



Sabbath and Sunday among the Early Adventists

A story of how Truth Creates Two Classes

In 1811 a small white church building was erected by the whole community in Washington New Hampshire pitching in and working and donating. This little church would later become the first Seventh-day Adventist church in the world. In 1842 the Advent Message of the Millerites came to this little church and in 1844 they went through the Great disappointment of October 22. Divisions had come with each ray of new light shining from the Word of God; but the biggest division was yet to come, shortly after 1844.

Miss Delight Oakes was a schoolteacher in Washington, New Hampshire. Her students thought it delightful to have such a pretty young woman as a teacher. She and her mother, Mrs. Rachel Oakes, were Seventh Day Baptists. As there was no church of their own in Washington, during the few years Delight had been teaching, they attended the Christian church with families of the neighborhood.

"Why do you worship God on Sunday?" Rachel Oakes asked the members of the little white church.

"Because Jesus rose from the tomb on Sunday. He changed the day of worship from Sabbath to Sunday," came the answer.

"Oh, no," Rachel Oakes said; "Jesus Himself said that He did not come to destroy the law of God (Matt. 5:17). He said that as long as there was a heaven and an earth the law of God would never be changed (Matt. 5:18)."

"Then why does everyone keep holy the first day of the week?" the members asked her.

Mrs. Oakes told them that about three hundred years after Jesus had returned to heaven a great ruler, Constantine, made a law in A.D. 321, that "Sunday should be kept as a day of rest in all cities and towns" (Encyclopedia Americana. Article "Sabbath".) Sunday was made the day to attend church. More and more people forgot about the fourth commandment. After a few hundred years, almost everyone was keeping Sunday. But the fourth commandment had never been changed by God.

Many of the members of the little white church just laughed about what Mrs. Oakes told them. Others said, "It really doesn't matter, just as long as we keep one day in every seven holy."

But William Farnsworth was not satisfied. Every evening, by the light of a candle, he studied his Bible. He believed, as did the other Adventists, that the second coming of Jesus was soon. He asked himself, "When my Saviour comes in glory, will we be found keeping all the commandments of God?"

William's father, mother, and younger brother, Cyrus, joined Sally and William as they prayed and searched for truth. Together they repeated the fourth commandment, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God."

Back and forth in the New Testament they hunted, trying to find a text that would prove that Jesus or His disciples had kept the first day of the week holy. Instead, they found that Jesus always went to church on Sabbath (Luke 4:16), and years after He had gone to heaven His disciples worshiped and preached, as did Jesus, on the seventh-day Sabbath.

One evening as William and his family were studying, they read Revelation 11:19: "And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament."

"Then that means that the Ten Commandments are in heaven!" exclaimed William. "God's law is in the ark in the most holy place! It has never been changed by God. It is holy to Him; it must be holy to us!"

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city' (Rev. 22:14). We dare not break one of His commandments if we are to eat of the tree of life!"

William stood up and started walking around the room as he said, "The Sabbath was changed by man, and ever since then, just because others are doing so, people have kept the first day of the week in place of the seventh day. It is always easier to follow the crowd. If we keep Sunday we are obeying man—not God! What are we going to do about this?"

What would they do? Did they have the courage to be different from everyone else they knew, even different from their dearest Adventist friends?

The next Sunday morning William and his family were sitting in their regular pews in the Christian church. They loved their church. They had helped to build it. They loved all of its members. How strange it would be not to worship with these dear ones every Sunday!

The Spirit of the Lord was whispering to William Farnsworth's heart. He must obey. Quickly he rose to his feet. He told the church members that from now on he was going to worship on the day that God had blessed in the fourth commandment.

There was a stir throughout the church. Cyrus joined his brother, then their parents, Daniel and Patty Farnsworth, stood and said they too must worship on Saturday. How happy the angels must have been that day as they saw these very first Seventh-day Adventists take their stand for truth! After church was out, and during the week, many of their friends tried to make them change their minds, but they were determined to obey all the commandments.

The next Sabbath morning, instead of going out to the fields to work, William and his family put on their best "Sabbath-go-to-meeting clothes," and went over to Grandpa and Grandma Farnsworth's for church. Cyrus, who was twenty-one years old, lived with his parents in a new brick house they had built beside the lovely Millan Lake. Together the Farnsworth family kept their first Sabbath.

The next morning was Sunday. It seemed strange for William and Sally to put on their work clothes, but these were pioneer days. There was much work to be done. "John and I must chop wood in the field

near the road," William told Sally. "When it is time for our neighbors to go to church, we will stop until they have passed."

"That is a good idea," answered Sally. "No use in making them angry." So William and his son John went to work out by the roadside chopping logs into firewood. They were so busy working that they forgot to watch the sun.

All of a sudden, around the bend in the road came a wagon full of people going to the little white church.

"Why, Mr. Farnsworth, what are you doing?" called the driver as he stopped his horses.

"I am chopping wood," he called back.

