

The IDL Shift in Samoa and the Unchangeable Nature of the Seventh-day Sabbath

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Introduction

I wish to sincerely thank my good colleagues for the valuable contributions they have made to the discussion of the International Dateline (IDL) in Samoa. The overlapping concerns do highlight the fact that there are many who are seeking answers to the perplexing IDL issues affecting Sabbath keeping in Samoa. Undoubtedly, this response does not answer all the questions that will continually arise. However, the dialogue does help to clarify many of the lingering questions that people may ask and help to affirm the biblical teaching regarding the "7th day Sabbath."

Many writers have underscored the solemn responsibility of Christians and in particular of Pastors of the Adventist Church to uphold the Bible as the supreme authority for faith and practice. This writer fully supports the Scripture as divine revelation and firmly believes that the position upheld by the Biblical Research Committee (BRC) of the South Pacific Division (SPD) and adopted by the Samoa Executive Committee regarding the Sabbath to be kept in Samoa in 2012 and beyond, is indeed a solid and well established teaching of Scripture.

This response is an attempt to address some of the overlapping issues highlighted by those insisting that Adventist Samoans should keep "Saturday" after the new IDL shift in Samoa post 2011. The 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.

Adventist Theology and Eschatology

This section addresses the following issues: (1) the different viewpoints regarding the IDL in Samoa. (2) The "Sabbath" as an Absolute will be discussed in contrast to the IDL variable. (3) The relative approach to the IDL issues. And, (4) the missing day in the process of transition.

1) Differing opinions regarding the IDL in Samoa

i) Disagreements not necessarily wrong!

Constructive dialogue about the Sabbath in Samoa post 2011 and the IDL issue in itself is a healthy exercise. It is not wrong to discuss matters in an open and Christian manner. It is also 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. The only way we can reach consensus on the IDL issue is for a decision to be made in a Council of some sort like that done by the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 15), as will be discussed later in this paper. However, contrary to the insistence by some that Adventists in Samoa should be given a choice as to which “Sabbath” day they should keep post 2011, this writer affirms the contrary and upholds the decisions by the BRC and other relevant Committees.

ii) The IDL, a “variable”

The conditional nature of “variables” and how they are affected by cultural values was stressed in a previous paper. 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 exegetes, when dealing with “variables,” is to find the relevant principles in Scripture that speak to those situations.

2) The “Sabbath” ABSOLUTE

i) The IDL change and “Sabbath” keeping are two separate Issues

The IDL and the keeping of the 7th day Sabbath are two separate issues. As noted earlier, the IDL is conditioned by culture and therefore subject to change at any time

by government (as evident in the Samoa situation) or other factors. However, the keeping of the “Sabbath” is a different matter. True, individuals may still hold different opinions regarding the Sabbath. But, the “Sabbath” consistently remains an “absolute.” NOTHING WILL CHANGE THAT FACT. And, with “absolutes” 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.”

ONLY ONE DAY IN CREATION WEEK IS CALLED “SABBATH” Gen 1; Gen 2:1-3						
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7 “Sabbath”
THIS 7 DAY WEEK CYCLE IS PERMANENT IT DOES NOT CHANGE						

ii) The nature of the “Sabbath” as an ABSOLUTE

The “7th day Sabbath” was set in CONCRETE by God in “Creation Week.” In fact, the “Sabbath” is firmly welded into “creation” and 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, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years” (Gen. 1:14). THUS, (A) “CREATION ITSELF,” (B) “THE SEVEN DAY WEEK” (NOT 1, 6, OR AN 8 DAY WEEK), AND, (C) THE “SUN” AND “MOON” to rule the day and night; ARE THE DETERMINING ABSOLUTES (UNCHANGABLE) THAT “MARK SACRED TIME,” THE “SABBATH.” Therefore, just as planet earth itself or the Sun and Moon are consistently in motion as divinely appointed by God Himself and does NOT to the slightest degree swerve or deviate from its path, THE SABBATH IN LIKE MANNER IS PERMANENT, CONCRETE, CONSISTENT, AND DOES NOT CHANGE.

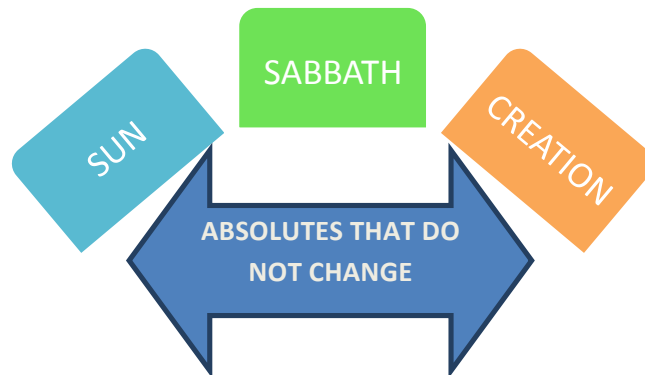
iii) The IDL change a challenge to biblical Sabbath keeping

