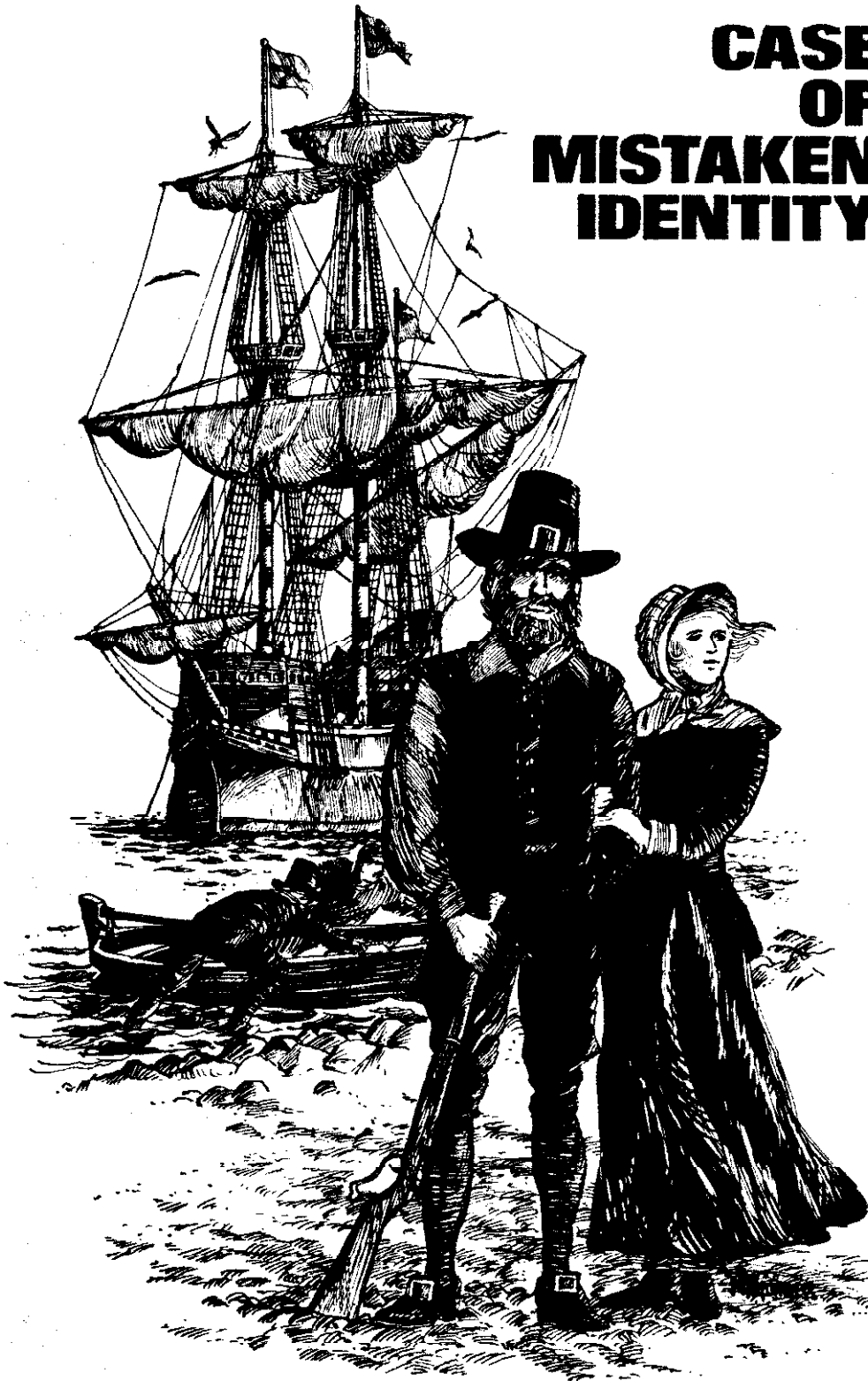


THE PILGRIM "SABBATH"

CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY



Many Mormons, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Pentecostals, even some Baptists — in short, the descendants of the Puritans and their friends of 16th-century Britain — call Sunday the "Christian Sabbath." The Puritans objected to many pagan features of so-called Christianity. They prohibited May Day and Christmas observances, etc., by law. They read the Bible, believed in real obedience to God, and taught strict adherence to godliness as a way of life. They were strict about their "Sabbath." The Mayflower Pilgrims who landed on Plymouth Rock in 1620 were Puritans, as were others who landed later in different spots on the forbidding New England coast. They were a stern, God-fearing race who fled the Old World for the New World to practice the religion of their conscience in peace. Their "Sabbath" was observed with rigor. But was it the Sabbath of God?

