

Millerite Conditionalism: A Doctrine Adopted by Seventh-day Adventists

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The biblical idea of death being an end of all life, including an independent separate-from-the-body “soul,” has been held by Christians since the time of Jesus. Closely connected is the belief that hell and the destruction of sin and evil will be finished or ended rather than continue without end. At its core, this view, referred to as Conditionalism, teaches that immortality is a gift of God and not an intrinsic part of the sinful human nature (see 1 Tim 6:16). The good news of the gospel is that through the resurrection at the Second Coming of Jesus, God will give immortality to the redeemed as a gift (see 1 Cor 15:53-54; Rom 2:7; 2 Tim 1:10).

D. M. Canright, while still a Seventh-day Adventist, nicely summarized a progression of publications in New England during the first decades of the nineteenth century, that influenced some who would become Millerite Conditionalists. Elias Smith, a founder of the Christian Connection, influenced thousands of Christians through the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*; the published sermons of the Unitarian minister, Aaron Bancroft, also played a role; J. Sellon, in Canandaigua, New York, wrote a book that impacted some people in western New York; the books of Walter Balfour in Massachusetts during the 1820s and Calvin French’s 1842 book *Immortality, the Gift of God* were also important.¹ Henry Jones was another American Conditionalist somewhat related to Millerites.² There were Conditionalists in England and other parts of the Christian world who are referenced by Isaac Wellcome and LeRoy Froom among others.³ But most important was the influence of George Storrs and those connected to him. It is his experience and teaching that figured most prominently for Millerites and the various groups and denomination that would emerge from them.

William Miller, as a Baptist, remained opposed to conditionalism throughout his life. Both his Baptist faith and his experience with Deism made him particularly resistant to any form of “annihilationism.” Before his conversion, he had found the Deistic idea of eternal oblivion for all humans after death to be both fearful and unsatisfying. Perhaps, based on his experience, Miller viewed Conditionalism as too similar to this view. Other key leaders in the Millerite movement would also reject Conditionalism. Up until 1844 Conditionalism would

¹D. M. Canright, “Immortality of the Soul,” *Review and Herald*, June 12, 1879, 185; later published in D. M. Canright, *A History of the Doctrine of the Soul among All Races and Peoples Ancient and Modern Including Theologians, Philosophers, Scientists, and Untutored Aborigines*, 2nd ed., rev. (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1882), 175-176; Calvin French, *Immortality, the Gift of God through Jesus Christ: To be Given those Only Who have Part in the First Resurrection* (Boston: The Author, 1842).

²Henry Jones, *The Scriptures Searched: or Christ’s Second Coming and Kingdom at Hand, including the Resurrection, Day of Judgment, End of All Things, New Heavens, and New Earth; Together with a Glorious and Everlasting Millennium, with Present Fulfilling Prophetic Signs that Now, it is Near Even at the Doors, No Man Knowing When the Time Is* (New York: Gould, Newman & Saxton, 1839).

³Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People* (Yarmouth, ME: I. C. Welcome, 1874), 516-517; LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers: The Conflict of the Ages Over the Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1966).

remain a minority view that transitioned to a majority view but continued to exclude key leaders like J. V. Himes, Josiah Litch, and William Miller.

The teaching of the unconscious state of the dead and the final destruction of the wicked would transition from relative obscurity before 1843 to be a major issue in structuring the organization of the post-1844 Adventists. It would also be the baseline view for Sabbatarian Adventists who later became Seventh-day Adventists. This transition was largely initiated by George Storrs who was influenced by Henry Grew. Storrs then influenced Charles Fitch and together they made Conditionalism a major point of discussion during the year 1844.

The Experience of George Storrs

George Storrs (1796-1879) was born into a “wealthy farmer” family in Lebanon, New Hampshire, the youngest of eight children. He was first a congregationalist and then a Methodist. He remained a Methodist minister until 1840 when he withdrew because of his abolitionist views.⁴

In 1837, Storrs read an early work of Henry Grew (1781-1862) and adopted the view that the lost would be annihilated in the fires of hell. Storrs’ biography is presented in the third person:

In 1837—three years prior to his [Storrs’] withdrawal from the M. E. Church—his mind was first called to a consideration of the subject of the final destiny of the wicked men as being, possibly, an entire extinction of being and not endless preservation in sin and suffering. This was by a small anonymous pamphlet put forth as he learned, by Henry Grew, of Philadelphia. He read it to pass away a leisure hour while passing from Boston to New York.⁵

