

Himes, Joshua Vaughan (1805–1895)

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Joshua V. Himes, minister and radical reformer, became “the principal promoter, manager, and financier”¹ of the Second Advent or Millerite movement of the 1840s and figured prominently in two denominations that emerged out of that movement.



Joshua V. Himes, from engraving by J. Sartain Phila, Boston.

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Early Life and Ministry (1805-1830)

The eldest of seven children, Joshua Vaughan Himes was born May 19, 1805 to Stukely Himes and Elizabeth Vaughan Himes in Wickford, Rhode Island, a village on the west end of the Narragansett Bay. Joshua’s parents groomed him for study at Brown University to prepare for ministry in the Episcopal church. However, his formal education came to an end at age 13 when his father, defrauded by a partner, saw his prosperous business in the West Indies trade collapse. Joshua was apprenticed to a cabinet maker in New Bedford, Massachusetts for eight years.²

Unsatisfied by the Unitarian church that he initially attended in New Bedford with his master, William Knights, Joshua joined the city’s First Christian church in 1823. This church was in the Christian Connection, one of several restorationist movements in nineteenth-century America dedicated to restoring the New Testament church, sweeping away all claims to authority other than the Bible. “Here I found the open Bible and liberty of

thought, and made good use of them," Himes later wrote.³ While still serving as an apprentice he showed promise as a public speaker and was granted a license as an exhorter, or lay preacher. After his apprenticeship concluded Himes was commissioned in 1825 as a missionary by the Conference of Christian Churches. In November 1826, he married Mary Thompson Hardy (c. 1807-1876).⁴

After he was ordained to ministry in 1827, Himes went to Plymouth, then Fall River (both towns in Massachusetts), raising up a sizable new congregation and housing it in a new church building in both locales.⁵ The First Christian church of Boston, in crisis due to rapidly declining membership, took note of the dynamic young minister and called him to be their pastor in 1830. When Himes arrived the congregation had dwindled to seven families. Within two years attendance at weekly services was filling the church to capacity.⁶

Radical of Radicals (1830-1839)

In Boston, a hub for the multitude of social movements that thrived in antebellum America, Himes became an advocate and organizer for a wide range of reform causes including temperance, women's rights, peace, and, at the forefront, abolition of slavery. He was a "radical and an enthusiast by temperament" and regarded as "among the most radical of radicals."⁷

Himes became one of the earliest supporters of William Lloyd Garrison's advocacy for immediate abolition of slavery in the *Liberator*, published from Boston beginning in 1831. In contrast to the more widely accepted approach of gradual emancipation and return of the formerly enslaved to Africa championed by the American Colonization Society, the abolitionist movement that gained momentum in the 1830s demanded immediate abolition of slavery and full equality for people of African descent. Such demands were overwhelmingly denounced in respectable public opinion as impractical and dangerous, and abolitionists were subjected to mob violence. Yet Garrison attested that Himes, at "a very early period avowed himself an abolitionist, and has been a faithful supporter of the anti-slavery movement, never ashamed to show his colors, never faltering in the darkest hour of its history."⁸

True to the Garrisonian spirit, Himes' commitment to reform was both *universal* – encompassing all reforms based on right principle, and *radical* – demanding ideal change, rather than negotiating compromises with evil. Also like Garrison, Himes directed fiery, provocative rhetoric against opponents. One account described him as "facing mobs, defying them to do their worst and pouring hot shot into their ranks in his peculiar and emphatic denunciation of the nation's disgrace and burning shame."⁹

Himes defended the editor of the *Liberator* early in 1835 against criticism from other abolitionists that Garrison was recklessly driving away potential allies among the clergy and respectable classes of Boston with the severity of his denunciations—not only of slaveholders but those he regarded as compromising in any way with the slave system.¹⁰ In response to queries from Joseph Bates, a retired sea captain turned moral reformer, Himes contended that the thrust of Garrison's leadership on behalf of a righteous cause far outweighed his flaws:

Let us resolve, my brother, to support Mr. G. in all his efforts to disenfranchise and elevate the colored race. And as we are not believers in the perfectibility of man, we shall not be likely to require perfection of the editor of the *Liberator*. We know his object and cause are good, and that he has thus far steadily pursued it in the midst of opposition, of contrary winds and currents, by which he has proven himself to be the *true*, unwavering friend of the colored race.¹¹

Many of Himes' church members objected to his extensive involvement in reform movements, charging that he was neglecting traditional pastoral duties and the quality of his sermons was suffering. He was dismissed as pastor of First Christian Church in 1836, but many of the younger and more progressive members joined him in forming the Second Christian church. They built a new house of worship the following year called Chardon Street Chapel, and the congregation quickly grew to fill its 500-seat capacity. It became a meeting place, or conference site, for many radical reform causes.¹²

The numbers also increased in the young pastor's household. During the years 1830 to 1844, Mary Thompson Himes bore five sons who lived to adulthood: Joshua, Jr. (1831-1888), John (1834-1864), William (1839-1917), Edwin (1842-1872), and Walter (1844-?).¹³ The third son, William Lloyd Garrison Himes, was the only one to follow his father in becoming a gospel minister. Mary was active in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society and served for a time as a director.¹⁴

Some of the movements Himes supported were even more controversial than abolitionism. For example, he supported Garrison in forming the New England Non-Resistance Society in a meeting at Marlborough Chapel in Boston on September 18, 1838, and was selected to be on the new organization's board of directors. The society's constitution declared opposition to the taking of human life for any reason, either by individuals or governments. Himes opened Chardon Street Chapel to the group during its first anniversary meetings in 1839, helped build its membership with a promotional campaign and raised funds for publication of a periodical, the *Non-Resistant*.¹⁵

In July 1840, as a member of the Non-Resistance Society's executive committee, Himes was signatory to an open letter defending Garrison and the American Anti-Slavery Society for the controversial decision to link the cause of women's rights with abolition of slavery.¹⁶ Two columns to the right on the same page of the *Liberator* (July 31, 1840) as this "important letter," an advertisement announced a new paper entitled *Signs of the Times* that would "expound the writings of the Prophets and Apostles relating to the Second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the first resurrection and the end of the world." The publication, it stated, "is conducted by Joshua V. Himes: assisted by Wm. Miller, and Josiah Litch, writers on the prophecies."

