

VOLUME II

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

SABBATH-KEEPING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

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THE CHALLENGE

For the duration of Adventism its apologists have sought to find and present evidence that there has been an unbroken line of Christians who did not “apostatize” from the original Faith by abandoning Sabbath-keeping for Sunday observance. In doing so they are seeking to validate Ellen G. White’s revisionist, “replacement” history of the first 2,000 years of the Christian Faith, represented by her signature book, *The Great Controversy*.

There have always been small pockets of Christian believers who seem to have rediscovered the heresy of Sabbath-keeping. At the same time, careful research firmly establishes the fact that so-called “Sabbath abandonment” took place immediately after the death of Christ almost everywhere but in Jerusalem and its environs. As discussed elsewhere, over 60% of the Jewish population of Judea were Hellenized Jews who had abandoned Sabbath-keeping 200-300 years or more prior to the birth of Christ. These Hellenized Jews seem to have met in their synagogues on the Sabbath days, but not to observe it as a holy day like the Orthodox Jews.

A hundred years or more prior to the reign of King James in England, what may have been the first major reassurance of Sabbatarianism developed in the Low Lands on the Continent. As a result of persecution, many of these Sabbath-keeping Christians immigrated to England, eventually causing a crisis that came close to forcing the Church of England to become Sabbatarian. This story is simply ignored by Ellen White and other Adventist historians, but we tell it in a separate chapter. This story represents the only major exception to the general rule that Sabbatarianism tended to spring up among small pockets of believers in various areas.

To provide balanced coverage of the phenomenon of Christian Sabbath observance, I list of eceptions has been provided at the end of this chapter. Adventist historians have claimed for a very long time that the St. Thomas Christians of India were Sabbath keepers, but as it has turned out, this theory has been substantially debunked, as we will note in the supplementary material.

Thanks to our exploration of Hebrew linguistics, we now understand that the Hebrew word for SABBATH was derived from the Semitic word for PROPITIATION. This discovery, together with new discoveries of the symbolic prophecies of Christ in the Law of Moses seems to validate the fact that the Israelites had a far better understanding of the Gospel in the Old Testament than we had previously understood. Since spotless, very young, and male lambs were required to be sacrificed on

every weekly Sabbath, and since Jesus had announced when He read from the scroll of Isaiah that He was the Jubilee Sabbath, the Israelites would virtually have known that the unmerited and arbitrary slavery and debt forgiveness that the Jubilee Sabbath provided was a symbol of Christ's death on the Cross, the Spotless Lamb of God. This understanding, in turn, almost certainly helped the Jews understand that the Sabbath Ordinance could not possibly continue to exist beyond the point where their "Sabbath" was literally slain and His mission accomplished. It is more reasonable than ever, now, to think that since the majority of initial converts to Christianity came out of Judaism, that they would immediately recognize that there was no longer any Sabbath to "keep" because its purpose had literally been fulfilled.

In other chapters we have presented the problem that the Orthodox Jews kicked any Jew who believed that Jesus was the Messiah out of their synagogues. In the Holy Land only 40% of the synagogues were Orthodox, but the Jerusalem Jewish Christians would not likely be thrown out of the Hellenized Jewish synagogues because they had abandoned the Sabbath hundreds of years before Christ's birth. The larger purpose of Hellenized Judaism was to evangelize the Gentiles to recognize the coming of the Messiah, and they retained from the Law of Moses only the Seven Laws of Noah and the Passover Ordinance for this purpose. In the Eastern Roman Empire, up to 90% of the Jewish population consisted of Hellenized Jews. Christians were evidently welcome there, and these synagogues are likely to ones most frequented by the Apostles to witness to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

Our chapter on the *Fiscus Judacaius* tax establishes the fact that beyond 70 AD and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, Christians could not have kept the Sabbath without paying an extremely high tax to the Romans which was utilized to rebuild a Heathen temple, and in the mid 90's the Roman Empire exempted Christians from the *Fiscus Juacaius* tax because the government recognized that as much as Rome hated the Jews, Christians, whether they were Jewish or Gentile Christians, were not be circumcised and were not observing any Jewish customs, including Sabbath-keeping. With this general background of the realities of Sabbath-keeping by the first Christians, let us examine the question in greater detail, paying special attention to any credible exceptions.

An examination of several examples of actual Sabbath-keeping by early Christians is profitable because, in an indirect way, one's findings demonstrate not only how rare a practice this was, as well as the perils involved in claiming that certain Christian groups were truly Sabbath-keepers. Therefore, we will take a look at the two best examples that Adventist historians might have to offer. A third group is discussed in our chapter on the Lunar Sabbath and documents both Christian and Jewish groups that kept the Jewish Sabbath according to the four phases of the moon.

To determine which Christians kept the Sabbath and which Christians did not keep the Sabbath during the first 300-400 years is complicated by differences in terminology. For example, some early Christian writers referred to Sunday as the "Sabbath." Other writers talked about Sabbath observance, which was different from Sabbath-keeping. Most of the churches seem to have observed the Sabbath festival in addition to their Sunday day of worship. Also, there is controversy over the use of the term, "Lord's Day." Was the Lord's Day the Sabbath or Sunday? Elsewhere in this book you will find a chapter devoted to what the term, "Lord's Day" meant, and when language usage patterns, Greek linguistics, and Greek vocabulary are considered, this term was never used to refer to the Jewish Sabbath. Sometimes these questions can only be answered by reading a writer's complete works. At other times one author's usage of these terms must be compared with that of others. First we will turn our attention to the Nazarene Christians.