Henry Grew wrote on such subjects as the Trinity, Sabbath, the unconscious state of the dead, and the destruction of the wicked in hell. A brief overview will provide some understanding of his theological emphasis. Between 1824 and 1855 Grew published three editions of a tract opposing the doctrine of the Trinity and arguing that Jesus was the divine “first and only begotten Son” of God the Father and thus originated and inferior.⁶ His view is very similar to what many Sabbatarian Adventists and early Seventh-day Adventists would believe during much of the nineteenth century. Grew also wrote at least two tracts on the subject of the Sabbath. In 1838 and 1850 he published *The Sabbath* and in 1844 he rebutted

⁴George Storrs, *Six Sermons on the Inquiry Is there Immortality in Sin and Suffering? Also, a Sermon on Christ the Life-giver; or the Faith of the Gospel* (New York: Published at the Office of the Bible Examiner, 1855), 5-9.

⁵Ibid., 9.

⁶Henry Grew, *An Examination of the Divine Testament Concerning the Character of the Son of God* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, Printers, 1841), 3; idem, *An Examination of the Divine Testament Concerning the Character of the Son of God* (Hartford, CT: n.p., 1824); idem, *An Examination of the Divine Testament Concerning the Character of the Son of God* 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Thompson, 1855); see also Henry Grew, *The Atonement* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1847).

aspects of Amos Phelps' 1841 book *An Argument for the Perpetuity of the Sabbath*. Grew did not advocate for keeping the seventh day of the week, but rather supported Sunday.⁷

Because of Storrs' influence, Grew is best remembered for his belief in the non-immortality of the soul. His 1837 anonymous tract, mentioned by Storrs, led to two other important tracts, *The Intermediate State* (1844) and *Future Punishment, Not Eternal Life in Misery but Destruction* (1850).⁸ Grew would later connect with the "age to come" Adventists during the 1860s. It is interesting to note that many of the tracts by Grew were owned by Seventh-day Adventist ministers, including J. B. Frisbie and J. H. Waggoner. They made various book-margin notes in response to Grew's views.⁹ Thus, Grew's interaction extended directly to Sabbatarian Adventists apart from his indirect impact through George Storrs.

George Storrs' *Six Sermons* and *Intermediate State of the Dead*

The development of George Storrs' presentation of his views on the non-immortality of the soul began through a series of three letters written to a Methodist minister colleague beginning December 17, 1840. These were then published in 1841 as *An Inquiry: Are the Souls of the Wicked Immortal? In three Letters*.¹⁰ This was followed by an expansion during the spring of 1842 to six sermons that he presented in Albany, New York. These six sermons were then first published as *An Inquiry: Are the Souls of the Wicked Immortal? In Six Sermons*.¹¹ These sermons were then repeatedly reprinted in his paper, the *Bible Examiner*. Storrs would report in May 1843 that 15,000 copies of his *Six Sermons* had been published.¹² He continued to revise and publish his *Six Sermons* during 1843 and 1844 with many thousands of copies printed and distributed in New York City, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Ohio, and in the state of Indiana.¹³ In the 1880 memorial issue of the *Bible Examiner* it was reported that "nearly, if not quite, 200,000 copies" of *Six Sermons* had been circulated.¹⁴

While the emphasis of both Grew and Storrs was to reject an eternally burning hell, the basis was the unconscious state of the human soul between death and the resurrection. They referred to this period as the "intermediate state." Following his *Six Sermons*, Storrs added another article, *Intermediate State of the Dead, or State from Death until the Resurrection*.¹⁵

⁷Henry Grew, *A Review of Phelps' Argument for the Perpetuity of the Sabbath* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1844); A. A. Phelps, *An Argument for the Perpetuity of the Sabbath* (Boston: D. S. King, 1841); Henry Grew, *The Sabbath* (Philadelphia: Stereotyped at W. M. Preston's Foundry, 1850).

⁸Henry Grew, *The Intermediate State* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1844); idem, *The Intermediate State* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Stereotyped at Morigridge's Foundry, 1849); idem, *Future Punishment, Not Eternal Life in Misery but Destruction* (Philadelphia: Stereotyped at Morigridge's Foundry, 1850).

