

Mormonism: An Overview

As the official version of the story goes, in 1820, 14-year-old Joseph Smith, Jr., had a vision in which God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him. Caught up in the Protestant revivalism of his day, Smith inquired as to which of the Christian denominations he should join. None of them, he was told, because they were all “wrong and corrupt.” Rather, God would use Smith to reinstate the true church, which had been in apostasy since the death of the apostles.

Thus began the saga of the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints, or Mormons, which today is the largest and fastest-growing cult (form of counterfeit Christianity) in the world, increasing at an average rate of 300,000 converts a year – as many as 75 percent of whom may be former Protestants, according to author Fritz Ridenour (*So What's the Difference: A Look at 20 Worldviews, Faiths and Religions and How They Compare to Christianity*, p. 130).

Today the LDS Church, headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, boasts roughly 13 million members in more than 160 countries; about 6 million members reside in the United States. In addition, the church has more than 50,000 missionaries who spread the Mormon message around the world. Its current leader is Thomas S. Monson, 81, who, like founder Joseph Smith and subsequent presidents, is considered the church's “prophet, seer, and revelator.”

The LDS Church initially stood in defiance of historical Christianity, claiming that after the death of the apostles the Christian church fell into “the great apostasy.” Joseph Smith taught that he alone was called to restore the true church and that the revelations God gave him – particularly as recorded in the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price* – would guide the church back to its historic foundation. In recent years, however, the LDS Church has minimized, refuted or re-interpreted many earlier teachings of its leaders – such as polygamy, the multiple marriages of Jesus, and the curse of African Americans – and has launched a concerted effort to promote Mormonism as mainstream Christianity. This leads some to ask legitimately whether the LDS Church can have it both ways. Either Mormonism is true and all other forms of Christianity are false, or the LDS Church is not really needed, since historic Christianity is true after all, despite Joseph Smith's claims to the contrary.

Mormon leaders are exceptionally vague in their official statements about what the LDS church really believes. A visit to the church's official Web sites (www.lds.org and www.mormon.org) will frustrate any sincere inquirer who wants to know what Mormons truly believe about the nature and character of God, the Trinity, the atonement, and man's potential for godhood. Of course, Web surfers can always click on the link for a free *Book of Mormon* and have Mormon missionaries deliver a copy personally to their door, although the answers these missionaries give likely will be as vague as those provided by their leaders.

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A Brief History

After Joseph Smith's initial visit from Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in 1820, he allegedly saw the angel Moroni appear at his bedside in 1823 and tell him of golden plates on which was inscribed a record of the ancient American people. During his earthly life, Moroni had been a great warrior who lived among the Nephite people, descendants of Jews who fled Israel for North America around 600 B.C. Moroni's father, Mormon, commander in chief of the Nephites, had given the golden plates to his son, who added a few words of his own before hiding the plates in Hill Cumorah near Palmyra, New York. These plates featured "the fullness of the everlasting gospel." In 1827, after further visits from Moroni, Smith dug up the plates and began translating the "Reformed Egyptian" with the assistance of two special stones called "Urim" and "Thummim." The result was the *Book of Mormon*. By 1830 the book was published and Smith founded the "Church of Christ" (not affiliated with the Church of Christ denomination) with five of his followers.

From 1831 to 1844, Smith gained converts and established strongholds in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois. Wherever they went, Mormons attracted curiosity and even hostility, either because non-Mormons did not trust Smith or were suspicious of Mormon beliefs and practices. During this time, Smith claimed to continue receiving revelations. In 1835 he released *Doctrine and Covenants*, which would become "inspired Scripture" along with the *Book of Mormon*. By 1838 the Mormons had been driven from Missouri to Illinois, where they converted a swampy area on the banks of the Mississippi River into a thriving community called Nauvoo. It was here that Smith claimed to receive revelations concerning the Godhead, the origin and destiny of the human race, eternal progression, baptism for the dead, polygamy and other unique doctrines. The fourth "standard work" of Mormonism (after the King James Version of the Bible, the *Book of Mormon*, and *Doctrine and Covenants*), the *Pearl of Great Price*, was first compiled and published in 1851 and incorporated into the LDS canon in 1880.

Tensions in Nauvoo arose between Mormons and non-Mormons and came to a head when the local paper, the *Expositor*, published stories exposing the LDS practice of polygamy. Smith, who had risen to power as mayor of Nauvoo and "lieutenant general" of the 4,000-man Nauvoo legion, ordered the paper destroyed. For this, he was arrested and jailed in Carthage, Illinois. While awaiting trial, a mob of 200 attacked the jail and a gunfight ensued. Smith, using a six-shooter that had been smuggled into the jail, killed at least two attackers before he succumbed to gunshot wounds.