"But don't you know that this is Sunday?"

"Yes, and I know that yesterday was the Sabbath. I kept it, and so I am working today."

"But you can't do that. It is against the law!"

"It isn't against God's law. God says, 'Six days shalt thou labour.' "

"We will have you arrested and in jail before night," called the neighbor, as he started the horses and disappeared down the road in a cloud of dust. William and John went quietly about their work. No one ever bothered them.

In 1844 there were many Adventists. Some were Methodist Adventists, others were Baptist Adventists. There were no Seventh-day Adventists until this little group of pioneers began keeping Sabbath. They were the first Seventh-day Adventists. Elder Fredrick Wheeler was the first Seventh-day Adventist minister.

More Seventh-day Adventists

Sunshine shone down and filled the whole green world. The long, cold winter was forgotten in the beauty of this spring day. Under the great maple trees in front of the Cyrus Farnsworth home, overlooking Millan Lake, sat Elder Frederick Wheeler, William Farnsworth, and Captain Joseph Bates. They were talking earnestly about the Sabbath.

Joseph Bates was a sea captain, and a great Adventist leader. He had heard about this group of Adventists in Washington who were keeping the seventh day. Immediately he left his home in Massachusetts and came to see them.

It was ten o'clock at night when he found Elder Wheeler's home. He was so anxious to know why they were observing Sabbath instead of Sunday that he and Elder Wheeler talked until sunup the next morning.

Then they drove to the Farnsworth home. All morning, and maybe longer, they talked out under the maple trees. Captain Bates was so excited that he could hardly wait to return to his home and tell his friends. He knew now for a certainty that the Sabbath was right. Hurrying home from his trip, the sea captain met a friend who called out, "Hello, Brother Bates! What's the news?"

"The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord our God," was the joyous reply.

Very soon after this, Hiram Edson called a meeting of all the Adventists. He wanted to tell them about his vision in the cornfield, and the new light God had given about the judgment. Captain Bates went to

this meeting. These two men had never met before, and Mr. Edson asked the captain to say a few words to the people.

Captain Bates was happy to talk to the people about the Sabbath. Eagerly they listened, especially Mr. Edson. He could hardly sit still, he was so excited. When Captain Bates was through, Hiram Edson jumped to his feet and exclaimed, "Brother Bates, that is light and truth! The seventh day is the Sabbath, and I am with you to keep it!"

It was in Massachusetts that Joseph Bates met Ellen Harmon. He told her, "The seventh day is the Bible Sabbath. I am keeping it." At first Ellen did not think it was important to keep the seventh day.

About this time she and James White were married, and together they studied the paper Joseph Bates had written about the Sabbath. They searched the Bible, and finding that God had not changed the day He had blessed, they began keeping holy the seventh day of the week.

About seven months later God gave Ellen White a vision in which she was shown the ark of God in the heavenly sanctuary. Two beautiful angels stood, one at each end of the ark, with their wings spread over it. The angel by Ellen's side told her that this represented all the angels in heaven looking reverently toward the law of God.

She saw Jesus raise the cover of the ark, and inside were the Ten Commandments, which God had written with His finger. The fourth commandment was in the center, and around it was a beautiful soft light.

Ellen's angel told her that when God made the earth He also made the Sabbath. If the true Sabbath had always been kept holy, everyone would believe in the true God. God's people were thankful for this vision. Quickly the Sabbath message spread among the Adventists.

Eventually the little white church came into the possession of the Seventh-day Adventist group becoming the first Seventh-day Adventist church.

The First Seventh-day Adventist Church

EXCITEMENT was in the air. This Sabbath was different! Down the icy road, singing hymns, came the Farnsworth family in their bobsled. Right past Uncle Cyrus' home they went. For eighteen years they had stopped here every Sabbath for meeting. But not today! The oxen pulled the sled past the end of Millan Lake, around the hill, and up into the yard of the little white church.

Eugene jumped out and tied the oxen to a tree while Father helped Mother and the little ones down. "Here we are," he said proudly. "This is our own Seventh-day Adventist church."

"Our own Seventh-day Adventist church!" Those were welcome words. William remembered how twenty years before, he and Cyrus had helped build this church. It was here they had waited on October 22, 1844, for Jesus to come. Now it was their church again, for the Adventists had bought it from the Christian Society.

The twin stoves in the back of the room sent forth a cheery warmth as the Sabbathkeepers greeted one another.

"Come, Brother Farnsworth, will you lead the music, please?"

Thirty adults and twice as many children made a grand choir as he led them in singing:

I love to wait, and watch, and pray,
And trust his living word,

And feel the coming of the day
No longer is deferred.
Then, waiting brethren, let us sing,-
He will not tarry long,-
And fill with joy the hours that bring
The glory of our song.

This was a special Sabbath, for they must organize themselves into a church. Before the meeting was over the members were asked to sign this promise: "We the undersigned hereby associate ourselves together as a church, taking the name Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ."