

## The Millerites

### William Miller

- Born at Pittsfield, Mass., Feb. 15, 1782.
- Moved to Low Hampton, NY., a rural area.
- Home-schooled until he was 9 yrs. old, but had no formal education until he was 18.
- He married Lucy Smith in 1803 & moved to her home town, nearby Poultney, VT where he took up farming.
- He served as a Constable, Deputy Sheriff & a Lt. in the Vermont Militia by 1810.
- He was raised a Baptist, but rejected it & became a Deist in 1810.

- Miller was also an active Freemason, but little is known of his Masonic ties other than he was a Royal Arch Mason but no further details.
- Miller (listed as Capt. Miller) is later given as one of the early Worshipful Masters of Morning Star Lodge, No. 27. (this lodge closed in 1832, during the time of Anti-Masonic Fervor)
- Miller doesn't appear to be an active Mason after he became a Baptist Minister by the Low Hampton Baptist Church on Sept. 12, 1833.
- But still remained openly sympathetic to the Masonic Order for a number of years.

- Upon the outbreak of the War of 1812, Miller raised a company of local militia-men and traveled to Burlington, Vt.
- He transferred to the 30th Inf. Reg. in the U.S. Army with the rank of Lieutenant (Lt.). Miller spent most of the war working as a recruiter.
- He saw his first action at the Battle of Plattsburg, where American forces were outnumbered but still defeated the British.
- Miller came to the conclusion that the outcome of this battle was miraculous & therefore at odds with his deistic view of a distant God far-removed from human affairs.

- He later wrote, "It seemed to me that the Supreme Being must have watched over the interests of this country in an especial manner, and delivered us from the hands of our enemies....So surprising a result, against such odds, did seem to me like the work of a mightier power than man."
- Soon after his discharge & return to Low Hampton on June 18, 1815, Miller took tentative steps towards regaining his Baptist faith.
- He was challenged by his fellow Deists to justify his conversion & he did so by studying the Bible.
- Miller started with Genesis & studied each verse until he felt the meaning was clear.
- He was convinced 1<sup>st</sup> that postmillennialism was unbiblical; & 2<sup>nd</sup> that the time of Christ's Second Coming was revealed in Bible prophecy.

- Basing this belief on Daniel 8:14: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed,"
- Using an interpretive principle known as the "day-year principle"; Miller concluded that the cleansing of the sanctuary represented the earth's purification by fire at Christ's Second Coming.
- This meant that a day in prophecy was not a 24-hr. period, but a calendar year--365 days.
- Miller became convinced that the 2,300 day period started in 457 B.C. Simple calculation then revealed that this period would end—and hence Christ's return occur--in 1843.
- Miller records, "I was thus brought... to the solemn conclusion, that in about twenty-five years from that time 1818 all the affairs of our present state would be wound up."

- He stated that Jesus would return to Earth between March 12, 1843 & March 21, 1844.
- When it did not happen, he lost a lot of supporters.
- He then based the Second Coming off of several different Jewish calendars, the Gregorian calendar, etc. & came up with the final date of Oct. 22, 1844.
- When that day came & went with Jesus Christ nowhere in sight, it became known as the Great Disappointment.
- Miller stated it was a flaw of "human origin" in the Biblical prophecy the reason Jesus did not appear.
- William Miller will die on Dec. 20, 1849, still looking for the Second Coming.

## Seventh Day Adventist

- Some Millerites believed that their calculations were correct, but that their understanding of the "sanctuary being cleansed" was wrong.
- They felt something else had happened in 1844, that Jesus had entered into the "Most Holy Place" of the heavenly sanctuary, and began an "investigative judgment" of the world.
- This is a process of the examination of the heavenly records to "determine who, through repentance of sin & faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of atonement," after which Jesus will return to earth.
- According to their teaching, Christ's return may occur very soon, but they are very careful not to set dates in accordance with the book of Matthew which says, "no one knows the day or the hour".

- A retired sea captain Joseph Bates, influenced by Seventh Day Baptists & other Millerites, introduced the Sabbath doctrine (Saturday-Sabbath).
- While initially it was believed that the "sabbath" started at 6 pm, by 1855 it was generally accepted that the "sabbath" begins at sunset.
- For about 20 years, the Adventist movement consisted of a loosely knit group of people who adhered to this message.
- Among its greatest supporters were James White, his sickly wife, Ellen G. White & Joseph Bates.
- Ellen was supposedly receiving Divine Visions since she was 17 yrs. old.