⁹See Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

¹⁰Ibid., 11; George Storrs, *An Inquiry: Are the Souls of the Wicked Immortal? In Three Letters* (Montpelier, VT: n.p., 1841).

¹¹George Storrs, *An Inquiry: Are the Souls of the Wicked Immortal? In Six Sermons* (Albany, NY: W. and A. White and J. Visscher, 1842).

¹²George Storrs, "Bible Examiner," *Bible Examiner*, May 1843, 1.

¹³Storrs, *Six Sermons*, 1855, 13-14.

¹⁴"Notices of the Press," *Bible Examiner*, Memorial Issue, March 1880, 404.

¹⁵George Storrs, "Intermediate State of the Dead, or State of from Death until the Resurrection," *Bible Examiner*, May 1843, 15-16.

Thus his *Six Sermons* are directly connected the state of the dead with what might be considered a seventh sermon or discourse, though he did not describe it that way.

Content of *Six Sermons*

In light of the importance of Storrs' *Six Sermons*, a brief overview is provided of the 1843 presentation of his views in the *Bible Examiner*. His presentation appealed to Scripture, reason, and logic, as well as experience.

The content of Storrs' *Six Sermons* began, in the first sermon, by challenging the idea of "an eternal state of conscious being in misery" or an eternally burning hell for the lost. He addressed the arguments Christians have use for an immortal soul and then presented biblical commentary. Observing that immortality is only ascribed to God (1 Tim 1:7), he showed that humans can lose their souls (Matt. 16:26, Mark 8:36). He then defined death as the "extinction of life" and that the "wicked" would "utterly perish in their own corruption" (2 Pet 2:12). He finally answered some questions including how to understand the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), ending with the idea of an eternal or everlasting hell applying to the effect rather than the duration.¹⁶

The second sermon focused on the punishment of the wicked. The sermon text "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen 4:4) was the first lie of Satan in the Garden of Eden. In this discourse he essentially contrasts many of the Scriptural words for the death of the wicked (perish, destruction, burn them up, perdition, second death, etc.) with the life of the redeemed (eternal life, "put on immortality," etc.). He ended by comparing the resurrected redeemed over whom the "second death has no power" who will live in a "new heaven and a new earth" after the "first heaven and the first earth have passed away" (Rev 20:6; 20:14; 21:1).¹⁷

The entire third sermon answered two major issues—the "forever and ever" torment of Rev 14:9-11 and character of God and justice. In addressing the second angel's message of Rev 14, he connected it to Rev 18. Babylon is "utterly burnt with fire" (Rev 18:8) and "thrown down, and shall be found no more at all" (Rev 18:21). He applied Rev 14 to the judgment of Babylon and those living in the present world and not the "punishment of the wicked in a future state." He saw both Rev 14 and 18 represented as occurring upon this earth before the restoration of the New Earth which will be the home of the saints. He concluded that, because of this, there cannot be an eternally burning hell. He used the second half of his sermon to address the character of God and justice, including the unreasonableness of the idea of "infinite punishment" for all of the lost—whether a child "who has just arrived to the years of understanding" and "dies impenitent" or as Storrs named, someone of great wickedness like Voltaire. Storrs argued that only an "utter extinction of being" with varying "degrees of torment prior to that event" "according to the degrees of guilt of the transgressor" can be reasonable justice. He concluded with a presentation of the hope of eternal life through "Christ, the soul's Physician."¹⁸

¹⁶George Storrs, "First Discourse," *Bible Examiner*, May 1843, 2-5.

¹⁷George Storrs, "Second Discourse," *Bible Examiner*, May 1843, 5-6.

¹⁸George Storrs, "Third Discourse," *Bible Examiner*, May 1843, 6-8.

