

## Church History (Part 4) A.D.1585-1934

### **The Sardis Era of the True Church**

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It's been six weeks since I spoke to you last. So I've had a lot of time to get a lot of business items for the church finished and completed, and also taken care of things that had built up prior to that time. If you think way back, you may remember that I was going through CHURCH HISTORY (as a series); and I've went through three parts. Today will be part 4, and it will cover basically what we call traditionally *as the Sardis Era* of God's church. The dates that we generally attribute to that would be 1585-1934 A.D.

Will and Ariel Durant, authors of *The Story of Civilization*, stated: "*We Americans are the best informed people on earth as to the events of the last twenty-four hours. We are not the best informed as to the events of the last sixty centuries.*" Oh, is that so true. It's an Israelite trait that we have forgotten our identity as a nation. The descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel have also forgotten the way of life that God gave to them through Moses.

This Israelite trait of *forgetfulness of God's truth* is also seen in the history of The Church of God down through the ages. Time after time, this characteristic is shown by those called by God to be among the firstfruits of the Kingdom. We saw it in the previous three sermons in this series on CHURCH HISTORY. We saw that Ephesus lacked diligence and love for the doctrine of Christ, and that Smyrna was sorely tested in their appreciation for the doctrine of Christ. Pergamos compromised the doctrine of Christ, and Thyatira was guilty of spiritual adultery. Many stayed in the Catholic Church—under valuing the holiness of the doctrine of Christ.

We will see that Sardis forgot much of the doctrine of Christ, as we go through this era. As we look at the Sardis Era and its attitude, we will see that those called were only to grow to a certain point and were unable to go over the wall that prevented them from making substantial spiritual growth. Because of this, their general characteristic was that they were *aspiritually dead church*. They didn't prove all things and search the Scriptures daily with the help of the Holy Spirit. Many allowed it to die down to just an ember, and eventually to die out. The result was that they produced few works; and we know that "faith without works" is a *dead faith*.

We'll read Revelation 3: 1-2, where we'll see that Jesus Christ verified that the Sardis Era began at a time when HIS TRUTH was in danger of being completely forgotten.

Revelation 3:1-2 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen [That is, do not forget.] the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

Jesus Christ said that the outstanding characteristic of the Sardis Era of His church was that they had a name that indicated that they were alive (from a physical point of view). That means that they existed. Sardis had a name—that is, a position or an office—representing God as one of the seven living eras of God's church. But it was, according to the inspired original Greek, *as if dead*. That is, as if they were spiritually dead. They accomplished little, or nothing, as a witness for God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Christ exhorted the people of the Sardis church to get busy. In the original Greek, it reads: *Become watchful or wake up*. They were to "strengthen the things which remain." That is, the doctrine that they already had, but that was ready to die. They *had* doctrines that they had received from the previous eras and from the apostles and all; but they were allowing them to die because of their forgetfulness. There was a lot that was lacking in the doctrine and practice that they received from the latter end of the Thyatira Era.

Proper organization and biblically based teaching in the church were in great need of strengthening, and they desperately needed an organized way to teach God's truth—because basically, at the end of the Thyatira Era, it was disintegrating to a point where they were doing no work at all.

Of all the seven churches, Christ had the least to say to Sardis—since there were only a few in the Sardis Era who had not spiritually defiled their garments. There again, as we saw all the way through the previous eras, it was THE FEW who remained faithful. And here again, for Sardis, we find that Christ says there were *a few* whose garments were not defiled.

Revelation 3:4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

They were THE FEW, who had not defiled themselves by coming into contact with the *irreverent* and the *polluted*. In other words, they had kept themselves free spiritually from the prevailing corruption that had constantly been entering into the groups that the Church of God met with. They were like people clothed in white—walking in the midst of the defiled, but keeping their clothing from getting dirty *spiritually*.

As a side note, significantly the site of the ancient city of Sardis is completely deserted today. Nomad Turkish herders pitch their tents near a place called "Sart," which even continues a little bit of the name of Sardis. But its dead condition symbolizes the spiritual condition of the Sardis Era of God's church!

About 1585 A.D. (almost immediately after the end of her 1260 years in the wilderness), God's church began to revive. Unlike the previous revivals in Asia Minor and Europe, this revival began in England. It was being revived in a totally new area of the world—a new place. Chamber's Encyclopedia under the article "Sabbath" states that in the reign of Elizabeth I (and her reign lasted from 1558-1603, to give you a time period in history) many conscientious and independent thinkers advocated the seventh-day Saturday Sabbath." Most of them—although they saw the truth about the Sabbath—were NOT truly converted in heart and mind. What they

actually became were Sabbath worshippers, rather than worshippers of the one true God and the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

A great disputation about the Sabbath arose. They would argue for the Sabbath; but they would NOT sincerely surrender to God in obedience and repentance. So really they were looking as if they were part of the Church of God only in that they were keeping the Sabbath. They weren't keeping the rest of the doctrines. During this time in history, Sabbath keepers were very well known; and books were published urging the keeping of the seventh day Saturday Sabbath.