A man of practical action as well as high ideals, Himes, after nearly a decade tirelessly promoting manifold reforms, had not seen them progress very far toward defeating the evils they targeted. His new cause, the Second Advent movement, was the most sweeping of all. It promised, as historian David Arthur put it, "not

merely a better world, but a world made new."¹⁷ And, it promised full success soon. Christ would return to earth "about the year 1843," according to the movement's evangelist, William Miller.

The Second Advent Cause (1839-1842)

Himes' first met William Miller at a conference of Christian Connection ministers in Exeter, New Hampshire, in November 1839, where he repeated in person an invitation to speak in Boston that he had previously mailed to Miller in October. Not yet a devotee, Himes noted the rising interest in Miller's message, and Chardon Street Chapel was *the* place for intriguing new causes to get a hearing. Miller agreed to deliver a series of lectures there beginning December 8, 1839.

As Miller preached his series, Himes became more seriously impressed with the possibility that Miller's message was true. "Do you really believe this doctrine?," he bluntly asked the preacher. Thus far, Miller's preaching had been confined to small towns and villages of upstate New York and northern New England. Himes saw the urgency of getting the message out to the wider world, especially if only three to four years remained for doing so, and he had the vision and skills needed to lead the effort. Assured by Miller's response not only of his sincerity but his readiness for a drastic expansion of his work, Himes told him to "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!"¹⁸ In the weeks following their meeting, Himes pondered his readiness to make Miller's cause his own. Then, on January 17, 1840, sensing that he was headed toward full commitment, he wrote Miller, "*I am coming on – and when I come – look out – all my soul will be in it*"¹⁹

When Himes came on board with the motto "what we do must be done quickly,"²⁰ the regional revival stirred in New England by William Miller's message about the "Advent near" became a national movement. Himes became Miller's publicist and booking agent, arranging for him to lecture in the large cities of the East – Boston (again), New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. Himes became the movement's chief promoter, utilizing the latest developments in communications technology and marketing to orchestrate "an unprecedented media blitz," in the words of Nathan O. Hatch a leading scholar of American religious history.²¹ He organized conferences that gave the movement coherence and momentum. With "Father Miller" as the spiritual and theological head of the Second Advent movement, Himes became its *de facto* organizational leader.²²

The application of steam power to printing and to transportation in the 1820s vastly expanded the reach of newspapers and other printed matter as mass communication media. Himes learned from the innovations that social reform movements developed in using print media and benefited from the connections he had made in those movements. Just two months after his pledge to Miller, Himes launched the *Signs of the Times*, published twice monthly beginning March 20, 1840. Dow and Jackson, printers who cultivated an antislavery clientele, agreed to invest in publishing *Signs* for a year while Himes edited the paper without salary and took responsibility for raising subscriptions. He recruited agents to sell the paper on commission and by the end of

1840 it had 1,500 subscribers. It was a profitable arrangement for Dow and Jackson, who wanted to continue it after the first year. Himes, however, wanted to see the profits used for the Second Advent cause, and prevailed on them to relinquish their interest to him as the new publisher as well as editor while he in turn contracted them as printers.²³ By January 15, 1842, *Signs of the Times* had 5,000 subscribers which meant, according to Himes' estimate, 50,000 readers.²⁴

The periodical was central to establishing the Adventist movement as a parachurch organization or network that brought together Christians in a shared purpose even as they retain their varying denominational affiliations and differing beliefs. In addition to *Signs*, Himes used temporary periodicals to publicize and reinforce meetings held in a particular locale, and to sustain and strengthen local networks of those drawn to the Second Advent message while remaining active in their denominational churches.²⁵

In New York City, a daily run of 24 issues of the *Midnight Cry*, edited by Himes and Nathaniel Southard, began November 17, 1842, with 10,000 copies of each printed. Most of these were given out free of charge with the endeavor focused on sending copies to every minister in the state. The paper was so well-received that Himes and his colleagues continued it as a weekly. While many local papers were discontinued after fulfilling their temporary purpose, others were sustained as effective vehicles for the Advent message in their respective locales. These included the *Trumpet of Alarm!* in Philadelphia, the *Second Advent of Christ* in Cleveland, and the *Western Midnight Cry!!!* issued from Cincinnati. These papers were edited by other leading figures in the movement but Himes was the overarching promoter and financier.²⁶

Though preeminent, newspapers were only one mode of print media that Himes utilized. In 1841 he published what in other contexts has been called a "campaign biography," compiling Miller's memoir with excerpts from his writings providing an overview of his message.²⁷ Another mode of publication, the Second Advent Library, was a series of treatises—eventually almost 50—that ranged in length from pamphlets of a few pages to books of up to 200 pages. To encapsulate the message in much briefer form, Words of Warning was a 36-tract series published on a single 5 x 8 sheet with print on both sides and circulated by the hundreds of thousands. Himes also published a songbook, *The Millennial Harp*, in 1842.²⁸

Beyond use of agents, Himes aggressively promoted circulation of the publications through a variety of innovations. He mobilized supporters to set up Second Advent Libraries in towns and villages throughout the northern states making literature available free of charge on a borrow and return basis. Second Advent literature was sent in bundles to postmasters with a request to give copies to individuals when they came to collect their mail (home delivery was a thing of the future). Similarly, ships' officers were requested to take bundles of literature with them for drop off at ports of call throughout the world, and thereby reach Protestant missionary outposts.²⁹

Not long after launching the *Signs of the Times*, Himes initiated his most important contribution as movement organizer—a series of "general conferences." Neither he nor Miller sought to form a new religious organization,

a point Himes made explicit as he opened the first general conference, held in Boston, October 14-15, 1840. He also expressed the intention that the conference entail a genuine interchange of views rather than attempt to impose a narrow uniformity. He welcomed those “who differ from us in regard to the period and manner of the advent,” a category that included the chair of the conference, Henry Dana Ward, and the secretary, Henry Jones, both scholarly expositors of premillennialism who did not accept Miller’s teachings regarding the expected time of Christ’s return.³⁰

