

SABBATARIAN BAPTISTS  
IN ENGLAND

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July 15, 1972

Revised, 1993, 2004

# Important Ideas

“It seems to have been customary in the Celtic churches of early times, in Ireland as well as in Scotland, to keep Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, as a day of rest from labor. They obeyed the commandment literally upon the seventh day of the week” (**James Moffatt**, *Church in Scotland*, page 140).

“Perhaps no other time or place in history had as great a potential for the wide acceptance of the seventh day Sabbath as the middle of the seventeenth century in England. The Sabbath was discussed and debated among the laity and the highest clergy. Even Parliament could not escape the implications of its importance” (**Don A. Sanford**, *The History of Seventh Day Baptists*, p. 54).

“ . . . happy shall the Church be, that worshipping God according to his Law, and giveth him his due, by placing on the Seventh day, the honours which God requireth to be performed on it” (**James Ockford**, in a 1650 book which was burned).

“The Jews of London are very much affected with our keeping the Sabbath . . . . I perceive it is a great stumbling block to them as to believe Christ to be the *Messiah*, because Christians violate the Sabbath; for (say they) if Christ were not a Sabbath-breaker, why are Christians? and if Christ were a Sabbath-breaker then he was a sinner, and if a sinner, what benefit can we expect by the death of an evil doer? And thus you see what evil consequences follow the non-observance of the Lord’s holy Sabbath” (**Thomas Tillam**, correspondence ca. 1657).

“I do own the Commandments of God, the Ten Commandments . . . . I durst not willingly break the least of those Commandments to save my life; I do declare that the rather, . . . I do own the Lord’s holy Sabbath, the seventh day of the week to be the Lord’s Sabbath . . . .” (**John James**, speech before his execution, 1661).

“What shall we say of those that take away of those ten words, or those that make them void, and teach men so? Nay, they dare give the lie to Jehovah, and make Jesus Christ not only a breaker of the law, but the very author of sin in others, also causing them to break them. Hath not the little horn played his part lustily in this, and worn out the saints of the Most High, so that they become little-horn men also?” (**Dr. Peter Chamberlen**, 1671 letter to Sabbath-keeping brethren in Newport, Rhode Island).

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Dr. Peter Chamberlen, M.D.  
1601-1683

Mill Yard Church, London, England  
This building was erected in 1791, abandoned in 1885.  
The present Mill Yard Church meets nearby.

Joseph Stennett  
Pastor of Pinner's Hall Church, 1690-1713  
Wrote *Another Six Days' Work*,  
which has been wrongly attributed to  
Samuel Stennett, his grandson

ANOTHER SIX DAYS' WORK

ANOTHER SIX DAYS' WORK

# SABBATARIAN BAPTISTS IN ENGLAND

## Seventh Day Baptist View of Church History

<sup>A</sup> According to the Seventh Day Baptist official history, *Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America* (two volumes, published in 1910), there have been Sabbath-keepers throughout history [*Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*, Plainfield, New Jersey: American Sabbath Tract Society, 1910, pp. 13-17. Hereafter this source is referred to as "SDB."]. Early Jewish Christians taught that Christ had removed the Pharisaical restrictions, and had restored the true Sabbath. Because of anti-Jewish prejudice, many Gentile converts to Christianity objected to the Sabbath. Beginning with Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century, the so-called church fathers claimed that the Sabbath was only for the Jew. The Sunday-Sabbath controversy continued for 400 to 500 years.

### Entering of Sunday

Through the combined influence of ancient sun worship and the tradition that Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Sunday and "many other pagan festivals" entered the Roman church. The civil power supported these, and legislation drove out Sabbath-keepers.

### Faithful Few

The papacy never succeeded in excluding every Sabbath-keeper from its dominions. Descendants of the apostolic church continued to keep the Sabbath, and many fled outside the bounds of the Roman Empire during the time of Constantine's persecution in order to continue obeying God.

Earlier in their history, these Sabbath keepers were known as Nazarenes, Corinthians, Hypsistarii. Later they were known as Vaudois, Cathari, Toulousians, Albigenses, Petrobrusians, Passagii and Waldenses.

They held three beliefs in common: **1)** they believed that the Roman Church was the antichrist, **2)** they rejected the doctrine of "church authority," and **3)** they accepted the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice. These principles were paramount.

### Line of Descent

Saccho, a Roman Catholic author, says the Waldenses, or Leonists, were dangerous for three reasons: **(1)** they were a most ancient sect, as old as Sylvester or the apostles, **(2)**

they were very generally disseminated in every country, and **(3)** they were pious, and "live justly before men, and believe nothing concerning God which is not good." They may originally have been followers of a Leo who opposed Pope Sylvester. Some say these Sabbath-keepers date back to the Apostle Paul's preaching in the Alps.

By the thirteenth century, Waldenses were scattered throughout Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Bohemia, Poland, Lithuania, Albania, Lombardy, Milan, Romagna, Vicenza, Florence, Velepenetine, Constantinople, Philadelphia, Sclavonia, Bulgaria, Diognitia, Livonia, Sarmatia, Croatia, Dalmatia, Britain and Piedmont.

Seventh Day Baptists state that the Waldenses were "our denominational ancestors, in fact, if not by direct organic connection," and that Waldenses were "representatives of the Sabbath-keeping apostolic church" (SDB, p. 17).

### True Christianity Planted in Britain

Numerous historians have concluded that Christianity was planted in Britain between 51 and 61 AD., either by the Apostle Paul before his second Roman imprisonment, or by his converts while he was imprisoned.

Historians and "church fathers" include the names of Paul, Peter, Philip, John, Simon Zelotes, and Joseph of Arimathea in their records of apostles and missionaries who had traveled to Britain. Paul may have gone even further than Britain, for Venantius Fortunatus in 560 A.D. states, "St. Paul passed over the

ocean to the Island of Britain, and to Thule, the extremity of the earth” (SDB, pp. 22-24).

The ancient Britons, although they bred pigs, refused to eat pork. Sir Walter Scott was puzzled over the fact that the strongest curse in ancient Gaelic was to call anyone a “swine eater.” (See *Ancient Man in Britain* by McKenzie.) This may indicate contact with Jewish Christians of the early Church.

### **Sabbath in England**

Seventh Day Baptists state that the Sabbath was observed in Britain by Christians generally until the thirteenth century (William Stillman, 1843, in *The Sabbath-day: Remember to Keep it Holy*, page 6), despite the introduction of Sunday at the end of the sixth century (596 A.D.) by Augustine, the first papal missionary to Britain, sent out by Pope Gregory “the Great.” Further, “Sabbath-keepers have continued in unbroken succession from the first introduction of Christianity down to the present day” (SDB, p. 25).

Whether or not the British church was founded by the Apostle Paul or his immediate converts, it was firmly grounded in the practice of Sabbath-keeping. Several church fathers testify that Sunday did not displace the Sabbath until after the fifth century. Late in the fifth century, the historian Socrates reported that with the exception of Rome and Alexandria, “all the churches throughout the whole world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath-day.” Augustine reported in his biography that he found the people of Britain in “grievous and intolerable heresies,” because they were “being given to Judaizing, but ignorant of the holy sacraments and festivals of the church” (Mrs. Tamar Davis, *A General History of the Sabbatarian Churches*, Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1851, p. 108).

“Easter” was observed on the seventh day of the week until 664, when Catholics convinced King Oswald of Northumberland to keep it on Sunday rather than be denied entrance to heaven by St. Peter. Colman the Culdee, rather than submit to King Oswald’s decision, took his monks and retired to the island of Iona, which for some time remained a center for Sabbath-keepers.

### **Sabbath in Ireland**

Ussher states that the church in Ireland was founded soon after the death of Christ by disciples of the Asian churches. If this is an accurate record, then the Irish church was established before Sunday entered the Christian church. O’Halleron’s *History of Ireland* (page 172) reports that the Irish church “adhered more closely to the Jewish customs than did the Roman Catholics.” St. Patrick was a Sabbath-keeper and was never connected with Rome, according to Seventh Day Baptists. St. Columba’s establishment of a Sabbath-keeping community on the island of Iona was the result of St. Patrick’s teaching. Celtic Ireland was untied to Rome until at least 1155 when Pope Adrian gave Ireland to Henry II to bring it into the Roman fold. Yet some Irish Sabbath-keepers remained until the nineteenth century (SDB, p. 27).