SDA Theology and eschatology are deeply rooted and entrenched in the absolutes of (a) Creation, (b) The 7-day weekly cycle, and (c) the “sun” and “moon” as the governing factor that determines time sequence. For that reason, this writer strongly disagrees with those who insist that the IDL issue in Samoa is non-theological and therefore the position taken by the Samoa Executive Committee is

unbiblical. Yes, the IDL in itself is a “variable.” 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 “7th 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.

iv) The sequential continuum of time

The “days and years” of Gen. 1:14, as a sequential continuum of time then underscores the fact that the TIME CALENDAR INSTITUTED BY GOD IN CREATION IS TIMELESS. Absolutes are NOT culturally conditioned. NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES THE IDL IN SAMOA OR ELSEWHERE SHOULD CHANGE BY GOVERNMENT, THE SABBATH WILL ALWAYS REMAIN THE 7TH DAY OF AN UNDISRUPTED WEEK. SDA Theology and Eschatology is deeply entrenched and SOLIDLY CEMENTED upon this fundamental biblical teaching. Any attempt to deviate from this principle is a direct challenge to SDA Theology and eschatology.



3) Relativistic influences on the IDL issue

i) One of either

The relativistic notion that individuals in Samoa may keep whatever Sabbath they prefer: (a) either to go along with the government IDL shift and keep “Saturday” as the seventh day Sabbath, OR (b) retain the current Sabbath day; because either is

still the 7th day Sabbath in their respective hemispheres, is an unbiblical position. Adventists cannot sit on the fence of indecision! The “Sabbath” must be one of either 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.

ii) The “Sabbath” is not determined by choice

Truly every individual has a choice 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 may choose to worship on “Saturday” post 2011, but that will be the day of their own choosing and not the “Sabbath” as biblically defined.

iii) Going along with the IDL change!

If Adventists in Samoa were to adopt the IDL change and keep “Saturday” in the new Samoan calendar, it would result in several things: (a) the new day of rest makes “void” the relevance of keeping the “7th day of the week as the Sabbath.” (b) Consequently, Adventists will keep the 6th day of week and NOT the 7th day. This literally degrades the biblical value of Sabbath. (c) Sabbath keeping then becomes subject to cultural and social needs and/or State laws and change.

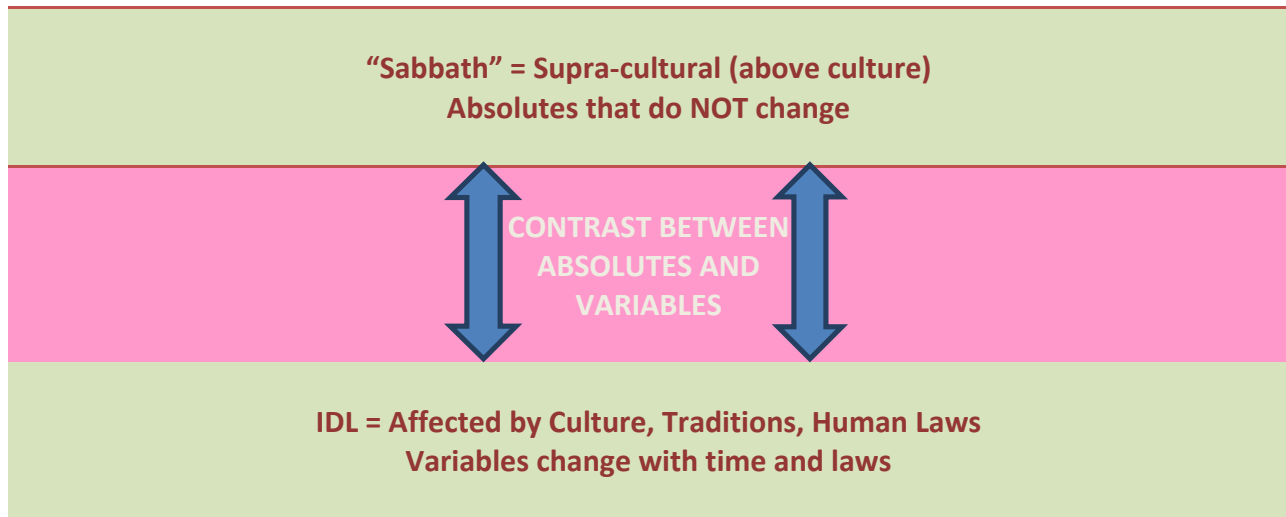
This means that we may change the Sabbath day as often as we wish to or if the State of Samoa chooses to do so. Therefore, if another change of IDL happens in 10 years’ time, the SDA Church in Samoa may change accordingly! The argument to go along with the IDL change is misguided and a cause for great concern. Perhaps, a revisit of Daniel 7:25 will remind us that Satan is at work in subtle and cunning ways to change “times and laws” that impinges on the keeping of God’s Seventh day Sabbath!

iv) 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 7th 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).

The unchanging nature of the Sabbath is illustrated below in contrast to the IDL.



