

## Seventh day Sabbath in Areas of the Pacific Affected by the International Date Line: Is it Saturday, Sunday or Neither?

A parable has been told about a fond mother who went to watch her son march in an army parade through the streets. As the parade passed by it was obvious that her Johnny was out of step. The foolish mother, however, called out “look, all the army is out of step except for my little Johnny.” It is alleged that the Adventist Church in Samoa and Tonga are like that foolish mother. Their members keep Sunday and are out of step with the rest of the Adventist world while they continue to brag themselves in the right! Those who attack the current Sabbath practice in Samoa and Tonga claim that Sabbath must always be the day called Saturday of the Gregorian calendar.

Another more sinister and insidious heresy has also been vying for the attention of Adventists in the Pacific and worldwide. This theory insists that Seventh day Adventists have got it wrong altogether. Proponents of the Lunar Sabbath point out that the seventh day is neither Saturday nor Sunday of the Gregorian calendar. They say that both worship days are of Roman origin. Therefore, they claim the Bible Sabbath must be rest days determined by the lunar cycles.

Which of the seemingly antithetical views should Adventists in Samoa and Tonga uphold? Should they keep Sabbath on Saturday, Sunday, or neither?

### Saturday Sabbath Proponents

Saturday proponents are currently calling for Sabbath change in Samoa and Tonga to unify Sabbath practice among Adventists worldwide. They claim the Lord of the Sabbath made provision for a one-off-six-day week or one-off-eight-day week adjustment when he said “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27 NIV). Therefore, it is acceptable for Adventists in Samoa to make a one-off-six-day week adjustment in order for them to adopt the new “Saturday” as a result of the IDL change (2011) just as any person would do when they fly or cross over the IDL.

Among other reasons, the Saturday heresy is wrong in two ways. Firstly, there is no biblical evidence whatsoever that the Sabbath must only be kept on Saturday. The Bible from Genesis to Revelation calls Sabbath a *rest*, *blest*, and *holy* day (Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:8-11), a *sign* between God and His people (Ezek. 20:12), and a day of *delight* (Isa. 58:13). However, the Sabbath is always called the *seventh* day (Gen. 2:3; Ex. 34:21; Ex. 31:17) in contrast to the six days of the weekly cycle (Gen. 1:1-31). The Sabbath day is never once in Scripture equated to or called Saturday. Secondly, Mark 2:27 was a rebuke against the Pharisees and inadvertently intended to refute their accusations about Jesus and his disciples breaking the Sabbath (vs. 24). To apply the text to the IDL in Samoa and to undermine the eternal values of the Sabbath misconstrues the primary meaning of Jesus' words. The point underscored by Christ was: In the beginning God first created man then instituted the Sabbath for his benefit (cf. Gen. 2:1-3). Jesus did not in any way deny nor ignore the immutable nature of the Sabbath (cf. Ex. 20:8-11; Isa. 58:13, 14). He affirmed the Sabbath rhythm within the context of the unbroken weekly cycle established by God in creation (Gen. 1:1-31; cf. 2:1-3).

### Lunar Sabbatarianism

Lunar Sabbatarianism says the Sabbath kept by Adventists based upon the Gregorian calendar is not in harmony with the Bible. They claim the Sabbath must be determined by the cycle of the moon. The luni-solar calendar is 29.5 days from one new moon to the next.

Each month then alternates consecutively between 29 and 30 days making a total of 354 days in a year, 11 days shorter than the regular Gregorian calendar year of 365 days. However, just as a leap day (29th day of February) is added to the Gregorian calendar every 4 years; the luni-solar calendar adds 1 extra month every 2 or 3 years. The first day of the week for each new month always begins on the day after the new moon. Therefore, the Lunar Sabbath consistently begins on the 8th day of each new month followed by the 15th, 22nd, and the 29th days of each month. What do they do with the extra day (30th day) that comes around 6 times a year? Well, they call this a transition, repairing, or a translation day of the new moon.

In contrast to the Lunar heresy, the 7th day Sabbath of the Gregorian calendar is not affected by the length of the month irrespective of whether it is 28, 29, 30, or 31 days long. In that sense, the regularity of the Gregorian Sabbath is consistent to the unbroken seven day week cycle established by God in Genesis 1-2:1-3. This is not the case with the luni-solar calendar. Lunar Sabbatarians keep a “floating” Sabbath throughout the modern Gregorian calendar week. This results in the Sabbath day becoming similar to a birthday celebration which falls on different calendar days throughout the Gregorian calendar month.

### **Saturday, Sunday or Neither?**

The Sabbath in areas of the Pacific affected by the IDL is absolutely unique and different to any other place in the world. Therefore the universal Adventist practice of keeping Sabbath on Saturday in conjunction to the Gregorian calendar does not apply to countries like Samoa or Tonga. While this unique situation appears inconsistent, the reality is that Sabbath keeping by Adventists worldwide has not changed. All Adventists worldwide are still marching to the rhythm of the seventh day weekly cycle as it comes to them in their respective hemispheres. So, even though the Sabbath in Samoa and Tonga is locally called Sunday, it is the same 7th day Sabbath that is called Saturday in America and the other countries located in the western hemisphere. They all keep the Sabbath together on the same day even though the day is locally called Sunday in Samoa and Tonga.

In biblical theology the Sabbath is solely defined as the seventh day of the week irrespective of what the day is called. Hence, while Adventists out rightly reject the Lunar Sabbath heresy for insisting upon a floating Sabbath throughout the Gregorian calendar; they also reject the literalist Saturday position which ignores the Biblical definition of the Sabbath. Both extremes are heretical and promote the idea that the Sabbath is not based upon an unbroken weekly cycle of seven days. It is part of the devil's strategy to undermine the commandments of God and the keeping of the seventh day Sabbath (cf. Rev. 12:12, 17). For Seventh day Adventists, the Sabbath remains the seventh day of the unbroken weekly cycle. For most parts of the Adventist world, that Sabbath is called Saturday of the Gregorian calendar. However, the same Sabbath celebrated in the western hemisphere as Saturday for most countries is the same Sabbath that is locally called Sunday in Samoa and Tonga. The crux is, irrespective of what the Sabbath is called Adventists must continue to keep the unbroken rhythm of the seven day week cycle established by God in Creation as it comes to us in each hemisphere as the Sabbath day of rest.