

Historical Records of Sabbath Keeping After New Testament Times Throughout History

RETURNING FROM THE SAVIOUR'S TOMB

"They returned,... and rested on the Sabbath day according to the commandment." Luke 23:56

"It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute forever." Lev 16:31

"Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil." Isa 56:2

Not all at once did the general churches, setting aside the true Sabbath of the Lord, change to Sunday observance. Even though most historical records of these Sabbath keeping churches have been destroyed throughout the ages, as the general churches of the world had fallen away, we see glimpses here and there by surviving manuscripts throughout history of faithful congregations who obeyed God's holy Sabbath and worshiped in Spirit and truth.

First Centuries

Josephus, first century Historian, says: "There is not any city of the Grecians, nor any of the barbarians, nor any nation whatsoever, whither our custom of resting on the seventh day hath not come!" M'Clathie, Notes and Queries on China and Japan. (edited by Dennys), Vol.4, Nos. 7,8, p.100.

An old English writer, Professor Brerewood, of Gresham College, London, put in shortest phrase what many writers say:

"They know little who do not know that the ancient Sabbath did remain and was observed by the Eastern churches three hundred years after our Saviour's passion."—*Treatise on the Sabbath*, p. 77.

Fourth Century

Canon 29, of the Council of Laodicea (a.d. 364), shows that the ecclesiastical system was laboring to put an end to Sabbath keeping:[Pg 174]

"Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday [the Sabbath], but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day [as they called Sunday] they shall especially honor, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they be found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ."—*Hefele*, "History of the Councils of the Church," Vol. II, book 6, sec. 93, canon 29.

Fifth Century

Sozomen's Ecclesiastical History shows Rome evidently leading in the effort to abolish any recognition whatever of the Sabbath:

"The people of Constantinople, and of several other cities, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the next day; which custom is never observed at Rome, or at Alexandria."—*Book 7, chap. 19*.

Seventh Century

There were true Sabbath keepers in Rome itself, teaching the truth of God among the people, and bringing upon themselves the denunciation

of Pope Gregory the Great, who wrote "to his most beloved sons the Roman citizens:"

"It has come to my ears that certain men of perverse spirit have sown among you some things that are wrong and opposed to the holy faith, so as to forbid any work being done on the Sabbath day. What else can I call these but preachers of Antichrist?"—*"History of the Councils" (Labbe and Cossart), Vol. V, col. 1511; see also "Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Vol. XIII, book 13, epistle 1.*

Eleventh Century

The Pope's legates at Constantinople (a.d. 1054) were called to discuss with Nicetas, "one of the most learned men at that time in the East," says Bower, whose position was "that the Sabbath ought to be kept holy, and that priests should be allowed to marry."—*"History of the Popes," Vol. II, p. 358.*

The people of north Scotland, the ancient Culdee church founded by Columba and his followers, far removed from direct papal influence, was still keeping the seventh-day Sabbath in the eleventh century. Of this church Andrew Lang says in his "History of Scotland:"

"They worked on Sunday, but kept Saturday in a Sabbatical manner."—*Volume I, p. 96.*

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Skene, in his classic work, "Celtic Scotland," says of these Sabbath keepers:

"They followed a custom of which we find traces in the early monastic church of Ireland, by which they held Saturday to be the Sabbath, on which they rested from all their labors."—*Book 2, chap. 8.*

Margaret, of England, married Malcolm the Great, the Scottish king, in 1069. An ardent Catholic, Queen Margaret at once set about Romanizing the Celtic church. She called in the church leaders, and held long discussions with them. At last, with the help and authority of her royal husband, and quoting the instructions of "the blessed Pope Gregory," she succeeded in turning the ancient Culdee church in Scotland away from the Sabbath. (See "Life of St. Margaret," by Turgot, her confessor.)

Twelfth to Fourteenth Century

WALDENSES HUNTED BY THE ARMIES OF ROME

"Destitute, afflicted, tormented;... they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Heb. 11:37, 38.

Among the numerous sects of southern Europe and the Alpine valleys, that were pursued and persecuted by Rome, were those who saw and obeyed the Sabbath truth. Thus, of one of these bodies, the historian PETER ALLIX, D. D. says:

"Also as one of their opinions, that the Law of Moses is to be kept according to the letter, and that the keeping of the Sabbath, Circumcision, and other legal observances, ought to take place."—*"THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE ANCIENT CHURCHES OF PIEDMONT. pg 169*

Fifteenth Century

Sabbath keepers in Norway drew the condemnation of a church council held in 1435:

"The archbishop and the clergy assembled in this provincial council at Bergen do decide that the keeping of Saturday must never be permitted to exist, except as granted in the church law."—*Keyser's "Norske Kirkes Historie," Vol. II, p. 488.*