In the fourth sermon Storrs continued with the second part of the third sermon answering the argument that “endless torment” must be true because the church fathers taught it. His answer was an exposition on the teaching of the New Testament. He used six witnesses against unending punishment: John the Baptist (Matt 3:10); Jesus (Matt 5:29-30; 7:13-14, 19; 10:28; etc.); Peter (Acts 3:23; 8:20; 2 Pet 2:1, 12; etc.); James (James 1:15; 5:29); John (1 John 2:17; Rev 14:14-15; 21:8); Jude (Jude 6); and Paul (Rom 1:32; 6:21-23; 8:13; Gal 6:8; 1 Thes 5:3, etc.). This Bible study was ended with a final appeal, “O, come to Christ and live.”¹⁹

Storrs’ fifth sermon continued answering objections. He discussed the idea of “spiritual death” and considered it be the effect of sin. Not to be confused with the “destruction of being” as the final punishment for sin. Also, the idea that most Christians teach an eternally burning hell and therefore it must be true. He responded that all denominations have truth and error in their teachings. Some reject an idea because it is a “new” understanding, to which he replied that if it is in the Bible it is not new. He also showed that there were some very old errors. He ended with a response to Joseph Benson’s sermon, *Future Misery of the Wicked*, published in 1791.²⁰ He quoted Benson’s vivid description of God presiding over hell:

God is present in hell, in his infinite justice and almighty wrath, as an unfathomable sea of liquid fire, where the wicked must drink in everlasting torture. . . . As heaven would be no heaven if God did not there manifest his love, so hell would be no hell, if God did not there display his wrath. . . . God is, therefore, himself present in hell, to see the punishment of these rebels against his government, that it may be adequate to the infinity of their guilt: his fiery indignation kindles, and his incensed fury feeds the flame of their torment, while his powerful presence and operation maintain their being, and render all their powers most acutely sensible; thus setting the keenest edge upon their pain, and making it cut most intolerably deep. He will exert all his divine attributes to make them as wretched as the capacity of their nature will admit.²¹

Storrs attributed these remarks to “horrible doctrines” based on “imagination” rather than Scripture and instead described the “second death” in the final “lake of fire” with these words: “O, that sinners make awake to see their danger, and fly from the doom that awaits them. O, the thoughts of the anguish that a dying soul must feel! An anguish kindled up by a sense of guilt, a sight of what, to them, is lost forever, and the curse of the violated law, which will cause their souls to perish, without recovery, and without hope.” He saw this as more consistent with the Scripture and a correct view of both the love and justice of God.

The sixth and last sermon countered the idea that biblical words such as “die,” “death,” “destroy,” “burned up,” “perish,” etc., were to be taken literally when referring to the “destiny of wicked men.” Like the fourth sermon, this final sermon contains a Bible study. He strongly

¹⁹George Storrs, “Fourth Discourse,” *Bible Examiner*, May 1843,8-11.

²⁰Joseph Benson, *Four Sermons on the Second Coming of Christ and Future Misery of the Wicked* (Leeds, England: J. Bowling, 1791), 52.

²¹George Storrs, “Fifth Discourse,” *Bible Examiner*, May 1843, 12.

opposed “making the terms life and death mystical or figurative.” His texts included: Deut 30:15; Ps 16:11; Matt 19:16; John 3:15-16; 5:28-29; 8:12; 11:25-26; Rom 5:17. Storrs ends his series of sermons with two simple points: (1) humans inherit from Adam “a dying nature” and are “destitute of immortality” and (2) for those who will choose and even those who cannot choose, “God has given his Son Jesus Christ, to die for us, that we might not perish” but have “eternal life.”²²

The net effect of these sermons was to present a scriptural view of death and the destruction of the lost with an effective appeal for a correct understanding of the loving and just character of God. Nearly all that Storrs presents in his 1843 *Six Sermons* would be consistent with current Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.

Content of *Intermediate State of the Dead*

George Storrs (and Henry Grew) treated the state of the dead and the resurrection as separate topics from the eternal life of the redeemed in the new earth and the destruction of the wicked in hell. Storrs central point was “that the doctrine of an intermediate state of conscious being, after death, and before the second coming of Christ, has led to a denial of the resurrection of the body.”²³

In this article, Storrs gave careful Bible evidence for his position that the soul does not have existence apart from the body. He used such texts as Gen 2:7; Ps 146:4; Eccl 9:5, 10; 1 Cor 15:17-18; 1 Thes 4:13-15. He answered various objections including Jesus’ statement to the thief on the cross that “today, shalt thou be with me in paradise” Luke 23:43. Using texts like John 20:17 and John 5:25 he demonstrated that Jesus was not in paradise the day He died and that the dead are waiting to hear the voice of Jesus at His second coming. Other popular ideas used to support a conscious state in death were answered, such as Paul being out of the body; Jesus seeing Moses and Elijah; souls under the altar (Rev 6:9); and the rich man and Lazarus.