THE NAZARENES

The earliest believers in the Messiah were called “Christians” or “Messianists” as the Greek word would imply. These terms were applied to them in a derogatory manner by local unbelievers. (See Acts 11:26) Later, the Apostle Peter used it himself to describe the followers of the Messiah. (See 1 Peter 4:16) The Greek word is *Christianos*. It comes from the word *Christos*, which means “Messiah” or “Anointed One.”

Early writings of the church fathers, such as Jerome, Eusebius, and Origen, along with the Jewish *Talmud*, record that the earliest Christians were known by their Jewish counterparts as “Nazarenes.”

The name, “Nazarene,” occurs about a dozen times in Talmudic literature. In all but two of these instances it refers to “Yeshua the Nazarene.” From references to the early Nazarenes from various sources we have learned that they observed the Law of Moses.

Jerome tells us that the Jewish Nazarenes, or followers of Yeshua-Notzgra, were cursed in the synagogues by the Pharisees and that they mixed faith in the Messiah with the keeping of the Law.

An interesting point is that Jerome tells us that in a letter written to Augustine he indicates that they are to be found “in all the synagogues amongst the Jews.”

Epiphanius, an early church father and writer, referring to the Nazarenes, said, “Also they are trained in the Law, in Circumcision, the Sabbath, and other things (See Ray Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, pages 33-34 as cited at <http://www.hope-of-israel.org/nazarene.htm>.)

Pritz adds:

The Nazarenes, as Jews, continued to observe certain aspects of the Mosaic Law, including Circumcision and the Sabbath, and it was this that brought about their exclusion from the church. This rejection and exclusion was, however, gradual.

Gentile Christianity rejected the Nazarenes because of their adherence to the commandments of Jehovah God and the *Torah*. The Nazarenes themselves rejected the Church’s setting aside of the Law of Moses.

History testifies that the Sabbath continued to be kept strictly by the Jewish believers for centuries after the Resurrection, and there is a possibility that a few isolated pockets of Gentile Christian believers may have continued to keep the Sabbath along with the Sunday assemblies.

Pentecost is the birthplace of the Christian church. It is not unreasonable to think that at that particular moment, they were all Sabbath-keepers. It is, in fact, possible that for the first ten years after the Resurrection, the believers in Israel were made up entirely of Sabbath-keeping Jews. (See Acts 2:5)

We see from Acts 21:20 that the Jewish believers, true to their Hebrew roots, were protective of the entire Law of Moses, with the Covenant of the Ten Commandments and a notable subset. Not once were the Jewish Christians accused of Sabbath-breaking. It is even possible that the men who experienced Pentecost went back home and established churches that kept the Sabbath.

While an established belief about the early Church is that the Christians were expelled from the synagogues early-on because they confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, exactly how and when this may or may not have happened in Gentile areas or Jewish territories is not well-understood. One interesting theory is that the Nazarenes continued to worship in the synagogues with their Jewish brothers and sisters up until the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, which was fought between 132-136 AD. This theory suggests that the Nazarenes were tolerated in the synagogues up until this event, being expelled from the synagogues because the Jews who practiced Judaism had come to believe that Bar Kokhba was the Messiah, whereas the Nazarenes insisted that Jesus was the Messiah.

D. W. Ekstrand, in his book, *Worship in the Early Church*, provides evidence that the Bar Kokhba theory is not particularly valid. In 90 AD, twenty years after the temple was destroyed, the Sanhedrin, which is like a Jewish supreme court, convened to discuss the problem of synagogue members who believed in Christ. At a special Sabbath service, many of the rabbis issued a special "benediction" that essentially forced the Jewish believers in Christ out the door of the synagogues. This Sanhedrin action included a decree to rid Judaism of any trace of Christianity and to condemn any Jew who accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

There is some evidence that the Nazarenes may have survived in small numbers up through 400 AD. John D. Keyser, in a paper he edited entitled, "The Mysterious Relationship of The Early Nazarene Christians and Rabbinic Judaism," provides this evidence, citing Ray A. Pritz. (Note that John D. Keyser is possibly the world's foremost authority on the Lunar Sabbath concept. You will find him cited frequently on our chapter on the Lunar Sabbath.):

Jerome, about 404 A.D., in a letter to Augustine, said, "They believe in Christ, the Son of God, born of Mary the Virgin, and they say about him that he suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again." In the Nazarene commentary on Isaiah 29:17-21, they wrote against the Scribes and Pharisees that they "made men sin against the Word of God in order that they should deny that Christ was the Son of God" (see Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the end of the New Testament Period until its disappearance in the Fourth Century*, The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, c.1992, p.35, 43, 53-54). In their commentary on Isaiah 31:6-9, they understand the passage as saying: "O sons of Israel, who deny the Son of God with such hurtful resolution."

<http://www.hope-of-israel.org/nazarene.htm>

We know from our experience with Keyser's work that he is a very deep and thorough researcher; so we are comfortable with suggesting that Jewish Sabbath-keeping may have continued for hundreds of years after the Resurrection. Cross referencing Keyser's other research on the Lunar Sabbath, it is possible that the Nazarenes, in particular, probably kept the Sabbath according to the four phases of the Moon.

THE COPTIC CHURCHES OF EGYPT AND ETHIOPIA

Recently a few Seventh-day Adventist apologists have discovered that there is a Roman Catholic denomination in Ethiopia which keeps Saturday holy. We propose a theory which raises the real probability that these Catholic Christians and their predecessors may have been keeping the Sabbath from the very beginning of the Faith. It is possible that our core group of researchers have put together a number of sources together to demonstrate an explanation of how this happened that has

never been widely understood.

Historians, to the extent of the limitations that fall upon those who research the question of Sabbath-keeping during the first 400 years of the Faith, believe they have determined that true Sabbath-keeping persisted much longer among the Southern Copts than it did with the Northern Copts. Until we developed our theory, even some highly regarded historians believed that this was because the two geographical areas of the believers used differing versions of a document that developed early among the Greek Christians which came to be known as the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Let us examine what seems to have been discovered about this phenomenon prior to our work.