Sixteenth Century

With the setting free of the Word of God by the Reformation, and the protest against the doctrine of papal tradition, multitudes saw that the Sunday institution was not of divine origin; while not a few went farther, recognizing the claims of God's Sabbath. Moravia was a refuge, in those early Reformation days, for many believers in the Reformed doctrines, and among these were Sabbath-keeping Christians:[Pg 176]

"Even most prominent men, as the princes of Lichtenstein, held to the observance of the true Sabbath. When persecution finally scattered them, the seeds of truth must have been sown by them in the different portions of the Continent which they visited.... We have found them [Sabbath keepers] in Bohemia. They were also known in Silesia and Poland. Likewise they were in Holland and northern Germany.... There were at this time Sabbath keepers in France,... 'among whom were M. de la Roque, who wrote in defense of the Sabbath against Bossuet, Catholic bishop of Meaux.' That Sabbatarians again appeared in England by the time of the Reformation, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth

(a.d. 1533-1603), Dr. Chambers testifies in his Cyclopaedia [art. 'Sabbath'].—"Andrews and Conradi, *"History of the Sabbath,"* pp. 649, 650.

In this century also, Sabbath keepers appeared in Norway, Sweden, and Finland. In 1554 King Gustavus Vasa, of Sweden, addressed a letter of remonstrance "to the common people in Finland," because so many were turning to keep the seventh day.

Seventeenth Century

There was much discussion in England over the authority for Sunday observance. When other church festivals were ignored, as Easter, King Charles I wanted to know why Sunday should be kept. He wrote:

"It will not be found in Scripture where Saturday is discharged to be kept, or turned into the Sunday; wherefore it must be the church's authority that changed the one and instituted the other; therefore my opinion is that those who will not keep this feast [Easter] may as well return to the observation of Saturday, and refuse the weekly Sunday."—Cox, *"Sabbath Laws,"* p. 333.

It was during this time that the idea first obtained of enforcing Sunday obligation by the fourth commandment and calling it the Sabbath. It was argued that any "one day in seven" was what the commandment meant. Of this argument, John Milton, the statesman-poet, wrote:

"It is impossible to extort such a sense from the words of the commandment; seeing that the reason for which the command itself was originally given, namely, as a memorial of God's having rested from [Pg 178] the creation of the world, cannot be transferred from the seventh day to the first; nor can any new motive be substituted in its place, whether the resurrection of our Lord or any other, without the sanction of a divine commandment."—"Prose Works" (Bohn), pp. 70, 71.

Again Milton wrote, in a manuscript which his publishers at the time feared to print:

"If we under the gospel are to regulate the time of our public worship by the prescriptions of the decalogue, it will surely be far safer to observe the seventh day, according to the express commandment of God, than on the authority of mere human conjecture to adopt the first."—Cox, *"Sabbath Literature,"* Vol. II, p. 54.

While kings and poets and ecclesiastics discussed, here and there believers began to follow the plain Word of God and Christ's example in Sabbath keeping.

"Loved Not Their Lives unto the Death"

In 1618 John Traske and his wife, of London, were condemned for keeping the Sabbath of the Lord, the man being whipped from Westminster to the old Fleet Prison, near Ludgate Circus. Both were imprisoned. Mr. Traske recanted under the pressure, after a year, but Mrs. Traske, a gifted school-teacher, was given grace to hold out for sixteen years,—for a time in Maiden Lane prison, and then in the Gate House, by Westminster,—dying in prison for the word of the Lord. An estimable woman she was, says one old chronicler, save for this "whimsy" of hers, that she would keep the seventh day. All that she asked of men, on her prison deathbed, was that she might be buried "in the fields."

By 1661 Sabbath keepers in London had further increased. In that year John James was minister to a considerable congregation, meeting in East London, off the Whitechapel Road. As part of the stern proceedings against dissenting sects after the restoration of the monarchy, he was arrested and condemned to death on "Tyburn Tree." His wife knelt at the feet of King Charles II as he came out of St. James's Palace one day, and pleaded for her husband's life; but the king scornfully rejected her plea, and said that the man should hang. Bogue says: [Pg 179]

"For once the king remembered his promise, and Mr. James was sent to join the noble army of martyrs."—"History of Dissenters," Vol. I, p. 155.

Nothing daunted, the number of Sabbath keepers increased. In a letter by Edward Stennet (between 1668 and 1670), it is stated.

"Here in England are about nine or ten churches that keep the Sabbath, besides many scattered disciples, who have been eminently preserved in this tottering day, when many once eminent churches have been shattered in pieces."—Cox, *"Sabbath Literature,"* Vol. I, p. 268.

