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Introduction

In 1657, the English Parliament, in response to mounting pressure from Sabbath-keeping leaders in London and supporting publications, appointed a committee to investigate observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. It appears either the committee never reported or, if it did, its report was never made public. We can only conjecture what might have happened if Parliament had reacted favorably to arguments advocating the seventh day. Three years later, in 1660, the former Puritan clergyman Theophilus Brabourne, to whom we shall return later, claimed the Sabbath question was "the highest controversy in the Church of England" at the time.[1] And in 1671 the influential Independent minister Dr. John Owen expressed the fear that "many might yet turn to the seventh day."[2] The Sabbatarians, though relatively small in number, were clearly not hiding their light under a bushel.

A number of questions arise from this quite remarkable situation that had developed in mid-seventeenth-century England: What led to it? How did this movement, which claimed the attention of both the English parliament and the established and powerful Anglican Church, come into existence? How widespread was it? What was its biblical and theological basis? To whom did it appeal? Did it have any real significance beyond its own time? In order to answer these and related questions, this chapter will examine the following aspects of English Sabbath-keeping history, with special focus on the movement that appeared after the English Reformation[3], the historical context in which English Sabbatarianism[4] developed, earlier English Sabbath-keepers, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sabbath-keeping movement, its theological and biblical basis, and the change from Saturday to Sunday as explained in Sabbatarian literature.

A Brief Survey of the Historical Background

The English Sabbath-keeping movement can only be fully understood in the context of the Reformation in Europe generally and

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[1] Theophilus Brabourne, *Of the Sabbath Day, Which is Now The Highest Controversy in the Church of England* (London, 1660).

[2] John Owen, *Exercitations Concerning the Name . . . and Continuance of a Day of Sacred Rest* (London, 1671), 399.

[3] Much of the material in this publication is extracted from Bryan W. Ball, *The Seventh-day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600–1888,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2009). References are to original sources.

[4] "Sabbatarian" and "Sabbatarianism" always refer to the English seventh-day movement, unless otherwise qualified.

in England in particular. The Reformation was in essence a reaction to the excesses and perceived errors of the medieval church, which had dominated Europe for more than a thousand years. It began in Europe, as is well known, with men like Huss, Luther, Calvin, Beza, Melancthon, and others who sought to address theological deviations and social abuses they found in Roman doctrine and practice. The Reformation was firmly grounded in the concept of *sola Scriptura*, the Bible only, seeking to reform the church according to biblical norms and doctrine. It is well documented that among other biblical teachings, the seventh-day Sabbath was recovered in many parts of Europe from the late 1520s onward as the Continental Reformation developed and people came to study the Bible for themselves.[5] This itself may well have influenced the development of English Sabbatarianism.

In Britain, as in Europe, a reformation was soon deemed necessary. Broadly speaking, the English Reformation proceeded in two stages: the first political, beginning in 1536 under Henry VIII, and the second more religious and doctrinal and extending over the best part of the next hundred years.

The main achievement of the first stage was the break with Rome and the establishment of a national church, the Church of England, with Henry as its head. There were some doctrinal and liturgical reforms, but they were comparatively few. When Henry died, the Reformation continued precariously for a few years under Edward VI until the crown passed to Mary Tudor, and with it came a violent return to Catholicism for the five years of her reign.

In 1558, Elizabeth I succeeded to the throne. Above all else she desired stable government and an end to the strife of the preceding years. Her religious policy, known as "The Elizabethan Settlement," was a *via media* between the old Catholicism and the thoroughgoing Protestantism that had developed in many parts of Europe and which many of the leading clergy in the Church of England also wanted. Although nominally Protestant, Elizabeth's brand of Protestantism retained many doctrinal and liturgical relics of former ages, a situation which did not commend itself to the many within her realm who now had the Bible in the English language and who were studying it intently. During Elizabeth's reign, therefore, the Anglican Church emerged in the form it has largely retained since—neither completely Catholic nor fully reformed.

This situation became increasingly unacceptable to many, both clergy and laity, who now recognized the Bible as the ultimate

[5] See, for example, George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1992), passim.

authority in all matters of doctrine and religious practice. After several years of futile waiting for further changes in the established church, some of the more vocal advocates of greater change took matters into their own hands, thus giving rise to a new and significant development in English religious history: the birth of Puritanism, a dynamic movement that appeared with increasing openness and growing significance from about 1570 onwards, and whose influence has reached down to the present time.

Possibly no word in the history of religious ideas has been so misunderstood or misused as the word "Puritan." It still carries today the unfortunate connotation of bigotry, fanaticism, and narrow-mindedness. In reality, it simply referred to those who wanted a purer church in England—a church more thoroughly cleansed from all remaining elements of medieval Catholicism in doctrine, practice, and structural organization. Above all, Puritans wanted a church that recognized the ultimate authority of the Bible. In the words of one historian,

> the Bible was, for the Puritans, the divinely inspired Word of God. In the pages of Scripture were to be found the standards of doctrine and the true way of worship specified by God for the use of his saints. The Old and New Testaments were thus the source of standards of behaviour, belief, and worship.[6]

A Puritan was not a religious fanatic, a killjoy, or a legalist. A Puritan simply wanted a more biblical religion. Puritans in general, particularly in the early years, did not want to break from the Anglican Church, but stay within it and refine it. Only later, when that dream became impossible to realize, did the impetus for separatism arise, leading ultimately to Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, the Baptist Churches, and, between 1640 and 1660, sectarianism on an unprecedented scale.

One of the outcomes of the developing Puritan impetus was what is now known as the "Sabbatarian Controversy." First articulated circa 1595 with the publication of Nicholas Bownd's now well-known book *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*, Puritans began calling for a stricter and more biblical observation of Sunday than currently prevailed within the Church of England.

Bownd's book was the first of many in what soon became a national debate, in which the pros and cons of Sunday as the redefined Sabbath were argued vigorously and sometimes with acrimony.

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[6] Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 19.

