

THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH, SAMOA & THE DATELINE
Why Seventh-day Adventists in Western Samoa Observe the Sabbath on Sunday
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Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God, and they believe that both the Old and New Testaments uphold the sanctity of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of rest and worship sanctified by God at the time of Creation (Gen 2: 2), and further identified in the 4th Commandment (Exodus 20: 8-11), as a day to be remembered and observed. The Sabbath was observed by Jesus during his earthly life and is identified by Scripture as the mark or sign of loyalty by His people. All around the world, Seventh-day Adventists keep the Sabbath – or seventh-day of the week on Saturday, and this is in distinction to most other Christians who worship on Sunday, the first day of the week.

Some Pacific Exceptions

However in Wallis & Futuna, Western Samoa, the Phoenix & Line Islands of Kiribati and the Kingdom of Tonga in the central South Pacific, Seventh-day Adventists keep the Sabbath on what is called Sunday, because they believe it is in fact the true seventh-day of the western hemisphere. Yes, as strange as it may seem, Adventists in Samoa & Tonga (and the other locations mentioned) go to church on the same day (Sunday) as the Congregationalists, Methodists, Roman Catholics and Mormons, and here is the reason why:

Located in the Western Hemisphere

Western Samoa lies in the Pacific Ocean north-east of Fiji. It is approximately 500 kilometres east of the 180 degree meridian – just 11 hours behind Greenwich Mean time (GMT) in London and therefore part of the Western hemisphere. Looking at a map or a turning globe, it is easy to see that if we bisect the world from the Zero Meridian at Greenwich and through the 180 degree meridian in the Pacific, both Tonga and Samoa are on the far edge of the *western* hemisphere.

A Crooked Date Line

The International Date Line, which for human convenience determines where the day begins, generally follows the 180 degree meridian, slicing through the Pacific Ocean from North to South. However, for commercial and practical reasons as determined by various Pacific countries, it zigzags across the Pacific and the Samoan government recently moved the Dateline immediately to the east of Samoa (on December 29, 2011) so that they now share the same day as Fiji, Tonga and New Zealand and Australia.

Reversal of History.

This change in the position of the dateline and the adoption of Eastern Hemisphere time for Western Samoa is a return to the situation which existed in Samoa prior to 1892. Since that time, for almost 120 years, both Western and American Samoa have followed western hemisphere time, with the dateline to the west of the Samoa group of islands.

A Mistake Rectified and now Reversed!

Prior to the Meridian Conference held in Washington in 1884 which established the Zero meridian at Greenwich UK (and thus by default the Dateline at the 180^o meridian), Christian missionaries who entered Tonga, Samoa (and other western hemisphere islands) from the western Pacific failed to account for a day change, and extended eastern hemisphere day names throughout the Pacific so that Saturday in the western hemisphere was wrongfully called “Sunday”, and Sunday (the 1st day of the week) was wrongfully called Monday.

By the turn of the 19th Century when the need for a standard Date Line was recognised and the 180^o meridian generally accepted as the place to start the day, corrections were made across a number of Pacific countries (eg. Tahiti, Cook Islands) including Samoa, in order to bring them back into western hemisphere time.^[1]

In Samoa specifically, Monday July 4 1892 was repeated by order of King Malietoa Laupepa, creating an 8-day week and thus aligning the Samoan islands with America and the western hemisphere.^[2]

With recent legislation in Western Samoa that moves the International Dateline to the east of Apia, and by dropping one day from their calendar (Friday, December 30), Samoa has returned to the 19th Century situation, adopting eastern hemisphere reckoning once again.

Now because of the Date Line's new position (since December 29, 2011), Tongans and Samoans share the same calendar day and Seventh-day Adventists are worshipping on what is locally called "Sunday".

Close Island neighbours separated by a day!

However, less than 50 kms to the east, American Samoa remains unchanged – choosing to remain in Western hemisphere time because of their close links with the USA. So although they are **experiencing exactly the same hours of daylight** as their neighbours to the west, American Samoans are actually now one day behind Western Samoa. What is Saturday in Pago Pago (American Samoa), is (without any sunset in between) called Sunday in Apia - all because the International Date line has been bent to pass between the islands of Upolu and Tutuila!

