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SEVENTH DAY BAPTIST INFLUENCE UPON MILLERITES

Summary

Before the October Disappointment in 1844 an interest in the seventh-day Sabbath had originated among Millerites. Some of them began to observe the seventh-day Sabbath instead of the first day. By that time, Seventh Day Baptists had been keeping the seventh-day Sabbath for a couple of centuries. During much of that long period of time Seventh Day Baptists had been quite passive in sharing the Sabbath with other Christians. By the beginning of the 1840s, however, they determined to take a more aggressive approach to promoting their understanding of the Sabbath. In this work we will discuss Seventh Day Baptist influence upon Millerites. The basic question addressed in this paper is: "To what extent did Seventh Day Baptists influence Millerites in terms of Sabbath?" The purpose of this work is to organize chronologically information about the influence of the Seventh Day Baptist Sabbath upon Millerites during 1840s. In order to accomplish the main purpose of this paper it will be necessary to chronologically reconstruct and analyze the historical development of the influence of Seventh Day Baptist upon Millerites. Millerites were people who followed William Miller who was one of the more remarkable and controversial Christian revivalist in the first half of the 19th century. He believed that the Second Coming of Jesus would be on October 22nd, 1844. About 200.000 people accepted his view with more than a million brought under his influence.

Key words: *Seventh day Baptists, Millerites, Adventists, the seventh-day Sabbath.*

Seventh Day Baptist Background

Seventh Day Baptists in England

Seventh Day Baptists date their origin in the early years of the 1650s in England. The first known Baptist writer who supported the seventh-day Sabbath was James Ockford whose book titled *The Doctrine of the Fourth Commandment, Deformed by Popery, Reformed & Restored to its Primitive Purity* was published in 1650 in London. Even though almost all copies of that book were burned and the author punished, many others who were influenced

by Ockford's book wrote anonymously about the seventh-day Sabbath. With the emphasis on the Scripture, people such as James Ockford, William Saller, Henry Jessey, Dr. Peter Chamberlen, John James, Francis Bampffield, Edward and Joseph Stennett believed that the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath was a requirement of biblical Christianity.¹

Seventh Day Baptists in America

According to Sanford the roots of American Seventh Day Baptists are found in places such as: Newport, Rhode Island; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Piscataway, New Jersey. Stephen Mumford of Newport, Rhode Island was the first Seventh Day Baptist in America. Mumford and his wife were probably instrumental in bringing Samuel and Tacy Hubbard to an acceptance of the seventh-day Sabbath. With several others who were convinced of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Mumford and Hubbard families established the first Seventh Day Baptist Church in America in 1671.²

Pennsylvania and New Jersey as mentioned above were places where "two other seemingly independent strains of Baptist Sabbatarian emerged. The movement grew slowly and by 1800 had about one thousand adherents."³

Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

The Seventh Day Baptist General Conference was organized in 1802. James Bailey wrote that the missionary labors were the most important idea that determined the organization of General Conference.⁴ This opened the door for believers to be sent on a mission. By 1841, there were about fifty Seventh Day Baptist churches with sixty-two ministers, and membership had reached 5,500.⁵

During much of their history Seventh Day Baptists had been quite passive in sharing the seventh-day Sabbath with other Christians. However, by the beginning of the 1840s their General Conference determined to take a more aggressive approach to promoting their understanding of the Sabbath.⁶ The church determined that evangelism of the seventh-day Sabbath was required by God. As a result, in 1842 the Sabbath Tract Society determined to publish a

¹ Don A. Sanford, *A Choosing People: The History of Seventh Day Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 58-75.

² Sanford, 94-97.

³ Merlin D. Burt, "The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G. White's Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844 to 1849" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2002), 46.

⁴ James Bailey, *History of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference: From its Origin, September 1802, to its Fifty-third Session, September 1865* (Toledo, Ohio: S. Bailey and Company, 1866), 50.

⁵ James Bradley, *Seventh-Day Baptist Register*, 6 October, 1841, 126, quoted in Burt, 46.