Patrick Collinson describes this urge to restore the sanctity of the Sabbath as "the leading concern" of many Puritans.[7]

Those who still advocate the seventh-day Sabbath will readily recognize many of the arguments advanced by proponents of the Sunday Sabbath. They may be summarized as follows: the Sabbath was instituted at creation and thus originated with Adam rather than with the Jews; the fourth commandment of the Decalogue was moral, as were all the other nine, and was therefore perpetually binding; the Sabbath was also therefore a perpetual institution, and was not ceremonial since it antedated all Jewish ceremonies; Christians were thus obliged to observe the Sabbath as the Jews had been obliged to keep the original seventh day, although now, according to the Puritan view, the Sabbath had been transferred from the seventh day to the first day in honor of the resurrection of Christ. The change was justified on the grounds that the Sabbath commandment called for one day of rest after six days of labor. The actual day of rest could thus be changed without affecting the inherent morality of the commandment. This had occurred with apostolic authority, so the Sunday Sabbath was equally an institution of divine appointment and was to be observed for the entire twenty-four hour period.

It is easy to see how this view, which ultimately shaped the understanding and observation of Sunday across much of the English-speaking world for the greater part of three centuries, carried so much weight and persuaded so many earnest people desirous of living their lives in harmony with God's will.

It is also easy to see how the Sabbatarian debate in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries led inevitably to the further discovery that the biblical Sabbath was not to be observed on the first but on the seventh day of the week, since that day was the original, weekly Sabbath. That discovery also had far-reaching consequences beyond the English scene, as we shall see.

Earlier English Sabbath-Keepers

It has long been known that the English seventh-day movement first came into the open during the seventeenth century. However, it is well documented that there had been many who had observed the seventh-day Sabbath in the British Isles long before that, and it will be helpful to note briefly their existence, since the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sabbatarians believed they were custodians of a long-standing tradition among earlier British Christians.

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[7] Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 437.

The Celtic Church

Various authorities have consistently maintained that a Sabbatarian tradition persisted for several centuries in the Celtic church. Both Moffatt and Lang refer specifically to the practice of observing the seventh day in the early Celtic church. Moffatt says that in keeping "Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath" the Celtic church "obeyed the fourth commandment literally upon the seventh day of the week." This was, he states, "customary in the Celtic church of early times, in Ireland as well as in Scotland."[8]

Lang adds that Saturday was kept strictly "in a sabbatical manner."[9] T. Ratcliffe Barnett notes it was traditional in the ancient Irish church to "observe Saturday instead of Sunday as the day of rest."[10]

More recent studies and extant documents reinforce these conclusions of nineteenth-century historians. The 1961 edition of *Adomnan's Life of Columba* notes that recognition of Saturday as the Sabbath and the dual role of Saturday and Sunday in the life of the Celtic church were known to Adomnan, Abbot of Iona, AD 679–704. Adomnan himself refers to the first day of the week as "Lord's day" (*dominica dies or dies dominica*) and calls Saturday the Sabbath (*Sabbatum*) or "the day of Sabbath."[11]

Another study points out that Adomnan invariably uses the term *Sabbatum* when speaking of the seventh day, and always refers to the Sabbath "in a manner betokening a respect which is not detected in writers two centuries later."[12] This fits well with the view that the complete Romanizing of the Celtic church occurred much later than it did in the British church at large. In his careful study of the Celtic church, Hardinge concludes "there was no Sabbatizing of Sunday during the Celtic period. The seventh day was kept from sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday, and even until dawn on Sunday in some places."[13]

The Lollards

Other antecedents of the English post-Reformation Sabbath-keepers have come to light among the Lollards—the followers of John Wycliffe. One scholar describes them as "characterised first

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[8] James C. Moffatt, *The Church in Scotland* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board, 1892), 140.
[9] Andrew Lang, *A History of Scotland from the Roman Occupation (to 1745)*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1900–1907), 1:96.
[10] T. Ratcliffe Barnett, *Margaret of Scotland, Queen and Saint: Her Influence on the Early Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1926), 97.
[11] Alan O. Anderson and Marjorie O. Anderson, eds. and trans., *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961), 120.
[12] Leslie Hardinge, *The Celtic Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 1972), 84.
[13] Ibid., 210.

and foremost by their biblical fundamentalism."[14] Two versions of "Wycliffe's Bible" were produced in manuscript form by Lollard scholars at Oxford, the "Early Version" in 1380–1384 and the "Later Version" in 1388 or shortly thereafter, and copies were rapidly disseminated across the country. Lollard insistence on the authority of Scripture for all teachings and practices and the belief that every person should have access to the Bible in the English language led to the severe anti-heresy act of 1401, *De Haeretico Comburendo*, "Concerning the Burning of Heretics." Under these circumstances it was almost inevitable that some Lollards would rediscover the biblical Sabbath and that some would suffer for their faith.

Within twenty years of Wycliffe's death in 1384, a heresy trial in London confirmed that observance of the seventh-day Sabbath had taken root among Lollard "heretics." In 1402, just a year after the introduction of the notorious anti-heresy Act, John Seygno, with two other defendants, was brought before the courts on a charge of heresy, indicted on several counts. Under interrogation he admitted, among other things, that the Sabbath was to be kept "according to what was observed in the Old Testament," testifying that he wished to observe "a Sabbath of this kind as described in the old law, according to the customs and rites of the Jews." He further stated that he intended to do so until he could be persuaded otherwise "with sufficient reasons."[15]

The case of William Fuer of Gloucester is another instance of Lollard Sabbatarianism, in a different part of the country. According to one scholar who records Fuer's case, a considerable number of heresy trials had been conducted in the Severn Valley area in the years preceding 1450, which had revealed views regarded by the ecclesiastical authorities as being more extreme than those previously detected. Strict Sabbatarianism would almost certainly have been regarded as such, and when in 1448 Fuer admitted to holding such views his "heresy" was thereby confirmed. He confessed that the Sabbath should be observed as strictly as commanded in the Old Testament, with the preparation of food as the only permissible activity.[16]

An early fifteenth-century manuscript in the British Library confirms that the Sabbath was already being debated in England at that time. The author of this anonymous manuscript clearly felt the need to respond to those who were questioning the change of the

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[14] Claire Cross, *Church and People, 1450–1660: The Triumph of the Laity in the English Church* (London: Fontana, 1976), 16.

