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OF SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTISTS

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HISTORY
OF SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTISTS

GEORGE R. KNIGHT



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Contents

- 13 Chapter 1: Millerite Roots
William Miller: The Reluctant Prophet
Adventism Takes a Giant Step Forward With Joshua V. Himes
Charles Fitch and the “Fall of Babylon”
The Passing of the Time
The Seventh-Month Movement and the “True Midnight Cry”
The “Great Disappointment”
For Those Who Would Like to Read More
- 29 Chapter 2: Era of Doctrinal Development (1844-1848)
Redefining the Sanctuary
The Gift of Prophecy
The Sabbath
Conditional Immortality
The “Pillar” Doctrines and the Three Angels’ Messages
The “Shut Door” Approach to Mission
For Those Who Would Like to Read More
- 51 Chapter 3: Era of Organizational Development (1848-1863)
The Sabbatarian Conferences
Publishing “the Truth”
Early Moves Toward Formal Organization
“Sister Betsy” and Support for the Ministry
The Final Drive for Church Organization
The “Shut Door” Cracks Open a Little
For Those Who Would Like to Read More
- 59 Chapter 4: Era of Institutional and Lifestyle Development (1863-1888)
Healthful Living and the Western Health Reform Institute
The Struggle for Noncombatancy
In Search of Proper Education
Advances in Financial Stewardship

Ellen White's Role in the Development of Adventist Lifestyle
Missions: Foreign and Not So Foreign
Other Important Developments Between 1863 and 1888
For Those Who Would Like to Read More

97 Chapter 5: Era of Revival, Reform, and Expansion (1888-1900)

The 1888 General Conference Session
The Aftermath of Minneapolis
Spiritual Revival and Educational Expansion
Worldwide Mission Explosion
Mission to Black America
The Contribution of Female Ministers in Early Adventism
For Those Who Would Like to Read More

109 Chapter 6: Era of Reorganization and Crisis (1901-1910)

Denominational Reorganization
Tension in the Power Structure
The Battle Creek Exodus and New Beginnings
A Renewed Mission Emphasis
For Those Who Would Like to Read More

125 Chapter 7: Era of Worldwide Growth (1910-1955)

The Passing of Ellen White
A Period of Crisis and Promise
Unparalleled Growth in Adventist Missions
The Maturation of Adventism Among African-Americans
For Those Who Would Like to Read More

140 Chapter 8: The Challenges and Possibilities of Maturity (1955-)

Arriving at Maturity
Mission With Conscious Intent
Challenges as Adventism Faces the Twenty-first Century
Infinite Possibilities
For Those Who Would Like to Read More

Dedicated to
Robert and Brenda Fusté-Bond—
two very special people
in my life

List of Abbreviations

A&D	William Miller's Apology and Defense
Adv. Rev.	Adventist Review
AH	Advent Herald
AR	Advent Review
AS	American Sentinel of Religious Liberty
CTemp	Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene, by James White and Ellen G. White
EGW	Ellen G. White
1888 Materials	The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials (4 vols.)
EW	Early Writings, by Ellen G. White
GCB	General Conference Bulletin
JL	Josiah Litch
JVH	Joshua V. Himes
JW	James White
LS	Life Sketches of Ellen G. White (1915 ed.)
LS (1888)	Life Sketches of James and Ellen G. White (1888 ed.)
MC	Midnight Cry
MS	Manuscript
MW	Morning Watch
PT	Present Truth
PUR	Pacific Union Recorder
RH	Review and Herald
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
SG	Spiritual Gifts, by Ellen G. White (4 vols.)
SM	Selected Messages, by Ellen G. White (3 vols.)
ST	Signs of the Times (Millerite)
T	Testimonies for the Church, by Ellen G. White (9 vols.)
WCW	William C. White
WM	William Miller

A Word to the Reader

Seventh-day Adventists have never viewed themselves as just another denomination. To the contrary, from their beginning they have understood their movement to be a fulfillment of prophecy. Their role, as they have seen it, has been to preach the unique message of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12, presenting God's last appeal to a dying world before Christ returns to "harvest" the earth (verses 14-20). Seventh-day Adventists eventually concluded that they needed to preach their special message "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (verse 6). That belief, coupled with a sense of nearness of the end of earthly time, has impelled them into one of history's most energetic mission programs.