⁶ George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventists Beliefs*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 66.

series of tracts in order to “introduce” the Sabbath to the other Christians.⁷ Seventh day Baptists named November 1, 1843, as a day of fasting and prayer that God would bless other Christians to see important of observing seventh-day Sabbath.⁸

Seventh Day Baptists were probably distressed because other churches did not respond to their evangelistic efforts except American Adventists.⁹ In June 1844, the *Sabbath Recorder* reported that considerable numbers of believers who were looking for Christ’s appearance observed the seventh day as Sabbath.

We learn from several sections, that considerable numbers of those who are looking for the speedy appearance of Christ, have embraced the seventh day, and commenced observing it as the Sabbath... Now the believers in the speedy Second Advent stand in the position where they do not feel bound by any creed, and having sufficient self-denial to lead them to practice according to their convictions of duty, are just the persons to understand the requirements of the Word of God in this matter... Now, although we do not feel at liberty to fix any time for the coming of the Lord, we do feel at liberty to suggest, that the best preparation for that events is to be found in a love for the truth, and obedience to it.¹⁰

References to the Sabbath in Millerite Publications

That the Sabbath was being promoted and even accepted by some Adventists in the first half of the 1840s has been proven by Milerites publications. In this chapter we will point out some persons, comments, and articles that made reference to either Seventh Day Baptists or Adventist Sabbatarians.

James A. Begg and His Letter in the Signs of the Times

James A. Begg was a Scottish Adventist minister who was especially interested in writing on the subject on Bible prophecy. He began writing on this subject during the first half of the 1830s. He accepted the seventh day Sabbath shortly after beginning writing on the subject of Bible prophecy. Even though we are not certain whether James A. Begg was a Seventh Day Baptist or not, we know that he wrote various books on the Sabbath, some of which were published by Seventh Day Baptists.¹¹

⁷ Burt, 47.

⁸ Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists*, (Mountain View, California; Pacific Press, 1982), 67.

⁹ Burt, 47.

¹⁰ George B. Utter, “The Second Advent and the Sabbath,” *Sabbath Recorder*, 13 June, 1844, 2, quoted in Burt, 48.

¹¹ Burt, 49.

James A. Begg became known to Millerite Adventists by writing a letter in *the Signs of the Times* of April 1, 1841. In that letter Begg tried to explain his belief in the seventh-day Sabbath. It was the first direct reference to the seventh-day Sabbath in Millerite Adventist literature. Begg wrote: “For myself, I must be allowed to say, that the little leisure which my business allows for the more congenial occupation of authorship, I require in the meantime for a work on the continued obligation of the Seventh Day, as the Christian Sabbath, which I am preparing for the press.”¹²

One month after Begg’s letter *The Signs of the Times* published an unsigned article which presented the typical view of Millerites concerning to the Sabbath. An unknown author of that article believed that a glorious Sabbath, the rest of all the redeemed will begin after Second Coming of Jesus, or when the one thousand years will be established. “We have seen six days, or six thousands years nearly past, during which the new creating work has gone forwards, and are warranted to expect the seventh day, or one thousand years of a glorious Sabbath, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall rest with his redeemed... The one thousand years shall be a seventh day, or Sabbath; during which no manner of work shall be done.” Referring to the eternal life that will follow the one thousand years, an author concluded that “God has covenanted with his people an eternal Sabbath.”¹³

The Signs of the Times published a second article entitled “The Ordinance of the Year of Jubilee.” This article presented the Sabbath as being fulfilled at the beginning of the Jubilee at Jesus’ Second Coming.¹⁴ With many other Adventist ministers, William Miller also promoted this argument.¹⁵

B. Clark and the Sabbath

In April 1842, B. Clark, who was a Seventh Day Baptist minister, tried to influence other Adventists regarding the Sabbath through the columns of the *Signs of the Times*. The editor’s following note has been found: “Brother B. Clark’s letter, on the Sabbath is received. We wish to have no controversy with Seventh Day Baptist, on the subject of the Sabbath. ‘Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind.’ We both agree that there is a Sabbath—a sign, of the blessed Sabbath rest which remains for the people of God. ‘Therefore let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect to a holy day, or of the new

¹² James A. Begg, “Letter from Scotland,” *Signs of the Times*, 1 April, 1841, 3.

¹³ [Joshua V. Himes], editorial, “Thoughts on the Second Appearing and Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, 1 May, 1841, 22.

¹⁴ [Joshua V. Himes], editorial, “The Ordinance of the Year of Jubilee,” *Signs of the Times*, 1 May, 1841, 22.

¹⁵ William Miller, *Lecture on the Typical Sabbaths and Great Jubilee* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), quoted in Burt, 49.

moon, or of the Sabbath, which are a shadow of things to come.' Col. 2: 16, 17."¹⁶

This note in the *Signs of the Times* evidently shows that the editor did not want to have a serious discussion about seventh-day Sabbath. Merlin D. Burt points out that since that time "silence reigned in Adventist papers on the subject of seventh-day Sabbath-keeping until shortly before the October 1844 disappointment. This silence though did not accurately reflect Adventist interest in the Sabbath."¹⁷

Articles on the Sabbath in the *Midnight Cry*

Articles on the Sabbath were also published in the *Midnight Cry* on September 5 and 12, 1844. We have found the following words from the editor: "We love the seventh-day brethren and sisters, but we think they are trying to mend the old broken Jewish yoke, and put it on their necks, instead of standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ makes free."¹⁸ He decided that: "there is no particular portion of time which Christians are required by law to set apart, as holy time."¹⁹

The *Midnight Cry* agreed that if there was a "particular portion of time" that had been required by God to be kept as holy, it was "the seventh day of the week, that is Saturday."²⁰ The articles even proposed that Adventists should "leave off applying the word 'Sabbath' to the first day of the week."²¹ According to Merlin Burt, "some even suggested that the *Midnight Cry* was giving more support to the Sabbath than to Sunday."²²

A short article entitled "The Lord's Day" published on October 3, 1844 tried to reassure Adventists to keep Sunday. "We cannot afford more room for this subject now. We did not wish to grieve any dear brother or sister. We prize the Lord's Day as a blessed privilege... We consider the observance of the first day of the week as equally pleasing to God as the observance of the day preceding it, and we feel ourselves warranted in this belief, by the language of Paul, and the example of the early Christians."²³

The Seventh Day Baptist *Sabbath Recorder* responded to the *Midnight Cry* articles by noting that: "The new discovery of the Second Advent believers, which makes it morally certain to them that Christ will come on the tenth day of the seventh month, has probably unfitted their minds in a great measure for the

¹⁶ [Joshua V. Himes and Josiah Litch], editorial, "The Correspondents," *Signs of the Times*, 6 April, 1842, 5.

¹⁷ Burt, 50.

¹⁸ [Joshua V. Himes], editorial, "The Lord's Day," *Midnight Cry*, 12 September, 1844, 77.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁰ [Joshua V. Himes], editorial, "The Lord's Day," *Midnight Cry*, 5 September, 1844, 6

²¹ "The Lord's Day," 12 September, 1844, 77.

²² Burt, 51.

²³ [Joshua V. Himes], editorial, "The Lord's Day," *Midnight Cry*, 3 October, 1844, 100.

consideration of the claims of the Sabbath upon their attention. The editor of the *Midnight Cry*, after a faint attempt to enlighten his readers in relation to the claims of the 'Lord's Day,' abandons the investigation."²⁴

On October 2, 1844, the *Midnight Cry* published a letter about the Sabbath written by a woman named S. Blake. She wrote: "We have a small band of Advent believers in this place, who are still looking for the speedy coming of the just one. I am still with the body of Advent believers in the main principles. I do love to see firmness, honesty, and moral courage in the Christian believer; no shrinking from any Bible truth, however much against our worldly interest or former views; I am a Bible Sabbath keeper, and to see due regard paid to every command of our blessed Lord."²⁵