[15] D. Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Brittanniae et Hiberniae ab Anno MCCCL ad Annum MDXLV*, 4 vols. (London, 1757), 3:270–271.

[16] John A. F. Thompson, *The Later Lollards: 1414–1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 36.

Sabbath from the seventh to the first day, as can be seen from the tract's title:

> A litil tretys agens ye opynyon of sem men yt seyn yat no man hath powr for to change ye Saboth fro ye Satirday to ye Sonday. And herein is pleynly proved ye contrarie, bi Holi Writt, and Doctouris sentence accordynge herwit.[17]

That the issue was the chauge of the Sabbath is confirmed when the writer goes on to say that some doubt ("summen douten") that any man has authority to chaunge the law of God. "Sith (since) no man hath leeve to chaunge ye ten commaundementis of God, how myghte we chaunge our Saboth fro ye Satirday to Sonday."[18] In reply, the author argues that observance of the seventh day was ceremonial and that the church has authority to make whatever changes she deems necessary. The cases of John Seygno and William Fuer show there were some in the Lollard community who were not so persuaded.

John Traske and Theophilus Brabourne

We note here two quite different early English advocates of the seventh-day Sabbath: John Traske and Theophilus Brabourne, both of whom were instrumental in bringing the biblical Sabbath to the attention of many in the early decades of the seventeenth century, and who undoubtedly laid the foundations for the movement that would soon be seen in many parts of the country.

John Traske was an itinerant Puritan preacher who appeared in several locations between 1611 and 1617, when he settled in London and first became known as an advocate of the seventh day. Traske is claimed by Seventh Day Baptists as founder of the Mill Yard Sabbath-keeping church in London. This he may well have been, although no records have survived of the early years of this congregation. Be that as it may, Traske, who was by all accounts a powerful and persuasive preacher, had within a year attracted a band of followers in London —and perhaps elsewhere—known as Traskites, who, among other things, observed the Saturday Sabbath.

One contemporary says that Traske's opinions were shared "by many other men and women,"[19] and early in 1618 a government official wrote from London to Lord Carleton, later Secretary of State, reporting the main Traskite doctrines as Saturday observance and

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[17] British Library, MS Harl. 2339, folio 104.

[18] Ibid.

[19] [John Falconer], *A Briefe Refutation of John Traske's Judaical and Novel Fancyes* (St. Omer, 1618), 3.

abstinence from swine's flesh, and commenting, "You will not think what a number of foolish followers he hath in this town, and in some other parts."[20] It seems that within a year Traske and his disciples had been successful in propagating their views within the city of London, and beyond it as well. While he is undoubtedly an important figure in early English Sabbatarianism, the evidence suggests he soon entertained extremist views and probably brought more discredit than credit to the early Sabbatarian cause. Theophilus Brabourne was quite different.

As already noted, Brabourne was an Anglican clergyman with strong Puritan sympathies and equally strong Sabbatarian convictions. He has the distinction of having written the first book in the English language to advocate the seventh-day Sabbath: *A Discourse upon the Sabbath Day* (1628). It was a seminal work and, together with his second book, *A Defence of . . . The Sabbath Day* (1632), shaped and advanced the development of the Seventh-day movement. In all, between 1628 and 1660, Brabourne wrote ten books wholly or in part defending the observance of Saturday—a total of more than one thousand pages of informed and well-argued text, demonstrating throughout a keen mind and a thorough grasp of the biblical and historical material.

An unequivocal respect for the authority of Scripture recurs in Brabourne's writings, and in this he is thoroughly representative of all Sabbatarian writers. His basic argument appears in this statement from the *Discourse*: "When it can be shown me that in Scripture's account any day of the week save Saturday, the last day of the week, was called the seventh day, then may I be brought to think the Fourth Comm[andment] may be understood of some other day besides Saturday, and not till then."[21]

It is the scriptural "account," the authority of divine revelation in God's Word, which alone will persuade Brabourne. He later asks an opponent, "Shall the words in the Scripture be thought to change their sense with the times? Shall they have one sense today and another tomorrow?" With characteristic frankness he presses the point:

> I care not whether you keep Saturday-Sabbath, Sunday-Sabbath, or Monday-Sabbath . . . but if we have respect to God or to his Scriptures, let us give him the day of his choice, not another: let us not so shamefully and abominably

[20] *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* 1611–18, 501.
[21] Theophilus Brabourne, *A Discourse upon the Sabbath Day Lately Come Forth* (London, 1628), 75.

> corrupt his Scriptures by notorious false expositions. It were far better for the Church and State to have no Scriptures, than to have Scriptures falsely expounded to the people.[22]

In view of what he sees as the prevailing confusion over the Sabbath question, Brabourne castigates those "blind guides of our time" who lead people to believe that "the Lord's day is the Sabbath day, and not the seventh day,"[23] thus perverting the clear and intended sense of Scripture. God's Word is the rule by which the Sabbath question, as well as all other questions regarding faith and practice, must be measured.

In this historical context, many congregations of Christian believers, worshipping on Saturday rather than Sunday, began to appear in post-Reformation England, perhaps as early as the 1620s and certainly by the early 1640s. The Mill Yard church in London, as previously noted, is claimed to have originated in 1617, and one account suggests that Sabbath-keepers had been worshipping at Braintree, in Essex, since the 1530s.

If correct, these are exceptions to the proven fact that the Sabbath-keeping churches in general are first known from the mid seventeenth century onwards. The story of their rise and development is full of interest and significance.

The Post-Reformation English Sabbath-Keeping Movement

Reference to a Sabbath-keepers "movement" may suggest that it was structured with some kind of central organization. It would be a mistake to think of the English Sabbath-keepers in this way. Churches or groups that observed the seventh day were known by the late 1630s in London, Salisbury, Tiverton, Kings Stanley in Gloucestershire and, as already noted, perhaps in the Braintree/Colchester area of Essex much earlier than that. With the exception of the London Traskites and any early Sabbath-keepers in Braintree, they were all Seventh Day Baptist congregations and thus independent. This is the key to the English Sabbath-keeping movement. It was identified by belief and practice, rather than by structure and organization. It arose spontaneously as study of the Bible led to greater understanding and as convinced individuals shared their convictions with others.

