

# Snow, Samuel

## Sheffield

### (1806–1890)

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*Samuel S. Snow*

Samuel S. Snow was a Millerite minister whose exposition of biblical prophecy, known as the “seventh-month message,” gave rise in the summer of 1844 to widespread expectation that Christ would return to earth on October 22, 1844.

Samuel Sheffield Snow.

From Samuel S. Snow's book, *The Voice of Elias: Or, Prophecy*

*Restored* (1863).

## From Infidel to Second Advent Minister

Samuel S. Snow was born in 1806 in Ashford, Connecticut, to Samuel (1774-1842) and Jerusha Robinson Snow (1780-1830). His ancestors were said to be “of Puritan stock.” He married Elvira M. Pound (b. 1805) on November 27, 1832 in Mansfield, Connecticut. Samuel and Elvira had four children who survived to adulthood: daughters Delia M. Rich (1836-1918), Frances Marion (1839-1871), and Mary Anne (1842-?); and son Theodore Sheffield Snow (1848-1916), who became a Baptist minister.<sup>1</sup>

Little has been discovered about Snow's education, but as a young man he rejected the Christianity he learned in his childhood. He became, in his words, a “hardened *Infidel!*” and “a settled unbeliever in the Bible.” After the *Boston Investigator*, a weekly paper promoting freedom from the authority of religious dogma, was launched in

1831, Snow not only became an avid reader but an agent for sale of the paper in Connecticut and did some writing for it. He regarded the Bible as “filled with nothing but gross absurdities” and read it only to find objections with which to challenge believers.<sup>2</sup>

In 1839, Snow’s curiosity was aroused by one of William Miller’s books that a peddler sold to his brother. Snow had heard of Miller and his teaching about the near second advent of Christ and regarded the preacher’s views as “moonshine.” But as he read the book he became increasingly “impressed with its truth.” He came to see “that the Bible which I had so long rejected, was the word of God, and I melted down before it.” He joined a Congregationalist church in the autumn of 1840 but some time later withdrew from it, finding it resistant to the Advent faith. In 1842, while attending the Millerite camp meeting in East Kingston, New Hampshire, he decided to give himself completely to promoting the Second Advent message.<sup>3</sup>

## The “True Midnight Cry”

In December 1843 he received ordination to gospel ministry at an Adventist meeting.<sup>4</sup> He did not become a prominent figure in the Millerite movement until the summer of 1844, after what is sometimes called “the Spring disappointment.” From the beginning of his preaching career, William Miller contended that Christ would return “about the year 1843” in fulfillment of the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14. As the time grew near, he took the position that Christ would return by March 21, 1844, the end of the Jewish year. Because Miller had allowed in advance for the possibility of miscalculation, the passing of this date without Christ’s return, while deflating, did not cause widespread loss of faith.<sup>5</sup>

In August, Snow issued a new paper entitled the *True Midnight Cry* and in its first issue, dated August 22, 1844, set forth his case that Christ would return in the autumn of 1844. Snow focused on the celebration feasts in the annual Jewish cycle as types of the saving work of Christ. He pointed out that Christ, the antitype, had fulfilled the springtime feast days at the very time of their occurrence in the Jewish calendar – Passover (crucifixion), First Fruits (ascension), and Pentecost (the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles). “God is an *exact time keeper*,” Snow declared. Thus, he reasoned that Christ would fulfill the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement on the date of its occurrence in the Jewish calendar, that is, in the autumn, on the “tenth day of the seventh month” (Leviticus 16:29).<sup>6</sup>

To establish the *year* in which this would take place, Snow calculated that the decree “to restore and build Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:25) that marked the beginning of the period of 2,300 days (symbolic years) given in Daniel 8:14 would have been issued in the latter part of the year 457 B.C. The 2,300-year period thus would end in late 1844, when the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) occurred that year. That is when the “cleansing of the sanctuary” referred to in Daniel 8:14, was to take place. With Miller and the Advent movement in general, Snow believed that “the cleansing of the sanctuary” would be accomplished by the second coming of Christ—that is how Christ as the antitype would fulfill what the high priest’s work on the Day of Atonement typified. Based on

