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## Elements in New Religious Movements

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## JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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## Jehovah's Witnesses

Elements in New Religious Movements

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**Abstract:** Jehovah's Witnesses began as an informal Bible study group in the 1870s that sought to recover first-century Christian beliefs and practices. They disseminated literature announcing the expected reign of God's Kingdom and called themselves Bible Students. In 1931, they adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses, epitomizing their belief in the Christian obligation to preach the gospel worldwide. Known for their ethic of nonviolence and their evangelizing work, and despite worshipping freely in most countries, Witnesses are subject to controversy, particularly vis-à-vis mainstream Christianity, the State, and secularized societies. The authors are practicing Jehovah's Witnesses who present this work as neither apologia nor official account, but as an emic description of the history, beliefs, identity, and organizational structure of Witnesses, and their societal interactions. While briefly covering main controversies, this Element focuses on the culture and lived experience of the millions comprising the Witness community.

*This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.*

**Keywords:** Jehovah's Witnesses, International Bible Students Association, freedom of religion, millennialism, law and religion

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