- Mrs. White would enter into a trance-like state in which she claimed to have been given revelations from God.
- She was considered a prophet by the group & reiterated several of the Seventh Day Baptist & other Adventists thoughts.
- Her words are considered authoritative & the source of all truth .
- She advocated the "Most Holy Place" of the heavenly sanctuary & the "investigative judgment".
- A formally organized church called the Seventh-day Adventist Church was established in Battle Creek, Mich., in May 1863, with a membership of 3,500.

## Seventh Day Adventist Beliefs

- **Law** – they believe that the Law of God is "embodied in the 10 Commandments", which continue to be binding upon Christians.
- **Sabbath** – they believe that the Sabbath should be observed on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.
- **Second Coming & End times** – They believe that Jesus Christ will return visibly to earth after a "time of trouble".
  - The Second Coming will be followed by a millennial reign of the saints in heaven.
- **State of the dead** - Adventists believe that death is an unconscious sleep, commonly known as "soul sleep", and reject the idea of an immortal soul.

- **Hell** - Adventists teach that the wicked will not endure eternal torment, but instead will be permanently annihilated!
- **Great Controversy** – they believe that humanity is involved in a "Great Controversy" between Christ and Satan.
  - This is a unique understanding of the origin of evil, which teaches that evil began in heaven when Lucifer rebelled against the Law of God.
- **The heavenly sanctuary** – they teach that Christ ascended to heaven to minister in the heavenly sanctuary.
  - In 1844, he began the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary in fulfillment of the Day of Atonement.

- **Investigative Judgment** - This doctrine asserts that a judgment of professed Christians began in 1844, in which the books of record are examined to determine who is worthy of salvation and eternal life.
- **Remnant** – they teach that there will be an end-time remnant who keep the commandments of God and have "the testimony of Jesus".
  - This remnant proclaims the "three angels' messages" to the world.
- **Spirit of Prophecy** – Ellen G. White is known as the "Spirit of Prophecy" to Adventists, and her writings are considered an authoritative source of truth.
  - Adventists make it clear that the Holy Bible is the definitive source of truth.

## Jehovah's Witnesses

- Jehovah's Witnesses trace their origin to the religious movement known as Bible Students, which was founded in the late 1870s by Pastor Charles Taze Russell.
- In the early 1870s, Russell organized a Bible study group in Pittsburgh, Pa., where they would study the bible topic by topic.
- Russell did not believe in the Christian concepts of the Trinity & Hell
- Interest in Bible prophecy was sparked in part by Jonas Wendell, a follower of William Miller.
- Russell attended one of Wendell's sermons & became convinced of the need to actively spread the gospel.

- Russell met Nelson Barbour in 1876 & adopted Barbour's theories.
- Barbour had predicted a visible 2<sup>nd</sup> return of Christ in 1873, and when that failed to occur, he revised the prediction to 1874.
- Soon after the "second disappointment", Barbour's group decided Christ had returned to the earth in 1874, but he was invisible.
- They differed from most Second Adventists by teaching that all of humankind descended from Adam would be given a chance to live in a paradise Earth. The year 1914 was seen as the final end, marking a forty-year period from 1874.

- Russell broke with Barbour in July 1879 over the concept of "substitutionary atonement" & he soon began publishing his own magazine, *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* now called **The Watchtower**.
- Russell became known as "Pastor Russell", and in 1881 formed the legal entity which developed into **The Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of Pa.**, now headquartered in New York City, NY.
- Pastor Russell became president of the Society in 1884, & he authored the six-volume series, *Studies in the Scriptures*.
- Following Russell's death on Oct. 31, 1916, Joseph F. Rutherford was elected as the 2<sup>nd</sup> president on Jan. 6, 1917.
- New by-laws were also passed that strengthened the President's authority.