This book is the story of how Adventists came to view themselves as a prophetic people, of their growing awareness of a responsibility to take their unique message to all the world, and of their organizational and institutional development as they sought to fulfill their prophetic mission. The story, of course, is not complete. The mission goes forward even as you read these words.

A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists

The church and the world still look forward to the great climax of world history at the second coming of Jesus. Thus the history of Adventism stands incomplete. By the end of this volume, you as a reader and I as an author will find ourselves in the flow of Adventist history.

This book does not claim to be a “contribution to knowledge.” Rather, it is largely a summary of the high points of Adventist history. In making that summary, however, this volume sets forth the material in a unique organizational format that should prove helpful to its readers as they seek to develop an understanding of the growth of the denomination.

I have written *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* for those who seek a quick overview of Adventism’s development. It will prove useful to church study groups, classroom students, new members, and others interested in the history of the denomination. The book seeks to develop the central lines of Adventist history, with a special interest in the growth of its concept of mission. While it does not seek to avoid significant problems in Adventism’s past and present, it does suggest that our primary focus of concern should be on possibilities rather than problems.

As an Adventist historian, I am indebted to those who have gone before me. Most topics treated in this book are covered in more detail elsewhere. I have suggested additional readings for those who wish to pursue special lines of study.

Pacific Press published an earlier version of this volume in 1993 under the title *Anticipating the Advent*. The present revision represents an overall updating. That is especially true of the final chapter that treats new issues and revises “old” statistics. Another major change is that I have added in-text references to the original sources for all direct quotations. Because of a lack of space, however, I have omitted the sources for general facts and indirect quotations.

A Word to the Reader

It should be noted that *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* could have done more with the secular and religious contexts in which Adventism arose, but the brevity of the treatment demanded that I keep contextual materials to a minimum.

The present book is intended to be the first of a series of five that highlight Seventh-day Adventist heritage. Other volumes in the series will include a study of the development of Adventist theology, an overview of the development of Adventist lifestyle, a volume treating those Adventist beliefs shared with other Christians, and a book highlighting in an integrated fashion those beliefs that make Adventism distinctive within the Christian community.

I should also point out that the Adventist Heritage Series is closely related to my series on Ellen White: *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Life, Writings, and Major Themes* (1996), *Reading Ellen White: How to Understand and Apply Her Writings* (1997), *Ellen White's World: A Fascinating Look at the Times in Which She Lived* (1998), and *Walking With Ellen White: The Human Interest Story* (1999). It is my intention that the two series will provide both Adventists and those outside of the Adventist community with an overview of what Seventh-day Adventism "is all about." Each treatment is intended to be brief but accurate. While I have written each volume with an Adventist readership in mind, they are also aimed at presenting a solid introduction of their respective topics to the larger community.

I would like to express my appreciation to Jennifer Kharbteng and Joyce Werner, who entered the "handwriting" of my original manuscript into the computer; to Bonnie Beres, who rekeyed the revised manuscript in its entirety; to Robert W. Olson, Richard W. Schwarz, and Alberto R. Timm, who read the original manuscript and offered suggestions for its improvement; to Gerald Wheeler and Jeannette R. Johnson for shepherding the manu-

A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists

script through the publication process; and to the administration of Andrews University for providing financial support and time for research and writing.

I trust that *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* will be a blessing to its readers as they seek to learn more about Seventh-day Adventists and their history.

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Berrien Springs, Michigan

Millerite Roots

Modern Seventh-day Adventism finds its immediate roots in the Second Advent movement of the early nineteenth century. While many preachers proclaimed the soon coming of Christ in Europe and other parts of the world, the belief made its largest impact in North America. Central to North American Adventist beginnings was a Baptist layman by the name of William Miller (1782-1849).

