

Our Day In The Light Of Prophecy

And so it must abide;
It was set apart before the fall,
It was made for man, it was made for all.

And when from Sinai's mount,
Amidst the fire and smoke, Jehovah did recount,
And all His precepts spoke,
He claimed the rest day as His own,
And wrote it with His law on stone.

The Son of God appeared
With tidings of great joy; God's precepts He revered,
He came not to destroy; None of the law was set aside, But every tittle ratified.
Our Savior did not die
To render null and void The law of the Most High,
Which cannot be destroyed; But, bruised for us, our stripes He bore, We'll go in peace and sin no more.
R. F. Cottrell

15. SABBATH KEEPING AFTER NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

NOT at once did the innovation of Sunday observance set aside the Sabbath of the Lord in the practice of even the general church. And through history, when the general church had fallen away, we catch glimpses here and there of faithful witnesses to God's holy Sabbath truth.

First Centuries

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 Savior's passion." – "Treatise on the Sabbath," page 77.

Fourth Century

Canon 29, of the Council of Laodicea (AD 364), shows that the ecclesiastical system was laboring to put an end to Sabbath keeping: "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," Volume 2, book 6, section 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

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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), Volume 5, column 1511; see also “Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,” Vol. XIII, book 13, epistle 1.

Eleventh Century

The Pope's legates at Constantinople (AD 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 1, page 93. Skene, in his classic work, “Celtic Scotland,” says of these Sabbath keepers:

“They seemed to have 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, chapter 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

Among the numerous sects of southern Europe and the Alpine valleys, that were pursued and persecuted by Rome, were at least some who saw and obeyed the Sabbath truth. Thus, of one of these bodies, the historian Goldastus says: “They were called Insabbatati, not because they were circumcised, but because they kept the Sabbath according to the Jewish law.” – “Deutsche Biographie,” Volume 9, article “Goldast” page 327.

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,” Volume 2, Page 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:

“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 Sabbath keepers again appeared in England by the time of the Reformation, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (AD 1533-1603), Dr. Chambers testifies in his Cyclopaedia Article 'Sabbath'.” - Andrews and Conradi, “History of the

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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,” page 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 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), pages 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 Ten Commandments, 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,” Volume 2, page 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:

“For once the king remembered his promise, and Mr. James was sent to join the noble army of martyrs.” – “History of Dissenters,” Volume 1, Page 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 this 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,” Volume 1, page 268.

Francis Bampffield 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:

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“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,” Volume 2, page 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 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,” Volume VI, page 346 (Narragansett Club Publications).

Through the following century numbers of Seventh Day Baptist churches were founded in America. 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 nineteenth century.

The prophecies 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 New Testament standard - “the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 14:12. Then began the great movement for Sabbath reform and the proclamation of Christ's Second Coming, which has given rise to the Seventh-day Adventist people, with a work spreading through all lands, leading thousands every year to keep the Lord's blessed Sabbath day.

In connection with this to f 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 t Moravians, on his visit to Pennsylvania in 1741. The record states:

“As a special circumstance It is to be remarked that he determined, 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.” – Zinzendorf's “Leben”, band 5, pages 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. page 1437.

Soon Christ is to be revealed in righteousness and judgment. One burden of God's message for the last days is:

“Thus said the Lord, Keep you judgment, and do justice. For My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that does this, and the son of man that lays hold on it; that keeps the Sabbath from polluting it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.” Isaiah 56:1,2.

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 open Book, it is for Christians everywhere to turn from tradition to the way of God's commandments and the example of Jesus Christ.