Yet the conferences accomplished much toward Himes’ stated purpose of “edifying and unifying” believers in the message of “the everlasting gospel of the kingdom at hand.”³¹ By promoting study and deepened understanding of the scriptural basis for the “advent near,” facilitating networks connecting believers and leaders, raising funds, developing strategies and coordinating efforts to spread the message, the conferences brought coherence to the movement and added to its momentum. They also strengthened Himes’ position as the tactical, organizational leader of the movement. He usually opened the conferences, setting forth the purpose of the meeting, presided over selection of officers, read messages and addresses sent by leaders who could not attend (often and most significantly, Miller), introduced resolutions calling for funds or new action plans, and gave a closing address usually exhorting listeners to fuller consecration and commitment. Approximately 15 more general conferences took place in rapid succession in 1841 and 1842, in addition to a much larger number of “local conferences.”³²

Himes’ qualities as a persuasive communicator, daring entrepreneur, and aggressive leader, all fired by passion for the Second Advent cause not only drove his outsized achievement but, arguably, made his dominance in the movement excessive.³³ That singular prominence made him a lightning rod for much of the criticism and ridicule directed toward the Millerites. In particular, the large amounts of money that passed quickly through his hands and over which he had personal control made him vulnerable to charges of corruption and exploitation. The *Olive Branch*, a Methodist periodical that probably was his, and Millerism’s, most relentless and severe source of criticism, asserted: “Elder Himes is a man with a mind in a nut shell, extremely weak in every point of light. . . . He is as fat as an Alderman and lives like a Prince.”³⁴

If there was an element of truth in criticisms of self-aggrandizement, charges of self-dealing on Himes’ part proved groundless.³⁵ Though he sometimes fired back at critics in the “Refuge of Scoffers” section that appeared occasionally in *Signs of the Times*, Himes avoided getting side-tracked in refuting accusations. In September 1842 he introduced the “Liar’s Department” in the *Signs*, reprinting denunciations generally without comment, relying on their self-evident excessiveness to discredit them.³⁶

From 1840 to 1842, especially, Himes continued involvement in a wide range of reform movements along with his devotion to the Second Advent cause. He served with the noted orator Wendell Phillips, among others, as a “counsellor” for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, and on the executive committee of the New England Non-Resistance Society.³⁷ In September 1841, Edmund Quincy, editing the *Liberator* while Garrison traveled,

placed Himes in the select company of Samuel May and Parker Pillsbury as examples of the few “highly honorable exceptions” to the compromise with evil and lack of moral courage among the clergy.³⁸

In December 1840, after the better part of a year immersed in building a movement around the hope of the “Advent near,” Himes denounced the approach of sitting out the struggle for reform, levelling criticism at reform efforts but taking no constructive action. At one of the conventions of the Friends of Universal Reform that brought Boston’s reform and literary elite to Chardon Street Chapel, Himes spoke against “those who are ‘always pulling down Babylon, but know not how to lay a single brick in building the walls of Jerusalem.’”³⁹

Sounding the Midnight Cry (1842-1844)

With the year of expectation nearing, the general conference held in Boston in May 1842 set forth resolutions that marked a new phase in the Millerite movement. First, the conference affirmed that the time had come to “distinctly avow” that God has revealed “the time of Christ’s Second Advent” and to “urge it with double diligence upon *all* men.” Second, publication of a chart developed by Apollos Hale and Charles Fitch demonstrating in graphic form the prophetic time periods culminating in 1843 received endorsement. Third, the conference called for a series of camp meetings to sound “the midnight cry” more widely.⁴⁰

In an agenda-setting editorial, “The Crisis Has Come!,” published August 3, 1842, Himes declared, “I am *confirmed in the doctrine of Christ’s personal descent to this earth, to destroy the wicked, and glorify the righteous, some time in the year 1843.*” For him this unequivocal avowal of conviction did not mean absolute certitude. In view of human fallibility, Himes could contemplate the possibility of error, but for him, the practical impact of Second Advent teaching took the sting out of that consideration: “Can we ever regret that souls were converted . . . and prepared to meet the Lord? If then we are mistaken about the time, what harm can result to the church or world?” With the year of Christ’s return only months away, Himes proclaimed: “We shall publish more extensively and scatter our publications more profusely than ever. We shall hold public meetings, and by every effort in our power endeavor to arouse the world to prepare for the coming of the Bridegroom.”⁴¹

To maximize the impact of camp meetings, Millerite leaders had already endorsed construction of a “great tent” that they claimed was large enough to accommodate crowds of 3,000 to 5,000. Though he did not originate the idea, Himes took charge of the project and raised funds for it. A month later, the “Great Tent” was ready for use. Purported to be the largest the nation had ever seen, the tent became an attraction in itself, and with overflow crowds drawn to the meetings as it traveled from place to place, its estimated capacity was expanded to 6,000.⁴²

The Millerite conferences continued, but from this point forward, the evangelistic work of the camp meetings absorbed the greater share of the movement’s energy and excitement. Although mobile, the Great Tent gave those responding to the Second Advent message something of a physical locus for a developing sense of shared identity. Beginning in 1843, tabernacles built to accommodate Millerite congregations further fulfilled this function. The 3,000-seat Boston Tabernacle, constructed in May 1843 due to overcrowding at Himes’ Chardon

Street Chapel, was the first of these.⁴³

In January 1843, William Miller, pressured to be more specific than “about 1843,” set forth his conviction “that some time between March 21st, 1843, and March 21st, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come.”⁴⁴ During the “last year of time” Himes extended the reach of the movement’s preaching and publishing operations in every direction – Canada to the north; Rochester, Buffalo, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and St. Louis to the west; and Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Louisville to the south. Arrangements for an eastward voyage across the Atlantic to England and Europe were in place and confirmed, but cancelled only a few days before the scheduled departure.⁴⁵

