

THE FIVE STAGES OF CHARLES FITCH'S LIFE (1805 – 1844)

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1. Introduction

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw an unprecedented worldwide revival of interest in the biblical teachings about the Second Coming of Christ.¹ Concluding that Christ would come in their own time, many students of the Bible put a date on the anticipated event.² However, this message of the return of Christ would come to a peak in the Second Advent Movement of the 1840s under the leadership of Baptist William Miller,³ who provided one of the most precisely “elaborated and refined” chronological calculations of biblical prophecies,⁴ showing the impending fulfillment of that event.

This paper will review, in chronological sequence, the life of Rev. Charles Fitch (1805-1844), one of the most prominent characters of the Millerite movement, focusing on his Christian experience. This angle was extracted from his existing correspondence and published writings. Thus those materials will aid our understanding of the crucial events of his life and his personal spiritual pilgrimage.

Looking at his life, one can note that Fitch went through five notable stages. Thus, this study is divided into five parts, one for each section. The first briefly explains the propitious times in which Fitch lived (1805-1825). The decade of preparation at the beginning of his ministry (1826-1835) and the three main issues that stirred controversy (1836-1840) are described in the next part. After that, I will portray his conversion to the doctrine of the

¹ Gottfried Oosterwal, “Modern Messianic Movements: As a Theological and Missionary Challenge,” *Missionary Studies*, no. 2 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1973), 50.

² There were many approximations of the return of Jesus Christ between 1830 and 1847.

³ Everett N. Dick, *Founders of the Message* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1938), 1.

⁴ Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), 291.

Second Coming of Jesus (1841). Finally, I will bring out the last period of his life as the era of outstanding communication (1842-1844). These periods suggest a pedagogical acrostic consisting of the first five letters of each title of the stages of Fitch's life, FITCH.⁵

2. Fortunate Moment, 1805-1826

Before and during Charles Fitch's life many important events occurred. Those events significantly influenced his life and gave him new perspectives.

2.1 Background

Such major events as the American Revolution (1776-1783) and the French Revolution (1789-1799) were climactic expressions of the increasing democratic spirit of that time. In the New World, the "age of democratic revolution" made a significant impact not only on the social and political structures of the United States but also on its religious life.⁶

Though the First Great Awakening (led by Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Gilbert Tennent) manifested great popularity, the Second Great Awakening (1790-1830)⁷ was "the most influential revival of Christi-

⁵ Bethany Margaret McIntyre's M.A. dissertation, "*A Star of no Small Magnitude: The Life and Work of Rev. Charles Fitch (1805-1844)*," is perhaps the most comprehensive and accurate secondary source that deals with Fitch's life. McIntyre, who is a deeply rooted in the Advent Christian tradition, describes Fitch's life and theology. L. E. Froom's four-volume *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1950-54); Francis D. Nichol's *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1944); and George R. Knight's *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1993) all contain, in some parts, general stories of Charles Fitch's life. Several sections of P. Gerard Damsteeg's Th.D. dissertation, "Toward the Theology of Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church or Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission," offer important points about the famous sermon of Fitch, "Come out of her, my people," especially the section entitled: "Attitudes to Other Churches." Thus, none of these studies present a more detailed description of Fitch's life.

⁶ See R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959, 1964).

⁷ The revivals reached their height in the United States around 1830. Borge Schantz, "*The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Thought: A Contemporary Appraisal*" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1983), 82.

anity in the history of the United States.”⁸ “One of the most popular and well publicized aspects of the Second Great Awakening was the tremendous increase in missionary work.”⁹ There was also a strong and recurring emphasis on eschatology.¹⁰ Evangelical Protestantism was exerting its greatest sway.¹¹ “By allowing the European denominations to coexist in the same geographic setting, American democracy put those denominations in the free, competitive environment that gave room to several new religious experiments.”¹² Thus, Charles Fitch lived in the midst of an unprecedented worldwide revival of interest in the biblical teachings about the Second Coming of Christ.

2.2 Beginning

Very little is known about Charles Fitch’s childhood. All the information that we know about is inferred from Fitch’s own writings, as well as from the sparse secondary sources available.

Even though we do not know the precise place where Fitch was born, we can presume that it was in Hampton, Connecticut, in 1805.¹³ Knowing the religious fervour of those years, it is very likely that he grew up in the midst of Christian faith and Christian parents. This upbringing was fundamental to his development as an enthusiastic minister.

⁸ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 166.

⁹ Stephen E. Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy: Timothy Dwight and the Origins of American Evangelical Orthodoxy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1974), 188.

¹⁰ “The theology of the Second Great Awakening also differed from the earlier revival tradition. Stressing God’s sovereignty in all things, Edwards and Whitefield had emphasized the inability of sinful people to save themselves. The theology of leading revivalists in the nineteenth century, both North and South, suggested that God had bestowed on all people the ability to come to Christ. This shift in perspective was related to the larger political and intellectual developments we have already noted, but it also arose from a widespread desire for a theology of action that could encourage and justify the expanding revivals of Christianity.” *Ibid.*, 170.

¹¹ “This stage was marked by a pluralism of Christian experience broadening well beyond evangelical Protestantism.” *Ibid.*, 164.

¹² Alberto Ronald Timm, “The Sanctuary and the Three Angels’ Messages, 1844-1863: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1995), 1, 2.

¹³ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, 4:533.

2.3 Ministerial Training

Fitch was trained at Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island.¹⁴ Brown University was the third college in New England and the seventh in America.¹⁵ It was also the first Baptist-affiliated university in the New World.¹⁶ Then, after obtaining his M.A., Fitch was ordained to the Congregational ministry.

3. Indispensable Decade, 1826-1835

The decade from 1826 to 1835 was the formative period for Fitch the preacher. It was also when he married.

3.1 Zerviah

The exact date of his marriage is not known. It is possible, however, that he married in his early twenties. He married a young woman named Zerviah¹⁷ with whom he had at least five children, Charles L., Ellen, Willie, Libby, and Jennie.¹⁸

Keeping a good relationship with each other, they understood their mission to be entrusted to them by God. Even though Charles spent much time away from his family, his heart remained with his wife and their children. On one occasion, writing to his eldest son, he admonished,

I want you to give a great deal of love from me to your dear mother because she is a very particular friend of mine and has been for a long time, before you were a baby; and I feel very sure that there is not a person on the earth, that I begin to love one half as well as I do her. In truth I feel as

¹⁴ Nichol declares that it was in 1826, but Fitch was already the pastor of the Congregational Church of Holliston, Massachusetts, in 1825, 185.