4) The missing day

- i) Friday 30 Dec, 2011 is not imaginarily dropped

Take time to observe the comparisons in the table below. The table includes the following: (a) a column of the “Old Samoa 2011-2.” This would have been the calendar in 2012 if the current time sequence in Samoa does NOT CHANGE. (b) Another new section has been added of time in the Western hemisphere for comparison. (c) The column for the new Samoan calendar highlights the DROP OF DAY 6 IN ORDER TO PUT SAMOA IN LINE WITH EASTERN TIME. FRIDAY, DEC 30 IS REPLACED BY SATURDAY DEC 31, 2011. THIS RESULTS IN SAMOA BEGINNING THE NEW YEAR 2012 TOGETHER WITH EASTERN TIME SEQUENCE ON SUNDAY JAN 01, 2012.

Samoa in transition from 2011 -2012

2011-2 NZ, Aust, etc.	Day 1 Sun Dec 25	Day 2 Mon Dec 26	Day 3 Tues Dec 27	Day 4 Wed Dec 28	Day 5 Thurs Dec 29	Day 6 Fri Dec 30	Day 7 Sat Dec 31	Day 1 Sun Jan 01	Day 2 Mon Jan 02
Old Samoa 2011-2		Day 1 Sun Dec 25	Day 2 Mon Dec 26	Day 3 Tues Dec 27	Day 4 Wed Dec 28	Day 5 Thurs Dec 29	Day 6 Fri Dec 30	Day 7 Sat Dec 31	Day 1 Sun Jan 01
Govt of Samoa 2011-2 New		Day 1 Sun Dec 25	Day 2 Mon Dec 26	Day 3 Tues Dec 27	Day 4 Wed Dec 28	Day 5 Thurs Dec 29	Day 7 Sat Dec 31	Day 1 Sun Jan 01	Day 2 Mon Jan 02
Samoa Mission SDA 2012		Day 1 Sun Dec 25	Day 2 Mon Dec 26	Day 3 Tues Dec 27	Day 4 Wed Dec 28	Day 5 Thurs Dec 29	Day 6 Sat Dec 31	Day 7 Sun Jan01	Day 2 Mon Jan 02

Comparison of Time kept with countries in the Western hemisphere

Kiribati, Niue, Hawaii, US		Day 1 Sun Dec 25	Day 2 Mon Dec 26	Day 3 Tues Dec 27	Day 4 Wed Dec 28	Day 5 Thurs Dec 29	Day 6 Fri Dec 30	Day 7 Sat Dec 31	Day 1 Sun Jan 01
Tonga		Day 1 Mon Dec 25	Day 2 Tusite Dec 26	Day 3 Pulelulu Dec 27	Day 4 Tuapulelulu Dec 28	Day 5 Filaite Dec 29	Day 6 Tokonaki Dec 30	Day 7 Sapate Dec 31	Day 1 Mon Jan 01

ii) The official statement

While some writers have tried to explain away the day loss by Samoa in transiting into Eastern Time sequence, the explanatory memorandum accompanying the Samoan Governments time and 'day' bill affirms otherwise. The bill confirms that Samoa loses Friday December 30, 2011 in this process.¹ This fact is undeniable as

noted in the table above. Samoa will not be able to adopt Eastern Time in 2012 unless Friday December 30, 2011 is dropped from its calendar. SURELY ANY PERSON WOULD BE ABLE TO SEE THAT THE WEEKLY CYCLE HAS BEEN BROKEN. The fact that this cycle will be broken in Samoa when the IDL changes is a challenge for every Seventh day Adventist in the homeland to remain faithful to God and to keep His Sabbath as clearly stated in Scripture. To deviate from this basic biblical principle is apostasy from the truth of Scripture and Adventism.

The Geographical Position of Samoa

Much has been voiced regarding the geographical location of Samoa. In this section, I will deal with: (1) the assumption that the “unbroken weekly cycle” is anchored on the geographical position of Samoa. (2) The significance of creation. (3) Human governments and law. And, (4) the IDL as universally recognized.

1) Assumption regarding the “unbroken weekly cycle”

- i) The assumption that the “unbroken weekly cycle” is anchored primarily upon the geographical position of Samoa is incorrect. While the geographical location of Samoa helps to determine the Sabbath it should keep, the 7TH DAY SABBATH IS DETERMINED BIBLICALLY BASED UPON THE KEEPING OF THE SABBATH IN AN “UNBROKEN” FASHION CONSECUTIVELY FOR GENERATIONS.
- ii) SDA SAMOANS HAVE ALWAYS KEPT THE 7TH DAY SABBATH CONSISTENTLY FOR OVER A HUNDRED YEARS NOW. WHY SHOULD THEY NOW SHIFT FROM THE KEEPING OF THE 7TH DAY SABBATH TO KEEPING THE 6TH DAY OF THE WEEK IN SAMOA WHEN THE GOVERNMENT DROPS A DAY IN ORDER TO FIT INTO EASTERN TIME?