While there were those with seventh-day convictions outside Baptist ranks, such as Theophilus Brabourne who remained an Anglican until his death in 1662, and others within Anglicanism

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[22] Theophilus Brabourne, *An Answer to M. Cawdrey's Two Books of the Sabbath Provocator Provocatus* (Norwich, 1654), 92, 94.

[23] Theophilus Brabourne, *A Reply to Mr. Collings* (London, 1654), 61.

and even Presbyterianism, the vast majority of the English Sabbath-keepers were Baptists. They fall into two distinctly recognizable groups: General Baptists and Particular Baptists. General Baptists, the older of the two, believed in general or universal redemption, the doctrine that Christ died for the sins of all humankind, and consequently were Arminian in theology, believing in free will. Particular Baptists, who began to appear from about the 1640s onwards, were Calvinistic and predestinarian in theology, believing that Christ died only for the elect. There were, of course, many points of agreement between these two wings of the early English Baptist Church, but there were also other notable differences. Thus the practice of foot washing, refusal to eat blood and perhaps adherence to other elements of Mosaic dietary law, and anointing of the sick were more likely to be found among General Baptists than among those in the Particular churches.

Most, if not all, early Sabbath-keeping congregations were General Baptists, including the Mill Yard Church in London, the earliest of the known Sabbatarian churches and the one that outlasted all others, surviving for more than three centuries. A present-day congregation in London claims descent from Mill Yard, a connection that is documented until at least the middle of the twentieth century. Much earlier than that, by the 1720s, Mill Yard, in common with most other General Baptist churches, had largely become Unitarian, a consequence of the intense Trinitarian debate among Baptists in the early eighteenth century. This emphasis declined in later years, although it preceded a revival in Mill Yard's fortunes and wider influence in various parts of the country in the mid-1700s.

Many Particular Baptists quickly adopted the seventh day, three of the four seventh-day congregations known in London before 1700 being of that mind. One of them, the influential Pinners' Hall Church, founded circa 1674 and ministered to in its heyday by the able and well-educated Joseph Stennett I, attracted members and worshippers from the upper levels of London society, becoming for a time the mother church of Calvinistic Seventh Day Baptists in the country. Overall, there were many more Particular Seventh Day Baptist churches than there were of the General persuasion, reflecting the influence of Calvinism on English Nonconformity in general during the seventeenth century.

A further element must be noted, which appeared among both General and Particular Baptists and also in Seventh Day Baptist congregations of both wings. It is the eschatologically driven Fifth Monarchy movement, which was based on the prophetic outlines of Daniel 2 and 7. Its adherents were convinced that the fifth kingdom of prophecy, the kingdom symbolized by the stone in Daniel 2, was to be established in their day. The Fifth Monarchy movement has long

been thought of as an extremist eschatological expression of biblical fundamentalism not representative of contemporary mainstream Christian thought. While there is some justification for this view, more recent research has indicated that not all Fifth Monarchists were violent agitators of the type who believed they were called to take up arms to bring about the downfall of existing governments, as did the more radical elements in the movement.[24] Many Sabbath-keeping churches, particularly in the years when Fifth Monarchism was strongest, circa 1650–1670, contained Fifth Monarchists of one kind or another and were sometimes identified as Fifth Monarchy congregations per se, even though only some of their members were so inclined. For the most part, and long after the Fifth Monarchy movement as such had disappeared, hope in the coming kingdom of Christ remained strong in Sabbath-keeping congregations. It is an interesting and important historical note on the relationship of eschatological hope and seventh-day convictions.

For many years it was thought that there had been ten or eleven seventh-day churches in England between circa 1640 and 1800, the date by which most of these congregations had died out.

However, research carried out over the past thirty years or so has significantly widened our understanding of the English Sabbath-keeping movement, and it is now documented that there were more than sixty congregations in this period, scattered widely across the country in more than thirty counties. Some of these groups were small in number and short-lived, but many were flourishing congregations under regular pastoral care, lasting for several decades, and some for centuries. Salisbury lasted until circa 1840, Watlington in Oxfordshire until 1808, and Natton in Gloucestershire until 1910. The heyday of English Sabbatarianism was undoubtedly the century between 1650 and 1750, when most of the seventh-day congregations co-existed and when there were hundreds of Sabbath-keepers across the country. If we include the whole period covered by this brief study, those who lived in parts of the country where no church existed, and the several hundred who left England and various parts of Europe for America during the years of hardship and persecution, the total number of Sabbath-keepers may well have reached several thousand.

It has generally been thought that, with a few notable exceptions, Baptist churches drew their support largely from the lower classes of society. Baptist chapels, where they existed, were usually tucked away in some alley or back street, or located in a remote corner of

[24] See Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 181–192.

the countryside where they attracted little attention. Compared to the thousands of sturdy, spacious, and well-appointed parish churches in which Anglicans worshipped, Baptists were very much the poor cousins. Baptist worship was often conducted in spartan conditions and with an eye open for authorities bent on detection and prosecution. The Seventh Day Baptist chapel at Natton was attached to the end of a barn and its elder for years was the local farmer. In Wallingford in Oxfordshire, the church met in the ruins of the castle.

