

Thy Kingdom Come
Seventh Day Adventists/Jehovah's Witnesses
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1. Today, we will look at two religious movements that started in the United States in the nineteenth century – the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses.
2. Although the groups have different beliefs, they share a common belief that the return of Jesus is right around the corner and have explanations for why their prior predictions of the return of Jesus were premature.
3. They also both reject the traditional Christian belief that people go to heaven when they die and reject the idea of an eternal punishment in hell.
4. More so than other Christians, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses find some of their most basic beliefs in the Old Testament.

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1. **“Beginning at the very end of the eighteenth century, a mighty reawakening of religious interest swept the land.”** Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* at 652.
2. Between 1800 and 1840, the proportion of Americans who were church members doubled during what became known as the “Second Great Awakening.”
3. This dramatic expansion in religious fervor was fueled by “revival meetings,” led by charismatic ministers who preached and obtained immediate conversions.
4. As a result, **“a conscious and often emotional conversion experience came to be widely understood as the normal way of entering the Christian life.”** *Id.*
5. Convinced that the return of Jesus was now just a few years away, Bible scholars in England and the United States began trying to pinpoint the precise year.
6. Out of this environment came the so-called “Millerite movement” that gave rise to both Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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1. The eighth chapter of *Daniel* predicts the **“Son of man”** will come at **“the time of the end”** after the **“transgression of desolation.”** *Daniel* 8:13, 17 (KJV).

2. The twelfth chapter suggests that the desolation will be over **“at the end of the 1,335 days.”** *Daniel* 12:13.
3. Jewish scholars believed this predicted the arrival of the Messiah, with **“days”** a code for **“years,”** an understanding they derived from *Ezekiel* 4 and *Numbers* 14.
4. When Jesus had talked to his disciples about **“the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world,”** he told them to look for the **“‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel, the prophet.”** *Matthew* 24:3, 15 (KJV).
5. Jesus said that then **“they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”** *Matthew* 24:30.
6. As a result, Christians for centuries have also looked to *Daniel* to predict the return of Jesus.

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1. *Daniel* says that after **“two thousand and three hundred days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.”** *Daniel* 8:14 (KJV).
2. By the nineteenth century, many Christians believed the earth was the “sanctuary” to be cleansed by the return of Jesus.
3. For them the key to determining the precise year of Jesus’ return was simply to determine when the 2,300-year period began.
4. Various starting years were suggested, all of which put the return of Jesus in the early part of the nineteenth century.

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1. William Miller was a New York farmer and one-time Deist who had come to believe in the literal truth of Biblical prophecies.
2. In 1818, after two years of studying the Bible, Miller concluded that the starting point for the 2,300 years could be determined by the reference in *Daniel* to **“seventy weeks.”** *Daniel* 9:24, 25, 26 (KJV).

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1. Using the prevailing understanding that a day in prophecy was a year, Miller reasoned that “seventy weeks” meant 490 years, which must have ended with the crucifixion of Jesus in 33 A.D.
2. The starting point for the 2,300 years therefore had to be 457 B.C., so Miller concluded that Jesus would return in 1843.
3. Miller was thrilled that, as he wrote, **“in about twenty-five years . . . all the affairs of our present state would be wound up.”** Schwarz, *Light Bearers* at 31.

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1. Miller immediately began giving sermons to convince people to accept Jesus before it was too late.
2. His lectures were reprinted by the *Boston Daily Times* in 1838.
3. Known as “Father Miller,” he organized conferences to promote his views, some as far away as Indiana and Michigan.
4. Tens of thousands of people agreed with the logic of Miller’s calculations and many **“held New Year’s Eve services on December 31, [1842] to welcome what they believed would be the last year of earth’s history.”** Schwarz, *Light Bearers* at 41.
5. **“Some fifty thousand followers sold their property and went to hilltops, to await Advent, inspired by Miller’s hugely popular newspaper, the *Midnight Cry*.”** Moynahan, *The Faith* at 624.
6. An unexpected comet in February 1843 and an earthquake in Haiti later that year convinced his followers, called “Millerites,” that Jesus would return by year end.

