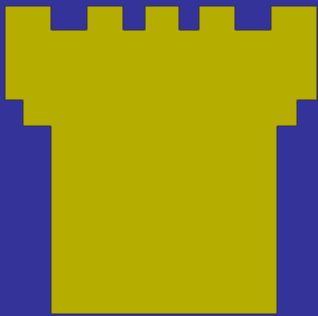


# Jehovah's Witnesses

The Watchtower  
Bible and Tract Society



December 16, 2020

Howard Culbertson, Southern Nazarene University

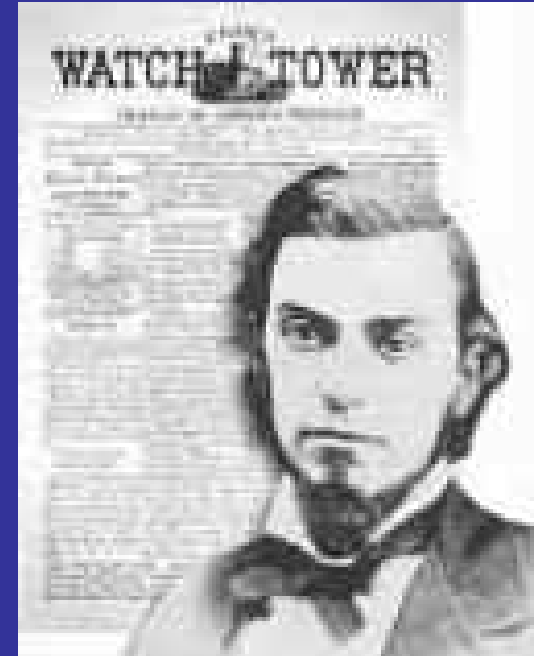
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# Do we really know them?

- History -- where did they come from?
- Doctrines -- what they believe
- Practices -- how they live
- Presence in world today
- When you encounter them . . .

# Charles Taze Russell 1852-1916

- Bounced from Presbyterian to Congregational churches
- Ended up contemptuous of all
- Age 17 -- Heard convincing argument that hell did not exist
- 1870 -- at age 18 organized Bible class



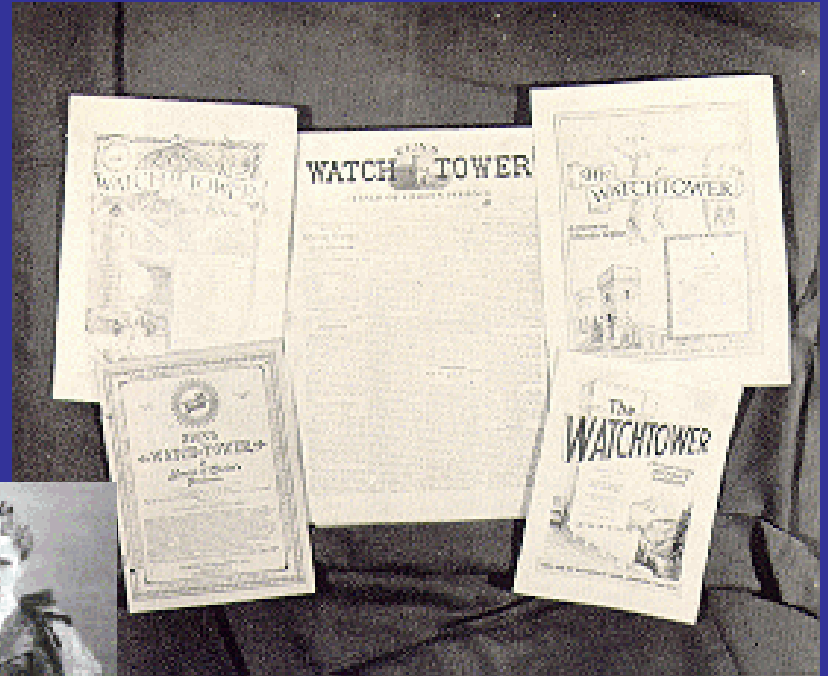
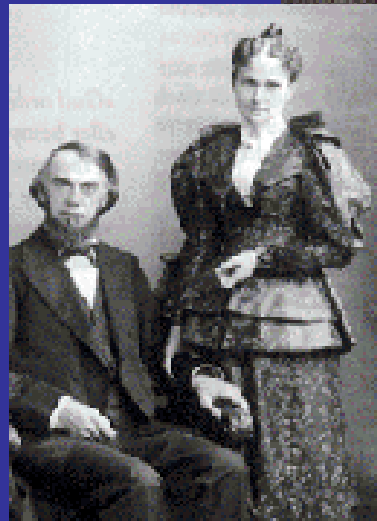
# The Russell era