One of these not satisfied with the Puritan Sunday service was a very verbal, outspoken, minister named John Traske. Traske also understood the truth concerning unclean meats. He ordained four evangelists in about 1616 A.D., whose labors resulted in the conversion of large numbers of people as they went around preaching throughout England and the British Isles.

Cox's analysis, entitled *Literature of the Sabbath Question*, volume 1, page 157, tells us that because of these things Traske was censored in the Star Chamber (which was an official part of the Church of England at that time). He was set on a pillory, publicly whipped, and then imprisoned. Three years later, having written and published a recantation—which was more a brief and silly essay (in the way that it is worded in history)—he obtained his release. And he *"afterwards relapsed, not into the same, but other opinions rather humorous than hurtful."* Meaning that what he did is that he made a joke out of God's truth in order to get out from being in prison. Thus, he didn't stick with it—even though he had raised up many to preach the Sabbath doctrine.

His wife died having been confined for about fifteen years for holding fast to the Sabbath. So there we see a case where the wife was very strong in the faith; but the husband, who was a minister, didn't hold fast. He didn't hold steady to the Sabbath doctrine and to the other doctrines that he believed. Rather, he gave in to the largest church at that time in that area—being the Church of England.

Another who shared Traske's belief in keeping the Sabbath was Theophilus Brabourne. He was a former Puritan minister in Norfolk, England—where many Anabaptists from Holland had migrated. If you think way back to previous sermons on this, you will remember that the Anabaptists were associated with God's truth. And actually people in God's truth—the elect—were actually labeled as "Anabaptists" when they weren't really. They were just lumped under that general heading. But Theophilus Brabourne published books in 1628 and 1632 advocating the true Sabbath. Thus, he continued to promote it.

Cox said of Theophilus: "[He] *may be regarded as the founder in England of the sect at first known as Sabbatarians, but now calling themselves Seventh Day Baptists.*" Cox continues: *"This sect arose in Germany in the Sixteenth Century."* What Cox was referring to in his history there were those who the world loosely called Anabaptists a little latter on in history and in Europe.

Later, the official pressure was brought to bear on Theophilus, and Cox wrote that he *"became a convert, conforming himself quietly [though temporarily] to the Church of England. His followers, however, did not all accompany him back to orthodoxy."* So there we see two ministers who were promoting the seventh day Saturday Sabbath and other doctrines of God; and yet the pressure that came upon them by the Church of England (which at times could be

as serious as the Catholic Church was in England) [caused them to] give in. They didn't hold on true to the doctrines and weren't really willing to witness unto death. We see that occasionally, and it is a sad thing to see.

About this time, Philip Tandy (a minister of the Church of England in northern England) saw the truth concerning the Sabbath and the true mode of baptism; and he abandoned the Church of England. And Underhill stated in his book, *In Confession of Faith and Other Public Documents*, that another book in defense of the Sabbath was written by James Ockford and published about 1642. His enemies called him an Anabaptist. You see that they lumped everyone under that label. Sabbatarians, true Church of God, or any Sabbath keepers were lumped under the "Anabaptists" label. At this time, those who called themselves the Church of God were commonly and falsely called Anabaptists.

Many others throughout the 1600 and 1700s also wrote and published works expounding and defending biblical truth—in particular the commandment to keep God's Sabbath. The *called of God* of the Sardis Era were beginning to use God's gift of the printing press, though still not with the zeal needed to do a visible work. So that's why we see, in this time period, so many books being published about keeping the seventh-day Sabbath—not only by the church members themselves but actually primarily by non-members of God's church who were promoting the seventh-day Sabbath. But it was the members of God's church at that time who really understood it, and how it was to be kept.

Now much is known of the congregations and local members of the true church during the first decades of the 1600s because they were persecuted somewhat and also were confused many times in history with [other] seventh-day keepers (as I mentioned earlier). For the most part, God's people had to stay very low key—because it was still illegal for them to hold Sabbath services, and to worship and preach. According to the book *The Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*, page 78, all was not easy for God's people. At least two ministers were martyred for preaching and conducting religious services outside of the nationally recognized church—the Church of England—at that time.

We know that one of the London churches goes back at least to the time of Traske and the four evangelists that he had ordained. Evidence is that this Mill Yard congregation (as it is called) dates back to 1607, or even possibly from the 1580s. It's can't be pinpointed exactly when the Mill Yard church, that housed some of God's people, was started; but it did last for quite a while. Positive evidence is extant for the existence of several other congregations in the 1650s too.

By 1668 A.D., in England there were nine or ten congregations (besides the numerous scattered brethren of God's church in other places). Edward Stennett, which is a name that is very prominent in the history of God's church, was one of the English ministers at that time. And Cox wrote in his *Literature of the Sabbath Question*, page 267: "*So wrote the famous seventh-day minister, Edward Stennett, to Rhode Island members not yet organized into a local church. Stennett addressed the Rhode Island members as 'the remnant in Rhode Island who keep the commandments of God and the testimonies of Jesus.'*"

The Stennett family, which provided ministers for the Church of God in England for four generations, is one example of the fact that Jesus Christ often uses and works through families.

As I said, they lasted for four generations in their prominence in God's church. And God used a similar approach with Abraham's family, as you remember. God began working with Abraham and continued down through his generations with Isaac and Jacob. God then inspired Jacob to command his family—as a physical and religious unit—to put away their foreign gods and to accompany him to Bethel, where Jacob set up an altar. (That's found in Genesis 18: 19.)

So throughout history, both in the Old and New Testaments times, God works through families. God sees families as an important unit for working out His purpose. Christ also used more than one member of several other families to proclaim His Word to the Sardis Era. Among them, in about 1675 A.D., were two brothers—Francis and Thomas Bampfield. Both of them wrote and published books on the Sabbath, on creation, on the law of God, and other doctrines. They were apparently quite accurate in their writings.

In their own book—A History of the True Church, page 241—Dugger and Dodd quoted from Francis Bampfield's book that the name of the church is "The Church of God." This has been one of the ways that we've been able to determine and distinguish where God's true church has been—by that name—the Church of God. Of these many organizations who end up associated with God's church, or who at times contained members of *God's true church*, in every case you see them changing their names to something else. That is, something other than "The Church of God" or something of that variation. They don't call themselves the Church of God. They call themselves the church of something else, or they are labeled other items that we'll see later. (For example, the Adventists.)

Francis Bampfield was driven from his Church of England pastorate in Devonshire by the 1662 Act of Conformity. (To call that "the Act of Conformity," it is obvious what the government was intending there. They wanted one church for their one country.) Much of his remaining life was spent in various jails. He raised up a small Sabbath-keeping congregation within the walls of Dorchester jail. When released, he began to hold meetings in London in his own rented house—much as the apostle Paul did in Acts 28: 30-31. He organized a congregation that continued for over a hundred years.

So even that is something that has happened time and time again in God's church. Many times people in God's church have to meet wherever they can, even in the jail like Francis Bampfield had to do. Shortly after being seized again, he died in prison. Then Edward Stennett (whom you'll remember from a few minutes ago) became pastor of the church. But Christ had exhorted His people in Sardis to not forget the way they received His truth through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Revelation 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

They were told to remember how they had received the truth. They received it from Jesus Christ, who used the prophets and apostles to guard and teach the truth in earlier church times—even unto death, to preserve it! They did not receive the truth from those who had fallen

away or perverted it, as Catholicism did or Protestantism is beginning to at this time.

Even through fear of persecution in England, and also later in America, many of the called of God continued to fellowship with those who had fallen way and even with some of the churches of this world. They proved that "many are called, but few are chosen" by the ease at which they committed *spiritual adultery* by attending these mainstream pseudo-Christian churches.

And so it was, as in all the eras of God's church. Many thousands were introduced to God's way through Scripture, and many of those promoted it to others; but most never took it to heart—internalizing it as a way of life, a way that was worth dying for. Many became Sabbath worshippers over the years, but they never internalized God's truth. So God's Word was consistently passed along down through the ages, many times by God raising up unconverted "stones" to help with the physical promotion of God's truth—as was done in the printing of the Bible. It was NOT God's people who printed the Bible. It was worldly people who printed the written Word, so that others could be converted later. Most were hearers only!

James 1:21-24 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

That's what these people were doing. When they were worshipping on the Sabbath as Sabbath worshippers, they were looking in the mirror and saying, "*I'm keeping the seventh-day Sabbath as God instructs.*" But they were doing little else to obey God.

James 1:25-27 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

One of the greatest failures of the Sardis Era was that they forgot what true and pure religion was, and they didn't keep themselves unspotted from the world. But they associated very closely with the world and its pagan churches. Many of the successors of the Waldensians later became Puritans within the established Church of England. Others, outside that church, had become Baptists. To their own demise, some of the ministers of the early Sardis Era of God's church maintained fellowship with these Protestants.

Jesus Christ was concerned about the inevitable result of this relationship with the world that some of His people maintained. They allowed—even encouraged—the circulation of false

doctrine among the called of God, causing more to fall away. Revelation 3: 3, which we just read, records that Jesus Christ commanded His Sardis people to repent. They had tolerated sin and false teachers within their midst and fellowshiped with unconverted Sunday keepers.

II Corinthians 6:14-15 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

This is exactly what the Sardis Era was guilty of—many, many times—over and over. And that was associating and having part with unbelievers.

II Corinthians 6:16-18 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate," says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters," says the LORD Almighty.

Fellowship—that is, close relationship—with those (in this case) of contrary beliefs to God's truth requires that a person be more tolerant of sin. A lesson in history is that *tolerance is the device used to turn free people into slaves*. By tolerating the sinful wrong-doing of others—for example homosexuality, adultery, child molestation, drugs, rape, or (as we are seeing very obviously today) terrorism—by tolerating those things, the sinful wrong-doing becomes rampant; and we become under subjection to it. It begins to rule our lives. Tolerance of sin moves those God calls from the *liberty* of the truth of God to the *slavery* of sin; and this principle stands firm in both the physical world as well as the spiritual world. Tolerance of sin leads to slavery.

The Sardis Era of God's church should have profited by the experiences of the Thyatira and Pergamos Eras of God's church before them. They should NOT have tolerated the unconverted teaching and promoting of different doctrinal opinions within their midst! Nor should they have invited ministers of other religions to preach to them.