### **Sabbath in Scotland and Wales**

James Moffatt states, “It seems to have been customary in the Celtic churches of early times, in Ireland as well as in Scotland, to keep Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, as a day of rest from labor. They obeyed the commandment literally upon the seventh day of the week” (*Church in Scotland*, page 140). Scottish Queen Margaret (Saint Margaret), in her attempt to harmonize the Scottish church with the rest of Europe, had to contend with those who “did not reverence the Lord’s day, but . . . held Saturday to be the Sabbath.” Not until 1203 did Scotland submit to Rome and its Sunday (SDB, pp. 27-29).

Welsh Sabbath-keepers were prevalent until 1115, when the first Roman bishop was seated at St. David’s. Vavasor Powell (1617-1671), a Welsh preacher with quite a following, had “the sentiments of a Sabbatarian Baptist” (*Neal’s History of the Puritans*, pages 2, 274).

### **Waldenses Come to England**

By the time of William the Conqueror (1066), Waldenses abounded in England. They were reported to despise Easter and all Roman Catholic festivals, and to keep Saturday holy (SDB, pp. 32-33).

By 1260, there were 800,000 to 3,000,000

Waldenses throughout Europe. In the fourteenth century, Waldenses in England seem to have merged with the Lollards.

### **English Lollards**

**Walter Lollard**, a German preacher, termed a “Waldensian bard,” came to England about 1350. Soon more than one-half of England became Lollards, and “in 1389 they formed separate and distinct societies agreeable with Scripture” (SDB, pp. 33-35).

By 1400, a law had been passed sentencing Lollards to be burned with fire. Despite severe persecution, English Lollards increased to 100,000. During his conflict with the Pope, Henry VIII encouraged Lollards, who flocked to England from all over Europe.

Benedict, in his *History of the Baptists* (page 308) states that Walter Lollard was in sentiment the same as **Peter de Bruys**. Peter Allix, who wrote a history of the Waldenses, states that the Petrobrusians resembled the Cathari of Italy, who kept the law of Moses and the Sabbath. There is no doubt, therefore, that Lollards were Sabbath-keepers.

### **Most Waldenses Join Protestant Reformation**

Benedict states, “The multitudes who lay concealed in almost all parts of Europe hailed with joy the dawn of that day which should relieve them from the persecuting power of the despotic heads of the Roman Church” (pages 79-83).

However, the Waldenses soon found that the Reformation needed reforming. Severely persecuted and polluted with much false doctrine, one group of Waldenses after another became “amalgamated with the Reformed or Protestant Party.”

In 1530, a group of Waldenses in the Alps united with the Reformers, renounced certain doctrines which they had formerly held, and adopted foreign new doctrines. Only a few remained faithful (*Baptist Cyclopedia*, 1881 ed., article, “Waldenses”). The focus of Sabbath-keepers was transferred to Great Britain.

### **Anabaptists and Sunday-Sabbath Controversy**

It is well known that Sabbath-keeping became a major issue in the late 1500s in Britain. As Chambers reports,

Accordingly, in the reign of Elizabeth (1558-1603), it occurred to many conscientious and independent thinkers (as it had previously done to some Protestants in Bohemia), that the fourth commandment required of them the observance, not of the first, but of the specified *seventh* day of the week (*Chamber's Encyclopedia*, 1881 ed., article, “Sabbath”).

Where did these ideas come from? Quite probably from Anabaptists. “Anabaptist” means “rebaptizer.” A common Catholic practice was the “baptism” of infants. Adult believers’ baptism upon repentance led many to be “rebaptized.” Hence the term “anabaptist” was applied to them.

During those times, it was dangerous to be an Anabaptist. As Seventh Day Baptist historian Don Sanford states,

“The sixteenth-century Anabaptists did not consider that they were rebaptized because they considered true baptism possible only on belief and confession of faith. Hence they rejected infant baptism because an infant could hardly make such confession or harbor any religious belief. Adult baptism or baptism of believers was impossible to practice within a state concept of the church, for it would leave too many people outside the church and thus deprive them of a chance for salvation. Such a threat to the very foundation of society was considered treasonous” (Don A. Sandord, *A Choosing People: The History of Seventh Day Baptists*, Nashville, Tennessee, Broadman Press, 1992, p. 22).

Anabaptists created such a stir in Europe that a 1526 council in Zurich, Switzerland decreed that anabaptists be put to death by drowning. There were 4,000 to 5,000 executions, but the movement spread throughout Europe.

About 1565, Anabaptists made their appearance in England. Many of these Anabaptists observed Saturday as the Sabbath. This practice generated a controversy with observers of Sunday, which was known as the “Lord’s Day.” In addition to Sabbath observance, Anabaptists taught that Christianity is a life-style following the pattern of Christ, rather than the doctrines of a church. They refused to take oaths or participate in government or war,

which served to isolate them from the state. Anabaptists can be credited with the idea of separation of church and state. Anabaptists developed a *congregational* form of church government, in which decisions were made by the entire membership rather than by a church hierarchy. They looked to the model of the earliest Christians and said a restitution was needed because the church “fell” at the time of Constantine, and his infamous Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

A prominent Anabaptist who kept the Sabbath was **Andreas Fischer** (1480-1540). Of him Liechty wrote that

“His Sabbatarianism was an essential and integral part of his whole approach to Christian reform, an approach characterized by the restitutionist pattern of thought . . . . He wanted only to revive the faith and practice of the apostolic church.”<sup>1</sup>

Fischer found many converts among the miners of Slovakia about 1528, which drew the wrath of the Holy Roman Emperor. Fischer’s wife was sentenced to death by drowning, and he was hung from Captain John Katzianer’s castle wall for several hours but somehow escaped. Fischer wrote a book in defense of the Sabbath.

Other noted Anabaptist leaders included **Menno Simons** (1496-1561), from whom the Mennonites received their name, and **Jacob Ammann** (late 1600s), from whom the Amish received their name. Although these Anabaptists never kept the Sabbath, they generally rejected the Trinity and practiced footwashing.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the practice of Sabbath-keeping in England faced several major threats: 1) there was long tradition of entrenched Sunday-keeping, 2) there was a strong anti-Jewish attitude, and 3) the society was indifferent to any solemn religious day and was chiefly concerned with pleasure.<sup>2</sup> William Tyndale (1494-1536), translator of the Bible during the time of King Henry VIII, wrote of the need for a day of rest and worship:

“ . . . we be lords over the Sabbath, and may yet change it into the Monday or any other day as we see need, . . . if we see cause why . . . [or keep no day holy] if the people might be taught without it.”<sup>3</sup>

John Frith, an associate of Tyndale, admitted that there was no Biblical basis for Sunday-keeping:

“We are in manner as superstitious in the Sunday as they were in the Saturday, yea, and we are much madder. For the Jews have the Word of God for their Saturday, since it is the seventh day, and they were commanded to keep the seventh day solemn; and we have not the Word of God for us, but rather against us, for we keep not the seventh day as the Jews do, but the first, which is not commanded by God’s law.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1595, Nicholas Bound (or Bownde), D.D., of Norton, Suffolk, published a book entitled *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*, in which he advanced the modern notion that the so-called “Christian Sabbath,” or Sunday, is a continuation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. He recognized that the Bible enjoins the seventh-day Sabbath, but supported the traditions of the church in changing the Sabbath to Sunday. Bound favored simplicity in worship and strictness of rest from labor. So restrictive were the ideas of the “Puritan Sabbath” promulgated by Bound and his followers that King James published in 1618 *The Book of Sports*, outlining specifically which activities were allowable recreation on Sunday afternoon. The king supported dancing, archery and ale drinking, but forbade bowling and bear and bull baiting on Sunday.

A writer of that age states the following of Bound’s thesis: “In a very little time it became the most bewitching error and the most popular infatuation that ever was embraced by the people of England.” Archbishop Wiggiff ordered the book suppressed in 1599, but the ideas that Bound had fostered led to a multitude of books with many conflicting opinions. The 1600s saw a great Sabbath controversy engulf the British churches.

At least one historical record of that period shows the existence of a number of “Churches of God.” In Confession of Faith, and Other Public Documents of the Baptist Churches of England, in the Seventeenth Century, edited by E.B. Underfield, there is recorded the “humble petition of several ‘Churches of God’ in London [1649] commonly, though falsely, called anabaptists.”<sup>5</sup>

Many Baptists at that time were Sabbath-keepers. Robert G. Torbet, a Baptist historian, reports that there were four Baptist groups in seventeenth-century England: 1) General Baptists (Arminian theology), 2) Particular Baptists (strict Calvinists), 3) Seventh Day



Baptists (recruited largely from disappointed Fifth Monarchy men), and 4) a cross section of the first two who fraternized with Independents and held to a higher society and culture. Baptist roots can be traced to the Puritan Separatist Movement, which began as an attempt to purify the Anglican Church.