That the Sabbath-keeping churches attracted people from a broader cross-section of the populace is evident from the following partial list of distinguished individuals who kept the seventh-day Sabbath,[25] worshipping regularly with seventh-day congregations in various parts of the country during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

- The Stennett family, including several generations of Baptist preachers, three of whom were national figures
- Joseph Stennett I, known to royalty and government ministers
- Dr. Peter Chamberlen, physician to three successive English royal households
- Francis Bampfield, descended from a distinguished family, eminent preacher and Hebrew scholar
- Joseph Davis, property owner and philanthropist
- Thomas Bampfield, MP, Recorder of the City of Exeter, and Speaker of the House of Commons
- Sir William Tempest, lawyer at the Court of Common Pleas in London and landowner
- Nathaniel Bailey, lexicographer
- Henry Jessey, author and publisher
- Arthur Squibb, MP and government official
- James Daniel, attorney
- Robert Cornthwaite, scholar and author
- Mordecai Abbott, Receiver General of Customs under William III
- Dr. Joseph Mason, psychiatrist and benefactor
- William Whiston, Newton's successor as Lucasian professor of mathematics at Cambridge

That most of the Sabbatarian churches were composed of ordinary men and women from all walks of life goes without saying, but any movement that attracted and held men of this caliber cannot easily be dismissed. On more than one occasion Joseph Stennett I

[25] Further concerning all the individuals listed here, see Ball, *Seventh-day Men*.

was chosen to represent the entire Baptist movement at Court when circumstances required it.

One important outcome of the ability and energy that characterized the seventh-day churches between 1650 and 1750 was the production of a significant body of apologetic literature. The number of books and pamphlets arguing for the seventh day as the true Sabbath and advocating its observance, including those by Brabourne already noted, totals sixty-five—perhaps more if we include those that have not survived. Many of these were substantial works, written by informed and articulate biblical scholars who knew Hebrew and Greek, and who understood history. These works appeared regularly throughout the period and it may safely be claimed that in an age when print was the only means of mass communication, these books were highly influential in sustaining and expanding the Sabbatarian movement. It is worth noting that after the five or six works by Robert Cornthwaite, the polished and articulate minister of Mill Yard during the mid-eighteenth century and the last of the influential Sabbatarian apologists, the movement atrophied until the end of the century, when it was all but dead.

It is instructive merely to note the titles of some of these publications:[26]

James Ockford, *The Doctrine of the Fourth Commandement* [*sic*], 1650
Edward Stennett, *The Royal Law Contended For*, 1658
Edward Stennett, *The Seventh Day is the Sabbath of the Lord*, 1664
William Saller, *The Seventh-day Sabbath No Ceremony*, 1667
Francis Bampfield, *The Seventh-Day-Sabbath the Desirable Day*, 1677
Henry Soursby, *The New Testament Sabbath*, 1696
George Carlow, *Truth Defended*, 1724
George Carlow, *A Dialogue between a Sabbath Keeper and an Antinomian*, 1733
Robert Cornthwaite, *The Seventh Day of the Week, the Christian Sabbath*, 1735

The titles of these and other similar works illustrate the theology that undergirded the seventh-day movement as it attempted to communicate the biblical truths of God's law and the Sabbath. It can hardly be doubted that the regular appearance of such books and pamphlets in defense of the faith contributed materially to the existence

[26] Short titles only. Most books of the time had lengthy titles, often running for several lines and making their point even more explicitly.

and vitality of the seventh-day churches. The story of Ockford's *Doctrine of the Fourth Commandement* is of particular interest. It was the first book written in defense of the seventh day since those of Theophilus Brabourne. Thirty years had passed but the religious climate was much the same. Suspicion, even hostility, surrounded the nascent Sabbatarian movement. In that context Ockford's book caused no small stir, largely on account of its provocative title, which could not be misunderstood. In full it read: *The Doctrine of the Fourth Commandement*, *Deformed by Popery*; *Reformed and Restored to its Primitive Purity*. The book came to the attention of Parliament and was promptly condemned as "Erroneous, Scandalous and Prophane," and accordingly prohibited. Parliament ordered that all copies throughout the realm be turned in to local authorities and burned. Only one copy is known to have survived. It is now held in the library of Christ's College, Oxford, and bears the signature of William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1716. Why the Anglican Primate of all England owned a copy of this obscure and contentious little book remains a tantalizing mystery.

During the 1690s, after years of persecution that had greatly diminished the Sabbatarian movement, a Frenchman, Henri Misson, spent several months travelling around England. When he returned to France he wrote a book of memoirs, published in 1698 and translated into English in 1719 under the title, *M. Misson's Memoirs and Observations in his Travels over England*. Apparently he had encountered enough Sabbatarians and/or seventh-day congregations in those few months to form an impartial and interesting opinion. This account we cite in part as follows:

> There is a particular society, though it makes but little noise, who go by the name of Sabbatarians. . . . so called because they will not remove the Day of Rest from Saterday to Sunday. They leave off work betimes on Friday evening, and are very rigid observers of their Sabbath. They administer Baptism only to adult people. . . . The major part of them will eat neither Pork, nor blood, nor things strangled, but they do not absolutely forbid the use of those meats, but leave it to the liberty of every conscience. For the rest, their morality is severe, and their whole outward conduct, pious and Christian-like.[27]

[27] John Ozell, trans., *M. Misson's Memoirs and Observations in his Travels over England with Some Account of Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1719), 233–234.

Misson also mentions their moderate eschatology, but goes on to say that observance of the Saturday Sabbath was sufficient to make them "unavoidably a society by themselves." It must be said that the English Sabbatarians had acquitted themselves well in communicating such an accurate picture of their beliefs and lifestyle to an itinerating foreigner.

A Theology of the Sabbath

Misson's conclusion that observance of the seventh-day Sabbath made the English Sabbatarians "unavoidably" a distinct body of Christian believers is beyond question. They themselves knew it and so did other Christians throughout the country. The "Seventh Day Men," as they were often known by contemporaries, revived the Sabbatarian controversy of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century but gave it a significantly different focus. Then, the debate had been whether Sunday should be regarded as the original Sabbath of Scripture or the Lord's Day in honor of Christ's resurrection; now it was whether Sunday or Saturday should be observed as the Sabbath. The extent of the seventh-day movement—spread as it was across many counties—and the literature it produced, made it inevitable that the debate reached virtually all parts of the land. Few indeed would have been unaware of it.