Following Smith's death, Brigham Young emerged as successor and led a large number of Mormons west, where they settled in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake in 1847. Today, Salt Lake City is home to the LDS Church. But all LDS members did not follow Young west. Smith's widow, Emma, stayed behind in Illinois. Those who affirmed her son, Joseph Smith III, as the true successor helped found the "Reorganized Church," now called the Community of Christ and headquartered in Independence, Missouri.

Four Standard Works

Mormons recognize four written volumes as inspired and authoritative:

- The *King James Version of the Bible* – “as far as it is translated correctly.” This caveat enables Mormons to question the Bible’s veracity and authority. Joseph Smith made more than 600 “corrections” to its text. According to the *Book of Mormon*, the Bible is missing “plain and precious parts” (1 Nephi 13:26), which the other three standard volumes complete.
- The *Book of Mormon*, also called “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” According to one of the church’s official Web sites (www.mormon.org), “By the power of God, Joseph Smith translated this book from an ancient record written on gold plates. The Book of Mormon is ‘a record of God’s dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains, as does the Bible, the fullness of the everlasting gospel.’”
- *Doctrine and Covenants*. This volume features 138 revelations given to Mormon prophets, along with two “declarations.” Here, much of Mormon doctrine may be found, including teachings on the priesthood, baptism for the dead, exaltation (or godhood), and polygamy.
- *Pearl of Great Price*, which contains Smith’s religious history, the Articles of Faith, the Book of Abraham, and the Book of Moses.

Basic Mormon Beliefs

“The first difference to grasp between the Mormon Church and biblical Christianity is one of semantics,” writes Fritz Ridenour in *So What’s the Difference?* “The Mormons use but have redefined many key terms employed by evangelical Christians – a definitive sign of a cult. Analysis of Mormon views, past and present, reveals that they dismiss, twist, change or add to all biblical doctrines, particularly revelation, the Trinity and salvation by grace alone through faith alone” (p. 131).

Here is a glimpse of several key doctrines of the Mormon Church:

One true church. Joseph Smith declared that all Christian denominations were false and apostate. Mormons teach that after the death of the apostles, all churches became heretical and no true saints existed until the LDS Church was established. Full salvation and “exaltation” (godhood) is found only in the LDS Church.

LDS president as living prophet, seer and revelator. Joseph Smith and his successors are considered the sole spokesmen and revelators of God through whom God’s will is made known to the church. These revelations are considered authoritative, although some early revelations have been superseded by more recent ones; others are minimized by the church today; and still others, such as Smith’s prophecy that the temple would be built in Independence, Missouri, in his lifetime, have not been fulfilled.

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Mormon scripture. Mormons accept “four standard works” – The King James Version of the Bible (“as far as it is translated correctly”); the *Book of Mormon*; *Doctrine and Covenants*; and *Pearl of Great Price*. In addition, LDS presidents may receive new revelations from God, and these become scripture.

God as an exalted man. Elohim, or Heavenly Father, is the god of this world. He was a man in prior existence, but by keeping the requirements of Mormonism, he was exalted to godhood and inherited his own universe. There are an infinite number of gods with their own worlds; these gods, too, once were men. The Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three separate and distinct gods. The Father and Son have bodies of flesh and bone; the Holy Ghost is a “personage of spirit.”

Jesus is God’s “Son.” Jesus (also called Jehovah) was Elohim’s firstborn spirit child in heaven. (Lucifer also was a spirit child, but his plan of redemption was rejected in favor of Jesus’ superior plan.) Jesus was begotten by God through Mary in a “literal, full and complete sense” (Bruce McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p. 67). Principally in the Garden of Gethsemane (and not on the cross), Jesus atoned for Adam’s sin and guaranteed all people resurrection and immortality (salvation). Jesus visited the Israelites (ancestors of Native Americans) after his resurrection and established the true church among them. We are the spiritual younger brothers and sisters of Christ. Jesus was married at Cana in Galilee (John 2); in fact, He had numerous wives and fathered many children Himself.

Humans are gods in embryo. Every person has the potential to become a god by keeping the requirements of Mormonism. A key phrase in Mormonism is, “As man is god once was, as god is man may become.” From a prior spirit existence in heaven, people may be born on earth in order to exercise freedom to choose good or evil and to have a body for the resurrection. By obeying Mormon teachings and performing required duties, worthy Mormon males may pass the celestial guards, bring their wives with them, and achieve a status similar to Elohim. In the resurrection, faithful Mormons receive exaltation (godhood) and will have authority over their own world.

