

THE GREAT APOSTASY

MODERN CHURCH HISTORY –SPRING 2024

SIMILARITIES

- These groups all originated in the 19th and early 20th centuries.
- They all began with a belief in the “Great Apostasy” – the perception that all mainstream churches (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) had fallen away from the original faith promoted by Jesus and the Apostles.
- They all share a desire to return to the beliefs and practices of the early church (this is known as “Restorationism”).
- They all deny the doctrine of the Trinity.
- They all emphasize strict moral codes for members, though they disagree significantly on the details.

ONENESS PENTECOSTALISM

- 30 million members worldwide
- The largest denomination is the United Pentecostal Church International (6 million).
- Originating from the early 20th century Pentecostal movement, Oneness groups have the most rigid theology and practices in the movement.
- True saving faith **MUST** be demonstrated by repentance, full-submersion water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit (with the evidence of tongues).
- Most Oneness groups also emphasize strict holiness standards in dress, grooming, and personal conduct.

LATTER DAY SAINTS (MORMONS)

- 17 million members worldwide
- Founded by Joseph Smith, who published the Book of Mormon in 1830.
- Smith claimed to receive visions from God directing him to buried golden tablets. With the help of an angel, he translated the tablets into English.
- Early Mormons were persecuted and migrated west, eventually settling in Utah.
- Mormons today are known for their family values and missionary work.
- Mormon doctrines and practices have changed over the years. Prior to 1978, black people could not be baptized, married, or serve as leaders.
- Mormons believe almost everyone will end up in heaven, but that the best version of heaven is reserved for faithful Mormons.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

- 8 million worldwide
- Founded in 1931 by Joseph Rutherford but based primarily on the teachings of Charles Taze Russell and the Bible Student movement.
- Russell started the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, the publishing arm of the Jehovah's Witnesses.
- The organization is now led by a "Governing Body", a group of older white men in New York who claim to receive revelations from God.
- There have been many failed end times predictions throughout the history of the organization, including a mass gathering in 1975 when the end of the world was predicted.
- JWs practice a very strict form of shunning.
- JWs are known for their missionary work and for refusing military service, blood transfusions, and celebrations of birthdays and holidays.

BLACK HEBREW ISRAELITES

- Nearly 2 million Black Americans and growing; 8 million agree with the main teaching, that they are the descendants of the ancient Israelites.
- Founded in the late 19th century by Frank Cherry and William Crowdy who both independently claimed they had revelations from God telling them that Black Americans were the true descendants of Abraham.
- There are many different groups with many different ideas and practices, but most reject the Trinity and keep strict observance of Old Testament laws and customs.
- Some groups accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. Others do not.

In each case above, and with the countless other smaller groups like them throughout church history, individual charismatic leaders relied too heavily on their private judgment and interpretation of Scripture when forming their theology. They ignored historical theology and the accountability of their contemporaries.