It was 1646, April 3. The first New England Thanksgiving was that year to be a quarter century old. By this time, in old England, there were Sabbath-keepers—observers of the seventh-day memorial of creation and creation's God (Ex. 31:13). Another Massachusetts spring was not far away as John Cotton wrote out his argument to Thomas Shepard to prove that the *first* day of the week, and not the seventh, should be observed as the Christian Sabbath (Felt, *The Ecclesiastical History of New England*, p. 569).

Obviously, there was some diversity of opinion in Massachusetts about the Sabbath. And Felt goes on

to record that the subject was at that time much discussed by New England ministers against objectors. But that anyone actually observed the seventh day in mid-17th century New England is not completely established. For the fact is that Puritans were Sunday observers, in spite of their use of the term "Christian Sabbath" (or just "Sabbath") to describe it, and contrary to the mistaken notions some Sabbath keepers publish today. It is not true, as some direct descendants from the Pilgrims have claimed they "well knew," namely that all their "grandparents and great-grandparents knew that the Pilgrims of the Mayflower days were strict Sabbath-keepers of the seventh day of the week, instead of Sunday" (Kiesz in *The Sabbath Sentinel*, June 1975, p. 10; also Duggcr and Dodd, *A True History of the True Religion*, pp. 265-266).

The term "Sabbath" (but meaning Sunday) even occurs in the ordinances of the Long Parliament (the Puritan-dominated body which ruled Britain during the 1640s when Oliver Cromwell was head of state in place of the rejected king). "Christian Sabbath," a term apparently newly coined about a hundred years before, occurs in an ordinance of 1644 (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., "Sunday").

How Sabbath Confusion Began. With all due respect to the Puritan forebears of Britain and America for all their sincerity and determination, they made some egregious errors. Mistaking the Sabbath was one.

No informed person assumes that the Sabbath God instituted is Sunday. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, but Sunday is another and different institution. No one confused the two for centuries after the apostles. And none regarded the Exodus command to rest and be rejuvenated on the seventh day as in any way applicable or transferred to Sunday.

In fact, some professing Christians observed both Sunday (as a time of meeting for worship) and Sabbath (as a day of abstinence from work) into the beginning of the Dark Ages. Some observed both days as days of assembly (as is recorded in Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 8 in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*).

Gradually, the Catholic world departed from the Sabbath, alleging apostolic authority for having abolished or changed the commandment. Throughout the Middle Ages in Europe, Sunday was the only day honored weekly, but it was *not* primarily nor generally a rest day. That came later, and in a different cultural milieu.

Sunday "Sabbath" Came with the Puritans. The story of Henry the Eighth, king of England, is well known. He wanted his freedom to marry another, and to get his divorce he declared the independence of the Church of England from Rome in A.D. 1534. With detachment from the Pope, a certain degree of reformation began, as it had in Germany and neighboring countries on the European continent. A Puritan element, so-called because they desired to *purify* the church, began to make itself heard in England.

But the same no-Sabbathism that characterized both Catholicism and Protestantism on the Continent continued in the Church of England. Work went on seven days a week.

Henry died and was replaced with his short-lived son Edward, then briefly by Mary, and finally by Elizabeth I whose long reign lasted 45 years. Church services included the reading of the Ten Commandments, commandment by commandment, and after each commandment the congregation responded: "Lord, incline our hearts to keep this law" (Thomas Broad, *Three Questions Answered*, 1621, title page). But here was a problem.

What would they do when they prayed for the inclination and help to obey the *Fourth* Commandment? Most Puritans had but one answer: they would try to invest *Sunday* with all the sanctity and respect (including total abstinence from work, "profane" sports, or pleasure of any kind) that belonged to the true Sabbath. They claimed the Sabbath had been changed. Of course, that led them into doctrinal deep water, because, lacking any real or valid evidence in the New Testament for such a supposed change, the only possible authority that remained for it was the Pope against whom they were in rebellion!