Sabbath-Keeping in New Hampshire

Rachel Oaks and Frederick Wheeler

Rachel Oaks Person (1809-1868) had a great influence on the Adventist congregation in Washington, New Hampshire, where her daughter was a member. She came from New York to live with her daughter in Washington, New Hampshire. This lady brought a burning belief in the Seventh-day Sabbath as well as various tracts concerning the Sabbath published by her denomination. Originally a Methodist, Rachel Oaks had begun to observe the Sabbath while still a member of that communion, but had transferred her allegiance to the Seventh Day Baptists.²⁶

Rachel Oaks' first convert was probably her brother-in-law, William Farnsworth, who had convinced her on the Millerite teaching.²⁷ Frederick Wheeler, a Methodist Adventist minister from Verona, New Hampshire, was also convinced by Rachel Oaks to observe the Sabbath. He has been considered the first Sabbath keeping Adventist minister in America. F. W. Bartle wrote an interesting story about his neighbor Frederick Wheeler. This story comes indirectly through W. A. Spicer from Bartle:

He (F. Wheeler) told me that they had held a quarterly meeting in the church, celebrating the Lord's supper. In his sermon about the service he made the remark that all persons confessing communion with Christ in such a service should be ready to follow Him, and obey God and keep His commandments in all things. Later, he said, he met Mrs. Preston (Rachel Oaks Preston), who reminded him of his remarks

²⁴ George B. Utter, "The Midnight Cry," *Sabbath Recorder*, 10 October, 1844, 62, quoted in Burt, 51.

²⁵ S. Blake, *Advent Herald*, 2 October, 1844, 72.

²⁶ Russel J. Thomsen, *Seventh-Day Baptists-Their Legacy to Adventists* (Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1971), 36-40.

²⁷ George Knight, *Joseph Bates* (Hagerstown, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2004), 79.

about the meeting of communion with Christ. ‘I came near getting up in the meeting at that point,’ she told him, ‘and saying something.’ ‘What was it you had in mind to say?’ He asked her. ‘I wanted to tell you that you would better set that communion table back and put the cloth over it, until you begin to keep the commandments of God.’ Elder Wheeler told me that these words cut him deeper than anything that he had ever had spoken to him. He thought it over and soon he began to keep the Sabbath.²⁸

When F. Wheeler began to keep the Sabbath he did not preach about it in his church, but rather in a schoolhouse near his home. There he probably discussed the matter with Thomas M. Preble, formerly a Freewill Baptist minister who became the second Sabbath-keeping Adventist minister in North America. By August 1844 Thomas M Preble began to keep the Sabbath.²⁹ In this paper we will not examine Preble’s contribution to Adventist Sabbatarian understanding because his article about Sabbath, which influenced many Adventists regarding the Sabbath, including Joseph Bates, was published after the Great Disappointment.

Merlin D. Burt states that: “by the end of 1844, however, a little company, which included various members of the Farnsworth family and some friends, began keeping the Sabbath in Washington, New Hampshire.”³⁰

Summary and Conclusion

Before the Great Disappointment in October 1844 an interest in the seventh-day Sabbath among Millerites came about through the Seventh Day Baptists approach to promoting their understanding of the Sabbath. Seventh Day Baptists determined to publish a series of tract in order to “introduce” the Sabbath to the other Christians. Adventists were probably more interested in accepting the Sabbath than other denominations.

Even though Adventist editors such as Joshua V. Himes and others were opposed to the Sabbath, various articles about the Sabbath were published in Adventist publications. On April 1, 1841 the *Signs of the Times* published a letter written by James A. Begg who tried to explain his belief in the seventh-day Sabbath. It was the first reference to the Sabbath in Millerite literature. A year later, B. Clark, a Seventh Day Baptist minister, attempted to influence Adventists on the Sabbath through the columns of the *Signs of the Times*. Several other articles regarding the Sabbath were also published in the *Midnight Cry* during September 1844. As a result a significant number of Millerite Adventists accepted the seventh-day Sabbath. Probably the most significant statement that proves that a significant number of Adventists observed the seventh-day Sabbath before the Great Disappointment comes from

²⁸ W. A. Spicer, “Our First Minister,” *Review and Herald*, 15 February, 1940, 8.

