

Bates, Joseph

(1792–1872)

DOUGLAS MORGAN

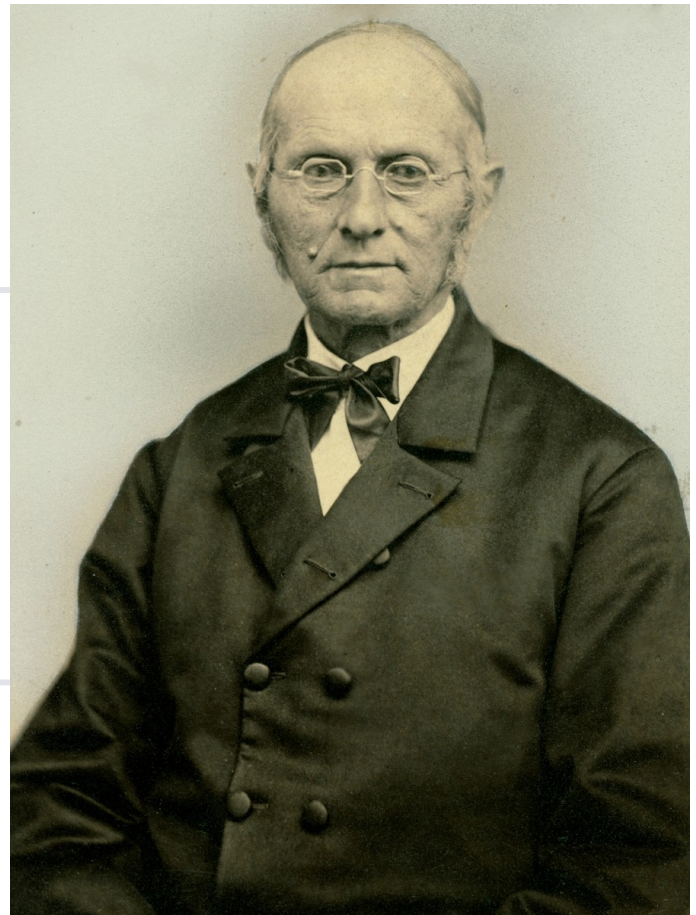
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Joseph Bates was a mariner, social reformer, pamphleteer, and evangelist who co-founded the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The birth of the American Republic, marked by ratification of the Constitution and Bill of Rights in 1789, took place just three years before Joseph Bates was born July 8, 1792, in Rochester, Massachusetts.

The Republic's first president, George Washington, was in the final year of his first term. When Bates died in 1872, Ulysses S. Grant, the nation's 18th president, was in the final year of his first term. A rebellion to preserve the slave system had just been defeated in a horrific Civil War, and a new struggle to re-constitute the nation as an interracial democracy was underway, and has continued ever since.¹

Bates not only lived through but passionately engaged the great events and movements that shaped the nation from founding to Civil War. As a young sailor, he entered the vortex of international conflict during the Napoleonic era, when tensions with Great Britain led to the War of 1812. Later, rising to captain and co-owner of his own vessel, Bates made a modest fortune in trade that built economic ties between the United States and the newly independent South American republics. As a public-minded New Englander in the late 1820s and 1830s, he threw himself into an array of social reform causes, particularly the radical abolitionist movement that stirred the national confrontation over slavery that led to the Civil War. Driven by an intense evangelical piety common in an era of revivals, often called, collectively, the Second Great Awakening, he came to see one of



Joseph Bates, (colorized) 1860s.

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those revivals, the Second Advent or Millerite movement as the “fountainhead” of reform. It promised what neither the Republic nor the other reform movements had yet delivered—a complete overthrow of oppression, injustice, and evil of all kinds—through the imminent messianic reign of Jesus. That remained his guiding conviction through a period of disappointment and division during which he, with James and Ellen White, founded the movement that gave rise to the Seventh-day Adventist church, one of the most impactful and enduring of the religious movements that originated in nineteenth-century America²

Mariner (1792-1827)

Joseph was the fourth of seven children born to Joseph Bates, Sr. (1750-1828) and Deborah Nye Bates (1865-1828).³ Though the younger Joseph is sometimes identified as “Joseph Bates, Jr.” in public records of his early life, he rarely included the designation “Jr.” in his published writings. In 1793 the family moved from the village of Rochester, Massachusetts, to the port town of New Bedford, located seven miles away. Well on its way to becoming “the whaling metropolis of the world,” New Bedford’s population grew from 3,000 to 22,000 during the 65 years Bates lived in the vicinity, before moving to Michigan in 1858. The town is located on the banks of the Acushnet River that widens as it flows southward into Buzzards Bay. The Bates family lived on the east side of the river, incorporated as Fairhaven in 1812.⁴

Joseph Bates, Sr. enjoyed at least moderate prosperity and social prominence. He was an army captain during the American Revolutionary war who fought under the command of the Marquis de Lafayette. After independence he went into “commercial business” and became a deacon of the Congregationalist Church—the established state church in Massachusetts until 1833. He was one of 16 citizens who founded New Bedford Academy (later Fairhaven Academy) in 1797. Though it was a college preparatory school, the academy also offered the primary grades, and it is undoubtedly where young Joseph received his education.⁵

Given his surroundings it is unsurprising that thoughts of becoming a sailor and going on “a voyage of discovery round the world” enamored Joseph. After failing to dissuade him, his father arranged for 15-year-old Joseph to be a cabin boy on a voyage to Europe in 1807.⁶

Bates’ *Autobiography*, the main source of information about the first 55 years of his life, was serialized in 51 installments that ran from 1858 to 1863 in the *Youth’s Instructor*, a Seventh-day Adventist monthly. He had a flair for telling stories, reconstructing scenes and dialogue with remarkable detail. During his first two voyages the youthful Bates narrowly escaped peril from a shark, icebergs, shipwreck, and capture by Danish privateers.⁷

While in Liverpool, England, in 1810, hoping to secure passage home after the ill-fated second voyage, Bates and several companions were seized by a “pressgang” and forced into service in the British Royal Navy. The British refusal to recognize the rights of American citizens caught up in impressment of alleged deserters was a cause of growing tension between the two nations. When the news that war had been declared between the United States and Great Britain in 1812 reached them, Bates along with six other Americans on the British warship

Swiftshore [sic] declared their refusal to fight against their own nation and formally requested to be treated as prisoners of war.

Eventually, Bates was among 700 Americans held in Dartmoor Prison, a massive and dreary maximum-security fortress near Plymouth, England. After the Treaty of Ghent ended the war, Bates finally arrived back in Fairhaven five months later on April 27, 1815, following five years of incarceration and more than six years away from home.⁸

From Common Sailor to Ship's Captain

At age 23, Bates was a survivor—still intact after eight years of high adventure interspersed with hardship and deprivation, but with little else to show for it. Yet rather than quit the sea, he determined to make a financial success as a mariner. During what biographer Godfrey T. Anderson calls the “acquisitive years” (1815-1827), Bates rose in rank to second mate, then chief mate, and then to ship's captain in 1821.⁹

At age 25 Joseph married 24-year-old Prudence M. Nye (1793-1870), daughter of Captain Obed Nye, Jr. (1750-1796) and Mary Marshall Nye (1767-1852), in Fairhaven on February 15, 1818.¹⁰ Despite his extended absences at sea and later as an itinerant evangelist, “Prudy,” as he called her, would remain his “beloved companion” for 52 years.¹¹ Their first son, Anson Augustus (1819-1821), lived only 20 months. Their eldest daughter, Helen (1823-1902), was 16 months old when Bates saw her for the first time after a lengthy marine expedition. After another daughter, Eliza Parker (1824-1914), Joseph and Prudy had a son, Joseph (1830-1865). Their youngest child was Mary Nye (1832-1915).¹²

Bates made two more voyages to Europe following his marriage, but for the most part his destinations shifted to the Western Hemisphere—the West Indies and South America, in particular Brazil, Argentina, and Peru. These voyages had their share of danger and excitement,¹³ but moral and religious concerns become more prevalent in this section of his *Autobiography*. As a young mariner, Bates had witnessed firsthand the “debasement” caused by liquor. He gave up “spirituous liquors” in 1821, followed by wine in 1822, then “ale, porter, beer, cider” and “any liquor that would intoxicate” in 1824, and the “filthy weed, tobacco” along the way. “From the ruinous habits of a common sailor, by the help of the Lord, I walked out into the ranks of sober, industrious, discerning men,” he later wrote. He continued on that path to becoming “joint owner, in the vessel and cargo which I commanded, with unrestricted commission to go where I thought best.”¹⁴

Christian Experience

Bates was raised in a devout home and, as he moved into adulthood, dedicated himself to personal rectitude. In addition to his temperance disciplines, he renounced swearing and committed to reading his Bible on Sundays. But he had no experience of inner transformation, and no sense of “peace and pardon.”¹⁵ With the death of one

of his sailors aboard ship in 1824, Bates underwent a spiritual crisis when it fell on him to preside over the Christian burial service. He found resolution by surrendering his will and consecrating his all in a “covenant with God,” signed and dated October 4, 1824.¹⁶ Still, though, he lacked assurance that God had forgiven him until, at a revival meeting in New Bedford in 1827, realization of “the simple manner in which God graciously condescends to pardon the guilty sinner” broke through and he experienced the longed-for peace about his acceptance with God.¹⁷

Bates could now testify to a standard evangelical conversion, but his Christianity would be far from conformist. Rather than join the Congregationalist Church of his father, Bates opted to join the Christian Church in Fairhaven, through baptism by immersion in the spring of 1827. The congregation was part of the Christian Connection—one among a variety of restorationist groups or movements in nineteenth-century America. Believing that the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century and the denominations it spawned had stopped short of the biblical ideal, the Christian Connection sought fully to restore the “primitive” or New Testament church.¹⁸ Accordingly, as Bates put it, “They took the Scriptures for their only rule of faith and practice, renouncing all creeds.” Thus, he agreed with their rejection of both the doctrine of the Trinity as defined in historic church creeds and the practice of infant baptism as he felt both lacked clear support in the New Testament.¹⁹

Radical Reformer (1827-1839)

Though he still had one more voyage ahead, Bates’ career as a social reformer also began in 1827 with the organization of the Fairhaven Temperance Society. Temperance was at the forefront of an era of “universal reform” in which idealistic Americans organized to end slavery, drunkenness, poverty, war, oppression of women, and all manner of systemic evils. The “liberationist’ impulse to free individuals from corrupt customs and coercive institutions,” noted by historian Steven Mintz as one influence driving the wave of reform, helps bring Bates’ agenda into focus.²⁰

Wanting others to gain the freedom from “corrupt custom” that he had found, Bates, on the day of his baptism in 1827, asked the minister who baptized him for help in organizing a temperance society. Ironically, the Christian Connection minister declined but the pastor of the Congregationalist church that Bates had spurned agreed to cooperate with him in organizing the Fairhaven Temperance Society (FTS) along with a dozen charter members, most of them sea captains.²¹

The first national temperance organization, the American Temperance Society (ATS), had formed in February 1826, calling for a commitment that went beyond conventional counsels of moderate use—a pledge of total abstinence from hard liquor.²² The FTS, however, took things a step further, requiring abstinence not only from “ardent spirits” (hard liquor) but from “all intoxicating drinks,” as Bates had done personally in 1824. This became known as the “teetotal” pledge, something the ATS did not adopt until 1836.²³ Here is early evidence of

Bates as a man at the radical, cutting edge of reform causes. He was not inclined to compromise, moderation, or gradualism. Instead, he gravitated toward “ultraism”—the pure, absolute ideal.

