

## William Miller (1782 - 1849)

Miller was an American Baptist preacher whose followers have been termed Millerites. He is credited with the beginning of the Adventist movement of the 1830s and 1840s in North America. William Miller was born on February 15, 1782 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. When he was four, his family moved to rural Low Hampton, New York. Country education was far below Miller's abilities, and at a young age Miller proved to be wise beyond his years. With a voracious appetite for reading, he spent most of his free time reading books borrowed from neighbors. His passion for reading led him to religion.



Miller began to preach in about 1831. Based on Daniel 8 and 9, Miller believed that 2,300 years would pass from the time of the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the Second Coming of Jesus. The commandment was given to the scribe Ezra by Artaxerxes I of Persia in the seventh year of his reign (i.e. 457 B.C.), and is detailed in Ezra 7:12-26. Miller believed this pointed to the year that began in the spring of 1843 as the time when Christ would return. When that time passed in the spring of 1844, Miller himself never set another date. Others refined the matter further, focusing on October 22, 1844, as the Day of Atonement and the time for the earth to be cleansed by fire at Jesus' second coming.

The Millerite movement spread rapidly by way of the printing press. Tracts and pamphlets were distributed among the early believers who in turn spread the literature to the masses. Estimates of the people accepting the Millerite message number between 50,000, conservatively, to 500,000 followers, at the peak of the movement.

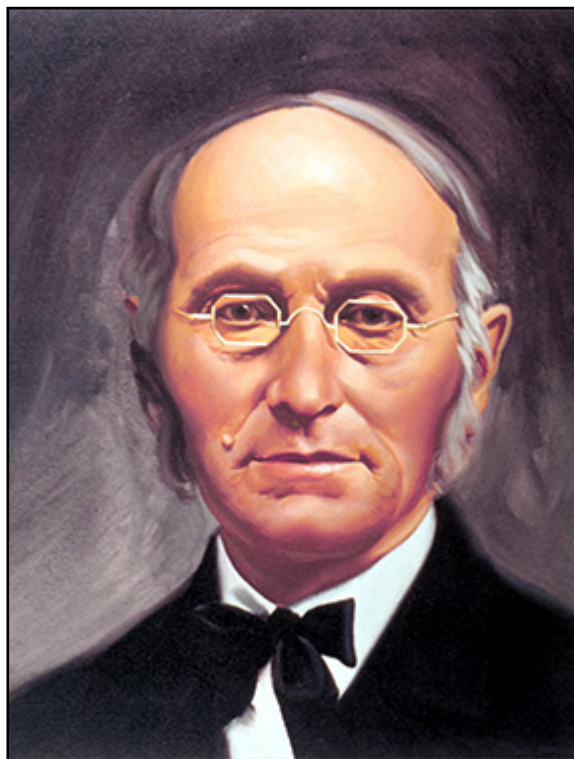
But Christ didn't come on October 22, 1844. This has come to be known as the Great Disappointment. Miller recorded his personal disappointment in his memoirs: "Were I to live my life over again, with the same evidence that I then had, to be honest with God and man, I should have to do as I have done. I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment." Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, p. 256.

William Miller died on December 20, 1849, and is buried near his home in Low Hampton, New York. Miller's home is a registered National Historic Landmark and is preserved as a historic museum by Adventist Heritage Ministry.

## Joseph Bates (1792-1872)

Perhaps there was no more unlikely preacher of the Seventh-day Adventist Church than Joseph Bates. He was born in Rochester, Massachusetts, but when he was young his family moved to Fairhaven, Massachusetts, a port city, where he became fascinated with the sea. He set out from Fairhaven at the age of 15 as a cabin boy. He experienced shipwreck, capture, and forced service in the British Navy, and for two-and-a-half years was a prisoner of war in England, being released in 1815.

Bates eventually served as captain of his own ship, beginning in 1820. In 1821 he gave up smoking and chewing tobacco, as well as the use of profane language. He later quit using tea and coffee, and in 1843 he became a vegetarian. Bates retired from the sea in 1827 with \$11,000 a small fortune for the time. During his years at sea he was converted, and he helped found the Fairhaven Christian Church.