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1. When Jesus did not return in 1843, Miller concluded he had failed to account for the Jewish lunar year, which he thought would have started in the spring.
2. Miller then announced that Jesus would return by March 21, 1844, and when Jesus did not return on that date he extended the date by a lunar month to April 18, 1844.
3. When Jesus again failed to appear, Miller was persuaded by his followers to predict one more date – October 22, 1844 – the Jewish Day of Atonement, the one day of the year when the High Priest could enter the sanctuary of the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Temple.

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1. Jesus's failure to return gave rise to the "Great Disappointment."
2. Many Millerites abandoned Miller and returned to their original religious beliefs.
3. Some former followers, angered that their reliance on Miller's predictions had caused them to sell everything, attacked Millerite churches.

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1. But a few followers decided "**something important had happened on October 22**" and that the problem was not with Miller's date but with his interpretation of its significance. Schwarz, *Light Bearers* at 53.
2. They concluded that the "sanctuary" that *Daniel* predicted would be "cleansed" by Jesus on October 22, 1844, was not on earth but in heaven.
3. So a few followers of Miller began teaching that on October 22, 1844, Jesus entered the "Holy of Holies" of a heavenly sanctuary.
4. In the heavenly Holy of Holies, Jesus would investigate the living and the dead in preparation for his return to earth and the final judgment based on his investigations.
5. This idea became known as the "investigative judgment," a term coined by James White, who had become a Millerite minister in 1842.

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1. One of the people who accepted the idea of an investigative judgment begun by Jesus on October 22, 1844, was Ellen Harmon, who had become a Millerite at age 13 and sought to convince her friends of the truth of Miller's predictions.
2. Just after the Great Disappointment, at age 17, she reported the first of 2,000 visions.
3. The visions often came to Ellen with people around her.
4. As one author writes: "**Throughout a vision – one lasted nearly four hours—there was no evidence of respirations, yet her heartbeat and facial color remained normal.**" Schwarz, *Light Bearers* at 63.
5. People became convinced that she was a prophet and the messages she reported "**were sent from God.**" *Id.*

6. In 1846 she married James White and the two of them became energetic promoters of the doctrine of the investigative judgment and its implications, gaining a handful of followers.
7. Still believing that the physical return of Jesus was imminent, when he completed his investigative judgment, the remaining Millerites were known as “Adventists.”

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1. One of the implications of the “investigative judgment” was that people needed to prepare for the imminent return of Jesus to earth and the final judgment based on his investigations in heaven.
2. The living had time to improve because Jesus would be judging the dead first.
3. As a result, Adventists began studying the Bible more thoroughly than before to be sure they were following its teachings as closely as they could.
4. **“Their renewed searching of the Bible convinced some Adventists that they should adopt long-ignored Biblical practices such as keeping the seventh day as the Sabbath.”** Schwarz, *Light Bearers* at 53.
5. One proponent of this idea was Joseph Bates, a retired sea captain who had sold his property in reliance on the Millerite teachings, but **“did not renounce either his advent hope or his belief that something important had happened on October 22, 1844.”** *Id.* at 58.

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1. Early in their marriage, James and Ellen White became convinced that Bates was correct that considering Sunday the Sabbath put them in violation of the Fourth Commandment, which requires honoring the Sabbath and keeping it holy.
2. On April 3, 1847, Ellen White reported a vision in which she visited the heavenly sanctuary, saw Jesus beside the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, and saw the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments.
3. Reading from the tablets, she concluded and later wrote **“that God had not changed the Sabbath, for He never changes. But the pope had changed it from the seventh to the first day of the week; for he was to change times and laws.”**
<http://www.diggingfortruth.org/article/117/prophecy/spirit-of-prophecy-section/visions-of-ellen-g-white/heavenly-sanctuary-vision-april-1847>
4. This vision influenced those around her, giving rise to Sabbatarian Adventists, people who believed in a Saturday Sabbath and the investigative judgment in heaven.