¹⁵ <http://www.brown.edu/web/about/history>.

¹⁶ Bethany Margaret McIntyre, 4. See also Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 111.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸ Zerviah Fitch, to Charles L. Fitch, April 16, 1841, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI. But McIntyre stated "at least seven," McIntyre, 5. Maxwell declares that Fitch was "father of six." C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists*, rev. ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1977), 34.

though I had lost a great deal more than one half of myself when she is not with me...I know however that she loves me well.¹⁹

Moreover, he wanted his family to be faithful to God:

My Dear Wife...Even now while I write, my heart is overflowing with gushing tenderness toward you, and I feel that I want words of tenderness which language does not contain, to express what I feel toward you. I speak sincerely my wife, my heart feels toward you just as I say. And yet I know that my love to you in either tenderness or strength is as nothing, is less than nothing, when compared with the love which our Blessed ever Blessed Redeemer continuously feels for us both.²⁰

3.2 Pastoral Care

His early career as a pastor was indispensable to his mature ministerial formation as a spiritual theologian, Bible student, and an encouraging Christian. By 1825, Charles Fitch, though only twenty years old, was the pastor of the Congregational Church of Holliston, Massachusetts. Froom suggests that Fitch served successively as a pastor “at Abington, Connecticut; Warren, Massachusetts; and Hartford, Connecticut.”²¹ After working in those places, he became pastor of the Marlboro Congregational Chapel in Boston, in 1836. In spite of little information about those years, it is possible to say that this decade was useful to the challenges of the next and last decade of his life.

At the beginning of Fitch's ministry he held some beliefs he would later repudiate. For instance, in his sermon at the funeral of Joseph Stedman Fairbanks, a member of his Holliston congregation, he preached ideas of Platonic dualism on November 10, 1825. Referring to Fairbanks, he explained:

His immortal spirit had fled; and all that we behold of the active, enterprising youth is the clayey tabernacle which that spirit inhabited...the immortal interests of the soul... The aged and the young the man of gray hairs, and the infant in the cradle will soon be sleeping together in the dark and gloomy abode of the congregated dead. And oh! may we so live, “that we shall dread the grave as little as our bed.” And when the

¹⁹ Written in the letter of Zerviah Fitch, to Charles L Fitch, April 16, 1841, in the hand of Zerviah Fitch, (photocopy), Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²⁰ Charles Fitch, to Zerviah Fitch, August 31, 1840, in the hand of Charles Fitch, (photocopy), Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²¹ Froom, 4: 533.

archangel's trump shall awake our sleeping dust, may we be prepared to welcome its summons; and with the rising saints be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so be ever with the Lord.²²

3.3 Century Sermon

As the fifth minister of the Congregational Church of Holliston, Fitch was responsible for delivering the "Century Sermon." Having heard the eloquent discourse delivered by Fitch, the citizens of Holliston, with their numerous and respectable neighbours, expressed their admiration for it and desired that it be published. Fitch divided his discourse into three parts: the first part contained the civil history of Holliston; the second its ecclesiastical history; and the third a statistical view of the town, with the addition of other important miscellaneous matters.²³ In the last part of his discourse, he persuaded the people to view the future with hope and clear anticipation of the personal return of Jesus Christ to earth to raise and judge the dead. The message of the second coming would be his passion in the last days of his life. He preached:

And while we sleep with our fathers, the monumental marble may stand at our grave's head to tell to future generations that we had lived; but it is only the monument which our works shall erect, that shall assure posterity that we have lived and died well...And when we, and our ancestors, and our descendants shall together stand before God, may we be found prepared to join the full chorus of saints and angels in praise to Him, that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever. Amen and Amen.²⁴

3.4 His Longest Work

Writing his most lengthy work, containing 214 pages, Fitch ended his decade of preparation and started a new stage of his life with new and bigger challenges. Now he was the pastor of the Free Congregational Church of Hartford, Connecticut. In 1835 he published his book with the title, *Inquirer's Guide: or Truth Illustrated by Facts*.

Thirteen stories of conversion are related in this book. One can find there the conversion of Ellen P. and the Universalist man who embraced Christ as he lay dying of tuberculosis. The stories of two young people

²² Ibid., 3, 6, 15.

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Ibid., 36.

twelve or fourteen years old, who accepted Christ through a pastor (probably Fitch), and the conversion of J. F. who abandoned his rum, are also narrated in Fitch's book.²⁵ Through these dramatic conversions to Christ, Fitch exhorted his readers on with different evangelistic expressions: "Let these feelings be manifested in your life, and you are a child of God, and an heir of heaven."²⁶

One can note an evangelistic tone in this work, desiring to see more sinners repent of their sins and turn to Christ.²⁷ Knowing of the success of Fitch's book, John Bigelow ordered from Fitch one hundred copies to sell in his city. Moreover, he asked, "Should there be one or more of your productions of a similar nature, if it is a late work, you may have them put in."²⁸

In his journey through this decade (1826-1835), Charles Fitch expressed his love for his wife and children and greatly desired that they walk in the way of God. Through his family and early ministry, this passionate preacher was preparing for greater challenges. Thus, during the next years three topics would command his focus.

4. Three Main Points, 1836-1840

Between 1836 and 1840, Charles Fitch openly proclaimed three key points: the abolitionist cause, the second coming of Jesus, and the doctrine of entire sanctification. Not surprisingly, these controversial points made many enemies for Fitch. While these topics were advocated by Fitch, others defended their traditional beliefs. And the result was numerous debates. Fitch was insatiable to get the truth.

²⁵ The contents are divided into thirteen chapters: The two neighbors; Ellen P.; W. B. and his friend; the cousins, conversion of J. F.; Delay is dangerous; God is willing that sinners should be saved; The moral man, Value of decision, Husband and wife; The new heart; All must be forsaken for Christ; and Pride. Charles Fitch, *Inquirer's Guide: or Truth Illustrated by Fact* (Harford: Daniel Burgess & Co., 1835).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁷ In the preface he states, "To awaken the thoughtless, therefore; to guide the inquiring; and to aid such as are laboring to win souls to Christ; are objects which the author hopes in some humble degree to promote by this little work." *Ibid.*, iv.