The whole thing was an embarrass-

ment to the established Church and churchmen. It was 1595 when Nicholas Bownd, D.D., a Suffolk clergyman, "boldly and crudely claimed for Sunday the authority and the observances of the Jewish Sabbath and maintained that they should be enforced by the State" (Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, "Sunday"). Bownd injected the term "Christian Sabbath, that it is a perpetuation of the Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment, but that the day specified in that commandment has been changed by authority from the seventh to the first day of the week" (Belcher, *Religious Denominations in America*, p. 228).

His book was suppressed by order of the archbishop. The English church as a whole was not prepared for a Sabbath doctrine that extreme. Neither, in fact, were all Puritans.

Nevertheless, Bownd's theory, in the words of a learned contemporary, was a "most bewitching error, and the most popular infatuation that ever was embraced by the people of England" (*ibid.*).

It soon permeated the thinking of all Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. "The book had an immense vogue. It was translated and circulated on the Continent, where it exercised much influence. In England, accepted as an inspiration by some and as challenge by others, it gave rise to a literary controversy which lasted for a hundred years" (Hastings, *op. cit.*).

In the absence of requisite evidence for a Sabbath change ever having been made, many began to argue that actually the Fourth Commandment merely required the observance of "one day in seven," a contention plainly contradictory to the context of Genesis 2. Exodus 20:11. etc.

Some did indeed draw the obvious conclusion (though there is no evidence any acted correctly upon it for some years), as the old *Chambers' Encyclopedia* (article "Sabbath") declares: "Accordingly in the reign of Elizabeth [1558-1603] it occurred to many conscientious and independent thinkers... that the Fourth Commandment required of them the observance, not of the first, but of the specified *seventh* day of the week."

Emergence of Seventh-Day Keeping. Seventh-Day Baptists trace their ori-

gin back to 17th-century England. But actually the earliest known English-speaking keepers of the seventh day were Puritans. John Traske, stentorian-voiced Puritan preacher from the west of England, is the first famous name. He and his wife, both schoolteachers, had the true Sabbath pointed out to them shortly after moving to London in 1617 by Hamlet Jackson, whom Traske later ordained one of four evangelists.

But all things did not go well for long. Both Traskes were imprisoned for "Judaising" contrary to the practice of the established religion. Mrs. Traske remained in prison sixteen years till her death. Mr. Traske, at least partially, recanted (of keeping the annual feast days of the Old Testament) and was released after three years, but ever afterward—as various mentions in State papers show—continued under suspicion of Sabbath-keeping, until he also died. Perhaps the treatment he received should rightly be described as "persecution." He continued a Puritan, becoming a member of the very famous Independent (Puritan) congregation led by Henry Jacob. (Most of Jacob's people learned and determined to practice the true meaning and method of baptism, and from this congregation sprang five or six others which became the origin of the Particular, or Calvinistic, Baptists.)

After the Traskes and their small group, a few other leaders stood forth to teach, by the printed word and by example, the real Sabbath—Brabourne, Tandy, Ockford, the Stennetts, etc. A Sabbatarian movement developed, which because of its association with baptism by immersion was "Baptist," though there was great diversity of belief and freedom of conscience in other doctrines. Some Sabbatarians were Calvinistic and some were not. But the diveristy continued, even after their descendants eventually became known as Seventh-Day Baptists more than a century later.

Meanwhile, the Puritans as a whole remained a Sunday people and practiced infant baptism.

All the while there was persecution—both for Sabbath-keepers and Puritans. In those days it was only necessary to differ from the party in power to be persecuted.

Any kind of difference in understanding was sufficient. It was for this reason that some Puritans found it preferable to flee to Holland and live in exile than to remain at home among people of their own language.

Some of them fled further, across the Atlantic, to found a new commonwealth and become the founding Pilgrim fathers.

But one of the ironies of the age was that the Puritans, whether in Britain or America, once they themselves were in power, were unwilling to grant to others the same religious freedom they had sought for themselves.

Puritanism In Control. In 1639, religious civil war broke out in Scotland. When the ensuing strife all over Britain was temporarily over ten years later, the king had been beheaded, the army was in control under its leader Oliver Cromwell, and a rubber-stamp Puritan-dominated Parliament made the laws.

Already by 1643, the Puritan Sunday "Sabbath" became the law of all the territory then under the authority of the Puritan-run Parliament. Continues the Hastings encyclopedia article quoted earlier: "The same Parliament proscribed every kind of Sunday recreation, even vainly and profanely walking for pleasure."