One incident that will always very clearly ring in my ears and I'll always be able to visualize is that I personally witnessed, in 1989, that Dr. Herman Hoeh of the Worldwide Church of God invited a Buddhist monk to speak to the Worldwide congregation meeting in the Imperial Schools gym for services. What was he thinking? Obviously he thought that he knew better than God! This was in direct defiance to what Scripture tells us to do. This was a minister of a pagan religion that he brought in. It may have even been a holy day. I think it was the Sabbath. I'm not sure. But I know it was very close to the Feast of Tabernacles in 1989, when most of us (I think, all of us) were still in Worldwide.

This wasn't the only incident of this type. History shows that God's called out ones throughout

the Sardis Era felt they should always have love and tolerance for those of differing doctrinal opinions. They equated "love" with "tolerance." They even invited outside ministers right into their meetings and asked them to preach! They didn't realize that condoning false teachings by listening to them did harm both to the believer and the hearer—and the speaker and the listener. This false concept is one of the primary reasons that the Sardis church is called *dead*. They were dead partly because they didn't watch out for Satan's infestation of false teachers. They went 'above and beyond' to even invite them in.

The apostle Paul made it very plain that condoning evil in the church is NOT showing love. The inevitable result of such practice is clearly expressed in I Corinthians 5, where Paul chastises the church in Corinth for tolerating that flagrant sin that was being committed there between the stepson and his mother.

This treatment of sin is a common misconception of the Protestants. In their tolerant attitudes, they show themselves guilty of the very thing the apostle John cautioned in I John 2: 15. "Do NOT love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." *Tolerance of sin is a way of loving the things of the world.* And Christ warned Sardis, in Revelation 3: 3, that their ways would eventually leave them completely unprepared for His Second Coming!

Now consider, for example, the further history of the congregation founded by Francis Bampfield. According to the book *The Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*, page 65: "*For many years another separate seventh-day congregation also met in the same hall. One church met in the morning, the other in the afternoon... Through the years—and several changes of meeting place—the two congregations continued to use the same hall wherever they went. They mainly differed on the question of Calvinism.*"

I think it is helpful here just to give you a very quick and brief explanation of what they were looking at in the way of Calvinism there. Calvinism was a prominent Protestant theological belief system that began in the Sixteenth Century. It's basically the theological system of John Calvin and his followers—marked by a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God, and especially how it relates to the doctrine of predestination.

In about 1619 A.D., the Calvinists produced the Five Articles of the Synod of Dort, which among other things proposed that Christ died exclusively for the chosen ones. Generally, the Calvinists believed that God chose specific people to save, and no one else had an opportunity for salvation—and that once chosen a person was permanently saved. We know this false doctrine today as "*Once saved, always saved.*" Today Calvinism is the origin for the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. So you can see where the progression has lead.

I mention this false belief because its influence on the Sardis Era of God's church was substantial enough to lead many astray. Because of a lack of qualified ministers within the congregations of the Churches of God, services were often conducted by ministers of the other churches. During one period, four different Baptist ministers preached to the afternoon congregation that I mentioned to you earlier. Similar instances seem to have occurred in the morning church as well. And gradually the two congregations merged. By this time, the leaven of error was firmly entrenched in the Sardis Era of God's church. So you can see what inviting

other ministers into your enfold can do to congregations—even people claiming to be God's church.

According to the book *The Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*, page 42, later this combined congregation merged again—this time with the so-called Mill Yard church. Significantly, in the Mill Yard church building also there had been separate morning and afternoon services with separate ministers since 1754. And the Mill Yard church records of that year contain the earliest extant mention in England of a group known as "*a congregation of Protestants dissenting from the Church of England, commonly called Seventh-day Baptists.*"

Now, I might add at this point that the Seventh Day Baptists were never God's church. They were never part of it. There may have been members that had gone through there—that had started there and moved over to one of God's Sardis churches; but they were not.

That there were two separate groups of seventh-day churches in England during this time is also indicated by the fact that ministers were often required to be re-ordained to move from one Sabbath-keeping congregation to another. So just picture that. You have a congregation in the morning and a congregation in the afternoon, and they have similar beliefs; but, in order for a minister to move from one to the other, he has to be re-ordained. (Of course, that would be true if one was the true Church of God and one wasn't.)

According to the book by Belcher titled *Religious Denominations in the United States*, by the late 1700s these people had so adopted Protestant viewpoints that they began to elect their ministers, instead of relying on Jesus Christ to select them. Some of these ministers—even seventh-day believers themselves—had long pastored first-day congregations on Sunday as well as congregations of the Churches of God on the Saturday Sabbath!

That's how they "overcame" the problem of having a shortage of ministers. They just borrowed them from the Sunday-keeping Protestant churches. The natural result was a total lack of properly feeding the flock or promulgating God's truth. We can see why Christ called the Sardis Era dead. The church's tolerance for this spiritual adultery made all efforts to promote God's truth *dead* and *in vain*. Again, faith without *good works* is a dead faith!