²⁸ John Bigelow, to Charles Fitch, 15 February 1836, typed transcript, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

4.1 The Abolitionist Cause

On the morning of July 4, 1836, being a member of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Fitch himself preached openly against the institution of slavery at Boston's Pine Street Church. Later in the afternoon, he preached the same address again in Salem, Massachusetts, this time "by request of the friends to the immediate abolition of slavery"²⁹ This address was probably based on his forth-coming tract concerning slavery.

By 1837 Fitch published a tract that provided a forceful attack on slavery entitled *Slaveholding Weighed in the Balance of Truth, and its Comparative Guilt Illustrated*. Throughout the 36-page tract, Fitch presented a series of comparisons concerning slavery with other evils, specifically with the Roman Catholic Church and the sin of infidelity.³⁰ Moreover, "the making and vending of ardent spirits," the problems of theft and robbery,³¹ the sin of murder,³² fornication, adultery, rape,³³ and treason³⁴ were compared with slaveholding. Thus, Fitch clearly saw the institution of slavery as the greatest sin the world had ever known.³⁵ Quite obviously, Fitch manifested a favorable attitude to the abolitionist cause and its well-known leader and agitator, William Lloyd Garrison. But their collaboration was short-lived. Both men believed that the Church was not fulfilling her duty in this man-

²⁹ McIntyre, 14.

³⁰ Fitch declares, "I say then, there are points in which slavery outdoes the Romish Church in cruelty and guilt; binds heavier burdens, and more grievous to be borne, and lays them on men's shoulders, and will not touch them with a finger." Charles Fitch, *Slaveholding Weighed in the Balance of Truth, and its Comparative Guilt Illustrated* (Boston: s.n., 1837), 8.

³¹ "This is slavery. It robs a man of all his earnings during his whole life. Labor as he may, sweat as he may, he can never have a farthing to call his own. ... what is that but robbery—except that it is unspeakably worse, because it is legalized—and the poor man has no means of redress?" *Ibid.*, 12-13.

³² "If a man shoots you dead by the wayside, it is your own fault if you do not go to heaven. You have the Bible, and the gospel. You know that there is a Saviour, and if you have not repented of your sins, and believed in him for your salvation, you are without excuse. If you lose your soul, the fault is your own. Though murdered-you might if you would, have been saved. But the poor slave is prevented from learning the way of salvation while he lives, and then worn out from toil, he dies and is lost forever. Surely I need not say more-what honest man is not prepared to say that slavery is worse than murder?" *Ibid.*, 18-19.

³³ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

³⁵ McIntyre, 18.

ner.³⁶ Unfortunately for Garrison, in August 1837, Fitch would become a formidable opponent of Garrison's anti-slavery organization³⁷ because Garrison's backlash against the churches resulted in more harm than good to the abolitionist cause.³⁸ The same month Fitch, along with four of his ministerial colleagues from the Boston area, authored the *Appeal of Clerical Abolitionists on Anti-Slavery Matters*.³⁹

The publication of the *Appeal* did not oppose the abolitionist agenda of Garrison: "Fitch was not so much out of harmony with Garrison's anti-slavery principles as he was with Garrison's teachings against the clergy and his downplaying of the Sunday-Sabbath as a holy day (Garrison taught all days were holy), the visible church, and the Christian ordinances."⁴⁰ The *Appeal* created debates between the followers of Fitch and Garrison.⁴¹ Thus, Fitch and his colleagues had decided to split off from the Garrisonians and create a society of "Evangelical Abolitionists."⁴² Garrison, for his part, saw Fitch as a "deserter" and a traitor.⁴³

"Between 1835 and 1840 Garrison bombarded the American religious establishment with every epithet that was none too vile to include in a speech or a newspaper article. He spared no denomination."⁴⁴ A few years after 1837, on January 9, 1840, Fitch sent a letter to Garrison expressing regret that he had participated in the *Appeal* and had condemned Garrison. Certainly, his conviction of the soon second coming of Jesus led Fitch to express his apology. All this bitter experience finished with the hope of seeing Jesus Christ coming "in the clouds of heaven, coming to judge the world, and to establish His reign of holiness and righteousness and bless-

³⁶ Ibid., 20.

³⁷ George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 107.

³⁸ McIntyre, 21.

³⁹ Charles Fitch and others, *Appeal of Clerical Abolitionists on Anti-Slavery Matters* (Boston, s.n., 1837).

⁴⁰ Knight, 108.

⁴¹ For a glance at those debates see, McIntyre, 22-29.

⁴² Knight, 108.

⁴³ Louis Ruchames, ed., *A House Dividing Against Itself, 1836-1840: The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 2:275.

⁴⁴ William L. VanDeburg, "William Lloyd Garrison and the 'Pro-Slavery Priesthood': The Changing Beliefs of an Evangelical Reformer, 1830-1840," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (June 1975), 232.

edness over the pure of heart."⁴⁵ Thus, this topic was his second talking point.

4.2 The Second Coming of Jesus

As the pastor of the Marlboro Chapel of the Congregational Church in Boston, Fitch was given a copy of Miller's Lectures, containing his views on the Second Advent, in early 1838. He "was greatly overwhelmed with the subject, until" he felt he "could truly love Christ's appearing."⁴⁶ Miller's book was to Fitch such a novelty that he "devoured it with a more intense interest than any other book I had ever read: and continued to feel the same interest in it, until I had read it from beginning to end for the sixth time."⁴⁷

It was then that Fitch's zealous spirit led him to preach his first two sermons on the Second Advent on March 4, 1838.⁴⁸ The following day, March 5, he penned a letter to William Miller:

My Dear Brother: I am the pastor of an Orthodox Congregational Church in this city. A few weeks since your lectures on the second coming of Christ were put into my hands. I sat down to read the work, knowing nothing of the views which it contained. I have studied it with an overwhelming interest, such as I never felt in any other book except the Bible. I have compared it with Scripture and history, and I find nothing on which to rest a single doubt respecting the correctness of your views. Though a miserable, guilty sinner, I trust that, through the Lord's abounding grace, I shall be among those that "love his appearing." Preached to my people two discourses yesterday on the coming of our Lord, and I believe a deep and permanent interest will be awakened thereby, in God's testimonies.

Yours in the faith of Jesus Christ,
Charles Fitch.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Charles Fitch to W. L. Garrison, January 9, 1840, in Garrison and Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison*, 2:335-337.

⁴⁶ Charles Fitch, "Fitch's two sermons," *Signs of the Time* III no 2 (13 April 1842): 13.

⁴⁷ Charles Fitch, Letter to Rev. J. Litch, on the Second Coming of Christ (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1841), 2.