2) The story of creation

- i) The story of creation is more than just a “simple story of God who created a perfect world for humanity.” Creation is the only event recorded in Scripture to which there is NO HUMAN EYE WITNESS. In that sense, Creation and Its Creator, and the Weekly Cycle that God has put in place in Creation itself, IS AN EVENT THAT DEMANDS ABSOLUTE FAITH AND TRUST. The CREATION STORY, CREATION WEEK, AND THE WEEKLY CYCLE FIRMLY ESTABLISHED BY GOD IN GENESIS 1 & 2 IS NOT ONLY

FUNDAMENTAL BUT FOUNDATIONAL TO THE WHOLE OF SCRIPTURE, SDA THEOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY.

- ii) Yes, the world has been affected by sin and its consequences, and we now live in an imperfect world arguably confused by the IDL issues, BUT THE CONDITIONAL NATURE OF OUR HUMAN CIRCUMSTANCES DOES NOT DETERMINE NOR AFFECT THE BIBLICAL SABBATH. SDA'S HAVE ALWAYS DEFINED AND DEFENDED THE SABBATH IN BIBLICAL TERMS, NOT BY THE IDL, CULTURE OR BY ANYTHING ELSE.

3) Human governments and laws

- i) The emphasis placed on the IDL as NOT OF DIVINE ORIGIN, BUT ONLY SOMETHING THAT IS MAN-MADE AND IMAGINARY, calls into question the legitimacy of governments and laws! We must remember that while God is the ultimate authority (Rom. 13:1); He gave Adam the authority to "rule" over the earth (Gen. 1:28). In like manner, God instituted human governments (Rom. 13:1; Prov. 8:15, 16), for the administration of justice (Ps. 72:2, 4, 14; Rom. 13:4; 1 Peter 2:14; Rom. 13:4), and for the general welfare of its citizens (Ps. 72:3, 4, 13; Jer. 22:16; Rom. 13:3; 1 Peter 2:14 [moral standards?]; 1 Tim. 2:2).
- ii) So, while human governments will be answerable to God and ultimately judged for their failure to act in God's authority (Rom. 13:6; Ps. 2:2-6, 10), Christians are still expected to "respect" (Rom. 13:7), "submit" (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13), "pay taxes" (Luke 20:25; Rom. 13:6, 7), and pray for the government and its leaders (1 Tim. 2:2). Jesus himself recognized the authority of governments (Matt. 22:15-22; 26:59; 27:1; John 19:11). Regarding the authority of Church government, Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (NIV Matt. 18:18; cf. Matt. 16:19).
- iii) Thus, the logical response to the belittling of the IDL as merely human devising may also be applied to the Samoan Parliament Act to move the IDL in order to accommodate Eastern Time. That Act of Samoan Parliament, like the IDL itself, is also a human law. Why then should Adventists go along with the "6th day Sabbath" affected by the change? As noted previously, this writer agrees that Samoa has the prerogative to change the IDL. And, the government of Samoa has rightly NOT predicated this change to prohibit religious freedom. Therefore, Adventists have broken no laws by remaining faithful to the biblical Sabbath in Samoa post 2011.

4) The IDL , as universally recognized

- i) It is undisputable that the IDL is universally recognized and accepted by the nations of the world. SDA's also consider the IDL a safe guide for time sequence. Besides, time sequence, in both the Eastern and Western hemispheres which are separated by the IDL, has been observed and respected by nations and religions for more than a hundred years. Why should it be any different now?
- ii) While the authority of governments and the church is NOT unlimited. Christians do not follow government with "blind patriotism!" There are legitimate causes for Christians to hold a different position to the ideology or policies of government. And, the Biblical examples in Daniel 3 & 6, Revelation 13, including those of Peter preaching (Acts 5:27-30), and Paul (Acts 16:35-40; Acts 17:7), are classics in Scripture. Post 2011, Adventist Samoans will be fully expected to take a stand for God in keeping the biblical Sabbath.

Consistency and Uniformity

The issues of consistency and uniformity have been an area of much discussion in past papers. Here, I will respond to: (1) the options for Sabbath keeping in Samoa post 2011. (2) The arguments for evangelism. (3) The OT concept of Sabbath. And, (4) the issues of Independent ministries and the potential aftermaths for Adventism post 2011.

1) The only option!

- i) Some have argued that the only and best option for Adventist Samoans in 2012 and beyond is to go along with the new IDL changes and adopt the "Saturday" of the new Samoan calendar. In contrast, this writer believes that the **ONLY BIBLICAL OPTION** for Adventist Samoans post 2011 is to remain faithful to the biblical Sabbath as currently kept.
- ii) If we were to ignore all the arguments about hemispheres (West and East), including those for consistency and uniformity with Tonga or Kiribati and others; the major factor in determining the biblical Sabbath would be "the keeping of the 7th day as it comes in the week without interruption." Faithfulness to the Word of God and the Sabbath as God Himself has set in concrete remains the only option. Adventist Samoans will only remain relevant as Seventh day Adventists when they keep the 7th day Sabbath that is NOT broken, removed or changed by the calendar to

accommodate the country's economic needs. THERE IS NO OTHER OR BETTER OPTION AS SUGGESTED OR IMPLIED BY SOME.