SEPARATE ORIGINS: NORTH AND SOUTH

Well-supported tradition credits St. Mark with founding the Northern Coptic Church. The situation is summed up well by the researchers at Ancient Origins Dot Net:

The Coptic Church of Egypt is the earliest Christian church in the world, going back to around 42 AD. According to Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, as well as Coptic traditions. Saint Mark the evangelist, who wrote the earliest of the four New Testament gospels, was the founder and first bishop of the Church of Alexandria, even before the Church of Rome was established. In his landmark *History of the Church*, written in Greek about the year 310, Eusebius writes: "Now, *they say* that this Mark was the first to have set out to Egypt to preach the gospel, which he had already written down, and the first to have organized churches in Alexandria itself" (Eusebius, *HE*2.16.1). This information is supplemented by Eusebius's *Chronicle*, where he places Mark's arrival in Alexandria in the third year of Claudius' reign, which would be AD 41-42 or 43-44. This is no more than ten years after the date fixed for the death of Jesus, traditionally held to be in AD 33.

Meanwhile, the traditional Egyptian account regarding the history of the early Coptic Church agrees with Eusebius on Mark's role as the founder of the Alexandrian Church. However, Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa' gives a slightly later date to Mark's arrival in Alexandria: "In the fifteenth year after the Ascension of Christ (c. AD 48), the holy Peter sent Saint Mark, the father and evangelist, to the city of Alexandria, to announce the good tiding (Gospel) there".¹ The *History of the Patriarchs* attributed to Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa is actually a multi-generational compendium of Egyptian church history that relies on several early Coptic sources, and was redacted and translated into Arabic in the eleventh century.

More information on Mark's life in Egypt is found in the Coptic account recorded by Sawirus, which is believed to have come from an earlier source. This source, known as the *Acts of Mark*, gives more details about Mark's activities in Egypt, including the account of the evangelist's martyrdom in Alexandria. The *Acts of Mark* has collected some early oral traditions and set them within a larger narrative, describing the details of Mark's mission and martyrdom in Alexandria. While the exact date of composition for the *Acts of Mark* is uncertain, these traditions are traceable at least to the late fourth or early fifth century. The *Acts* incorporates two streams of tradition within a single narrative. The first stream concerns Mark's founding of the church in Alexandria. The second stream concerns Mark's martyrdom, and provides an explanation for the

establishment of his martyr church on the outskirts of Alexandria.

<http://www.ancient-origins.net/history/origins-ancient-coptic-church-egypt-002462>

As we will demonstrate with tentative certainty in this chapter, there is no evidence that the Northern Copts ever kept Saturday as a Sabbath. The evidence is that these Christians appear to have observed both Saturday and Sunday, but neither day as a holy day with intrinsic sacredness.

By contrast, early church historians believe that it was the Apostle Philip who was either directly or indirectly responsible for establishing the Southern church. We have an important clue the likelihood in Acts 8, rendered in the NIV:

Philip and the Ethiopian

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³²This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”

³⁵Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” ^[37] [C] ³⁸And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

There is good reason to believe that this eunuch had traveled to Jerusalem to worship from the enclave of Judaism centered in Ethiopia which is believed to have been established by the Queen of Sheba who had once visited King Solomon and her son, Menelik. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menelik_I)

So, whereas St. Mark appears to be the founder of Northern Coptic Church and the church in Alexandria, the Ethiopian Eunuch may have been the founder of the Southern Coptic Church. This explanation is, perhaps, a bit oversimplified, but this fact in itself suggests a high degree of probability of the evolution of significant differences. The Northern Copts appear to have had a better chance to have had access to the writings of the Apostles, whereas the Southern Copts were more isolated.

DIFFERING VERSIONS OF THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS?

One of the most respected historical theorists of the early church era has a Seventh-day Adventist background— the late Milson B. Bishai. Understandably, his bias is that Sunday observance represented apostasy, and his analysis of Sabbath-keeping during the first 400 years or so of the Coptic Churches might possibly reflect this bias. His interpretation of Coptic Church history is articulated in his paper, "Sabbath Observance From Coptic Sources." At the time this paper was written, he was with the School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D. C. Later he transferred to the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard. He attended Maryland's Washington Missionary College and Adventist Seminary, then earning his Ph.D. in Oriental studies in 1959 at Johns Hopkins University.

Dr. Bishai points to evidence he found that suggests that the Southern Copts (primarily Ethiopia) held on to Sabbath-keeping for much longer than their Northern counterparts (Egypt and Syria, primarily). He seems to attribute these differences between the Northern and Southern churches to the use of differing versions of an instructional literary work for the Christian Church, or the *Apostolic Constitutions*:

Apostolic orders regarding Sabbath observance on the seventh day of the week appear almost exclusively in the **southern** group versions represented by Coptic, Ethiopic, and Arabic, and are included mainly in book VIII of the Constitutions, which is missing in the versions of the northern group. This study considers two statutes in the Coptic version, the first prohibiting any work on the Sabbath, and the other calling Friday "the preparation day."⁶ Following is the Coptic statute regarding Sabbath observance:

Let the servants (of the Lord) work five days; On the Sabbath (Sabbaton) and the Lord's day (*kyriake*) let them rest for the church that they may be instructed in piety. The Sabbath because God Himself rested on it when He completed all the creation. The Lord's day because it is the day of the resurrection of the Lord.