The extent and vitality of this debate can readily be seen from Robert Cox's two-volume annotated bibliography of all known works on the Sabbath, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, published in Edinburgh in 1865. Cox's massive and carefully researched work covered everything on the Sabbath published in England, including those works from the later years of the sixteenth century that opened the original Sabbatarian debate, right through to those from the latter half of the eighteenth century that included advocates of both Sunday and Saturday. Of particular importance for our purposes is that the extensive literature of the English Sabbatarians sets out the reasons why they argued in favor of the seventh day, preserving their arguments for posterity to see and evaluate. We can better understand these Sabbath-keepers and the impact they had in their day, and any remaining relevance they may have for us, as we grasp the reasons for their insistence that Christians should still observe the seventh-day Sabbath. Space will permit only the most cursory sampling of this theology.

It is tempting to restrict this survey to the writings of Theophilus Brabourne, whose work we have previously sampled, since his understanding of the biblical material is undoubtedly representative of seventh-day literature as a whole, and since there are few aspects

of seventh-day doctrine he does not at some point consider. A survey of Brabourne's theology, based on an analysis of all his major works, reveals the following reasons for his advocacy of the seventh-day Sabbath and his corresponding rejection of the Lord's Day or Sunday:

- The Sabbath was instituted at creation for man's good and is a memorial of creation.
- It thus predates the Jews.
- The seventh-day Sabbath is specified in the perpetually binding moral law of the Ten Commandments.
- The seventh day was observed by Christ and the apostles and was not abrogated in the New Testament.
- The seventh day was observed in the post-apostolic church for several centuries.
- The Sabbath is a sign and a means of the believer's sanctification.
- The Lord's Day was not introduced or substituted for the seventh day by divine authority.
- The New Testament texts used to support Sunday observance are incorrectly interpreted.
- The change from Sabbath observance to Sunday observance was instituted by the post-apostolic church.
- The observance of the Lord's Day is based on canon law and ecclesiastical decree only.
- The change from Sabbath to Sunday observance was predicted in prophecy as the work of the "little horn" of Daniel 7.

Brabourne castigates those who claim "Christ altered and changed the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day." He says, "Search the Scripture and you will nowhere find that Christ spake one word against the Sabbath, or about altering it and changing it." It was, therefore, "a perpetual ordinance," applicable to Christians in all ages.[28] Brabourne is justifiably regarded as one of the most important figures in the development of seventh-day belief and practice in the English-speaking world. Most of the foregoing arguments were adopted and developed by writers who followed Brabourne in advocating the seventh-day tradition. Only a few of the most significant arguments will be noted in detail.

The Sabbath as a Perpetual Memorial of Creation

Between 1672 and 1681, Francis Bampfield, founder of the Pinners' Hall church in London, wrote several books in favor of the

[28] Brabourne, *Of the Sabbath Day*, 28.

seventh day, from which it is clear that his two fundamental arguments for the Sabbath were its foundation in creation and its foundation in Christ. Bampfield speaks of "Creation-work" and "Redemption-work," both flowing from "Jehovah-Christ," who as the "All-in-All" was both Creator and Redeemer.

It behooved all believers, then, to consider carefully both "Creation-work" and "Redemption-work," since the seventh-day Sabbath was derived from both and should therefore be observed and celebrated because it centered in Christ Himself.[29]

The biblical teaching of creation was crucial to a correct understanding of the Sabbath and its place in the divine purpose. God Himself had given a "faithful" and "punctual record" of creation in Scripture, from which the seventh-day Sabbath logically followed. Bampfield writes:

> The day on which this world began to be created, was properly one day. . . . There was not at that time any other day that had actual existence. Those days of this one created week, which did follow in the same week, were ordinal, and successive, and numerable. . . . The evening and morning of every day were a distinct day, and were distinct parts of every day. The one day was before the second, and the third day was after the second, the fourth followed the third, and the fifth was after the fourth, the sixth succeeded the fifth, and the seventh which is the last day of the week, was the Holy close of that week. No other day in this, or in any following week, is properly the seventh day of the week in the weekly revolution.[30]

Thus the week itself, as a unit of time originating at creation, testified to the identity and perpetuity of the Sabbath. Bampfield goes on to argue that the "real intent" of the Sabbath was to enable human beings to reflect on their divine origin, to meditate on the implications of creation, to commune with the Creator, and to provide the believer with everything necessary "for the feeding of his thoughts, the nourishing of his soul, the strengthening of his heart, and the enlightening of his mind." The transference of the weekly Sabbath to another day had "wholly inverted this established order."[31]

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[29] Francis Bampfield, *The Seventh-Day-Sabbath the Desirable Day* (London, 1677), 39.

[30] Francis Bampfield, ΠΑΓΓΝΩΣΙΆ, ΠΑΝΤΕΧΝΙΆ, ΠΑΝΣΟΦΙΆ. *All in One. All Useful Sciences and Profitable Arts in One Book of Jehovah Aelohim, Copied Out, and Commented upon in Created Beings, Comprehended and Discovered in the Fulness and Perfection of Scripture Knowledges* (London, 1677), 65, 93.

[31] Bampfield, *All in One*, 45.

The Binding Obligations of the Moral Law

Few reasons for observing the seventh day were argued more consistently than the perpetuity of the moral law as expressed in the Ten Commandments. The precedent had been set on the title page of Brabourne's first book, *A Discourse upon the Sabbath Day* (1628), which advised that the author would undertake "an exposition of the iiii Commandment." From then on, advocates of the seventh day pressed the claims of the moral law with candor and clarity. Brabourne himself states, "The Moral Law or Decalogue, spoken by God, and wrote by His Finger [*sic*] in Tables of Stone, is still in force." Referring to Matthew 5:17–18, he added, "In these words Christ doth ratify the law, in every jot and tittle of it to the World's end, or until Heaven and Earth perish."[32] The logical outcome was inescapable:

> Consequently the Seventh-day Sabbath, which is part of this law, is also in force . . . hence it clearly follows, that if not a jot or tittle must be taken from the Law, then the Seventh-day Sabbath in that Law must still be in force, and untaken away. You may as well take away the third or fifth Commandment, as the fourth Commandment, or any part of it.[33]

One of the publications that brought the Sabbath question to the attention of the English Parliament in 1657 was a short pamphlet written by William Saller, later elder of Mill Yard. The tract was entitled *Sundry Queries . . . for clearing the Doctrine of the Fourth Commandement*, *And the Lords Sabbath Day* and was addressed directly to all London clergy in order to clarify the pressing "weighty controversy about the Sabbath Day."[34] Eight of the thirteen queries specifically related to the fourth commandment in the context of the moral law as a whole, and Saller argues:

> I cannot easily believe that the Law which was given at Creation, Genesis 2:2, 3, and was spoken by the Lord's own voice from heaven, out of the midst of the fire, Exodus 20:19, 20, Deuteronomy 4:12, 13, and which alone was writ with his own fingers in Tables of stone to be kept in the Ark, and that are so carefully distinguished by Moses from the statutes

[32] Brabourne, *A Discourse upon the Sabbath Day*, 3–4.
[33] Ibid., 4.
[34] William S. Saller, *Sundry Queries Formerly Tendred to the Ministers of London, for Clearing the Doctrine of the Fourth Commandement, And the Lord's Sabbath-day, But Now Tendred to the Consideration of All Men* (London, 1660), 1.

> and judgments which he taught Israel, and he hath described them by the name of Ten Commandments, should be any of them abolished. I must have better ground to believe it than any at present I see.[35]

Saller's bold pamphlet was republished in 1660, after Parliament had given it inconclusive thought, but now "for the consideration of all men," and in the hope that it might stir some consciences to the binding claims of the entire moral law.

Christ and the Apostolic Church

The arguments from the example of Christ and the practice of the apostolic church were also prominent in Sabbatarian apologetic. We have already noted the emphasis Francis Bampfield gives to this aspect of Sabbatarian theology. He further says, "It was Jehovah-Christ as Mediator," who at Sinai proclaimed the "Law of the Ten Words," "the Seventh-day God" Himself who had rested at the end of creation "from all his works," and who "in the days of his flesh . . . through all the weeks of his life yielded obedience unto this Command by keeping the Seventh day as the weekly Sabbath."[36] Further, "He has left us an example . . . that we should follow his steps. He that saith he abideth in Christ, ought himself to walk even as he walked."[37]

We have also referred to James Ockford's *Doctrine of the Fourth Commandement* (1650). This early document of the English Sabbatarian movement again argues that the seventh-day Sabbath had been observed in the early church for at least four centuries. Citing the Greek church historian Socrates (circa AD 380–450), Ockford records, "Almost all the churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath, i.e. Saturday, of every week," the exceptions already at that time being Rome and Alexandria.[38]

Ockford also quotes Sozomen, a fifth-century contemporary of Socrates, who confirms the Sabbath-keeping tradition in the post-apostolic church, saying, "The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or Alexandria."[39]

A century or so after Ockford, Robert Cornthwaite, the last of the influential Sabbatarian apologists, again stresses the example of

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[35] Saller, *Sundry Queries Formerly Tendred to the Ministers of London*, 3.
[36] Bampfield, *The Seventh-Day-Sabbath*, 7–8.
[37] Ibid., 8.
[38] James Ockford, *The Doctrine of the Fourth Commandement, Deformed by Popery; Reformed and Restored to its Primitive Purity* (London, 1650), 27.
[39] Ibid.

Christ and the post-apostolic church. The seventh-day Sabbath was "unrepealed by Christ," he states, pointing out that it was still observed at the time of Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 (cf. Matt 24:20). So Cornthwaite asserts, "Christ and his apostles not only kept the seventh-day Sabbath, but also never said a word that we can find, either that it should be abrogated or changed for another."[40] Although space forbids further pursuit of these claims, it is worth noting that many respected scholars of the age, including Peter Heylin and William Cave, both eminent seventeenth-century church historians, agree that the seventh-day Sabbath had been kept by the early church. Heylin offers as evidence, among others, Theophilus of Antioch, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Council of Laodicea.[41] Sabbatarians themselves, as their books and pamphlets indicate, were not unaware of the evidence.

The Substitution of Sunday for the Biblical Sabbath

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the Sabbatarian apologists were keen and able Bible students, determined to find scriptural authority for every aspect of doctrine and practice. They were also good students of history, particularly when that history testified to the fulfillment of prophecy. It was this combination of biblical exegesis and historical fact that had led Theophilus Brabourne to the conclusion that observance of the biblical Sabbath had been replaced by Sunday by the "little horn" power foretold by Daniel in his prophetic outline of world kingdoms. Standard historicist interpretation of the period held that the "little horn" of Daniel 7 symbolized the papacy, which had arisen as the Roman Empire, the fourth beast in the prophetic sequence of world powers, had come to its end.[42] It was "that little Horn, Antichrist . . . who hath destroyed the fourth commandment," one anonymous Sabbatarian wrote.[43]

Of the many features given in the text of Daniel 7 that helped to identify the "little horn" as the papacy, the attempt to "change times and laws" (Dan 7:25) was of particular significance to Sabbatarians, many of whom emphasized this prophecy and the papal substitution of Sunday for the biblical Sabbath. Dr. Peter Chamberlen wrote an open letter to the Lord High Chancellor and the English judiciary in 1682, arguing that the "Triple-Crowned-Little-Horn-Changer of Times and Laws" had changed the Sabbath, thus "giving the lie to the Seventh day" by claiming "that the First day is the Sabbath of the

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[40] Robert Cornthwaite, *An Essay on the Sabbath* (London, 1740), 32, 42.
[41] See Ball, *Seventh-day Men*, 23.
[42] See Ball, *A Great Expectation*, 78–79, 130–132.
[43] *The Moralitie of the Fourth Commandement* (London, 1652), 53.