In preparation for a voyage to South America on the *Empress* in August 1827, Captain Bates set forth a set of rules that imposed a strict teetotal regime on the crew. Other rules included no swearing and no washing of clothes or shore leaves on Sunday, as had been typically allowed. Though a few instances of drinking on shore drew his reprimand, Bates judged his radical experiment in reforming the behavior of sailors an overall success. More than that, it apparently inspired others to do likewise. The *Sailors' Magazine and Naval Journal* reported that 40 ships sailed from New Bedford in 1830 without distilled liquor (except for medicinal use) and another 75 did so in 1831, suggesting that Bates' “temperance ship” innovation had significant influence in extending the temperance movement to sailors.²⁴

After arriving back in New Bedford in June 1828, Bates retired from the sea, 21 years after his first voyage to Europe. At age 36, Joseph had achieved the financial goal he had set for himself, amassing a “competency” of \$12,000, equivalent to 20 years of annual salary. He occupied himself with managing the small farm he inherited from his parents, engaging in real estate transactions, and supervising maintenance of the New Bedford toll bridge, a drawbridge in which he had a share of ownership.²⁵ These activities left him with sufficient time to pursue his intensifying passion for Christian revival and its outworking in social reform.²⁶

Bates took satisfaction from a report in 1831 that the number of temperance societies organized in the United States had grown to 3,000 with 300,000 members, a progression that he traced to “our small beginning in Fairhaven” in 1827.²⁷ With some associates he organized the Fairhaven Seaman's Friend Society to help meet the needs of sailors. He became interested in foreign missions and participated in the work of the American Tract Society, circulating many of its tracts on “religious subjects and temperance reform.” He was also favorably impressed by the American Colonization Society (ACS) and its program for ending American slavery: gradual emancipation of the enslaved and their deportation to colonies formed in Africa.²⁸

A Stand with the Oppressed

Things changed for Bates, and for the nation, after William Lloyd Garrison of Boston in 1831 launched the *Liberator*, “a militant abolitionist newspaper that was the country's first publication to demand an immediate end to slavery.”²⁹ Like earlier Black abolitionists, Garrison contended that the gradualism of the colonization scheme was a cover for perpetuating slavery and its program for removal to Africa a danger to the nation's free Black citizens. Organizations such as the American Anti-Slavery Society (1833) formed to spread the demand for repentance from the sin of slavery and immediate action toward dismantling the system.

As he followed the unfolding events, Bates became disgusted with the ACS and with the American Tract Society for its spinelessness in refusing to throw its considerable influence, as a major interdenominational Protestant agency, against the slave system. His *Autobiography* recounts the violent backlash that defenders of the status

quo unleashed on the abolitionists in the early 1830s. Bates wrote that “antislavery advocates were maltreated and mobbed in many places where they attempted to organize or hold meetings” and that supporters of colonization “were foremost in this shameful work.” A mob dragged Garrison through the streets of Boston with a rope and nearly lynched him in 1835.³⁰

Regarding Garrison, the “notorious abolitionist,” Bates sought the perspective of Boston minister and reformer, Joshua V. Himes, with whom he had become associated in the Christian Connection. In response, Himes stated his belief that Garrison’s confrontational rhetoric was largely justified in order to expose the evil of the slave system. “Let us resolve, my brother, to support Mr. G.,” Himes urged, even though he was being labeled “an incendiary and a mad man.”³¹ All of this left Bates with a decision:

I then began to feel the importance of taking a decided stand on the side of the oppressed. My labor in the cause of temperance had caused a pretty thorough sifting of my friends, and I felt that I had no more that I wished to part with; but duty was clear that I could not be a consistent Christian if I stood on the side of the oppressor, for God was not there. Neither could I claim his promises if I stood on neutral ground. Hence, my only alternative was to plead for the slave, and thus I decided.³²

Once again going for radical rather than moderate reform, Bates was one of the approximately 40 individuals who, on April 23, 1835, formed the Fairhaven Anti-Slavery Society (FASS) as an auxiliary of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (MASS), pledged both to the “total and immediate abolition” of slavery and to equal rights for “people of color.”³³

In his *Autobiography*, Bates wrote that “opposition was more clearly manifest in the North” than in the South. He experienced this opposition directly when the FASS, meeting in August 1835, “drew down the wrath of a certain class of our neighbors.”³⁴ Announcements from “the several pulpits in town” mobilized the opposition, leading to denouncement of the FASS for agitation that threatened “to disturb the tranquility of our village.”³⁵ Despite threats that their meetings would be “broken up,” wrote Bates, the FASS was able to continue its activities.³⁶

Bates also supported other radical commitments, including women’s rights and nonresistance.³⁷ In 1837, the Bristol County Anti-Slavery Society, of which Bates was not only a member but an elected officer, defended the right of women, then under attack from Northern white men, to express a political voice through petitions to Congress.³⁸

Second Advent Advocate (1839-1844)

In the fall of 1839, Bates agreed to attend a lecture in New Bedford on the second coming of Christ by a Christian Connection minister, whom he identified only as Elder R. At first deeply skeptical that anything about the timing of Christ’s return could be shown from the Bible, Bates left the meeting with an emerging conviction that he had been wrong. Reading a compilation of lectures by Baptist revivalist William Miller convinced Bates

that time periods in the prophecies of Daniel indeed constituted, as stated by the book's title, *Evidence From Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, About the Year 1843*³⁹ Bates was all-in for the most "ultra" reform imaginable—the complete eradication of injustice, oppression, and evil, replaced by a new world of peace, righteousness, and joy under the direct, personal reign of Christ Himself.

Bates' commitment to the Second Advent message coincided with the momentous shift wrought by the involvement of his long-time friend and trusted collaborator in radical reform, Joshua V. Himes. With his work as organizer, promoter, and publisher, Himes turned the regional stirrings produced by Miller's preaching into a national mass movement.⁴⁰

Bates devoted his resources and stature as a widely known, respected reformer and Christian Connection lay leader to the Second Advent cause. He also took leadership roles in the series of conferences crucial in bringing cohesiveness to the movement. Though Bates was not in the top tier of influential Millerites, he was a "very able speaker and writer, who was very useful in the cause of Christ" according to Isaac C. Wellcome in his *History of the Second Advent Movement*⁴¹ Bates would be the only figure with any degree of prominence in Millerism who would go on to leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist movement.

With William Miller, Joshua Himes, Josiah Litch, and others, Joseph Bates was one of 16 signatories to a call published in *Signs of the Times* summoning those "looking for the advent near" to a general conference in Boston to begin October 14, 1840.⁴² He and his wife Prudy attended the conference together. Bates was kept busy as a member of the committee on arrangements and the business committee.⁴³ Bates noted that the conference concluded with a communion service in which "the Lord's supper was administered to about two hundred communicants of different denominations," emblematic of a unity that transcended the differences in belief and practice that had long divided Protestants. With the singing of the closing hymn, the "Spirit of the Lord . . . seemed to vibrate and move the whole congregation."⁴⁴

William Miller's inability to attend the conference had been a disappointment, but Bates arranged another opportunity to hear him in person five months later, scheduling him for a brief series of lectures at the Washington Street Church in Fairhaven, March 15-18, 1841. The meetings attracted crowds too large for the meeting house to accommodate, and Bates found Miller's preaching to be "deeply interesting, and very far in advance of his written lectures."⁴⁵

At the second general conference held in Lowell, Massachusetts, June 13-17, 1841, Bates served as an assistant chairman.⁴⁶ A highlight of this conference was Josiah Litch's message about recently received news from Europe that corroborated the prediction he made in 1838, based on Revelation 9, that the Ottoman Empire would fall on August 11, 1840. For Bates, and the movement generally, this seemed a powerful validation that the prophetic time periods in Daniel and Revelation revealed historical developments in advance.⁴⁷

Adventist and Activist

Bates' high level of involvement in the Second Advent movement did not cause a decrease in his activism for social reform. In fact, Bates' antislavery work increased for a time, as demonstrated by historian Kevin Burton. Around the time that Bates became a Millerite in the fall of 1839, he was elected president of the Fairhaven Anti-Slavery Society. He quickly initiated petition drives as a means by which the citizens of Fairhaven could make their antislavery views known to the Massachusetts state legislature and the United States Congress. In this respect, at least, he surpassed previous FASS presidents, who had not engaged in this form of activism.⁴⁸

During 1840, Bates petitioned for eradication of the "gag laws" that forbade discussion of slavery in Congress. His radicality became especially evident in proposals that went much further toward racial equality than even many abolitionists were prepared to go. One petition, for example, called for elimination of New England racial segregation laws, and another for the repeal of a Massachusetts law prohibiting interracial marriage.⁴⁹

As controversy over slavery began to hit American churches with full force in the 1840s, Bates led his Washington Street Christian Church in putting on record "a decided testimony against this system of iniquity." In resolutions published in the *Liberator* during the summer of 1841, his church declared that it could not "receive to our fellowship, as a christian or christian minister, a slaveholder, or an apologist for slavery."⁵⁰

The priority he gave the Second Advent cause did, in time, divide Bates both from his fellow congregants and his associates in social reform. A general conference held in Boston in May 1842, with Bates in the chair this time, reflected and sharpened the emerging lines of distinction. Although some of the movement's leaders disagreed, the conference endorsed more definite proclamation of 1843 as the year when Christ would return (heretofore Miller had generally said "about the year 1843"). To spread the message more effectively, the conference also voted to fund publication of a portable chart developed by Charles Fitch and Apollos Hale that could be used in any setting as a visual aid to help explain the time periods in scriptural prophecy, and recommended that camp meetings be held to draw a broader audience.⁵¹

At Bates' own Washington Street Christian Church, where Miller's preaching had been well received in 1841, resistance now arose from a portion of the congregation to Bates' preoccupation with the second coming of Christ and insistence on the time. After the election of a pastor unfavorable to their cause, members who shared Bates' Millerite convictions began to withdraw from the church, though he was reluctant to do so. As a principal founder, donor, and lay leader, he had dedicated himself and his resources unreservedly to "build up and sustain a free church, who took the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice." But after agonizing for a few weeks, he too, cut his ties to the church, a move that ended up in substantial financial loss of funds loaned to build the meeting house in 1831.⁵²

In his *Autobiography*, between descriptions of the break with his local church and the May 1842 general conference, Bates tells of inquiries from his "good friends engaged in the temperance and abolition cause" as to why he was not attending their meetings as he had before. His questioning friends also told him they thought that his belief about Christ's return should make him "more ardent" for reform rather than lessening his

involvement.

My reply was, that in embracing the doctrine of the second coming of the Saviour, I found enough to engage my whole time in getting ready for such an event, and aiding others to do the same, and that all who embraced this doctrine would and must necessarily be advocates of temperance and the abolition of slavery; and those who opposed the doctrine of the second advent could not be very effective laborers in moral reform. And further, I could not see duty in leaving such a great work to labor single-handed as we had done, when so much more could be accomplished in working at the fountainhead, and make us every way right as we should be for the coming of the Lord.⁵³

The difference, then, between Bates and fellow social reformers who were not convinced by Miller's message was not over the goals or value of the movements for righteous social change, nor the Christian mandate for involvement in them. It was over the method or mode of action most efficacious at that given moment—the all-encompassing, transformative power of preparation for the imminent return of Christ (“the fountainhead”) or piece-meal work on individual causes.

