

A New Look at the International Date Line

The world's International Date Line is about 10 hours EAST of Jerusalem. How does this fact affect the observance of God's weekly Sabbath Day? Should the Sabbath day begin with the sighting at Jerusalem? What about those people living west of the International Date Line but before Jerusalem? Should the International Date Line be moved to Israel, so that the Sabbath Day begins first in Israel? Why so much confusion? Here is The PLAIN TRUTH!

William F. Dankenbring

Since according to God's calendar, New Moons -- the first visible crescent of the New Moon -- is the beginning of a new Biblical month, and must be sighted from Jerusalem, this poses a dilemma -- at least on the surface -- for people who live around the world -- but especially for those living eastward from Jerusalem as far as the Mid-Pacific Ocean. This would include people from Iran to China, from India to Australia and New Zealand.

What is the problem?

Simply this: The nations of the world agreed during the late 1800s to establish an "International Date Line" half-way around the world from the Greenwich Meridian, running north to south in the mid-Pacific ocean! This means the hours of a new day begin first in the mid-Pacific, and then sweep westward, coming to Jerusalem about 10 hours later than in eastern countries west of the IDL.

Since the New Moon sighting must be done by God's people, from Jerusalem or Israel, this means that by the time it is sighted there, the New Moon has already begun in these areas, retroactively, as it were!

Of course, in today's modern world with instant communication, and the knowledge that every seventh day of the week is a Sabbath day, there is no problem in knowing which day is the Sabbath.

But nevertheless, some argue, the day should begin in Israel, then sweep around the world, so they say the International Date Line is in the wrong place, and that we **MUST** move it to Jerusalem, or Israel, so that the Sabbath is first observed there, and not 10 hours east of Jerusalem!

Holy Horrors, Batman! Does this mean that people east of Jerusalem should keep the Sabbath AFTER it is first observed in Israel? But since the International Date Line is 10-12 hours EAST of Israel, does that mean it is pagan, and those people living west of the IDL but east of Jerusalem are keeping the WRONG DAY?

Horrors to Betsy! Should people in New Zealand, Australia and the Philippines be keeping SUNDAY as the seventh day Sabbath?

Have the world's nations totally messed up the calendar? Have the Jews been keeping the WRONG day as the Sabbath in Australia? And have the Catholics and Protestants been keeping the seventh day Sabbath, by mistake? Wow!

What is the real truth? What is the solution to this matter – this mystery?

What IS the "International Date Line"?

First, let's look at the International Date Line itself. This is an imaginary line on the earth extending from the north pole to the south pole, where the nations have decided that a new calendar day begins. Thus, the calendar date to the west of the line is one day later (newer) than the date to the east of the line. For example, it would be Sabbath to the west of the line, but Friday to the east of the line, at the same moment.

Says the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, it is “an imaginary line extending the North Pole and the South Pole and arbitrarily demarcating each calendar day from the next. It corresponds along most of its length to the 180th meridian of longitude but deviates eastward through the Bering Strait to avoid dividing Siberia and then westward to include the Aleutian Islands with Alaska. Southward of the Equator, another eastward deviation certain island groups to have the same day as New Zealand.”

It declares, “A traveler going completely around the Earth, carrying a clock that he advanced or retarded by one hour whenever he entered a new time zone and a calendar that he advanced by one day whenever his clock indicated midnight, would find on returning to his starting point that the date according to his own experience was different by one day from that kept by persons who had remained at the starting point.”

The International Date Line follows the 18th meridian for the most part, but zig zags occasionally. The meridian is half way around the world from the Greenwich meridian (or prime meridian) which is 0° longitude and runs through Greenwich, England (a borough of London).

As the sun seems to travel over 15° of the earth's surface each hour, for each 15° west of Greenwich meridian, the time is set back one hour; for each 15° one travels eastward, the clock is advanced one hour. Therefore, if two travelers -- one going east and one going west -- meet at the 180° meridian (the International Date Line), the one going west will have passed through 12 time zones and lost 12 hours, whereas the person going east will have passed through 12 time zones and gained 12 hours. At the Date Line, if one stood on one side and the other on the other

side, the one on the western side will be 24 hours ahead of the person on the east side!

A new date first begins on the western side of the date line. As the earth rotates on its axis, this new date sweeps westward across the globe, and covers the entire earth in 24 hours. As the earth is approximately 24,000 miles in circumference, this means in one hour the sun will sweep over about 1,000 miles -- thus each time zone is about 1,000 miles wide.

According to this arrangement, January 1 occurs first just to the west of the date line. As a result, people in New Zealand, just to the west of the date line, would celebrate New Year's Day 22 hours before people in Hawaii, on the eastern side of the date line.

