**The *Saturday* Sabbath Men!**

|  |
| --- |
| Few modern Saturday Sabbath-keepers know anything of the first formulation of this doctrine in the modern era. Many will be surprised to learn that it has come directly from the seventeenth century, where a handful of Englishmen and their congregations 'discovered' and began observing it instead of worshipping on Sunday. While these Saturday Sabbath-keepers did not realize that YEHOVAH God's Sabbath-day is tied to the phases of the moon, they considered themselves to be one step ahead of their brethren. Today, it is possible to uncover the main features of this erroneous discovery. It is a story of real people, from diverse backgrounds, many of whom displayed the same human failings as modern Saturday Sabbath-keepers. This article uncovers the origins of the false doctrine of modern Saturday Sabbath-keeping. |

**Leon J. Lyell and John D. Keyser**

**John Traske: The Truth in Trouble**

Soon after the publication of the famous King James Version of the Bible in 1611, an itinerant preacher named John Traske arrived in London. Disgusted by the obvious corruption and indulgence of the clergy of his day. Traske emphasized that YEHOVAH God would give his Spirit to those who obey Him in the way they live their lives.

Traske began advocating fasting and went on to revive the Old Testament prohibition on unclean meats. In a short time this gifted preacher had built a significant following of men and women seeking to obey YEHOVAH's commandments. Hamlet Jackson was one such scrupulous student. While his studies correctly led him to conclude that there was no Biblical command to observe Sunday, he unfortunately thought that the Saturday-Sabbath observed by the Jews was Biblically correct.

Not realizing that the Jews had corrupted YEHOVAH's Sabbath-day, Jackson went immediately to Traske who was also convinced and began observing the Sabbath and vigorously preaching the 'Saturday Sabbath'. Most of Traske's congregation also adopted it. In 1614, Traske ordained Jackson and three others to proclaim the erroneous discovery of the Saturday Sabbath and also to heal diseases by anointing with oil.

**Sunday verses Sunday**

At this time two opposing and equally elaborate arguments were developing about the meaning of Sunday.

The traditional Anglican view, upheld by King James himself as Head of the Church of England, saw Sunday as a new Christian festival. It had been established by the early church with the consent of YEHOVAH God. It was called the 'Lord's Day' in honour of the Lord's resurrection, and it had no connection at all with the Sabbath of the Old Testament, which was made redundant at the cross.

Opposing this view, a growing body of 'Puritan' opinion insisted that the Bible nowhere annulled the Sabbath command. However, because of the resurrection, the true Sabbath had somehow been transferred to Sunday, which was now the 'Christian Sabbath'. Exactly how and when this transformation took place was the subject of much disagreement!

**Traske's Judaising'**

Traske's argument was by contrast attractively simple. The Sabbath command remained and it had not been changed to Sunday. Unfortunately, as we have seen, he didn't realize that YEHOVAH's true Sabbath-day follows the cycles of the moon. However, Anglican and Puritan alike both cried 'Judaising'. Now, while the term was very ill-defined, all agreed it was a very undesirable thing to be!

In circumstances still unclear, Traske and his followers were arrested in 1616. Brought before a panel of bishops, Traske refused to be argued back to Anglican orthodoxy. Offended by his challenge that they would all one day observe the Saturday Sabbath, they imprisoned him and urged him to "repent".

While in prison Traske continued his study of early Church history, no doubt with material provided to him by the bishops. As a result, he made another surprising discovery. He denounced Easter as a man-made blasphemy of the same kind that Sunday was! In its place Traske adopted the Old Testament date of the Passover and also observed the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Infuriated with his "arrogance", Traske's persecutors formally charged him in 1618 with sedition; seducing the King's subjects away from the Church of England to Judaism. Traske was imprisoned, degraded from the ministry, whipped, mutilated, branded with a 'J' on his forehead and fined one thousand pounds. Defeated and dejected, Traske gave up his beliefs and published a recantation three years later. He was immediately released from prison. His wife, however, remained in prison till her death -- still a Saturday Sabbath-keeper.