⁴⁸ In Charles Fitch, "Fitch's two sermons," 13, Fitch claimed that the sermons were preached on the date of February 17, 1838. However, in a letter of Fitch to Miller, he suggests March 4, 1838. Charles Fitch, to William Miller, March 5, 1838. Reproduced in George R. Knight, *1844 and the Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 82.

Thus, Fitch had his first contact with Miller. Following these events, on March 6, the Suffolk South Association of Congregational Ministers had a meeting where Fitch introduced to its members the exciting news: Jesus is coming for the second time to Earth. At that time, the famous preachers, Bush, Finney, Cowles, and others had taught “the soon-coming millennium would be a thousand years of earthly peace and plenty brought about through social reform, national progress, and personal perfection.”⁵⁰ Fitch’s message, therefore, was considered by his colleagues as “moonshine,” “ditto,” and that “the prophecies can’t be understood.”⁵¹ Moreover, at the end of the meeting an elderly pastor approached the young Fitch and expressed his concern over the views he had presented to the ministerial association.⁵² “Fitch was led to believe that it was his lack of training in prophetic study.”⁵³ On the one hand, it was negative because it drove Fitch to keep silent for some time and, on the other hand, it was positive because it drove him to learn more about the Second Advent. Even though he lacked knowledge of the Second Coming in the beginning, the seed had been sown and soon would bear fruit.

4.3 The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification

The last and more important point between 1836 and 1840 that affected his theology till the end of his life was his focus on Christian perfection or “full sanctification.” This topic also highlights the utter sincerity of his personality.⁵⁴ After leaving the Marlboro Chapel in Boston, Fitch went to New Jersey, where his “mind became deeply absorbed in examining the subject of full sanctification by faith in Christ.”⁵⁵

While he was pastoring the Presbyterian Church in Newark, New Jersey, he wrote *Views of Sanctification* in November of 1839. It was ironic because the Presbyterian Church, just like the Congregational Church, did not believe in the possibility of Christian perfection. Thus, at the beginning of

⁴⁹ *A Brief History of William Miller, the Great Pioneer in Adventual Faith*, 2d ed. (Boston: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1910), 140, 141.

⁵⁰ Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, 18.

⁵¹ Charles Fitch, “Fitch’s two sermons,” 14.

⁵² Charles Fitch, to Dr. W.C. Palmer, 26 July 1842, typed transcript Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

⁵³ McIntyre, 35.

⁵⁴ Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, 108.

⁵⁵ Charles Fitch, Letter to Josiah Litch, 9

his ministry, Fitch rejected the doctrine of sanctification, due in part to the bad testimonies of those who professed full sanctification.

A work popularly called "A Treatise on Christian Perfection," written by English Methodist John William Fletcher, was read by Fitch and caused him to change his position about Christian perfection.⁵⁶ This "little work," as he named it, showed that Christian perfection was equated with the experience of Pentecost. Considering Christian perfection as an instantaneous work, Fletcher thought that there was gradual experience of the work of the Holy Spirit both before and after the baptism.

For that time, Charles Fitch was not the only minister preaching the doctrine of holiness. This doctrine was also prevalent among the faculty of Ohio's Oberlin College and became known as "Oberlin Perfectionism."⁵⁷ For them "holiness consists primarily of the perfection of the will and is available to every Christian after conversion." Although not officially connected with Oberlin College, Ohio, Fitch united with their theology "and thus became a colleague in the cause with such Oberlin theological professors as Asa Mahan, Henry Cowles, and Charles Finney;" all of these men published books "on the subject of perfection."⁵⁸ Finney wrote *Views of Sanctification* in 1838 and the next year Mahan wrote *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection*.

Fitch's *Views of Sanctification* was divided into three sections. In the first, Fitch asked, "Had God, in the economy of His grace, made provision to save His people from their sins?" He answered: "He is my Saviour [Jesus], to save me from my sins; and this is just the Saviour that I need."⁵⁹ Then he questioned whether Christians can avail themselves of this provision of the grace of God so as to be saved from sin in this life? He answered: "He who serves God...is saved from sin, all the days of his life."⁶⁰ And finally he asked: "In what way may the provisions of God's grace become available, to save His people from their sins?" He states "we are...to cleanse ourselves

⁵⁶ John William Fletcher was a close friend with both John and Charles Wesley, and thus was exposed directly to their doctrines. Later on Fletcher was appointed Superintendent of Trevecca College, Wales; but after controversy broke out at Trevecca between the Calvinists and the Arminians, Fletcher resigned, siding with Wesley and the Arminians. As a result of this theological controversy, Fletcher authored his most well-known work, *Checks to Arminianism*.

⁵⁷ McIntyre, 50.

⁵⁸ R. J. Green, "Oberlin Theology," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 834.

⁵⁹ Charles Fitch, *Guide to Christian Perfection* (Brushton, NY: TEACH Services, 1997), 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, by the promises of God. These contain the truth, through which we may be sanctified, according to our Saviour's prayer."⁶¹

After this publication, the Newark Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church accused him of heresy in a "*Resolution of Censure.*" This resolution prohibited Fitch from preaching about entire sanctification. Later, Fitch declared to Litch, "I lost my church connection, and became, in part an ecclesiastical outcast."⁶² Early in 1840, the journal, *Guide to Christian Perfection*, began publication of a series of letters written by Charles Fitch on the doctrine of entire sanctification. In replying to the accusations of his ecclesiastical superiors, Fitch penned a short preface introducing the topic for the readers of the *Guide*:

Some have thought that I was bringing "strange things to their ears," and such a report went abroad. At a late meeting of the Presbytery, the brethren, with perfect propriety, and with the utmost kindness, desired of me that I would tell them "what this new doctrine is." I gave them a brief statement of my feeling and views, and answered as well as I was able several inquiries. The Presbytery, then, with perfect propriety, in my apprehension, appointed a Committee to confer with me further on the subject. Of all this, I fully approve. Soon after, I received a note from one of the committee,⁶³ in which, in a kind and Christian-like manner, he proposed [a series of] questions, and requested an answer.⁶⁴

Convinced of the doctrine of entire sanctification, Fitch wrote a letter to the Presbytery of Newark which gave the reasons why he taught that doc-

⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

⁶² Charles Fitch, Letter to Josiah Litch, 9

⁶³ William R. Weeks, who was an associate of Fitch, was the pastor of Newark's Fourth Presbyterian Church. He was not satisfied with Fitch's answers to the presbytery, and wrote a lengthy letter to Fitch questioning him further. Weeks objected to the fact that Fitch had chosen to publicly respond to a private matter. In the last part of his letter he penned, "I offer no apology for the plainness of these questions. The relation we sustain makes it my duty to try to open your eyes to what I think a dangerous delusion. I have not designed to say anything to hurt your feelings, nor to cast any unkind imputations. I have been obliged to [do this] in great haste, and have not had time to weigh all my words with as much exactness as might be desirable. If there is any appearance of hardness, I ask your forgiveness for it. But if the questions are in any degree searching, both to you, and the subject, this is what I supposed it was my duty to aim at. May the Lord make them the means of good to you and to me, and to the church of Christ." William R. Weeks, *Letter to the Rev. Charles Fitch, on his Views of Sanctification* (Newark, 31 December, 1839), 23.

