

## Holocaust Report Draft 1

Imagine back to when the Nazis were in control of Germany. Only the Jews are in trouble, right? Wrong. Various religions were persecuted during the Nazi era, and the Jehovah's Witnesses were among them.

The Jehovah's Witnesses religion was started in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A man named Charles Taze Russel (1852-1916) first started the organization under the name International Bible Students Association in the 1870s. The group's purpose was to find God's true word that has been hidden by many false teachings. In the 1890s, they sent missionaries to Germany to seek converts. In 1931, the International Bible Students Association was changed to the Jehovah's Witnesses under Russel's successor Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869-1942). They got this name from the prophet Isaiah who said in the Bible (43:12) "You are my witnesses, and I am God,"

Nazis persecuted Jehovah's Witnesses from 1933-1945. The group was officially outlawed on April 1, 1935. After that point, they faced nearly total persecution. Witnesses were thrown in jail and concentration camps if they refused to join the army or continue to carry out religious meetings.

Witnesses were a minority group in Germany at the time. Only 20,000 Germans were Jehovah's Witnesses in the early 1930s, when the total population of Germany was 65 million. That is only about 3% of all Germans. The popular religions were Catholic and Protestant. Today, the Jehovah's Witnesses have members in more than 200 nations after only around 125 years of being. Right now there are five million door-to-door preachers from 69,558 congregations in 229 nations.

Witnesses have many beliefs. They get them from the Old and New testaments of the Bible. They believe that Jesus Christ is not God himself, but the son of God. They do not pledge allegiance to anybody but God. They do this because they believe that they are citizens of Jehovah's Kingdom. They will not fight for any nation for they are troops in Jehovah's military. Witnesses also believe in a theory called Millennialism. This says that earth will be under the heavenly rule of Christ for 1,000 years and then there will be the battle of Armageddon (end of the world).

Witnesses are devoted to carrying out their religion. They meet in churches called Kingdom Halls. They spend as much time as possible preaching door-to-door. Door-to-door preachers are called publishers. Books are published in more than 100 languages in over 200 nations.

Jehovah's Witnesses were denounced in Germany for various reasons. Nazis hated the fact that they would not give them allegiance. Witnesses would not raise their hands in the "Heil Hitler" salute. As the Nazis were at war, it did not please them to have people refusing to join the army. The group's ties to America and Judaism contribute fuel for the Nazi's hate of them. Their belief of Millennialism was not popular with the Nazis.

Witnesses were persecuted even before being nationally banned. German authorities marked their conduct as illegal peddling. Bans were made on Jehovah's Witnesses books. Some were arrested for defying Nazi bans. This resulted in loss of their jobs, unemployment, social welfare, and pension benefits.

The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses was different from other groups. Over 40 other groups received the same punishments, but none like they were (except the Jews). Witnesses, unlike the Jews, Sinti, and Roma, were persecuted for their beliefs not their racial background.

Hitler became Chancellor in April of 1933. Within four months, Witnesses were banned from much of the country. Persecution definitely became much greater when he came to power. Witnesses still did continue meeting outside of the law, though.

Witnesses attempted to fight the persecution. In October of 1934, they sent a letter to the German government that explained their harmlessness and what they believed in. This did not have any affect. Witnesses could escape persecution in a very simple manner. They could tell the Nazis that they did not hold their religious beliefs any more and they would be out of harm's way. Very few did this though, and they refused this offer of freedom with great strength.

Children of Witnesses were also treated horribly. Teachers at school would chastise them not doing the "Heil Hitler" salute or singing songs that represented Germany. Other kids at school taunted and beat them up. Principals kicked them out of their schools. Authorities tore families apart by taking the children away and sending them to reform schools, orphanages, or to another family to be brought up with Nazi beliefs.

Many witnesses were jailed. Many continued to meet, pray, and make converts while in jail or concentration camps. By 1939, around 6,000 Witnesses were imprisoned. In all the Nazi days, about 10,000 Witnesses were imprisoned, mainly from Germany. It is guessed that from 2,500 to 5,000 Witnesses were killed in captivity. At least 200 men were killed because of German War Court rulings for not joining the army.

Jehovah's Witnesses were wrongly persecuted by the Nazi regime. Will this cruelty ever happen again? Make sure it does not by thinking things through. Always try to find good reasoning behind what you believe in.