And further: "No recreation remained but whisky-drinking, and a great part of the drunkenness which is still [in 1917] in common in Scotland [and we may perhaps add, in the regions of Scottish settlement in the United States] may be traced to an unwise Sabbatarianism."

Among many regulatory acts, the Parliament in 1656 took care to ordain that "the Sabbath should be deemed to extend from twelve of the clock on Saturday night to twelve of the clock on Lord's-day night, and within that compass of time they prohibited all kinds of business and diversions, except works of necessity and mercy" (Ncale, *History of the Puritans*, vol. 2, p. 118).

Stringent laws, with severe penalties, were enacted against all the prominent vices, such as profaneness, different forms of licentiousness, impious opinions concerning God and the Bible, drunkenness, etc. Next to

Sunday, one other day was most important to them, a *fast* on the last Wednesday of every month.

On the positive side, the moral character of people was much improved during Puritan supremacy. No doubt they enforced some things with too much rigor and preciseness, but laying the lusts of mankind under tangible restraint did foster the spirit of religion as well as its appearance.

Puritan political supremacy virtually ended in England in 1660. But the argument, "Which day for the Sabbath?" raged on, and the scene of further progress broadened to North America.

The Persecuted Persecute. The first Puritans landed in America at Plymouth in 1620. The civil government they set up had been based directly on the theocracy of the Hebrews under Moses. Gradually their Common Law became more and more rigid and all-confining. "In 1650, June 10th, the general court

For Those Who Want to Help

Jesus said: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations," just before the end of the age. His true disciples were to announce His second coming around the globe.

He told them: "Freely you have received, freely give." But a price must be paid for giving this reprint article, *The Plain Truth*, the Correspondence Course, booklets and other literature to as many as possible. Therefore, God expects every child of His to give generously as His means of paying the cost of carrying this gospel to others.

"It is more blessed to give," Jesus said, "than to receive."

enacted the following: 'Further be it enacted, that whosoever shall profane the Lord's-day by doing any servile work, or any such like abuse, shall forfeit for every such default ten shillings, or be whipped.'

"In 1651, June 6th: 'It is enacted by the court that whatsoever person or persons shall neglect the frequenting of public worship of God that is according to God, in the places where they live, or do assemble themselves upon any pretense whatsoever, contrary to God and the allowance of the government... to pay ten shillings for every such default... or be whipped!'" (A. H. Lewis, *A Critical History of the Sabbath and the Sunday*, pp. 342, 343.)

"In 1652 and again in 1656, laws were passed, prohibiting Indians from hunting, working or playing on Sunday, within the limits of the colony" (*ibid.*, p. 347).

Even earlier, the Massachusetts Bay Colony operated under the following 1629 instruction from their proprietors in England: "And to the end the Sabbath may be celebrated in a religious manner, we appoint that all that inhabit the plantation,

both for the general and particular employments, may surcease their labor every Saturday throughout the year, at three of the clock in the afternoon, and that they spend the rest of that day catechising, and preparations for the Sabbath, as the minister may direct" (*ibid.*).

In the very year of the before-mentioned discussion in Massachusetts about which day was the Sabbath, the general court decreed: "That wheresoever the ministry of the Word is established, according to the order of the gospel, throughout this jurisdiction, every person shall duly resort and attend thereunto, respectively upon the Lord's-days, and upon such public fast days and days of thanksgiving as are to be generally held by the appointment of authority" (*ibid.*, p. 348). Massachusetts colony, like Plymouth, provided penalties—fines and whippings—for Sunday absence. Similar laws were enacted in New Haven and Connecticut colonies.

No wonder, then, that Roger Williams, fleeing from Massachusetts to found Rhode Island, was soon joined by many others, and

that *there* religious liberty was brought forth on the American continent.

Rhode Island became a haven for the persecuted Baptists.

To Rhode Island came Stephen Mumford in 1664 from London bringing the Saturday Sabbath, and there he persuaded others who became the first true Sabbath-keeping church in America in 1671.

Americans have a lot to be thankful for, both that the Puritans strove mightily to serve God, and that their *misguided* zeal was finally tempered so that freedom to serve God and follow his ways to the fullest degree might prevail. □

RECOMMENDED READING

The question of which day is the Christian Sabbath has been bitterly debated for centuries. Yet the answer is clearly revealed in God's Word and in the pages of history. We offer three booklets which contain irrefutable proof on this subject. Simply request them by title:

- Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?
- The Sabbath Was Made for Man
- The Sabbath and the Ten Commandments