### Sabbatarians

Besides “Anabaptist,” another important term applied to Sabbath-keepers in England during the 1500s and 1600s was “Sabbatarian.” This term, along with “Seventh Day Baptist,” meant “a body of Christians who observed the seventh or last day of the week as the Sabbath. The former term, Sabbatarian, was adopted by them in England soon after the Reformation when the word Sabbath was applied exclusively to the seventh day” (SDB Manual).

As more and more Sunday-keepers adopted Bound’s “Christian Sabbath” concept, the term Sabbatarian began to be applied to those who rigorously observed Sunday. Scottish and English Reformers, especially John Knox and the Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians, became excessively strict in observing *Sunday*, which they considered a perpetuation of the fourth commandment.

So powerful was the promotion of the fourth commandment by these English Sabbatarians that Sunday-keepers appropriated the Sabbath command and applied it to their own day of worship. “The influence of the Seventh Day Baptists was a prominent factor in forcing Puritans to adopt the change of day theory which gave birth to the Puritan Sabbath [Sunday]” (Blackwell, page 306). This teaching led to “Blue Laws” in England and later in America, where many Puritans settled.

The first reference to the transference of the Sabbath command to Sunday was made by Alcuin in the eighth century, and was echoed in the 1647 Westminster Assembly, which stated: “From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath; and the first day of the week, ever since, to continue to the end of the world which is the Christian Sabbath.”

Thus the term “Sabbatarian” was changed in meaning to identify not seventh-day Sabbath-keepers, but strict Sunday-keepers. In

1818, Sabbatarian Baptists in America recognized the change by rejecting the term “Sabbatarian” as being indefinite, and retained the name “Seventh Day Baptist” as “more distinctive of the opinions and practices of the people.”

### John Traske

Born ca. 1583, schoolmaster **John Traske** sought to become a minister in the Established Church but was refused. He moved to Salisbury, became a Puritan and obtained ministerial orders.

Traske came to London as a revival preacher in 1616-1618. Disgusted by the obvious corruption and indulgence of the clergy, Traske emphasized that God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him in the way they live their lives. Traske began advocating fasting and went on to favor the Old Testament prohibition on unclean meats. Preaching on streets and in public places, he soon had a large number of followers, who became known as “Traskites.” They began seeking godly commandments to obey.

One of Traske’s students was a tailor named **Hamlet Jackson**. His studies led him to conclude that there was no Bible command to observe Sunday and that the Saturday Sabbath observed by the Jews had never been abrogated. Through Jackson, Traske and most of his followers accepted the Sabbath, apparently about 1617. Another source, however, claims that this change occurred earlier and that in 1614 Traske ordained Hamlet and three others as evangelists, sending them out to preach obedience to God and to heal diseases by anointing with oil. Traske’s group formed the nucleus of the London Mill Yard Church.

Traske’s simple message that the Sabbath command remained in effect, and that the commanded day of rest had not been changed to Sunday, was gaining ground. Traske’s treating Sunday as an ordinary work day ran afoul of the Puritan strictness in Sunday-keeping. Anglicans and Puritans both cried “Judaizer!” — an ill-defined term that was very odious. Arrested and brought before the infamous Star Chamber, Traske was indicted for Judaizing; specifically, for abstaining from “unclean meats” and for keeping the Jewish Sabbath, and for illegally preaching and

writing in defense of these “heretical” views. A panel of bishops was offended by his proclaiming that they would all one day observe the Sabbath. They ordered Traske whipped and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment, urging him to “repent.” The fiendish court prescribed pork for him to eat, which Traske refused, existing on only bread and water.

In prison, Traske continued his study of early church history. As a result, he denounced Easter, like Sunday, as a man-made holiday. In its place, he began keeping Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. His persecutors retaliated with vengeance. In 1618, they formally charged him with sedition, for leading the King’s subjects away from the Church of England to Judaism. He was kept in prison, whipped, nailed to the pillory by his ears, branded with a “J” on his forehead, and fined a thousand pounds.<sup>6</sup>

It was too much for Traske. On December 1, 1619, Traske was released from prison upon recantation and was said to have relapsed afterwards into “other opinions.”<sup>7</sup> Traske gave up his beliefs and published a recantation three years later entitled *A Treatise of Libertie from Judaism*. He apparently ceased to keep and defend the Sabbath from that time until his death in 1636. Mrs. Traske did not recant as her husband had. She refused to teach school on the Sabbath and died in prison after having been incarcerated for 15 to 16 years for Sabbath-keeping (Sanford states 25 years). Mrs. Traske was buried in the open fields. Returne Hebdon, another follower of Traske, spent eight years in prison until his death in 1625.<sup>8</sup>

John Traske was the first known Messianic believer of modern times to observe both the Sabbath and the Passover. But the “Judaizer” stigma was so strong that succeeding Sabbath-keepers avoided his name. Sanford says that Traske was never known to be associated with any Seventh Day Baptist church.<sup>9</sup>

### **Theophilus Brabourne**

Born in Norwich, Norfolk, in 1590, **Theophilus Brabourne** lived perhaps until 1671 (Katz says he died in 1661). He became a minister of the Established (Anglican) Church, but later probably founded a Seventh Day Baptist church at Norwich. (Many

Anabaptists from Holland had migrated to Norfolk, Lesson 53 of *The Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*, page 4.) Brabourne was led to investigate the Sabbath upon reading the book *Three Sabbath Questions*, published in 1621 by Thomas Broad, who lived and died a rector of the Church of England.<sup>10</sup> The book was required reading for Puritan ministers. After reading Broad’s book, Brabourne could find no convincing evidence for the change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. In 1628, he published a three-hundred page book titled *A Discourse upon the Sabbath Day*, in which he attempted to persuade the Church of England to accept the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath. Surprisingly, his book generated little response.

Brabourne became a much abler writer than Traske. Robert Cox states that Brabourne “may be regarded as the founder in England of the sect at first known as Sabbatarians, but now calling themselves Seventh-day Baptists.” Cox continues, “This sect arose in Germany in the sixteenth century,” where they were known as “Anabaptists.”<sup>11</sup>

Four books on the Sabbath were published by Brabourne between 1626 and 1659. Brabourne’s writing received such opposition that in 1632 he wrote *A Defence Of the most Ancient and Sacred ordinance of God’s, the Sabbath Day*, which was directed against “all Anti-Sabbatarians, both of Protestants, Papists, antinomians, and Anabaptists.” In his second revision, Brabourne promoted Sabbath observance more forcefully, dedicating the book to King Charles I and asking him as head of the Church to enforce the Saturday Sabbath. Charles was offended, and Brabourne’s writings were considered so heretical that he was taken to court before the Archbishop of Canterbury. Brabourne was pronounced “a Jew, a heretic and schismatic.”<sup>12</sup> He was sent to Newgate Prison for eighteen months. After a year, he was reexamined and threatened with loss of his ears unless he recanted. Brabourne succumbed to the pressure, signed a recantation, and returned to the Church. It is likely that his “recantation” was merely to save his skin. Not wishing to be “disloyal” to the Church of England, Brabourne refused to lead a breakaway congregation. “His followers, however, did not all accompany him back to orthodoxy” (Cox, I, 220; II, 6). Brabourne lost

his living as a minister but continued to write in defense of the Sabbath. In 1654 he again published a work on the Sabbath.<sup>13</sup>

Although Brabourne was firmly convinced of the Sabbath, he himself apparently did not always observe it. He wrote that “a man is not bound in all cases, and at all times, to put into practise what he knoweth should be done.” His 1660 book claimed that the Sabbath day was the greatest controversy in the Church of England. As Sanford writes, “Perhaps no other time or place in history had as great a potential for the wide acceptance of the seventh-day Sabbath as the middle of the seventeenth century in England. The Sabbath was discussed and debated among the laity and the highest clergy. Even Parliament could not escape the implications of its importance.”<sup>14</sup>

### **James Ockford Calls for Sabbath Purity**

In 1650, **James Ockford**, a pupil of Brabourne, wrote a 72-page treatise stating that the Sabbath commandment had been “restored to its primitive purity.” It was entitled *The Doctrine of the Fourth Commandment, Deformed by Popery, Reformed & Restored to its Primitive Purity*. Sabbath-keeping spread rapidly among some Baptist congregations. Ockford’s book caused such controversy in Salisbury that the mayor asked the Speaker of the English Parliament to intervene, since the book was undermining the observance of Sunday. Parliament recommended that all copies be burned and the author punished. Only one copy is known to have escaped the flames. Ockford was called both an Anabaptist and a Jew.<sup>15</sup> He protested, denying that he was a Jew. Ockford saw the Sabbath as a delight and joy:

“... happy shall the Church be, that worshippeth God according to his Law, and giveth him his due, by placing on the Seventh day, the honours which God requireth to be performed on it.”<sup>16</sup>

Daniel Cawdry, in his book *Sabbatum*, attacked Ockford’s book. Theophilus Brabourne, from within the Church of England, answered Cawdry’s arguments. Parliament took further steps to strengthen Sunday observance with stricter Blue Laws.