In regard to the Northern group, he observes:

Perhaps the justification for observing Sunday as produced by the Ethiopic version of the *Statutes of the Apostles* does not appeal to either Jews or Christians today, yet it must have sounded reasonable to the Early Christians of the southern group of churches during the fourth century of our era. Nevertheless, the question is: Why did the editor of the Ethiopic version resort to such a justification? The only logical answer to this question is to suppose some sort of complaint on the part of people regarding working only on five days and resting on two. **This in turn leads us to think that prior to the fourth century, Christians in Egypt and Ethiopia may have observed only the seventh-day,**

and that for some reason the Coptic bishops more recently had introduced the observance of Sunday. Being conservative, the Copts in accepting Sunday did not abandon the Sabbath. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that the Coptic bishop who represented the Copts at Nicea is known to have agreed to hold the Easter festival on Sunday instead of the Jewish passover.¹¹ It does not seem sensible that they should have honored the resurrection day itself on the Jewish passover if they observed Sunday as a weekly rest. Comparing this attitude of the southern group of churches to that of the northern group as illustrated by the Syriac version of the Statutes of the Apostles, we find a sharp difference of opinion. Referring to a day of rest, the Syriac version mentions only Sunday: . . . **And make not your worldly affairs of more account than the word of God; but on the Lord's day leave everything and run eagerly to your church . . .**

The world's most respected authority in this area of history and Arabic languages is Dr. Robert Kraft. (To learn more about Dr. Kraft's accomplishments, please view the article on him in *Wikipedia*.) Dr. Kraft wrote a paper that explains a set of issues that tend to invalidate Dr. Bishai's conclusions about the alleged Sabbath-keeping differences between the Northern and Southern Coptic churches. We will explore Dr. Kraft's objections shortly. Dr. Kraft also focuses on the merits of the different versions of *Apostolic Constitutions*, but with different conclusions.

DR. KRAFT ON DR. BISHAI

Dr. Kraft's statements in this section are all taken from his paper, **Some Notes on Sabbath Observance in Early Christianity.**"

Dr. Kraft explains Dr. Bishai's position on Saturday and Sunday observance among the Northern Copts as follows:

In the inaugural issue of *Seminary Studies*, W.B. Bishai has attempted to shed some light on the development of the custom of observing Sunday as a rest day in addition to the seventh-day Sabbath in early Coptic (and related) Christianity.¹ He suggests that it may have been under the influence of the first Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) that this situation first came about:

(One) It seems possible that Sabbath observance among the Copts in Egypt and Ethiopia may have passed through three stages:

(Two) Only the seventh-day observed – from apostolic times until the Council of Nicea;

(Three) Sunday and the seventh-day Sabbath both observed – from the Council of Nicea until perhaps a century or two later

(Four) Only Sunday designated as a day of public worship – a practice still observed today (p. 31).

In simplified terms, Dr. Kraft argues that Dr. Bishai thinks he has sources to analyze that originate from a variety of sources, including proprietary Coptic and Alexandrian Coptic sources, when most of these sources ultimately came from Greek

Christian writings which were translated into the Coptic language. **The problem, again simplified for my purposes, is that the Greek Christians seemed to have observed both Saturday and Sunday from the earliest dates that can be determined.**

Ellen White and her successors have taught for nearly the last 150 years that the early Christians kept both Saturday and Sunday with Sunday gradually displacing Saturday as a false and sinister replacement for the Bible Sabbath. This concept is the basis for the "Dual Day Theory" of Sabbath abandonment developed after 1980 by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to replace the highly discredited and historically impossible teaching of Ellen White that the papacy "changed" the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. But as we will come to see, this information does not support a conspiracy-apostasy picture of the contrasting recognitions afforded to Saturday and Sunday "observance" by the Gentile churches. The details are in the unique view the first Christians observed both Saturday and Sunday without attributing any intrinsic sacredness to either day. While Saturday had a special function in their weekly lives, it was not treated as a holy day in the Jewish way.

Here is what Dr. Kraft says:

This suspicion is borne out by a closer look at the passages adduced – the "Coptic statute regarding Sabbath observance" which Bishai cites as prime evidence (p. 27) is in fact a verbatim translation from Greek and is preserved in a parallel Greek form in *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII. 33.2: *Greek Apostolic Constitutions* (11). *Sahidic Statutes*" (12)

Let the slaves(13) work five days. But on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day let them devote themselves to the church that they may be instructed in piety. The Sabbath, indeed, because God himself rested on it when he completed all the creation and the Lord's Day because it is the day of the resurrection of the Lord.

Thus the statement that such passages are exclusive to the "southern group" (Coptic-Arabic-Ethiopic) as opposed to the "northern group" (Greek-Latin-Syriac) is incorrect. On this point alone, the framework of Bishai's argument collapses – which is not to say that his conclusions are necessarily false, but only that they do not follow from the evidence he cites.

In the literature of the time, we find it very clear that these early Christians made an effort to distance themselves from the observance of the Saturday festival in the Jewish manner. Again, Kraft continues:

But the same Synod prescribes that "the Gospels along with other Scriptures be read on the Sabbath" (Canon 16), and recognizes the special nature of the two days, Sabbath [Page 24] and Lord's Day, during Lent (*Canons* 49,51). A similar attitude is attested by the Christian editor (from Antioch-Syria?) who expanded the Ignatian Epistles at about the same time:

Therefore let us no longer observe the Sabbath
in a Judaistic way and rejoice in idleness...
But each of you should observe Sabbath in a

spiritual way, rejoicing in study of laws...
And after keeping the Sabbath, let every lover
of Christ celebrate the festival of the Lord's
Day – the resurrection day, the royal day,
the most excellent of all days (19).