Salvation by works. When Mormons say people are “saved” by grace through faith, they mean “resurrection.” In this sense, virtually all people will be saved. To achieve the highest tier of the highest level of heaven, Mormons must exercise faith in the god of Mormonism, in Christ, and in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; exercise repentance; and be baptized in the LDS Church. Additionally, they must keep the “Word of Wisdom” by abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine; tithe to the church; attend weekly meetings; support the Mormon prophet; do temple works; and be active in their support of the church. “Full salvation” or “exaltation” (godhood) is only available through the LDS Church.

Eternal progression. All people, as well as all gods, have existed eternally. There are four stages in “eternal progression” through which people may pass: 1) eternally existing intelligence; 2) pre-mortal spirit; 3) mortal probation; 4) resurrection and eternal life in one of six places: outer darkness; the telestial kingdom (lowest level of heaven); the terrestrial kingdom (next-highest level of heaven); or the celestial kingdom, consisting of three levels, the highest of which is exaltation/godhood.

Comparing Christianity to Mormonism

“For if a person comes and preaches another Jesus ... or you receive a different spirit ... or a different gospel ...” (2 Cor. 11:4)

What the Bible Says About Jesus:

1. He is the virgin-born Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-23; Luke 1:34-5).

[Satan is a created – and fallen – angel].

What Mormonism Says About Jesus:

“Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of the Eternal Father!” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, p. 7. Quoted in the *Ensign*, April 1997, p. 15)

“God the Father became the literal father of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal father.” (*Gospel Principles*, p. 64)

“Jesus is the only person who had our Heavenly Father as the father of his body.” (Joseph F. Smith, *Family Home Evening Manual*, pp. 125-26)

“Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His mission in the flesh.” (James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, pp. 466-67)

“Let it not be forgotten, that He is essentially greater than any and all others, by reason (1) of His seniority as the oldest or first born; (2) of His unique status in the flesh as the offspring of a mortal mother and of an immortal, or resurrected and glorified, Father ...” (James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, p. 426).

“Long before you were born a program was developed by your creators.... The principal personalities in this great drama were a Father Elohim, perfect in wisdom, judgment, and person, and two sons, Lucifer and Jehovah.” (Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, pp. 32-33)

What the Bible Says About Jesus:

What Mormonism Says About Jesus:

2. Jesus did not marry.

“The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the world was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer ... this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind.” (Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages*, p. 15)

“Both the scriptures and the prophets affirm that Jesus Christ and Lucifer are indeed offspring of our Heavenly Father and, therefore, spirit brothers.... Both Jesus and Lucifer were strong leaders with great knowledge and influence. But as the First-born of the Father, Jesus was Lucifer’s older brother.” (Jess L. Christensen, *A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions*, pp. 223-24. This teaching also appears in other Mormon publications.)

“Jesus was the bridegroom at the marriage of Cana – We say it was Jesus Christ who was married, to be brought into relation whereby he could see his seed.” (Orson Hyde, apostle, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 82)

“From the passage in the forty-fifth Psalm, it will be seen that the great Messiah who was the founder of the Christian religion, was a Polygamist.... the Messiah chose to take upon himself his seed; and by marrying many honorable wives himself, show to all future generations that he approbated the plurality of Wives under the Christian dispensation, as well as under the dispensations in which His Polygamist ancestors lived.” (Orson Pratt, *The Seer*, p. 172)

3. Jesus is the foundation of the true church (Matt. 16:18; Acts 4:11-12; Col. 1:18).

Joseph Smith: “I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. The followers of Jesus ran away from Him, but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet.” (*History of the Church*, Vol. 6, pp. 408-9)

What the Bible Says About Jesus:	What Mormonism Says About Jesus:
<p>4. Jesus is the judge of all (John 5:22).</p>	<p>“No man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith ... Every man and woman must have the certificate of Joseph Smith, Junior, as a passport to their entrance into the mansion where God and Christ are.” (Brigham Young, <i>Journal of Discourses</i>, vol. 7, p. 289)</p>
<p>5. Jesus is the one who resurrects all (John 5:28-29).</p>	<p>Joseph Smith will receive the keys of the resurrection. “If we ask who will stand at the head of the resurrection in this last dispensation, the answer is – Joseph Smith, Junior, the Prophet of God. He is the man who will be resurrected and receive the keys of the resurrection, and he will seal this authority upon others, and they will hunt up their friends and resurrect them.” (Brigham Young, <i>Discourses of Brigham Young</i>, p. 116).</p>
<p>6. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the Creator, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Holy Spirit (John 1:1-14; Col. 1:15-20; Phil 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-13).</p>	<p>A “council of the Gods” created the world. “In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it ... In all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods.” (Joseph Smith, <i>History of the Church</i>, Vol. 6, pp. 308, 474).</p> <p>“He [Jesus] is the Firstborn of the Father. By obedience and devotion to the truth he attained that pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as a God, as the Lord Omnipotent, while yet in his pre-existent state.... Inasmuch, however, as Christ attained Godhood while yet in pre-existence, he too stood as a God to the other spirits.” (Bruce McConkie, <i>Mormon Doctrine</i>, pp. 129, 323)</p>