To Traske goes the dubious honour of being the first known Christian of modern times to observe the Saturday Sabbath and the Passover. While he was correct regarding Passover, and also correct in realizing that Sunday was not YEHOVAH's true Sabbath-day, he failed to understand that the true Sabbath-day is tied to the phases of the moon and can fall on any day of the week in our Gregorian calendar of today! Nonetheless, his name became so stigmatized with the Judaising tag, that the following generation of Sabbath-keepers avoided all mention of his name.

**Brabourne: A Vital Link**

In 1621, the Puritan Thomas Broad published a book detailing the reasons why Sunday should be considered the Christian Sabbath. It became prescribed reading for Puritan ministers, and Theophilus Brabourne was one of the many respectable preachers who studied it.

However, Brabourne's reading led him to disagree with Broad on one point; he could find no convincing evidence for observing the Sabbath on Sunday. Amazed that no-one seemed to have notice this gap in logic before, he published a three hundred page book ***Discourse on the Sabbath*** in 1628 on this issue. Unfortunately Brabourne, like Traske before him, failed to understand the connection to the moon's cycles.

Brabourne had more surprises to come. No-one responded to his book. He then revised it in 1628, putting the case for the Saturday Sabbath more forcefully. This time he dedicated the work to King Charles I and asked him as head of the Church to enforce the Saturday Sabbath.

This book certainly was noticed. Charles was offended and Brabourne found himself before the Bishops. Astounded and unrepentant, Brabourne was sent to Newgate prison for eighteen months. After a year Brabourne was re-examined and threatened with the loss of his ears in an effort to speed his repentance. Brabourne then quickly submitted a brief ambiguous statement, which was accepted as a recantation.

Brabourne lost his living as a minister, but continued to observe and write for the Saturday Sabbath. Not wishing to be disloyal to the Church of England however he remained a staunch supporter of her and refused the opportunity to lead a break-away congregation.

**Ockford: A New Phase**

By 1643, the Puritans had won the argument about Sunday and the law of the land now upheld the so-called 'Christian Sabbath'. Politically, two Civil wars preceded the execution of Charles I in 1648. Cromwell now headed a Puritan government which opposed the idea of a State Church and was prepared to allow some freedom of thought. Interestingly, the Government opposed the celebration of Christmas because of its papist/pagan origin.

Up sprang a variety of 'independent' churches. It is important to remember that these were a long way from modern denominations. Each congregation considered itself to be a part of the one Christian Church. For example, 'Baptist' was at this stage a popular name given to those congregations which practiced believers baptism. It did not become a denominational title until the following century.

In 1650, a pupil of Brabourne's, who had adopted believers baptism, announced that the Sabbath commandment has been "restored to its primitive purity". James Ockford's seventy-two page treatise indeed marks the start of a rapid spread of Saturday Sabbath keeping amongst some 'Baptist' congregations.

**Thomas Tillam and Peter Chamberlen M.D.**

Thomas Tillam was a prominent preacher at Hexham, to the north of London. His vigorous exhortations, usually based on graphic adaptations of "Revelation," brought scores of people to baptism by immersion. Jealous rivals soon complained of his preaching methods to Hansard Knolleys, whose London congregation provided leadership for many Baptists. Eventually Tillam was called to give an account of himself in 1653.

The particular issue of dispute which provoked this was Tillam's adoption of the laying on of hands on all believers at baptism. This newly discovered ordinance was not accepted by Knolley's congregation, which then revoked its support of Tillam's ministry. Essentially, this meant that Tillam had no money or credentials with which to preach.

Feeling betrayed, Tillam set out to find other congregations which might share his views on baptism, prophecy and laying on of hands. This search led him to Dr. Peter Chamberlen, who guided the only Baptist congregation which supported the Fifth Monarchy Movement.