5. Many of the beliefs and practices of the Sabbatarian Adventists were **“reminiscent of early Jewish Christianity.”** Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* at 263.

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1. At the same time that Ellen White was reporting her visions, other Adventists began articulating their own ideas about how to prepare for the coming of Jesus.
2. As Ellen White continued to report visions, **“she began to receive confirmation of the new doctrinal discoveries others were making.”** Schwarz, *Light Bearers* at 65.
3. In 1848, the Whites began organizing annual “Sabbath Conferences” to see if the Sabbatarian Adventists could reach agreement on their ideas.
4. When the participants couldn’t agree, Ellen White would report a vision from God on the issue and agreement was then quickly reached.

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1. In 1850, James White began publishing a semi-monthly paper, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.
2. This paper brought **“cohesion, encouragement, and doctrinal unity to the slowly expanding body of Sabbatarian Adventists.”** Schwarz, *Light Bearers* at 79.
3. By 1850, **“individuals who had no connection with the Millerite movement were converted to Christ and accepted the doctrines of His imminent return, the heavenly sanctuary, and the seventh-day Sabbath.”** *Id.* at 67.
4. In 1854, the Whites began calling for a new church based on their teachings.
5. On May 21, 1863, 3,500 Sabbatarian Adventists formed the Seventh Day Adventist Church, a name they had chosen for themselves.
6. The headquarters of the new church was in Battle Creek, Michigan.

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1. In 1872, the Seventh Day Adventist Church published a small pamphlet called *Fundamental Principles* setting forth a synopsis of its 25 core beliefs.
<http://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/949.1411>
2. Article IV set out the requirement of baptism by immersion, which takes place when a believer accepts Seventh Day Adventist teachings.

3. Article XVIII set out the teaching on the investigative judgment, a unique belief of Seventh Day Adventists: **“That the time of the cleansing of the sanctuary . . . is a time of investigative judgment, first with reference to the dead, and at the close of probation with reference to the living, to determine who of the myriads now sleeping in the dust of the earth are worthy of a part in the first resurrection, and who of its living multitudes are worthy of translation-points which must be determined before the Lord appears.”**

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1. The **“myriads now sleeping in the dust of the earth”** is a reference to another belief of Seventh Day Adventists that differs from that of most Christians.
2. Article XIV and XX of the *Fundamental Principles* state: **“[T]he grave, whither we all tend, expressed by the Hebrew *sheol*, and the Greek *hades*, is a place of darkness in which there is no work, device, wisdom, or knowledge. [T]he state to which we are reduced by death is one of silence, inactivity, and entire unconsciousness.”** <http://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/949.1411#1455>
3. **“Seventh Day Adventists hold that the ancient supposition that people go to heaven or hell immediately upon death is an infiltration of pagan mythology into Christian theology.”** Rosten, *Religions of America* at 247.
4. Instead they believe that the dead are **“asleep until the glorious return of Jesus,”** when they will be resurrected and receive their rewards and punishments. *Id.*
5. This idea, called “soul sleep,” was promoted by George Storrs, a Millerite who published a popular book in 1837 to prove **“that the dead are unconscious or asleep until the resurrection.”** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 16.

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1. Based on statements in *Revelation*, Christians have long associated the coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead with a 1,000-year period called the “Millennium.”
2. The *Fundamental Principles* lay out the Seventh Day Adventist perspective on this period, consistent with their ideas of the investigative judgement.
3. When Jesus returns, all the dead that he has determined were righteous when alive will rise from their graves in the “First Resurrection.”
4. These resurrected dead and the righteous living will be taken directly heaven.
5. Jesus and the righteous now in heaven will continue the investigative judgment and jointly determine the punishment for the wicked dead, still in their graves.