The urgency created by the time factor left little if any opportunity for activism in other reform causes but did not alter Himes’ social idealism nor blind him to needs that could not wait, even if the ultimate relief was less than a year away. Speaking in New York City in early 1843, he exhorted believers to take the hope of a soon-coming new earth to the neglected poor of the city. He also made clear that comforting words would not suffice – we must “do all that we can to relieve their pressing temporal wants.”⁴⁶

For Himes and the Second Advent movement, 1844 was a year of spiritual fervor, non-stop evangelizing, eager expectation, disappointment, and damage control, with the cycle repeated a second time with multiplied intensity. The failed expectation when March 21, 1844 brought the year 1843 as Miller calculated it to an end, was disconcerting but not devastating. Miller and Himes acknowledged that their hopes had been disappointed and their conviction erroneous, but only with regard to the specific time calculation. In the April 10, 1844, issue of the *Advent Herald*, Himes expressed his assurance that “the second glorious and blessed Advent of the Savior of the world . . . must transpire within a very short time.” He then pointed to the spiritual danger of focusing expectation on a future date: “It is not safe, therefore, for us to defer in our minds the event for an hour, but to live in constant expectation, and readiness to meet our Judge.”⁴⁷

Most Millerites seemed to agree, and despite some losses, the movement held together and its evangelizing continued. Yet something of the previous dynamism was missing. Himes and Miller found themselves responding to new stirrings in the ranks as much or more than leading a cohesive following forward. As the two leaders toured together through Canada, upstate New York, and Ohio late in the summer of 1844, Himes acknowledged the legitimacy of something he had long resisted—separation of Second Advent believers from their denominations. His (and Miller’s) vision for the movement, and its posture until 1843, had been that of a unifying parachurch network. But in the summer of 1843, Charles Fitch issued a fiery and influential call to “come out” of the fallen churches of Protestant Christendom that had been exposed as “anti-Christ” by expelling those—both ministers and laity—who faithfully proclaimed the message about Christ’s imminent return to rule the earth.⁴⁸ Other influential Millerite orators such as Joseph Marsh and George Storrs issued the “come-outer” call. It would be “death to remain connected with those bodies that speak lightly of, or oppose, the coming of the Lord,” Himes conceded in August 1844.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, while Miller and Himes were in Ohio, the “seventh-month” message originated in New England by the previously unknown Samuel S. Snow gained a powerful momentum that demanded their attention. Building on Miller’s prophetic chronology, Snow contended that Christ would return on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) – the “tenth day of the seventh-month” in the Hebrew calendar, which fell on October 22, 1844. Although Snow had picked up on points Miller had suggested but never fully developed, both Himes and Miller initially resisted the seventh-month message. Neither had ever been inclined to settle expectations on a specific date, and the disappointment of March 1844 made them resistant to doing so again.

As late as September 20, 1844, after returning to Boston, Himes remained determined to embark in October on a twice-deferred mission to London, England, where he planned to establish a base for publishing and disseminating literature throughout the British isles and the European continent. But his plans changed sometime during the next several days as he became impressed by the compelling power that seemed to attend the “seventh-month” movement.

“This thing has gone over the country like lightning,” he reported to Miller in a letter of September 30. “Nearly every lecturer has come into it and are preaching it with zeal, and with great success.” True to form, Himes put stock in practical results. The fact that he “did not yet get the light as to the month & day” would not be determinative. The results or impact that impressed him ran deeper than numbers or dollar amounts and had to do with spiritual qualities. “The worldly minded have been quickened and made alive—and all classes have been blessed beyond anything we have seen in time past,” he told Miller. It was an influence that he “dare not oppose.” He canceled his mission to England 10 days before the scheduled departure, explaining that it was now his “hope to go to the *New world*, instead of the *Old*.” On October 6, Himes announced his belief that the Lord would return on the “tenth day of the seventh-month” (October 22) and that same day Miller wrote a letter to Himes stating that he now saw a convincing “glory in the seventh-month” and looked to October 22 with glad expectation.⁵⁰

The disappointment of October 22 dealt the Millerite movement a far more shattering blow than that experienced the previous Spring, and for Himes, created a gamut of serious problems. Charges of venality reemerged with wild rumors about the extent of the fortune he raked in and where he had fled with his stash – Texas, or Canada, or England, while others said he was already in jail, facing criminal charges. When a *Boston Post* writer alleged that Himes and the other Millerite leaders had cynically defrauded gullible people with teachings the leaders knew to be absurd, Himes felt compelled to respond. The *Post* agreed to publish the lengthy defense he wrote with the help of fellow Adventist editor Sylvester Bliss. Along with detailed refutations, Himes called for a public investigation, opening his records to unrestricted scrutiny and pledging fourfold restitution if he had defrauded anyone. Himes and Bliss made their case effectively, and the press coverage turned more favorable with other newspapers reprinting it and editors who knew him vouching for his integrity.

Himes nonetheless held himself and the entire Adventist community accountable for meeting the temporal needs of those impoverished by disposing of property or leaving their employment. He urged Advent believers to take care of those in need so that they would not turn to public charity. He spent the last two months of 1844 traveling to visit Adventist groups, exhorting them to meet this responsibility as well as ministering to them as they struggled with grief and spiritual disorientation.⁵²

The largest questions of all, though, for the Second Advent people during the final two months of 1844 were how to make sense of their experience and where to go from here. By early November, Himes concluded that the margin for minor error had past, and that it was time to acknowledge that the seventh-month movement had been incorrect in its designation of October 22, 1844 as the date in which the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 would be fulfilled by the return of Christ. He also reverted to the position that both he and Miller held into September 1844 against specifying dates for the second advent.