William Miller: The Reluctant Prophet

Born into a Christian home, Miller abandoned his religious convictions for deism in the first years of the nineteenth century. Deism (a skeptical belief that rejects Christianity with its miracles and supernatural revelation) argues for a more distant God—one who does not actively participate in earthly affairs. Deistic beliefs became popular in both Europe and North America during the last half of the eighteenth century, but the atrocities and excesses of the French Revolution in the 1790s led many to question human reason as a sufficient basis for civilized living. One result was the widespread abandonment of

deism and the return of many people to Christianity during the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

In the United States the ensuing revival became known as the Second Great Awakening. Miller was among those who returned to a belief in the Bible during the Awakening. His skepticism lasted through the War of 1812. But in the face of violence and death, he began to reevaluate his personal life and the meaning of life in general.

Like many of his generation, he felt impelled to study the Bible, and, also like many, he was converted or reconverted to Christianity as the Second Great Awakening revitalized the American churches. Unlike most of his contemporaries, though, Miller became an especially zealous Bible student.

His method of Bible study was to compare scripture with scripture in a methodical manner. "I commenced with Genesis," Miller wrote, "and read verse by verse, proceeding no faster than the meaning of the several passages should be so unfolded, as to leave me free from embarrassment. . . . Whenever I found any thing obscure, my practice was to compare it with all collateral passages; and by the help of CRUDEN [’s Bible concordance], I examined all the texts of Scripture in which were found any of the prominent words contained in any obscure portion. Then by letting every word have its proper bearing on the subject of the text, if my view of it harmonized with every collateral passage in the Bible, it ceased to be a difficulty" (A&D 6).

For two years (1816-1818) Miller studied his Bible intensively in this way. Finally he came to "the solemn conclusion . . . that in about twenty-five years from that time [i.e., 1843] all the affairs of our present state would be wound up" and Christ would come (*ibid.* 12).

Miller had reached his conclusion through a study of the prophecies of the book of Daniel, especially Daniel 8:14:

“Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” Operating on the commonly accepted understanding of Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:5, 6 that a day in prophecy equals a year, Miller calculated that the 2300-day prophecy would conclude in 1843. And, interpreting the sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 as the earth and its cleansing as the last-day purging of the earth by fire, Miller reasoned that Christ would return to the earth at the end of the 2300 days—about 1843. His heart filled with joy.

But he was also quite aware that his conclusion that Christ would return at the beginning of the millennium (1,000 years) of Revelation 20 flew in the face of the almost universally accepted theology of his day, which held that Christ would return at the end of the millennium. “I therefore,” he penned, “feared to present it [his conclusion], lest by some possibility I should be in error, and be the means of misleading any” (*ibid.* 13).

Because of his fears, Miller spent another five years (1818-1823) reexamining his Bible and raising every objection he could to his conclusions. As a result he became more sure than ever that Christ would arrive about 1843. So after seven years he began to speak of his beliefs openly to his neighbors. However, he found only a “very few who listened with any interest” (*ibid.* 15).

For nine years (1823-1832) Miller continued to study his Bible. Meanwhile, he came increasingly under the conviction that he needed to share his findings of impending doom. The impression “‘Go and tell the world of their danger’” continually assailed him. “I did all I could to avoid the conviction that any thing was required of me,” Miller wrote. But he could not escape his conscience (*ibid.* 15, 16).

Miller finally “entered into a solemn covenant with God” that if God opened the way, he would do his duty. Feeling he needed to be more specific, Miller promised God that if he

should receive an invitation to speak publicly in any place, he would go and teach about the Lord's second coming. "Instantly," he penned, "all my burden was gone; and I rejoiced that I should not probably be thus called upon; for I had never had such an invitation" (ibid. 17).

To Miller's dismay, however, within a half hour of his agreement with God, he had his first request to preach on the Second Advent. "I was immediately angry with myself for having made the covenant," he confessed. "I rebelled at once against the Lord, and determined not to go." He then stomped out of his house to wrestle with the Lord in prayer, finally submitting after another hour (ibid. 18).

His first presentation on the Second Advent led to several conversions. Thereafter Miller had an unending stream of invitations to hold meetings in the churches of various denominations. By the end of the 1830s the reluctant prophet had won several ministers to his view that Christ would come about the year 1843. The most significant of those ministerial converts was Joshua V. Himes of the Christian Connexion.