What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit:	What Mormonism Says About the Holy Spirit:
<p>1. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the triune Godhead (Matt. 3:16-17, 28:19-20).</p>	<p>Joseph Smith taught that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit “constitute three distinct personages and three Gods.” (<i>Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith</i>, p. 370)</p>
<p>2. The Holy Spirit is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son (Acts 5:3-4).</p>	<p>The Father has a body of flesh and bones. So does the Son. But the Holy Ghost is “a personage of spirit.” (<i>Doctrine and Covenants 130:22</i>)</p>

What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit:	What Mormonism Says About the Holy Spirit:
<p>3. The Holy Spirit and the Holy Ghost are two Biblical names for the same person.</p> <p>4. The Holy Spirit/Holy Ghost is God (Acts 5:3-4).</p>	<p>“The Holy Ghost ... is a personage distinct from the Holy Spirit. As a personage, the Holy Ghost cannot any more than the Father and the Son be everywhere present in person.” (John A. Widtsoe, <i>Evidences and Reconciliations</i>, p. 76).</p> <p>“The Holy Ghost is yet a spiritual body and waiting to take to himself a body as the Saviour did or as the gods before them took bodies.” (Joseph Smith, April 6, 1843; see <i>Discourses on the Holy Ghost</i> compiled by N.B. Lundwall, p. 73)</p>
What the Bible Says About the Gospel of Jesus Christ:	What Mormonism Says About the Gospel of Jesus Christ:
<p>1. Christ’s death at Calvary paid our sin debt and purchased our salvation so that everlasting life is received by grace through faith in the Person and work of Jesus (John 3:16, 5:24; Rom. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).</p>	<p>Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection made it possible for mankind to be resurrected, but “men will be punished for their own sins.” (<i>Article of Faith #2</i> by Joseph Smith). Through the atonement of Christ “all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.” (<i>Article of Faith #3</i> by Joseph Smith)</p> <p>“There is <i>no salvation</i> outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” (Bruce McConkie, <i>Mormon Doctrine</i>, p. 670)</p> <p>“Baptism ... is for the remission of sins ... (and) is the gate to the celestial kingdom of heaven.” (Bruce McConkie, <i>Mormon Doctrine</i>, p. 70)</p> <p>There is “no salvation without accepting Joseph Smith ... No man can eject that testimony without accepting most dreadful consequences, for he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, <i>Doctrines of Salvation</i>, Vol. 1, p. 188)</p>

<p>What the Bible Says About the Gospel of Jesus Christ:</p>	<p>What Mormonism Says About the Gospel of Jesus Christ:</p>
	<p>A summary of Mormon teaching on grace and works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grace of God provides for resurrection from the dead • Works are necessary for a person to achieve exaltation, or goodhood • Salvation by grace alone is a pernicious doctrine • Perfection is an achievable goal <p>(Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, <i>Mormonism 101</i>, p. 169)</p>
<p>2. The Bible teaches that at death, man’s eternal destiny is fixed in one of two places: heaven or hell (Luke 16:19-31).</p>	<p>Virtually all men are saved in “General Salvation ... meaning resurrection.” (<i>Contributions of Joseph Smith</i> by Stephen L. Richards, p. 5)</p>
	<p>Then, based on works, all men will spend eternity in one of three levels of heaven – telestial, terrestrial or celestial. A few “sons of perdition” will not be saved/resurrected.</p>
	<p>More specifically, Mormonism teaches that a person is destined for one of six places after death:</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outer darkness – reserved for Satan and his demons and the extremely wicked, including apostate Mormons • Telestial kingdom – the lowest of the three heavens; the wicked will spend eternity here • Terrestrial kingdom – the second of the three heavens; honorable people and “lukewarm” Mormons will live here • Celestial kingdom – the highest of the three heavens consisting of three separate levels; the top level is where Mormons hope to be exalted
<p>3. All men are sinners by nature and by volition (Rom. 3:23, 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22).</p>	<p>There is no such thing as original sin. All men are gods in embryo. “God and man are of the same race, differing only in their degrees of advancement.” (Apostle John Widtsoe, <i>Rational Theology</i>, p. 61)</p>
<p>4. There is no second chance for salvation after death (Heb. 9:27).</p>	<p>Mormons may be baptized on behalf of the dead for their salvation. “If a man cannot enter the kingdom of God without baptism, then the dead must be baptized.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, <i>Doctrines of Salvation</i>, Vol. II, p. 141)</p>