In a statement dated November 5, published in the *Midnight Cry*, Himes wrote:

We are disappointed. We are now satisfied that the authorities on which we based our calculations cannot be depended upon for definite time. We now take the ground that we are near the end, and still hold to our published views relating to the personal reign and kingdom of Christ – that the next event in historical prophecy will be the coming of Christ in the elements of heaven. . . . With our present light, we have no knowledge of a *fixed day* or *definite time*, but do most fully believe that we should watch and wait for the coming of Christ, as an event that may take place at any time.⁵³

Yet, in rejecting the time calculations set by the seventh-month message, Himes did not repudiate the movement's spiritual power or deny God's leading in it. In the October 30, 1844 issue of the *Advent Herald*, he and his fellow editors Sylvester Bliss and Apollos Hale affirmed:

It swept over the land with the velocity of a tornado, and it reached hearts in different and distant places almost simultaneously, and in a manner which can be accounted for only on the supposition that God was [in] it. . . . It caused a weaning of affections from the things of this world, a healing of controversies and animosities, a confession of wrongs, a breaking down before God and penitent broken-hearted supplications to him for pardon and acceptance.⁵⁴

Himes believed that under the providence of God the seventh-month message had prepared the Advent believers for Christ's return as never before by removal of every source of alienation from God and from other humans.

Diverging Adventisms (1844-1845)

The disappointments of 1844 devastated but did not destroy the Second Advent movement. With Miller sidelined from public ministry by poor health, Himes was the most influential Adventist leader in charting a path forward. He achieved a measure of success in his efforts to unite the movement, but other voices led in other directions resulting in lasting divisions that eventually took form in a variety of Adventist denominations.

In the January 10, 1845 issue of the *Advent Herald*, Himes announced his intention to “agitate, agitate, agitate, until the slumbering watchmen with their churches shall see the falsity of their position, or feel the full force of the truth, that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.”⁵⁵ In terms of the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) that Millerites regarded as a prophetic type that prefigured the final events they were experiencing, Himes believed their mission was to continue to sound the “midnight cry” about the coming of the bridegroom in order to wake the church out of its spiritual slumber and prepare to meet the returning Lord, without setting a specific date for the event. But many Adventists, including William Miller, were not ready to resume their evangelistic mission, because they saw themselves at a different point in the unfolding of the events adumbrated by the parable.

The ideas that received the most attention in Adventist papers in the early months of 1845 centered on the conviction that the midnight cry had been sounded in 1844 and the bridegroom had come as prophesied—not to this earth—but to a heavenly marriage ceremony to receive his bride (the true church). Those appropriately prepared to meet Him accompanied the bridegroom into the marriage while “the door was shut” (Matt. 25:10) excluding those unprepared to receive Him. Apollos Hale and Joseph Turner, in an influential article published in January 1845, equated this heavenly marriage with the “son of man” receiving the eternal kingdom from “the Ancient of Days” in Daniel 7. Christ’s return to establish His kingdom on this earth could thus still be expected in very short order, and meanwhile the “shut door” indicated opportunity for entering the kingdom was over and thus so was the Adventists’ work of sounding the warning message.

As historian George Knight puts it, the advocates of varying versions of the “shut door” or “bridegroom” teachings “set the agenda” in early 1845.⁵⁶ Himes found it necessary to aggressively oppose that agenda because it stood in the way of the agenda he envisioned of a renewed heralding of the second advent. Also, shut door/bridegroom teachings were associated with extreme behavior to demonstrate that believers had spiritually entered the eternal heavenly kingdom such as no work, disposal of property, and crawling as children, along with aberrant emphases on ecstatic worship, visions, foot-washing, and the holy kiss—the latter two made all the more scandalous by “promiscuous” participation on the part of both genders mixed together. All of this stood to worsen the public reputation of Adventism, savaged in 1844, that Himes was painstakingly working to restore.⁵⁷

Himes’ first priority was convincing William Miller to publicly repudiate theories regarding a heavenly or spiritual fulfillment of prophecy on October 22, 1844. Though Miller had announced his retirement from public involvement, he still wielded vast influence as the spiritual father of the movement. Moreover, shut-door

advocates could point to passages from his past writings as lending support to their view and Miller himself had expressed some sympathy with it.

The shut-door teaching is “producing the most disastrous effects both to believers, and to the movement,” Himes warned William Miller in a letter of February 18, 1845.⁵⁸ It was part of a barrage of letters, articles, and a personal visit in the early months of 1845 that finally convinced Miller to come out against the “shut-door” in late March. Miller also agreed to speak at a conference that Himes called to meet in Albany, New York, beginning April 29, 1845.⁵⁹ The Albany Conference brought a renewed sense of coherence, identity, and purpose to Adventists who wanted to move on from the October 1844 crisis and continue the mission of proclaiming an imminent Second Advent without setting specific dates. It meant that those who had experienced profound renewal and re-centered convictions in the Advent movement, had not given up on it, and remained alienated from their previous church affiliations still had a spiritual home.⁶⁰

At the same time, Himes’ unifying efforts also helped deepen the divide between those who had been united by Second Advent hope until October 1844.⁶¹ Despite vehement denials from Himes and his associates, the Albany Conference and its resolutions looked, to fiercely anti-organization Adventist leaders such as Joseph Marsh and George Storrs, suspiciously like the first steps in forming a new denomination. The conference issued a statement recommending a congregational form of governance for Adventist churches, five ministers were examined and ordained, and plans agreed upon for a series of forthcoming conferences. A voluntary network of independent congregations, conferences, and periodicals—these were the major components of the denominations from which a large sector of Millerites came, such as Baptist and the Christian Connection in which Himes ministered—and coming out of the Albany Conference they were all in place. A key difference was that Adventists did not expect any of this to last more than a few months or very few years. But for a substantial though by definition unorganized segment of Adventists, it was apostasy, a return to Babylon, and they continued in sustained opposition to Himes and the Albany Adventists.⁶²

Those on the opposite side of another line of division sharpened by the Albany Conference were seen as a source of embarrassment and spiritual delusion more than serious competitors for leadership. Himes summoned to Albany “the Second Advent lecturers and brethren who still adhere to the original Advent faith, as proclaimed by us to the world for the last few years.”⁶³ Advocates of new teachings such as the “shut door” were thus excluded.⁶⁴ And various disreputable practices associated with these theories, such as “promiscuous foot-washing,” the “holy kiss,” and demonstrating humility by “acting like children” were condemned. A follow-up conference in New York in May declared “no confidence in any new messages, visions, dreams, tongues, miracles, extraordinary gifts, revelations, impressions, discerning of spirits, or teachings, &c. &c., not in accordance with the unadulterated word of God.”⁶⁵

Himes would devote the subsequent three decades to leading the Adventist movement in the direction charted by the Albany Conference. But his endeavors to advance a dynamic mission to the world would become

enmeshed in seemingly endless and sometimes bitter factional strife.