2) Migration of Samoans and evangelism

- i) Evangelism among the Samoan community has been used as an argument favoring the new calendar in Samoa. But, evangelism is not unique to the Samoan community. Evangelism is vital for all communities and countries in a round world. It does not matter if one lives in New Zealand, Australia, or Samoa. The gospel and the three angel's messages will still be preached in each country irrespective of the IDL issues or the Sabbath kept in those countries. EVANGELISM IS NO EXCUSE TO ADOPT THE SIXTH DAY OF THE WEEK AS THE BIBLICAL SABBATH.
- ii) It appears that the movement and migration of Samoans from the homeland has become a major argument for keeping the day of rest in Samoa in line with NZ and Australia. This argument is senseless when considering the fact that if this was to be done, the two Samoan territories located side by side and together in the same geographical location and hemisphere will be keeping two different Sabbaths. Why worry too much about the lapse of a day when crossing the IDL? The bigger worry or concern should be that the two territories of a united Samoa retain the biblical Sabbath. IF TWO DIFFERENT SABBATHS ARE KEPT IN THE SAMOAN TERRITORIES, THEN ONE OF THEM WILL NOT BIBLICAL. Just imagine the confusion that would create!

3) The OT concept of Sabbath

- i) Dr. David Tasker has pointed to a significant OT concept regarding the Sabbath. The Sabbath is tied to the land and not to the individual's body clock or preference.² Just as God asked Israel for a weekly rest, or Sabbath, in his honor, he also asked for a Sabbatical Year to be celebrated every seventh year.

Lev 25:1-13 (NIV)

¹ The LORD said to Moses at Mount Sinai, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the LORD. ³ For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. ⁴ But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the LORD.

Exodus 23:10-11 (NIV)

¹⁰ “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops,¹¹ but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.”

- ii) Yes, individuals experience the phenomenon of a day lost while transiting across the IDL but this individual experience does not predicate the Sabbath. The Sabbath is tied to its locality (land). Therefore the Sabbath is not determined by an individual experience while in transit but rather by the location a person finds himself in. In context of the diaspora (which is used to support keeping the 6th day Sabbath called “Saturday.”), Adventist Samoans in New Zealand or Australia keep the “Sabbath” of Eastern Time. If they live in Samoa, or America they keep the “Sabbath” of Western Time. That is the “Sabbath” reality in their respective locations.

4) Independent Samoan SDA Church

- i) Independent ministries do not influence the Sabbath

The fact that the Samoan Independent SDA Church has made a public statement to keep the Sabbath of Eastern Time is an advantage to the Seventh day Adventist faith and message. Now, the Independent Church cannot claim to be Seventh day Adventists because they now keep the 6th day of the week as the Sabbath. While trying to be “distinct” and “different” is admirable, it is NOT THE BASIS OF TRUTH OR THE DETERMINING FACTOR FOR BIBLICAL SABBATH WORSHIP. SO, THE DECISION BY THE INDEPENDENT SDA CHURCH IN SAMOA SHOULD NOT INFLUENCE THE DECISION ADVENTISTS TAKE ON SABBATH KEEPING.

- ii) True, there is the possibility of an exodus from the Adventist Church by “pro-Saturday” advocates come 2012. If that happens, it will be a truly sad situation. Therefore, the current IDL issue requires urgency for all God fearing and Scripture based Pastors of the Adventist Church, to UPHOLD THE BIBLICAL SABBATH IN CONTRAST TO ANY OTHER DAY INFLUENCED BY HUMAN DIVISINGS. The challenge in Samoa is really in the hands of Adventist Pastors. Pastors will either succeed together in unity upon the clear instructions of God’s Word OR FAIL MISERABLY in disunity with the Church as a whole come 2012.

Our success in Samoa under the current situation will be measured by the apostasy rates due to the IDL change come 2012! Whatever happens we must remember we now live in the “shaking time” where everything and everyone that could be shaken will be shaken. SO, FEAR OF LOOSING SDA MEMBERS SHOULD NOT PERSUADE US TO COMPROMISE THE “SABBATH” TRUTH NOR TO KEEP THE “6TH DAY OF THE NEW WEEK” CALLED “SATURDAY” ONLY TO PLEASE PEOPLE.

Prophetic Application

It has also been argued that the examples of Dan 3, 6, and Rev. 13 do not speak to the IDL issues affecting Sabbath keeping in Samoa. This writer believes otherwise. Here, we discuss (a) the homiletical use of these passages in reference to the situation in Samoa. And, (b) the importance of the examples recorded in Scripture and their relevance to our contemporary situations.