The burning of Ockford’s book may have caused others to write anonymously. In 1652 an unknown author, in *The Moralite of the*

*Fourth Commandment*, wrote that those who rejected the Sabbath as Jewish were inconsistent, because they used the Old Testament example of the rite of circumcision in support of infant baptism. Besides supporting the Sabbath, the author called for believers’ baptism by immersion.

### **The Fifth Monarchy Movement**

England was going through a tumultuous period. Two civil wars preceded the execution of King Charles I in 1648. Oliver Cromwell headed a Puritan government which established the “Christian Sabbath” (Sunday) as the law of the land, but which opposed the idea of a state church and allowed some freedom of thought.

During this period of unrest, “independent” churches sprang up. A religio-political movement known as the “Fifth Monarchy” movement arose from fundamentalist congregations who expected Christ’s kingdom would soon be established on the earth. To prepare, Fifth Monarchy men advocated that England quickly pattern its government and laws after the Bible. Fifth Monarchists felt that they were most qualified to rule before Christ came. They understood that Christ would reign on the earth with His saints for 1,000 years as the fifth world-ruling kingdom, after the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires. Some of them became extremists and tried to usher in the Messianic kingdom with armed force.

About 1661, the son of Charles I restored the British monarchy and reigned as King Charles II. Instead of promoting religious toleration, Charles II persecuted “heretics,” banning the Fifth Monarchy movement and treating those who supported it as rebels.

A number of Baptists and Sabbath-keepers were associated with the Fifth Monarchy movement, which caused some to conclude that Sabbatarian Baptists were an offshoot of the movement. With only brief freedom of worship amid decades of violent persecution, the 1600s were an especially dangerous time for Sabbath-keepers. Sanford reports, “Many believed that the rapid growth of dissenting churches and sects had been one of the main causes of the civil war and execution of the king. They viewed freedom of religion as a challenge to authority which might cause

another civil war or total anarchy.”<sup>17</sup>

The Fifth Monarchy movement was never large, but it was perceived as a serious threat to Cromwell and then to the restored monarchy of Charles II. The movement reached its peak in 1661, when Thomas Venner led an unsuccessful uprising to overthrow King Charles II.

### **Thomas Tillam Calls Sunday “Mark of the Beast”**

At Hexham, north of London, **Thomas Tillam** was a prominent Baptist preacher. His powerful prophetic sermons led many to be baptized by immersion. In 1653, Baptist leader Hanserd Knolleys of London called Tillam to task for practicing the ordinance of “laying on of hands” on all believers at baptism. Knolleys revoked Tillam’s credentials. Undaunted, Tillam began searching out other congregations that agreed with his views.

Tillam located **Dr. Peter Chamberlen**, who led the only Baptist church which supported the Fifth Monarchy movement. Chamberlen had been a royal physician and was a clean shaven aristocrat, while Tillam was a man of the people and believed real men had short hair and long beards. Nevertheless, they apparently became close associates.

In 1655, Tillam moved to Colchester. He may have been acquainted with Brabourne, who lived in the area. Early in 1656, Tillam began holding church services on Saturday. How he came to his belief in the Sabbath is not clear. It may have been through Chamberlen, who probably knew Ockford.

While imprisoned for Sabbath-keeping, Tillam wrote a book of over 200 pages titled *The Seventh Day Sabbath Sought Out and Celebrated*. The book was written in answer to a pamphlet against Sabbath-keeping by William Aspinall, a leading Fifth Monarchist. Aspinall, in attacking the arguments of Ockford and John Spittlehouse, ridiculed the Sabbath and those who kept it. Spittlehouse, spokesman for Chamberlen’s congregation, had published his advocacy of the “unchangeable morality” of the Sabbath in mid-1656.

Published in 1657, Tillam’s Sabbath defense brought a chorus of condemnation. Tillam developed a link between the Sabbath and Bible prophecy by declaring that the

Sabbath would “in these very last days become the last great controversy between the Saints and the Man of Sin, the Changer of Times and Laws.” Tillam may have been the first to call Sunday the “Mark of the Beast.”

Tillam disagreed with Chamberlen on one point: Chamberlen believed the Sabbath negated all significance of Sunday, while Tillam felt the resurrection could be celebrated on Sunday. Both agreed that Messianic Sabbath-keepers would aid the conversion of the Jews, and were a sure sign that Christ’s return was near. Chamberlen wrote Tillam:

“The Jews of London are very much affected with our keeping the Sabbath . . . I perceive it is a great stumbling block to them as to believe Christ to be the *Messiah*, because Christians violate the Sabbath; for (say they) if Christ were not a Sabbath-breaker, why are Christians? and if Christ were a Sabbath-breaker then he was a sinner, and if a sinner, what benefit can we expect by the death of an evil doer? And thus you see what evil consequences follow the non-observance of the Lord’s holy Sabbath.”<sup>18</sup>

By 1660, Tillam was even more adamant, proclaiming, “. . . tis time to withdraw from such as cannot endure to hear it [the Sabbath].”<sup>19</sup>

In 1653, Tillam had unknowingly baptized a false Jew, who later was proven to be an Englishman trained in Rome as a Jesuit infiltrator. The false Jew’s admission that the Vatican had sent him and many others to infiltrate them, and destroy England’s government, army, and its growing numbers of Bible believers from within, came close to precipitating a national panic. The scandal created by this revelation ruined Tillam’s reputation and cast a very unfavorable light on all Sabbatarian Baptists.

The false Jew, Thomas Ramsey, was imprisoned. Tillam ultimately fled England to establish a colony of dissenters in Heidelberg, Germany, where he set up an independent church whose doctrines stressed keeping the Ten Commandments. Their church covenant (reflecting old English spelling) stated

“wee will walke and religiously obey all his lawes, statutes, and Judgments which hee haith commanded for all Jsraell, particulercly . . . ye seaventh day Sabbath . . .”<sup>20</sup>

Tillam’s influence among Sabbatarians must have continued, for in 1667, a number of

leading Seventh Day Baptists signed a document disavowing Tillam's "legalistic" beliefs and practices,<sup>21</sup> including his adherence to circumcision.<sup>22</sup>

### **Dr. Peter Chamberlen**

Dr. Chamberlen (also spelled -laine, -lain, -lane, -layne, -lon) was born in 1601, baptized in 1648, and began keeping the Sabbath about 1651. From 1642-1662 he wrote about religious issues such as the Sabbath and baptism, as well as about medical and science subjects. He believed that the Old Testament laws and statutes are still valid, and should be enforced by government. Chamberlen was generally regarded as pastor of Mill Yard Church from 1651 to his death in 1683. He is recorded as leader of the Whitechapel congregation (precursor of Mill Yard) in November 6, 1653.<sup>23</sup>

A Cambridge graduate, Chamberlen studied medicine and surgery at Heidelberg and Padua, and later became senior doctor at both Oxford and Cambridge, as well as personal physician to three British sovereigns, including Charles I and Charles II. Dr. Chamberlen participated in the famous Stone Chapel debate in 1659 beside St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Jeremiah Ives spoke against the Sabbath, while Chamberlen, Thomas Tillam, and Matthew Coppinger spoke for the Sabbath. There were hundreds of people at the debate.

Although Chamberlen was a nationally respected figure, he could not translate his social status into effective leadership among Sabbatarian Baptists. The Huguenot family from which he was descended guarded the secret of the obstetrical forceps, which resulted in a very lucrative medical practice. Profit-making schemes, political plans and solving social problems in England occupied so much of Chamberlen's life, that he chose not to wholeheartedly devote himself to propagating the Sabbath truth. He regained the post of royal physician with the restoration of Charles II, but in 1661 did not stand up for his Christian brother John James when James was about to be executed. Sabbatarians lost respect for Chamberlen. As royal physician, Katz reports that Chamberlen kept the Sabbath privately, at his home, until his death in 1683.<sup>24</sup>

### **Mill Yard Church**

The Mill Yard Church has been termed the oldest Sabbath-keeping church in England. Some attribute the founding of the Mill Yard Church to John Traske; others, to John James (martyred in 1661). There are records that point to its beginning in 1607 or even in the 1580s. Positive evidence is extant for several other congregations in the 1650s.