Those in the Sardis Era needed more of God's Holy Spirit to strengthen them; but through their pursuit of their own form of religion, they lost this gift of God and error continued to weaken them. According to *A History of the Sabbath*, pages 733-734, by Andrews: "*With the Eighteenth Century, its zeal vanished.*" And the cause was their willingness to remain in fellowship with false churches!

Ephesians 3:14-19 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, [Especially notice this next verse.] that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened [This is something that the Sardis Era desperately needed.] with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth

and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

So God promises that He will strengthen those in His church who need the Holy Spirit. But the Sardis Era appears to have let their candle dwindle, and in many cases go out. It was only THE FEW that remained faithful. And it's THE FEW that we have very little record of in history.

Because of the political power of the Church of England, there were never very many Sabbath keepers in England. By about 1800, they had become almost extinct again. Since no seventh-day pastor could be found in Europe or England, the three remaining English congregations imported an American. He led them to limited prosperity again, but no longer as the Church of God. They now called themselves "Seventh Day Baptists." But before these early congregations were completely swallowed up in the Seventh Day Baptist denomination, Jesus Christ caused His church—the true Church of God—to be established in America.

Almost as early as local congregations are known to have existed in England, the Church of God in the Sardis Era spread to America. In 1664 (looking back just a few years), Stephen Mumford was sent from the Bell Lane Church of God in London, England to Newport, Rhode Island. For a while, he associated with the members of a Sunday Baptist church, and in time persuaded several of them to embrace his views of the Sabbath. After seven years, a seventh-day congregation of seven members was raised up. Isn't that interesting? It took seven years to get seven people to come out of that into God's truth. Seven members were raised up from these people; and they identified it as part of the Church of God.

The Church of God in Rhode Island became the mother church in America. It grew slowly for about thirty years. Then, in 1708, the enlarged and geographically widespread Newport congregation was officially separated into two congregations. The Newport congregation became the Westerly (and it was also called the Hopkinton) congregation; and they retained the original records—being recognized as the leading or headquarters location of God's church in America at that time.

The reason for this transfer is very interesting. Previous to this time, the Westerly (or Hopkinton) site had become the regular meeting place for a yearly meeting of members from all over. It was at such a meeting—on September 28 on the Gregorian calendar—that the decision was made to establish the new congregation. Details are lacking, but it is significant that this date falls during the Feast of Tabernacles of that year!

According to the book *The Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*, the earliest of these annual meetings had been held in late May of 1684. Other annual meeting dates consistently fell either during the fall holy day season or near Pentecost. None of these meetings came at Christmas, Easter, or even in midsummer. It appears that God's people were—at least, in part—attempting to follow the pattern of the holy days that He had ordained.

In the meantime, a number of other congregations of Sabbath-keepers were formed—mostly of new converts and immigrants from England. And though they recognized their relationship to the mother church in Rhode Island, distance made it necessary for the brethren in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania to gather in annual meetings of their own areas. These

assemblies often sent greetings to each other by letters and delegates. At these times, according to *The Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America: "The Sabbath, with its general communion, was indeed a high day."* It was not until much later that the majority accepted the Protestant idea that God's holy days were done away.

There were only a few people in Sardis who were truly dedicated commandment-keeping Christians. Revelation 3: 4 says, "You have A FEW NAMES even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

Continuously throughout the Eighteenth Century, many other Saturday Sabbath-keeping congregations were being formed in America. But, disappointingly, many of the people in these congregations had NOT become converted, nor had they acquired the habit of prayer and Bible study. They had merely accepted the doctrinal argument of the Sabbath being on the seventh day—that is, Saturday. Among them were some individuals who had "crept in unawares"—just as they had in Jude's day—for the specific purpose of drawing away converts to their own style of religion.

Jude 3-4 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of these was an evangelist who was very important historically in connection with the future development of the Seventh Day Baptist denomination in America. His name was William Davis. He had studied at Oxford University to become a clergyman for the Church of England, but he changed his mind and became a Quaker instead. Migrating to Pennsylvania, he soon fell into disagreement with other Quakers. He then switched to the Baptists. Soon afterward, he accepted the Sabbath and founded a seventh-day church near Philadelphia.

Now, Davis came among the members of the Newport, Rhode Island Church of God in 1706 and applied for membership. He was turned down on the grounds that he held wrong doctrines. Four years later, he tried again at Westerly and was accepted—subject to approval by the annual meeting. Approval was finally granted, though some still objected. In 1713, he was authorized to preach and to baptize.

Remember that this was what seemed to be God's church at that time. But he had NOT become a true member of God's church—as his fruits exposed. He was in trouble with the church and was "in" and "out" of fellowship for the rest of his life. He twice moved to Pennsylvania and back. He lived in Connecticut for a while, and finally died in the midst of a settlement of his followers and children in New Jersey. To the end, he maintained the "rightness" of his own views and argued with God's Word. In I Timothy 6, Paul wrote to Timothy about this very thing—that inevitably happens over and over and over again to God's church.

I Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accord with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

We have very clear instruction on what to do when these types of individuals bring in their heresies.

Listen to part of the letter that Davis wrote defending himself and accusing the truth. I believe that he wrote this to the headquarters church there in Rhode Island.