Storrs concluded the article with a Bible study on the resurrection. After discussing various texts, he summarized his understanding:

The period, however long from death to the resurrection, is as no time; because perfect unconsciousness annihilates the time to the person asleep, and it is precisely the same to them as though they had been glorified, body and soul at death; and with this additional happiness, that all the redeemed, not already raised, will wake up together. Blessed hour—glorious day, when death is swallowed up in victory, and the whole company of the saints shall shout the triumph at once!

While often overlooked by those who review Storrs’ *Six Sermons*, his material on the “intermediate state” is vital and must be given due consideration to adequately round out his overall teaching and influence on early Sabbatarians and Seventh-day Adventists.

²²George Storrs, “Sixth Discourse,” *Bible Examiner*, May 1843, 13-14.

²³George Storrs, “Intermediate State of the Dead, or State from Death until the Resurrection,” *Bible Examiner*, May 1843, 15.

Conditionalism and the Dividing of Millerite Adventism

George Storrs' writing on the intermediate state and destruction of the wicked produced a broad response in the Millerite movement. Some who read his writings were already Conditionalists including some from the Christian Connection. Elias Smith, who has already been mentioned, had taught views similar to Storrs early in the nineteenth century.²⁴

Many were converted to this view by Storrs. Most notable was Charles Fitch. Fitch had helped Storrs to accept and preach the Millerite Advent Doctrine beginning in 1843, but it was not until January 1844 that Fitch accepted conditionalism. Fitch wrote on January 25, from Cleveland, Ohio, where he lived and ministered: "As you have long been fighting the Lord's battles alone, on the subject of the state of the dead, and of the final doom of the wicked, I wrote this to say, that I am at last, after much thought and prayer, and a full conviction of duty to God, prepared to take my stand by your side."²⁵

Fitch's new advocacy greatly expanded the discussion among Millerites. Josiah Litch engaged in a debate with Fitch and went so far as to publish a response in an 1844 single-issue periodical, the *Anti-Annihilationist*.²⁶ William Miller wrote a letter on May 7, 1844, declaring "I disclaim any connection, fellowship, or sympathy with Br. Storrs' views of the intermediate state, and end of the wicked."²⁷ After the fall 1844 disappointment, the conflict over the state of the dead would continue until "mainline" or non-Sabbatarian Millerites were split into various groups.

Nineteen-century Advent Christian historian, Isaac Wellcome, observed that as a result of Fitch's support "in a short time a large number of the Advent ministry embraced the above views [Storrs' and Fitch's], and commenced preaching and writing them. Wellcome then named 27 people and concluded that "the number has continually increased, until perhaps seven-eighths of the [Advent Christian] body now believe them [the view of Storrs and Fitch]."²⁸ David Dean observed, "The ever-growing number of Conditionalists believed the Advent Message could not be preached properly if the Bible teaching on the destiny of the wicked were excluded."²⁹

Four Divisions of Mainline Adventists

Various historians, both Seventh-day Adventist and Advent Christian, have helpfully described the complexity of Millerite divisions following the May 1845 Albany Conference. This fragmentation was greatly influenced by disagreements over Conditionalism.

²⁴See Michael G. Kenny, *The Perfect Law of Liberty: Elias Smith and the Providential History of America* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 221-226.

²⁵Quoted in Storrs, *Six Sermons*, 1855, 15.

²⁶Josiah Litch, *The Anti-Annihilationist*, April 15, 1844, 1-32.

²⁷William Miller, "Letter from Mr. Miller," *Midnight Cry*, May 23, 1844, 355.

²⁸Wellcome, *History of the Advent Message*, 517; See also George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 195-199.

²⁹David Arnold Dean, "Echoes of the Midnight Cry: The Millerite Heritage in Apologetics of the Advent Christian Denomination, 1860-1960," (Th.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1977), 124-125.