6. Because the righteous dead will be in heaven and almost everyone else will still be in their graves, the earth will become **“a desolate, depopulated wilderness.”** Rosen, *Religions of America* at 249.
7. At the end of a thousand years, Jesus will return to earth and resurrect the wicked dead in the “Second Resurrection,” who will then be sent to the fire to be annihilated.
8. Article XXI summarizes this idea: **“That out of this prison house of the grave mankind are to be brought by a bodily resurrection; the righteous having part in the first resurrection, which takes place at the second advent of Christ, the wicked in the second resurrection, which takes place a thousand years thereafter.”**
<http://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/949.1411#1462>
9. With the earth purged of sin and sinners, the righteous will come back from heaven to live forever with Jesus on the new earth.
10. For Seventh Day Adventists, this complex scenario gives effect to all Biblical teachings.

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1. The *Fundamental Principles*, published in 1872, had an anti-Roman Catholic tone.
2. Article VIII condemned **“the papal power, with all its abominations,”** and Article XIII called the Pope the **“man of sin”** for supporting a Sunday Sabbath.
<http://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/949.1411#1462>
3. Although the *Fundamental Principles* mentioned God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, they said nothing about belief in the Trinity.
4. Seventh Day Adventist theologians at the time believed the traditional conception of the Trinity was **“simply another instance, comparable to the Sunday Sabbath and the natural immortality of man, where the Catholic Church had perverted the clear teachings of the Scripture.”** Schwarz, *Light Bearers* at 161.
5. For most Seventh Day Adventists, the conclusion that Jesus was co-eternal with God **“was contrary to common sense and of pagan origin”** because **“sons were always younger than their fathers.”** *Id.*
6. As a result of their anti-Trinitarian views, Seventh Day Adventists were criticized by other Christians as an un-Christian cult, with views similar to those of the Arians who had been deemed heretics in the fourth century.
7. Perhaps as a result of this criticism, Seventh Day Adventists gradually began to

accept the traditional Trinitarian view that there was never a time when Jesus did not exist, a view supported by statements of Ellen White in the 1880s.

8. In 1931, the Seventh Day Adventists added this statement to their *Fundamental Principles*: **“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons.”**

9. With this addition, the Seventh Day Adventist view of the Trinity became aligned with that of most other Christians.

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1. Seventh Day Adventists see the Bible as the inspired word of God and are encouraged to read the Bible very literally.

2. Article 6 of the current statement of 28 *Fundamental Beliefs* states that God **“established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of the work He performed and completed during six literal days that together with the Sabbath constituted the same unit of time that we call a week today.”**

<https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>

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1. In June 1863, just after the organization of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Ellen White received a 45-minute vision about health.

2. In that vision, she was told that people needed to avoid alcohol, coffee, tobacco and highly spiced foods.

3. As a result, Seventh Day Adventists began seeing avoiding harmful food and drink as a matter of religious doctrine.

4. **“To disregard the laws of health was considered tantamount to breaking the sixth commandment, hence, a sin.”** Swarz, *Light Bearers* at 171.

5. The current statement of 28 *Fundamental Beliefs* includes this statement: **“Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well.”**

<https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>

6. Seventh Day Adventists today live an average 10 years longer than most Americans. <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/healthscience/2015/February/Secrets-to-Longevity-Revealed-in-Denominations-Lifestyle>

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1. Ellen White encouraged eating fat-free foods and avoiding pork.
2. One of the people who took her seriously was Will Kellogg, a Seventh Day Adventist neighbor in Battle Creek, Michigan, who invented corn flakes to replace the standard breakfast of bacon and eggs.

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1. Ellen White, whose dramatic visions underlay much of the early success of the Seventh Day Adventists, died in Battle Creek in 1915, at the age of 87.
2. By that time, the church claimed a membership of 136,879.
3. Over the course of her life, Ellen White published more than 40 books and 5,000 articles about her visions and the beliefs she believed flowed from them, making her perhaps the most published female non-fiction author in history.
4. One book, *Steps to Christ*, has sold more than 20 million copies and is still used as a guide to Seventh Day Adventist beliefs and practices.