One of the keys to understanding the observance of both Saturday and Sunday in the Coptic Church is the fact that their guiding literature originated from the Greek-speaking Christian sources. Again, Kraft continues:

Finally, if we are allowed for the moment to treat the *Apostolic Constitutions* as somewhat of a unity representing 4th-century Hellenistic Egyptian Christianity, we will find that it not only refers to the Sabbath and Sunday festal gatherings which commemorate creation and resurrection respectively,(20), and advocates rest from usual labors on these two days (See above on Bishai's main text, *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.33.2), but it also guards against leaving the impression that a person should be “idle” on the Sabbath – for creature as for creator, Sabbath rest means study of the laws, not idleness of hands (21). The *Apostolic Constitutions* and related literature are also quite clear that one is not to fast on the Sabbath, except at Passover/Easter time in memory of the Lord's death/burial (See *Apostolic. Constitutions* V. 14.20; 18.1f; 20.-19 [above, n. 17]; VII.23.3f; etc.)--an attitude which is widely attested by other contemporary witnesses such as Basil of Cappadocia (*De jejuniis*, hom. I.7,10; II.4.7), John Chrysostom of Antioch, *In Gen.*, hom. 13.2), and even Augustine of Hippo (*Ep.* 36, *ad Casulanum* 2.4). [Page 25].

Larry Dean's new chapter on the explosion of Christianity in Greek-speaking areas of the Roman Empire explains the various cultural attitudes that would have made it impossible for the Gospel to succeed in these areas if the Jewish Sabbath and dietary laws had been imposed on the Greeks. The Greeks hated the Jewish Sabbath because it caused the Jews to be idle one-seventh of their lives always doing nothing. Similarly, the Greeks believed that pork was the best meat ever made available for consumption to the human race. If Paul had preached the Sabbath and the Jewish dietary laws, he would have gotten nowhere with the Greeks. For a complete view of this picture, please study Dean's chapter. It is with this new understanding of the relationship between the explosion of Christianity as it related to all things related to the Greeks that Dr. Kraft's observation above takes on added meaning.

As Dean so thoroughly documents in his chapter on Greek Christianity, there is no record that the Eastern Orthodox churches ever kept the Jewish Sabbath. The records of the Greek Orthodox Church go back almost to the very beginning, and the record is that the seventh-day was kept as a festival and the first day was observed as a day of gathering together for public worship.

Kraft argues that the message of ancient Greek-Coptic Christian literature does hint of the possibility that some small pockets of believers may have kept the Sabbath in the Jewish manner, but he is quick to note that such is not definitive. He lists several of these considerations:

There are, indeed, a few additional clues from second century Christian literature which suggest that some Christian communities habitually kept the Sabbath at that early date.

(1) *Didache* 8:1 retains the Jewish name [for the] ("day of preparation" before the Sabbath) for Friday, which might indicate that Sabbath was still observed. It could be argued, per contra, that [*Greek word here is not reproducible*] here has simply become a standard designation for the 6th day of the week and does not carry any implications concerning Sabbath observance. The Jewish-Christian flavor of the *Didache* in general, however, along with the apparently anti-Pharisaic polemic in 8:1 and the preservation of the *Didache* tradition by the Eastern communities which maintained the dual observance (it is embedded in *Apostolic Constitutions* VII) argue against such a neutral use of [*Greek word here is not reproducible*] In 14:1, the *Didache* also speaks of observing the Eucharist on the [*Greek here is not reproducible*] --the weekly Lord's Day (or does it mean Easter Sunday?) – showing that the first-day observance also seems to have been practiced by the communities which the *Didache* tradition represents (Syria? Egypt?).

(2) The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* also uses the designation [non-reproducible Greek word] (7:1) **and does not hesitate to record that Polycarp's death fell on (and was commemorated on?) a "Great Sabbath" (8:1; 21:1), despite the hostile attitude to the Jews exhibited elsewhere in that document (see 12:2; 13:1).** Thus it may be that the churches of Asia Minor among whom the *Martyrdom* circulated also retained some contact with Sabbath observances in the later second century. Although neither the *Martyrdom* nor the preserved *Epistle of Polycarp* makes mention of Sunday observance, it would be difficult to conclude from [Page 27] this that Polycarp and those who revered him did not in fact also observe the Sunday day of gladness.

(3) There probably is more than symbolic significance to Logion 27 of *Gospel of Thomas*: "If you do not fast to the world, you will not find the Kingdom; if you do not keep the Sabbath as a true Sabbath, you will not see the Father." (25) These sentiments circulated in the second century in Greek, and some years later they were translated into Coptic also. They would seem to find their life-setting in a community which in some way observed the seventh-day Sabbath, although it is not at all clear whether this community also observed Sunday.

Furthermore, the second century provides us with another type of evidence that certain Christians may have continued to observe the Jewish Sabbath; namely, by the occasional polemic against such a practice. (1) In the opening years of that century, Ignatius of Antioch warns the Magnesians in Asia Minor not to live "in accord with Judaism" but to follow the insight which even the divine prophets of old had received through God's grace and to live "in accord with Christ Jesus," God's Son and God's Logos sent to man.

If then, those who walked in the ancient customs[i.e., the aforementioned prophets] came to have a new hope, no longer "sabbatizing" but living in accord with the Lord's life –in which life there sprang up also our life through him and through his death – ...how shall we be able to live apart from him, of whom the prophets also were disciples, since they had received him as teacher in the spirit? Wherefore, he whom they justly

awaited when he arrived, raised them from the death....Thus, we should be his disciples– we should learn to live in accord with Christianity... It is absurd to proclaim Jesus Christ and to "judaize". For Christianity has not placed its trust in Judaism, but vice-versa (26).