Sanford believes that William Saller (also spelled Salter, Seller or Sellers) was probably the first pastor of the Mill Yard Church in London. About 1653, writing under the name W. Salter, he published a booklet entitled *Sunday queries tendered to Ministers for clearing the doctrine of the Fourth Commandment And the Lord's Sabbath Day*. In 1657, Saller and John Spittlehouse wrote an appeal to the chief magistrates concerning the Sabbath day. They were concerned that laws requiring cessation of labor on Sunday caused severe economic distress on those who observed the seventh-day Sabbath, because they had to rest on two days. Spittlehouse and William Sallers tried unsuccessfully to convince the chief magistrates that the Sabbath should be established in law. Saller wrote eleven books, ten of which are known to be in existence.<sup>25</sup>

### **Sabbath Debate**

Sunday-keeping Baptists were disturbed by the fact that many Baptists were observing the Sabbath. Jeremiah Ives, a First-day Baptist, challenged Tillam, Chamberlen and Matthew Coppinger to a public debate on the Sabbath issue in 1659. The debate, held at Stone Chapel next to St. Paul's Cathedral in London, ended after three days with both sides declaring themselves the winner. Afterwards, preachers Edward Stennett and John James began to defend the Sabbath.

Stennett had been a Parliament chaplain during the civil wars. Though not a Fifth Monarchist, he expected Christ to return in his lifetime. He published a defense of the Sabbath in 1658, arguing for the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments, which he termed the "Royal Law."

### **John James — Christian Martyr?**

A company of Sabbatarian General Baptists (Arminian) met in London at Bullstake Alley, Whitechapel, under the leadership of **John James** in 1661. The Whitechapel congregation was known as the Mill Yard Church at this time.<sup>26</sup> James' profession was a silk ribbon weaver. Like Stennett, James was not a Fifth Monarchist but did expect Christ to return to earth literally, displacing all earthly government and establishing the millennium.

At this very point in history, Charles II restored the monarchy and clamped down on all potential opposition. Fifth Monarchists, as well as all religious dissenters, were rebels to him. In a skeptical, materialistic age, Charles was a typical degenerate monarch, who sired at least fourteen acknowledged illegitimate offspring. His life testified to his belief that "God will never damn a man for allowing himself a little pleasure." He died in 1685 after a hasty profession of the Catholic faith.

When he came to power in 1661, Charles II needed to show that he was a strong king. A tug of war over power between King Charles I and Parliament had led to that king's losing his head. Charles II needed to show he was tough on religious dissenters. He needed an example to establish his authority. Although Charles promised toleration, his Parliament continued to harass Nonconformists.

On Sabbath, October 19, 1661, after a vigorous sermon on the subject of the Kingdom of God, John James was forcibly removed from the pulpit by a justice of the peace and constable, arrested with thirty of his congregation, and charged with treason for having called Jesus Christ the King of England, Scotland and Ireland. Four witnesses were coerced to testify falsely against him, and he was convicted and sentenced to death by hanging for plotting treason and being a Fifth Monarchist.

When John James heard his sentence, to be "hanged, drawn, and quartered," he exclaimed, "Blessed be God! Whom man condemneth, God justifieth." While he was in prison waiting execution, many notables visited John James and tried to obtain his pardon from the king. King Charles returned with ridicule two requests for pardon by Mrs. James.<sup>27</sup>

On November 26, at the scaffold, John

James knelt down, thanked God for His mercy, and prayed for the false witnesses, the executioner, the people of God, for removal of divisions, for the coming of Christ, for the spectators, and lastly for himself that he might enter glory. At his final speech at the gallows, James professed belief in the doctrines of **Hebrews 6:1-2**. John James also proclaimed:

"I do own the Commandments of God, the Ten Commandments as they are expressed in the 20th of Exodus. I do here, as before the Lord, testify that I durst not, I durst not willingly break the least of those Commandments to save my life; I do declare that the rather . . . I do own the Lord's holy Sabbath, the seventh day of the week to be the Lord's Sabbath; you know the Commandment 'Remember that thou keep holy the seventh day.' I shall forbear to speak any more to that."<sup>28</sup>

Before the final moment, James cried, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." After the execution, James' heart was taken out and burned. His quarters were put on the gates of the city, and his head was set up in Whitechapel on a pole opposite the alley of the Mill Yard meetinghouse. The thirty members of the Mill Yard congregation were taken in groups before the justice of the peace and were required to take an oath of allegiance to the king. Those who refused were committed to Newgate Prison.<sup>29</sup> Although martyred mainly for political rather than religious reasons, John James' death has inspired Sabbath-keepers for generations.

### **Persecution Leads to Sabbath-Keeper Migration to America**

In such times of religious persecution and bigotry, it is not surprising that large numbers of Sabbath-keepers fled to America, which offered much greater religious freedom. **Stephen Mumford**, a member of Stennett's congregation, fled to Rhode Island in 1664, barely three years after John James' death. Mumford began to fellowship with Sunday keepers and later established the first Sabbath-keeping Christian church in America in 1671, with the help and encouragement of Stennett and Chamberlen.

### **Mill Yard Ministers**

The following is a partial list of Mill Yard ministers:<sup>30</sup>

John Traske, 1617-1619  
Dr. Peter Chamberlen, 1653- ?  
John James, ? - 1661  
William Sellers, 1670-1678  
Henry Soursby, 1678-1711  
various ministers, 1712-1895  
William C. Daland, 1896-1899

### Church Records — Passover Once Yearly

“The Mill Yard Church of London, the original Seventh Day Baptist Church, celebrates it [communion] but once a year, at the time of the Passover, from the Jewish Church.” Indications are that it had always done so.<sup>31</sup>

The creed of the Mill Yard Church in September 1, 1698, was stated to be the Ten Commandments, **Matthew 5:19**, **Revelation 12:17**, and **14:12**.

The first mention of the name Seventh Day Baptist is dated October 6, 1754.

By 1885, because of lack of male members, most of the trustee positions were filled by First-day Baptists. A court dispute involving church property resulted in the decision that “the Seventh-day Baptists were dead — or so nearly so as to be in no condition” to receive money from sale of the property.<sup>32</sup>

### Beliefs of Joseph Davis, Sr.

**Joseph Davis, Sr.**, a wealthy seventeenth century member of the Mill Yard Church, gave the church a yearly allowance. Apparently imprisoned for his beliefs, Davis wrote members of the church in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1670 from Oxford prison. He was released on September 13, 1672.

In a statement of his beliefs, Davis used the words “Church of Christ” twice. He believed in one God the Father, one Lord Christ, and that the Holy Spirit is the power of God, not a part of the “Trinity.” He knew that man is justified by the faith of Jesus Christ, not by the works of the law, **Galatians 2:16**. He also knew “that this justifying Faith is evidenced by Evangelical Good-works, a Readiness of obedience to what God requires . . .,” and to prove this he cited **James 2:21-25**.

Davis further stated:

“I believe there is but one true visible Church . . . . The members of the Gospel visible Church, in the latter times, that Anti-Christ prevailed, are noted by the Spirit in **Revelation 14:12** to be such as keep the Commandments of God, and the Faith of Jesus, and such are, and shall be Blessed, Revelation 22:14 . . . . They are the Lord Christ’s Church . . . .”<sup>33</sup>

Joseph Davis’ endowment to the Mill Yard Church helped it to survive during the early years of persecution. But a century later, jealousy and litigation over the fund resulted in Seventh Day Baptists being left with only a token of the Davis legacy.<sup>34</sup>

### Natton (Tewkesbury) Church

Another early church is that of Natton, or Tewkesbury, on the River Severn. There is evidence here of Sabbath-keepers as early as 1620, and a church by 1640. Complete organization was not achieved until 1650. Prior to 1680, Natton was a mixed congregation of both Sunday and seventh-day observers.

Natton’s ministers included <sup>35</sup>:

John Cowell, began keeping the Sabbath 1661,? -1670, and rejected it in 1670

John Purser, faithful Sabbath keeper, 1660-1720

Edmund Townsend, called to London to succeed Joseph Stennett at Pinner’s Hall, 1720-1727

Philip Jones, “energetic,” but membership grew by only 30 to 40, 1727-1770

Thomas Hiller, his nephew, a pastor also at First Baptist Church in Tewkesbury, was “successful at Natton as well as at Tewkesbury,” 1770-1790

Interim period till 1800s.

No pastor after 1903. Last baptism 1858. Members and ministers often kept Sunday also.

In reaction to the extreme views of Tillam and others, Pastor John Cowell, after thirteen years of promoting the Sabbath, abandoned it. Cowell rejected Tillam’s support of circumcision and keeping the whole law. He rejected Edward Stennett’s and William Saller’s assertions that the death penalty is in force for profaning the Sabbath. Cowell could not find a single scripture showing that Gentile Christians kept the sabbath. The last straw

was the confusion among Sabbath-keepers themselves:

“I observed an aptness in them (as it is in too many others) to cry out against their dissenting brethren for being in confusion in Babylon . . . for a non-compliance with them in their notions, whereas they themselves are in as much confusion, if not more than most others, who are the men of their indignation . . . . [their confusion is] their diverse beginning and ending of their Sabbath, some of them beginning to rest at sunset on the sixth day . . . [others] an hour or more after sunset . . . .”<sup>36</sup>

Cowell’s book *The Snare Broken*, written in 1677, caused considerable disturbances in the seventh-day churches. As Sanford writes, “When a person rejects the Sabbath after having spent years championing it, the effect can be devastating.”<sup>37</sup>

Sabbath-keepers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have experienced similar devastation from former members. (In the 1880s, D.M. Canright left the Seventh-Day Adventists and wrote against the Sabbath. In 1974, Dr. Ernest Martin left the Worldwide Church of God and drew many with him in a rejection of the Sabbath.)

### **Bell Lane Church**

Another famous English Sabbatarian Church is the Bell Lane Church of London. Benedict (page 339) says this church was organized c. 1662. In 1668 it was flourishing, with John Belcher as its minister. Belcher, a bricklayer, was imprisoned in 1658 for suspected Fifth Monarchy beliefs. In 1671 he was again imprisoned, this time for both his political and nonconformist religious beliefs. State papers referred to Belcher and his company as “Sabbatarians and Fifth Monarchy Men.” Belcher was taken to the Tower, and thirty others were imprisoned elsewhere. Their place of meeting was ordered destroyed.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, correspondence from Belcher and others in the church gave encouragement to American Sabbath-keepers in Newport, Rhode Island. In 1668, Bell Lane Church members wrote of the need for those in Newport to persevere and be true to their convictions, yet exhibit tolerance to those who refused to accept the Sabbath.<sup>39</sup>

Toward the close of the 1600s, the Church

moved to the same building where Elder Stennett’s Pinner’s Hall Church met, also on the Sabbath. One group met in the morning, and the other in the afternoon. The two groups differed in their views of Calvinism.

Belcher died in 1695 and was succeeded by Henry Cooke. The Bell Lane Church was greatly reduced because many members joined Elder Stennett’s church. Elder Cooke died in 1704 or 1707, and the remainder of the Bell Lane Church merged with the Pinner’s Hall Church.

### **Pinner’s Hall Church**

Located on Broad Street in London, the Pinner’s Hall Church was also known by its other meeting places, Cripplegate and Devonshire Square. During the reign of Charles II (1660-1685), the church was assembled by Francis Bampfield. It was organized on March 5, 1676, on two principles: 1) Christ is one Lord and one Lawgiver, and 2) the Bible is the one and only rule of faith. Originally, meetings were held at Bampfield’s house; the Pinner’s Hall location was chosen by lot in 1681.<sup>40</sup>

### **Francis Bampfield**

Born in 1615, **Francis Bampfield** received a Master of Arts degree from Wadham College of Oxford University in 1638. A minister of the Established Church, Bampfield was ejected by the Act of Conformity in 1662 because he believed it was wrong to take an oath. He preached at his own house for a month before he and twenty-six others were arrested and imprisoned. After being released on bail, Bampfield was again arrested, and he remained in the Dorchester jail from 1662 to 1671.

While in jail, he preached to his fellow inmates and even formed a prison church, preaching as often as sixteen times a week. Soon after entering prison (ca. 1665), he embraced the Sabbath and believers’ baptism. In 1671 or 1672, while at Salisbury jail, he baptized himself and raised up a jail church, holding Saturday services during his eighteen-month stay there.

Upon release from jail, Bampfield moved east of London. Sabbath-keepers met at his house for a year before he organized the



Pinner's Hall Church in 1676. The reason for a separate church from Mill Yard was that Bampfield differed with them on the subject of Calvinism. He would probably be considered more "Particularist" or "Calvinistic" than those of the Mill Yard Church.<sup>41</sup> Eight men joined Bampfield by signing a church covenant which stated

"We own the LORD Jesus Christ to be the One & Only LORD & Lawgiver to our Souls & Consciences. And we own the Holy scriptures of Truth as ye One & only Rule of Faith Worship & Life, According to which we are to Judge of all our Cases."<sup>42</sup>

### Beliefs of the Bampfields

Francis Bampfield was probably converted to the Sabbath through his brother, Thomas Bampfield, a lawyer and the last Speaker of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1659. Thomas himself may have come to the Sabbath truth through the book *An Appeal to the Consciences of the Chief Magistrates of this Commonwealth Touching the Sabbath-day* by W. Saller (of the Mill Yard Church) and J. Spittlehouse, published in 1657. Thomas Bampfield wrote several books on the Sabbath, in which he professed the following<sup>43</sup>: 1) Christ, as the Jehovah of the Old Testament, instituted and sanctified the Sabbath from the beginning. 2) The Sabbath is binding on Gentiles as well as Jews. 3) Saturday was observed generally in England until the reign of Edward VI (1537-1553), when the first Parliamentary act for the "Lord's Day" was passed. 4) The Sabbath lasts forever, is the seventh day, not a seventh day, and begins at sunset of Friday.

Bampfield taught that God's Laws as given in the Bible should be the law of the land. George Hickes, later royal physician, denounced Bampfield and his followers as "unsound Judaizing Christians [who] have still dreamed, that the *Mosaick* Code was yet in force . . . . [these men are] our Modern *Kaeraites*, who make the Scriptures the sole and adequate rule of human actions."<sup>44</sup>

His church sent Bampfield as a special messenger to the Sabbath churches in Wiltshire, Hampshire, Dorsetshire, Gloucestershire and Berkshire. He sent a letter to all the Sabbath-keeping churches, including those in Holland and New England, advocating a

"Yearly Meeting of all Seventh Day Baptist Churches."

### More Jail Time

In 1682, Francis Bampfield was brought before the Court of Sessions on a variety of charges of "nonconformity." He was examined several times, and on each occasion he refused to take an oath of allegiance on grounds of conscience. The court declared he was outside the protection of the king, and that his goods be confiscated and he be imprisoned for life, or as long as the king wished.<sup>45</sup>

Three times Bampfield was arrested while preaching in Pinner's Hall. The first arrest was on December 17, 1682. After the second arrest, he was sent to Newgate Prison, where he was incarcerated from December 24, 1682, to August 12, 1683. After his third arrest, he died during imprisonment in Newgate on February 16, 1684, at the age of 68 years. There is no record that he ever recanted his faith.<sup>46</sup> In his book, *Shem Archer*, the only extant copy of which is in the library of the British Museum, he mentions the "Church of God" and states that Christ is the supreme head of His church (page 28).<sup>47</sup>

### Stennett Resurrects Pinner's Hall Church

The Pinner's Hall church organized by Bampfield was dispersed for a while during his imprisonments and after his death. However, the church was assembled again on October 14, 1686, by **Edward Stennett**, who came to London from Wallingford, where he apparently pastored a Sabbatarian church. He continued to serve in Wallingford, but because of the difficulty in serving at both churches, he resigned from the London pastorate in 1689. The following is a partial list of Pinner's Hall ministers<sup>48</sup>:

Francis Bampfield, 1676-1684  
Edward Stennett, 1686-1689  
Joseph Stennett, 1690-1713  
various ministers, 1713-1726  
Edmund Townsend, 1727-1763  
various ministers, 1764-1848  
Extinct, 1849

### Edward Stennett — Father of a Sabbatarian Family

As a rector of the Established Church, Edward Stennett did not hold to the Sabbath in 1631 when Brabourne wrote against him. A Parliament supporter, Stennett lost his ministerial position in 1660 with the Restoration of the crown. He turned to the medical profession to support his family and give his children a liberal education.