Lord."[44] Thomas Bampfield, MP, lawyer, and at one time Speaker of the House of Commons, had engaged in a long-running published discussion concerning the Sabbath with John Wallis, Professor of Geography at Oxford. Bampfield argued that although the bishops of Rome claimed authority to change or "dispense with the laws of the church, [they] could not alter or dispense with the laws of God." Therefore "the law to alter the seventh day to the first" was based on a spurious authority.[45]

Francis Bampfield, brother to Thomas and later to die in prison for his faith, describes Rome as "the papal Antichrist" and the "Anomos one" (the lawless one), since it had changed the law of God just as Daniel had predicted. Bampfield speaks uncompromisingly of Rome's attack on the Ten Commandments as expressed in contemporary Psalters and Catechisms, writing that "the Antichristian party have mangled the Ten Words" (Ten Commandments) by leaving out the second commandment entirely and dispensing with the seventh day from the fourth commandment. He explains:

> They thrust the weekly Seventh-day Sabbath of Jehovah out of the Fourth Word, and substitute their own unscriptural holy days; they turn the last Word into two. They teach religious reverence to creatures as to angels, to Souls departed, to the Cross, and they teach invocation of saints; . . . they lay aside the weekly Seventh-day Sabbath and set up days of men's inventing. . . . If the Pope command what Christ doth forbid, or if he forbid what Christ doth command, yet they require their people to obey them, contrary to Christ's law.[46]

The evidence for Rome's complicity in changing the Sabbath and "mangling" the Ten Commandments is contextualized here in terms that any informed Protestant of the day would readily have understood.

An interesting reference to the "little horn" and the change of the Sabbath appears in Thomas Tillam's book, *The Seventh-day Sabbath Sought out and Celebrated* (1657). Tillam's vigorous promotion of the Sabbath in the eastern counties of England had resulted in such large numbers turning to the seventh day that the city authorities in Colchester had granted Tillam and his congregation the use of one of the Anglican parish churches in which to worship. The full title

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[44] Peter Chamberlen, *Englands Choice, &c.* (London, 1682), 2–3.

[45] Thomas Bampfield, *An Enquiry Whether the Lord Jesus Christ made the World, and be Jehovah, and gave the Moral Law? And Whether the Fourth Command be Repealed or Altered?* (London, 1692), 135.

[46] Francis Bampfield, *The Seventh-Day-Sabbath*, 129. Bampfield uses "Word" to mean "commandment," as do some other writers of the time.

of Tillam's book referred to Daniel 7:25 and "the Man of sin," stating that the book was "a clear discovery of that black character in the head of the little Horn, the Change of Times and Laws." Tillam went on to argue that the Sabbath had already become the central issue in the final conflict between good and evil and that those who kept the seventh day were "obtaining the victory over the mark of the beast." The struggle over the Sabbath was "the last great controversy between the saints and the man of sin."[47]

The foregoing is in harmony with the Sabbatarian call for the Reformation to be completed, notably with respect to the Sabbath, re-iterated by Cornthwaite as late as 1740. Of the issue between Sabbath and Sunday, Cornthwaite writes to his fellow Protestants, "If therefore we desire to persuade the Papists that we are in earnest in our Reformation . . . it is undoubtedly our incumbent duty honestly to give up those points which we cannot fairly defend."[48] Brabourne had earlier urged Protestants to "imitate the more pure primitive churches, from whom the Church of Rome is fled in practise of the Sabbath day, than the corrupted Romish Church, from whom we have sucked this evil milk."[49] It was language that could not be misunderstood.

Concluding Observations

It would be easy enough to dismiss the English Sabbath-keepers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as historical curiosities—the more so since their movement had all but died out by 1800 or soon thereafter. But that would be a mistake. Their theology and biblical exegesis remain of continuing interest to biblical scholars today. Beyond that, however, the English Sabbatarians were the first Seventh Day Baptists, and those who chose America as their new home became the first Sabbath-keepers in North America. In the nineteenth century their descendants communicated the biblical doctrine of the Sabbath to early Adventist pioneers, who in turn "searched the Scriptures" (cf. Acts 17:11) and found it to be true. The historical link is specific and incontrovertible.

Following the restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660, there began a period of intense hardship and persecution for English Nonconformity in general, including Seventh Day Baptists and other minority groups. The history is well documented, and remains

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[47] Thomas Tillam, *The Seventh-Day Sabbath Sought out and Celebrated, or, The Saints Last Design Upon the Man of Sin with their Advance of Gods first Institution to Its Primitive Perfection . . . with the Christians Glorious Conquest over that Mark of the Beast, and Recovery of the Long-Slighted Seventh Day to its Antient Glory . . .* (London, 1657), 1–2.

[48] Cornthwaite, *Essay on the Sabbath*, iii–iv.

[49] Brabourne, *Discourse upon the Sabbath*, 226.

instructive for all who would understand the lasting significance of the English seventh-day movement. In 1664, Stephen Mumford, a member of the Bell Lane Seventh Day Baptist church in London and formerly of the mixed-communion Baptist church in Tewkesbury, emigrated to Rhode Island to avoid the difficult times in England. He took with him a firm belief in the seventh-day Sabbath and was instrumental in establishing a small congregation of Sabbath-keepers in Newport, Rhode Island, from which eventually grew the Seventh Day Baptist church in North America.[50] That Rachel Oakes Preston, a Seventh Day Baptist, passed on an understanding of the biblical Sabbath to early Adventist pioneers is a well-established fact of Adventist history.

Isaac Backus, in his *Church History of New England*, summarizes Mumford's part in this series of events, which prove to have planted the seeds of seventh-day observance and the Seventh Day Baptist Church in the American colonies:

> Stephen Mumford came over from London in 1664, and brought the opinion with him, that the whole of the Ten Commandments, as they were delivered from mount Sinai, were moral and immutable, and that it was the antichristian power, which thought to change times and laws, that changed the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. Several members of the first church in Newport embraced this sentiment, and yet continued with the church for some years.[51]

The English Sabbath-keepers in London and elsewhere kept in touch with the fledgling movement in North America for several years and the correspondence that passed between them has mostly survived.[52] It still makes interesting reading, and provides conclusive evidence of a direct link between the English post-Reformation Sabbath-keepers and those in North America, who would eventually pass on the good news of the biblical Sabbath to early Adventists and, through them, to growing numbers of believers around the world in our day.

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[50] Don A. Sanford, *A Choosing People: The History of Seventh Day Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 95–97.

[51] Isaac Backus, *A Church History of New England*, 3 vols. (Boston, MA, 1777–1796), 3:232.

[52] See Ball, *Seventh-day Men*, 107–109; The Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society, MS 194x6, 78–82.

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