Again, thanks to Larry Dean's recent research on Greek Orthodox Christianity, we have another *Gestalt*. As noted elsewhere in this book, the Greek Orthodox Church celebrated only two Sabbaths a year. The first one was "The Great Sabbath." It was celebrated on the Saturday that came immediately before Easter Sunday, and it commemorated the last Sabbath there ever was– kept by Jesus as He rested in the tomb the night before Resurrection morning. Here is the *Wikipedia* entry from the article, "Holy Sabbath:"

In Eastern Orthodoxy this day, known as **Holy and Great Saturday**, is also called **The Great Sabbath** since it is on this day that Christ "rested" physically in the tomb. But it is also believed that it was on this day he performed in spirit the Harrowing of Hades and raised up to Paradise those who had been held captive there. In the Coptic, Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches, this day is known as **Joyous Saturday**.

The second Sabbath observed once a year by the Greek Orthodox Church was Lazarus Saturday. It was celebrated on the Saturday immediately preceding Palm Sunday (See *Wikipedia* article, Lazarus Saturday.)

Dr. Kraft may not have understood that he was dealing with the work of a scholar who had Seventh-day Adventist connections. Dr. Bishai is likely to always want to see that an ancient church started out keeping the Jewish Sabbath and then transitioned over time to keeping the false Sabbath, or Sunday. The idea seems like a good one to bolster the credibility of Adventism's focus on the Sabbath, but the devil is in the details. A belief model that really works for them remains continually illusive. Again, Kraft takes on Bishai's Sabbatarian-friendly theory:

The central thesis of Bishai's argument, however, still remains to be considered: **Did Coptic Christianity observe only the Sabbath rest until the mid-4th century, when Sunday observance was added under the influence of Nicea?** The failure of adequate evidence from Coptic Christianity prior to the 4th century makes it impossible to discuss this hypothesis with precision. An important aspect of the problem is the date at which one can speak of "Coptic" Christianity as an entity to be compared with other types (e.g., "Hellenistic") of Christianity – Bishai implies that such a distinction is possible "from apostolic times" onward (p. 31), but this is open to serious doubt. Certainly there were Coptic and Ethiopian Christians soon after Christian missionary work began, but no distinctively Coptic Christian community [Page 30] emerges until the middle of the 3d century (29). Prior to that time, it would seem that whatever Christian communities did exist in "non-Hellenistic" Egypt used primarily Greek and not Coptic as their "official" language; since Greek was the political language of Egypt at this time, as well as the language of the Egyptian Church, organized around Alexandria, they were not particularly isolated from "Hellenistic Christianity.(30)

This, plus the fact that the **multitude of Coptic texts which refer to the observance of both Sabbath and Sunday in 4th-century Egypt give no hint that this is a new**

practice, seriously undercuts Bishai's thesis. It would seem that as peculiarly Coptic Christianity developed (in the 3d century?), it adopted and translated certain traditions current in the Hellenistic East – like the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*. **Thus from its very beginnings, "Coptic Christianity" observed both Sabbath and Sunday, because such was the practice taught in its adopted traditions!**

SOLOMONIC JUDAISM IN ETHIOPIA: THE KEY TO THE DIFFERENCES

Both scholars seem unaware of the astonishing fact that Ethiopia has apparently been a stronghold of Judaism from the time of King Solomon to this day. The story is told in greater detail in Larry Dean's chapter on the Ethiopian churches. A combination of credible legend and verifiable historical data suggests that King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba had a dalliance when she visited him at his palace in Jerusalem. King Solomon taught her the worship of the True God and sent copies of the Jewish sacred manuscripts with her back to Ethiopia. She taught Judaism to her people, built a temple for the worship of the True God, and bore King Solomon's son. Her son's name and accomplishments are documented by history and legends. The story goes that Melenik, when he became of age, journeyed to Jerusalem to visit his father, King Solomon, before he died. While he was in Jerusalem he noticed that the political situation was very unstable, and he worried that the Ark of the Covenant was at serious risk. He and his soldiers built a replica of the Ark and snuck into the Temple one night and switched them, taking off immediately for the border with the real Ark. Solomon was notified of the situation and Solomon's army pursued Menelik but his soldiers were unable to catch up with him. Melenik escaped to Ethiopia with the Ark, and the historical legend claims that the Ark was placed in a secret dungeon under a Christian church. To this day the Ethiopians claim to have the Ark in this same location.

The early observance of the Jewish Sabbath in Ethiopia is exactly what this historical legend would suggest. The Evangelist, Philip, taught him the Gospel, and he returned to the Kingdom of Sheba with the great news. Converts to Christianity were largely drawn from this population of Ethiopian Jews. Without the benefit of the writings of the Apostles, the first Christians in Ethiopia would almost certainly continue the tradition of Sabbath-keeping. In fact, to this very day there is a large enclave of Sabbath-keeping Christians. They are Roman Catholics, and give their allegiance to the pope of Rome. This qualifies them to be thought of as Seventh-day Catholics.

Christian missionaries who came to Ethiopia a century or centuries later were astonished to find populations of both Jews and Christians right smack in the depths of Africa. These missionaries, being from the Eastern Orthodox churches, never kept the Sabbath. They would have introduced Sunday observance and attempted to teach them that Sabbath-keeping was against the plain teachings of the apostles. As a result in Ethiopia during these early days of Christianity there were Jews, Sabbath-keeping Christians, Sunday-observing Christians, and Christians who observed Saturday as a festival but worshipped on the first day of the week. Note the similarity of the latter group of Christians to the original church, the Greek Orthodox Church, which never kept the Jewish Sabbath but rather observes Sunday as a day of worship and certain Saturdays a year as a "festival"-- the Sabbath Festival.

For documentation of the various Christian denominations in Ethiopia, please see Larry Deans chapter on this subject.