Like thousands of other Millerites, Bates became caught up in the spiritual momentum of the large camp meetings that began in the second half of 1842, such as that held at Taunton, Massachusetts, in September. The preaching, led by Josiah Litch, “was so clear, and accompanied with so much power of the Holy Spirit, that it seemed like a sin to doubt,” Bates wrote. At a Sunday meeting, its attendance estimated at 10,000, “animated singing of the new Second-advent hymns, accompanied by the Spirit of the living God, sent such thrills through the camp, that many were shouting aloud for joy.” At Salem, Massachusetts, the following month, the Millerite “big tent,” its capacity estimated as high as 7,000, could not accommodate the crowds. To serve the overflow, the Fitch-Hale “43-chart” was fastened to trees around the encampment, with ministers designated to explain the prophecies to the groups that gathered around.⁵⁴

Expectation now centered on March 21, 1844, the date that, Miller contended, marked the close of 1843 on the Jewish calendar. Bates, having already devoted his entire savings to the Second Advent cause, now did the same with his remaining assets in early 1844. He sold his home for \$4,500 along with other real estate holdings, paid all his debts, and gave the rest to support efforts, including his own, to spread the message in the time that remained.⁵⁵

Freedom Mission to Maryland

Having given up all his wealth, Bates put his life on the line by selecting, for his preaching mission, what in all likelihood was the most dangerous option available to him. The Millerite movement had remained a largely northern phenomenon, its Yankee origins and close identification with abolitionism making work in the South perilous. In early 1844, though, with only about two months remaining until the anticipated end, Millerite

leaders ventured below (albeit not far below) the Mason-Dixon line to give the final warning. Miller, along with Himes and Litch, held meetings in Washington, D.C., February 20-March 2, and Baltimore, March 3-8.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, Bates ventured to the Eastern Shore of Maryland in mid-February, accompanied by Heman S. Gurney, a blacksmith and skillful singer.⁵⁷ At their first stop, Kent Island, they faced resistance driven by concern about “the danger of preaching the doctrine of Christ’s second coming among the slaves.” When threatened with a ride out of town on a rail, Bates won the crowd over by responding, “If you will put a saddle on it, we would rather ride than walk.” A serious resolve backed the witty remark. Bates continued:

You must not think that we have come six hundred miles through the ice and snow, at our own expense, to give you the Midnight Cry, without first sitting down and counting the cost. And now, if the Lord has no more for us to do, we had as lief lie at the bottom of the Chesapeake Bay as anywhere else until the Lord comes. But if he has any more work for us to do, you can’t touch us!⁵⁸

Bates’ retort was reported to the *Baltimore Patriot*, and published with the editorial comment, “The crush of matter and the wreck of worlds would be nothing to such men.”⁵⁹

At Centerville, where they held meetings for three days, Judge Hopper, a leading citizen who enslaved a large number of persons, said to Bates, “[Y]ou are an abolitionist and have come here to get away our slaves.” Bates replied: “Yes, judge, I am an abolitionist, and have come to get your slaves, and you too! As to getting your slaves from you, we have no such intention; . . . We teach that Christ is coming, and we want you all saved.”⁶⁰ This was not a general statement of Adventist indifference to societal conditions in view of the second coming. Rather, Bates was engaged in an all-out final endeavor to help the enslaved and the enslavers be ready to meet their Maker within about one month’s time.

In a pattern running through Bates’ anecdotes about his Maryland mission, the initial skepticism and hostility of community leaders and white audiences is replaced either by acceptance, near acceptance, or at least respectful interest. The Black listeners, by contrast, were receptive to Bates’ message from the start. In the Bates-Gurney duo’s next-to-last stop, Black slaves filled the gallery of an academy at a place called The Three Corners. Bates observed, “They listened with marked attention. Anything that would work deliverance from perpetual bondage was good news to them.”⁶¹

The Midnight Cry

It was in narrating his mission to Maryland that Bates first presented himself as a preacher or evangelistic lecturer. He continued in that role after the Millerite movement experienced its first “disappointment.” The passing of March 21, 1844, without Christ returning, caused “deep trial and anguish,” Bates wrote. However, Second Advent believers soon concluded that they were in “the tarrying time” spoken of in Habakkuk 2:2-3, and thus needed to persist in faith until receiving further, clarifying light.⁶²

“New light” broke into a camp meeting held in Exeter, New Hampshire, in August 1844, where Bates, while lecturing on familiar points, was interrupted from the audience by Mrs. John Couch, who believed the encampment needed to hear a fresh word from her brother-in-law, Samuel S. Snow of Connecticut. Snow indeed electrified the encampment by declaring that Christ would return in two months on October 22, 1844.⁶³ William Miller had drawn on the prophecy, “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (Daniel 8:14, KJV), to identify the *year* in which Christ would return and cleanse the earth of evil. Snow now asserted that the *day* of that occurrence would have to be the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)—the “tenth day of the seventh month”—the day in the Hebrew worship calendar on which the sanctuary was cleansed with a solemn ritual (Leviticus 16).⁶⁴

Snow’s “seventh-month” message was also called “the midnight cry,” drawn from Christ’s parable about “ten virgins” in a wedding party awaiting the delayed arrival of the bridegroom. At midnight the announcement is made “Behold the bridegroom cometh,” and those who are prepared enter the wedding feast with him (Matthew 25:1-13). After the Exeter camp meeting, the seventh-month message swept the land “with the velocity of a tornado,” according to the *Advent Herald*.⁶⁵ The top Millerite leaders were initially skeptical, resistant to endorsing a specific day. But by early October 1844, both Miller and Himes accepted the seventh-month message and intense anticipation focused on October 22 as the day when Christ would appear in glory.

Bates was unreserved in his conviction about the seventh-month message and exhilarated by the outpouring of spiritual blessing that attended the movement that proclaimed it. Yet, along with the joyful anticipation of October 22, he and Prudy must have been deeply pained on October 21 when their only surviving son, Joseph, Jr., went to sea as a crew member on a whaler, the *Marcus*. Joseph was 14 years old, a year younger than his father had been when he did the same thing in 1807. It was a demonstration of disbelief, possibly calculated defiance, of all that his father stood for.⁶⁶

“Hope sank and courage died,” wrote Bates in describing the shattering emotional blow that he and like-minded believers suffered when their expectations for Christ’s return on October 22, 1844, proved untrue.⁶⁷ Previously a respected, moderately wealthy citizen and community leader, Bates found himself impoverished and discredited, ridiculed by boys in the street, and unable to understand how his beliefs had gone wrong.⁶⁸

Prophetic Pamphleteer (1845-1849)

Hope began to rise once again for Joseph Bates in 1845, with new conviction that resurrected his courage. As devastating as it was, the October 1844 disappointment did not destroy his faith nor that of thousands of others in the Second Advent movement. It did, however, divide them. As they struggled to understand what had gone wrong and find a way forward, they reached differing conclusions, split into factions, and soon turned against each other.

As Bates put it, the main line of division that emerged in 1845 was between “the large majority” that “believed that the days had not ended” and a minority who “believed that the days had ended, and that duty would be made plain.”⁶⁹ In other words, most who continued in Second Advent faith believed that the passing of October 22, 1844, meant that scriptural prophecy had not been fulfilled on that date—it had simply been a mistake to specify it. On the other hand, the dissenters, Joseph Bates among them, insisted that the prophecy had been interpreted correctly and the blessing of God in the movement had been unmistakable. The 2,300-day period *had* ended on that date, but the prophesied “cleansing of the sanctuary” pointed to some occurrence other than the return of Christ to earth. Though his understanding of *how* would develop over time, conviction *that* biblical prophecy was fulfilled on October 22, 1844, would remain absolute for the remainder of Bates’ life.

The smaller sector was further divided into several camps, most of them ephemeral, except for the group that, during the years 1846 to 1849, would cohere around Bates and two much younger leaders, James White (1821-1881) and Ellen Harmon White (1827-1915). Among these, Bates was the first to propose new convictions concerning the “cleansing of the sanctuary” and the seventh-day Sabbath that unified this group and gave it a distinct identity amidst the various factions of Second Adventism. He also originated a rudimentary theology of history that invested these and related beliefs with an urgency of purpose, making for a dynamic movement that would eventually be organized as the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1860-1863).

As a theological innovator, Bates did not lay down authoritative dogma but instead initiated lines of ongoing pursuit of truth. As he put it in 1868, the “light” on prophecy and the Sabbath in the 1840s “was not one-tenth part as clear as it is at the present time.”⁷⁰ Through an intensive period of study, consultation, and conflict in the late 1840s, unity emerged around convictions that, if true, demanded widespread proclamation, yet contained an in-built resistance to rigidification as “fixed creed.”

The Shut Door and the Celestial City

Tracing Bates’ journey toward clearer light can be taxing and at times perplexing, but short cuts exact a toll in understanding. Bates accepted the adjusted interpretation of the wedding parable of Matthew 25 that Apollos Hale and Joseph Turner used in January 1845 to show that something of cosmic significance had occurred on October 22, 1844. The bridegroom had indeed come on that date in fulfillment of prophecy, but not to this earth. Instead, following the story line of the parable, he entered a heavenly marriage ceremony to receive his bride (the true church). This event was one and the same as the judgment scene described in Daniel 7 in which the “son of man” received the eternal kingdom from “the Ancient of Days.” Christ’s return to establish His kingdom on this earth could thus still be expected in very short order. Meanwhile the “shut door” that, in the parable, excluded the unprepared “foolish virgins” from entry into the wedding feast meant that opportunity for entering the eternal kingdom was over for those who had rejected the final warning message given in 1844.⁷¹

“Shut-Door” became the dominant label for the post-1844 sector of Adventism that Bates identified with, and he would spend the remainder of the 1840s pursuing and explicating the contested implications of this interpretation for the faithful minority. Taking this course set him at odds with his long-time friend Joshua V. Himes, with whom he had frequently collaborated. Himes was convinced that the Adventists should continue to proclaim the message of Christ’s soon return albeit without specifying dates. He also wanted to distance the movement from a variety of extremes exhibited by Shut-Door believers. Some of these believed that they had already entered the heavenly kingdom in a spiritualized sense and sought to demonstrate this by, for example, cessation of work, disposal of property, and crawling as children. More generally, Shut-Door teaching was associated with ecstatic worship, visions, foot-washing, and the holy kiss. The latter two practices became particularly notorious when men and women engaged in them with each other in mixed groups.⁷²

Under Himes’ leadership, a conference held at Albany, New York, in April 1845, repudiated the Shut-Door teaching and its alleged extremes. The conference gave the majority of Second Adventists, including William Miller and his most influential associates, an identity and a loose network for cooperation in renewed proclamation of an “open door” to salvation through a soon-returning Savior. The Albany Adventists excluded and essentially disowned Shut-Door dissenters such as Bates, who had once enjoyed the respect and fellowship of Millerite leaders and held a measure of prominence in the movement. In response to the denunciations, Bates reaffirmed his conviction in a letter to the *Jubilee Standard*, published May 29, 1845: “I cannot help believing still that our position is right respecting the cry at midnight, and that we have been to the marriage and the door is shut—not half or three-quarters of the way—but effectually.”⁷³

Within a year, Bates would also find it necessary to differentiate his views from those in the Shut-Door camp who espoused a thoroughly spiritualized conception of the second advent of Christ. Enoch Jacobs, the Cincinnati-based editor of the *Day-Star*, had done just that in the spring of 1846, and joined a Shaker community. Because the *Day-Star* had become virtually the only periodical open to their views, this development left Shut-Door Adventists who believed the second coming would be literal without a publishing outlet.⁷⁴ Bates raised their standard in May 1846 with publication of *The Opening Heavens*, a 39-page pamphlet to “correct” those who asserted that Christ had “come in spirit” in 1844 and had given up belief that He would ever return visibly.⁷⁵ He had no reserves with which to pay a printer, but a fellow believer met the need by selling a rug she had just finished making.⁷⁶

Bates buttressed his scriptural case for the “third heaven” as the locale of a tangible heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, by describing astronomical marvels. He gave a particularly detailed description of the constellation Orion that he observed through his own telescope. The New Jerusalem, “the capital of our coming Lord’s everlasting kingdom,” Bates, concluded, “is now about to descend from the ‘third heaven,’ by way of the open door, down by the ‘flaming sword’ of Orion.”⁷⁷ Christ’s eternal reign would thus be established in a literal, physical manner “upon this renovated earth.”⁷⁸

Bates touched briefly on two other highly consequential points in *Opening Heavens*. First, he endorsed O. R. L. Crosier's lengthy exposition, published February 7, 1846, in the *Day-Star Extra*, to show that the 2,300-day prophecy pointed to the work of Christ in cleansing the sanctuary in heaven, not his return to earth, beginning October 22, 1844. Prior to that date, the mediation of Christ in heaven, represented by the daily ministry of priests in the Holy Place of the Hebrew sanctuary, had provided forgiveness to sinners. The Day of Atonement, in which the high priest alone entered the innermost, or Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, pointed to a final phase of Christ's ministry as high priest in heaven, begun October 22, 1844, to accomplish a final blotting out of sin.⁷⁹ Bates did not at this point delve deeply into Crosier's proposal but mentioned, without elaboration, that before their entry into the holy city, both "the saints" and the sanctuary itself would "be cleansed, not by fire, but by blood."⁸⁰

Second, Bates devoted a page to decrying the near universal regard in the Christian world for "the first day of the week" as the Sabbath, rather than the seventh day specified in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11). The switch, he charged, had been instituted by the medieval papacy, but now a return to God's commandment was required because only "they that do [God's] commandments" would be permitted to "enter in through the gates into the city" (the New Jerusalem), according to Revelation 22:14, King James Version.⁸¹

A Perpetual Sign

The Sabbath theme would swiftly become Bates' central preoccupation. Here was something, beyond holding on in faith, that Shut-Door believers must *do* to show that they were indeed part of the final, faithful remnant.

