



February 9, 2024

In Prison or on the Run

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

My wife and I have just returned midweek from the Birmingham, Alabama area where we were visiting brethren for a few days. It's always a blessing to be with God's scattered children.

Speaking of scattered, we examined a little of the history of the church of God in England last time. It is intertwined with the history of the "true church" in Europe. "By the end of the 1500s, congregations that the world labeled -"Sabbatarian Anabaptists" had appeared and were growing in Central Europe, Germany and England. They were termed Sabbatarian because they taught and observed the seventh-day Sabbath. They were called Anabaptists, meaning re-baptizers, because they refused to accept as Christians those who had merely been sprinkled as babies. They taught that baptism was only for adults who had come to believe the Gospel and had repented of their sins (cf. Acts 2:38)." (God's Church Through The Ages, J. Ogwyn)

I'd mentioned the courage of John James, one of the leaders of the church of God in London in the 1660's. Another outstanding courageous leader during that time was Francis Bampfield. His autobiography, *The Life of Shem Acher*, has been preserved in the British Museum Library. From 1662 until his death in 1683, he spent most of his time either in prison or on the run from the English authorities. In 1686 Dr. Edward Stennett, another courageous leader who strongly preached about the Sabbath, moved from Wallingford to London where he apparently gathered together the members of Francis Bampfield's Pinner's Hall Sabbatarian Church. This congregation had been dispersed a few years earlier at the time of

Bampfield's imprisonment and death. It was at this time of persecution of the church in England that Stephen Mumford and his wife, members of the Church in London, left England for the New World and came to Rhode Island in 1664.

"Upon arriving in Rhode Island, the only American colony founded upon the principle of religious liberty, the Mumfords began to fellowship with Baptists in Newport. They weren't quiet, however, about their belief in the Sabbath. In 1665, within the first year of the Mumfords arrival, Tracy Hubbard started keeping the Sabbath with them, becoming the first convert in America. Shortly afterward, her husband Samuel joined her. In 1671 the first Sabbath-keeping church in America officially began with seven members. William Hiscox was the first pastor of the church, serving from 1671 until his death in 1704. In 1708 a second church was officially organized in Westerly, Rhode Island (later renamed Hopkinton)." (God's Church Through The Ages, J. Ogwyn)

Mumford was sent to Newport, Rhode Island, by the Bell Lane Sabbatarian Church of London. He was not a minister. It seems likely that Stephen Mumford decided to migrate across the Atlantic Ocean because of the difficult circumstances in which not only the Seventh Day Baptists but other Baptists and Dissenters found themselves in England at the time.

"When King Charles II came to the throne in 1660 the measure of religious freedom that had been permitted during the time of Oliver Cromwell was not to continue. Several Acts of Parliament were passed designed to enforce uniformity of religion in Britain, which in effect meant conformity to the teachings of the Church of England. The third Act was the Conventicle Act of 1664 which forbade the assembly of more than five people in addition to the family of the house for religious services except according to the Prayer Book, under penalty of fines and transportation. For the third offense they could be banished to the American plantations, excepting New England and Virginia. If they should return or escape, death was the penalty. . . It may have been this Act which led Stephen Mumford to decide to migrate to Rhode Island, to banish himself by so doing rather than wait for the Government to do it." (The Incredible History Of God's True Church-

Chapter 10, Fletcher)

"In 1708 a second church was officially organized in Westerly, Rhode Island (later renamed Hopkinton). Throughout the eighteenth century, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and New Jersey seem to have been the main areas of Sabbath-keeping churches. During this time, German Sabbath keepers immigrated to Pennsylvania. Peter Miller was the best known minister of the German Sabbath-keepers in Pennsylvania and was a friend of Benjamin Franklin." (God's Church Through The Ages, J. Ogwyn)

Many have visited the graveyard in Newport, RI and seen the grave markers of Stephen Mumford and other early Sabbath-keepers. It is quite moving. Next time we will examine the challenges and shortcomings of Sabbath-keepers trying to meet with those who observed Sunday as their weekly day of worship and held to other practices not found in the Bible. It will no doubt be an example of "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3) More next time...

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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