1) Exegesis vs. homiletics

- i) The shifting of the IDL is merely a human initiative motivated by commercial endeavors. In that case, the Christian “faith” (in God and Scripture) and “practice” (such as the keeping of the Sabbath) should not be determined by the shift of the IDL. This is the point stressed in the application of Dan 3, 6, and Rev 13. Clearly, the way in which these biblical references were used in my previous study was not exegetical. They were used homiletically, and as such, are legitimate.

- ii) The core issue of Dan 3, 6, and Rev 13, is WORSHIP. And, the undergirding lesson, among others, is “faithfulness” and “steadfastness” to God and His Word. Undoubtedly, the principles apply to the IDL issues in Samoa. So, while the shifting of the IDL by the government of Samoa does not enforce any legislation or decree that deprives “freedom of worship,” the change of the IDL does challenge the keeping of the biblical “7th day Sabbath” in Samoa. Hence, homiletically these references speak directly to the issues of worship in Samoa. **UNLESS THE BIBLE SPEAKS TO OUR CONTEMPORARY SITUATION IT REMAINS MERE HISTORICAL FACTS OF ANTIQUITY THAT ARE IRRELEVANT TO THE MODERN CHRISTIAN. WE KNOW THIS IS NOT TRUE OF SCRIPTURE.**

2) Examples in Scripture

- i) Paul reminds us, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11). Our responsibility as biblical exegetes is to find the biblical examples that speak to our contemporary issues such as the IDL in Samoa. Subsequently, we may learn from those examples!
- ii) Paul warns, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Cor. 10:11). This warning is applicable to the current IDL issues in Samoa. If we do not learn from the examples of Dan 3, 6, and Rev 13, we will “fall” by adopting IDL “time change” that interrupts the weekly cycle of days affecting the biblical Sabbath.

The way forward on divisive issues³

In retrospect, I will propose a way forward when dealing with divisive issues. This section will progress by way of questions and answers.

1) Responding to decisions by Church authority

i) Question

How should Pastors and laity in Samoa deal with the theological issues surrounding the IDL? What should they do if they do not agree with the decision of the BRC, the SPD Executive Committee, BRICOM, or the Samoa Mission Executive?

ii) Answer

While the Holy Spirit speaks to us individually, the Bible also underscores the value of subjecting our theological views and interpretation to the collective understanding of the body of believers (Prov. 12:15; 13:10; 11:14).⁴

iii) EGW underscores the following critical points:

“It is not enough for a man to think himself safe in following the dictates of his conscience.... The question to be settled is, Is the conscience in harmony with the Word of God? If not, it cannot safely be followed, for it will deceive. The conscience must be enlightened by God. Time must be given to a study of the Scriptures and to prayer. Thus the mind will be established, strengthened, and settled.”⁵

The community of believers is what keeps us as individuals in check and accountable lest we assume we can stand alone or safe in our own judgment!

“God has not passed His people by and chosen one solitary man here and another there as the only ones worthy to be entrusted with His truth. He does not give one man new light contrary to the established faith of the body. In every reform men have arisen making this claim.... Let none be self-confident, as though God had given them special light above their brethren. Christ is represented as dwelling in His people. Believers are represented as 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone' [Eph. 2:20-22].”⁶

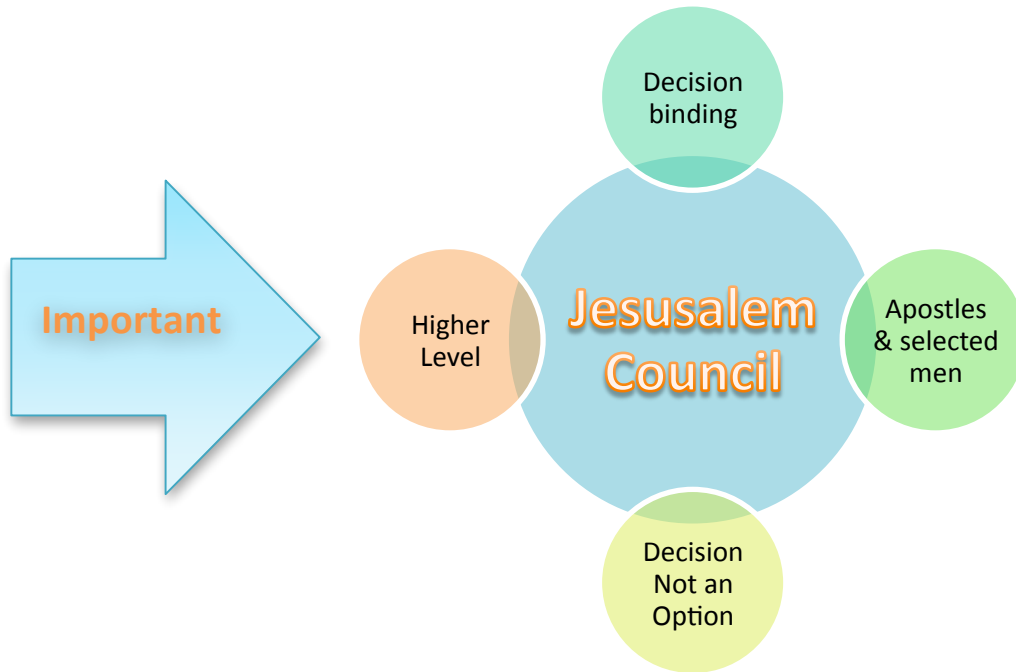
2) The Bible as a guide

i) Question

What are the implications of the above counsels for Adventist members in Samoa on the issue of the IDL?

