egyptian mythology. It also argues that there is no basis in Scripture or ancient church history for the Trinity, and has mistranslated its version of the Bible to support its position.

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Witnesses believe the “holy spirit” is not God, but rather an impersonal, invisible, active force—the “energy” Jehovah projects to accomplish his will.

Apostasy and Restoration

Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that Christianity fell into general apostasy (abandonment of the faith) under Emperor Constantine in the fourth century AD. God appointed Charles Taze Russell to restore pure worship in the last days and establish the Watchtower Society to provide spiritual truth through literature such as *The Watchtower* and *Awake!*



Charles Taze Russell

HOW TO BE SAVED

Be baptized as a Jehovah’s Witness. Most followers must earn everlasting life on Earth by “door-to-door work.” Salvation in heaven is limited to 144,000 “anointed ones”—a number that has already been reached.

More Salvation Requirements

Jesus died as a “ransom sacrifice” to buy back what Adam lost: the right to perfect life on earth. Most Witnesses hope to be found worthy enough to be “saved” from destruction in the future battle of Armageddon and to survive into God’s new earthly system of rule, when “paradise” will be restored to Earth. The four requirements for salvation are:

- taking in knowledge of Jehovah God and of Jesus Christ
- obeying God’s laws and conforming one’s life to the moral requirements set out in the Bible

- belonging to and serving with God's one true channel and organization (the Watchtower Society)
- being loyal to God's organization

Salvation is earned through a combination of faith plus good works. True Christians can have no assurance of eternal life. They must work toward perfection throughout this life, and then throughout Christ's 1,000-year reign on earth. Next they must pass the final test of Satan (during which Satan is released from the pit to tempt all faithful Witnesses one last time) before God will grant them eternal life. If they fail at any point they risk annihilation (eternal destruction).



A Record of False Prophecy

Jesus predicts the coming of prophets who will mislead many by falsely announcing his return (Matthew 24:23–34). The Watchtower Society fulfills the criteria of a false prophet, having first pointed to 1874 as the date when Christ's invisible presence began and currently teaching that it began in 1914. It has repeatedly predicted the end of the age: 1914, 1915, 1918, 1925, 1940s, and 1975. While demanding absolute devotion to its teachings and proclaiming that it alone has "the Truth," the Watchtower has also reversed itself on a number of other doctrines.



OTHER FACTS, BELIEFS, OR PRACTICES

Also known as the International Bible Students Association. Witnesses meet in “Kingdom Halls” instead of churches. Active members (“publishers”) proselytize door-to-door. Once a year members

observe the Memorial of Jesus’ death/Lord’s Evening Meal (Communion); only “anointed ones” may partake. Witnesses are forbidden to vote, salute the flag, serve in the military, accept blood transfusions, or celebrate holidays and birthdays. They also reject the symbol of the cross.

No “Independent Thinking”

Spiritual truth is not given to God’s people individually, but only through his ordained channel (the Watchtower Society). Thus, Jehovah’s Witnesses must accept the Watchtower’s interpretation of Scripture over their personal ideas and analyses; “independent thinking” is dangerous. Any Witness who challenges the Watchtower’s current doctrines may be labeled prideful and “spiritually weak” and be subject to shunning by other Witnesses, including close family members.



Two Classes of Christians

According to the Watchtower Society, 144,000 people living between the day of Pentecost (c. AD 30) and 1935 were chosen by Jehovah to rule with him in heaven as spirits. They are called the “anointed class,” the “little flock,” or the “heavenly class.” Since 1935, whenever members of the little flock fall away from the true faith, God replaces them with other Jehovah’s Witnesses. All Jehovah’s Witnesses after 1935 who are actively obeying Jehovah—along with those from all ages who never heard of Christ but were not wicked—are the “other sheep,” or “great crowd.” The great crowd will have a chance to live forever in paradise on Earth. The heavenly class and the great crowd will remain eternally separated; the “earthly class” will never see God or Christ.



New Covenant Privileges Only for the 144,000

The Watchtower says that only members of its heavenly class are parties to the new covenant. They alone have Jesus as their mediator, are “born again,” have “adoption” as God’s children, are members of the “Christian congregation” (the church), may partake of the “memorial emblems” of Jesus’ last supper once a year, and will rule from heaven over the earth.