⁶⁴ Charles Fitch, *Guide to Christian Perfection* I (February 1840), 168-169.

trine.⁶⁵ He ultimately received rejection, and then he soon replied with his *Reason for Withdrawing From the Newark Presbytery* in April of 1840. There, he firmly declared, "I do hereby withdraw from you."⁶⁶ "Thus he bade adieu to his Presbyterian brethren."⁶⁷

Fitch would continue preaching the doctrine of entire sanctification until his death. For him it was completely the work of God, and contained nothing of the works of the believer. His thinking on entire sanctification was that it was "really a matter of the efficacy of the atonement-if Christ died for sins, and those for whom he died were unable to be freed from the bonds of those sins, then his death must not have been efficacious."⁶⁸ Knowing that Christ's death was efficacious, Fitch concluded that entire sanctification was possible.

In short, for Fitch the doctrine of entire sanctification was inseparable from the efficacy of Christ's atonement. He claimed that it changed his life: "He was given an assurance of forgiveness and salvation after which he had long sought."⁶⁹ Furthermore, the doctrine of holiness affected his understanding of the second coming of Jesus.

5. Convinced of the Second Coming of Jesus, 1841

After he left the First Free Presbyterian Church of Newark, Fitch moved back to Haverhill, Massachusetts, to begin a new stage of his life. While he did not have a specific church for a while, he did have greater freedom to preach. This was a period of trouble and uncertainty. He remembered those sad days in a letter written to Walter and Phoebe Palmer:

You know dear Bro. & sister how my heart had been bounding with intense desire to get about to proclaim the glorious doctrine of holiness... My way seemed completely hedged up after I came to Haverhill. I felt as though shut up in some narrow cell, looking out with intense desire at my grated windows and longing and weeping, and wrestling with God to open the way before me that I might go forth and spread out before

⁶⁵ Charles Fitch, *Letter to the Presbytery of Newark* (10 April, 1840).

⁶⁶ Charles Fitch, *Reason for Withdrawing From the Newark Presbytery*, 3, 12.

⁶⁷ Froom, 4:536.

⁶⁸ McIntyre, 41.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 51, 52.

my fellow men the bread and water of life. I fasted, I prayed, I groaned, I wept before the Lord.⁷⁰

In the middle of the enveloping darkness he received new rays of hope through Josiah Litch. This light, which three and a half years previously had shone for a while (in 1838), would now shine until the last day of his life. Thus, Fitch testified: "At length brother Litch, whom I had never seen, called & said, 'Brother, you need the doctrine of the Second Advent to put with the doctrine of Holiness.'" ⁷¹

After this challenge, Fitch began to examine the Scriptures anew regarding Miller's teaching. It would prove to be his second chance. But now he was not intimidated by anybody. Sensing strength and aid from God, he studied with prayer, meditation, and fasting in order to find "all truth."⁷² Later on, in November of 1841, Fitch would write a tract of 72 pages, entitled a *Letter to Rev. J. Litch, on the Second Coming of Christ*:

My dear Brother Litch: You will, doubtless, remember that when you called at my house some months ago, you requested me to examine the Bible doctrine respecting the second coming of Christ, and write you the result of my investigations. Having now looked at the subject, until I feel that my mind is settled and established, and my feet placed on "the Rock," I take great pleasure in attempting to communicate my views and feeling to you, according to your request. Permit me here to say, that it is my wish to bear testimony, on this momentous subject, to the world, as extensively as the Lord shall permit...My mind is now in a state of delightful rest in the Lord, touching the whole matter; and I feel fully prepared, and happy, to lay before you what I believe to be the truth, and the arguments by which I find it supported.⁷³

Fitch's testimony was not only shared with Litch, but was also sent to his Holiness friends, the Palmers. He expressed to them that he wished only to know God's will and added, "Light seemed breaking in upon my mind, ray after ray, & I found myself more & more unable to resist the conviction that it was indeed the truth."⁷⁴ He was convinced that the Second Coming of Jesus was at the door. He was now resolved to proclaim the good news to

⁷⁰ Charles Fitch, to Dr. W.C. Palmer, 26 July 1842.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "When Dear Bro. Litch named the second advent, I went to the Lord; I read my Bible, & all the works that I could obtain. I possessed myself of all the evidences in that case that I could; & then with fasting & prayer I laid them & myself with all before the Lord, desiring only that the Blessed Spirit might guide me into all truth." Ibid.

⁷³ Charles Fitch, *Letter to Rev. J. Litch, on the Second Coming of Christ, with the Sentiments of Cotton Mather* (Boston, Joshua V. Himes, 1841), 5, 14.

⁷⁴ Charles Fitch, to Dr. W.C. Palmer, 26 July 1842.

the world, whatever the cost. Quite evidently, in this message he had found what he did not have, peace and assurance. He composed poetry and wrote scores of letters about the Second Coming as well.

On December 15, 1841, the newspaper, *Signs of the Times*, reported with joy that Fitch had returned to Adventism: "This dear brother has come into the full faith of the Second Advent, both as to the *manner*, and the *time*." Moreover, the Millerite newspaper announced that Fitch's views "will be published in a pamphlet, and will be for sale about the 10th of the present month, at this office." And the advertising ended, "Friends will send in their orders without delay."⁷⁵ Thus, his acceptance of the belief of the pre-millennial return of Christ was so well known that he made enemies. But from that time it would be completely different. Before he had felt badly, with a strong sense of failure, but now his eyes seemed illuminated with hope. He trusted in the soon return of Jesus and the hope it engendered took on great significance for him.