The Sabbath was a live issue in America's Protestant-dominated culture of the 1840s. Its observance on Sunday was widely regarded as a bulwark of a godly, moral society, marking the United States as a Christian nation. Promotion of legal backing for Sunday observance featured prominently on the agenda of evangelical social reformers such as Lyman Beecher and the Tappan brothers (Arthur and Lewis), with widespread support found in all the Protestant denominations.⁸² On the other hand, radical reformer William Lloyd Garrison antagonized such activists by conducting an Anti-Sabbath Convention in March 1848, seeking to "strike a blow for freedom of conscience" against the "spiritual tyranny" manifested by clergy-backed laws regulating behavior on Sundays.⁸³

Another radical reformer, Gerrit Smith, dissented from the Protestant majority by observing the seventh-day Sabbath. He was influenced by Seventh Day Baptists, evidence that their re-energized advocacy for the Sabbath in the 1840s was gaining a hearing in antebellum reform circles.⁸⁴ Some articles on the topic appeared in Millerite periodicals, although generally limited by the desire of editors to avoid an issue that could undermine unity on "the advent near."

Rigorous observance of the Sabbath (on Sundays) had been one of the reforms Bates instituted to govern life on his "temperance ship" in 1827.⁸⁵ Seventeen years later, in March 1845, a tract written by Thomas M. Preble, a Millerite who was pastor of a Freewill Baptist church in Nashua, New Hampshire, convinced Bates that he had

been observing the Sabbath on the wrong day. Preble had come out in favor of the seventh day through the influence of a fellow Millerite minister, Frederick Wheeler, located some 35 miles to the north in Washington, New Hampshire. Wheeler and members of his congregation, in turn, had been persuaded in 1844 under the witness of a Seventh Day Baptist, Rachel Oaks.⁸⁶

Bates' conviction deepened as a result of a brief trip to New Hampshire in April or May 1845, for consultation with Wheeler and other members of the first Second Advent congregation to also observe the seventh-day Sabbath. His radical zeal now fully engaged, Bates, as he walked across the bridge that linked New Bedford and Fairhaven on his return, was greeted by his friend James Madison Monroe Hall who asked, "What's the news Captain Bates?" Bates replied that "the news is that the seventh day is the Sabbath and we ought to keep it." Within two weeks, Hall and his wife would become Bates' first two converts on the Sabbath issue, and they were soon joined by his evangelistic partner, H. S. Gurney. A community of Advent believers who were "keeping [God's] commandments" as they waited in expectation for their coming king, formed in New Bedford/Fairhaven that summer.⁸⁷

As "an uncompromising advocate for present truth,"⁸⁸ Bates felt compelled by duty to get the Sabbath news out in the form of a 48-page booklet published in August 1846, well-summarized by its full 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*. In it, Bates interpreted the Sabbath in a new dimension, that of an apocalyptic theology of history.

In its broad sweep, his understanding of history drew from the Seventh Day Baptist witness, combined with the restorationism of the Christian Connection. The seventh-day Sabbath, originated at creation and enjoined by the fourth commandment of the Decalogue continued to be observed in the apostolic era. Controversies over "whether both days [the seventh and the first] should be kept or only one" originated in the second century. Then, beginning in the fourth century "the Imperial and Papal power of Rome" brought legal coercion to bear in favor of observing the first day. Not only had Protestants largely failed to rectify this medieval subversion of God's law, but Bates, following Preble, charged "one of the rigid puritans" with being the first to apply the word "Sabbath" to Sunday, thus putting a final touch on the great deception.⁸⁹

The seventh-day Sabbath—the perpetual sign of God's covenant with His people throughout the history of redemption—thus needed to be restored before the second advent of Christ. Bates' innovation was in seeing that restoration as the urgent, time-specific vocation of "the little flock" that continued to believe that prophecy had been fulfilled in October 1844. More than simply one among many biblical doctrines or injunctions, its observance was of decisive significance for those looking to enter "the holy city" about to descend from heaven.⁹⁰

The Opened Temple and Three Angels' Messages

In a second, revised edition, expanded to 64-pages and published in January 1847, just five months after the first, Bates elaborated on how two passages in Revelation disclosed the centrality of the Sabbath to “the closing up of the last message which God ever gave to man.”⁹¹ Bates understood these passages as predictive prophecy, that is, coded forecasts covering specific time frames, both of which were being fulfilled, or coming true, in a specific, univocal way in the Second Advent movement, in the years from 1840 onward.

The first, Revelation 11:14-19, came with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (simultaneously the time of the “third woe”): “And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament . . .” (v. 19, KJV). The tables of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments had been placed in the ark located in the Most Holy Place of the Hebrew sanctuary (Numbers 17:10, Hebrews 9:4). Thus, Bates concluded, the ark containing the Ten Commandments in the heavenly temple was being opened to view spiritually at the time marked by prophecy for the seventh trumpet/third woe. That is why, after being obscured for long centuries, it was only since 1840 that understanding of the seventh-day Sabbath in the fourth commandment was being restored. Thus, during these recent years “the spirit made an indelible impression to search the scriptures for the testimony of God” on the mind of Joseph Bates and others, resulting in the spread of “additional light from the Word on this important matter of present truth.”⁹²

Bates’ interpretation of a second passage, Revelation 14, made the action required and the consequences at stake more explicit:

Now the history of God’s people for the last seven years, or more, is described by John in Rev. xiv:6-13. An angel preaching the everlasting gospel at the hour of God’s judgment. This without any doubt represents all those who were preaching the second Advent doctrine since 1840. During this proclamation, there followed another angel, saying “Babylon is fallen, is fallen.” This angel was some of the same Advent lecturers, (for invisible angels dont [*sic*] preach to men.) And the third angel follows them, showing the curse that befell all such as “worship the beast or his image, or *receive his mark*,” . . .⁹³

Bates went on to point out two groups defined by the only two possible options in response to the third angel’s message: “One is keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus,” including the Sabbath commandment [Rev. 14:12]. “The other has the mark of the beast [Rev. 14:9-11],” which he identified as the Sunday-Sabbath set up in defiance of God’s commandments.⁹⁴

This exposition of the three angels’ messages gave the Shut-Door believers an understanding of the dramatic events that had transpired in the Second Advent movement, of where they now stood in the final outworking of history, and of the imperatives thus placed upon them. They must “*do and teach*” all of Jesus’ commandments, and, in view of the “war” to be visited upon the commandment-keeping remnant (Rev. 12:17), remain faithful through an intense time of trouble: “That there will yet be a mighty struggle about the restoring and keeping the seventh day Sabbath, that will test every living soul that enters the gates of the city, cannot be disputed,” Bates confidently concluded.⁹⁵

The Seventh Day Sabbath: A Perpetual Sign “anchored the Sabbatarian movement,” according to historian Merlin Burt.⁹⁶ Indeed, it exerted a formative influence on Seventh-day Adventism that has endured into the twenty-first century, most notably through an understanding of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 that has generated a distinct identity as a people with a distinctive, last-day message and a world-shaking mission. Or, put another way, it set forth an apocalyptic theology of history highlighting the seventh-day Sabbath as a sign of a complete loyalty to Jesus and resistance to coercive religious authority that can be traced through the past, must be sustained in the present, and will endure through a future, final conflict.

Way Marks and High Heaps

In another small book, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps*, published in April 1847, Bates set forth the three options that remained in play at this final, post-1844 stage of salvation history, now that the time for evangelistic work on behalf of the world at large was over: 1) “Nominal Adventist,” that is, the Albany Adventists who now repudiated “the Midnight Cry” of 1844 and rejected present truth regarding the Shut Door; 2) “Spiritualizers,” who had wrongly construed the post-1844 new light; and 3) “Keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus,” as demonstrated by acceptance of the restored truth about the seventh-day Sabbath. “One out of the three to be saved,” Bates starkly asserted.⁹⁷

Again in this instance, it is difficult to improve on the full title, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps, Or, A Connected View, of the Fulfilment of Prophecy, by God’s Peculiar People, From the year 1840-1847*, as a summary of Bates’ third major treatise. A donation from a woman who had just sold her home enabled him to pay for production of the 80-page work.⁹⁸ Bates identified ten familiar “way marks” of prophecy fulfillment, from the Second Advent proclamation beginning in 1840 through the critical events of 1844 and the subsequent Shut-Door experience.

Way Marks highlights continuity between the radical abolitionist Bates and the Shut-Door Adventist Bates, despite the often dense and difficult scriptural expositions of the latter. Bates lambasted the United States for a war of aggression against Mexico begun in 1846: “Then I suppose we shall begin to think (if not before) that the third wo has come upon this nation, this boasted land of liberty; this heaven-daring, soul-destroying, slave-holding, neighbor-murdering country!” He detailed the depredations suffered by Mexican civilians, including women and children, and the resultant state of anarchy, and then caustically exposed the preeminent cause of it all:

Why out of about 7,000,000 of slaves in the Christian world, we of this continent can boast about 6,000,000 of them. Our neighbors, the Mexicans, undertook some years ago to obey God by breaking the yoke of their slaves. This was too much for the most enlightened nation under the sun to bear. So a revolt ensued, and finally we took part of their territory from them: from hence has come this havoc and murder.⁹⁹

Joseph, James, and Ellen

Reading *The Seventh Day Sabbath: A Perpetual Sign* convinced Ellen Harmon White and James White to begin observing the seventh day Sabbath in the autumn of 1846, not long after their marriage in August. Ellen, born November 26, 1827, near Portland, Maine, had begun attracting attention in New England Millerite circles in 1845 for the visions she experienced, often in public.¹⁰⁰ James, born August 4, 1821, in Palmyra, Maine, had taught school before taking up Second Advent lecturing in 1842.¹⁰¹

Prior to their marriage, the Whites had heard Bates speak about the Sabbath, and while not rejecting his arguments for the seventh day, believed he was placing undue importance on the subject. For his part, Joseph, was ambivalent about Ellen's visions, having observed her experience them on a number of occasions. He did not find anything contrary to the Word of God in what she claimed had been revealed to her, but Bates was for a time unconvinced that the prostration and trance-like state she entered "was anything more than what was produced by a protracted debilitated state of her body."¹⁰²

Bates acknowledged that initially he had been a "doubting Thomas" with regard to Ellen's visions.¹⁰³ The rational basis that he sought for their authenticity did not come until November 1846 at a meeting in Topsham, Maine, where he listened to her narrate what she was seeing in vision. Though incidental to the message of the vision, she described the features of planets and their moons with a detailed accuracy that amazed him, and he found entirely credible her assurance that she had never studied these matters.¹⁰⁴

In April 1847 he affirmed that the visions were indeed from God: "I can now speak confidently for myself. I believe the work is of God, and is given to comfort and strengthen his 'scattered,' 'torn,' and 'peeled people,' since the closing up of our work for the world in October, 1844." And, he acknowledged that he personally had "received light and instruction on many passages that I could not before clearly distinguish" through the gift of the teen-aged prophet.¹⁰⁵

By early 1847, then, Joseph Bates, James White, and Ellen White, shared the following convictions: 1) the perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath; 2) the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 as prophetic illumination of the Second Advent movement, pointing to the Sabbath commandment as a final test of loyalty to Christ; 3) October 22, 1844, as the beginning of the Day of Atonement phase of Christ's high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary; 4) Ellen's visions as an authentic manifestation of the gift of prophecy; and 5) their calling to make known the final warning message. These shared convictions led to a collaboration from which Seventh-day Adventism would emerge.

