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From Personal Trauma to Global Impact

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From Personal Trauma to Global Impact

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is indebted to Rachel Oaks Preston (née Harris) (1809–1868), a Seventh Day Baptist, for sharing the biblical truth about the seventh-day Sabbath with a group of Advent believers in 1844.



▲ Denis Kaiser

She provided the initial impetus for them to embrace the Sabbath, gradually leading to a broader proclamation of the Sabbath and giving rise to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In a nutshell, this is what we have known so far. In early 1844, Rachel moved to Washington, New Hampshire, to be with her daughter Rachel Delight Oaks (age 18), who had taken charge of the rural school there. Without other Seventh Day Baptists in the area, they attended the services of the Christian Connexion. Many of the Connexionists had become Millerites, but their openness to biblical truth did not necessarily translate into an openness to the Sabbath truth. It was not until late 1844 that they finally embraced it. Yet, Frederick Wheeler, a Millerite Methodist minister who served those believers, came into contact with Rachel who shared the Sabbath with him. Convinced of it, he began to keep the Sabbath sometime in 1844. This group became the first Sabbatarian Adventist church and through Wheeler's influence, the Sabbath reached others, including Joseph Bates, "the real founder" of Seventh-day Adventism. But Rachel never joined the church.

Several new insights present a broader fascinating picture of Rachel's life. Her life was less than ideal, particularly for a young girl and woman in 19th-century America. Four days after her 4th birthday, her two-years-older brother Charles passed away, certainly

a traumatic experience for a child. At the age of 15, she married Amory Oaks, who was eight years her senior. Being still a child herself, she gave birth to her first child, Delight, ten months later. Nine years later, another child was born to them, Sarah, but the joy over this addition to the family did not last long because Amory suddenly died less than seven months later. Here she was — a 26-year-old widow with two children (a 10-year-old and a baby). About ten years after remarrying, the traumatic experiences resumed. Her daughters, Delight and Sarah, died in 1858 (aged 33) and 1863 (aged 29), respectively. Rachel cared for her aged parents; her mother died in 1864 and her father three years later. Meanwhile, her own health took a toll and by 1863 she herself had become "helpless." Shortly before she died, a spiritual revival occurred in the Washington Seventh-day Adventist Church. This news cheered Rachel's heart and she spoke about Jesus as her friend.

James White and S.N. Haskell credited her for introducing the Sabbath to Adventists. Rachel did not have an easy life but it did not prevent her from sharing with others the truth that God had placed on her heart, having global ramifications she could never have foreseen. ■

¹ Denis Kaiser, "Preston, Rachel Harris Oaks (1809-1868)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, January 12, 2023, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=AIQ1>.

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