- Captivated by Adventist preaching on Christ's Second Coming
- 1876 -- joined staff of Adventist publication "Herald of the Morning"
  - ✦ That group said Christ had returned invisibly in 1874 and would take believers to heaven in 1878

# Charles Taze Russell

1879

- Took control of Barbour's publication, renamed it "Watchtower"
- Married
- Began feeling he was the 7th messenger of Revelation



# Movement gets underway

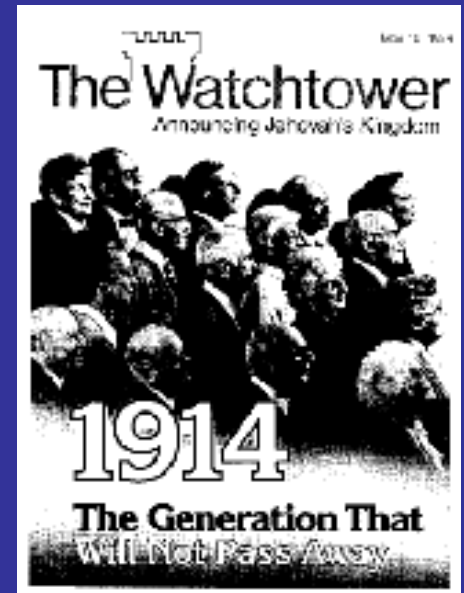
- 1884 -- Incorporated Zion's Watchtower Tract Society
- 1893 -- First major convention in Chicago
  - ✦ 360 in attendance
  - ✦ 70 baptisms



# 1914?

- 1894 -- Watchtower set 1914 as the return of Christ and beginning of millennium
- 1914 came and went . . . remains key date for Jehovah's Witnesses

“The Creator’s promise of a peaceful and secure new world *before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away*” -- *Awake!* October, 1995



# Pyramidology

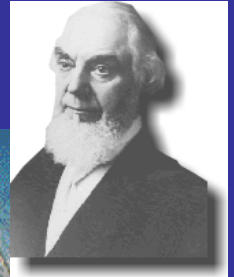
measurements of Egyptian Great Pyramid used to calculate dates

## ■ 1909

- ❖ Wife divorced him
- ❖ moved headquarters from Pittsburgh to Brooklyn

## ■ 1916

- ❖ Died during train trip
- ❖ Buried near this pyramid structure





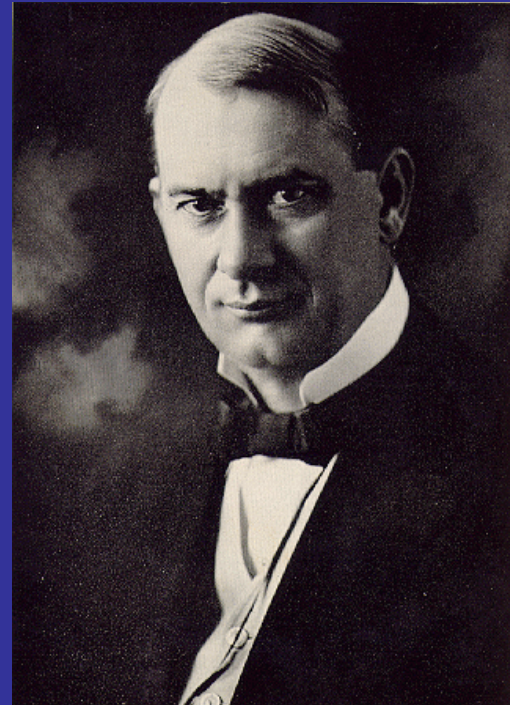
# “Judge” Rutherford 1869-1942



- A power vacuum ensued with Russell's death
- By quasi-legal maneuvering, this lawyer edged out competition and took over the organization in 1917

# Judge Rutherford 1869-1942

- First visited by Watch Tower representatives in his Missouri law offices in 1894
- Baptized as a Bible Student in 1906
- When he took over, several groups splintered off