ii) Answer

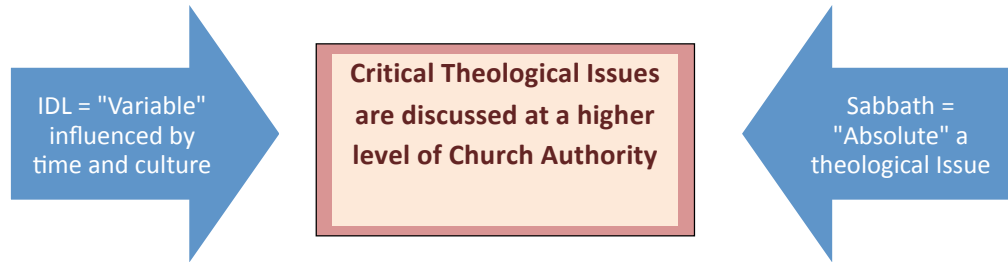
The current SS quarterly stressed the significance of the collective decision of the early Church at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). There “certain people” had taken a legalistic stand on issues of salvation (vs. 1), which resulted in heated debate between Paul and Barnabas (vs. 2). So, “Paul and Barnabas” “along with other believers” together with the “apostles and elders” met to discuss the issues. Given the theological and divisive nature of the issues discussed (Acts 15:15-17), IT HAD TO BE DECIDED AT A HIGHER LEVEL OF THE CHURCH (COUNCIL) AND NOT AT THE LOCAL CHURCH LEVEL. After the issues were discussed, the council agreed to send men “to confirm by word of mouth” the decision that had been reached (Acts 15:25-27), one which met the approval of the Holy Spirit (vs. 28). The decision of the Council was not OPTIONAL but BECAME BINDING UPON ALL THE CHURCHES.



iii) The example of the Jerusalem council

Several significant points may be deduced from the Jerusalem Council which may well apply in the Samoa IDL issues:

- Like the soteriological issues discussed in the Council of Jerusalem, the IDL changes in Samoa affecting the keeping of the 7th day Sabbath is also a THEOLOGICAL ONE. THEREFORE, the IDL ISSUE SHOULD BE DISCUSSED AT A HIGHER LEVEL OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND NOT AT THE LOCAL CHURCH LEVEL. Additionally, the IDL issue in Samoa should not be muddled by cultural patriotism, biases, or sentimental affiliation. The issues must be discussed in a neutral forum where objectivity may be upheld. Thus, the argument that the final decision of which Sabbath should be kept in Samoa must be a decision of the Samoan people themselves is invalid. This subjective approach to decision making leaves the Adventist Church and its members at risk of “Lone Rangerism” and “self-sufficiency.”



- Ironically, the biblical precedence and exemplary process has been fulfilled by the BRC. The issues have been studied by biblical scholars for over a hundred years in Adventism. The situation in Samoa is not unique. Similar to the situation faced by Tonga for over a hundred years now, the issue has been studied by the various committees at SPD (BRC, ADCOM, and EXECUTIVE) and in consultation with the wider SDA Church via the Biblical Research Institute of the GC. The theological decision reached by these committees therefore SHOULD BE BINDING AND NOT OPTIONAL in Samoa.
- The same principle noted by EGW regarding the decisions of the GC is applicable in the Samoa IDL issue where she insists that "private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body."⁷
- The fact that the stringent process of determining doctrine and truth as recommended by inspiration (Scripture and EGW) are being questioned highlight perhaps a more serious problem at a deeper level. Inadvertently, it casts doubt on the Adventist Church and message (even though it may not be perceived in this way by some!), upon Church leadership, and the ordained processes by which "truth" and "doctrines" are reached.

3) EGW counsels

i) Church authority not to be taken lightly

"Many do not realize the sacredness of church relationship and are loath to submit to restraint and discipline. Their course of action shows that they exalt their own judgment above that of the united church, and they are not careful to guard themselves lest they encourage a spirit of opposition to its voices. Those who hold

responsible positions in the church may have faults in common with other people and may err in their decisions; but notwithstanding this, the church of Christ on earth has given to them an authority that cannot be lightly esteemed Church relationship is not to be lightly canceled; yet when the path of some professed followers of Christ is crossed, or when their voice has not the controlling influence which they think it deserves they will threaten to leave the church. [But] in leaving the church they would themselves be the greatest sufferers; for in withdrawing beyond the pale of its influence, they subject themselves to the full temptations of the world.”⁸

ii) The Samoan Executive decision

I sincerely believe that the Adventist Church in Samoa and particularly the Pastors should embrace the recommendations of the BRC and the SPD as adopted by the Samoa Executive Committee. The theological understanding reached by the BRC in consultation with BRICOM at the General Conference, should be binding in Samoa and not considered as optional. It is the responsibility of Pastors and Church leaders in Samoa to understand the theological and biblical reasons for why the Adventist Church at large has taken this stand. And, it is their duty to help our lay members in Samoa to understand our commitment to Scripture. As Pastors we need to rise up and to defend the Scripture when it matters most.