British Mission and Anti-slavery Witness (1846-1849)

Such struggles were nowhere on the horizon for Himes in 1845. Mission was at the forefront. One of his highest priorities was to revive plans for the British mission that, at the last minute, the momentum of the seventh-month movement had swept aside in 1844. Accompanied by F. G. Brown and Robert Hutchinson, Himes crossed the Atlantic in the summer of 1846, set up a publishing office from which the *European Advent Herald* was launched, and preached throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland.⁶⁶

If Himes' endeavors for other reform causes diminished from late 1842 to 1844 during the final run-up to dates on which the Advent movement fastened its hopes, his actions in Britain make clear that he never changed his basic position that preparation for the soon-coming Kingdom requires consecration touching all aspects of life. Mission required both preaching and action to liberate the enslaved and oppressed from the powers holding them in oppression.

While in London in 1846, Himes was a delegate at a meeting of the Evangelical Alliance, an organization dedicated to advancing interdenominational cooperation among Protestants. With slavery already outlawed in England, the British participants had no difficulty with the Alliance's policy against admitting slaveholders into membership. American delegates, however, sought to soften the policy and thereby open the door to wider participation in the Alliance by churchmen from their nation. Himes and John Howard Hinton, a Baptist who had opened his pulpit to Millerite preachers, stood alone among the American delegation in opposition. Himes called the proposal "a miserable compromise of principle, which, if carried out, would be the strongest bulwark of the slave system."⁶⁷ Himes' stand drew cheers from abolitionist leaders, including Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, the latter saluting Himes as the "one man who nobly did his duty." The convention ended up deciding on formation of separate Alliances in Great Britain and the United States, with each deciding its own rules of admission.⁶⁸

A few days later, Himes spoke at an Anti-Slavery League meeting in Liverpool. Douglass, Garrison, and George Thompson, legendary opponent of slavery in the British Parliament, all spoke before Himes, just minutes before 10:00 p.m., finally had his turn at the podium. He rose to the challenge with a speech that was "brief but highly impressive" according to a report in the *Liverpool Times*.⁶⁹

Himes and his American colleagues had some success in advancing the Adventist cause, but due to lack of funds brought their "special mission" in Britain to a close in 1847.⁷⁰ The effort to unify and lead the cause forward in the United States suffered a blow when its beloved "Father," William Miller, died on December 20, 1849. Himes' presence with him in Low Hampton, New York, during his final few days seems to have cheered him. "Elder Himes is here. I love Elder Himes," Miller said.⁷¹

Fightings Within (1849-1876)

Soon thereafter, an attack on the integrity of Himes' dealings, calculated to undermine his pre-eminence as a leader after Miller's death, absorbed much time and energy but proved specious. When Himes defended himself in print his principal opponents, J. P. Weethee and George Needham, charged him with slander in a law suit that was tried in the Supreme Court of Rhode Island in 1852. However, just before the case was scheduled to go to jury, his accusers, realizing they would lose, withdrew from the trial.⁷²

In 1855 Himes' spirit of mission and adventure took him to the booming new state of California, where he celebrated his 50th birthday. He traveled and preached throughout the state and briefly tried his hand at panning for gold, without success.⁷³

The California trip was a break from the stifling hotbed of intra-Adventist disputation in the East. After Himes' return, divisions over issues other than the near Second Advent of Christ, the kind of division that he had long worked to prevent, became structured into competing denominations. On the one side in the escalating war of words were those who held to the beliefs long-dominant among Christians about the immortality of the soul and everlasting torment in hell as the fate of the unrepentant. On the other side were those who asserted that immortality was not inherent but conferred only through faith in Christ (conditionalism) and that the final punishment of recalcitrant sinners put their existence to an end rather than subjecting them to conscious torment throughout eternity (annihilationism). In his periodical, the *Advent Herald*, Himes, with the support of Josiah Litch, affirmed the traditional view. They and their supporters formed the American Evangelical Adventist Conference (Evangelical Adventists) in 1858 over against those whom they accused of making conditionalism a new doctrinal litmus test.⁷⁴

But by the time the conditionalists formed the Advent Christian Association in 1860, Himes had come around to their position after long opposing it. Himes, then in poor health, had sold his interest in the *Advent Herald* to Josiah Litch in 1858. Then, in 1860 Himes began publishing the *Voice of the Prophets* in which he advocated, along with conditionalism, a new calculation of time prophecies pointing to the return of Christ between 1866 and 1868. This claim was similar to William Miller's original "about the year 1843" in its imprecision, and Himes never settled on a specific day as in 1844. When the designated time frame passed, Himes finally was entirely through with connecting future fulfillment of last day prophecies with the modern calendar, even in an approximate way.⁷⁵

In the meantime, the Advent Christians called upon Himes to evangelize "the west." He established headquarters in Buchanan, Michigan in 1863, about 90 miles southwest of Battle Creek, where the Seventh-day Adventists were finalizing their organization as a denomination. He began publishing the *Voice of the West and Second Advent Pioneer* in 1864, renamed the *Advent Christian Times* in 1870. His work thrived, with the paper's subscriber list growing to 5,000.⁷⁶

On January 1, 1865, Himes once again had the privilege of sharing a podium with Garrison and other prominent abolitionists during services held in Boston to celebrate the second anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.⁷⁷ Also during the early months of 1865 he met President Lincoln and the First Lady at a reception in Washington, D.C.⁷⁸

Beyond celebration of past achievements, Himes had a leading part in organizing the American Advent Mission Society in 1865 and was elected its first president. He took particular interest in the society's project of establishing schools for those newly emancipated from slavery in cities such as St. Louis, Missouri, and Memphis, Tennessee.⁷⁹

Another priority for Himes was higher education for the training of young Adventist ministers. He received an offer of land for establishing a school in Illinois in 1872, along with pledges of financial support. That project was stymied, however, when Himes faced a new crisis of opposition from within Adventism.⁸⁰

Differences deepened in the late 1860s between Himes and Miles Grant, editor of the *World's Crisis* and an exceptionally hard-hitting theological pugilist who had supported Himes' accusers in the 1852 trial. Though the two, as conditionalists affiliated with the Advent Christian Association, were on the same theological team in the 1860s, Grant found reasons to oppose Himes' growing influence. Himes criticized the new emphasis on a particular understanding of sanctification that Grant was promoting among the Advent Christians. Grant opposed Himes' activism in establishing schools and building churches as contrary to belief in the near Second Advent.