In May 1847 James White compiled and published their first collaborative project, a 24-page pamphlet entitled *A Word to the "Little Flock."* Its contents had been intended for the *Day-Dawn*, published at Canandaigua, New York, by O. R. L. Crosier, the only Second Advent paper open to advocates of the seventh-day Sabbath. But Crosier had stopped publishing it in April 1847, so White, with the help of a donation from H. E. Gurney, published the

material independently.¹⁰⁶

The aforementioned "Remarks" endorsing Ellen White's visions, initially given limited circulation as a "broadside" (single sheet), constituted Bates' only contribution to the pamphlet as an author. In their contributions, the Whites' elaborated upon and adjusted key points drawn from the January 1847 edition of Bates' *The Seventh Day Sabbath: A Perpetual Sign*. Of greatest long-term importance was James White's brief exposition on the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. In his seminal proposal, Bates included in the third angel's message only the dire warning against receiving the mark of the beast given in verses 9-11, and did not mark a clear chronological distinction between the time of its fulfillment and that of the second angel's message. Both angels seem to have "gone forth" in 1844. White, on the other hand, included verse 12, pointing to "they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus," thereby placing the call for restoration of the Sabbath commandment within the third angel's message and clarifying the chronological sequencing of all three messages. It was only after accepting the Second Advent proclamation (first angel), and then breaking free from the resistant churches of "Babylon" (second angel) that believers were in a position to receive the third and final message of Sabbath reform that came after October 1844. All this made clear a divine purpose at work in the perplexities and disappointments of the movement's past and a mandate for the present: "we live in the time of the third angel's message."¹⁰⁷ Bates soon came into agreement with White's reinterpretation.¹⁰⁸

In a letter to Bates dated April 7, 1847, also included in *Word to the "Little Flock,"* Ellen White described a vision that gave striking visualization to the Sabbath significance Bates had seen in connection with the ark of the covenant being opened to view in the heavenly temple (Rev. 11:19). She saw the ark in the "Holiest" of the temple, and Jesus himself open the folded tablets containing the Ten Commandments. When he did so "the fourth (the Sabbath commandment,) shone above them all" and a "halo of glory was all around it."¹⁰⁹

Ellen's vision also elaborated on what Bates had written about the restoration of the Sabbath bringing about a final "mighty conflict" that would be a testing experience for those on the cusp of entry into the holy city. "I saw that the holy Sabbath is, and will be, the separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers," she wrote. In somewhat broader terms than Bates, she wrote of a mission that must take place before the separation was final. This would be to reach God's children who, though not Sabbath keepers, "had not rejected the light on it." They would do so when believers "proclaimed the Sabbath more fully."¹¹⁰

Vindication

Bates' fourth book, *A Vindication of the Seventh-Day Sabbath*, published in January 1848, was, at 116 pages, his longest yet. He undertook the task at a time when his cash in hand was down to a "York shilling." Bates had long-since expended his fortune in support of the Advent movement and other reforms, but apparently he had never revealed to his wife the full reality of their precarious financial status until now, when he used the shilling to acquire only a meager portion of the new supply of baking flour and other essentials she requested. When

Prudy asked what he was going to do so they would have something to live on, Joseph replied that he was going to write a book on the Sabbath, and assured her, "The Lord is going to open a way." Prudy, herself not yet a believer in Joseph's seventh-day message, left the room in tears. Soon afterwards, Bates went to the post office where an unexpected donation of \$10 awaited him, \$4 of which he used to have a barrel of flour, along with potatoes, sugar, and more sent to his home.¹¹¹

The story of faith providentially rewarded is a favorite of Adventist historical lore. Less emphasized is the fact that after 1844 Bates was always cash poor as an article of faith. He believed that "selling what they have, giving alms," was, along with seventh-day Sabbath observance, another practice marking the radical restoration of apostolic faith needed before Christ returns.¹¹² He believed it was appropriate to labor six days per week to meet immediate needs but thought that "God's people will be absolutely afraid to be found with a surplus treasure here, when Christ comes."¹¹³

Bates and the Whites succeeded in stirring discussion of the Sabbath issue in wider Second Adventist circles during 1847, but the *Bible Advocate* was the only one of the three Adventist periodicals then in publication to give the topic sustained attention. Joseph Turner who debated the issue with seventh-day proponent J.B. Cook in a series of articles, acknowledged Bates' impact, calling him one of the "most valiant champions for the Saturday Sabbath." But because he was in the Shut-Door camp, the *Bible Advocate* denied Bates a voice in the interchange.¹¹⁴

Going out on faith to finance production of yet another book was the only means Bates had for making that voice heard. *Vindication* was his heated response both to the exclusion itself and to attacks he saw as not only unfair but as part of the dragon's final attempt to destroy the remnant faithful to the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12). His purpose was "to expose these deceivers, who for the last five months more especially, have been bearing down upon the remnant in a paper war, with all the power they could wield."¹¹⁵

In the pages of *Vindication*, Bates entered the "paper war" with guns blazing on behalf of the Shut-Door remnant. *Vindication*, like *Perpetual Sign*, contains extensive biblical argumentation, but its tone reflects a heightened level of conflict, the language more acrimonious and emotionally charged. Bates was frustrated by the persistent refusal of the "nominal Adventists" to accept truth that he thought he had conclusively demonstrated "from the clear word." And he was fed up with being dismissed with such epithets as "'door shutters,' 'mystery folks,' 'Judaizers,' 'feet washers,' 'deluded fanatics,' etc., etc."¹¹⁶

The rhetoric against the Shut-Door believers included accusations about other practices, along with Sabbath reform, that had a socially radical edge. Bates disavowed the sexually scandalous elements associated with practitioners of foot-washing and the "holy kiss" in 1845, but saw these practices as part of the restoration of apostolic faithfulness to Jesus, and he refused to abandon them in conformity to pressure from the more socially respectable Albany Adventists. In *Perpetual Sign*, he upheld those who adhered to "the testimony of Jesus" by "selling what they have, giving alms . . . doing as their master told them to do, 'washing one another's

feet,' and as the apostles have taught, 'greet all the brethren with an holy kiss,' 'salute every saint in Christ Jesus.'"117 In *Vindication*, Bates published an open letter to William Miller that included a spirited reaffirmation of these controversial practices, as well as shouting "glory to God" in meetings.¹¹⁸

Ad hominem insinuations from both sides added rancor to the Sabbath dispute. One letter writer in the *Bible Advocate*, using the pseudonym Barnabas, unfairly associated Bates with excesses he had repudiated: "If a tree may be known by its fruits, we have a woeful tree here. First, *shut door*; next, *seventh-day Sabbath*, or the *bondage of the law*; next, Oh, it would be a shame to speak of things which are done of them in secret."¹¹⁹

For his part, Bates, in his refutation of Joseph Turner's arguments in favor of Sunday, alleged that Turner had used "mesmerism" in 1845, and then added a sarcastic innuendo about "what a loving drawing and wonderful effect this mesmerism produced on some of the dear sisters!"¹²⁰ Turner threatened legal action if Bates did not withdraw his statements, but did not follow through.¹²¹

In October 1848, J. B. Cook renounced the seventh-day Sabbatarian position that he had recently defended in the *Bible Advocate*. T. M. Preble had given up the seventh day in 1847 and O. R. L. Crosier did likewise earlier in 1848. The Sabbath line between Adventist factions had become more sharp, firm, and alienating than ever. Joseph Bates and James and Ellen White, all on the Shut-Door side, were now the only ones leading the call for Sabbath reform, with no one on the Albany Adventist side supporting the seventh day.¹²²

The Sealing Message and the Gathering Time

Bates and the Whites cooperated in a series of conferences and meetings beginning in 1848 to gather a people around their interlocking Sabbath and Shut-Door teachings. At least six were held in 1848 and several more in 1849 and 1850.¹²³ A conference at Dorchester, Massachusetts, in November 1848, was of distinctive importance for breakthroughs toward a fuller understanding of their message and how best to disseminate it.

Three months prior to this conference, Bates identified the Sabbath with the "seal of God" in Revelation 7:1-4, a connection that had been germinating in his mind since 1846.¹²⁴ In this passage, an "angel ascending from the east" with the "seal of the living God" instructs four other angels positioned at "the four corners of the earth" to continue restraining violent winds about to wreak havoc on the planet, "till we have sealed the servants of God in their foreheads." Though this insight was in continuity with the apocalyptic Sabbath theology that Bates had already formulated, it offered a fuller picture both of what needed to happen on earth before Christ returns, and of His work in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary begun on October 22, 1844.