The Day Determined by the Sun

From the Bible it is clear that the setting sun determines the beginning and ending of the day. In Genesis in the account of creation we are told that "the evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen 1:5) and that the Sabbath rest was to be observed from "evening to evening" (Lev 23:32), and thus sunset becomes the marker commencing each new day.^[3]

With the creation of the celestial bodies on the fourth day, we are told that they are for "signs and seasons, and **for days** and years" (Genesis 1:14), but that the greater light - the sun, was to rule (or determine) the day (Gen 1:16). Thus we find that the Biblical pattern for determining **the starting point for any day, is the setting of the sun**, and this occurs across every meridian of the globe, as the planet turns from west to east, and the line of sunset moves from east to west in a never-ending arc across the surface of the world, dipping and changing only towards the poles during the equinoxial seasons.^[4]

Thus the true start of any Sabbath, is as the sun sets across the meridian of the globe at the end of the sixth day of every week. ***It is really not possible to have 24-hour periods of night and day in any similar longitude experiencing a 'different' day.*** It is the sun that determines the bounds of the day - not human lines on a map. Regardless of problems created by modern travel when crossing a date line^[5], **the day period in any given longitude is identical - no matter what we choose to call it.** It is "the same day" whether 10, 20 or 30 degrees north or south of the equator along any meridian of longitude. So the "seventh" day in any week, is a consistent day, prescribed by the sun as it disappears beyond the horizon at the end of the sixth day and then rises again in the morning across the entire meridian of the sphere. It is the same 24 hour period from north to south, regardless of what name we give to it. And the sun's rays cast a straight line across the surface of the globe, not a zigzag line as humans have drawn. The **date line** can be altered by any government that wishes to bend it – or extend it, for commercial or political reasons^[6]. But the **day line** that best defines the day across the world is the 180th meridian^[7], with variations only to avoid confusion in island groups that lie across it.

Early Adventist pioneers accepted this 180 degree meridian as the correct place to change their day reckoning as they crossed this longitude – either adding a day or losing a day depending on their direction of travel. They did not follow the modified dateline to the east of Tonga, but with other geographers and Pacific cartographers of the time, considered that Tongans were observing their Sunday on what was really Saturday, the 7th day. When Adventist pioneers first arrived in Samoa they likewise found the local "Sunday-keeping" churches worshipping on what was really Saturday^[2]. And when the switch to western hemisphere time was made in 1892 to align more with American trade and shipping connections, Adventists never altered their cycle of worship.

Confirming the importance of the sun in defining the day, and when challenged over the date line issue in 1900, Ellen White wrote: "God made His Sabbath for a round world; and when the seventh day comes to us in that round world, controlled by the sun that rules the day, it is the time in all countries and lands to observe the Sabbath." 3SM 317

The "seventh-day" is singularly defined across the meridian of the globe *by the movement of the sun* and the **observance of the Sabbath must be consistent within each longitude as far as is possible.**

Sunday in Samoa & Tonga = the true 7th Day

So Seventh-day Adventists in Western Samoa and Tonga believe that it is their position east of the 180th in the western hemisphere, that should determine what is the true seventh day, NOT the man-contrived date line which determines their day sequence. Saturday is seen as the end of the working week, and the Tongan name for Saturday is **Tokonaki** - or "preparation". This was the name given to the sixth day of the week by the early missionaries^[8], and Sunday was identified as **Sapate** - or Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. Monday is the first day of the week, when commercial work commences. So Tongan and Samoan Seventh-day Adventists identify Sunday as being the true 7th day of the week whereas in all other parts of the world, Sunday is the first day of the week, and Saturday is recognised in most calendars as the seventh day. By observing Sunday as the 7th day Sabbath in Samoa and Tonga, Seventh-day Adventists are honouring the same day period as their immediate neighbours in American Samoa to the east, where the day is called Saturday. Sabbath observance is thus consistent across the western edge of the Pacific hemisphere, and Seventh-day Adventists have never been challenged by other Protestants in Tonga concerning this practice. Sunday is accepted by all as the true seventh day.