The Fifth Monarchy movement was what we might describe today as a semi-political pressure group which drew support from "fundamentalist" congregations. It expected the Messiah's Kingdom (the Fifth Monarchy to follow the four Kingdoms described in Daniel 2) would soon be literally established on earth. To prepare for this they advocated that England quickly pattern its government and laws on Biblical prescription.

This link and the firm friendship which grew from it would prove important for the spread of the erroneous Saturday Sabbath idea and the long term establishment of Saturday Sabbath-keeping congregations in England and later the United States. In normal times these two men would never have met. Chamberlen was a clean shaven aristocrat and former Royal Physician who wore his hair long and powdered. He and his father had invented forceps for use in child-birth and had the influence to undertake many good-works for the community. Tillam, who believed that real men had short hair and long beards, came from a very different social position.

Another Baptist and moderate Fifth Monarchist was Henry Jessey. He was a gifted preacher with a sound knowledge of Hebrew who believed that the King James version had lacked an understanding of Israel's calendar and customs. He was active in the campaign to readmit the Jews to England in the 1650s. The Jews had been expelled from England in the twelfth century and this fact created some awe regarding what the Jews actually were. Some had an irrational fear and others, such as those who observed the Saturday Sabbath, wanted to know much more about YEHOVAH's "chosen people." Jessey observed a number of what opponents described as 'Jewish laws' which certainly included the Saturday Sabbath. He knew that the 'lost tribes' were to play a part in end time prophecy and made attempts to identify who they were, even postulating that they may be the American Indians. He was never to know that the truth was closer to home!

**Their "Discovery" of the Saturday Sabbath**

By 1655 Tillam had moved to Colchester. There his gifts as a preacher impressed the local mayor who invited him to use the parish church. Enlivened by this opportunity, Tillam had baptized over one hundred people in a few short months. It is also probable that Tillam came to know Brabourne who lived in the area.

Early in 1656, Tillam began holding services in the parish church on Saturday. Exactly how he arrived at the notion of the Saturday Sabbath is not clear. Through this period he had remained in regular and close contact with Chamberlen, whose London congregation adopted the Saturday Sabbath about the same time. Another possible link is that Chamberlen probably knew Ockford.

Displeased with Tillam's innovation, the authorities had him imprisoned. Like many seventeenth century religious prisoners, Tillam occupied himself in writing and produced his most memorable work. ***The Seventh Day Sabbath Sought Out and Celebrated*** was published in 1657 and brought a rush of condemning response. In more than two hundred pages, Tillam developed the link between the Sabbath and Biblical prophecy, first suggested by Ockford, into a detailed scenario. The Sabbath, said Tillam;

"...is in these very last days become the last great controversy between the Saints and the Man of Sin, The Changer of Times and Laws".

How true! He little realized that the Jews were "changers of Times and Laws" as well as the Catholic Church!

Tillam is the first to call the Sunday Sabbath the Mark of the Beast, a cry many later Sabbath-keepers would take up.

Tillam had one disagreement with Chamberlen on this subject. While Chamberlen felt that Saturday Sabbath observance negated all significance of Sunday, Tillam believed that the resurrection could be celebrated on Sunday, so as not to cause divisions between Christians.

Perhaps the strongest agreement of the pair was that their adoption of the Saturday Sabbath would aid the conversion of the Jews, a sure sign, so they thought, that the Messiah's return was near. As Chamberlen wrote to Tillam;

"the Jews of London are very much affected with our keeping the Sabbath...I perceive it is a great stumbling block to them...that Christians violate the Sabbath."

**Chamberlen's Congregation**

Tillam's book was written as an answer to a pamphlet against Saturday Sabbath keeping by William Aspinwall a leading Fifth Monarchist. Aspinwall systematically dissected the arguments of Ockford and another Saturday Sabbath-keeper, John Spittlehouse, in an effort to ridicule both the Saturday Sabbath and Saturday Sabbath-keepers.

