



WHY DO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS IN TONGA WORSHIP ON SUNDAY?

In 1948, Robert Dunton, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, was sent to the island of Guam where he directed the work of his denomination in the Pacific islands. There he labored to convince people to worship on Saturday instead of Sunday. But in time, he became increasingly concerned for those he had persuaded to make this change. It was not that he doubted that the seventh day is the Sabbath—as a Seventh-day Adventist, he certainly believed this! The reason for his concern, quite simply, centered on one thing: the International Date Line.

The date line, the reader will recall, is an imaginary line in the middle of the Pacific Ocean where, by modern reckoning, the date changes. It is where one day ends and another begins. If a person is travelling west on May 15, for example, upon crossing the date line, the date immediately becomes May 16. If it is a Friday, upon crossing the date line, it immediately becomes Saturday. If it is a Saturday, it immediately becomes Sunday, etc. This provides a workable way to keep track of a day for *secular* purposes. But, Dunton questioned, what about *sacred* purposes? Can a man-made date line suddenly cause Saturday to become Sunday?

Dunton believed, as does his denomination, that the seventh day should be figured by the *sun*—from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. But suppose a Sabbath keeper is sailing west on a Friday in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He notices that the sun is about to set and prepares to keep the Sabbath. Then, just as the sun goes down, the ship crosses the date line. It is now sundown on Saturday. Figured by the date line, the Sabbath is over. What happened to the Sabbath?

Most of us are more familiar with losing or gaining an *hour* when crossing from one time zone to another. Years ago when I was holding meetings in Texas, someone told me the following humorous story:

A young man walks into the bus station at Brownfield, Texas, and asks the agent: “What time does the bus leave for Hobbs, New Mexico?”

“7:30,” the agent answers.

“What time does it get there?”

“7:30.”

“You mean it leaves *here* at 7:30 and gets *there* at 7:30?”

“Yes, that is correct,” the agent assures him. “Do you want to buy a ticket?”

“No-o-o-o, thanks anyhow! I think I’ll just stand here and *watch it take off!*”

This young man failed to take into account the one hour time zone difference between Texas and New Mexico!

As a young preacher, when driving to Yuma, Arizona to hold meetings, I was almost late for service the first night. I had forgotten that Arizona time was an hour later than California time!

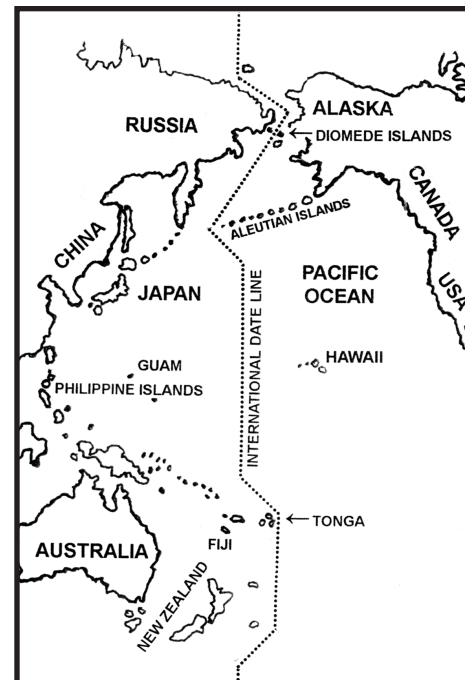
On another occasion, I flew to Chicago and some people picked me up to drive to Indianapolis, Indiana, where I was to speak that night. Unaware that upon entering Indiana we had crossed into a different time zone, we supposed there was time to stop and eat. As we left the restaurant, I noticed that according to a clock on the wall it was an hour later than we thought! I phoned the church and explained. They went ahead with the service and when I got there—an hour late (by their time)—they immediately called me to the pulpit. The one-hour difference was not too serious. But, had it been a case of crossing the date line, I would have arrived on a different DAY!

As strange as it sounds, before the establishment of the date line, some parts of the world had no uniform rule for determining the day of the week. In 1844, Spanish governor Narciso Claveria y Zaldua decided to bring the days of the Philippine islands into conformity with Europe and America. December 31, 1844, was dropped and called the first day of January 1845. By this reckoning, what came to be called Saturday in the Philippines had been Sunday before.

Alaska also experienced a change of days. When it was colonized by Russians, they figured the days of the week the same as in Russia. But as American settlers moved there, they figured the same as in the United States. This led to confusion, because what the Russians called Sunday, the Americans called Saturday! In 1867, when the United States purchased Alaska from Russia, the day was made to conform to that used in the United States.