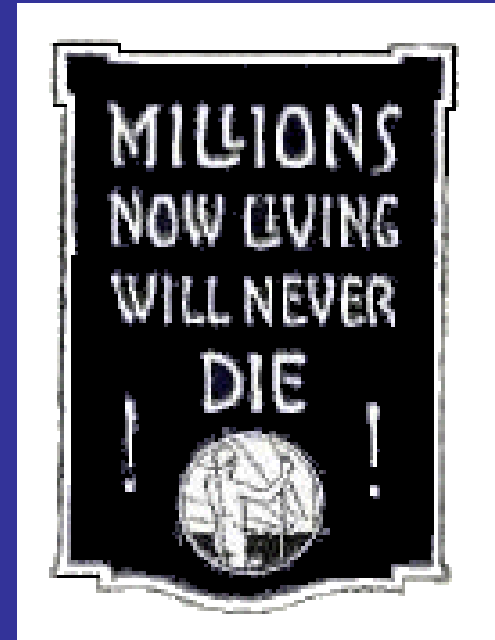


# Rutherford continues dating game

1918 -- **Watchtower** sets  
Christ's return for 1925

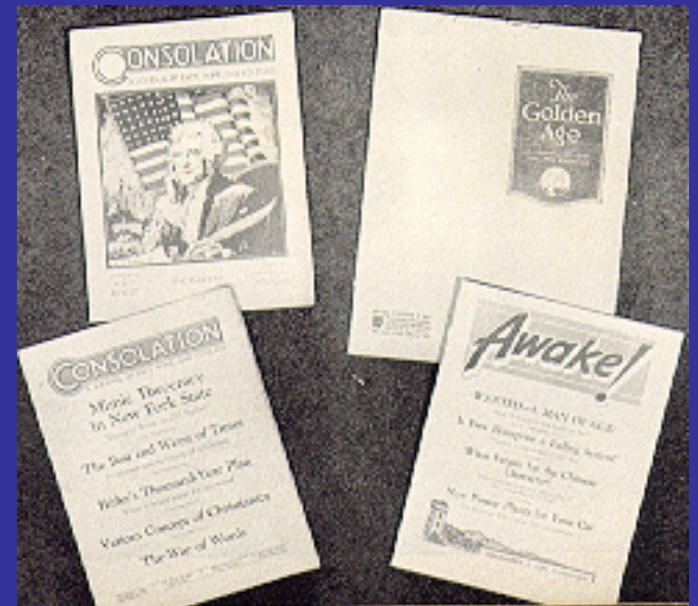
*"Millions Now Living Will Never  
Die" -- article became book title  
two years later*

Worldwide anarchy was  
predicted to occur in 1920



# Expansion in Rutherford era

- 1919 -- began *Awake!*
- 1920's, 30's -- Extensive use of radio and phonograph records
- 1933 -- over 400 radio stations were carrying his Bible lectures



# Steady revision of doctrine and structure

- 1931 -- New name: Jehovah's Witnesses
- Under Rutherford, membership grew from 10,000 in 1916 to 100,000 in 1942



## ■ Beth-Sarim

- ❖ Palatial San Diego home built by Rutherford
- ❖ To be deeded to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David when they returned to earth
- ❖ Rutherford planned to be buried here
- ❖ After his death, quietly sold



## ■ Beth-Shan

- ❖ 79 acres purchased in 1939; also deeded to “princes”
- ❖ Had bomb shelter





# Personality era ends

With Rutherford's death, the era of charismatic, flamboyant leadership ended.

Power now vested in the governing council.

# JW Bible translation

- “New World” Bible translation appeared in 1950
  - ✦ Only one member of translation committee knew anything about the original languages of the Bible
    - Knorr had two years of Greek
- What is the “New World Translation?”
  - ✦ An authentic translation? No.
  - ✦ Systematic re-writing of Scripture in support of doctrinal positions. Yes.

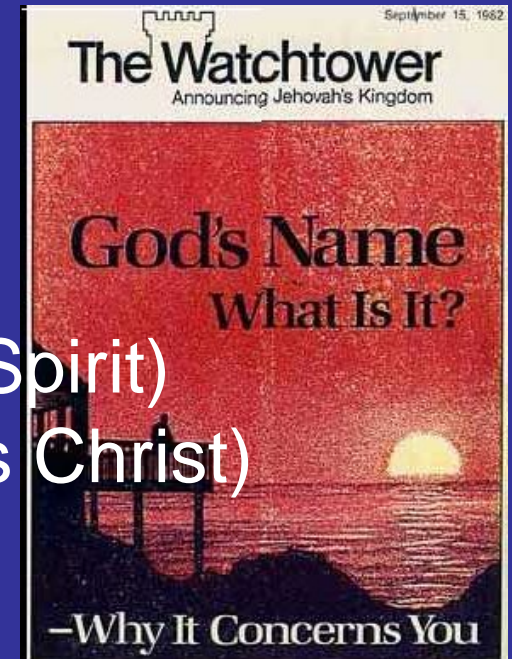


# 1975 -- a new date

- 1966 book hinted that 1975 would see a new period in human history.
- August 1968 **Watchtower** set 1975 as year for Armageddon
  - ✦ For JW's, period of growth leading up to 1975, then stagnation when the year came and went