4) Take home value

i) Question

What take home value does the IDL situation in Samoa have for us as Adventists and for our Samoan brothers and sisters in the homeland?

ii) Answer

Unity is a major theme of the Scripture and the desire of Christ Himself (John 17:21). EGW says, “...We should not needlessly take a course that will make differences or create dissension. We should not give the impression that if our particular ideas are not followed, it is because the ministers are lacking in comprehension and in faith, and are walking in darkness.”⁹

iii) Remain faithful to God and do not leave the Church

Regardless of what we think or whatever happens, our members in Samoa need to make a commitment to remain faithful to God and never leave the remnant Church. This movement was established by God with a special and unique message for the world (Rev. 14:1-). So, no matter what happens, we must not let anything – not a committee decision, a church leader’s actions, someone’s apostasy or teachings, or evil in the church take us out of the church.

EGW counsels, “My brother, if you are teaching that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Babylon, you are wrong.”¹⁰

iv) Strive for Unity, not separation

See, 1 Cor. 3; Ephesians 2; and Phil. 2. White says, “Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent.”¹¹

v) Respect and support leadership

Remember David ... 1 Samuel 26:11, 9. As my good mate Pastor Wame Sausau has noted aptly, “We do not show a responsible Christian spirit when we claim that the church is God's remnant and profess to be its loyal members, if at the same time we proceed to defy, disrespect, blackmail, rebel against, or undermine the church's authority and leadership. To do so is misguided, if not hypocritical.”

vi) Prayerfully Work towards the Change.

Ask God for wisdom and spiritual insight to understand the IDL issues in Samoa and to accept the recommendation by the BRC. Also pray and ask the Lord for wisdom as to how to effect biblical changes and how to witness effectively. Unquestionably, it will not be easy to worship on a day that will called “Sunday” in the new calendar. But, we can pray that God give us courage to stand for the biblical truth of the Sabbath.

vii) Remember that God Is in Control.

See Daniel 2. White underscores, “There is no need to doubt, to be fearful that the work will not succeed. God is at the head of the work, and He will set everything in order. If matters need adjusting at the head of the work, God will attend to that, and work to right every wrong. Let us have faith that God is going to carry the noble ship which bears the people of God safely into port.”¹²

Conclusion

This response is much much longer than I anticipated. However, it is intended to help readers to understand why the issue in Samoa post 2011 is more than just an IDL matter. The IDL shift in Samoa impinges on the “7th day Sabbath” and thus it is an unintended attack on biblical Sabbath keeping. This writer has taken the time to defend what SDA’s have believed about the sanctity of the Seventh day Sabbath for generations. The biblical emphasis of the Sabbath has been the thrust of the recommendation by the BRC of the SPD and adopted by the Samoa Executive Committee.

I wish to sincerely thank all those who have contributed to the discussion of the IDL and Sabbath in Samoa. The dialogue has undoubtedly opened up many areas for ongoing discussion and learning. I have personally enjoyed the privilege of being part of this theological journey. Let’s continue to uphold the IDL situation in Samoa in our prayers and in particular ask God to help the Adventist Church in Samoa embrace the unique opportunity to be a “Republic of Sabbath Keepers.”

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.

Talofa

Endnotes

¹ See David Hay, “The Change of day in Samoa: its implications for 7th day Sabbath observance” in <http://adventist.org.au/assets/340130> (accessed 05 Dec, 2011).

² See the document release by Dr David Tasker, “Concerns Expressed in Samoa about the Dateline Change” in <http://adventist.org.au/assets/340382> (accessed December 05, 2011).

³ In this section I am largely indebted to the power point by Pr. Wame Sausau of Fiji Mission entitled: "How Does the Holy Spirit Lead Us & The Church?" presented at a multi-ethnic district combine meeting for SDA's in Fiji, 5 June, 2010.

⁴ This biblical counsel is supported by EGW regarding someone who thought he saw new light. The advice was to submit his assumed new light "to brethren of experience ... in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for 'in the multitude of counselors there is safety'" (Testimonies for the Church, 5:293; see also pages 291-295).

⁵ EGW, *Our High Calling*, p. 143.

⁶ EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5:291.

⁷ EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9:260.

⁸ EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4:17, 18.

⁹ *Notebook Leaflets From Elmshaven Library*, vol.1, p. 110.

¹⁰ EGW, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 58, 59.

¹¹ EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:258.

¹² *Review and Herald*, September 20, 1892; *Selected Messages*, 2:30; emphasis supplied.