Adventism Takes a Giant Step Forward With Joshua V. Himes

The year 1839 found Himes as the influential pastor of the Chardon Street Chapel in Boston. He was not only a prominent pastor, but a recognized leader in the interchurch movement to bring about the earthly millennium through broad-based personal and social reform. In November 1839, however, Himes issued an invitation to William Miller to hold a series of meetings in his church. Miller's Second Advent message transformed the energetic Himes into the foremost publicist of his message—that Christ would return about the year 1843.

Sensing the urgency of the message, Himes felt a burden to

Millerite Roots

get the Advent doctrine before the world. He asked Miller why he had not preached in the large cities. Miller replied that he went only where invited. Such a passive approach was too much for the aggressive Himes, who inquired if Miller would go “where doors are opened”? Miller replied in the affirmative. “I then told him,” claimed Himes, that “he might prepare for the campaign; for doors should be opened in every city in the Union, and the warning should go to the ends of the earth! Here I began to ‘help’ Father Miller.” Adventism was never the same after that (S. Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, pp. 140, 141).

In the next four years the activist Himes made Millerism and Adventism household words in North America. Beyond North America, Himes’s ingenuity saw to it that by 1844 the advent doctrine had received a hearing around the world. He utilized several avenues to fulfill his mission of warning the globe that Christ would come about the year 1843 and that “the hour of his judgment is come” (Rev. 14:7). Perhaps the most important and influential was the printed page. Himes unleashed what historian Nathan Hatch has referred to as “an unprecedented media blitz” (*Democratization of American Christianity*, p. 142). Not being one to let any grass grow under his feet, within three months of his first invitation to Miller Himes had started publishing the *Signs of the Times* to get the Advent message before the world.

In addition to the *Signs*, in 1842 Himes began the *Midnight Cry* in an effort to wake up New York City to the nearness of Christ’s return. He established the *Midnight Cry* as a two-cent daily newspaper in connection with a Millerite evangelistic campaign being held in the nation’s metropolis. Himes had 10,000 copies printed daily for a number of weeks and either had them sold on the streets by newsboys or given away. At least one copy went to every minister in the state of New York. In 1842 alone he distributed more than 600,000 copies of the

A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists

Midnight Cry in five months. When the New York campaign closed, the paper became a weekly.

Himes's exploits in periodical publication soon stimulated imitators, and Adventist literature began coming off the press with unprecedented urgency.

Beyond periodicals, Himes also guided the publication of a vast array of pamphlets, tracts, and books. Many of them were collected into the "Second Advent Library," which people could purchase for under \$10 to circulate in local communities. By July 1841 the Adventist publishing program had grown to such an extent that it had to employ Josiah Litch (a Methodist minister) to serve as "general agent" for the Committee of Publication. That arrangement left Himes free to respond to calls for travel and preaching in behalf of Millerite publications.

Meanwhile, he was not content with spreading the Advent message through publications alone. A born organizer, the dynamic Himes initiated the first General Conference of Christians Expecting the Advent in October 1840. That Boston "general conference" led to at least 15 more before 1844, along with scores of local Millerite conferences.

More important, however, Himes also had a forceful role in developing the Adventist camp meeting. Beginning in the summer of 1842 the Millerites held more than 130 camp meetings before the autumn of 1844. It is estimated that their combined attendance exceeded one-half million people (approximately one out of every 35 Americans). The impact of the camp meetings, however, affected many more than just those attending, since media blitzes accompanied them and they were held in or near large cities.

To accommodate the camp meeting crowds in locales where outside meetings were inappropriate and proper buildings were unavailable, Himes pioneered in the use of a tent. With a seating capacity of approximately 4,000, the Millerite

Millerite Roots

tent was apparently the largest of its kind in the United States up through that time. The novelty of the big tent, of course, also attracted listeners. It is reported that in some locations several thousand people, unable to get into the tent, stood listening on the outside.

Many parts of the world outside of North America also heard the Millerite message. The Millerite method for worldwide outreach was not generally to send missionaries, but to place their publications on ships bound to various seaports. Thus by the summer of 1842 Himes could write that Millerite publications had been “sent to all the Missionary stations that we know of on the globe” (ST, Aug. 3, 1842). Under his guidance, the Advent message made a significant impact in North America and was at least “heard” through the printed word in other parts of the world. That success, however, met with resistance among the churches as the inevitable reaction set in.