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1. Today, the Seventh Day Adventist Church claims more than 18 million members in 200 countries, more than 90 percent of them outside of North America.
2. It operates more than 700 hospitals and health care centers and almost 8,000 schools.

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1. Seventh Day Adventists see it as their duty **“to warn mankind that the end of the world is at hand.”** Rosen, *Religions of the World* at 244.

2. But, chastened by the failure of Millerite predictions about the return of Jesus, Ellen White refused to predict the actual date of Jesus' return.
3. Article 25 of the current Seventh Day Adventist *Fundamental Beliefs* states: **“The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ’s coming is near. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times.”** <https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>
4. Other Millerites were not so reluctant, leading to the group known today as “Jehovah’s Witnesses.”
5. The word “Jehovah” is an earlier translation of “YHWH,” the name of the God of Israel in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament that is currently vocalized as “Yahweh” and translated as LORD in most English translations.
6. The term “Jehovah’s Witnesses” comes from *Isaiah* 43:10: **“You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD [Jehovah or Yahweh), ‘and my servant whom I have chosen.”**

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1. Jonas Wendell had been a follower of William Miller until 1844, the year of the Great Disappointment.
2. After his own study, Wendell concluded that Miller was wrong in his calculations.
3. Wendell noted that the *Book of Daniel* contained numbers other than the “2,300” on which Miller had relied.
4. It also contained references to 1,260 and 1,335 days, which he also interpreted as years. *Daniel* 7:25; 12:12
5. The 1,260 days was in reference to the **“little horn”** described in *Daniel* 7:8, which some Protestants associated was the papacy.
6. When French forces invaded Rome and took Pope Pius VI prisoner in 1798, many people concluded that the 1,260-year period of the papacy had ended, meaning it had started in 538 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Justinian.
7. Wendell assumed that the 1,335-year period also must have started in 538, so he concluded that Jesus would return in 1873.

8. In 1870, Wendell published his conclusions in a booklet entitled *The Present Truth, or Meat in Due Season* and began making presentations about his certainty that Jesus would return in 1873.

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1. One of the people attending Wendell's lectures was 18-year-old Charles Taze Russell.
2. Wendell's chronology, which he claimed predicted the French Revolution based entirely on the Bible, convinced young Russell that everything in the Bible was true and that Jesus would soon return.
3. Russell and his father began meeting with others to determine whether their religious beliefs were in tune with what they thought the Bible taught.
4. The group became known as "Bible Students" and soon accepted the Adventist teachings of the time that traditional Christian beliefs about the Trinity and an immortal soul that goes to heaven or hell immediately at death were not based on the Bible.
5. This group eventually changed its name to "Jehovah's Witnesses" to avoid confusion with other Bible Student groups.

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1. When Jesus did not return in 1873 and then not in 1874, Russell published a book in 1877 entitled *The Object and Manner of our Lord's Return*, articulating a view, also held by others, that the return of Jesus was a process and not an event.
2. Russell wrote that Jesus had begun the process and **"had returned invisibly to earth in 1874."** Moynahan, *The Faith* at 625.
3. Jesus' visible return would come soon.

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1. By now Russell had become familiar with the use of the *Daniel* to predict the year in which Jesus would appear and he tried his hand at a calculation.
2. He found reference in *Daniel* 4:32 to **"seven times"** in connection with Babylonia King Nebuchnezzar, who had captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Kingdom of Judah, beginning the "time of the Gentiles" that the return of Jesus to Jerusalem would end.
3. Russell believed Jerusalem had fallen in 606 B.C. and the "seven times" must mean seven years of 360 days or 2,520 days.