# Doctrines - Beliefs

- Eschatology (end times)
- Soteriology (salvation)
- Pneumatology (doctrine of Holy Spirit)
- Christology (beliefs about Jesus Christ)

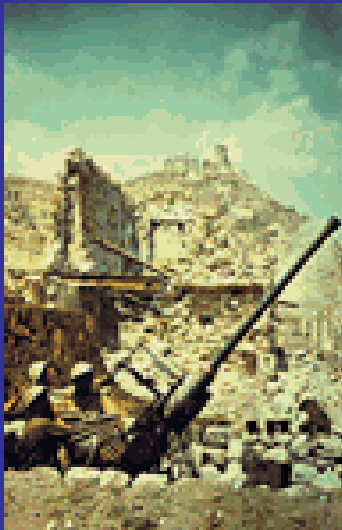


# Authority

Watchtower Society claims to speak for Jehovah as His sole “channel of communication” on the earth

# Beliefs: Apocalyptic

Focused on end times  
Waiting for paradise on  
earth after battle of  
Armageddon



# Future Paradise on earth

- Only 144,000 “anointed” will go to heaven
- Hell does not exist; evil people will simply be annihilated



Beautiful surroundings like these can be yours forever!

What must you do to enjoy them? The answer lies in a special kind of knowledge.

This book will help you gain the knowledge that leads to everlasting life.

# Salvation

- People God approves will receive eternal life here on earth
- You may be saved, depending on your faithfulness and obedience

“Just as a proper secular education is necessary to fit a person for a place in everyday society, so a proper Bible education is necessary to equip one for entering the society that will survive to live in the Paradise earth.” -- from Jehovah’s Witnesses web site

# Holy Spirit

- Denial of trinity
  - ✘ Claim trinity comes from ancient mythology
  - ✘ “a complicated, freakish-looking, three-headed God” -- *Let God Be True*
- Holy Spirit is an active force like electricity or fire



# Core issue: Christology

- As fascinating as all the date setting and shifting is . . .
- As fascinating as the issues of blood transfusions and saluting the flag may be . . .
- The core of our disagreement with our Jehovah's Witness friends centers on Jesus Christ



# Latter day Arians

- Arianism -- a 4th century heresy denying deity of Christ, saying Jesus was the first thing God created
- To JW's, Jesus Christ is Archangel Michael
- At Jesus' death, God disposed of Jesus' physical body.
- Because Jesus was raised a spirit creature, God had to “materialize” a fleshly body for him

# Practices -- how they live

- No drugs; alcohol in moderation
- Sexual purity
- Limited social environment
  - ✦ Pervasive us/them mentality
  - ✦ Everyone else is of the devil
- Heavy control
  - Not allowed to read literature critical of JW's
- Children discouraged from higher learning
- Respect government but do not participate in elections

# Community life

## ■ Congregations

- ❖ Attendance expected at weekly “book studies” (can be in homes)
- ❖ Full congregations meet in “Kingdom Halls”
- ❖ Ministers serve without pay
- ❖ Disfellowshipping -- kicking people out of the family

## ■ Communion or Lord’s Supper

- ❖ Observed annually on date of Jesus’ death  
Nisan 14 -- March/April
- ❖ Only 144,000 elite may take the elements
- ❖ In 1999 the “partakers” worldwide were 8,755

# Iconoclastic

“overthrowing traditional or popular ideas”

- No celebrating Christmas
- No celebrating Easter
- No celebrating birthdays
- No celebrating Mother’s Day
- No saluting of the national flag
- No blood transfusions



# Iconoclastic

“overthrowing traditional or popular ideas”