*"Now all this enmity against ME among seventh-day men arose against ME originally from a noted seventh-day man and soul sleeper in this country, who about twenty years ago opposed ME about my principles of immortality of human souls, and afterward proceeded to differ with ME about my faith in Christ and the Trinity, who having poisoned several other seventh-day men with the mortal and atheistical notion, and set them against ME, he secretly conveyed this drench[That's Old English. Today we would say "accusation."] against ME over to Westerly to the persons before named, who, complying with him in their judgments in the Socinian and Anti-Trinitarian error, drank it greedily down before I came among them..."*

What he was saying was: *"These seventh-day men are kicking me out of the churches and out of their fellowships because I teach the Trinity, immortality of the soul, and things like that."* And he was indignant about it, thinking to the end that he was absolutely right. We see these types of individuals come and go constantly in God's church. (And they really do need to go!) But notice how he continually accuses his opponents of being against HIM, and at the same time tacitly admitting to all those false doctrines.

Now, according to Randolph's A History of the Seventh Day Baptists in West Virginia, in later years many of William Davis' descendants and followers could be found in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. And this was how it came to be that, as early as 1776, some Sabbath keepers began to take part in war, and to believe in a Trinity and an immortal soul. They called those among them who knew the truth *soul sleepers*—referring to their disbelief of the false doctrine of the immortality of the soul. *Soul sleepers* was the nickname given to people in God's church for rejecting the "immortality of the soul" belief. (Remember that came partly from the Calvinist belief of "once saved, always saved" as well.)

By 1900, these and other Protestant doctrines were prevalent in the Sabbath-keeping congregations. Many began to try to organize—so that at first seven or eight, and later a majority, of the congregations united to form a denomination. This group officially adopted the

name "Seventh Day Baptist" in 1818. So we see again that they reject the name "Church of God," and they go with names that refer to them as individuals. So with physical individuals, that is what is emphasized. As always, THE FEW had refused to go along with false doctrine and had remained faithful to the *name* and *doctrine* of the Church of God.

Next we are going to take a look at the Adventist Movement. It's very important to look at these because, in order to sort out God's people, we need to see those whom Satan has placed out there as the *imitations of God's people*. And that's what we've been seeing here with the Seventh Day Baptists, and the Anabaptists, and so on and so forth.

About a generation later, a great movement began among the Sunday-keeping churches. Basing their hope on William Miller's false interpretation of Daniel's prophecy of "the 2300 days" (found in Daniel 8:14), many began to expect the return of Jesus Christ to earth in the year 1844. They became known as "Adventists"—from the term "advent," meaning coming or arrival.

When Adventists' expectations for 1844 proved to be an illusion, they split into a number of differing groups according to their various doctrinal backgrounds. The most important group, refusing to admit that they had been wrong, accepted the idea that God's throne in heaven had been in need of "cleansing" at that time! Who can imagine God's throne as needing cleansing at any time? That's directly from Satan, isn't it?

A Seventh Day Baptist woman in New Hampshire called the Sabbath to the attention of some of these Adventists in 1844. But it was not until about 2 years after their great disappointment that the seventh day was widely publicized among them. The group as a whole then accepted the Sabbath. But they did not join the Seventh Day Baptists. Instead, they began to assemble with the remnant of the Church of God with whom they had come into contact.

This is shown by the fact that they gave up their former beliefs in a Trinity and an immortal soul (doctrines the Seventh Day Baptists also believed). They began to call themselves by the biblical name—the Church of God. Their first songbook was dedicated to "The Church of God." And some of them were active in publishing a periodical in the name of "The Church of God." Nevertheless, those Adventists were never spiritually a part of the Church of God. They had only associated themselves with God's church for a while. Later, the majority of them began following a woman whom some considered a prophetess (and most of you have probably already guessed her name).

In 1854, the Adventists began to set a price on and to sell their religious literature—even though Christ tells His ministers to give it *freely*. In, 1860, they rejected the name "The Church of God," and officially adopted the name of "Seventh Day Adventists." As before, a few faithful members—but only THE FEW—of the Church of God did not go along. Some of the Adventist doctrines were prophesied for the latter times by Paul. I Timothy 4 especially mentions forbidding the eating of meats, which the Adventists require.

I Timothy 4:1-3 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and

commanding to abstain from foods [The King James translates "foods" as "meats."] which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Every one of the points prophesied here was not necessarily fulfilled at the same time, or in a single group of misled people. But each of these points has been fulfilled in one group or another that departed from the truth in the last few centuries. The error of their sin is that they allow themselves to be deceived with the doctrine of demons. The early history of this movement of the Seventh Day Adventists shows the kind of "*spirit*" that's behind it. In its early days, the supernatural power of demons was manifest.

For example (according to Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy*, page 366), in Norway and Sweden children were encouraged to preach and spread the church's doctrines. Some of them were no more than six or eight years old. These children were too young to have been able to experience true conversion. This sounds very, very similar to the "credibility" that the Catholic Church has put on those children who received the Fatima vision.