Stennett then began keeping the Sabbath, holding secret meetings in his Wallingford Castle, which was immune from search warrants. The local squire and parson hired false witnesses against him, but by a striking series of “accidents,” the judge and the witnesses were prevented from appearing in court, and his case was dismissed.<sup>49</sup>

### **Stennett’s Letters to America — Sound Advice**

Dr. Edward Stennett of the church in Bell Lane, London, wrote a letter to the Sabbath-keepers in Rhode Island from Abingdon, Berkshire, February 2, 1668 (before the Newport Church was formed in 1671). He begins, “Edward Stennett, a poor, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ, to the remnant in Rhode Island who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus, sendeth greeting.” He continues, “Dearly Beloved, I rejoice in the Lord on your behalf, in that he hath been graciously pleased to make known to you his holy Sabbath, in such a day as this: when truth falleth in the streets and equity cannot enter . . . Here are in England about nine or ten churches that keep the Sabbath, besides many scattered disciples, who have been eminently preserved in this tottering day, when many eminent churches have been shattered to pieces.”<sup>50</sup>

Stennett further exhorted the Rhode Islanders to carry the Sabbath truth “with all meekness and tenderness to our brethren, who . . . differ from us.” He indicates that in the past the English churches had flourished, but were now in a state of decay. “. . . it is a time of slumbering and sleeping with us, tho God’s rod is upon our backs [persecution]” (Seventh Day Baptist Memorial, I (January 1852), pages 26-27).

Sabbath-keepers among the First Baptist Church in Newport had written to Stennett for his advice. His second letter to Newport,

Rhode Island, dated March 6, 1670, states, “My dear friends, as for those that have drawn back from the Sabbath to profaneness . . . [you] must withdraw yourselves from them, as sinful and disorderly persons; and if the [Baptist] church will hold communion with those apostates from the truth, you ought then to desire to be fairly dismissed from the church, which if the church refuse, you ought to withdraw yourselves, and not be partakers of other men’s sins, but keep yourselves pure . . .”<sup>51</sup>

The Newport Sabbath-keepers followed Stennett’s advice, and their withdrawal from the Sunday-keeping church led to the formation of the Newport Sabbatarian Church. Stennett’s role thus appears to be that of a leading elder.

### **Stennett’s Legacy**

Edward Stennett wrote a number of books on the Sabbath. His 1658 book, *The Royal Law Contended For*, states that the Ten Commandments will always be in full force until heaven and earth pass away. He insisted that the Bible Sabbath begins at Friday sunset. His son Joseph Stennett succeeded him as pastor of the Pinner’s Hall Church. On his parents’ tombstone, Joseph engraved an epitaph with the words “heirs of immortality.” Four generations of Stennetts became Sabbatarian leaders in England.<sup>52</sup>

### **Stennett’s Sons Preached on Sunday**

Joseph Stennett, son of Edward, pastored the Pinner’s Hall Church from 1690 to 1713. Very well educated, “he preached on Sunday to other Baptist churches, but remained the faithful pastor of the Pinner’s Hall Seventh-day Baptist church until his death.” He wrote several Sabbath hymns, the most noted one titled “Another Six Days’ Work Is Done,” which is still published in a number of hymnals,<sup>53</sup> and reproduced on page 36 of this paper.

Joseph’s son, Joseph Stennett II, became a minister at the age of 22. He declined to become pastor of the Mill Yard Church. Later, as “it was quite customary in those days for a seventh-day minister to serve a first-day church,” he at the age of 45 became pastor of a First-day Baptist Church in London, although

he remained a “faithful” Sabbath keeper for the rest of his life. One of the most eloquent preachers of the day, and a dissenter, he was known personally by King George II.<sup>54</sup> He died in 1759, having served forty-four years as a Baptist minister. His son, Samuel Stennett, likewise maintained a dual relationship with both First-day Baptists and Seventh Day Baptists. For nearly twenty years, Samuel Stennett was a part-time pastor. He is remembered as a hymn writer as well. His most noted hymns are “Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned,” and “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks.” Samuel died in 1795.<sup>55</sup>

### **Other Sabbath-Keeping Churches in England**

Compared to records of the Mill Yard, Natton, and Bell Lane-Pinner’s Hall churches, only scant information is available concerning other Sabbath-keeping churches of the time. By 1730, other Sabbatarian churches had been founded at the following locations:

Burton-on-Trent, Derbyshire  
 Leominster, Herefordshire  
 Hexham, Northumberland  
 Dorchester, Dorsetshire  
 Norwich, Norfolk  
 Colchester, Essex  
 Dorchester Jail, Dorsetshire  
 Wallingford, Berkshire  
 Salisbury, Wiltshire  
 Sherbourne, Dorsetshire  
 —, Hampshire  
 Braintree, Essex  
 Chertsey, Surrey  
 Norweston, Oxfordshire  
 Woodbridge, Suffolk  
 Manchester, Lancastershire

### **Practices of English Sabbatarians — Sabbath Debate**

Seventeenth-century England was the scene of much religious and political strife, with the execution of King Charles I followed by Cromwell’s Commonwealth, and then the Restoration of the monarchy under Charles II. Sabbath books, published by numerous dissenters, may have been partly a result of political opposition to the king and the Established Church.

Sabbath debate, not sincerely promoting the truth, seems to have been the order of the day. Thomas Bampffield, Edward Stennett and others continued to publish one book after another on the Sabbath refuting each time the counter attacks of others. Another example is William Saller, pastor of the Mill Yard Church from 1670 to 1678. In 1657 he and John Spittlehouse wrote a book in an attempt to gain legal recognition of the Sabbath. The Seventh Day Baptist history notes of Saller, “He is spoken of as a man of considerable power in debate and controversy, using his gift in defense of the Sabbath.”<sup>56</sup>

These seventeenth-century English Sabbatarians were convinced that they must defend the Sabbath from all opposition, lest observance of the seventh day be totally stamped out by bigotry and persecution. Throughout their history, Seventh Day Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and the Church of God (Seventh Day) have continued to debate the Sabbath. Although persecution at times ceased, it might at any time, begin anew, and Sabbath-keepers needed to be ready to defend their faith. This kept their faith strong.

That there was laxity among some English Sabbatarians in teaching observance of the Sabbath is indicated by the fact that Seventh Day Baptist ministers commonly spoke to Sunday congregations as well. Some Seventh Day Baptist ministers continue this practice today. To some Sabbatarians, “their” Sabbath was little different from the Catholic-Protestant Sunday.

Yet some had balance and compassion for other people, instead of merely strict legalistic Sabbath-keeping. Sir William Tempest, poet and lawyer, joined the Mill Yard Church in 1732 and became a lay preacher. “If a case came up for trial on the Sabbath day, he would plead the case lest injustice be done his client, but he would take no pay for such services.”<sup>57</sup> If it is important enough to rescue an ox in a ditch on the Sabbath, how much more a person who is being oppressed by an unjust human government?

### **Laying on of Hands**

Laying on of hands was generally performed by early Seventh Day Baptists in America as well as in England. Whether the

rite was administered for all new members, or only ministers, is not known.

Elder Thomas Tillam, pastor of the Hexham Church in Northumberland from 1651 to 1654, also pastor of a Sabbath church of 200 baptized believers in Colchester, Essex, in 1655 published a work entitled, "The fourth principle of Church Religion: or the foundational doctrine of Laying on of Hands, asserted and vindicated."<sup>58</sup>

### **Spiritual Condition of English Churches**

As stated previously, Edward Stennett's 1668 letter describes the decayed and slumbering condition of the English churches. Additional contemporary statements magnify this decline from their former zeal.

Eleven members of the Bell Lane Church in London, including William Gibson, wrote a letter dated March 26, 1668, to the Newport Sabbath keepers.<sup>59</sup> It began, "The church of Christ, meeting in Bell Lane, London, upon the Lord's holy Sabbath . . . to a remnant of the Lord's Sabbath-keepers in or about Newport in New England . . . Oh, what were the contests in former ages, as the saints were creeping out of Babylon! What fiery trials they have met withal! The mother of harlots and beast that carries her have changed times and laws." The Newport brethren were encouraged to show tolerance to Sunday-keepers and not use harsh words against them.

### **Candlestick Threatened to be Removed**

Joseph Davis, Sr., in his letter to the Newport Sabbath-keepers from Oxford prison dated January 26, 1670, mentions the "Church of Christ" more than once. "As to the churches of Christ," he states, "they generally keep from a sinful compliance with the false worshippers."

His letter relates that many had preached and written against the Sabbath, and their teachings had done great damage among Sabbath-keepers. Describing the spiritual decadence into which many Sabbatarians had fallen, he declares, "There were many shining lights in this nation; but many of them, I fear, have decayed, and much lost their splendor . . ."