As travel and commerce between the countries of the world increased, to avoid confusion, it was necessary that a uniform policy be established whereby the day of the week could be determined worldwide. For this reason, in 1884, President Chester A. Arthur convened a conference at Washington D.C. to establish an international date line. Various countries sent delegates and a plan was worked out whereby the meridian passing through Greenwich, England (where the Royal Observatory was located), would be that from which all others would be reckoned. Accordingly, precisely half way around the world from Greenwich—at what would be designated the 180th meridian—they decided to locate the date line.

Other locations were considered, but because of the very small population in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, a majority agreed this would be the most convenient location. In some places, in order to keep certain islands and land groups together, they decided the date line would deviate somewhat from the 180th meridian. See illustration.



International Date Line

On a round world, somewhere it is always sundown. Because of the earth’s rotation, a day continually moves westward. Sabbath keepers commonly pray: “And dear Lord, bless our brethren around the world as the Sabbath comes to them!” In common with his denomination, Dunton believed that as

the Sabbath day moves westward, the same day is kept across Europe as in Jerusalem—Saturday. As the day comes to the United States, it is still Saturday, the day before Sunday. When the day gets to Hawaii, it is still Saturday. Thus Sabbath keepers across Europe and America keep the same day—“as the day gets to them”—figured by the *sun*. But, then, as the day reaches the date line, is the rule about figuring by the sun suddenly changed? If not, Dunton could only conclude that what is now *called* Sunday west of the dateline is *actually still Saturday* (the Sabbath)!

I recall discussing this point some years ago over an early lunch with some friends in Honolulu, Hawaii. It was a lovely setting—in one direction we could see Diamond Head rising majestically from the sea, in the other direction was Pearl Harbor, and spread out before us were the waters of the beautiful, vast Pacific Ocean. It was close to noon; the sun was shining brightly overhead. Being a Saturday, only blocks away from where we were, Seventh-day Adventists were attending Sabbath services. Yet, at that very moment, west of us—on the other side of the date line—there were Baptists in the Marshall Islands getting ready to go to *Sunday* School! Were not these Baptists meeting on the very *same* day as the Adventists in Honolulu? The same sun would have been visible to both groups. How, then, figured by the sun, could it be two different days?

The implications narrow even more strikingly further north in the Bering Strait where the date line runs between two islands: Big Diomed Island (Russia) and Little Diomed Island (United States). The distance between the two islands is only about 2 ½ miles. It is a dismal area, almost always shrouded in fog, with neither island commonly visible to the people on the other. But, let's suppose, it is one of those rare days when it is clear and the sun is shining brightly. People on each of the two islands can look across the water and see the other island. They can also look up and see the same sun overhead. Yet, according to the date line reckoning, on the Alaskan island, it is Saturday; on the Russian island, it is Sunday. What happened to the policy of figuring a day by the sun?

Nor is this issue easily brushed aside, for even Seventh-day Adventists in Tonga meet for worship on Sunday—exactly the same day as the other churches there. Of course they believe it is really Saturday. They do not believe the day was suddenly changed

in 1884 when government leaders decided to place a date line east of them!

During one of Dunton's visits to Tonga, his plane was scheduled to leave on Saturday morning to fly to Fiji. The Seventh-day Adventist pastor told him this was fine, since what was called Saturday there was really Friday. But leaving Tonga on Saturday would make problems at the other end of his short flight, for he would be arriving in Suva, Fiji, right in the middle of the Adventists' Saturday Sabbath! In other words, the Adventists in Fiji accepted the date line, the Adventists in Tonga did not.

As Dunton shared his concerns with leaders and others within his denomination, he got the feeling they would rather avoid the issue. He questioned why they would spend multiplied millions of dollars trying to convince people to switch from worship on Sunday to Saturday—through evangelistic efforts, radio, television, books, tracts, magazines, etc.—and yet fail to consider the implications of the date line. It seemed to him, they did not want to admit that multitudes of *Sunday*-keepers west of the date line—in Russia, Japan, China, Korea, India, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, —actually worship on Saturday! And equally devastating was the thought that the Adventists west of the date line worship on Friday!