- The June 20, 1917 meeting of the full board of directors proposed to return control of the Society to the board, but Rutherford prevented their attempt.
- This came to a head on July 17, 1917, when Rutherford announced that he was dismissing the 4 directors and replacing them with new members.
- Dissention & schisms ensued in congregations worldwide as a result of this, and new predictions made for the years 1918, 1920 & 1925.
- The Watchtower Society's opposition to the draft during WW I resulted in the arrest of Rutherford & the new board of directors, who were sentenced to 20 yrs. in prison for violating the Espionage Act. They were released on bail, and in March 1919, the judgment against them was reversed, and the charges dropped.

- By 1928, attendance at their yearly Memorial dropped nearly 75% from 1922, due to the previous power struggle, the failed predictions for the year 1925, and the evolving doctrinal changes which alienated those who sided with Russell's views.
- From 1925 to 1933, their eschatological beliefs underwent radical changes.
- In 1931, the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" was adopted.
- By 1933, 1914 was seen as the beginning of Christ's presence, his enthronement as king, and the start of the last days instead of being considered the terminal date in their chronology.
- Under Rutherford, membership grew from about 44,000 in 1928 to about 115,000 at the time of his death in 1942.

## Jehovah's Witnesses Beliefs

- The entire Bible, except the Apocrypha, is considered the inspired word of God.
- A literal interpretation of the Bible is usually favored, though it is acknowledged that at times biblical writers and characters employed symbolism, parable, figures of speech, and poeticism.
- The doctrine of "sola scriptura" is principal, that is, only the Bible should be used for deciding issues of doctrine, & the interpretation of scripture is the responsibility of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses.
- God is the creator & supreme being, sovereign of the universe.
- Using God's name, Jehovah, is a requirement for true worship.
- Jesus is God's first creation and he was used by God to create everything else.

- Jesus is literally the only begotten Son of God, and received his life from God. He is the one who is the means of approach to God in prayer, and is the "Chief Agent of life" and salvation for all worthy mankind.
- Jesus is the mediator of the "new covenant" is limited to those going to heaven, whose number totals 144,000.
- The vast majority of God's faithful servants will live on a renewed paradise earth.
- They believe that Jesus did not die on a cross but on a "torture stake" without a cross-bar.
- Mary was not "perpetual virgin", but had more children after Jesus.
- The soul is the human body and consciousness, not an immaterial entity that dwells in a physical human.
- Death is a state of non-existence.
- Hell, Hades or Sheol is not a place of fiery torment, but the designated common grave of all mankind.

- The period known as the "last days" began in 1914.
- All religions, including Witnesses themselves, will come under attack by governments leading into Armageddon, banning all forms of religion.
- After religion is destroyed, governments will also be destroyed. Any who are not deemed faithful by God will be destroyed.
- The fate of some, such as small children or the mentally ill, remains indeterminate. After Armageddon, an unknown number of dead people will be resurrected, with the prospect of living forever on the paradise earth.

- Gambling is strictly forbidden.
- Practices that advocate nationalism/patriotism or false religion are avoided.
- Weddings, anniversaries, and funerals are typically observed; however, common celebrations and religious or national holidays such as Birthdays, Thanksgiving, & Christmas are regarded as unchristian and are not celebrated.
- The family structure is patriarchal.
- The husband is considered the final authority on family decisions, but is strongly encouraged to actively solicit his wife's thoughts and feelings.
- Marriages are required to be monogamous.

- Vigorous efforts are made to spread their beliefs by all members throughout the world, with particular emphasis on the written word.
- The preaching work is regarded as a form of humanitarian effort by giving people a hope for the future.
- Aid work after large natural disasters is considered an important part of their work. Thousands of dollars in donated money is used in the affected areas to rebuild communities and provide aid. However, on-going aid work that some other religious groups provide, such as soup kitchens, clothing donations, or building homes for the homeless, is not focused on.

- Homosexuality & premarital sex are considered sins.
- Abortion is considered murder.
- Modesty is heavily encouraged in dress and grooming.
- The most important annual event is the observance of the death of Jesus (Memorial, Jesus' sacrifice for all mankind) held after sundown on the date corresponding to Nisan 14 on the Hebrew calendar.
- Weekly meetings are also held that feature a variety of discourses.
- Elders and ministerial servants deliver the majority of these, with some student discourses being given by both women and men. As well, certain segments feature audience participation.

