

## **The Sabbath: Variable or Absolute?**

This paper is written primarily with the laity in mind coupled by the sincere hope that the readers, particularly our Adventist Samoan members in the homeland, may find peace in accepting the decisions of the Samoa Executive Committee to adopt the recommendations of the BRC.

The IDL and the keeping of the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath are two separate issues. The IDL is conditioned by culture and therefore subject to change at any time by governments (as evident in the Samoa situation). However, the keeping of the “Sabbath” is a different matter.

i) The International Date Line (IDL), is a VARIABLE

It is not wrong to hold a different opinion on certain matters. We know, for example, that all cultures are different. Therefore, what may be considered right in one culture may be wrong in another! People do see things through presuppositions affected by their cultural values. So, when “variables,” such as the IDL are considered, it is natural for individuals to hold different opinions. And, that is fine! There is room for us to agree to disagree on “variables.” After all, the IDL as stressed by others is imaginary anyway! All “variables” are liable to change with time and may be different from culture to culture. People, for example, dress up or pray in different postures depending on societal or cultural influences! People in different cultures also have their own preferences to their choice of music or use of instruments. All of these and many others are “variables” which naturally differ in time from culture to culture. Our responsibility then as biblical students, when dealing with “variables,” is to find the relevant principles in Scripture that speak to those situations.

ii) The “Sabbath” is an ABSOLUTE

While individuals may still hold different opinions regarding the Sabbath, the “Sabbath” consistently remains an “absolute.” **Nothing will change that fact.** While we still have a choice to obey or to disobey God, the actual day in which we worship God as the “Sabbath” day is not a matter of human choice. **Only God decides the day he calls the “Sabbath.”**

God set the 7th day Sabbath in CONCRETE at Creation. In fact, the “Sabbath” is firmly welded into “creation” and is part of the “natural cycle of life” itself. And God hung up and fixed the sun and moon “in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, [to] serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years” (Gen. 1:14).

Therefore the determining absolutes (unchangeables) that mark sacred time, the Sabbath, are:

- (a) Creation itself
- (b) The seven day week (not a 1, 6, or 8 day week), and,
- (c) The sun and moon to rule the day and night.

**Just as planet earth itself or the Sun and Moon are consistently in motion (as divinely appointed by God Himself) and do NOT swerve or deviate from their path in the slightest degree, THE SABBATH IN LIKE MANNER IS PERMANENT, CONCRETE, CONSISTENT, AND DOES NOT CHANGE.**

### **The Main Issue**

However, the IDL is NOT THE MAIN ISSUE in Samoa; it is only a peripheral issue. **The real core issue affecting Adventists in Samoa by the change of the IDL is the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. And Sabbath keeping is a deeply entrenched theological issue.** The Samoan parliament has every right to change the IDL. The IDL after all is of human origin and can be changed. But, the Sabbath affected by the change does not belong to the Samoan government, nor is the Sabbath dependent on a vote by SDA members in Samoa. The Sabbath remains solely the prerogative of God.

The relativistic notion that individuals in Samoa may keep whatever Sabbath they prefer is an unbiblical position. Adventists cannot sit on the fence of indecision! The Sabbath must be one or the other and cannot be both. Jesus says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (NIV Matt. 12:30; cf. Luke 11:23). THERE IS NO SITTING ON THE FENCE ON THE IDL ISSUE.

### **The "Sabbath" is not determined by choice**

Every individual has the right to keep any day of their choosing as the Sabbath. God has given us that freedom. BUT, THE DAY CALLED "SABBATH" IS NOT DETERMINED OR DEPENDENT UPON OUR CHOICES. GOD HAS ESTABLISHED THE SABBATH IN CREATION AND THAT DAY DOES NOT CHANGE. So, Adventists in Samoa who chose to worship on "Saturday" post 2011, **may have been worshipping on the day of their own choosing but it is not the "Sabbath" as biblically defined.**

### **Implications of wavering on the Sabbath truth**

While the "Sabbath" was made for man (Mark 2:27), it is by nature "supra-cultural" just as God Himself who created the Sabbath is above culture. Hence, in contrast to the changeable nature of cultures, human behaviors, government laws and regulations, the "Sabbath" remains enduring now and always just as God Himself is unchangeable (cf. Num. 23:19; Ps. 55:19; Heb. 7:21). Failure to keep the seventh-day Sabbath exposes the SDA faith and practice in Samoa to disrepute and ridicule. It gives the impression that, (a) we are uncertain about which Sabbath day to keep holy. And, (b) that Adventist faith is built upon shifting sand (because our Sabbath keeping keeps changing with the IDL changes in Samoa).

We may not have all the answers to the questions we individually have, but God will in good time help each of us to find peace in His leading in the Church we all love dearly.