After his retirement at age 35, Bates became associated with several reforms, including temperance and antislavery. In 1839 he accepted the second advent preaching of William Miller, and he became an active and successful Millerite preacher. He eventually invested all of his money in the advent movement. Bates experienced the 1844 disappointment without losing his faith. In 1845 he read a tract by T. M. Preble on the Sabbath, published in Nashua, New Hampshire. Learning of Sabbathkeepers in Washington, New Hampshire, Bates traveled there to study for himself. Upon his return to Fairhaven, he met a friend, James Hall, at the old bridge approach. Hall asked him: "What's the news, Captain Bates?" His reply was: "The news is that the seventh day is the Sabbath." Hall became a convert to the Sabbath as well.

The next year, 1846, Bates wrote a tract on the subject of the Bible Sabbath. This tract came to the attention of James and Ellen White, around the time of their marriage in August of that year. They accepted the seventh-day Sabbath as a result of their study. In the tract Bates argued for beginning the Sabbath at 6 p.m. Friday. For more than ten years, many Sabbathkeepers, including the Whites, began the Sabbath at 6 p.m. Other Adventists kept it from sunrise, sunset, or midnight. In 1855 James White asked J. N. Andrews to make a study of the Bible on the subject. His paper was presented at a meeting in Battle Creek, in November of that year. His conclusion supported sunset. After the meeting, Ellen White had a vision confirming the result of his Bible study, and unity on the subject was gained.

Joseph Bates was often the chairman at the "Sabbath conferences" of 1848-1850. He became more closely associated with the Whites at that time. Earlier, he had written about his efforts to verify Ellen White's visionary experiences for himself:

"I therefore sought opportunities in presence of others, when her mind seemed freed from excitement, (out of meeting) to question, and cross question her, and her friends which

accompanied her, especially her elder sister, to get if possible at the truth. . . . I have seen her in vision a number of times, and also in Topsham, Me., and those who were present during some of these exciting scenes know well with what interest and intensity I listened to every word, and watched every move to detect deception, or mesmeric influence. And I thank God for the opportunity I have had with others to witness these things. I can now confidently speak for myself that I believe the work is of God."—*A Word to the "Little Flock,"* p. 21.

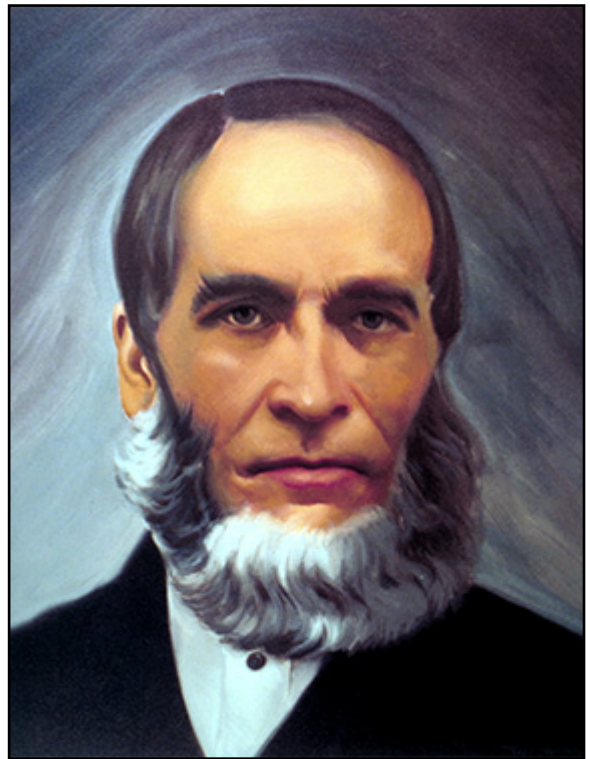
Joseph Bates is considered one of the three co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, along with James and Ellen White. When he left the sea, he continued his travels to many places, including Battle Creek, where he won the first convert there. The year before he died he preached at least 100 times. He died at the age of 80 at the Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek, and is buried at Monterey, Michigan.