4. Using the familiar days-to-years formula, Russell calculated that Jesus would appear 2,520 years after 606 B.C., or 1914, which he considered would be **“the farthest limit of imperfect man.”** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 66.
5. With this understanding, Russell sold his business for what would now be almost seven million dollars and began preaching what he believed to be essential Biblical truths before time ran out and Jesus returned.
6. People who accepted Russell’s beliefs came to see him as their pastor.

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1. In 1879, Russell began publishing the *Zion Watch Tower* to promote his ideas about the return of Jesus and the Biblical truths people needed to know to get ready.
2. The *Zion Watch Tower* was the predecessor of today’s *Watch Tower*, the most widely disseminated magazine in the world, with a bimonthly circulation of 59 million copies in 254 languages.
3. Today’s Jehovah’s Witnesses pass out *Watch Tower* on street corners and try to deliver it to people in their homes.

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1. Russell used the *Watch Tower* magazine to publicize his views on a variety of topics that today form the core of Jehovah’s Witnesses beliefs.
2. In 1880, he rejected as unbiblical the idea of a paid clergy and insisted that his followers become a “preaching brotherhood.”
3. **“Hence all those who regarded Russell as their pastor were expected to preach to their neighbors in any reasonable way, a practice followed by Jehovah’s Witnesses to this day.”** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 38.
4. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe they **“have the most urgent message of all time and should follow the example in the Bible and take it to people’s homes.”** Rosen, *Religions of America* at 140.

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1. In 1881, relying on the Jewish *Shema*, *Deuteronomy* 6:4 – **“Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the LORD is one”** – Russell rejected the traditional Christian belief in the Trinity, in which Jesus is equal to and co-eternal with God.
2. As a result, Russell and his followers **“broke completely with Evangelical Protestantism.”** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 36.

3. Jehovah's Witnesses today assert that **"Jehovah God and Christ Jesus are two distinct persons and are not combined with a so-called 'Holy Ghost' in one godhead called a Trinity."** Rosen, *Religions of America* at 133.

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1. Russell accepted the Adventist idea, promoted by George Storrs, that people do not go to heaven or hell upon their deaths.
2. Instead they "sleep" until the resurrection of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked, an idea called "conditional immortality" or "conditionalism."
3. In 1882, Russell published his views on hell, which gave rise to current Jehovah's Witnesses teachings: **"Hell is the grave; it is *not* a place of torture from which one can never escape."** Rosen, *Religions of America* at 135.

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1. As a result of the published views on the Trinity and conditional mortality, Russell and his followers were rejected by other Christians and **"were being forced to become a separate and distinct religious organization."** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 38.
2. In 1884, Russell formed a not-for-profit corporation now known as the "Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania" and moved its headquarters to Brooklyn, New York.
3. The Watch Tower Society is the primary legal entity associated with the Jehovah's Witnesses and the entity that determines Jehovah's Witness beliefs.
4. During his life, **"Russell traveled a million miles and delivered thirty thousand sermons."** Moynahan, *The Faith* at 626.
5. As a result, **"Russell became well known throughout the western world."** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 38.
6. By 1910, 50,000 people worldwide considered Russell their pastor and relied on his views about what the Bible teaches.
7. One of those views is that infant baptism is a form of coercion because it makes people Christians without their consent.

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1. The fourteenth chapter of *Revelation* refers to **“the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth”** and **“who had [the Lamb’s] name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.”** *Revelation* 14:1, 3.
2. *Revelation* 7:4 refers to **“the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.”**
3. In 1904, Charles Taze Russell gave an interpretation of *Revelation’s* 144,000 that has become a unique belief of Jehovah’s Witnesses.
4. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that of all the people who have ever lived on earth, only 144,000 **“will qualify for eternal life in heaven.”** Moynahan, *The Faith* at 626.
5. All others, no matter how righteous, **“are destined to live forever on earth.”** Rosen, *Religions of America* at 136.
6. And for everyone but the 144,000, called the “great crowd” or “other sheep,” they **“do not receive salvation by grace or ‘undeserved kindness’ – they must work for it.”** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 275.