Charles Fitch and the “Fall of Babylon”

The Millerite preaching that Christ would return about the year 1843 directly contradicted the generally accepted Protestant teaching that Christ would come after the millennium. While the pulpits and church buildings of most denominations had been opened to Adventist preachers during the early 1840s, things began to change in 1843. Millerites came under progressively more ridicule and often had to decide between their Advent belief and that of their denominations. Those choosing to retain their faith in the soon return of Christ increasingly found themselves disfellowshipped by their congregations. In other words, as the “year of the end” approached, a confrontation between theologies of the Second Advent flared up.

In that context, Charles Fitch (a popular Millerite minister of the Congregationalist denomination) preached a sermon

A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists

on Revelation 18 in the summer of 1843 focusing on the fall of Babylon. “Come out of her, my people” (Rev. 18:2, 4; cf. 14:8) was his message. That sermon, later published in both article and tract form, signaled another shift in Millerite development as the Advent believers progressively came to view themselves as a separate body.

Up through the summer of 1843 the Millerites, in harmony with most Protestants, had generally identified the papacy as the Babylon of Revelation 18:1-5. But, argued Fitch, Babylon is antichrist, and anyone who opposes the personal reign of Jesus Christ over this world is antichrist. Fitch’s definition of the antichrist included all Catholics and Protestants who rejected the teaching of a soon-coming Christ.

“To come out of Babylon,” Fitch wrote, “is to be converted to the true scriptural doctrine of the personal coming and kingdom of Christ. . . . If you are a Christian, come out of Babylon! If you intend to be found a Christian when Christ appears, come out of Babylon, and come out Now! . . . Come out of Babylon or perish” (*Come Out of Her, My People*, pp. 18, 19, 24). Thus Fitch provided many Millerite Adventists with a theological rationale for separating into a distinct body before the close of earth’s probation. The call was to leave those churches that had rejected the judgment-hour message.

While most Eastern Millerite leaders initially responded coolly to Fitch’s call for separation, the aggressive reaction within the various denominations made it acceptable to many Advent believers as they faced increasing opposition and loss of membership. Himes did not become an advocate of separation until the autumn of 1844, and then only reluctantly. Miller never could bring himself to urge separation, even though the Low Hampton Baptist Church, where he was a member, eventually expelled him.

In the end, separation was not a choice but something im-

pelled by the force of events as the world entered the predicted “year of the end.”

The Passing of the Time

Miller originally had resisted being too specific about the exact time of Christ’s return. His message emphasized “about the year 1843.” But by January 1843 he had come to the conclusion, on the basis of the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 and the Jewish calendar, that Christ would return sometime between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. “PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD,” headlined the *Western Midnight Cry* of March 8, 1844, as the end of that period approached. But, needless to say, Miller’s “year of the end of the world” passed without the return of Christ. Thus the Millerites experienced their first disappointment.

A frustrated but deeply sincere William Miller wrote to Himes on March 25, 1844: “I am now seated at my old desk. . . . Having obtained help of God until the present time, I am still looking for the dear Saviour. . . . The time, as I have calculated it, is now filled up; and I expect every moment to see the Saviour descend from heaven. . . . Whether God designs for me to warn the people of this earth any more, or not, I am at a loss to know. . . . I hope I have cleansed my garments from the blood of souls. I feel that as far as it was in my power, I have freed myself from all guilt in their condemnation” (MC, Apr. 18, 1844).

An equally frustrated Himes editorialized on April 24, 1844: “In the passing by of the Jewish year, our friends and the public . . . have a right to expect from us some exposition of the position we occupy. . . . We . . . fully and frankly admit that all our expected and published time . . . has passed: the Jewish year . . . has expired, and the Savior has not been revealed; and we would not disguise the fact at all, that we were mistaken in the precise time of the termination of the prophetic periods.”

A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists

Yet, Himes significantly added, “We have never been able to find any other time for the termination of the prophetic periods.” He then went on to build hope in his readers by noting that “we are placed in a position, which God foresaw his children would be placed in, at the end of the vision; and for which he made provision, by the prophet Habakkuk.”