Even though Miller's doctrine of a personal, premillennial return of Christ was so repugnant to the Oberlin theologians, Fitch accepted it. For him, sanctification was the means by which one could become prepared for second coming of Jesus. Through both the doctrine of sanctification and Christ's imminent return, Charles Fitch found personal peace and assurance.⁷⁶ With these two doctrines in mind, the impulsive Fitch would communicate with enthusiasm his legacy in the last stage of his life.

6. Heir of Outstanding Communication, 1842-1844

In the last part of his life, Fitch proved to be an outstanding communicator. For most of his last three years, he enthusiastically put his whole heart into the Millerite Advent Movement. He had become one of the most aggressive and successful Millerite leaders. He fearlessly proclaimed that Jesus is coming again, and exhorted, "Be prepared." Between 1842 and 1844, we can note nine important events which revealed that he was an heir of outstanding communication.

⁷⁵ "Bro. Charles Fitch," *Signs of the Times* II, no 18 (15 December 1841), 144.

⁷⁶ McIntyre, 56.

6.1 Communicating Through His Preaching

With great eloquence, Charles Fitch preached in many parts of New England, to particularly large congregations in 1842. LeRoy Froom's description of him claimed that "in appearance he was slender but well built, with an engaging smile and genuine kindness of heart." As to his preaching, he added that Fitch "was a cogent reasoner and a powerful preacher, deep solemnity characterizing his style. There was warmth and glow in his public address."⁷⁷ And while he received many invitations to preach, he was unable to answer all the calls:

And now so soon as I was ready to come out on the Second Advent, the door before me was thrown wide open and I have been wholly unable for the last 8 months to meet one half the calls which I have received. Wherever I have been God has been with me. Since the 1st of Dec. last, I have preached as often as every day & about sixty times besides. I have been in all The New England States, congregations have been large in all places. Wherever I have been I have preached holiness. My usual practice has been to preach on Holiness in the afternoon, & on the Second Advent in the evening. I have seen saints sanctified & sinners led to Christ.⁷⁸

These years (1842-1844) were very busy for Fitch. Having left his family at home, he went forth to communicate the blessed hope. People came long distances—five, ten or fifteen miles—in those days of primitive travel. His sincere passion for Christ attracted many people in various places. The two following letters reveal his tireless work:

I reached this place [Montpelier] at about half past twelve o'clock on Wednesday. I had then preached 13 times in a week, & attended many prayer meetings & then at the end of it instead of taking rest I had had a most fatiguing ride of 75-miles. A meeting however was appointed for me here on the evening of my arrival. Accordingly I went to bed, & after sleeping 2 hours & a half, I arose exceedingly refreshed, & preached in the evening. The audience was tolerable for numbers-though by no means such as I had left at Claremont. Yesterday I preached twice, & the audience in the evening was much increased. The spirit of the Lord was present, & truth had power.⁷⁹

After eleven days Fitch wrote again to Zerviah, his wife:

⁷⁷ Froom, 4, 539.

⁷⁸ Charles Fitch, to Dr. W.C. Palmer, 26 July 1842.

⁷⁹ Charles Fitch, to Zerviah Fitch, June 17, 1842.

This morning I Lectured at 5 o'clock on the 2nd advent-I expect to Lecture once or twice more, in the course of the day & evening. Tomorrow morning I leave for Richmond 60 miles toward the north-west, where I am to tarry till Monday morning, when I set out for home I have preached already 39-sermons since I left.⁸⁰

Not only his charismatic personality, but also his creative methods of presentation endeared him to his hearers and readers. As an evangelist, he knew how to capture the people. Depicting the figure from King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the book of Daniel, he used visual aids and a three-dimensional statue. After talking about each kingdom, he removed each part of King Nebuchadnezzar's body, according to the dream. At the end of his preaching, his audience in the "Great Tent"⁸¹ understood that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44) at the Second Coming of Jesus.

6.2 Communicating Through His Famous "1843 Chart"

While Fitch was travelling about, proclaiming the message of the soon return of Christ, the words of Habakkuk came forcefully to his mind: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For revelation awaits an appointed time; It speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay."⁸² This was the call that resulted in the making of the legendary "1843-chart."⁸³ After designing the "1843' prophetic chart, assisted by

⁸⁰ Charles Fitch, to Zerviah Fitch, June 28, 1842.

⁸¹ "Bro. Fitch lectured in the afternoon, briefly going over the second, seventh, and eighth chapters of the prophecies of Daniel. The rise and fall of the four universal kingdoms that were to precede 'God's Everlasting kingdom,' was illustrated in a very impressive manner, by the aid of a carved image, representing the one described in Dan 2:32, 33. When proof was adduced that ancient Babylon fell, the head of the image was taken off and laid aside; and so of the breast and the arms, the belly and sides, then the legs, leaving nothing behind but the feet and toes. None but the willfully blinded could help seeing that we are living in the very last days." "The Meeting," *Midnight Cry* VI, no 21 (1844): 372.

⁸² Habakkuk 2:2-3, New International Version. "As early as 1842, the Spirit of God had moved upon Charles Fitch to devise the prophetic chart, which was generally regarded by Adventists as a fulfillment of the command given by the prophet Habakkuk." Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy: The Controversy between Christ and Satan* 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1884), 4:241.

⁸³ Named the "1843 chart" because it displayed numerous arithmetic calculations pointing to the year 1843, it superseded all previous charts. Its use became an identifying mark in public representations of the Movement until the seventh-month phase, which was based on "1844," not on "1843."

Apollos Hale, Fitch presented it to the Millerite General Conference in Boston, of which Joseph Bates was chairman. It was an instant success. The conference recommended the production of 300 lithographed copies for the use of Adventist preachers.⁸⁴ This was in May of 1842.