Davis states, "Love is waxed cold, and the Christian zeal of many is very low: and there

are but few who follow on to know the Lord in farther obedience . . . Woe unto us! for we have sinned, and the candlestick is threatened to be removed." Davis terms himself a "sincere Sabbath-keeper."<sup>60</sup>

### **Saints Worn Out**

Peter Chamberlen, a pastor of the Mill Yard Church, sent a letter in September of 1671 to the Newport brethren to present to the governor of New England. Pleading for religious liberty for the Sabbath-keepers, Chamberlen cites **I John 3:4, James 2:10-11, Exodus 20, and Revelation 22:18-19**, and states,

"What shall we say of those that take away of those ten words, or those that make them void, and teach men so? Nay, they dare give the lie to Jehovah, and make Jesus Christ not only a breaker of the law, but the very author of sin in others, also causing them to break them. Hath not the little horn played his part lustily in this, and worn out the saints of the Most High, so that they become little-horn men also?"<sup>61</sup>

### **Dead Church**

An article in the Birmingham *Weekly Post* of April 13, 1901, states that the Natton Church was the only Seventh Day Baptist church left in the provinces (outside London?). The minister there, as usual, also ministered to a First-day Baptist church at Tewkesbury. The writer of the article remarks, "There is nothing in the type of service to differentiate it from that of an ordinary nonconformist service." He was amazed that this sect, which few know about, had continued to exist for two and one-half centuries, because

" . . . there appears to be little attempt to propagate the faith, and without such effort the number of adherents is not likely to increase."

The writer concluded that any interested persons had better make haste to find out about the group "before it passes out of existence altogether."<sup>62</sup>

### **Their Own Admissions of Why They Declined**

Many Sabbatarians in England during the nineteenth century experienced difficulty in

finding employment which would leave them free to rest and worship on the Sabbath. They had little standing in the court system because the Sabbath was not legally recognized. Consequently, they were left with the following choices: They could submit to the dictates of business and society by giving up the Sabbath, they could leave the country, they could resist passively, or they could openly rebel. All four alternatives were taken by various English Sabbath-keepers. Thus the pressures of their society sapped their strength and prohibited effective growth, threatening their survival<sup>63</sup>

In addition to pressures from without, the official Seventh Day Baptist history gives three internal reasons for the decline of British Sabbath-keeping churches: 1) Lack of organized fellowship among the churches (improper government), 2) Dependence on charitable bequests for finances (tithing not enforced), 3) Employment of first-day pastors (failure to keep the Sabbath properly).<sup>64</sup>

Belcher adds two related reasons: 1) Sabbatarian preachers were trying to serve two masters by preaching on Sunday to First-day Baptists also, and 2) There was "an almost total neglect, for a long period, to make any energetic efforts to promulgate their views."<sup>65</sup>

In 1845, in an article in the *Sabbath Recorder*, George B. Utter attributed the cause of the decline of the English church at Natton to the ministry of Thomas Hiller. Although a Sabbath-keeper in opinion and practice, Hiller at the same time remained pastor of a First-day Baptist church. He was highly esteemed by both congregations, but Sabbath-keeping attendance declined. Utter lamented,

"A minister of the Gospel, who is at the same time pastor of one church worshipping on the seventh day of the week, and another church worshipping on the first day of the week, can never be faithful to them both."<sup>66</sup>

There were also doctrinal differences among English Sabbatarians. General and Particular Baptists argued over Calvin's concept of "the elect." Some kept the Sabbath more strictly than others. Some were involved in politics. As Sanford notes, "the differences which separated them may have been greater than the doctrine of the Sabbath which united them." They did not subordinate their doctrinal differences to their common Sabbath belief, which "requires sacrifice, push, and

devotion, fifty-two times a year, every year of one's life."<sup>67</sup>

The above reasons for decline of the English Sabbath-keepers can also be applied to Seventh Day Baptists in America.

In 1971, Dr. Kenneth E. Smith, President of the Seventh Day Baptist Milton College in Wisconsin, gave another reason for the Seventh Day Baptist decline: Seventh Day Baptists have always been ecumenical; they have consistently taught that they are not the only true church, that all believers in Christ are Christians, and that one can be a Christian without keeping the Sabbath. When asked how to distinguish Seventh Day Baptists from other Baptists, he said, "You can't. The only difference is the Sabbath."<sup>68</sup>

As a final historical footnote, it is interesting to note that the Mill Yard Church in London is still functioning. Years ago, some natives from a Seventh Day Baptist mission in Jamaica moved to London, and now the Mill Yard Church is nearly all black. A "Reverend" A.L. Peet is its minister. The Jamaicans seem to have added life to the church, for it is growing. However, as President Smith admits, the beliefs of modern Seventh Day Baptists differ markedly from those of their spiritual ancestors. Ω



## Footnotes







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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Liechty, *Andreas Fischer and the Sabbatarian Anabaptists: An Early Reformation Episode in East Central Europe* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1988), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Sanford, 45-46.

<sup>3</sup> William Tyndale, “Answer to sir Thomas More’s Dialogue”; cited in Sanford, 45-46.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Sanford, 46.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in *Bible Advocate*, LX (July 6, 1926), 463.

<sup>6</sup> David S. Katz, *Sabbath and sectarianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Cox’s *Literature of the Sabbath Question*, 157.

<sup>8</sup> SDB, 107-109.

<sup>9</sup> Sanford, 51.

<sup>10</sup> SDB, 71.

<sup>11</sup> Cox, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Katz, 16.

<sup>13</sup> SDB, 69-70.

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<sup>14</sup> Sanford, 54.

<sup>15</sup> SDB, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Sanford, 59.

<sup>17</sup> Sanford, 66.

<sup>18</sup> Katz, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Tillam, *The Temple of Lively Stones* (1660); cited in Sanford, 64.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Katz, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Sanford, 64.

<sup>22</sup> Katz, 45.

<sup>23</sup> SDB, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Katz, 48, 75.

<sup>25</sup> Sanford, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, Revised Ed. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: The Judson Press, 1963), 80.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Belcher, *The Religious Denominations of the United States* (Philadelphia: J.E. Potter, 1854), 257.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Trial of John James* (London: 1730); cited in Sanford, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Torbet, 80.

<sup>30</sup> SDB, 40.

<sup>31</sup> William L. Burdick, *A Manual of Seventh Day Baptist Church Procedure* (Plainfield, New Jersey: W.L. Burdick and C.F. Randolph, 1926), 47.

<sup>32</sup> SDB, 42-43.

<sup>33</sup> William Henry Black, ed., *The Last Legacy of the Autobiography and Religious Profession of Joseph Davis, Senior* (London: Mill Yard Congregation, 1869), 28-47.

<sup>34</sup> Sanford, 79.

<sup>35</sup> SDB, 44-46.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Cox, II:58.

<sup>37</sup> Sanford, 67-68.

<sup>38</sup> SDB, 51-52, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Sanford, 67-68.

<sup>40</sup> SDB, 53-54.

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<sup>41</sup> SDB, 64-65.

<sup>42</sup> Katz, 110.

<sup>43</sup> SDB, 66-67.

<sup>44</sup> Katz, 114.

<sup>45</sup> Belcher, 260-61.

<sup>46</sup> SDB, 64-65.

<sup>47</sup> *Bible Advocate*, LX (July 6, 1926), 463.

<sup>48</sup> SDB, 53-54.

<sup>49</sup> SDB, 93-96.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Clarke, *A History of the Sabbatarians, or Seventh Day Baptists in America* (Utica, New York: 1811), 10-11.

<sup>51</sup> Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists*, Vol. II (Newton, Massachusetts: Backus Historical Society, 1871), 501.

<sup>52</sup> SDB, 95-96.

<sup>53</sup> SDB, 97.

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<sup>54</sup> SDB, 96-100.

<sup>55</sup> Sanford, 74.

<sup>56</sup> SDB, 91.

<sup>57</sup> SDB, 104.

<sup>58</sup> SDB, 105.

<sup>59</sup> *Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, I (January 1852), 24-26.

<sup>60</sup> Black, 55-57.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in Backus, I, 378-79.

<sup>62</sup> SDB, 48-49.

<sup>63</sup> Sanford, 81.

<sup>64</sup> SDB, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Belcher, 264.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Sanford, 80.

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<sup>67</sup> William Meade Jones; cited in Sanford, 79.

<sup>68</sup> Interview. Kenneth Smith. President of Milton College, Milton, Wisconsin. August 18, 1971.