## Hiram Edson (1807-1882)

Early the next morning after the Great Disappointment of October 22 1844, Hiram Edson, a farmer and leader among the Millerite Adventists in western New York, went out with a group of friends to his barn to pray. They fervently asked God for an answer to the burning question of why Jesus had not returned to earth to take His faithful people home as they all had believed would happen. Edson later related what took place that morning in the barn. "We continued in earnest prayer until the witness of the Spirit was given that our prayer was accepted, and that light should be given, our disappointment be explained, and made clear and satisfactory."

No explanation came just at that time, but a certainty sprang up in their hearts that God is love, and that though they did not understand what had happened, He would make it plain someday. Feeling better, they went back to the house to eat breakfast. After eating and feeling refreshed, Edson suggested to O. R. L. Crosier that they visit and encourage some Millerite neighbors. Edson later reported that as they cut across a field of grain standing in shocks, "I was stopped about midway through the field. Heaven seemed open to my view, and I saw distinctly and clearly, that instead of our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth [on October 22], . . . that He for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that sanctuary; and that He had work to perform in the Most Holy before coming to this earth."

This new interpretation of the event to take place on the day of the Disappointment brought courage to many when they heard it. After diligent Bible study it became clear to them that they had misunderstood what was to happen at the end of the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:14.





## Ellen White (1827-1915)

Ellen Gould Harmon, co-founder and messenger from God to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was born on November 26, 1827 in Gorham, Maine. She was a woman of remarkable spiritual gifts. She lived most of her life during the nineteenth century, yet through her writings she is still making a revolutionary impact on millions of people around the world.

During her lifetime she wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books; but today, including compilations from her 50,000 pages of manuscript, over 100 titles are available in English. She is credited as the most translated woman writer in the entire history of literature and the most translated American author of either gender. Her writings cover a broad range of subjects, including religion, education, social relationships, evangelism, prophecy, publishing, nutrition, and management. Her life-changing masterpiece on successful Christian living, *Steps to Christ*, has been published in more than 150 languages.

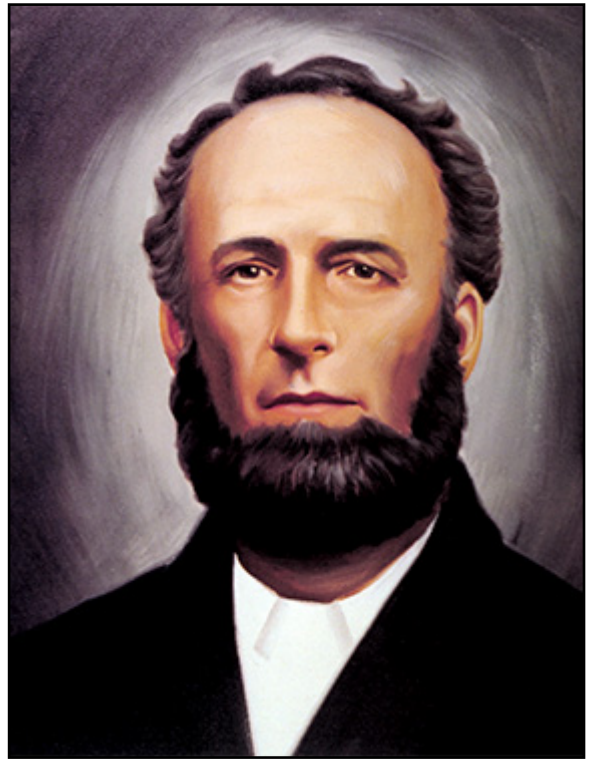


Seventh-day Adventists believe that Mrs. White was more than a gifted writer; they believe she was appointed by God as a special messenger to draw the world's attention to the Holy Scriptures and help prepare people for Christ's second advent. From the time she was 17 years old until she died 70 years later, God gave her an estimated 2,000 visions and dreams. The visions varied in length from less than a minute to nearly four hours. She wrote out and shared with others the knowledge and counsel she received through these revelations.

For the last 15 years of her life, Mrs. White lived at "Elmshaven" in St. Helena, California, where she died in 1915 at the age of 87. She is buried in the family burial plot in Battle Creek, Michigan.