After hearing a rumor alleging inappropriate behavior with women on Himes' part, Grant secured letters from two women accusing him of immorality. Himes eventually acknowledged "improprieties" while insisting that he was innocent of adultery. Grant used the threat of making the letters public to blackmail Himes into resigning his editorship of the *Advent Christian Times* and other positions in 1872. But when Himes was elected president of the Michigan Advent Christian Conference in 1874 and began publishing *Himes' Journal*, Grant made the "scandal" public and, despite heavy opposition, succeeded in having Himes disfellowshipped from the Advent Christian Association.⁸¹

An Adventist in Episcopalian Robes (1876-1895)

During the years of conflict within Adventism, Himes experienced a series of family losses. His sons John and Edwin both died in Buchanan around age 30—John in 1864 and Edwin in 1872. Both were described as faithful Christian workers. His wife of nearly 50 years, Mary, died on April 7, 1876, also in Buchanan. Isaac Wellcome described Mary Himes as a "faithful wife" who remained "in full sympathy" with her husband "in all his sacrifices and toils."⁸² Three years later, on June 13, 1879, Himes, at 74, married Hannah C. Baker, a 50-year-old widow from Maine, in a ceremony conducted by an Advent Christian minister in Detroit, Michigan.⁸³

Himes not surprisingly disassociated himself with denominational Adventism in 1876. Yet, he insisted: "I am an *Adventist*. I have ever been true and faithful to the cause."⁸⁴ During more than 40 years of ministry to this point, Himes, according to Wellcome, had organized more than 300 churches and assisted in organizing 14 state and sectional conferences. He had "immersed over fifteen hundred souls" and "traveled 20,000 miles per year a portion of the time, lecturing on an average of once each day much of the time," holding "about 5,000 meetings."⁸⁵

Still vigorous in his 70s, Himes was not through with gospel ministry. He followed the footsteps of his son, William Lloyd Garrison Himes, into Episcopal ministry, and in so doing returned to the church of his boyhood. Yet, in an important sense, it was not an abandonment but a return to an Adventism that transcended denominations with the unifying conviction that Christ will soon return to reign over a world made new again. Himes was ordained in 1879 and served as rector of St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Elk Point, South Dakota, until his death in 1895. Finding a struggling congregation in a decrepit house of worship, he led out in a new building campaign at the age of 85 and lived to see it succeed with years to spare.⁸⁶

Interaction With Seventh-day Adventists

Paradoxically, the institutional expression of Adventism with which Himes eventually became the most friendly originated from the "shut door" side in 1845—the radicals whom Himes had resolutely sought to disassociate from respectable Albany Adventism. The Sabbatarian Adventists "disentangled"⁸⁷ themselves from much in their shut door origins in the process of becoming the Seventh-day Adventist church organized 1860-1863. It was differing conceptions about the significance of 1844 and the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 that entrenched a firm boundary between the two broad streams of Adventism after William Miller, but the Sabbath was the most easily recognizable point of distinction—"first day" Adventists over against "seventh day" Adventists. But Seventh-day Adventists had declared an "open door" to salvation around 1851, only six years after the Albany Conference, and moved rapidly toward becoming the most mission-oriented of the Adventist factions. Himes found much of interest in their movement and conversely the Seventh-day Adventists held Himes in honor because of his leading role in the Millerite movement through 1844, regardless of subsequent disagreements.⁸⁸

From the time of his move to Michigan in 1863 to his death three decades later, Himes and the Seventh-day Adventists interacted periodically. Never without tension, the interaction became testy, even acrimonious for a time, yet on the whole was remarkably amicable.

When Himes stopped in Battle Creek on a return trip to the East in November 1863, his visit with the Seventh-day Adventists was friendly and he spoke at their church during a midweek service.⁸⁹ The following summer, after attending evangelistic meetings in Lapeer, Michigan, Himes, in the *Voice of the West*, commended the spirit he found there and wrote:

The Seventh-day Adventists have treated me with kindness, and in my severe trials in times past have not, like some, stood in the cross-ways to help on the affliction, but gave me their kindly Christian sympathies. They have among their number many who are the fruit of my labor, having since been converted to their view of the Sabbath, and other questions, which separated them from me, of which I have not complained. Let every one be fully persuaded in their own minds.⁹⁰

Having set up headquarters in close proximity to Seventh-day Adventist strongholds, Himes sought to establish terms of friendly coexistence and fair competition for adherents. He warned his readers against “vain wrangling” and urged all the Adventist factions to remember that their “warfare is with the common enemy,” not with each other.⁹¹

Review and Herald editor Uriah Smith, while maintaining a courteous tone, felt compelled to push back against the implications of some of the ways Himes had characterized Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. What began as friendly theological sparring all too quickly degenerated into a slugfest over how the parameters of the Sabbath can be determined in a round world, with increasingly harsh language from Himes about the “delusion” of Ellen White’s visions and influence. “Elder J. V. Himes, without the least provocation on the part of seventh-day Adventists, has done what he could to prejudice the people against them,” James White protested in January 1865. With “his unjust raid against them for the past seven months,” White declared, Himes “joins in the general howl of fanatics and bitter opponents against what they call ‘the visions.’”⁹²