SUMMARY

Thanks to inputs from multiple sources over many decades of research by a number of different scholars, including ourselves, we are in a better position than ever before to paint a picture of Sabbath-keeping among Christians for the first 300-400 years of the Faith:

- There have probably always been small groups of Christians who kept the Sabbath in the manner of the Jews. One particular group is likely to have been the Nazarenes.
- From our chapter on the lunar Sabbath, we know that some Jewish sects, like the Nazarenes, and some isolated groups of Christians, kept the Jewish Sabbath according to the lunar calendar.
- The first Christians, and virtually all of the churches in the East, tended to OBSERVE Saturdays, but they did not KEEP it and did not view the day as possessing intrinsic sacredness in and of itself. It was observed as a festival – in fact, a religious festival.
- The first Christians seem to have OBSERVED both Saturdays and Sundays as religious “festivals,” not attributing any holiness to either day.
- The “Dual Day” Theory of Sabbath Abandonment created and promoted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is an unfortunate half-truth. What is true about it is that the first Christians honored both Saturday and Sunday as a general rule. What is wrong about this “Dual Day Theory” is that almost immediately, Christians everywhere ceased to view Saturday as the sacred Sabbath. Neither Saturday nor Sunday were considered to be sacred days. When the church moved toward one major gathering day a week, the choice of Sunday did not represent the substitution of a phony “Sabbath” for the real one.
- One of the factions of the Southern Coptic church, Christian converts from the large and nearly mysterious pocket of Judaism in Ethiopia, probably always KEPT the seventh-day in the Jewish manner even if Sundays were attributed with similar reverence. Evidence that this generalization is likely to be very consistently true is that the “Seventh-day Catholics” of Ethiopia keep the Seventh-day Sabbath to this very day.

As a clearer picture of the conditions present within the early church progressed right up through the 1960’s and beyond, Adventism has struggled to maintain credibility with the following assumptions:

That Sabbath abandonment was the result of a sinister conspiracy that represented a very early apostasy.

That the pope changed the Sabbath.

That there was an unbroken chain of loyal Sabbath-keeping Christians of substance that kept the true Sabbath from apostolic times up until the present day.

As far as Adventist scholarship goes – if you can dignify it with that term – it has been one defeat after another in regard to its conspiracy-apostasy theory of Sabbath abandonment. As we present in other chapters, the members of D.A. Carson’s Sabbatarian research team – some of the finest

biblical scholars in the world – studied the three theories of Sabbath abandonment proposed to replace Ellen White’s failed theory that the pope changed the Sabbath, and discredited them.

One of the themes of *Lying for God* is that top Adventist leadership has known for many years that Ellen White was a false prophet and that its Sabbath-keeping theology had been thoroughly discredited. We have pointed out numerous times that when it comes to these subjects, no amount of evidence to the contrary is acceptable.

In another chapter we tell the story of J.N. Andrews, Ellen G. White’s *de facto* historian, who conceded in writing that Sabbath-keeping was universally abandoned by 200 AD. It has been widely known for centuries that there was no bishop of Rome who qualified to be considered a “pope” until the mid 400’s. Yet, despite these immovable facts of history, Andrews was an outspoken supporter of Ellen White’s conspiracy theory that the pope had changed the Sabbath. He seems to have allowed the nearly undeniable supernatural element of her public visions to believe her words despite having the facts staring him right in the face that would have told any reasonable man that the woman was either lying or delusional.

If we want to give the Adventists some much needed slack, we can concede in their favor that determining Sabbath observance, Sunday observance, or both day observance during the first 400 years of Christianity is not easy. From the content of our other chapters, here is a summary of the reasons why examining the Christian writings of the first 300-400 years of the Faith must be conducted with extreme caution:

Some early writers viewed Sunday as the Sabbath, whether it was kept in the Jewish manner or as a festival, and in their writings they labeled it as the “Sabbath.” Exhaustive studies are often necessary to determine what day these writers meant. In some cases it is possible to determine their intent by the content of their entire set of writings and/or related writings, and in other cases it is not possible to determine which day was intended by the terminology of “Sabbath.”

There is little doubt that the Jewish Christians in Palestine clung to literal, Jewish Sabbath observance for many years. While some of them probably figured out that when Circumcision was nixed in 50 AD that the Sabbath observance was not required for Christians, they probably continued keeping the Sabbath as part of their Jewish heritage, as did the Nazarenes and other Christians who observed the Sabbath according to the four phases of the moon – the lunar Sabbath.

The Apostle Paul himself, seemed to allow for Sabbath-keeping, despite its serious theological ramifications, for either Jews or Gentiles. Through the Spirit of God he instructed Christians not to judge each other in regard to whether they kept the sabbaths or not.

For the serious theological problems with Sabbath-keeping, please see Kerry Wynne’s chapter about Colossians 2:14-17.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

List of Sabbath-keeping Groups Throughout Church History Provided by Sabbatarian Apologist Marcos Schroeckenthaler

The Malabar Christians of India, established by St. Thomas, were discovered and it was learned by Jesuit missionaries that they also observed the Sabbath. Not just in Ethiopia. But Ethiopia ALONE is sufficient to prove Sabbath-keeping in early Christianity. REBUTTAL BY KERRY WYNNE: This Seventh-day Adventist

claim that these Malabar Christians kept the Jewish Sabbath has largely been debunked. A Seventh-day Adventist scholar debunks this theory and explains the errors of how this misunderstanding likely took place in a paper entitled, SABBATHKEEPING AMONG CHRISTIANS IN INDIA: A BRIEF NOTE AECIO E. CAMS, PH.D. Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, PHILIPPINE. This paper can be found and studied with an Internet search.