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1. The belief that only 144,000 people will go to heaven gives rise to a very unusual communion service.
2. Each year at the time of the Jewish Passover Jehovah’s Witnesses hold a “Memorial service,” during which they talk about Jesus’ last meal with his disciples.
3. They then pass wine and unleavened bread, but only those people who consider themselves among the 144,000 are permitted to partake of the communion “emblems.”
4. The others simply pass them on.
5. Here is how one author describes the process: **“[E]ach person could indicate to his congregation by partaking of the *emblems*, the bread and wine, that he considered himself to have received the spirit’s call to become one of the *anointed*, a member of the 144,000; and in theory his brothers were to respect that calling.”** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 142.
6. Because the 144,000 must come from all the people who have ever lived, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe there are only about 11,000 spots still open.
7. Because there are more than 100,000 Jehovah’s Witness congregations, in nearly all congregations no one takes the communion emblems.

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1. Unlike the Seventh Day Adventists, who base many of their beliefs on the visions of Ellen White, Jehovah's Witnesses do not rely on visions for their beliefs.
2. Instead, they rely on the leaders of the Watch Tower Society, who claim their pronouncements are based entirely on their study of the Bible.
3. The leaders of the Watch Tower Society admit that their teachings can be wrong, leading to modifications, and members are encouraged to see such changes as the result of a continuing effort to find the truth.
4. Members who fail to conform to new teachings are subject to expulsion.
5. The need for modifications has been most pronounced in the announcements about the return of Jesus.
6. Based on his calculations, Russell had been "**absolutely certain**" in the late nineteenth century that Jesus would begin his visible earthly rule in 1914. Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 66.
7. When Jesus failed to return as predicted, Russell said that he must have been wrong that Jesus would return physically, but instead had begun to rule from heaven, an explanation similar to that used by Millerites to explain why Jesus did not appear in 1844.
8. Russell said the "end times" had begun on October 1, 1914, when Jesus cast Satan out of heaven and Satan came to earth.
9. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Satan is now in charge of human governments, leading to human suffering that will not be eliminated until Jesus returns.

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1. Charles Taze Russell died on October 31, 1916.
2. He was replaced as president of the Watch Tower Society by Joseph Franklin Rutherford, a Missouri lawyer who had become a follower of Russell in 1894.
3. Believing that Satan was now in charge of world governments, Rutherford decreed that "**Christians should pay taxes for the services they received, but they need obey no other human law unless it was in harmony with God's.**" Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 210 (original emphasis).
4. "**When there is direct conflict between God's law and that of a government, [Jehovah's Witnesses] obey the supreme law of God as set forth in the Bible.**" Rosen, *Religions of America* at 134.

5. Because Satan is in charge of governments, they are to **“avoid voting, holding public office, or enlisting in military service.”** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 209.

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1. In 1920, Rutherford predicted that in 1925, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be resurrected, creating a new order on earth.
2. Jehovah’s Witnesses began promoting this idea with a campaign called “Millions Now Living Will Never Die.”
3. Many who had been following church teachings to the letter gave up their jobs in the expectation that they would not need them.
4. When 1925 came and went, without the promised resurrections, **“many thousands [left] the movement within the next few years.”** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 82.
5. But the failures of his predictions did not prevent Rutherford from announcing more and more rules for his followers.

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1. In 1927, Rutherford declared that Christmas had a pagan origin and should not be celebrated by Jehovah’s Witnesses.
2. Over the years, Jehovah’s Witnesses have been taught to avoid virtually all holidays as pagan, including Easter, Mother’s Day and their own birthdays.

Slide 41

1. Jehovah’s Witnesses refuse to salute the flag, considering it a “graven image.”
2. When Jehovah’s Witnesses students refused to salute the flag in violation of West Virginia law, they were expelled from school and their parents threatened with prosecutions for causing delinquency.
3. In 1943, the Supreme Court ruled 6 to 3 that requiring students to salute the flag violated the students’ First Amendment rights to freedom of religion and freedom of speech. *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943).