²⁹ Maxwell, 68.

³⁰ Burt, 54.

the *Sabbath Record*, a Seventh Day Baptist periodical. It was noted, in that paper, that “considerable numbers” of Adventists “embraced the seventh day, and commenced observing it as the Sabbath.”³¹ Those believers remained a peripheral group but active among Adventists.

In Washington, New Hampshire, Frederick Wheeler, a Methodist Adventist minister was convinced by Rachel Oaks, a Seventh Day Baptist believer, to keep the Seventh-day Sabbath. He was the first Sabbath-keeping Adventist minister in America. Wheeler probably convinced Thomas M. Preble, formerly a Freewill Baptist minister to accept the Sabbath. After the Great Disappointment, Preble wrote an article about the Sabbath which influenced Joseph Bates to accept the seventh-day Sabbath. By the end of 1844, William Farnsworth, who also was convinced by Rachel Oaks to keep the Sabbath, and various members of his family along with some others began keeping the Sabbath in Washington, New Hampshire.

This research has shown that the real push for the Sabbath in Millerism came from the Seventh Day Sabbaths. Both the Seventh-day Adventist and the Seventh Day Baptist churches can benefit from this work because of opportunity to see how the Seventh Day Baptists influenced Millerites regarding the Sabbath. The research also has indicated that the members of the Seventh-day Adventist church cannot think that they are the only ones who possess truth. On the contrary, they must acknowledge their deep indebtedness to countless other Christians through the ages who have cherished and passed on truth from one generation to another. The Seventh-day Adventists own the special debt to Seventh Day Baptists who influenced Millerites, later the Seventh-day Adventists, to observe the Sabbath.

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³¹ George B. Utter, “The Second Advent and the Sabbath,” 2.

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BAPTISTI SEDMOG DANA POD UTICAJEM MILERITA

Rezime:

Pre razočarenja u oktobru 1844. godine, interesovanje za sedmi dan subotu pojavilo se među mileritima. Neki od njih počeli su da poštuju sedmi dan subotu umesto prvog dana u sedmici. Baptisti sedmog dana držali su sedmi dan subotu nekoliko vekova. Za vreme tog dugog perioda, baptisti sedmog dana bili su sasvim pasivni prema drugim hrišćanima u podeli verovanja da treba svetkovati subotu. Početkom 1840. godine, naime, oni su odredili da zauzmu mnogo agresivniji pristup da promovišu svoje razumevanje subote. U ovom tekstu mi ćemo razmatrati baptiste sedmog dana i njihov uticaj na milerite. Osnovno pitanje pokrentuto u ovom radu je: "U kom obimu su baptisti sedmog dana uticali na milerite po pitanju subote?" Namera ovog rada jeste da prikaže hronološki informacije o uticaju baptista sedmog dana na milerite tokom 1840s. U nameri da dobro ispunim osnovnu nameru ovog rada, biće neophodno da hronološki rekonstruišem i analiziram istorijski razvoj uticaja baptista sedmog dana na milerite. Mileriti su bili ljudi koji su sledili Viljema Mlera (William Miller) koji je bio jedan od impozantnih i kontroverznih hrišćanskih vođa, obnovitelja vere u prvoj polovini devetnaestog veka. On je verovao da će Drugi Hristov dolazak biti 22. oktobra 1844. godine. Oko 200.000 ljudi je prihvatilo njegovo viđenje ovog proročanstva, dok je više od million ljudi bilo pod njegovim uticajem.

Key words: baptisti sedmog dana, mileriti, adventisti, sedmi dan subota