CELTIC SABBATH KEEPING CHRISTIANS:

Here's some history of the Sabbath-keeping Churches in Scotland and Ireland during the 4th-11th centuries:

Andrew Lang, in "A History of Scotland from the Roman Occupation", Vol. I, p. 96, wrote:

"In Scotland until the tenth and eleventh centuries it was asserted that: They worked on Sunday but kept Saturday in a Sabbatical manner ... These things Margaret abolished."

In "History of Scotland," Vol. I, p. 96. Prof. Andrew Lang says:

"The Scottish Church, then, when Malcolm wedded the sainted English Margaret, was Celtic, and presented peculiarities odious to the English lady, strongly attached to the establishment as she knew it at home The Celtic priests must have disliked the interference of an Englishwoman. "First there was a difference in keeping Lent. The Kelts did not begin it on Ash Wednesday They worked on Sunday, but kept Saturday in a sabbatical manner" In "Celtic Scotland ," Vol. II, p. 349. Edinburgh : David Douglas, printer, 1877.

William F. Skene says:

"Her next point was that they did not duly reverence the Lord's day, but in this latter instance they seem to have followed a custom of which we find traces in the early Monastic Church of Ireland, by which they held Saturday to be the 'Sabbath on which they rested from all their labours.'"—"Celtic Scotland ," Vol. II, p. 349. Edinburgh : David Douglas, printer, 1877.

"They held that Saturday was properly the Sabbath on which they abstained from work."— Id. , p. 350.

In Blair's translation of the Catholic historian, Bellesheim, we read:

"We seem to see here an allusion to the custom, observed in the early monastic Church of Ireland, of keeping the day of rest on Saturday, or the Sabbath"—"History of the Catholic Church in Scotland," Vol. I, p. 86.

Professor James C. Moffatt, D. D. , Professor of Church History at Princeton, says:

"It seems to have been customary in the Celtic churches of early times, in Ireland as well as Scotland , to keep Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, as a day of rest from labor. They obeyed the fourth commandment literally upon the seventh day of the week."—"The Church in Scotland ," p. 140. Philadelphia :1882.

Noted theologian James Moffat reported:

"It seems to have been customary in the Celtic churches of early times, in Ireland as well as Scotland, to keep

Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, as a day of rest from labor, and Sunday, commemorative of the Lord's resurrection, as one of rejoicing, with exercises of public worship. In that case they obeyed the fourth commandment literally upon the seventh day of the week... The Queen insisted upon the single and strict observance of the Lord's Day. People and clergy alike submitted, but without entirely giving up their reverence for Saturday, which subsequently sank into a half-holy day preparatory for Sunday" (Moffat, James Clement. *The Church in Scotland: A History of Its Antecedents, its Conflicts, and Its Advocates, from the Earliest Recorded Times to the First Assembly of the Reformed Church*. Published by Presbyterian Board of Education, 1882. Original from the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Digitized Mar 13.

Though details are lacking, it is not difficult to picture the leaders of Columba's church in Scotland as, for three days, they were obliged to listen to the proceedings of Margaret's council. There were points to listen to the proceedings of Margaret's council. There were points of difference as is recorded in her Life, written by her priestly confessor, Turgot (Barnett, *Margaret of Scotland, Queen and Saint*, page 89).

The first two points were relative to the age-long controversy about Easter. It was all a matter of religious opinion with which the government had no right to concern itself. As to the third point, on the celebration of the mass, some authorities think this was an indignant threat, because the Culdees conducted the services of the Lord's Supper not in Latin, as Rome did, but in the native language.

The question of Sabbath and Sunday was particularly contested. As shown clearly in other quotations from Drs. Flick and Barnett, the traditional practice of the Celtic Church was to observe Saturday instead of Sunday as the day of rest. This position is supported by a host of authors, as previously given. The Roman Catholic historian, Bellesheim, gives the claim of the queen and describes the practice of the Scots as follows:

"The queen further protested against the prevailing abuse of Sunday desecration. 'Let us,' she said, 'venerate the Lord's day, inasmuch as upon it our Saviour rose from the dead: let us do not servile work on that day.'... The Scots in this matter had no doubt kept up the traditional practice of the ancient monastic Church of Ireland, which observed Saturday rather than Sunday as a day of rest." (Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, vol. 1. pp. 249, 250)

Andrew Lang writing up on the general practice of the Celtic Church says:

"They worked on Sunday, but kept Saturday in a sabbatical manner." (Lang, *A History of Scotland*, vol. 1, p. 96)

Another author states:

"It seems to have been customary in the Celtic churches of early times, in Ireland as well as Scotland, to keep Saturday the Jewish Sabbath, as a day of rest from labor. They obeyed the fourth commandment literally upon the seventh day of the week." (Moffat, *The Church in Scotland*, page 140)

The Historian Skene in commenting upon the work of Queen Margaret also reveals the prominence of the Sabbath question as follows:

"Her next point was that they did not duly reverence the Lord's day, but in this latter instance they seemed to have followed a custom of which we find traces in the early monastic Church of Ireland, by which they held

Saturday to be the Sabbath on which they rested from all their labors, and on Sunday on the Lord's day, they celebrated the resurrection." (Smith, The Life of Columba, page 142)

Despite what critics wish to believe, Sabbath-keeping was deeply rooted and entrenched in Celtic Christian lifestyle for centuries, until finally it was abolished by Papal usurpation after the turn of the millennium. REBUTTAL BY KERRY WYNNE: While it is possible that the papacy abolished Celtic Sabbath observance, it is unlikely. Note that there is a Roman Catholic church that observes the Seventh-day Saturday Sabbath in Ethiopia. We document this fact elsewhere. It seems that if the papacy disliked Sabbath-keeping so much, it would have abolished this Ethiopian Catholic Sabbath observance over a thousand years ago. KW