Spittlehouse, spokesman for Chamberlen's congregation, had published his advocacy of the "unchangeable morality" of the Saturday Sabbath in mid 1656. Aspinwall's abuse did not quell Saturday Sabbath enthusiasm. Almost immediately Spittlehouse and William Sellers presented a, perhaps naive, petition to the Chief Magistrates, asking that the Saturday Sabbath be established in law. The task must have seemed easy as English law now supported all the arguments in favour of Sabbath-keeping. All they had to do was convince the law-makers that the supposed Sunday texts of the New Testament did not change the Sabbath to Sunday. Their confident appeal was, to their dismay, unceremoniously rejected. In retrospect this is fortunate since one error would have been compounded by another!

**The Baptist Challenge**

The Saturday Sabbath had now become an issue of controversy amongst Baptists, many of whom now observed it. Jeremiah Ives, a popular Baptist controversialist, decided to meet the arguments head on. He challenged Tillam, Chamberlen and one Matthew Coppinger to a public debate on the issue. The three agreed, and for three days in 1658, the Stone Chapel in St. Paul's Cathedral was crowded with eager listeners.

Each side considered itself the winner. Whatever the case, it was soon after that two other preachers added their voices to the defense of the Saturday Sabbath; Edward Stennet and John James.

Stennet had been a chaplain for the Parliament during the Civil wars, and though not a Fifth Monarchist he did expect the Messiah to return in his lifetime. His defense of the Saturday Sabbath was published in 1658. In it he argued for the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments, which he dubbed the "Royal Law" (See James 2:8). While his defence of the "Royal Law" was admirable he, like all the others before him, failed to perceive the truth of the Sabbath-day linkage to the moon's cycles.

**Persecution Renewed**

That same year Cromwell died and soon the Commonwealth lacked stable government. By 1661 the exiled son of Charles I was asked to return as king. This he willingly did, promising religious toleration. In fact persecution was renewed. All who would not support the Church of England as previously constituted were to be imprisoned or otherwise punished. The Fifth Monarchy Movement was banned and those who supported it regarded as rebels.

John James was at this time preaching to a "seventh day" church in Bullstake Alley, London. Like Stennet, James was not a Fifth Monarchist, but he did expect the Messiah to literally return to earth displacing all earthly government to establish the Millennium.

On the (Saturday) Sabbath of 19 October 1661, after a vigorous sermon on this subject, James was arrested with thirty of his congregation. The charges were plotting reason, and being a Fifth Monarchist. The authorities apparently decided to make an example of James and ordered him executed. His head was placed on a stake outside the Bullstake Alley meeting house.

**Saturday Sabbath-keeping Spreads**

No wonder that in such times many sought the relative freedom of America. One member of Stennet's congregation, Stephen Mumford, decided to escape and arrived in Rhode Island in 1664. There he found fellowship with the local Sunday keeping congregation. With Mumford the Saturday Sabbath idea came to America and in a few years, with the help and encouragement of Stennet and Chamberlen, he established America's first Saturday Sabbath-keeping church.

Back in London, the dozen or so Saturday Sabbath-keeping congregations tenaciously clung to the erroneous Saturday doctrine. Other men would yet add their voices to the Saturday Sabbath chorus; and with each a new harmony. The aristocrat Francis Bampfield, also fully conversant with Greek and Hebrew was but one. For example, in defending the Saturday Sabbath in 1677, he wrote in his book ***The Seventh Day Sabbath -- The Desirable Day***;

"The LORD Jesus Christ, who is Redeemer, was Creator to...Jehovah Christ as Mediator did himself at Mount Sinai proclaim the law of Ten Words."

His argument is quite simply that it was Yeshua the Messiah himself who wrote the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, how then could this same Yeshua seek to do away with one of the Ten Words (which is Bampfield's translation of the Hebrew for ten commandments). This idea is totally in contrast to the Bible -- Yeshua the Messiah DID NOT pre-exist prior to his birth so, therefore, could NOT have authored the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. The Old Testament is adamant about the fact that there was only ONE GOD during Old Testament times, and not two as some suppose.