Now, notice how one of these poor, deluded, misused Adventist children later described his experiences: "*Preach! Yes, I had to preach. I had no devising in the matter. A power came upon me, and I uttered what I was compelled by that power to utter.*" Another, who was fifteen years old when these events occurred, related: "*As soon as we were seized by this heavenly power, we began to speak to the people, and to proclaim with a loud voice that the judgment hour had come.*" (These examples are found in Emma Howell Cooper's book, *The Great Advent Movement*, on pages 22-23.)

God's Spirit *leads*, but it does NOT force one to do anything. The apostle Paul was inspired to write in Romans 8: 14, "For as many as are *lead* by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." Turn with me to Mark 9, and we'll see an example contrary to this. [This is the example of the lad with a mute spirit being brought to Christ.] The power that *seizes* and *completely controls* a human being is demonic!

Mark 9: 20-22 Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. [This is uncontrollable.] So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And often it has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

I bring that out merely to show that when a demon enters someone, or is in someone, the actions of that individual are uncontrollable. But Paul states that it is those who are lead by the Spirit—NOT "controlled"—who are of God.

So you see that the Seventh Day Adventists movement has its origins in doctrines and beliefs that God's Word goes as far as to say are *demonic*. The Seventh Day Adventist Church is NOT the true Church of God. They are Trinitarian and Protestant in their philosophy. And I mention

this because many people have fallen for the idea that the Seventh Day Adventists are a branch of God's truth.

I have been shocked, and appalled, and amazed at how many evangelists and high-ranking members of previous affiliation with the Worldwide Church of God have had dialogue and discussions with the Seventh Day Adventist, Samuele Bacchiocchi. Just from the example of the Sardis Era, they are playing with fire, and have played with fire! And we will see the fruit of what they have acquired from that man.

Remember, according to Revelation 3:4, only A FEW remained faithful in the Sardis Era of God's church. When the Adventists organized themselves as a denomination in 1860, only A FEW—mostly in the states of Ohio, Iowa, and Missouri—did not go along. The printing plant and the magazine (formerly published in the name of "The Church of God") were taken over by the Adventists. But a group of the faithful, in 1861, began the publication of a new monthly paper called "The Remnant of Israel" which was later changed to "The Sabbath Advocate" and finally "The Bible Advocate." I've seen photocopies of these, and I think also Mr. Armstrong's autobiography has a copy of one of these in it.

Some of these people—greatly influenced by the Protestants around them—began to organize themselves into a general conference and various state conferences. Through the remainder of the century, their numbers slowly increased (though they still remained relatively few). Certain strong families provided the Church of God *a tenuous continuity*. These came to be located mainly in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Oregon. Some of them retained knowledge of God's holy days and the identity of modern Israel.

During the same period, Church of God ministers began missionary work into Mexico, Chile, Argentina, the Philippines, and other areas around the world. They were very small missionary works. Jesus Christ prophesied in Revelation 3:2 that the Sardis Era would be lacking in spiritual works. In an analysis of the characteristics of the modern remnants of the Sardis era of Christ's church, we find that there is a lack of true spirituality. That is, a lack of true understanding of not only "true doctrine" but also "the true application of doctrine"—righteousness.

As a whole, this era of the Church of God did NOT *remember how* it had received the truth from earlier true Christians, who were faithful even to death by fire. Unlike those martyred, it did NOT *hold fast* to the truth they had. Sardis did NOT emphasize repentance, as Revelation 3:3 points out; and it did NOT *watch*, as Revelation 3:2 shows.

During those last seventy years, only A FEW individuals really repented and strengthened the truth that was slipping from their midst. Most of their ministers—instead of yielding themselves to be used by God—tried to carry on their work by their own human power. At the end of the era, many were only seeking an income for themselves. They were NOT diligently seeking to serve God, and they were NOT guarding the truth of God (because they had lost so much of it).

These ministers had rejected *God's government*, having lost the knowledge of how God governs His church. They observed the Protestant idea of democracy applied to church government—with its accompanying divisions, controversies, and self-orientedness. The result of rejecting Christ's direction was increasing *doctrinal deviation* and *lack of true*

*conversion* among the members.

In 1927, Herbert Armstrong came in contact with these people. Six months before his conversion, an elderly woman (who was a member of the Sardis church in Oregon) introduced [his wife] Mrs. Loma Armstrong to the truth about God's Sabbath. Loma gladly accepted this truth, as God opened her mind. But Herbert Armstrong was not pleased—because he was so worried about what their friends would think! If you remember, he has many times (even in sermons) said how embarrassed he was that his wife was a seventh day Saturday Sabbath-keeper. And he set out, for those six months, to "prove her wrong."

Knowing the strength and determination that Mr. Armstrong always showed, there's no doubt in my mind that not a man on earth ever tried to prove somebody more wrong than Herbert Armstrong did Loma D. Armstrong! But you know the end result—that he proved her absolutely right. Herbert was challenged to study the Bible for the first time in his life. He tried to disprove this seemingly "crazy, wacky" idea (Those were his words. "Crazy" and "wacky" is what he called it.) that his wife had accepted. Instead, he found and proved the seventh day Sabbath to be the day God commands us to keep holy today.