Buchanan-Battle Creek relations remained frosty until late 1869, around the same time that Miles Grant mounted his vicious “raid” against Himes from within the Advent Christian community. In early September 1869, James and Ellen White and a small group of fellow Adventists attended a “national Camp-meeting of the Adventists” in Springfield, Massachusetts, organized by the Advent Christians under the leadership of Grant. When James White was accused of violating an agreement that he would not sell Adventist books at the gathering, Himes intervened to allow White’s explanation to be heard and calmed the dispute. White noted the “friendly course” taken by both J. V. Himes and his son William L. Himes in Springfield and expressed hope that it signaled “a more friendly relation between the *Voice of the West* and the *Review and Herald*.” Toward that end White acknowledged that the *Review* “has not always spoken of those who differ from us with all that patience, kindness, and respect that it should.”⁹³

Himes again stopped by Battle Creek in November 1873 while the General Conference was in session and gave “a few remarks” during a Friday evening service. He reported to readers of *Himes’ Journal* that although “known to be an unbeliever in many of their views, I was received and treated with the greatest kindness.” Profiling the Seventh-day Adventist work and institutions in Battle Creek, he explained that though he continued to regard “many things in the theory of this branch of the Advent body as erroneous,” his conclusion “as a journalist” was that “their devotion, piety, liberality, and industry have not been exceeded by any other branch of the Advent family.”⁹⁴

Himes' lifelong inclination to assess an idea or movement by its fruit – its practical impact – rather than by doctrinaire absolutes may in part account for his ability to establish good rapport with the Seventh-day Adventists and develop a genuine admiration for their achievements without accepting their distinctive teachings. In a letter to James White on July 12, 1878, informing White about the closing up of his Buchanan office, Himes elaborated on what he saw as the leading features that made the Seventh-day Adventist work fruitful:

First, the full proclamation of the future coming and reign of Christ on the earth; second, the establishment of a school and the promotion of education; and, thirdly, the establishment of a health institution, in which the laws of life and health are taught and enforced. These are facts. This is work, for the good of all, and must tend to the better preparation of all who come under these influences to meet Christ.⁹⁵

In the summer of 1894, Himes returned to Battle Creek, this time seeking treatment from Dr. John Harvey Kellogg of Battle Creek Sanitarium for cancer on the left side of his face. At 89, he was “astonishingly well preserved for one of his age,” Dr. Kellogg observed. Himes resolved not to discuss any points of controversy while at the Sanitarium, but seemed to enjoy talking with people about his memories of “Father Miller” and the events of the 1840s.⁹⁶

He wrote Ellen White in Australia on September 12, 1894, after attending a meeting in the Battle Creek Tabernacle at which her letters, which included an appeal to support the work in Australia, were read. His treatments seemed to be going well and he was hopeful of a cure. He briefly filled her in on his work with his Episcopal parish in South Dakota while affirming, “I preach the Advent as being near, without a definite time, and I believe it.” Though he wrote of his own work in a positive tone, he concluded the letter in a wistful, self-deprecating mode. “You and your associates have done a great work since 1844—and still go on,” he told Ellen White. Then, in the next and final paragraph, apparently by way of contrast he wrote: “Well, I finished my work really, in 1844, with Father Miller. After that, what I have done at most was to give comfort to the scattered flock.”⁹⁷ He enclosed \$5 as a gift, followed up by donation of another \$40 for Seventh-day Adventist mission work.

Ellen White seemed profoundly moved by Himes' letter and donation and attached great significance to his gesture. Along with expressing warm gratitude, she told Himes that she saw his donation as signifying “that you have not lost the missionary spirit which prompted you first to give yourself to the work, and then to give your means to the Lord to proclaim the first and second angels' messages in their time and order to the world.”⁹⁸ Drawing out her meaning in a letter to Sister Austin, the nurse who attended to Himes at the Sanitarium, Ellen White glossed over Himes' rejection of the Sabbath reform entailed in the third angel's message that Seventh-day Adventists believed they were called to proclaim after 1844. Instead she celebrated his support as “evidence that one of the pioneers in the work of giving the message of warning to the world in 1840-1844 is acting a part now in giving the third angel's message.”⁹⁹

In his reply dated March 13, 1895, Himes reiterated that he did not see “the events or the work relating to the close of the present dispensation” as Ellen White did. As for her work, “I am no judge, you are judge of that,” he wrote, and he encouraged her to “do it as best you can.” Speaking her language, he wrote: “There is a great and earnest work being done to send the message of the 3^d angel everywhere.” But he also had a warning. Despite his repeatedly stated admiration for the Seventh-day Adventist advances along medical and educational lines, Himes pointed out that prosperity “in worldly things, and heaping up of riches” threatened to give their “talk of the coming of Christ as an event very near at hand” an inconsistent ring.¹⁰⁰

In an added note dated the next day, March 14, Himes wrote that Dr. Kellogg had pronounced his cancer incurable. He had to face the inevitable: “And so, my last years will be very bad—but the morning will soon break and sickness, disease and death will pass away forever.”¹⁰¹

It turned out that Himes had only months and not years ahead of him. He died in Elk Point, South Dakota, on July 27, 1895.¹⁰²

Legacy

It is as impossible to conceive of the Millerite movement without Joshua V. Himes as it would be without Miller himself. Thus Himes, with Miller, can be viewed, along with the three usually mentioned—Joseph Bates, Ellen White, and James White—as one of five co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church to which the Millerite movement gave birth. Himes’ resourcefulness as a promoter, communicator, and organizer, combined with his evangelical fervor and reforming idealism was of singular importance in launching the Adventist movement and shaping its character.

Himes’ life and ministry can also be instructive on questions with which Seventh-day Adventists, along with many in other faith traditions, continue to wrestle. How much value should be placed on practical outcomes—the fruit—in contrast to doctrinal purity or ethical consistency in making discernments? Is it possible to be prophetic without being divisive? Must institutional prosperity dampen zeal for mission? How can lively hope in an imminent second advent of Christ be sustained over the long haul of decades, or centuries? Most significant of all, perhaps, how does proclaiming an urgent message about God’s soon-coming new world relate to changing the world of here and now?

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