During the five years after the 1844 expectation, the leading Adventist paper—the *Advent Herald*—under the firm leadership of J. V. Himes, strongly opposed conditional immortality. David Dean observed that “the usually scholarly and gentlemanly periodical. . . . descended into vindictive, personal attacks; bitter and sarcastic tirades. . . . Conditionalists gradually concluded that the *Herald* was clearly opposed to the views held by the majority of Adventists on the ‘immortality question.’”³⁰ The *Bible Advocate*, an alternative Adventist paper, was started to allow Conditionalists and others who disagreed with Himes and the *Advent Herald*, to communicate their views. Though the *Bible Advocate* ceased publication toward the end of 1848 and merged with the *Advent Harbinger* in Rochester, New York, “conditional immortality” Adventists continued to meet regularly. “Union” campmeetings were held in North Wilbraham, just east of Springfield, Massachusetts, beginning in 1849 and continuing into the 1860s.³¹ After the passing of the 1854 time-expectation, Miles Grant and his *World’s Crisis* also played an important unifying role for Conditionalists.

The final result was organizational separation. First, the American Evangelical Adventist Conference formally organized in 1858 and included the *Advent Herald* publishing office with other formal aspects of denominational organization.³² This group would continue until the 1880s when their only unique doctrinal distinctive—a personal, pre-millennial Second Coming of Christ—would be widely accepted by American Protestants. Thus there remained little reason for a separate existence. The final remnants of Evangelical Adventist activities would end during the 1920s.³³

The second group became the Advent Christian Church. Miles Grant had refused to join Evangelical Adventists and with other Conditionalists met in 1860 and formed the Christian Association which was soon renamed the Advent Christian Association.³⁴ Though many refused at first to acknowledge that a denomination had been formed—due to anti-organizational sentiment—it has endured to this day and retains a Conditionalist view.

The third group was the Life and Advent Union. Miles Grant, editor of the *World Crisis*, modified the Conditionalist view of the Advent Christian group to reject that the wicked would ever be resurrected. George Storrs abandoned his previous view and theologically joined with Grant. In 1863, Storrs became the president of newly formed Life and Advent Union group. Storrs also began a new paper, the *Herald of Life and of the Coming Kingdom*. By 1864 Union members were no longer allowed in the Advent Christian Association. But by 1920 the Advent Christians and Union Adventists were exchanging delegates at each other’s General Conference meetings. The diminishing numbers of the Union Adventists ultimately led to their merger with the Advent Christian Church in 1964.³⁵

Finally, a fourth group emerged, which were popularly called “Age to Come” Adventists. This Conditionalist group shifted their expectation to a temporal earthly kingdom at the return

³⁰Ibid., 117-118.

³¹Ibid., 120.

³²Ibid., 128; “Adjourned Meetin[g] of the Nineteenth Annual Conference,” *Advent Herald*, November 20, 1858, 369-372.

³³Clyde E. Hewitt, *Midnight and Morning: An Account of the Advent Awakening and the founding of the Advent Christian Denomination, 1831-1860* (Charlotte, NC: Venture Books, 1983, 270, 272.

³⁴Dean, 133-135.

³⁵Hewitt, 267.

of Christ with the restoration of Israel as the kingdom of God and head over the Gentile nations—a very different view from the Millerite movement. Joseph Marsh, editor of the *Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate* was joined by George Storrs, Henry Grew, J. B. Cook, and O. R. L. Crosier in a loose organization through the last decades of the nineteenth century. In 1921, though remaining congregational in polity, they finally organized a headquarters in Oregon, Illinois, referred to as the Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith.³⁶ Today the group calls itself the Church of God General Conference (COGC) and focuses its ministry through the Atlanta Bible College in Atlanta, Georgia. It connects with non-trinitarians who also include those who still hold the name Church of Abrahamic Faith and Church of the Blessed Hope.

Sabbatarians and Conditionalism

Storrs' Millerite-era Conditionalist views directly influenced those who would later become Seventh-day Adventists. In his autobiography, James White wrote that Storrs' *Six Sermons* were "widely circulated among Adventists." He hinted at his acceptance of Storrs' view when he observed that "the doctrine of man's unconsciousness in death and the destruction of the wicked, was being adopted by some and regarded with favor by many." He believed "the time had come, in the providence of God, for this question to be agitated."³⁷ As early as 1847 James White had integrated Conditionalism into what would become the Seventh-day Adventist framework of eschatology in *A Word to the "Little Flock."* In the last section on the final judgment, White was clear on the unconscious state of the dead and the final destruction of the wicked. He wrote that at the Second Coming, the Son of Man will "raise the sleeping saints." Referring to the lost at the Second Coming, he continued, "the wicked are to remain silent in the dust, all through the 1000 years." He concluded with the "execution of the judgment." "Then God will have a clear universe; for the devil, and his angels, and all the wicked, will be burnt up 'root and branch.'"³⁸ This tract also included content from both Ellen White and Joseph Bates.