Based on a vision she experienced at Dorchester on November 19, Ellen White both confirmed Bates' general understanding of the sealing and corrected his interpretation of a detail that seemed important at the time. Though all Sabbath-keeping Adventists understood themselves to be experiencing the outworking of the scriptural end-time prophecies, Bates' was exceptionally concrete and specific in making connections between

scriptural passages and current events. He believed that the post-1844 Shut-Door Adventists fulfilled the prophecy about the “angel ascending from the east” because their work had begun on the East coast and then started moving westward (in contrast to William Miller who began in western New York/Vermont and moved East). This interpretation “tried me much,” James White wrote, and after her Dorchester vision Ellen White convinced Bates to see the “ascending angel” as symbolic of the Sabbath sealing message itself emerging with increasing brightness and power.¹²⁵

Ellen White also encouraged Bates to write on the subject, and this he did, incorporating her corrective insight. For the third year in a row, he published a short book in January, this time the 72-page *A Seal of the Living God. A Hundred Forty-Four Thousand, of the Servants of God Being Sealed. In 1849* Also true to form, he had no funds on hand to pay for the printing. The need was met by a young widow who donated half the proceeds from the sale of a small house.¹²⁶

Bates did not get past the “Shut Door” entirely until 1852, but *Seal of the Living God* represented substantial movement beyond the restrictive aspects of the teaching. In this book, Bates more fully developed the pivotal insight he introduced in 1846, that while one door was shut in 1844, another had opened—to the innermost sanctum of the heavenly sanctuary. When Jesus ended his “ministration or work for the world” in 1844, Bates explained, the door to the temple of God in heaven “was opened for the first time . . . to introduce our great High Priest and King to his bride, and for him to present at the Father’s throne the whole Israel of God on his ‘breastplate of judgment,’ for remission, or blotting out of all their sins; but this cannot be accomplished until he has tried them, and humbled them, to prove them, to know what is in their hearts, whether they will keep his commandments or no.”¹²⁷

Bates equated the sealing with this proving or testing based on the Sabbath commandment, and showed its connection with Christ’s final work in the heavenly sanctuary, ongoing since October 22, 1844. Jesus stands beside the Ark “presenting on his breast plate the hundred and forty-four thousand now to be sealed with the seal of the living God. This is and has been the present truth for God’s Israel ever since the vail of the inner temple has been raised, or door open, *i. e.* since October 1844.”¹²⁸

Bates took 144,000 to be a literal number comprising all among those alive at Christ’s return who will be saved. It would include two classes of people: 1) All “advent believers” who love and keep covenant with God, “especially his Holy Sabbath”; and 2) those “who do not yet so well understand the advent doctrine,” but “will receive this covenant and Sabbath as soon as they hear it explained.”¹²⁹

Though from a later perspective 144,000 seems a quite limited number, it represented a dramatic expansion of mission for the Shut-Door Adventists, who then numbered in the few hundreds. Since they alone had the truth about the sealing, only they could be “sealing messengers” to explain the message to those in the second category so that the total of 144,000 sealed Sabbath-keepers could be reached.¹³⁰

Bates continued to hold that the door had been shut to those who rejected the Second Advent message culminating in 1844, but the sealing message entailed substantial modification of the belief that the era of evangelistic work for the world in general had closed in that year. In a previous and less detailed discussion of the topic in *Vindication*, Bates had stated that the “144,000 will be composed of all nations, particularly the poor ignorant, but honest hearted Slaves of this doomed country.”¹³¹ Then, in *Seal of the Living God*, he added his belief that “God is now giving dreams and visions to his scattered children, in many places, to prepare them for the coming scenes of the last coming conflict, the slaves of our own land, especially.”¹³²

Though he did not pull these threads of thought together in an explicit way, it remains the case that Joseph Bates, in 1849, summoned the Sabbatarian Adventists to a new vocation as sealing messengers that opened the door to mission for the world in a meaningful if modified sense. For the present, though, the main target remained Advent believers who had not yet accepted the Sabbath and sanctuary teachings entailed in the third angel's message.

Traveling Messenger (1849-1872)

With this initiative to take the sealing message to any who might hear, the Sabbatarians had entered what they called the “gathering time.” In this endeavor, Bates, as one historian put it, was the “great path breaker.”¹³³ Having introduced the key lines of thought that comprised the message, he now pioneered its spread as traveling messenger, going where no Sabbatarian Adventist yet had gone to talk with individuals, families, and small groups scattered throughout the northern United States. The two years from 1849 to 1851 were pivotal in establishing a viable base for a movement, with the number of believers in the network connected by Bates and the Whites increased from an estimated 200 to more than 2,500.¹³⁴

Since his retirement from the sea in 1827, Bates' travels in connection with the temperance, abolitionist, and Adventist movements had not taken him very far or very long from his home in Fairhaven. But his journey westward to Michigan in the summer of 1849 marked a new era of extended albeit land-based itineraries, described by historian Godfrey T. Anderson: “From this time on until his death he traveled almost continually near and far, with meager means, enduring hardships in order to preach the message he so fully believed and so deeply loved.” During these final decades of his life, according to Anderson's research, the proportion of Bates' time away from home was approximately the same as during his career as a mariner—75 percent.¹³⁵ With the 1849 trip Bates became the first to take the Sabbatarian Adventist message to Michigan and to “the West” (the Great Lakes area) more generally. It also marked the beginning of a series of conversions under Bates' influence over the next five years that would prove to be of enormous consequence for Seventh-day Adventist history.¹³⁶

In Jackson, Bates' first stop in Michigan, an inquiry at a boarding house about Adventists in the area led him to Dan Palmer, a blacksmith.¹³⁷ Palmer did not bother to pause when Bates introduced himself but Bates,

undaunted, launched into presentation of his message as the blacksmith continued his work. Finally convinced that Bates had something important to say, Palmer put down his tools, took Bates to his home, introduced him to others in the small Second Adventist congregation and invited him to meet with the whole group on Sunday. All accepted Bates' message in short order, resulting in formation of a seventh-day Sabbath-keeping Adventist congregation of 15 members, including Palmer and farmer Cyrenius Smith,¹³⁸ in August.¹³⁹

When he returned to Michigan in 1852, Bates stopped in Battle Creek, where, after asking at the post office for the name of the most honest man in town, was directed to David Hewitt.¹⁴⁰ After a day-long study that began at breakfast the next morning, Hewitt and his wife, Olive, accepted the third angel's message, and eventually a group of believers formed in the town. In Jackson, Bates conducted public meetings that led to the conversion of Merritt E. Cornell, an "Age to Come" Adventist preacher who then became one of the most effective early Seventh-day Adventist tent evangelists.¹⁴¹ John P. Kellogg and Henry T. Lyon¹⁴² were among the others who joined the Sabbatarian movement during this visit. They, along with Palmer and Smith, were enterprising men of means who financed the transfer of the movement's publishing office to Battle Creek in 1855, and supported the cause in other critical ways during its earliest years. Battle Creek would become the Seventh-day Adventist center of gravity for the remainder of the nineteenth century.¹⁴³ Other early converts won by Bates' traveling evangelism who cast a wide influence included Uriah Smith, Stephen N. Haskell,¹⁴⁴ and Ezra Pitt Butler, whose son George I. Butler would become an influential church leader and General Conference president.¹⁴⁵

Along with illustrating his influence, these compressed examples give glimpses of Bates' evangelistic abilities and method. Though the public preaching series would eventually become a prominent feature of his ministry, it was not during the early years prior to 1855. Mainly, Bates, using his Bible and where possible, his prophetic chart, talked—often at length!—to individuals, families, and small groups to whom he was led in various ways—recommendations, requests, names and addresses conveniently given in Second Adventist papers such as the *Advent Harbinger*, and in some instances, dreams. Sometimes he would draw a crowd by launching into his message, with his prophetic chart on display, in a public venue such as a train station or deck of a boat. Sometimes his talks led to larger group meetings, although these were usually held in homes or schoolhouses, leading to establishment or strengthening of small congregations.¹⁴⁶

God specially endowed Bates with a "gift to talk the Word," Ellen White observed in September 1850: "None had a gift like his. He could talk to a small company when there was not more than two present, as well as to a large company."¹⁴⁷

No one is likely to have listened to Joseph talk about the Sabbath as much as Prudence Bates. It seems a testament to her strength of character that for five years she neither yielded without honest conviction, nor did she close her mind to the evidence, despite the economic insecurity caused by her husband's risky publishing ventures. In 1850, though, Prudy became one of the "gathered," making her own commitment to the "present truth" that her husband pioneered. "I love the Holy Sabbath better and better," she testified a year later.¹⁴⁸

Leadership Crisis

Paradoxically, amidst the success of the gathering time, a leadership conflict threatened to divide the nascent Sabbatarian movement. Conflict between Joseph Bates and James White probably was inevitable. Both were independent-thinking dissenters, leaders among men, iron-willed, driven by the sacred mandate of absolute conviction, and skilled in persuasive rhetoric.

The two leaders differed on several points of biblical interpretation, some of them important, but these would be reconciled without much long-term damage after a more critical dispute over publishing strategy was addressed. Ellen White's prophetic gift, perhaps more than any other factor, would serve to hold the founding trio together, but that was neither a magical nor necessarily smooth solution. Indeed, the publishing conflict emerged out of differing understandings of the vision she experienced at the Dorchester, Massachusetts, conference on November 19, 1848.

Joseph and James both understood the vision as a mandate to publish but differed on publication format and strategy. Bates thought it meant another pamphlet or small book. At the time of the conference, Ellen had admonished him to publish his treatise on the sealing message and he may well have considered that if his *Seal of the Living God* accomplished its purpose, there would be no further need for publications as the sealing would be completed rapidly. For James White, the vision called for publication of a periodical. At some point after the vision ended, apparently in a private conversation, Ellen told him that he should "print a little paper" that would eventually "be like streams of light that went clear round the world." Accordingly, James began, somewhat tentatively, publishing *Present Truth* in July 1849 as a pamphlet but issued in monthly installments as a periodical.¹⁴⁹

Bates thought that publishing a regular paper was a serious error, a move toward the backslidden, Laodicean condition of the "nominal Adventists" who continued publishing periodicals. He thought a periodical diverted too much money and too much of the editor's time in a settled routine, and away from direct proclamation of the final message. Thus, the name Joseph Bates appeared nowhere in the masthead or pages of *Present Truth* as an editor, publisher, or author.¹⁵⁰

Opposition from the movement's senior figure, and his only real colleague at the time, was a serious blow to White. In December 1849 Bates wrote a sharply critical letter that "threw me down as low as I ever was," James wrote in personal correspondence. Thinking the paper likely would die, James was on the verge of discontinuing it until an affirming vision experienced by Ellen on January 9, 1850, renewed his resolve. It apparently quieted Bates' criticism as well.¹⁵¹

Yet in September 1850, with no sign of positive support from Bates for the periodical, Ellen White reported having a vision in Sutton, Vermont, that prompted her to speak to the heart of the interpersonal conflict between Bates and her husband. She confronted Bates with several shortcomings. He had presented the radical

call to “Sell that ye have and give alms” in a way that opened the door to manipulative opportunists. He had brought reproach to the cause of God, in ways not fully detailed, with prayers to heal the sick in the midst of unbelievers and “in attending the washing of the saints’ feet and the communion” among them. Even more important, during “the gathering time,” when it was most needed, “his testimony has been withheld” from the paper.¹⁵²

The problem underlying these and other issues, Ellen pointed out, was that they had “destroyed James’s confidence in Bro. Bates.” The disagreements between the two leaders had become personal, and here James was as much or more at fault. His concerns had started as “godly jealousy for the truth, then other jealousy crept in until he was jealous of most every move Bro. Bates would make,” Ellen perceived. The relationship between these two co-founders needed to be healed if their movement was to survive in unity. Toward that end, Ellen highlighted from her vision something that ran deeper than reprimands and directives—the boundless love of God: “Then I saw James and Bro. Bates. Said the angel, Press together, press together, press together, press together, ye shepherds, lest the sheep be scattered. Love one another as I have loved you. Swim, swim, swim, plunge deep, deep, deep in the ocean of God’s love.”¹⁵³

She desired that Bates’ heart would be “open, ready to yield up a dear point when the clear light shines.” He and all “shepherds” needed to consult other “shepherds” that are “firm in all the present truth . . . before they receive and advocate any new point of importance.”¹⁵⁴ It is also noteworthy that Ellen White was more concerned about Bates’s collegiality with his brothers in the faith than his responsiveness to her messages. He needed to be more receptive to “light that comes in other ways besides through visions,” she wrote. “I saw that he was too slow to receive light from his brethren.”¹⁵⁵

Ellen White’s testimony evidently prompted a positive response without delay. When James White reconstituted the periodical as the *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Joseph Bates was listed first in a four-man Publishing Committee on the masthead of Volume 1, No. 1, November 1850, followed by S. W. Rhodes, J. N. Andrews, and James White. Nearly two of its eight pages were taken by his article on “The Laodicean Church.” From that point forward he would be a vigorous promoter of the *Review* and a frequent contributor to its pages.