Slide 42

1. Joseph Rutherford died in 1942 and Nathan Knorr became president of the Watch Tower Society.

2. Under his leadership, the Watch Tower Society promoted the most recent of its predictions about the return of Jesus.
3. Jews have traditionally believed that the Messiah will come six thousand years after creation and then there would be a thousand year “Sabbath” period, paralleling the seven days of creation.
4. Christians have traditionally believed that the return of Jesus will lead to a 1,000-year period before everything is finally wrapped up and everyone lives forever on earth.
5. Putting these two ideas together, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Jesus will return 6,000 years after the last act of creation, the creation of Adam.
6. In the 1960s, *Watch Tower* published its conclusion that Adam had been created in 4026 B.C. and **“electrified the Witness community by pointing to the year 1975 as the end of six thousand years of human history and, therefore, in all probability, the beginning of the millennium.”** Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* at 123.
7. Once again, people quit their jobs, postponed marriages, took money out of the pensions and began preparing for the arrival of Jesus.
8. The slogan became **“Make do till ’72; Stay alive till ’75.”** *Id* at 125.
9. Anticipating the return of Jesus, the number of people claiming to be Jehovah’s Witnesses almost doubled between 1968 and 1975.
10. Surprisingly, when 1975 came and went without the return of Jesus, the number of Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide continued to grow, albeit at a slower pace.

Slide 43

1. Jehovah’s Witnesses proudly state that they are following the only true religion.
2. Their reasoning is straightforward – **“If they thought someone else had the true faith, they would preach that.”** Rosen, *Religions of America* at 141.
3. Of the remainder of the 144,000 people who will be allowed into heaven, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe all will come from people who accept their beliefs.
4. Because they believe they alone are following the correct teachings of the Bible, Jehovah’s Witnesses are encouraged not to have personal relationships with those of other faiths, whose beliefs might influence them away from the truth.
5. Members who stray from church teachings are “disassociated” from their congregations.

6. Following what they believe are the authoritative teachings of Paul, women are not allowed to preside over congregations and are not allowed **“to enter into debates with men in the congregation, challenging them.”** *Id.* at 139.
7. Relying on the Jewish prohibitions against eating blood, Jehovah’s Witnesses **“would risk ‘temporary’ death rather than accept a blood transfusion and incur God’s disapproval.”** *Id.* at 139.
8. Jehovah’s Witnesses are forbidden to smoke or engage in premarital sex.

Slide 44

1. Because of their unusual views and their claim to be the only true church, Jehovah’s Witnesses have been subjected to persecution and harassment.
2. They sometimes assert that they are the world’s most hated religion, which they believe shows that they are following the lead of Jesus, who said: **“If the world hates you, keep in mind it hated me first.”** *John* 15:1.
3. The Nazis put Jehovah’s Witnesses in the same category as Jews and Gypsies and sent thousands of them to concentration camps.
4. The persecution and repeated failed predictions of the return of Jesus have not harmed their ability to recruit.
5. As of August 2015, Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that almost eight million people worldwide called “publishers” who spent at least one hour a month preaching to non-members.
6. More than 19 million people participated in the 2015 Memorial service.

Slide 45

1. Of those attending the Memorial service, about 15,000 took the bread and wine, indicating they considered themselves among the 144,000 who will be taken to heaven.
2. That is more than the number of open spots.

Slide 46

1. Next week, we will talk about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, whose members are nicknamed “Mormons.”
2. It arose in the same period and in the same area as the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the so-called “burned over” district of New York of western New York that was at the center of the Second Great Awakening.

3. As we will see, Mormon beliefs about the nature of God are dramatically different from those of most Christians.

Resources:

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Rosten, Leo, *Religions of America* (Simon & Schuster 2005)

Schwarz, Richard, *Light Bearers* (Pacific Press 2000)