

The Sabbath – “The Seventh Day”!

One of the recurring issues in the reflection on the Sabbath and the dateline in the Pacific is the name for the Sabbath and the various week days. To some, there is a sense that the names commonly used, like Saturday and Sunday, are by themselves an indication of which day we should celebrate as the Sabbath, as if the particular label we attach to the day in any given modern calendar, is the decisive factor.

Biblically speaking, however, none of this holds true.

Let me briefly touch upon the issue of *numbering* the week days. While much of Western culture still names Saturday the seventh day, that has not been the case in Europe since the early 70s. In European calendars the seventh day is named Sunday. What then do Adventists do? Why do they not meet on Sundays for corporate worship if the culture has named it the seventh day?

The answer is simple. What matters here is the sequence of days. In biblical based counting the day named Sunday is not the seventh day. The calendar change in the 70s switched the numbering. So, the Adventists, like Jews, still keep to **the** seventh day, counted on the basis of how the Sabbath was calculated in times past, as attested by history, going back to the time of Jesus and his apostles. History affirms that in Europe people have celebrated the Sabbath on the seventh day in an unchanged sequence of days since the time of Jesus.

Now, the situation in the Pacific highlights the other aspect mentioned, namely the names given to the days of the week. In Western culture, not in the Bible, the days are named for pagan gods and the planets. In the English language the day before Sunday is Saturday, named for Saturn, god and planet in one.

The perception is being promoted that we as Adventists keep Saturday, not Sunday. That perception is often strengthened by the way we have spoken about the prophecies of last day events where the issue of Sabbath keeping becomes significant. Expressed popularly, often Adventists are seen not so much as celebrating Sabbath, but as being against keeping Sunday.

But it must be underscored that as Adventists nowhere in the world have we simply kept Saturday as our Sabbath. We do not worship Saturn, and we do not keep the Sabbath because of that name. In actual fact our Sabbath day does not exactly coincide with any of the weekdays in our calendars. We have always kept the Sabbath over a period straddling two days of the week, in most places both Friday and Saturday.

The days in our calendars go from midnight to midnight. The Sabbath day goes from sunset to sunset. So, we do not keep Saturday, we celebrate the Sabbath. In my original home country that meant that as a young and new Adventist during the winter I would leave school or work early afternoon in order to be prepared for the arrival of the holy day. It became a deliberate act of worship, and that fact provided a special blessing.

So it is, also, in the Pacific. When Sabbath arrives, we are awake and ready, and where possible, we gather to sing and listen to God’s Word on the new Sabbath. Most places that happens on the week day which in our calendars is called Friday. Now, in Samoa as it has been for some time in Tonga, we welcome the Sabbath on Saturdays.

But the name of the weekday is not important. What matters in Samoa, (as in Europe after the calendar change), is the **sequence of the days**.

It has been acknowledged, from the outset of our modern investigation of Sabbath keeping in the Pacific, that the dateline is a human invention. The Bible does not mention it. However, our church members and leaders locally have in general kept to the above principle of the sequence of days. Since the arrival of the pioneers and the Seventh-day Adventist message to the Pacific islands in the late 19th century our church members have kept the Sabbath in the same sequence of days, counting faithfully "**the seventh day**." They did so in generations past in spite of changing calendars, and today, the Samoan Church has itself, with support from the South Pacific Division, chosen to maintain that principle of keeping "**the seventh day**" holy.

In conclusion, we do not as Adventists keep either Friday, Saturday or Sunday. Our celebration of God's holy day always take place on more than one of the weekdays of any modern calendar. The naming of these days is irrelevant. What matters biblically speaking, is the sequence of the days, in which the Sabbath is "**the seventh day**", celebrated from sunset to sunset.