Doctrinal Conflicts and Leadership Transition

The publishing crisis had been resolved, averting potential schism between Sabbatarian Adventism’s two ministerial leaders. On the disputed issues that remained, Joseph Bates was not always the one required to yield his position. James White opposed the view, held by Bates, that a process of judgment was part of Jesus’s high priestly ministry in the anti-typical Day of Atonement, that is, from October 22, 1844, until the “close of probation” immediately prior to the second coming. White ceased fire against this teaching in mid-1851, though he did not explicitly endorse the “investigative judgment” doctrine until 1857.¹⁵⁶

However, when it came to “the duration of the judicial proceedings on the livings saints in the Most Holy,” Bates’s position proved untenable. His contemplation of the details of the sanctuary service and Day of Atonement led him to a momentous conclusion: the pre-advent judgment that began in October 1844 would last seven years, and thus, in October 1851, “Jesus will be gathering in the harvest with his sickle, on the white cloud.”¹⁵⁷ He made his case in *An Explanation of the Typical and Anti-typical Sanctuary*, a 16-page pamphlet published in March 1850, the last of the seven works he issued from New Bedford starting in 1846. Both Ellen and James White sharply opposed this claim. With excitement about it rising among the believers, Ellen wrote in the *Review and Herald* “Extra” published July 21, 1851, that the third angel’s message “should not be hung on time; for time will never be a test again.”¹⁵⁸

The passage of time itself would have overthrown Bates’s position, but he apparently ceased promoting his theory before that happened. After Ellen’s article in July and another repudiation from James in August, interest died down, with no build-up of anticipation heading into October.¹⁵⁹ The fatal attraction of setting dates for Christ’s return seems to resist extirpation among prophecy-believing groups. Yet, with the Whites’ adamant opposition to Bates’s flirtation with it in 1850-1851, the movement soon to take the name Seventh-day Adventist put date-setting decisively in the past.

Certain they had the right day of the week, the Sabbatarian Adventists grappled for close to a decade with the question of exactly when the Sabbath day starts. Bates’s study led him to the firm conviction that 6:00 Friday evening marked the beginning of the 24-hour period, and the Whites agreed. But despite publishing a number of articles in the *Review* defending this position, James White kept receiving letters and inquiries indicating that many were not convinced. In 1855 he called upon John N. Andrews to research the matter thoroughly, and the scholarly young minister produced a compelling case for sunset as the starting point. At a conference in Battle Creek in November 1855, Bates adamantly defended 6 p.m. and, initially, Ellen White continued in her support for that view. But during a season of prayer she had a vision indicating that Andrews’s biblical case for sunset was sound and thus, by implication, that her own understanding had been incorrect. Bates yielded, and the conference achieved unity and, it would turn out, enduring resolution of the issue for Seventh-day Adventists.¹⁶⁰ Even though the outcome, for Bates, was surrender of a stoutly defended, “dear” position, he described the November 1855 conference as “a rich blessing from the Most Holy Place in the heaven of heavens.”¹⁶¹

After 1855, points of contention between Bates and the Whites would be minor. The three co-founders had solidified a platform and a precedent for unity—an achievement that often eludes movements that emerge out of apocalyptic critique of the status quo. Realization of that unity entailed a transition in leadership. Historian and Bates biographer George Knight has convincingly argued that in and through the conflicts, whether or not the participants were fully aware of or intentional about it at the time, James White replaced Joseph Bates as the preeminent leader.¹⁶²

During the late 1840s, Bates had been the initiator and hub for the beliefs that brought Sabbatarian Adventism into existence and made it dynamic. During the 1849-1852 period, James White became predominant in the ongoing formulation of a system of beliefs and systematic action to disseminate those beliefs. Joseph Bates, as he entered his 60s, took the roles of path-breaking promoter of the message and seasoned facilitator of steps toward advancing the movement in a more cohesive way.

Sharp Boundaries, Open Door

Along with the gains of the gathering time—striking growth and deepened unity through conflict—came hardened lines of alienation between the Sabbatarians and other Adventist groups. For example, the leader of a Second Adventist congregation in Melbourne, Canada East (Quebec), troubled by the interest Bates had stirred when he came to town in 1850 “professing to be an Advent preacher,” sought the counsel of Joshua V. Himes, editor of *Advent Herald*.¹⁶³ In reply, Himes acknowledged that “Capt. Bates is an old friend of ours, and so far as we know, is better as a man than most of his associates,” but he was also adamant that Bates “should not be tolerated for a moment.”¹⁶⁴ For his part, Bates questioned whether Himes, as the acknowledged leader of the Advent cause, “has taken one right step since January, 1845.” In fact, Himes was leading others “to their utter destruction,” Bates charged.¹⁶⁵

The only hope that Bates held out was for those who had already, in response to the second angel’s message, made a clean break with “the nominal church or Babylon” (American Christendom as a whole) in 1843-1844, to now make another clear and absolute break with the “nominal Adventists” by accepting the third angel’s message. Bates drew a hard, bright line between the small, seventh day Sabbath-observing subset of Adventists—“the only true church of God on earth”—and all others.¹⁶⁶

It is thus not surprising that he drew criticism for “judging”—preaching a message that condemned all other Christians in the world, not to mention unbelievers. Responding to objections such as these, Bates denied teaching that “those who keep the first day of the week have the mark of the beast.” That, he said, would be received by those who understand the truth about God’s commandments but reject it anyway in order to “worship the beast.”¹⁶⁷ That distinction may not have meant much to those who objected to Bates’ sharp either/or message. Yet it expressed a significant principle in the widening scope of Sabbatarian Adventist mission.

In May 1852, James White wrote that “a large portion of those who are sharing in the blessings attending the present truth were not connected with the advent cause.”¹⁶⁸ The third angel’s message was winning hearts and minds beyond the fragmented remnants of Millerite Adventism. Bates experienced this soon afterwards when the first individual won through his evangelism in Battle Creek, David Hewitt, was a Presbyterian with no previous involvement in the Millerite movement.

The door had been opened to an exponential expansion of potential converts to Sabbatarian Adventism. The second angel's message (Revelation 14:8) had declared the fall of Babylon in 1844. But that "fall" would now be seen as localized and preliminary. "Babylon" was again a mission field for Sabbatarian Adventism. No one would have the "mark of the beast" until proclamation of the third angel's message closed in a blaze of glory that made the issue at stake unmistakably clear to all (Revelation 18:1-4).¹⁶⁹

It was primarily James White who recast the three angels' messages in alignment with this expanded mission. Joseph Bates continued relentless travel to pioneer its advance. In late October 1851 he journeyed to Canada where he and Hiram Edson made a five-week wintry trek around the perimeter of Lake Ontario. Then it was on to western New York for another five weeks (February 2 to March 11) during which they stopped in 20 locales for meetings and visits. Bates subsequently headed west for several months of travel that took him to Illinois, Wisconsin, and Ohio before a fruitful return trip to Michigan. He arrived back in Fairhaven in early October, spent one Sabbath with his family, then set out again for extended travel throughout New England. A similar pattern recurred through 1853 and 1854.¹⁷⁰

Bates traveled by any means available from horse-drawn vehicle to steam-powered ships and trains. Sometimes he just walked, such as in Canada in 1852 when he and Edson trudged as far as 40 miles through deep snow and "tedious cold weather" to reach meeting places, or in 1849 when he walked from his home in southern Massachusetts to Vermont because he had no money for train fare. Bates sojourned by faith, with neither salary nor travel budget, entirely dependent on what fellow believers might feel moved to send him.¹⁷¹

Bates' evangelistic labors began to shift in two ways during 1855. First, he, along with other leading Sabbatarian ministers, began using a tent for evangelistic meetings. In May 1855, a conference held in Portland, Maine, commissioned Bates and Eri L. Barr, the first Seventh-day Adventist minister of color,¹⁷² to conduct tent meetings throughout New England. By September they had pitched the tent 12 times. In most places, the meetings continued for no more than a few days, usually over a weekend. "In this tour, the Tent has been transported by land and water about 1100 miles, at an expense of \$43.28, averaging less than four dollars per meeting," they reported.¹⁷³ The evangelistic duo baptized new believers in small numbers from time to time. "The church in Unity [New Hampshire] were together with one accord," Bates and Barr wrote after meetings there in mid-July, adding, "We . . . went down by the water-side, where seven were planted together in the likeness of the death of Jesus their Lord, henceforth to walk in newness of life."¹⁷⁴

It would soon become the norm for a series of tent meetings to run for a number of weeks rather than days. In August 1856, Bates worked with Merritt E. Cornell during the final week of a four-week series in Hillsdale, Michigan, that planted a congregation of close to 70 members.¹⁷⁵

By then Bates was spending more and more time in Michigan, which was becoming the center of the Sabbatarian Adventist work. The church in Battle Creek wanted Bates to move there, but he seemed to have

developed a particularly close bond with the congregation at Monterey, a rural township about 50 miles to the northwest. The Monterey church had already organized with around 40 members and constructed a house of worship by the time Bates evangelized in the area from November 1856 to February 1857, holding meetings in schoolhouses. The believers in Monterey braved extreme cold to come out for meetings held February 14-18, 1857. On the morning of February 18, with the temperature at -30 degrees (Fahrenheit), church members “cut and sawed out the ice some three feet thick, and found water of sufficient depth, wherein seven souls were buried with Christ in baptism,” with 65-year-old Elder Joseph Bates administering the rite.¹⁷⁶ In 1858, Joseph and Prudence Bates, after a lifetime in Fairhaven, joined the westward movement to Michigan, making their home on the outskirts of Monterey.¹⁷⁷

Organization Man

For Joseph Bates, the 1844 movement, in response to the “flying messages” of Revelation 14, realized the aspirations of restorationist Christianity: “Those whose fear of God rather than man prevailed, cleared themselves from the different orders and sects, and all their various views, they have merged and united as in apostolic times. Creeds and formulas passed away like smoke from the chimney.” Like George Storrs and other radical Adventists, Bates adamantly opposed any new denominational organization, and he repeatedly lambasted the Albany Conference of 1845 for in principle doing just that. It had adopted a belief statement, formulated plans for cooperative work, and denounced all that “did not subscribe to this creed and countenance this organization,” treating them as “disorganizers and fanatics.”¹⁷⁸

Bates sustained his critique of ecclesiastical organization through 1850 at least, and throughout his life remained a staunch opponent of creeds and human authority structures that threatened to usurp God’s Word. But that did not mean opposition to the church offices and ordering principles clearly seen in the New Testament. Thus, he did not seem to have any difficulty supporting the rudimentary steps toward organization that James and Ellen White began advocating in 1853. All the varieties of post-1844 Adventism faced the problem of preachers who claimed to speak for them but in reality were seeking to build up an opposing faction. Even within the small “seventh day” camp, factions emerged from within, undermining the Whites’ leadership and misrepresenting the community united by the third angel’s message. In 1853, as a first step, Bates and James White began signing and issuing cards to approved ministers to help distinguish those who truly spoke for their movement from those who did not.¹⁷⁹

In an 1854 *Review* article, Bates tied “church order” to the final restoration of the church. He laid out New Testament passages describing church offices and the functions of the varied gifts of the Holy Spirit to show that “church order and the unity of the faith existed in the days of the apostles who kept all the commandments of God.” He traced church history and prophecy to show that during the medieval apostasy, church order “was deranged by commandment-breakers.” But now, he wrote, in the third angel’s message “we find

commandment-keepers . . . going up into the breach, restoring first the Sabbath of the Lord . . . and then 'all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.'" Thus, he concluded, the last-day church of God will "be in order, having her 'Elders, Deacons, Teachers, gifts of healing, helps, governments.' &c."¹⁸⁰

This put Bates firmly on the side of "gospel order," but did not take him beyond the congregationalist polity of his Christian Connection heritage. Nevertheless, for the remainder of the 1850s and into the 1860s, Bates facilitated advances toward broader and more centralized organization advocated by the Whites in their uphill struggle against those who feared such a course would lead back to "Babylon." The foremost way Bates did this was by chairing a series of landmark "general conferences" at which crucial steps were taken on the way to Seventh-day Adventist church organization:

1855: Bates' own view of 6 p.m. as the start time for Sabbath rejected in favor of sunset.