Dunton's heart went out to a Seventh-day Adventist man in Russia who reportedly spent years in prison for refusing to work on Saturday. His punishment resulted in separation from his wife and family, economic loss, and a severe beating which left him paralyzed from the neck down. But if what is *called* Sunday west of the date line, is

actually Saturday, this poor man's suffering was unnecessary. “It is one thing to elect martyrdom for one's faith in the Redeemer and a desire to follow Him,” says Dunton; “quite another to suffer needlessly because some well-intentioned leader has imposed his views of duty upon those who are blindly trusting his wisdom or divine appointment.”

Even Ellen G. White—though dealing in her many books with all kinds of issues about the Sabbath, the Bible, diet, marriage, etc.—seemed to avoid writing about the date line. Yet she must have been very familiar with it, having traveled to and from Australia where she had a large home for a number of years. Her first trip there was in 1891, not long after the date line was established.

While on one hand, Seventh-day Adventists insist that the keeping of a precise segment of time—the Saturday Sabbath—is an *inflexible* law of God; on the other hand, when it comes to how this day is determined for nearly half of the world, things seem to suddenly become very flexible! The Seventh-day Adventist author of *The Lord's Day On A round World*, a friend of Dunton, wrote (pp. 165,166): “The precise location of the date line is not established by a law of God, but rather is fixed by an agreement between nations...determined by men in the light of reason, experience, and *convenience*.” But, as Dunton points out, “convenience” is not a common word in the vocabulary of Sabbatharians!

By present-day reckoning, we end one day and begin another at midnight—for convenience. But a Sabbatharian would not begin his Sabbath observance at midnight; for this he would begin at sundown. “Convenience” would not be any basis for beginning the



Seventh-day Adventist Church near Nuku' alofa, Tonga, keeps Sunday!

Sabbath in the *middle* of the night. It might be asked, then, why an imaginary line in the *middle* of the ocean should determine which day is the Sabbath for nearly half the world.

It is not uncommon for Adventist literature to claim that Sunday worship came from *paganism*,* and that the Pope, Constantine, or someone else, “changed the day”—way back when. But, almost nothing is said about Saturday being changed to Sunday at the International Date Line—in 1884!

Some have set forth the view that government authorities were divinely guided as to where they placed the date line—half way around the world from Jerusalem. And though each day begins at the date line, the day that Jerusalem observes as the Sabbath (Saturday) is the *same* day as it travels around the world. But this “explanation” is misleading. The date line is not half way around the world from Jerusalem. It is half way around the world from Greenwich (near London). Literally millions of people live within the land area between London and Jerusalem! The claim that the present date line allows all the world to observe the same day as Jerusalem (as the day moves around the world) proves nothing. This would be the case *wherever* the date line was placed.

The way some deal with the date line is by telling a story about twin brothers. One twin travels around the world going west and “loses” a day crossing the date line; the other twin travels around the world going east and “gains” a day crossing the date line. When they get back home, if one had *actually* lost a day and one had *actually* gained a day, one twin would be two days older than his twin brother. Finally, if they made enough trips, the one twin would be old enough to be the father of his twin brother! No one believes that. Time is not *really* gained or lost. The twins would still be the same age no matter how many trips they made. The problem with this story is that it avoids the real issue: the *location* of the date line.

Dunton recognizes that a date line is necessary—at some location on a round world, one day has to end and another begin. His position, quite simply, is this: if the seventh day Creation Sabbath began in that part of the world where Eden was located, the day would then move around the earth

(because of the earth’s rotation) and not end until it returned to where it began!

This can be illustrated in the following manner: Picture a man who runs in a 7-lap race around a huge circular track. He leaves the starting line and runs all the way around the track, completing lap 1. The end of lap 1 begins lap 2. The end of lap 2 begins lap 3, etc. Finally, lap 7 is not completed until he runs clear around, back to where he started.

So is it with the sun—“as a strong man to run a race” (cf. Psalms 19:4, 5). The seventh day, like the seventh lap, is not completed *until it returns to where it began*. If it began in that part of the world where Eden was located, it would need to end there also. That part of the world, then, according to Dunton’s book, *Out Where the Day Begins*, is where the date line should be located—not in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

While it is not the purpose of this article to argue about the present location of the date line—I believe there are issues of greater importance—it does provide some unique food for thought. This is especially true for those who suppose the observance of an “identical day” is in some way an essential part of the Gospel.