**What the Bible Says
About the Gospel of Jesus Christ:**

5. Once a person is justified, his or her salvation is eternally secure, based on the finished work of Christ at Calvary and the faithfulness of God (John 5:24, 10:27-30; Rom. 4:21, 8:28-39; Heb. 7:25, 10:14; 1 Peter 1:1-5).

6. Each individual is a uniquely created person whose beginning came at the moment of conception; after death, that person retains his or her personhood and spends eternity in heaven or hell.

**What Mormonism Says
About the Gospel of Jesus Christ:**

Believers must do works to earn a level of heaven and risk losing their position in that heaven if they are not faithful in service. For example, failure to marry in an LDS church will “damn” persons so that their eternal progression will be stopped short of godhood. (See *Doctrine and Covenants 132:16-20*)

Each individual has four stages of life (eternal progression): 1. Eternally existing intelligence. 2. Pre-mortal spirit born by procreation of God and one of his wives. 3. Mortal probation (present life on earth). 4. Post-mortal status that depends on works done in this life. Eternity is spent in one of three heavens: telestial (almost everyone makes it at least this far); terrestrial (good and religious folk make it here); and celestial (only Mormons who have fulfilled the proper requirements make it into one of this heaven’s three levels).

Jehovah's Witnesses: An Overview

Some 50 years after Joseph Smith claimed to be visited by God the Father and Jesus Christ, an event that launched the Mormon Church, another teenage boy began an inconspicuous Bible study in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in 1870. The result was the establishment of a second major cult (counterfeit form of Christianity) in the 19th century, known today as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Officially known by several names -- The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, and the International Bible Students Association -- the Jehovah's Witnesses today boast more than 6.6 million active participants (known as "publishers") in more than 230 countries, with nearly 100,000 Kingdom Halls, one of the largest publishing operations in the world, and an aggressive door-to-door "preaching" ministry.

A Brief History

It all began with Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916). As a teenager he rejected many of the views taught in his Congregational church, particularly the doctrines of hell and the Trinity, which he found unreasonable. Influenced by Adventists, who assured him there is no eternal punishment and who focused on the return of Christ, he formed his own Bible study and began to develop his unique theology. In 1879, Russell began publishing his own magazine, eventually known as *The Watchtower*, predicting that the battle of Armageddon would take place in 1914, at which time Jehovah would destroy all earthly governments, end the "Gentile times" and establish His kingdom on earth. Russell believed and taught that Jesus had returned to earth invisibly in 1874.

By 1896 Russell had founded the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. In 1908 he moved his headquarters from Pennsylvania to Brooklyn, New York, where it remains today, along with a massive printing operation, an apartment building, offices, and a Bible school. When the First World War began in 1914, Russell claimed his prophecy of Armageddon was on the verge of being fulfilled, but he died a failed prophet two years later.

Joseph F. Rutherford, legal advisor to Russell's organization, became its new president in 1917. He set a new date of 1925 for Armageddon, but when it didn't happen, the charismatic and domineering Rutherford backed away from his prediction, claiming that his followers misunderstood him. Undaunted, he changed the name of the society to the Jehovah's Witnesses, taken from Isaiah 43:10, in part to distance his followers from splinter groups forged by former disillusioned members. He also escalated the aggressive door-to-door "preaching" that distinguishes Jehovah's Witnesses today. In fact, Jehovah's Witnesses log more than 1.2 billion hours of "preaching" door-to-door each year. In an effort to rapidly increase membership, Rutherford proclaimed that only 144,000 people would make it to heaven. When Watchtower ranks swelled beyond this number, Rutherford announced that everyone who had become a Witness before 1935 would go to heaven (the "little flock"), while everyone who joined after 1935 would be among the "great crowd" who would not go to heaven but could live in an earthly paradise after Armageddon and the Millennium.

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Rutherford died in 1942. His successor, Nathan Knorr, was less flamboyant than Rutherford and changed Watchtower policy so that all publications from that point forward were released anonymously. Under his direction, the society issued a new Armageddon dating system, teaching that Jesus had not returned invisibly in 1874, as Russell had taught, but in 1914. Further, the generation that had been alive in 1914 would not “pass away” (see Matt. 24:34) before Armageddon would occur – an “absolutely final” date of 1975. Knorr died in 1977 with the final battle yet to be waged.

