

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

SUPPORT MATERIALS - GMGY - BELIEFS & RELIGIONS



People adhere to religious traditions in different ways. Not all Jehovah's Witnesses will adhere to all of the following points of information. If there is a child in your class that follows this religious tradition it is important that the child's parents or guardians are the primary source of information about that child's beliefs and practices.

INTRODUCTION TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian tradition. The tradition was founded in 1879 by Charles Taze Russell, a Pennsylvanian businessman. Russell's Adventist background and rigorous study of the Bible led him to conclude, among other things, that the second coming of Christ would occur in 1914, that Hellfire did not exist, and that God was not a Trinity.

Although Christian-based, the group believes that the traditional Christian Churches have deviated from the true teachings of the Bible, and do not work in full harmony with God.

The traditional Christian Churches, for their part, do not regard the movement as a mainstream Christian denomination because it rejects the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and that Jesus was God.



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AN OVERVIEW OF THE BELIEF

Jehovah's Witnesses base their beliefs only on the text of the Bible. They believe that the Bible is the Word of God and consider its 66 books to be divinely inspired and historically accurate.

Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas or Easter because they believe that these festivals are based on (or contributed to by) pagan customs and religions.

AT A GLANCE...

Sacred text: New World Translation of the Scriptures

Other texts: The Watchtower; Awake!

Clergy/leaders: Elders

Special place: Kingdom Hall

Theism: Monotheism

Special people: Jesus: The Son of God

BELIEFS

Beliefs about God: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that God's name is Jehovah and refer to him as the almighty God and creator of the universe. The name Jehovah appears almost 7,000 times in the original Hebrew Scriptures but has been changed in different Bibles to 'God' or 'Lord'. Jehovah is the English rendering of the Hebrew word 'Yahweh'. They are dedicated Bible students and their aim is to share the news about the coming of Jehovah's Kingdom.

Beliefs about how to live: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that you should live morally and in accordance with Jehovah's commandments in the Bible and spread the good news of the Kingdom to others.

All Jehovah's Witnesses are keen Bible students and differ from other Christian religions in their interpretation of Scripture. They firmly believe in their commission to help others to come to acknowledge what they understand as truth, but also respect the fundamental right of all to believe as they wish. They endeavour to improve their ability to explain Bible teachings to others.

Beliefs about the afterlife: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that 144,000 elect will reign in heaven and have spirit bodies. Other Witnesses will live forever on a restored paradise on earth. All others will be annihilated. Hell does not exist.

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Where they differ from other Christian churches is around the topic of the **Earthly Paradise**. They believe that we are awaiting the second coming of Christ and that the Garden of Eden, created for Adam and Eve, will be restored to humanity here on earth.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that they will never die, believing that the Bible promises they are to live forever in paradise on this earth. Those who have died will be raised up and if they accept Jehovah they will live in a perfect paradise in harmony with nature and all living things, just as Jehovah had originally intended for Adam and Eve. There will be no famine, no suffering, no disease and no war.

They also believe that we are living through the End Times since the outbreak of World War I. We are now living through the transition period from human rule to the Thousand Year Reign of Christ, here on earth. However, first there will be a 'great tribulation'; Armageddon or the Day of Judgement, when the sinful either turn back to Jehovah and live forever on earth, or they die and experience no afterlife.

Beliefs about symbols: The watchtower is an important symbol. The cross is rejected as a pagan symbol.

CELEBRATIONS

Major holidays: Memorial of Christ's death, celebrated annually. All Christian or other religious-based holidays are rejected as unbiblical and pagan.



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PRACTICES

- They reject blood transfusions because of the Old and New Testament command to 'abstain from blood' (Gen. 9:3; Levi. 17:10; Deuteronomy 12:23 & Acts 15:28-29).
- They do not vote, serve in the military, or participate in national anthems or flag salutations. They remain resolutely neutral regarding politics but respect elected governments and the laws of the land and other people's rights to support nationalism. They believe their only allegiance is to God's Kingdom.
- Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate any traditional Christian holidays, and do not celebrate birthdays. Birthdays are mentioned twice in the Bible but in reference to unsavoury characters like King Herod. There is no mention of Jesus celebrating a birthday or holding it in regard so they consider it a pagan concept.
- They worship once per week and their place of worship is often called Kingdom Hall.
- There is a strong focus on evangelism. Evangelism is the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness.

KINGDOM HALL

A Kingdom Hall is a house of worship used by Jehovah's Witnesses for their religious services. Every Kingdom Hall has an auditorium where Bible study programs and lectures are held. In most auditoriums, a stage serves as a teaching platform for the conducting of meetings. The Kingdom Hall may also have one or more auxiliary classrooms, an office, and a small library containing Bible-related literature and reference works that can be used for research by any member of the congregation.

In a Kingdom Hall, however, you will not find any of the religious emblems and fixtures typically associated with the churches of Christendom. There are no altars, images, or crosses on display. Why not? Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the use of such items conflicts with the Bible's command to 'flee from idolatry'. (1 Corinthians 10:14; John 4:24) Many churches and temples are ornate and lavishly decorated. By contrast, Kingdom Halls are designed to be functional and are modest in design. The emphasis is placed on the Bible instruction that takes place within the building rather than on the structure itself. For more information visit www.jw.org.