Day Names not Important

According to the Bible, it is the recognition of God's holy time, set aside by God at Creation as a Sabbath rest, that is important. "On the seventh day God ended His work....and He rested on the seventh day from all His work.... Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.." [Genesis 2:2,3] Again in the fourth Commandment, God asked His people to "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy", and He clearly identified "the seventh day" as the Sabbath of the Lord your God. [Exodus 20: 8,10] The day names that we use today are primarily of Roman origin, so they are not important for identifying the true day of worship. However the continued succession of the weekly cycle has never been lost. From ancient times, the Jewish people have observed the 7th day Sabbath, and the 7 day week as we know it has not been interrupted or broken. Calendar changes have altered dates, and different languages provide different names for the days, but the weekly cycle continues. It is this "seventh day" that Adventists around the world wish to remember and observe as it comes to them each week, regardless of what it might be called. Thus it does not matter whether that day is called Sunday in Apia or Nuku'alofa, as long as it is **the true seventh day across the central Pacific**, when God's children will meet together to worship and rest from their work. If other Christian churches also happen to worship on the same day, this is no problem, but rather a cause to rejoice in worship together. Unlike other churches, which define their day from midnight to midnight, Seventh-day Adventists observe the day from sunset Saturday night to sunset on Sunday night, for it is the setting sun that marks the boundary of the day.

Do Governments have Authority to Determine God's time?

Some have argued that human authorities and governments should be respected and that they have the authority to determine how time should be observed. It is thought that governments have a legitimate role in determining the position of the date line. New Testament scriptures are quoted to support the God-given power and authority of governments.⁹ It is true that in all matters of civil obedience, law and order and conventions for society, the Christian should obey and respect human governments. We accept the determination of government's for our calendar-time, and for dates. [No Seventh-day Adventist would disregard the actual dates or "day names" that are used in Samoa or Tonga] However we are also warned that in matters of worship and conscience, no human power supercedes our responsibility to God. (Acts 5:39) It is not for Governments to tell us "when" to

worship, or when God's sanctified time begins. In fact we are warned that they may even think "to change times and laws" (Daniel 7:25). God's holy time is not defined by human governments or authorities, but *by the setting of the sun along a meridian of the globe, regardless of what that day is called.*

Countries may choose to alter their week names, or dates by moving the IDL as they wish, but **nothing changes the meridian upon which the sun sets and the 7th day Sabbath begins.** This is an unchanging Biblical principle. Regardless of what we call the day, the "seventh day" of the week is consistent from pole to pole.

Seventh-day Adventists are, as their name specifies, "seventh-day" observers, not Saturday-keepers. If Tongan and Samoan Adventists were observing Sabbath on Saturday, as in other parts of the world, they would actually be "sixth-day" observers. But in keeping with the rest of the western hemisphere, they observe the true seventh day, which is called Sunday but is observed by all as the Sabbath (Sapate). Such a position may seem to be at odds with Sabbath observance in all other parts of the world, where Seventh-day Adventists worship on Saturday, but to Samoans and Tongans who are living in the western hemisphere, it is clear that they are observing the true "seventh" day. It is the same daylight that is called Saturday in Pago Pago to the east. It is the same 24 hour period that moves from east to west across the planet in a continuous arc, regardless of dateline modifications. This 24 hour period is God's Holy Time from north to south from sunset to sunset. When the sun sets in the west at the end of the Sabbath, the new week begins.

FOOTNOTES

1 Tonga should have also accepted their position in the Western hemisphere, correcting the names of the days and placing the Date Line between Fiji and Tonga (along the 180th meridian). [One German map of 1904 actually shows the IDL passing between Fiji and Tonga.] This would have meant that Tonga and Samoa would have had the same day. However, Tonga never made that correction and for over 110 years Tonga remained "out of sync" with its western hemisphere neighbours. What was called Sunday in Tonga, was in fact Saturday, and Seventh-day Adventists in Tonga and Samoa were thus observing the same "seventh-day" on different days of the week.

2 David E Hay, *Samoa 100 + Years – The South Pacific and Beyond*. p 14,15 & 22 Quoting from JHW 'Time Lost. When and How' and *Evening News*, Sydney 20 July 1892.

3 See Deut 16:6, Deut 23: 11, Joshua 8:29, Nehemiah 13: 19, Mark 1:29-32, Robert L Odom "The Lord's Day on A Round World" p 38,39

4 Sunset times vary considerably across the latitudes, and are altered by Daylight Saving Times in the latitudes further from the equator during that hemisphere's summer. However at the equator, sunset times vary little from an approximate 6:00pm each evening. Though sunset times change with latitude, this astronomical phenomena itself, caused by the rotating planet, brings night and then new daylight to a whole meridian at once - not controlled or determined by national boundaries. The setting of the sun in any part of the longitude, is the ending or beginning of the same day regardless of what it is called.