Frederick Franz became the next president. While he would not permit the society to set any more dates for Armageddon, he insisted that persons alive in 1914 would witness this cataclysmic event. He died in 1992 at age 99. Successor Milton G. Henschel discarded the entire end-times scenario in favor of “new light” that made the “generation” of Matt. 24:34 apply to any generation that sees the signs of Christ’s return. Don Adams heads the organization today – a society that remains prolific in its publications and aggressive in its evangelism. *The Watchtower*, a semimonthly magazine that instructs the society’s members in faith and practice, is published in 158 languages with a circulation of more than 21 million. *Awake!*, designed for non-members, reaches 18 million readers in 81 languages. The society’s official Web site may be found at www.watchtower.org.

Basic Jehovah’s Witness Beliefs

Jehovah’s Witnesses acknowledge that Charles Taze Russell was “the prime mover of the group” (official Web site) but seek to distance themselves from him and his teachings. Unfortunately, Jehovah’s Witnesses today still cling to Russell’s main false teachings: a denial of the Trinity; a denial of the deity of Christ and His bodily resurrection; a denial of the Holy Spirit’s deity and personality; a denial of hell as a place of everlasting punishment; and more.

Here is a glimpse of several key Jehovah’s Witnesses doctrines:

God’s name is Jehovah; He is not triune. No other names must be used to depict the one true and living God. Jehovah is a “spirit being,” invisible and eternal, but He has a spiritual body and is not omnipresent (*Insight*, vol. 1, pp. 969-970). Neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit is God; the Trinity is strenuously denied.

Jesus is Jehovah’s first created being. Jesus had three periods of existence. In His pre-human existence he was called “God’s only begotten Son” because Jehovah created him directly. He then used Jesus to create all other things. He also had the personal name Michael the Archangel. The second stage of Jesus’ life was on earth as Jehovah transferred his life from heaven to the womb of Mary. Jehovah’s Witnesses are adamant that this was not an incarnation. Jesus became Messiah at his baptism, was executed on a torture stake, and his humanity was annihilated. He then began the third stage of his life, being raised an immortal spirit who returned to heaven once again as Michael the Archangel. He returned invisibly to earth and “very soon now, he will manifest his rulership over our troubled earth” (*Knowledge*, p. 41).

Jesus is not God. Jehovah's Witnesses teach a type of polytheism with a doctrine of two gods. They say Jehovah is the Almighty God who created Jesus, and Jesus is the mighty god who created everything else. This is simply a modern version of an ancient heresy. Arius, a pastor's assistant in Alexandria, Egypt, taught that Christ was a created being. He captured a strong following, which necessitated the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325.

Jesus rose spiritually, not physically, from the dead. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Christ was raised from the dead as a spirit who only appeared to have a body. What the disciples saw after Christ's death was Jesus' "re-created body." Because in Watchtower reasoning the body and soul of an individual become extinct at death, God must re-create the "life pattern" of a person, and He does so by retrieving the life pattern from His memory.

The Holy Spirit is not God. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the "holy spirit" is an "invisible act or force" that Jehovah uses to inspire His servants to accomplish His will. Put simply, the holy spirit is like electricity, according to Watchtower reasoning.

Christ's death did not provide full atonement. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was a "ransom to God for Adam's sin." By this, they mean that Jesus (Michael the Archangel in human form) was a fair exchange for Adam's sin. As such, he made it possible for all people to be saved by obedience to Jehovah. Christ died on a torture stake, not a cross. After lying in death for parts of three days, Jehovah re-created him as a mighty spirit person.

Salvation is by faith and obedience. Requirements for salvation are "exercising faith in Jesus' ransom sacrifice," baptism by immersion, active association with the Watchtower society, righteous conduct, and absolute loyalty to Jehovah. There is no assurance of salvation, only hope for a resurrection.

There are two classes of saved people. Only 144,000, known as the "Anointed Class," will go to heaven at death to rule with Jesus. Most Jehovah's Witnesses hope to be among the "other sheep" or "great crowd" who will not go to heaven but live forever in Paradise on earth after Armageddon and the Millennium.

Hell is mankind's common grave. The body and soul cease to exist at death, say Jehovah's Witnesses. When Jehovah raises them from the dead one day, the righteous will populate Paradise on earth (the 144,000 "Anointed Class" are the only people in heaven). Apparently, the wicked will have a second chance for life, but if they don't measure up, they will be annihilated, ceasing to exist forever. Jehovah's Witnesses deny the biblical teaching that hell is a place of conscious, everlasting separation from God.