In the Old Testament, as God dealt in a special way with the people of Israel, they were in one part of the world. A day for one was the same day for all of them. At that time, there would have been no concern about when a day began or ended in some other part of the world. But, eventually, through the preaching of the Gospel, people all around the world became believers in the God of the Bible.

With the divine program having now moved from the national to the international, things that applied to people living in one land, could not apply to *all* people living in *all* lands. Rules like: “Keep the day as the day gets to you,” “Accept the authority of the 1884 International Date Line,” “Keep the day from sundown to sundown, except in countries like Alaska, then figure from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m.,” only become necessary when attempts are made to apply the *national* to the *international*.

In the Old Testament, the annual feast days observed by the Israelites occurred on specific dates that corresponded with their seasonal crops. Pentecost was observed seven weeks after the first sickle went into the barley, the Feast of Tabernacles followed the fall harvest, etc. (Deut. 16:9,13). But this would not work in countries like South America, south of the equator, where the seasons are *reversed*!

I know some people who phone a man in Jerusalem to make sure he has seen the new moon *there*. Based on his observation, they then count the days to Passover, etc.

When the Adventists first started advocating the seventh day Sabbath, they had to face the fact it is not the same time in all parts of the world—somewhere on a round world the sun is always setting! They realized also that the time of sundown varies north and south from the equator, as in Alaska, “the land of the midnight sun.” Consequently, an early Adventist leader, Joseph Bates, taught the Sabbath should be observed from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday, based on time *at the equator*, where day and night are equal. Ellen G. White was of the same opinion. And so, “for ten years the Sabbath keeping Adventists generally observed Sabbath from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday” (*Review & Herald*, Dec. 4, 1855).

But following this ten year period, the Adventists decided to keep the Sabbath the same as the Jewish people—from sundown to sundown. Of course this failed to solve the problem about sundown in places like Alaska, Norway, Sweden, Finland, etc. Apparently Mrs. White—feeling some frustration about this—questioned whether God ever intended for people to live in extreme northern countries!

If keeping a day from sundown to sundown is essential to salvation, Eskimos would need more than a Bible—they would need an almanac with sunset tables!

The Bible says, “...from even unto even, shall you celebrate your sabbath” (Lev. 23:32), but when taken in context, this verse says nothing about the *weekly* Sabbath. “On the *tenth* day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement...it shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and you shall afflict your souls: in the *ninth* day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall you celebrate your sabbath” (Lev. 23:27-32).

The day of atonement was observed by the Israelites from the evening of the ninth day of the month until the evening of the tenth. The question could be asked: If the Sabbath every week—week after week—was always observed “from even to even,” why would this need to be mentioned here? Had the Fourth Commandment said, “Six days shalt thou work, but the seventh night and day, *from even to even*, is the Sabbath,” the whole issue would have been clarified.

Some believe that when the Fourth Commandment was given, the Israelites simply figured the Sabbath day from *sunrise to sundown* (not sundown to sundown).

*** Printed article: “Did Sunday Worship Come from Paganism?”—shows that Sunday was not a day of rest and worship among pagan sun worshippers—free upon request. Or online: www.ralphwoodrow.org/articles/sunday-worship.pdf**

They point out that the wording—"six days shalt thou labor...but the seventh *day* is the Sabbath...in it thou shalt not do any work" (Exod. 20:9,10)—says nothing about a seventh *night*. It does not say "the seventh night and day is the Sabbath." The Sabbath as a day of rest is *contrasted* to the six days of work. This could not be the case with a seventh *night*—they rested *every* night (cf. John 9:4; 11:9,10; Matt. 20:6-8; Deut. 24:15).

Yet another view is that the Sabbath should be figured *from sunrise to sunrise*. Edward Lim, a Seventh-day Adventist, has (unofficially) argued this in his book *Restoring The True Sabbath*. He points out that when God said, "Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3), it was the *beginning* of the first day of Creation, *not the end of the day*. If he is correct in his interpretation, the Seventh-day Adventists—even with all their efforts to keep the seventh day for the past 160 years—have not correctly done so!

Among still other variables that exist, there are people scattered here and there that suppose *Friday* is the seventh day. I met a couple back in the 1970s, former Seventh-day Adventists, who were Friday-keepers. Their reasoning went something like this: God, having created everything in six days, rested on the seventh day (Saturday). But because man was created on the sixth day, the "seventh" day *for him* was Friday.