Francis Bampfield was formerly an influential minister of the Church of England, and prebendary of Exeter Cathedral, but later pastor of a Sabbath-keeping congregation meeting in the Pinner's Hall, off Broad Street, near the Bank of England. Calamy said of him:

"He was one of the most celebrated preachers in the west of England, and extremely admired by his hearers, till he fell into the Sabbatarian notion, of which he was a zealous asserter."—"Non-Conformist Memorial," Vol. II, p. 152.

He was arrested while in the pulpit preaching, and in 1683 died of hardships in Newgate prison, for the Sabbath of the Lord. An old writer says that his body was followed to burial by "a very great company of factious and schismatical people;" in other words, dissenters from the state church.

Thomas Bampfield, his brother, Speaker of the House of Parliament at one time, under Cromwell, published a book in defense of the Sabbath of the Lord. In fact, many published the truth in this manner, and doctors of divinity and even bishops wrote replies.

"Sabbatarian Baptists," these English witnesses to God's Sabbath were first called in those times, and then "Seventh Day Baptists." In 1664 Stephen Mumford, from one of these London congregations, was sent over to New England. He settled in Rhode Island, where the Baptist pioneer of religious liberty, Roger Williams, had founded his colony. In 1671 the first Sabbatarian church in America was formed in Rhode Island. Evidently this movement created a stir; for the report [Pg 180] went over to England that the Rhode Island colony did not keep the "Sabbath"—meaning Sunday. Roger Williams wrote to his friends in England denying the report, but calling attention to the fact that there was no Scripture for "abolishing the seventh day," and adding:

"You know yourselves do not keep the Sabbath, that is the seventh day."—*Letters of Roger Williams," Vol. VI, p. 346 (Narragansett Club Publications).*

Through the following century numbers of Seventh Day Baptist churches were founded in America. [E]

Sabbath keepers were springing up also on the continent of Europe, in Bohemia, Moravia, Transylvania, and Russia, where here and there Bible believers saw that tradition had made void one of the commandments of God. Then, as the events at the end of the long period of papal supremacy had moved Bible students to the earnest study of the prophecies, and as the predicted signs of the near approach of Christ's coming began to appear, there arose the great advent awakening in the earlier decades of the Eighteenth century to our present day.

Eighteenth Century

John Wesley (1703-1791) The Works of the Rev. John Wesley "But, the moral law contained in the ten commandments, and enforced by the prophets, he [Christ] did not take away. It was not the design of his coming to revoke any part of this. This is a law which never can be broken Every part of this law must remain in force upon all mankind, and in all ages; as not depending either on time or place, or any other circumstances liable to change, but on the nature of God and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relation to each other." (Wesley was a Methodist) "The Sabbath instituted in the beginning and confirmed again and again by Moses and the Prophets, has never been abrogated. A part of the moral law, not a part or tittle of its sanctity has been taken away."- New York Herald 1874, on the Methodist Episcopal Bishops Pastoral 1874.

Nineteenth Century

AMERICA

Methodist, Dwight L. Moody- Weighed and Wanting, The Sabbath was binding in Eden, and it has been in force ever since. This fourth commandment begins with the word 'remember,' showing that the Sabbath already existed when God Wrote the law on the tables of stone at Sinai. How can men claim that this one commandment has been done away with when they will admit that the other nine are still binding?"

Lutheran- Dr. Augustus Neander, The History of the Christian Religion and Church (1843)"The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intentions of the apostles to establish a Divine command in this respect, far from them, and from the early apostolic Church, to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday."

Baptist Dr. Edward T. Hiscox,-a paper read before a New York ministers' conference, Nov. 13, 1893, reported in New York Examiner, Nov. 16, 1893. "There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but that Sabbath day was not Sunday. It will be said, however, and with some show of triumph, that the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week Where can the record of such a transaction be found? Not in the New Testament absolutely not."To me it seems unaccountable that Jesus, during three years' intercourse with His disciples, often conversing with them upon the Sabbath question . . . never alluded to any transference of the day; also, that during forty days of His resurrection life, no such thing was intimated..... "Of course, I quite well know that Sunday did come into use in early Christian history But what a pity it comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism!"

American Congregationalists: No authority in the New Testament for substitution of the first day for the seventh "The current notion that Christ and His apostles authoritatively substituted the first day for the seventh, is absolutely without any authority in the New Testament." Dr. Lyman Abbott, in the Christian Union, June 26, 1890

"Examining the New Testament from cover to cover, critically, we find the sabbath referred to sixty-one times. We find too, that the Saviour invariably selected the Sabbath (Saturday) to teach in the synagogues and work miracles. The four Gospels refer to the Sabbath fifty-one times. In one instance , the Redeemer refers to Himself as 'Lord of the Sabbath' as mentioned by Matthew and Luke, but, during the whole record of His life, while invariably keeping and utilizing the day, (Saturday), He never once hinted at a desire to change it. "- The Catholic Mirror Nov. 25 1893. J. Cardinal Gibbons.