Comparing Christianity to the Jehovah's Witnesses

What the Bible Says About the Bible:

The Bible is the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God, and is His sole written authority for all people (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

What Jehovah's Witnesses Say About the Bible:

The *New World Translation* is the official Jehovah's Witnesses translation. It essentially strips out key doctrines such as the deity of Christ and salvation by grace alone through faith.

The Bible is authoritative only when interpreted by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, because only the Watch Tower Society receives divine illumination as to its true meaning.

During the era of founder Charles Taze Russell, it was stated that his *Studies in the Scriptures* were necessary to understand the Bible accurately: "They are not mere comments on the Bible, but they are practically the Bible itself ... if anyone lays the 'Scripture Studies' aside ... and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness." (*The Watchtower*, Sept. 15, 1920)

What the Bible Says About God:

There is one true and living God, who exists as three distinct, co-equal, co-eternal persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Deut. 6:4; John 10:30; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:13; 1 Peter 1:2).

What Jehovah's Witnesses Say About God:

The Christian God is, in fact, the devil, according to Charles Taze Russell: "The clergy's God is plainly not Jehovah but the ancient deity, hoary with the iniquity of the ages – Baal, the Devil Himself." (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. 7, p. 410)

"The obvious conclusion is, therefore, that Satan is the originator of the trinity doctrine." (*Let God Be True*, p. 101)

What the Bible Says About God:

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are described as deity using similar terms: **Omniscient** (Matt. 9:4; Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:10); **God** (John 10:30; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Peter 1:2); **Lord** (Luke 2:11; Rom. 10:12; 2 Cor. 3:17); **almighty** (Gen. 17:1; Rom. 15:19; Rev. 1:8); **truth** (John 7:28; 1 John 5:6; Rev. 3:7); **eternal** (Ps. 90:2; Micah 5:2; Heb. 9:14); **powerful** (Jer. 32:17; Matt. 28:18; Luke 1:35; Rom. 15:19; Heb. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:5).

What Jehovah's Witnesses Say About God:

"Jehovah" is the only name by which God rightly may be called.

"... the Bible plainly states that in his prehuman existence, Jesus was a created spirit being, just as angels were spirit beings created by God.... The fact is that Jesus is not God and never claimed to be." (*Should You Believe in the Trinity?* pp. 14, 20)

"... it is logical to conclude that the holy spirit is the active force of God. It is not a person but is a powerful force that God causes to emanate from himself to accomplish his holy will." (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, p. 381)

What the Bible Says About Jesus:

He is the virgin-born Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-23; Luke 1:35). He is eternal God, the Creator, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Holy Spirit (John 1:1-3, 10, 14; 10:30; Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-3).

What Jehovah's Witnesses Say About Jesus:

Jesus is the first creation of Jehovah; Jesus then made all "other" things. (See Col. 1:16 *New World Translation*)

"In other words, he was the first and direct creation of Jehovah God." (*The Truth Shall Make You Free*, p. 47)

"... Jesus was conceived by a sinless, perfect Father, Jehovah God ... Jehovah took the perfect life of his only-begotten Son and transferred it from heaven to ... the womb of the unmarried girl Mary ... Thus God's Son was conceived or given a start as a human creature ... Jesus' birth on earth was not an incarnation." (*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, pp. 126-27; *What Has Religion Done for Mankind?* p. 231)

"... the true Scriptures speak of God's Son, the Word, as 'a god.' He is a 'mighty god,' but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah." (*The Truth Shall Make You Free*, p. 47)

What the Bible Says About Jesus:

Jesus rose physically from the dead (Matt. 12:38-40; 28:5-10; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:4-8; 1 Peter 1:18-21).

Jesus is coming back physically and visibly one day (Matt. 24:29-31; John 14:3; Titus 2:13; Rev. 19:11-14).

What Jehovah's Witnesses Say About Jesus:

"This firstborn from the dead was raised from the grave, not a human creature, but a spirit." (*Let God Be True*, p. 276)

"Christ Jesus returns, not again as a human, but as a glorious spirit person." (*Let God Be True*, p. 196)

"Some wrongfully expect a literal fulfillment of the symbolic statements of the Bible. Such hope to see the glorified Jesus coming seated on a white cloud where every human eye will see him ... Since no earthly men have ever seen the Father ... neither will they see the glorified Son." (*Let God Be True*, p. 186)

"Jesus returned to earth in 1914, has expelled Satan from Heaven and is proceeding to overthrow Satan's organization, establish the Theocratic Millennial Kingdom, and vindicate the name of Jehovah God. He did not return in a physical form and is invisible as the Logos." (Walter Martin, summarizing the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses in *Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 52)

What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the triune Godhead (Matt. 3:16-17, 28:19-20).