Nevertheless, most seventh-day Sabbath keepers believe the correct day is Saturday and that it should be figured from sundown to sundown—people keeping the day "as the day gets to them." But some have challenged the idea of a *moveable* day, insisting that the "identical day" to the Creation Sabbath must be an established, fixed, precise segment of time. If the Sabbath day moves around the world, they point out, instead of it lasting for 24-hours, it would be 48 hours long!

For example, suppose someone in New York begins his Sabbath observance at Friday sundown. Twenty-four hours later, Sabbath for him is over. But the end of the Sabbath for someone in Chicago, would be an hour after this, for someone in Denver an hour later, and for someone in Los Angeles an hour after that, etc. Finally, by the time Sabbath keepers around the world have *all* "kept the day as the day gets to them," it would take 48 hours! If so, the Sabbath would not be one day in seven, but two days!

Those who reject the idea of a "moveable" Sabbath, believe the true Sabbath can only be figured from sundown to sundown

Jerusalem time. This works out as follows: Suppose it is the time of year that sundown occurs at 6 p.m. in Jerusalem. Sabbath in Washington D.C., by this reckoning, would be from 11 a.m. Friday until 11 a.m. Saturday. Ironically, Seventh-day Adventists in Washington D.C. (where their headquarters is located) would be starting their 11 a.m. Sabbath services *just as the Sabbath ended!*

In Melbourne, Australia, the Sabbath (figured by Jerusalem time) would be from Saturday at 2 a.m. until Sunday at 2 a.m.! Some set their alarm clocks to remind them when the Sabbath is beginning—in Jerusalem. Ultimately all such efforts, though they may seem technically correct, bog down beneath the weight of their own legalism.

If keeping the Sabbath by Jerusalem time were God's requirement, how would people living in remote parts of the world have done this in past centuries? Without clocks, phones, or even an accurate knowledge of geography, they would have had no way to know what time it was in Jerusalem.

Finally, some have become so concerned about the technicalities involved in keeping an "identical day"—issues like the date line, the moveable day, and how to figure the new moon—they suppose that by moving *to Jerusalem* they will have everything right at last. I personally know several people who have actually made the move. But from my observations, this has not enriched their Christian experience. Changing from one geographical location to another did not make them more fruitful, victorious, or any closer to God. Often, it seems, just the reverse has been the case.

We should recall that 2,000 years ago there were people living in Jerusalem that kept the Sabbath right on schedule. They observed the new moon by observation. They were strict about the letter of the law. But these things failed to have a sanctifying effect on them. Failing to find the true "rest" in Christ, they rejected the Lord and crucified him! (Matt. 11:28,29; 1 Thess. 2:15).

Having pointed out some of the many *variables* that result from trying to observe an "identical day," it is not my intention to make light of any Christian who may happen to belong to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some years ago I met two well-known Adventist ministers: H.M.S. Richards, Sr. and Pastor Tucker. I have no reason to doubt they believed in Christ.

I have had the opportunity to speak in hundreds of churches over the years—including some that meet on Saturday—and

many that meet on Sunday. But, in my experience, I have never found those who meet on Saturday to be more victorious, more joyful, more dedicated, more spiritual, or better soul winners than those who meet on Sunday. This would be difficult to explain, if (as some claim), those on the one side are the "commandment *keepers*," and those on the other side are the "commandment *breakers*." Why would God bless and use people who week after week break his commandment, if indeed that were the case?

I don't believe any are saved—or lost—on the basis of how a day is figured. Even William Miller, from whom the Adventists trace their beginnings as a movement, worshiped on Sunday.

As New Testament Christians, we do not throw away the Old Testament—but not everything applies in the same way. All Christians generally recognize a basic *principle*: that setting aside one day in seven for worship and rest serves a good purpose. But strict and confusing rules about keeping an "identical day" can be frustrating and fruitless.

Many things in the Old Testament served as "shadows" of the greater spiritual reality in Christ. As the old era was passing away, and the gospel was going forth "to every creature under heaven," Paul wrote: "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a *shadow* of things that were to come; the *reality* [body, substance] is found in *Christ*" (Col. 1:23; 2:16).

Each true believer must study to show himself approved of God; he must walk in the light he comes to see, knowing that each of us will give an account of himself to God (Rom. 14:5-12). But in the final analysis, salvation is by *grace*. It is not based on how well one can figure out technical points about sunset tables, date lines, calendars, and new moons (cf. Eph. 2:8,9; Rom. 11:6). These are shadows and side issues—the reality is found in CHRIST himself.

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