5 Modern travellers are quite familiar with the phenomena of gaining or losing a day as they cross the International Date Line. But this only became apparent with global travel, as early explorers discovered that they were a whole 24 hours out in their estimation when circumnavigating the globe. A Day line to identify where the day should start became necessary, and the Meridian Conference in Washington DC which chose Greenwich as the Zero meridian in 1884 helped to identify the 180 degree meridian as this place, although it was already being treated as such by mariners and navigators before this date. This meridian line became known in time as the International Date Line.

6 The British Admiralty originally authorised the IDL to deviate around island groups in the Pacific in order to avoid confusion of day reckoning within the group, and the British Colony in Fiji did this in 1879 in order to include the north eastern parts and the Lau Group in the colony, within Eastern hemisphere time. (Uniform Date Ordinance, 5 June 1879)

* The **Tongan islands** had long been observing Eastern hemisphere time also, because early missionaries had never allowed for a day change as they crossed the 180o meridian, and in order to maintain commercial links with Fiji and New Zealand, the IDL 's deviation includes these islands as well, even though they lie much further east than the Lau group.

* In 1995, the **Republic of Kiribati** also decided to include their eastern islands of the Phoenix and Line Islands within Eastern hemisphere time, even though they lie far to the east and well inside the western hemisphere. So for political and commercial reasons, the IDL has been dramatically extended eastward to include these groups which required them to skip a day (Friday) to catch up with Tarawa time. (Seventh-day Adventists on Kiritimati Island refused to interrupt their 7-day cycle, and now observe the Sabbath on Sunday also.)

* **Niue Island** also proposed skipping a day and moving to Eastern hemisphere reckoning in October 1996, but this never eventuated. (Amendment to Sect 717 Niue Act 1966). Such a decision would have bent the IDL further around Niue Island.)

* The islands of Wallis & Futuna also lie west of the IDL as it bends eastward around Tonga, but when Seventh-day Adventist entered the island in October 2008, recognizing their position east of the 180 meridian, they began observing their 7th day Sabbath on what is called Sunday.

* **Western Samoa** is the latest Pacific Government to re-position the Dateline to the east of Upolu in order to bring the Samoa group back into Eastern hemisphere time. This was done in December 2011 by dropping Friday, December 30, and proceeding straight to Saturday, December 31 after Thursday, December 29. American Samoa was not included in this change. So Western Samoa and American Samoa are now 24 hours apart.

* **Kermadec and Chatham Islands** which are politically under New Zealand are also included in Eastern hemisphere reckoning by the deviation of the IDL. (There are no Seventh-day Adventists living on these islands affected by this deviation of the Date line.)

* The **Aleutian Islands** which extend westward from Alaska, USA, also provide an example of deviation in the IDL, where the Date Line bends westward in order to include the string of islands in Western hemisphere time. Once again this is for commercial and practical reasons to maintain communication and uniformity within the island group with mainland Alaska. (There are at present no Seventh-day Adventists in the western Aleutian islands affected by this deviation of the Date line.)

7 That the 180 degree meridian is widely recognised as the true Day line (apart from the deviations made by governments) is witnessed by the fact that on the island of Taveuni in Fiji, where the 180 meridian crosses the island, a Tourist attraction is made of the fact with a Geographic marker and sign pointing eastward and westward with the words "Yesterday – Tomorrow". A person standing at this point with one foot either side of the meridian is said to be standing in two different days! Such a situation demonstrates the practical difficulty of observing the date line too strictly, but also of the widely accepted significance of the 180th meridian. Seventh-day Adventist pioneers who entered the Pacific on the "Pitcairn" in the early 1890s consistently changed their calendars when crossing the 180th meridian. (Ellen White and all early Adventists who travelled across the Pacific recognised the 180 degree meridian as the place to change their day reckoning.)

8 The early Methodist missionaries who came to Tonga from Fiji, did not drop a day or take into account the fact that they had crossed the 180th meridian. They extended Eastern hemisphere reckoning to this western hemisphere group, and called Saturday, "Sunday". Whereas other Pacific countries like Samoa and the Cook Islands, where a similar situation existed, later added a day to revert to Western hemisphere time, Tonga has never done this. They remain out of sync with other western hemisphere groups.

9 Romans 13:1-3, 1 Peter 2:13,14