the calendar of the Karaite Jews, Snow concluded that the Day of Atonement in 1844 would fall on October 22.<sup>7</sup> William Miller had suggested a line of interpretation similar to Snow's more than a year before in a letter to Joshua V. Himes that was published in the *Signs of the Times*, May 17, 1843. But Miller had offered it only as a tentative possibility and it received little further discussion.<sup>8</sup> But when Snow preached it at a camp meeting in Exeter, New Hampshire, in August 1844, the "seventh-month message" or "true midnight cry" (Matthew 25:6) brought powerful new energy to the Second Advent movement.<sup>9</sup> James White, who would become a Seventh-day Adventist co-founder, observed that the message of Christ's return in October 1844 was attended by a "power almost irresistible."<sup>10</sup> The vigorous support of George Storrs, a prominent Millerite leader, boosted dissemination of the new message. The foremost leaders, Miller and Himes, viewed the development with caution, but they too eventually embraced the message, and intense expectation focused on October 22, 1844.<sup>11</sup>

## After 1844

After the "great disappointment," Snow accepted the teaching of Apollos Hale and Joseph Turner that on October 22, 1844 Christ came as the bridegroom and entered the marriage banquet in heaven, at which time He would also receive His everlasting kingdom from the "Ancient of Days" as described in Daniel 7. This was called "bridegroom" or "shut door" teaching because its proponents held that the door of salvation had been shut to those who had rejected the "true midnight cry." Snow began publishing the *Jubilee Standard* in 1845, in which he fiercely denounced Adventist leaders who repudiated the seventh-month message after Christ did not appear on October 22.<sup>12</sup>

Later in 1845 Snow declared himself to be Elijah the prophet, the messenger that would appear immediately prior to the advent of Jesus the King. His followers started a new periodical, *The True Day Star*, to spread the message. Snow went still further in 1848. He issued "A Proclamation to All People Nations, Tongues and Kings," declaring himself to be Christ's "Prime Minister" and "Premiere," and demanding from all earthly rulers and heads of state "a full surrender of all power and authority, into my hands, on behalf of King Jesus the Coming One." The nations would suffer catastrophic consequences such as war, famine, and pestilence should they fail to submit.<sup>13</sup>

Subsequently, however, Snow's notoriety diminished. Until his death more than four decades later, he continued to pastor a small following that became known as the Church of Mount Zion and met in varying locales in New York City. He died in late July 1890 at his residence in Brooklyn and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery on July 30.<sup>14</sup>

## Legacy

Samuel S. Snow's broader and enduring legacy for Seventh-day Adventists is the biblical exposition he championed that delineated October 22, 1844, as the date for the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 in conjunction with an antitypical Day of Atonement. In contrast to Snow, Seventh-day Adventists would hold that the date marked the beginning of a new and final phase of Christ's work as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, a work involving a pre-advent judgment.<sup>15</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Samuel Sheffield Snow Family Tree, *FamilySearch*, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/K4NL-HGY>; "The Rev. Samuel S. Snow Dead," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 30, 1890, 5.
2. "Remarks of Bro. S.S. Snow," *The Midnight Cry!*, March 7, 1844, 260; "Boston Investigator (Boston, Mass.) 1831-1904," Library of Congress, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ca10000607/>; Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald, 1944), 195-196.
3. "Remarks of Bro. S.S. Snow."
4. George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 193.
5. *Ibid.*, 126-128; 161-166.
6. [S.S. Snow], *The True Midnight Cry!*, August 22, 1844, 1-4.
7. *Ibid.* Snow set previously forth his argument for 1844, not 1843, as the terminus of the 2,300-day prophecy in a letter published in *The Midnight Cry!*, February 22, 1844, 243-244. See also Pieter Gerard Damsteege, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), 16; Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 188-189.
8. Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 190-191.
9. "The Exeter Camp Meeting," *Advent Herald*, August 21, 1844, 20.
10. J. White, *Life Incidents* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association), 166, quoted in Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 190.
11. Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 191, 199-205.
12. Merlin D. Burt, *Understanding Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 104; Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 238-239.
13. Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 255-256.
14. "The Rev. Samuel S. Snow Dead."
15. "Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary," Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/>.

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