## James White (1821-1881)

James Springer White was born in the township of Palmyra, Maine, on August 4, 1821. Elder White was a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the husband of Ellen G. White. His contributions to the Adventist denomination were notable: in 1849 he started the first Sabbatarian Adventist periodical, *Present Truth*, in 1855 he relocated the center of the fledgling movement to Battle Creek, Michigan, and in 1863 played a pivotal role in the formal organization of the denomination. He also played a key role in the development of the Adventist educational structure, beginning in 1874 with the formation of Battle Creek College (now Andrews University).



James, the fifth of nine children, was a sickly child who suffered fits or seizures. Poor eyesight prevented him from obtaining much of an education, so he worked on the family farm. At age 19 his eyesight improved and he enrolled in a local academy. He earned a teaching certificate and briefly taught at an elementary school. Baptized into the Christian Connection at age 16, he learned of the Millerite message from his parents. After hearing impressive preaching at an advent camp meeting in Exeter, Maine, James decided to leave teaching and become a preacher. Consequently, he was ordained a minister of the Christian Connection in 1843.

James White was a powerful preacher. During the winter of 1843, 1000 people accepted the Millerite message from his preaching. At times, however, he was met with angry mobs who hurled snowballs at him. During these early travels he met Ellen G. Harmon, whom he later married on August 30, 1846. James and Ellen had four boys, Henry Nichols, James Edson, William Clarence, and John Herbert. Only the two middle boys, Edson and "Willy," lived to adulthood.

*Present Truth*, the paper which James White initially started, was combined with another periodical called the *Advent Review* in 1850 to become *The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. This periodical became the main source of communication for the Sabbatarian Adventist movement as they debated points of doctrine and organization. James White served as editor of the periodical until 1851 when he invited Uriah Smith to become its editor. He played a senior role in the management of church publications as president of the Review and Herald Publishing Association. He also served on three occasions as president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (1865-67, 1869-71, 1874-80).

## Rachel (Oaks) Preston (1809-1868)

Rachel Oaks was a Seventh Day Baptist widow who moved to Washington, New Hampshire, in 1843 to be near her daughter, Delight, a school teacher there. She introduced the Sabbath to the Washington Millerite congregation and their pastor, Frederick Wheeler. When the congregation met for communion one Sunday morning, Wheeler suggested that those who participate "should be ready to obey God and keep His commandments in all things." Later Rachel told him that she had almost risen to her feet to point out that he should keep all of God's commandments, including the Sabbath.

Wheeler began keeping the Sabbath about March, 1844. After "the passing of the time" in 1844, others in the Washington church began keeping the Sabbath, including the Farnsworth brothers, William and Cyrus. Thus, Washington had the first Sabbathkeeping Adventists in the world. By 1862 the church had become a Seventh-day Adventist church, and a congregation still meets regularly there during warmer months of the year. Rachel's daughter, Delight, later married Cyrus Farnsworth, and Rachel moved away from Washington. In the last year of her life Rachel finally became a Seventh-day Adventist.



The story of Rachel's connection with Ellen White really amounts to a chain reaction of Sabbath acceptance. Her introduction of the Sabbath led to Frederick Wheeler's accepting it, making him the first Sabbathkeeping Adventist minister. In nearby Weare, New Hampshire, the Sabbath came to the attention of T. M. Preble, who first wrote an article and then published a small pamphlet on the subject. This pamphlet was read by 15-year-old John Nevins Andrews in Paris, Maine, who later became the first Seventh-day Adventist overseas missionary in Europe.

Preble's writing also came to the attention of Joseph Bates in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, in early 1845, and he determined to study the subject more thoroughly. He traveled to Washington, New Hampshire, to study with Frederick Wheeler and Cyrus Farnsworth at the Farnsworth home. Bates returned from his trip to Washington with the news that the seventh day is the Sabbath. He then wrote a small pamphlet with a long title, "The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign, From the Beginning, to the Entering Into the Gates of the Holy City, According to the Commandment." The first edition was published in August, 1846.

Bates's tract came into the hands of James and Ellen White, just at the time of their marriage that very month. From its Bible evidence they also were led to begin observing the Sabbath. And so, the long trail of influence from Rachel Preston found its way into the home of James and Ellen White and through them to others around the world.