After all, did not the prophet write: “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come” (Hab. 2:3). Himes connected that text with Matthew 25:5, which points out that the bridegroom delays before he comes, while those waiting “slumbered and slept.”

On the basis of those texts, Himes could say that “we are now prepared to tell the world what we shall do . . . We intend to hold fast the integrity of our faith without wavering. . . . We shall continue to believe God’s word, in its literal acceptance: for not one jot or tittle of all that is written therein will fail” (AH, Apr. 24, 1844).

Thus the Millerite Adventists entered the “tarrying time.” Their movement had been saved from disintegration by the fact that it had had some imprecision regarding the exact date for the prophetic fulfillment and by the application of Habakkuk’s prophecy and other texts to its situation. The Adventists had been disappointed, but the movement went on, albeit with less enthusiasm than before.

The Seventh-Month Movement and the “True Midnight Cry”

Millerism found a new lease on life at the Exeter, New Hampshire, camp meeting in mid-August 1844. At that convocation, Millerite minister S. S. Snow convincingly demonstrated through a variety of mathematical calculations that the fulfillment of the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 would take place in the autumn of 1844. In fact, through extensive

Millerite Roots

study of the ceremonies of the Jewish year, Snow predicted that Daniel's prophecy about the cleansing of the sanctuary would meet its completion on the Jewish Day of Atonement—the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish year (see Lev. 23:27).

Snow claimed that he had calculated the exact day for the cleansing, which the Millerites still universally interpreted as the second coming of Christ. That day in 1844, according to Karaite Jewish reckoning, was October 22. Thus Christ would return, Snow said, on October 22, 1844—in about two months.

The idea electrified his audience. They left the Exeter meeting to spread their urgent message as quickly and as widely as possible. "Behold," they proclaimed, "the Bridegroom cometh!" Christ is coming on the tenth day of the seventh month! Time is short; get ready! Get ready! Although Miller, Himes, and other leading Adventists hesitated to fix their hopes on a definite day, the seventh-month enthusiasm spread like fire in stubble among the bulk of the believers.

The words of George Storrs give us a feel for the epidemic enthusiasm. In September he wrote, "I take up my pen with feelings such as I never before experienced. Beyond a doubt, in my mind, the tenth day of the seventh month, will witness the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven. We are then within a few days of that event. Awful moment to those who are unprepared—but glorious to those who are ready. I feel that I am making the last appeal that I shall ever make through the press. My heart is full. . . . Alas! we have all been slumbering and sleeping—both the wise and the foolish; but so our Saviour told us it would be; and 'thus the Scriptures are fulfilled,' and it is the last prophecy relating to the events to precede the personal advent of our Lord; now comes the TRUE Midnight Cry. The previous was but the alarm. NOW THE REAL ONE IS SOUNDING: and oh, how solemn the hour"

A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists

(MC, Oct. 3, 1844).

Miller, Himes, and other Millerite leaders eventually capitulated to the forcefulness of Snow's arguments. On October 6, 1844, Miller wrote of his enthusiasm and hopes: "Dear Bro. Himes:—I see a glory in the seventh month which I never saw before. . . . Thank the Lord, O my soul. Let Brother Snow, Brother Storrs and others be blessed for their instrumentality in opening my eyes. I am almost home, Glory! Glory!! Glory!!! I see that the time is correct. . . .

"My soul is so full I cannot write. I call on you, and all who love his appearing, to thank him for this glorious truth. My doubts, and fears, and darkness, are all gone. I see that we are yet right. God's word is true; and my soul is full of joy. . . . Oh, how I wish I could shout. But I will shout when the 'King of kings comes.'

"Methinks I hear you say, 'Bro. Miller is now a fanatic.' Very well, call me what you please; I care not; Christ will come in the seventh month, and will bless us all. Oh! glorious hope" (*ibid.*, Oct. 12, 1844; italics supplied).

On October 16 Himes announced that the *Advent Herald* (previously *Signs of the Times*) would cease publication. "As the date of the present number of the *Herald* is our last day of publication before the tenth day of the seventh month, we shall make no provision for issuing a paper for the week following. . . . We are shut up to this faith; . . . Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him!" (*AH*, Oct. 16, 1844).

