

Jehovah's Witnesses—History

- 1870—Charles Russell (age 18) organized Bible class in Pittsburgh
- “Bible Student” movement
- Russell rejected eternal torment, denunciation of “organized religions”
- Bible study group concludes that many primary doctrines of established churches—including Trinity, hellfire, immortality of soul—were not biblical



Jehovah's Witnesses—History

- Russell heavily influenced by Millerite Adventism, particularly Nelson Barbour
- Blending of rejection of organized religion and millennial speculations
- April 1878—Barbour taught all dead Christians would be raised, Russell sold his clothing stores
- After disappointment, split with Barbour, Russell begins publishing “Zion’s Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence”



Jehovah's Witnesses—History

- Russell taught that Christ had returned invisibly in 1874, Christ would take over powers of earth in 1914
- As publications through Watch Tower grew, local congregations sprang up with local leadership that answered to Watch Tower
- 1914—Christ did not return, Witness literature later claims he returned invisibly
- 1922—Watch Tower introduces need for house to house preaching



Jehovah's Witnesses—History

- 1925—WT claimed that in 1925 the patriarchs would be resurrected
- 1961—New World Translation published
- WT claimed that 1000 year reign of Christ would begin in 1975 or shortly thereafter
- Gradual shift in leadership from power resting in president (Russell, then Rutherford) to resting in “Governing Body”—including appointments of elders and ministerial servants



Jehovah's Witnesses—Overview

- Several unique doctrines spring from Russell's distrust of organized religion and emphasis on millennial concerns
- Reject idea of Trinity—Jesus is “a god” and “holy spirit” is only God's active force
- No part of human is immortal—this must be granted by God
- Death is the cessation of consciousness, condemnation is simply annihilation



Jehovah's Witnesses—Overview

- Jesus' resurrection was spiritual, not bodily
- “The Bible contains no divine mysteries”
- Particular emphasis on the name of God—YHWH, believe that Septuagint was corrupted (to “Lord”)
- New World Translation rewrites passages that challenge JW doctrines (John 1:1-3, Col 1:16, Phil 1:21-23, Matt 24:3)
- Flags and symbols of national power are idols, saluting is a violation of prohibition of idolatry



Jehovah's Witnesses—Overview

- Blood transfusions are “eating blood”, forbidden
- Witnesses believe that 144,000 will be in heaven, other faithful will be princes on the earth (the unfaithful will be annihilated)
- *Very* strong sense of loyalty and control between Watch Tower organization and local churches



Jehovah's Witnesses—Toward Understanding

- Serious about Bible study
- Willing to be different
- View persecution positively
- Extremely evangelistic
- Resistant to contrary ideas
- Strong belief in end times
- Extremely autocratic church structure



Jehovah's Witnesses—Toward Understanding

Similarities

- Serious about Bible study
- Willing to be different
- Reject idea of denominations
- Strongly emphasize logic



Jehovah's Witnesses—Engaging

- The key issue: Is the Bible or the Watchtower the authority?
- Witnesses must prove the authority of the Watchtower
- It is led by men and characterized by failed predictions—why is this true? Why do they have authority?
- Is this how the NT church worked (proof?)? How did the apostles prove their authority?



Jehovah's Witnesses—Engaging

- Example: baptism's relationship to salvation
- Watchtower specifically denies that baptism saves—how can this be? (1 Pet 3:21, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16)
- Why should I take the Watchtower as more than just ideas to be examined (Acts 17:11)?
- If the Watchtower filters everything, then Jesus' nature, NWT, soul sleep, end times theory become unavoidable, clearly divine