On September 23, 1851, Ellen G. White, the Sabbatarian Adventist prophet, was shown the “1843 chart” and reported “that the 1843 chart was directed by the hand of the Lord, and that it should not be altered; that the figures were as He wanted them; that His hand was over and hid a mistake in some of the figures, so that none could see it, until His hand was removed.”⁸⁵

6.3 Communicating “The Hope” to the Oberlin Community

Later on, between September 19 and October, 4, 1842, Fitch made his first public presentation at Oberlin. This occasion became known for the debates with the Oberlin faculty. His opponents were Oberlin president Asa Mahan and professors Charles Grandison Finney,⁸⁶ Henry Cowles, and John Morgan. He was no stranger to the Oberlin theologians. They noted “with grief” that their beloved Charles Fitch had accepted Miller’s religious thinking.⁸⁷ Their postmillennial theory, a thousand years of earthly peace, was contrary to the premillennial return of Christ. Once Miller’s theory was spread throughout Oberlin College, its leader took some measures against it:

Oberlin’s consternation with Miller’s doctrine is indicated by that between February 17, 1841, and December 22, 1841, the *Oberlin Evangelist* published a series of twenty-three articles on “The Millenium [sic].” That series was succeeded by a second one of seventeen articles entitled “No Millenium [sic]” that extended from January 19 through August 31, 1842. Both series were aimed at Miller, but the second more openly specified the problem as Miller’s “doctrine that the world is never to be converted to God.” The *Evangelist* deplored the fact that many of the “best ministers” were “renouncing the doctrine of the temporal Millenium [sic].”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps*, 10, 11.

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1906), 74.

⁸⁶ In 1835, Fitch had been the dedicatory speaker for Finney’s new Broadway Tabernacle congregation in New York City.

⁸⁷ *Oberlin Evangelist*, January 19, 1842, 14.

⁸⁸ Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, 110-111.

The next year, 1843, Fitch and his family had located in Cleveland, Ohio. Then, a second series of debates was held in September. This time, the debates would be in the public square. Despite the great interest of the population, the Oberlin scholars held to their position. However, Fitch, though anguished at the opposition, strengthened his belief in the return of Christ:

I have never seen the glorious truths of the Bible, teaching the kingdom and coming of Christ, met with more determined opposition, contempt and scorn, than they have been by the Oberlin Faculty; and never, in all my life have I felt such anguish at my heart's core, or shed such bitter, burning tears as I have at their rejection of the Word of the Lord.⁸⁹

6.4 Communicating Through His Own Journal

While thinking about how he could expand the proclamation of the truth of the Second Coming in the western region, the innovative Fitch decided to begin the publication of his own journal. After writing to Joshua Himes, Fitch received a long awaited answer. Himes appreciated his initiative and sent him \$100, of which \$25 "was from a friend in Providence," and "the rest from the Lord's treasury, 14 Devonshire Street."⁹⁰ 14 Devonshire Street was the publication office of Himes' own paper, *The Signs of the Times*.

Furthermore, Himes advised him to write more and promised to send him more publications soon. He challenged Fitch to keep his paper alive.⁹¹ The journal had already begun on January 18, 1843 as a weekly newspaper called the *Second Advent of Christ*.

6.5 Communicating Through His Most Famous Sermon

Anti-Millerite sentiment had rapidly developed in the year 1843.⁹² The general idea held among the Millerites up until 1842 was that the Roman Catholic Church/Papacy was Babylon. This changed with the preaching of Charles Fitch's sermon, "Come Out of her, My People."

The big factor that moved Fitch to preach his famous sermon was the prohibitory "Bath Resolutions" of July 19, 1843, seven days before his famous sermon on July 26, 1843). These resolutions were enacted at Bath, Maine, where "Bishop E. Hedding presided, and W. H. Pillsbury (the histo-

⁸⁹ Charles Fitch, *Midnight Cry*, December 21, 1843, 167.

⁹⁰ Joshua Vaughan Himes, "Letter to Charles Fitch," *Signs of the Times*, V, no 7 (19 April 1843), 52-53.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² P Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1995), 79.

rian) was secretary. 'Millerism' occupied most of the time of the session."⁹³ The resolutions were clearly aimed at the Millerite message. For instance, one resolution says:

Resolved, that those who persist in disseminating those peculiarities, either in public or private, and especially those who have left their appropriate work for this purpose, be admonished by the Chair, and all be hereby required to refrain entirely from disseminating them in future.⁹⁴

Charles Fitch, "true to his zealous and sincere character,"⁹⁵ concluded in his sermon that Catholics and Protestants are Antichrist:

Thus I have defined what Babylon, or Antichrist is. It is everything that rises in opposition to the personal reign of Christ on David's throne, and to the revealed time for his appearing: and here we do find the professed Christian world, Catholic and Protestant, on the side of Antichrist. They all say, let *us* take the kingdom, and let Christ and the departed saints that have suffered with him, to whom the kingdom has been promised, remain where they are.⁹⁶

To Fitch, Babylon meant "confusion." His sermon received wide circulation. "Its greatest impact was in the West."⁹⁷ Charles Fitch published it in his paper, the *Second Advent of Christ* (Cleveland) and Himes sent it out for publication from New York to publications in the west, and a pamphlet was also published in Rochester, New York.⁹⁸ The *Signs of the Time* only published part three of the sermon. "It thus avoided giving wider circulation to Fitch's definition of Babylon with which the editors did not agree."⁹⁹

6.6 Communicating His Belief on the Conditional Immortality of the Soul

George Storrs, who was convinced by Fitch to become an Adventist in mid-1842, now convinced Charles Fitch of the biblical teaching of death as an unconscious sleep. After much study, as was his habit, Fitch confessed to

⁹³ From, 4:775-776.

⁹⁴ *Bath Maine Inquirer*, July 26, 1846, 3. Oddly enough, it was published the same day that Fitch preached his famous sermon.

⁹⁵ Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, 106.

⁹⁶ Fitch, *Come out of Her, My People*, 15.

⁹⁷ Arthur, 66.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60, 66.

⁹⁹ "Notwithstanding the fact that many of these leaders could not endorse Fitch's position and actually opposed it, Fitch's sermon exerted a tremendous impact on the movement, and the cry to leave Babylon assumed an importance second only to proclaiming the Second Advent." *Ibid.*, 66.

the former Methodist, Storrs, his complete acceptance of the doctrine of the conditional immortality of the soul.¹⁰⁰ On January 25, 1844, Fitch wrote the following:

I write 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. I am thoroughly converted to the Bible truth, that "the dead know not anything," and that all the instances in the Bible in which they are spoken of as though in a conscious state, are instances in which "God who quickeneth the dead, calleth the things which be not as though they were."¹⁰¹

Though William Miller himself never accepted conditional immortality, Fitch never hesitated in his acceptance of this doctrine.