RUSSIA

"But the majority moved to the Crimea and the Caucasus, where they remain true to their doctrine in spite of persecution until this present

time. The people call them Subotniki, or Sabbatarians," Sternberg, "Geschichte der Juden in Polen," p.124

CHINA

"At this time Hung prohibited the use of opium, and even tobacco, and all intoxicating drinks, and the Sabbath was religiously observed." The Ti-Ping Revolution," by Llin-Le, and officer among them, Vol. 1, pp.36-48, 84

"The seventh day is most religiously and strictly observed. The Taiping Sabbath is kept upon our Saturday." P. 319

"The Taipings when asked why they observed the seventh day Sabbath, replied that it was, first, because the Bible taught it, and, second, because their ancestors observed it as a day of worship." A Critical History of the Sabbath and the Sunday.

INDIA AND PERSIA

"Besides, they maintain the solemn observance of Christian worship throughout our Empire, on the seventh day." Christian Researches in Asia," p.143

DENMARK

"This agitation was not without its effect. Pastor M.A. Sommer began observing the seventh day, and wrote in his church paper. "Indovet Kristendom" No.5,1875 an impressive article about the true Sabbath. In a letter to Elder John G.Matteson, he says: "Among the Baptists here in Denmark there is a great agitation regarding the Sabbath commandment..However, I am probably the only preacher in Denmark who stands so near to the Adventists and who for many years has proclaimed Christ's second coming." Advent Tidende," May, 1875

SWEDEN (Baptists)

"We will now endeavour to show that the sanctification of the Sabbath has its foundation and its origin in a law which God at creation itself established for the whole world, and as a consequence thereof is binding on all men in all ages." Evangelisten (The Evangelist). Stockholm, May 30 to August 15,1863 (organ of the Swedish Baptist Church)

Twentieth Century

"Take the matter of Sunday. There are indications in the New Testament as to how the church came to keep the first day of the week as its day of worship, but there is no passage telling Christians to keep that day, or to transfer the Jewish Sabbath to that day." Methodist- Harris Franklin Rall, Christian Advocate, July 2, 1942

"The Sunday Problem"- United Lutheran Church (1923), "We have seen how gradually the impression of the Jewish sabbath faded from the mind of the Christian Church, and how completely the newer thought underlying the observance of the first day took possession of the church. We have seen that the Christians of the first three centuries never confused one with the other, but for a time celebrated both.

Baptist - Harold Lindsell, former editor of Christianity , said, 'There is nothing in Scripture that requires us to keep Sunday rather than Saturday as a holy day.' Christianity Today, November 5, 1976.

Episcopal - 'The Bible commandment says on the seventh day thou shalt rest. That is Saturday. Nowhere in the Bible is it laid down that worship should be done on Sunday.' Philip Carrington, Toronto Daily Star, October 26, 1949.

Catholic Virginian Oct. 3, 1947- "To Tell You the Truth." "For example, nowhere in the Bible do we find that Christ or the Apostles ordered that the Sabbath be changed from Saturday to Sunday. We have the commandment of God given to Moses to keep holy the Sabbath day, that is the 7th day of the week, Saturday. Today most Christians keep Sunday because it has been revealed to us by the [Roman Catholic] church outside the Bible."

The prophecies in Scripture regarding the work of the Papacy in seeking to change the law of God began to be understood, and it was seen that the last message of the everlasting gospel was a call to turn from human traditions to the Biblical standard—"***Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.***" *Jude 1:3* .

Through all the dark centuries, the Lord had somewhere a little remnant keeping the light of the Sabbath truth glowing. They, too, overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, loving not their lives unto the death. Now, with the clear light shining from the Scriptures, it is for Christians everywhere to turn from tradition to the way of God's commandments and the example of Jesus Christ.

FOOTNOTES:

[E] In connection with this topic of Sabbath observance in colonial America, it is of interest to note that Count Zinzendorf, the leader of the Moravian missionary movement, was a believer in the sanctity of the Sabbath of God's appointment. In his life, by Bishop Spangenberg, it is stated that the Sabbath question was discussed by Zinzendorf with the Moravians, on his visit to Pennsylvania in 1741. The record states:—

"As a special circumstance it is to be remarked, with the church in Bethlehem, to celebrate the seventh day as a rest day. The matter was previously fully gone over in the church council, with consideration of all the reasons for and against it, when the unanimous agreement was reached to observe the day Sabbatically.... The Count had already long held the seventh day of the week in special honor."—Zinzendorfs "*Leben*," band 5, pp. 1421, 1422.

The Bethlehem congregation evidently did not follow the practice long. "But as for himself," says Spangenberg, "with his house, he adhered firmly to this aforementioned practice until his end."—*Id.*, p. 1437.