1857: Purchase of a power printing press and construction of a larger meeting house in Battle Creek to accommodate general meetings.

1859: Systematic Benevolence plan for support of gospel ministry.

1860: Legal incorporation of the publishing association; organization of local churches so as to legally hold property; and adoption of the name Seventh-day Adventist.

1861: Organization of the Michigan Conference.

1862: First annual session of the Michigan Conference, with measures taken to further develop the effective functioning of the conference.¹⁸¹

The critical 1861 conference also roundly rejected adopting a creed to which all members must assent, instead approving the following "church covenant" as the instrument for organizing individual believers into a church: "We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ." The conference also voted that "our present Chairman [Bates] and Clerk [Uriah Smith], act as officers of this Conference for the coming year."¹⁸² Thus, as George Knight has noted, Bates acted as the first president of the Michigan Conference, a role he relinquished a year later at the 1862 session.¹⁸³

Health Reform and Michigan-based Ministry

After moving to Michigan, Bates continued his peripatetic ministry, but for the most part remained within the state. Despite the narrower range, there was little let up in intensity. James White wrote in October 1859 that it would have been entirely appropriate for Bates to relax his efforts in view of his "advanced years," but he was instead "continually breaking new ground, laboring incessantly, preaching from five to ten times a week, and

receiving a limited support." Bates maintained a rigorous travel and preaching schedule until November 1871, just months before his death, except for a few brief periods. One of these resulted from a bout of "ague" (probably malaria) that sidelined him for most of November and December 1859, with a brief relapse in 1860. For Prudy, it was a "strange" experience to see her husband ill because he had "always enjoyed such perfect health."¹⁸⁴ In fact, except for a recurrence of the same disease in 1866, Bates experienced such good health that, in his 70s he became the "poster boy" for Adventist health reform.

First in so many ways, Bates was by far the first Seventh-day Adventist health reformer, though he became such long before the church was formally organized. As previously discussed, he became a teetotaler in 1827. In 1838 he added tea and coffee to his list of abstentions. In February 1843 he committed to a vegetarian diet and a few months later advanced to near-vegan status, giving up "butter, grease, cheese, pies, and rich cakes" (but no mention of eggs).¹⁸⁵ However, Bates did not preach health reform to others until Ellen White, based on visions she experienced in 1863 and 1865, urged Adventists to regard health reform—including a simple diet and use of natural therapies—as a "sacred duty." She saw restoration of bodily health as integral to the third angel's message, an essential component of preparation for the life to come.

For much of 1865 and 1866, nearly all of Bates' colleagues—James White, Uriah Smith, Joseph H. Waggoner, John N. Loughborough, and John N. Andrews—were all incapacitated by illness, making it impossible for nearly a year to get a quorum for meetings of either the General Conference Committee or the Michigan Conference Committee. That he alone, 30 to 40 years their senior, could continue working at a vigorous pace was impressive testimony to what health reform could accomplish.¹⁸⁶

James White, reporting on a speech Bates gave at a health reform convention in Battle Creek in 1871, wrote that his venerable colleague, by then nearly 79, "stood straight as a monument and could tread the side-walks as lightly as a fox."¹⁸⁷ In his speech, Bates made clear that he had not rested on his laurels when Ellen White pointed the church forward on health reform. He was "endeavoring" to confine himself to two meals per day and ever seeking to continue progress in reform. He also included health reform in his own teaching, regarding it as one of the practices "necessary to qualify those who will be esteemed worthy to carry out the loud cry of the third angel's message."¹⁸⁸

In 1866 the Michigan Conference assigned Bates responsibility for churches in its eastern district, giving the western district to John Byington, previously the first General Conference president (1863-1865). Still traveling, and still evangelizing at every opportunity, Bates's work shifted more toward "encouraging and strengthening" believers and helping them work through "trials and affliction."¹⁸⁹

On February 25, 1868, Joseph and Prudy Bates celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary by "trying to get nearer to God by humiliation, fasting, and prayer, mixed with praise for sparing us so long to each other." The expression of praise for each other seems genuine despite being couched in an ascetic spirituality foreign to many twenty-first-century readers. It is difficult to imagine Joseph Bates always being an easy man to live with,

but after 50 years the elderly couple found joy in each other's company. A few weeks before the anniversary, for the only time that can be documented, Prudy accompanied Joseph on one of his pastoral-evangelistic itineraries, an experience she very much enjoyed.¹⁹⁰

Joseph and Prudy developed a deep bond of unity in their faith, but they were never able to realize a similar unity with their children. In 1865 they received word of the death of their son, Joseph Anson, a sailor since he left home at age 14 in 1844. Of their three daughters—Helen, Eliza, and Mary—only the latter showed any interest in her parents' faith. Mary Bates Reardon and her son, Willie, lived with Joseph and Prudy in Monterey during their later years. But while Mary expressed belief in the Sabbath and the second coming of Christ, she felt unable to live a faithful life when apart from her parents' influence.¹⁹¹

"When his younger and most intimate fellow-laborers told him that his age should excuse him from the fatigue of itinerant life and public speaking, he laid his armor off as a captured officer would surrender his sword on the field of battle," James White wrote of Joseph Bates in 1877.¹⁹² White did not say when this happened, but it must have been in November 1871, about five months before Bates' death. His reports in the *Review* from the autumn of 1868 to the autumn of 1871 suggest that the veteran warrior was as relentless as ever on the Michigan battlefield, with occasional forays into northern Indiana and northern Ohio.¹⁹³

His "beloved companion, Prudy M. Bates," died on August 27, 1870, at age 77, Joseph reported in the *Review*. She had been in "usual health," performing household duties until she began to suffer "intermittent fever" 10 days before her death. In her obituary, Bates quoted sentiments expressed in her last letter to him that she must have felt countless times over the preceding two decades: "God bless and prosper your efforts to do good and get good, and return you in safety to us, is the prayer of your affectionate wife."¹⁹⁴

Within a few weeks Bates resumed his traveling ministry with no slackening in its pace, with meetings and visits to churches during every month until December. During the first 11 months of 1871, he held at least 100 public meetings, above and beyond meetings in local churches and conference meetings. He was at the December 1871 General Conference in Battle Creek and was in regular attendance at evangelistic meetings in Monterey that extended through several weeks in January-February 1872, for which W. H. Littlejohn was the main speaker. But reports of his own traveling ministry in the *Review* ceased in November 1871.¹⁹⁵

Suffering from "diabetes and putrid erysipelas" (skin infections), Bates sought treatment at the Western Health Reform Institute (later Battle Creek Sanitarium). He died there on March 19, 1872, four months shy of his 80th birthday. His funeral took place March 22 in the Monterey church and he was buried alongside Prudy at the nearby Poplar Hill Cemetery.¹⁹⁶

Legacy

“Our venerable Bro. Bates was the first in this cause,” wrote James White in 1859.¹⁹⁷ Bates indeed was first in doctrine, initiating formulation of the defining beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism: the seventh-day Sabbath and Christ’s final work in the heavenly sanctuary, and the three angels’ messages that gave these teachings decisive urgency at the culmination of history. Bates was also the first in publishing the message and in far-flung travels to proclaim it. And, Bates was the first in health reform, though he waited for the church to catch up with him before emphasizing it. Put another way, the influence of Bates preceded that of the Whites in the development of the major beliefs and practices that continue to make Seventh-day Adventists a distinct religious body in the twenty-first century. It is thus for good reason that George Knight has called Joseph Bates “the *real* founder of Seventh-day Adventism.”¹⁹⁸

Bates maintained a firm grip on the Millerite historicist reading of apocalyptic prophecy that demarcated and sacralized the present, in quite vivid and specific ways, as the end time. He, with James and Ellen White, sustained and revived the power of the Millerite historicist timeline by reconceiving its very final segment as the third angel’s message.

All of this gave Seventh-day Adventists a clear identity, strong confidence about the unique decisiveness of their message, and a driving urgency of mission in view of the shortness of time. The importance of all of this in the vitality of the Seventh-day Adventist movement seems undeniable,¹⁹⁹ and for all of it the movement is indebted to Bates, not as sole or final formulator but as first pioneer and connecting link with the church’s Millerite origins.

Bates’s legacy as an apocalypticist is not an unmixed blessing. He was prone to extremes, interpreting biblical passages as forecasts of recent and current events in ways that even James White at times found “doubtful.”²⁰⁰ Few, if any, of Bates’ spiritual heirs today share his certainty that the prophet Nahum, in describing chariots that “shall seem like torches” and “run like the lightnings” (Nahum 2:3-4), was predicting “the lightning trains” of the mid-nineteenth century, “speeding their course over the rail track at the rate of 40 or 50 miles per hour” as a sign of Christ’s imminent return.²⁰¹ Yet, a proclivity on the part of some to seize upon the latest technological marvels in a similar way has endured.

The passing of time has compelled a renegotiation of the stark, absolute boundary that Bates’ interpretations of apocalyptic prophecy drew around the seventh-day branch of Adventism as the sole bearer of the saving message in the last days. That exclusive identity was empowering, yet also helped build up a toxic atmosphere of accusation and suspicion in interaction between Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians. Bates’s co-founders came to see this development as unsustainable and at variance with the basic virtues of Christianity that they claimed to espouse. Already within Bates’s lifetime, James White took the lead in revising interpretation of the three angel’s messages in a way that enabled Ellen, in her influential book, *The Great Controversy*, to affirm that “the great body of Christ’s true followers” remained outside the ranks of Seventh-day Adventism.²⁰² Throughout their subsequent history, Seventh-day Adventists have grappled with the tension between being

distinct from yet part of the wider Christian world.

Bates's radical convictions about the demands of adherence to "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" through a final crisis also left a mixed legacy. He could testify warmly of how God, "for his dear Son's sake, granted me his rich grace and pardoning mercy." Yet his hope for finally standing "before the throne of God without fault" seemed to depend largely on his own moral success—"if I continue to reform, and forsake every wrong."²⁰³ Bates' preoccupation with judgment and human performance injected a persistent legalism and lack of Christian assurance into the Adventist experience.²⁰⁴ Overcoming this spiritual malady and its damage to the church's evangelistic witness would become a major theme of Seventh-day Adventist history, and a flashpoint of controversy beginning in the 1880s, and continuing with fluctuating intensity ever since.

On the other hand, it is possible to see Bates' spiritual rigor through the lens of radical discipleship, and thus as an antidote to the danger of a complacent and cheapened grace orientation. This perspective connects with Bates the radical reformer, his ultraism driven not by petty religiosity but a passion for justice and liberation of the oppressed. The historical recovery of Bates the antebellum social reformer by Ronald Graybill in the 1980s, taken further by Kevin Burton in the 2020s, has coincided with a desire on the part of many Adventists to connect their faith in a more wholistic way with contemporary societal concerns.²⁰⁵

Finally, though, it was in subordinating his individual judgments as a dissenting radical to a higher value that Bates made one of his most signal contributions to the thriving of Seventh-day Adventism. That value, during the church's early, fragile decades, was unity achieved through the working of a multiplicity of spiritual gifts. Bates was, in the words of James White, a man of "natural firmness and independence" who "would speak what he regarded truth with great freedom and boldness." In concert with these virtues, wrote William A. Spicer, a denominational leader of a later era, "one of the strongest traits of Joseph Bates was that he could receive help and even correction from his brethren."²⁰⁶ That was something that his "sister," Ellen White, advised him to do. It was only in this way that Joseph Bates could become not only an exemplary radical for social reform and an influential witness for Jesus and His coming kingdom, but co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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