At this distance we can only imagine the excitement in the Millerite ranks, but we can capture some of it if we ask ourselves, How would I feel if I knew Christ was coming in a few short days? How would I act? How would I order my priorities?

In their conviction and exuberance, the believers put their all into a final effort to warn the world of its impending doom. They made no provision for the future—they didn't need to. Some left their crops unharvested, closed their shops, and re-

signed from their jobs. Jesus was coming. The thought was like honey in the mouth, but unbeknown to them, it would be bitter in the belly (see Rev. 10:8-10).

The “Great Disappointment”

On October 22 tens of thousands of believers lingered in expectation of the appearance of Jesus in the clouds, while countless others waited in doubt, fearing that the Millerites might be correct. But the day came and went, thus encouraging the scoffers and fearful, but leaving the Millerites in total disarray and discouragement. Their specific claims about the time and their unbounded confidence in the October 22 date served to heighten their disappointment.

On October 24 Josiah Litch wrote to Miller: “It is a cloudy and dark day here—the sheep are scattered—and the Lord has not come yet” (JL to WM and JVH, Oct. 24, 1844).

Hiram Edson later penned: “Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn” (H. Edson MS).

And Washington Morse mused, “That day came and passed, and the darkness of another night closed in upon the world. But with that darkness came a pang of disappointment to the Advent believers that can find a parallel only in the sorrow of the disciples after the crucifixion of their Lord. The passing of the time was a bitter disappointment. True believers had given up all for Christ, and had shared His presence as never before. The love of Jesus filled every soul; and with inexpressible desire they prayed, ‘Come, Lord Jesus, and come quickly;’ but He did not come. And now, to turn again to the cares, perplexities, and dangers of life, in full view of jeering and reviling unbelievers who scoffed as never before, was a terrible trial of faith and patience.

A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists

When Elder Himes visited Waterbury, Vt., a short time after the passing of the time, and stated that the brethren should prepare for another cold winter, my feelings were almost uncontrollable. I left the place of meeting and wept like a child” (RH, May 7, 1901; italics supplied).

We might expect Miller, as founder and titular head of the movement, to be terribly shaken by the experience. On the surface, however, he maintained an upbeat public-relations stance. “Although I have been twice disappointed,” he stated on November 10, 1844, “I am not yet cast down or discouraged. God has been with me in Spirit, and has comforted me. . . . Although surrounded with enemies and scoffers, yet my mind is perfectly calm, and my hope in the coming of Christ is as strong as ever. I have done only what after years of sober consideration I felt to be my solemn duty. . . .

“Brethren, hold fast; let no man take your crown. I have fixed my mind upon another time, and here I mean to stand until God gives me more light.—And that is To-day, TO-DAY, and TO-DAY, until He comes, and I see Him for whom my soul yearns” (MC, Dec. 5, 1844).

In spite of those reassuring words, the bulk of the Millerites probably gave up their Second Advent faith. Meanwhile, those who continued to hope for the soon coming of Christ saw their once fairly harmonious movement dissolve into chaos as different leaders and self-appointed “leaders” put forth conflicting claims and counterclaims regarding the meaning of their experience and the “truth” about the Second Advent.

Out of that seething cauldron and shapeless mass of discouragement and confusion would come the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But, of course, no one could have predicted that development in 1844. That story will be the focus of our next two chapters.

Millerite Roots

For Those Who Would Like to Read More

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Era of Doctrinal Development

(1844-1848)

The aftermath of the great disappointment of October 22, 1844, found Millerite Adventism in a state of utter confusion. The height of their hope had led to the depth of their despair. The mathematical certainty of their faith left them in shock when the expected event failed to take place. It is impossible to get a completely accurate picture of the disappointed Millerites, but it is probable that the majority abandoned their Advent faith and either went back to their previous churches or into secular unbelief.

We can roughly view those who maintained their hope in the soon return of Christ as belonging to one of three groups, depending upon their interpretation of what had occurred on October 22. The most easily identifiable group, under the leadership of Joshua V. Himes, rapidly came to believe that nothing had happened on that date.

Holding that they had been correct as to the expected event (that is, the second coming of Christ), they concluded that they had been wrong on the time calculation. On November 5, 1844, Himes wrote that “we are now satisfied