6.7 Communicating Through His Baptism

The baptism of Charles Fitch communicated his public acceptance of Jesus Christ. But what kind of baptism? By early 1844, after having completed his ministry in Painesville, Ohio, Charles Fitch reported to the *Midnight Cry* that "My wife and I have recently been 'buried with Christ by baptism,' having received that precious sacrament at the hands of brother Cook."¹⁰² Soon afterwards, the intrepid Fitch himself baptized eight people at Painesville, and about thirty at Cleveland.¹⁰³

Not only were he and his wife baptized, but also Charles L. Fitch, their eldest son. On April 16, 1844, Charles L. Fitch sent a letter to his mother narrating his impression after his baptism by immersion: "I have felt as though this world was nothing; it seems as though we should soon be done with this and exchange it for a better world."¹⁰⁴ Later that summer, at the St. George's Campmeeting, Charles Fitch "went into the water" baptizing a good number; among them were Josiah Litch and his wife.¹⁰⁵ Then, in September 1844, the editors of the *Midnight Cry*, on the subject of the adherents

¹⁰⁰ Neither Charles Fitch nor George Storrs ever became Sabbath keepers.

¹⁰¹ Charles Fitch, to George Storrs, 25 January 1844. Reproduced in George R. Knight, ed., *1844 and the Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism*, 163.

¹⁰² Charles Fitch, "Letter from Bro. Charles Fitch," *Midnight Cry* VI no. 8 (7 March 1844), 270.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Charles L. Fitch, to Zerviah Fitch, 16 April 1844, In the hand of Charles Fitch, (photocopy), Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

¹⁰⁵ McIntyre, 75.

of immersion, such as Fitch and others, did not take a firm position of accepting or rejecting baptism by immersion.¹⁰⁶

6.8 Communicating Through His Death

By September of 1844, with a clearer understanding prophetic time, the Millerite Movement put all its evangelistic efforts into promoting the Second Coming. There was a powerful sense that the Day was drawing nigh. For his part, Fitch, who was a spokesperson in the west, left his home in Cleveland to go preach in various places in Ohio, and Buffalo and Rochester, New York, and even to several cities in Canada. The ardent Fitch was tireless in his proclamation that Jesus was coming.

However, his last days of life were at the door. Chronic disease was soon to take its toll. After another successful preaching campaign at the Morrisville and St. Georges camp meetings, Fitch believed that it was time to come back home. On September 16, 1844,¹⁰⁷ while at home, Fitch was requested to baptize a group of believers in the chilly waters of Lake Erie near Buffalo. He continued his journey home with his wet garments, and a cold wind blowing. A second group of believers then desired to be baptized and Fitch acceded to their request. Later, a third company came with the same desire as well, and Fitch again went into Lake Erie. Now Fitch was seriously chilled.

Having contracted a “bilious fever” (possibly pneumonia) in Buffalo, Fitch was unable to return home. A certain Brother Judson reported to the *Midnight Cry* that Fitch was “apparently just alive. His soul, however, was full of hope and glory.”¹⁰⁸ He had read the article on the tenth day of the seventh month by George Storrs and fully expected the Lord to come on October 22. Thus he trusted that “If he went into the grave, he would only have to take a short sleep.”¹⁰⁹ On Monday, October 14, 1844, just eight days before he expected to meet his Savior, Charles Fitch died at the early age of thirty-nine. It is said that being in a public meeting, he mentioned that “he had a presentiment that he must sleep a little while before the coming of the Lord.”¹¹⁰

Zerviah believed that very soon she would see her beloved Charles again. Thus the Millerite journal, *The Midnight Cry*, reported that “his

¹⁰⁶ See “Mode of Baptism,” *Midnight Cry* VII no. 12 (26 September 1844), 92.

¹⁰⁷ “Bro. Charles Fitch,” *The Midnight Cry* VII. No. 18 (31 October 1844), 142.

¹⁰⁸ “Bro. C. Fitch,” *The Midnight Cry* VII. No. 17 (19 October 1844), 133.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ “Bro. Charles Fitch,” *The Midnight Cry* VII. no. 18 (31 October 1844), 142.

widow and fatherless children are now at Cleveland, confidently expecting the coming of our Lord to gather the scattered members of the family."¹¹¹ Moreover, a "Bro Williamson reported that 'Sister Fitch is there [Buffalo], without a tear, expecting to meet her husband very soon. So far from sorrow, she is smiling and happy.'"¹¹²

Being widely loved, the Millerite movement lost one of its most prominent preachers. Remembered as a compassionate pastor, a deep thinker, an original writer, a powerful preacher, and a lover of truth, Charles Fitch died in the hope of seeing the Second Coming of Christ on October 22, 1844.

6.9 Communicating After His Death

Charles Fitch communicated through his preaching, his famous "1843 chart," his witness of hope to the Oberlin Community, his own journal, his most famous sermon, his belief in the conditional immortality of the soul, his baptism, and his death. Later on, Ellen G. White was shown that Charles Fitch was to be among the redeemed:

Here we saw the tree of life and the throne of God. Out of the throne came a pure river of water, and on either side of the river was the tree of life. On one side of the river was a trunk of a tree, and a trunk on the other side of the river, both of pure, transparent gold... We all went under the tree and sat down to look at the glory of the place, when Brethren Fitch and Stockman, who had preached the gospel of the kingdom, and whom God had laid in the grave to save them, came up to us and asked us what we had passed through while they were sleeping. We tried to call up our greatest trials, but they looked so small compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory that surrounded us that we could not speak them out, and we all cried out, "Alleluia, heaven is cheap enough!"¹¹³

7. Conclusion

Although his name does not appear much in the pages of nineteenth-century American historiography, Charles Fitch was a prominent leader in the Millerite movement. He was an Abolitionist, a Perfectionist, and an Adventist. McIntyre recognizes him as "a star of no small magnitude." L. E. Froom admired him as "well educated, deeply pious, and a lover of truth."

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 17.

George R. Knight calls him "the zealous Charles Fitch." And *The Midnight Cry* mentioned that he had "a father's tenderness, and a brother's love for the children of God."

Many times, Charles Fitch was separated from his family while preaching his convictions. He was an eloquent and impulsive preacher, an innovative teacher, a productive writer, and a seeker of the truth. He worked beside many of the most influential characters of his day. William Lloyd Garrison became a friend. Together with Charles Grandison Finney, Asa Mahan, and Phoebe Palmer, Fitch preached entire sanctification. Subsequently his proclamation of the soon return of Jesus Christ would be linked to the doctrine of holiness. Thus, Fitch worked passionately for the Millerite movement.

Through the five stages of his life he was a fervent, unapologetic Christian. His last words of hope still resound-- "I believe in the promise of God."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ From, 4:545.