Ellen White recollected that about 1843 as a teenager in Portland, Maine, she overheard her mother speaking with another Christian friend about a sermon they had recently heard that the "soul had not natural immortality." When Ellen expressed surprise and concern that people would not be converted, Eunice Harmon responded, "If the love of God will not induce the rebel to yield, the terrors of an eternal hell will not drive him to repentance. . . . The love of Jesus attracts; it will subdue the hardest heart."³⁹ For a few months Ellen thought about it and then heard a sermon on the topic herself that settled her thinking on the topic.

There are various memory statements from Seventh-day Adventists who had been Millerites and accepted conditional immortality through the publications by Storrs and others. Two examples are provided:

In 1843 I was handed a paper containing Bro. Storr's six sermons on the final destruction of the wicked. This was as much as I could stand, having always

³⁶See Gary Land, "Church of God General Conference," *Historical Dictionary of Seventh-day Adventists* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 62-63; Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 1993, 283-292.

³⁷James White, *Life Incidents in Connection with the Great Advent Movement, as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation 14* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1868), 154.

³⁸James White, "The Judgment," *A Word to the "Little Flock"*, May 30, 1847, 24.

³⁹Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 48-49.

been taught the old theory that the wicked would live eternally in hell, or that they would die the second death and be destroyed, but yet live and never die.⁴⁰

In 1844, I got possession of the works of Elds. French, Fitch, and Storrs, on the Life and Death question. I read, and saw that man had no immortality by creation, or at least, he lost all claim to it at the fall.⁴¹

Storrs' Conditionalist foundation was combined with Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. The eschatological framework would become even more important with the rise of modern spiritualism. Seventh-day Adventists understand the book of Revelation to teach that Spiritualism is a significant part of the last deception of Satan before the second coming of Jesus.

Conclusion

While there were various advocates of Conditionalism during the first half of the nineteenth century, it was George Storrs who played the most important role in the Millerite movement. He influenced many, including those who would later become Sabbatarian Adventists and Seventh-day Adventists. When Charles Fitch embraced Storrs' Bible teaching, it raised the profile of Conditionalism to prominent status. Through Fitch's and Storrs' influence, the majority of post-disappointment Millerites would become Conditionalists. The exceptions were certain key leaders of the movement including William Miller, J. V. Himes, Josiah Litch, and those connected to the *Advent Herald* in Boston. Though they would be the first to organize the American Evangelical Adventist Conference in 1858, the denomination would cease to be distinctive by the turn of the twentieth century and lost all of its Adventist advocates.

Three other Conditionalist mainline Adventist groups would form. The Advent Christian Church in 1860 and the Church of God General Conference in 1921 have remained to this day, though with limited membership and influence. The Life and Advent Union, which had a variant view that rejected the resurrection of the wicked for a final judgment, would emerge in 1863 and continue until it finally lost adherents and reintegrated with the Advent Christian Church by 1964. George Storrs modified some aspects of his view as a Conditionalist and would play an important and progressive role, first with the Advent Christians, then the Union Adventists, and finally with the Church of God "age to come" Adventists.

Seventh-day Adventists followed a different course than the four groups connected to majority or mainline Adventists. Mainline Adventists rejected the prophetic significance of 1844 shortly after the fall 1844 disappointment, while "Bridegroom" Adventists continued to believe the date was important. The two groups went separate ways following Albany Conference and subsequent conferences beginning in May 1845.

"Bridegroom" Adventism was followed by Sabbatarian Adventism which then became the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the early 1860s. Like many mainline post-disappointment

⁴⁰Alvarer Pierce, "From Bro. Pierce," *Review and Herald*, April 18, 1854, 102.

⁴¹G. W. Mitchell, "A Sketch of Experience," *Review and Herald*, November 3, 1868, 226.

Adventists, Seventh-day Adventists were Conditionalists and have remained consistent in holding to a non-immortality of the soul view and the destruction of the wicked at the final judgment. For Seventh-day Adventists, George Storrs' and Charles Fitch's pre-disappointment views have essentially remained normative as a part of Seventh-day Adventist fundamental belief and have been integrated into their eschatological framework.