Jehovah’s Witnesses  
say Jesus died on a  
stake rather than on  
a cross



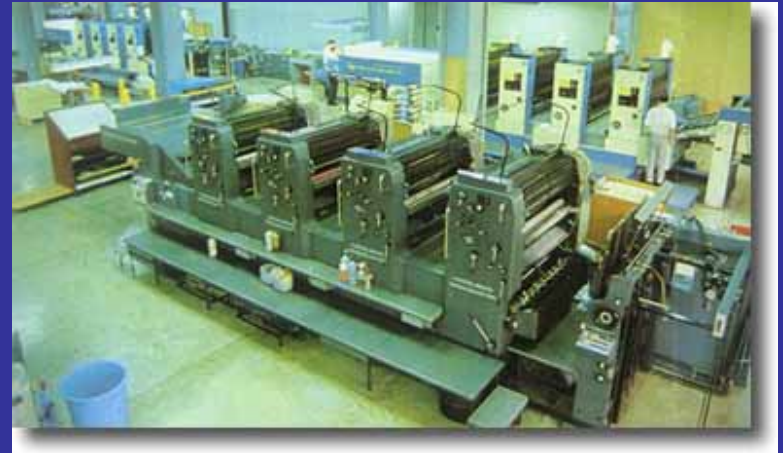
# Presence in world today

- 800,000 in USA
- 5 million “publishers” worldwide
  - 300,000 baptisms annually
  - 100,000 net increase
- 90,000 “congregations” worldwide



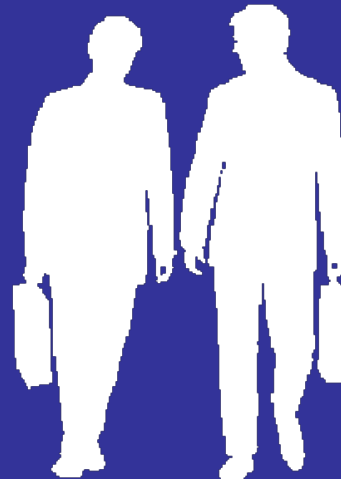
# Global publishing operation

- 15 million publications each week
  - ❖ Brooklyn factory building bought in 1927
  - ❖ Several expansions
  - ❖ 3,000 now work there



# Recruitment / Evangelism

- Door-to-door house calls
- 740 house calls needed to recruit one new member





# 7 Step Process



- Literature put in prospect's hands
- "Back calling" or follow up
- Prospect starts actual "book study"
- Attendance at Kingdom Hall meetings
- Attendance at worship services
- Active tract distribution
- Baptism

# When we encounter them

- Do we slam that door?
- Do we just politely close it?
- If we let them in . . .  
should we try to prove them wrong?

# When we encounter them

Remember . . .

- They believe they are the only “true religion”
  - ❖ JW’s are used to attacks and persecution
  - ❖ Using logic to prove them wrong accomplishes little
  - ❖ Criticism will likely encounter a stone wall

**How do we overcome that “true religion” idea?**



# Overcoming “true religion” syndrome

- Shy away from “setting them straight”
- Ask disarming questions
- See yourself as a sower of seeds, not a harvester

# Question possibilities

... not to provoke a fight

- Have true Christians always existed somewhere over the last 2,000 years?
- Are the marks of *real* Christians exclusive to the Watchtower or are they shared by other groups?
- Does the Watchtower believe all other Christian groups are completely false?

# Questions on the Bible

- Was the Bible written to all people?
- Can someone who had a Bible and no other literature understand it and become all that God wanted him or her to be?
- The Mormons claim that one must study their books in order to get an accurate knowledge of Scriptures. What do you think of that?

# Key question on Christ

- Can you come to Christ as your mediator?

# Be friendly and neighborly

- Don't focus on winning arguments
- Don't defend yourself or your beliefs
- Win trust
- Don't try to back people into a corner
- Allow them to “save face”



# Use of Scripture

- Get your Bible
- Read aloud every text they mention
- Look carefully with them at the context (the surrounding verses and chapters) in a verse appears

# Be sensitive to whom you are speaking. . .

- Someone made in God's image for whom Christ died
- A human being with whom you have much in common

**Stay in touch with the One in whose presence you are having the discussion. . .**

**Your greatest advantage is prayer  
Be constant in prayer as you talk with them**

# Maintain with discipline . . .

- your position and role
  - ✦ Humility and love
  - ✦ Make your conversation “heart to heart” rather than “head to head”

# A bit of poetry . . .

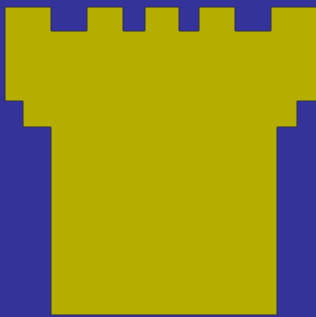
He drew a circle that shut me out.  
Heretic, rebel; a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win.  
We drew a circle that took him in.

-- Edwin Markham



# Jehovah's Witnesses

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