The Holy Spirit is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son (Acts 5:1-11).

What Jehovah's Witnesses Say About the Holy Spirit:

"... The holy spirit is the invisible active force of Almighty God that moves his servants to do his will." (*Let God Be True*, p. 108)

"The Scriptures themselves unite to show that God's holy spirit is not a person but is God's active force by which he accomplishes his purpose and executes his will." (*Aid to Bible Understanding*, p. 1543)

"As for the 'Holy Spirit,' the so-called 'third Person of the Trinity,' we have already seen that it is not a person, but God's active force." (*The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, p. 24)

**What the Bible Says
About the Gospel of Jesus Christ:**

Christ's death at Calvary paid our sin debt and purchased our salvation so that everlasting life is received by grace through faith in the Person and work of Jesus (John 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

Once believers are justified, their salvation is eternally secure based on the finished work of Christ at Calvary and the faithfulness of God (John 5:24; 10:27-30; Rom. 8:28-39; Heb. 7:25; 10:14; 1 Peter 1:1-5).

All who receive Christ by faith enter immediately and everlastingly into Christ's kingdom (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 10:9-10, 13).

**What Jehovah's Witnesses Say
About the Gospel of Jesus Christ:**

"The atonement is a ransom paid to Jehovah God by Christ Jesus and is applicable to all who accept it in righteousness. In brief, the death of Jesus removed the effects of Adam's sin on his offspring and laid the foundation of the New World of righteousness including the Millennium of Christ's reign." (Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 52)

"Those people of good will today who avail themselves of the provision and who steadfastly abide in this confidence will find Christ Jesus to be their 'everlasting Father.'" (*Let God Be True*, p. 121)

"We have learned that a person could fall away and be judged unfavorably either now or at Armageddon, or during the thousand years of Christ's reign, or at the end of the final test ... into everlasting destruction." (*From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, p. 241)

"Who and how many are able to enter in (the Kingdom)? The Revelation limits to 144,000 the number that become a part of the Kingdom and stand on heavenly Mount Zion." (*Let God Be True*, p. 136)

**What the Bible Says
About Life After Death:**

At death, man's eternal destiny is fixed in one of two places: heaven or hell (Luke 16:19-31).

Hell is a place of everlasting conscious existence, where the unbeliever is forever separated from God (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 14:9-11; 20:10).

**What Jehovah's Witnesses Say
About Life After Death:**

"... the claim of religionists that man has an immortal soul and therefore differs from the beast is not Scriptural." (*Let God Be True*, p. 68)

"Who is responsible for this God-defaming doctrine of a hell of torment? The promulgator of it is Satan himself. His purpose in introducing it has been to frighten the people away from studying the Bible and to make them hate God." (*Let God Be True*, p. 98)

"Hell is mankind's common grave." (Jehovah's Witnesses Official Web Site)

**What the Bible Says
About Life After Death:**

All believers have God's promise of a home in heaven, will go there instantly upon physical death, and will return with Christ to earth one day (John 14:1-3; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 19:11-16).

There is no opportunity for salvation beyond the grave (Luke 16:19-31; Heb. 9:27).

Learn more about the Jehovah's Witnesses at www.oncedelivered.net.

**What Jehovah's Witnesses Say
About Life After Death:**

"The doctrine of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death cannot be true, mainly for four reasons: (1) Because it is wholly unscriptural; (2) it is unreasonable; (3) it is contrary to God's love; and (4) it is repugnant to justice." (*Let God Be True*, p. 99)

"Would a loving God really torment people forever? ... The wicked, of course, are not literally tormented because, as we have seen, when a person is dead he is completely out of existence.... And it is also a lie, which the Devil spread, that the souls of the wicked are tormented ..." (*You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, pp. 81, 88-89)

Only 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, chosen by Jehovah, will be in heaven. The remaining faithful Witnesses, after an indefinite length of time in a state of soul sleep, will be raised to populate Paradise Earth.

"So this 'congregation of God' is made up of all Christians on earth who have the hope of heavenly life. In all, only 144,000 persons finally make up the 'congregation of God.' Today, only a few of these, a remnant, are still on the earth. Christians who hope to live forever on earth look for spiritual guidance from members of this 'congregation of the living God.'" (*You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, pp. 125-26)

"Many millions that have lived in centuries past and who were not Jehovah's Witnesses will come back in a resurrection and have an opportunity for life. Many now living may yet take a stand for truth and righteousness before the "great tribulation," and they will gain salvation. (Jehovah's Witnesses official Web site)