He came to the conclusion that, if the Bible is true, the Sabbath must be kept on the seventh day. That led to proving the existence of God and that the Bible is indeed His Word. He studied each question intensively, from all angles, for six months. Indeed, Herbert began to search for the one true church that had to exist. Somewhere there had to be the church Jesus Christ said He would build.

He read that promise in Matthew 16:18, which records Jesus' promise (which I think I've read in almost all of these CHURCH HISTORY sermons): "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." That should always ring in our ears—that God's church has always existed and always will.

These Church of God people in Oregon seemed to have the truth. Certainly, they were the closest of any. But something was wrong. He could discern that they were *spiritually dead!* Consequently, Herbert began to fellowship with the people that he saw having God's truth but having spiritual problems. He was asked to speak to them, and was eventually ordained by the Oregon Conference of the Church of God in June of 1931.

Because the gift of the Holy Spirit is promised to those who have truly repented, God was able to use Herbert Armstrong to restore the lost truth. He restored eighteen significant doctrines to the church and many, many other clarifying truths.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Sardis would have received that gift in a greater way had they done these things—had they repented.

Acts 2:39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all

who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Lead by a repentant leader—that is, Herbert Armstrong—that Sardis church was to become a new era as a repentant church. It was to a repentant church era that God restored truth in a major way—through *a repentant leader* and *a repentant church*. As soon as Herbert Armstrong was baptized, the fruit of God's Spirit began to be manifested in his life. He continued to study and prove all things (as we are instructed to do, in I Thessalonians 5: 21).

As he studied, much of THE TRUTH that the Sardis Era had allowed to dissipate began to be brought to Herbert's attention by the Holy Spirit. Immediately, he began to expound this truth to the remnant of God's people in the state of Oregon. (And remember they were still part of the Sardis Era of God's church.)

God revealed the true identity of the modern "House of Israel" to Herbert through the writings of earlier ministers of the Church of God. He also came to see that God's annual festivals were commanded to be kept—along with the seventh day weekly Sabbath. He began to understand their meaning, but it was seven years before any others in Oregon kept God's annual Sabbaths with Herbert and Loma Armstrong.

And that number "7" keeps coming up. It appears many times. God's leaders, whom He has risen up, have [often] taken seven years before they could get anything going. Seven years must be a number that is very critical in teaching a man to be able to preach God's word.

By 1933, it was obvious to many that voting their own leaders into office was NOT God's way, and that it had lead only to confusion. In an effort to strengthen the hands of men at the top, it was decided to "*reorganize*" the church. As Dugger and Dodd recorded it in their book *A History of the True Church*, on page 299, *government of the church* was to be placed in the hands of "*12 to look after the spiritual affairs of the church, and 7 to take charge of the financial business, and also the 70 to go forth two by two in giving the warning message for the hour.*"

A reorganization meeting was held in Salem, West Virginia on November 4, 1933. An appeal was made by lot—like "casting lots" (in an attempt to follow the singular case in Acts 1: 23-26)—to choose from among the names presented. Prior to the meeting, a call for prayer had been sent to God's people around the world "*that God would again choose men to lead His church as in the former time.*"

According to *The Bible Advocate* (November 6, 1933 issue, on page 5) "*the fortieth name was Elder Herbert Armstrong of Oregon.*" No one knew it then—least of all, Herbert Armstrong (who was not present at the meeting)—but Jesus Christ had made His choice with the number "40" of a man to REVIVE HIS WORK in the end time. Forty signifies *the completion of testing*. Now the time of trial and testing for the Sardis church had run out! The reorganization by men in 1933 was never to be a success. In just a few years, that church had permanently disintegrated into several ineffective fragments—neglecting much of God's truth.

The great multiplication and distribution of printed Bibles, though it occurred during this Sardis Era, was NOT accomplished by the Church of God of Sardis but by various Bible societies—by "stones" that God raised up. Christ saw to it that the Word of God was made available to the

world. But it was His church's responsibility to make that *Word understood!* And Christ raised up a special work in His church for this purpose.

At the critical moment, when the Church of God in the Sardis Era was breaking up, Jesus Christ separated A FEW people in Oregon to begin *the Philadelphia Era* of His church (mentioned there in Revelation 3: 7). He began to use Herbert Armstrong—and the small group He had called to assist as coworkers—to reach the world with the good news of the coming Kingdom of God.

So, looking back at *the Sardis Era*, what we see is a group of people who God promised could have whatever they wanted in the way of God's Holy Spirit so to speak, and understanding—IF they would just repent, and IF they wouldn't forget. And that word "forget" should ring in our ears. They *forgot* what had been given to them. They *forgot* what to guard. And they *forgot* to use zeal to promote God's way of life.

We commonly think of *the Sardis Era* as a dead church—spiritually. And one of the major reasons that they were a dead church spiritually is because they forgot. So their nickname probably should be more like "*the church that forgot*," because that is their major characteristic.

Next Sabbath, we will continue from here with the history of the one true church. I am determined to finish it in five parts. Next week is the fifth part, and I am looking forward to wrapping this up. Hopefully, I'll be able to approach this in a slightly different way than the chronology that I've gone through for the other eras.