How did the International Date Line originate? The location of the date line was established by agreement among the world's larger nations, to facilitate international commerce and trade, and international relations. When created by the nations, it was decided to make the date line zig zag in order to prevent the line from falling within single nations. Thus although the northeastern corner of Siberia extends 10° east of the 180th meridian, so the date line was moved to run east of Siberia. Since part of the Aleutian islands belonging to the United States extends west of the 180th meridian, the date line was curved to cause all the Aleutians to fall east of the date line. The date line jogs again, to allow all the Fiji islands to fall on one side of the line, so they would all be on the same day.

How does this convention affect Biblical days and time keeping?

What the Scriptures Reveal

We read that when the Messiah returns, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give Him the *throne of His father David*" (Luke 1:32). The throne of David was in Jerusalem! In fact, the Messiah will rule over ALL the nations FROM His royal city of JERUSALEM!

Isaiah the prophet tells us:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths.' For *out of ZION shall go forth the LAW, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*" (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Micah the prophet also records a very similar prophecy:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:1-2).

Notice! God's LAW and His WORD *shall* go forth FROM ZION -- from the city of JERUSALEM! God's Law and His Word *includes His sacred CALENDAR, and the proclamation of every NEW MOON, every NEW MONTH, every annual HOLY DAY, and every WEEKLY SABBATH DAY!* Judging by this Biblical criteria, then, it would certainly appear that in God's great Plan *everything should begin with His people Israel -- Mount Zion -- and His headquarters city, JERUSALEM!* -- and it WILL, in the Kingdom of God!

It would seem that God's system of day and time keeping would cause the new day, weekly Sabbath, and Holy Days to arrive FIRST AT JERUSALEM, and then be proclaimed there, and THEN follow the sun around the globe of the earth, westward, until all the earth then observes that very same day, *as it arrives at their location.*

Will Christ allow things to continue the way the modern nations have placed the International Date Line, in His soon-coming Kingdom? I don't think so!

In God's system, time -- and the DAY itself -- will most likely first BEGIN in Jerusalem, in the land of modern Israel. The first "time zone" on the planet would most likely begin in the Middle East, with the area stretching a thousand miles east to west, from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea -- the land God promised to His people Israel.

God told the children of Judah, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, upon the conquest of Canaan, that their inheritance in the "Promised Land" stretched as far as "the brook of Egypt and the Great Sea with its coastline" on the west (Joshua 15:47). "The west border was the coastline of the Great Sea" -- the Mediterranean (v.12).

But the inheritance of the 12 tribes was far greater. God told Joshua:

"From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river EUPHRATES, all the land of the Hittites, and to the GREAT SEA toward the going down of the sun [in the west], SHALL BE YOUR TERRITORY" (Joshua 1:4).

This vast stretch of land in the Middle East was promised to ISRAEL! And, in the coming reign of the Messiah, it will belong to them -- all twelve tribes!

Jerusalem, of course, is Israel's capital. Jerusalem is mentioned more than any other city in the Bible -- 666 times in the Old Testament, and 144 times in the New Testament! Why this strange number of occurrences? "666" is the number of the Beast of Revelation.

Jerusalem, at the present time, has rejected the Messiah, and He was even crucified there. Therefore, in its human, carnal form, Jerusalem represents the evil city, "which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where our Lord was crucified" (Rev.11:8).

Old Testament Jerusalem was a filthy, lewd, idolatrous city, condemned by the prophets, and judged by God, sent into captivity, and punishment. It is the symbol of rebellion, sin, lawlessness, and death!

Jerusalem Transformed

But Jerusalem is mentioned 144 times in the NEW Testament -- showing it will be TRANSFORMED into God's own spiritual headquarters city, the capital of the New Messianic Reign on earth! The number "144" has special significance -- it is 12 X 12, the number "12" being the number of organizational beginnings, foundations, and strength. The "New Jerusalem" will have 12 foundations, according to the 12 apostles of Christ -- and 12 gates or entrances, according to the 12 sons of Jacob (see Rev.21:12-14). 12 X 12 X 1000 also gives us the number of the 144,000 -- 12,000 out of each of the tribes of Israel, who will become a leadership corps of the Kingdom of God, during the beginning of the Millennium (see Rev.7:1-8). For a fuller explanation of the 144,000, write for our article, "Who Are the 144,000 of Revelation?"

It is certainly true that the central focus of Almighty God is the city of Jerusalem -- much more so than any other city on earth! Revelation 21 speaks of the New Jerusalem "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev.21:2).

Jerusalem has a great destiny in God's eyes. God says to her:.

"Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you. Shake yourself from the dust, arise; sit down, O Jerusalem! Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion!" (Isa.52:1-2).

"Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isa.52:9-10).

God thunders:

"For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will name. You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You will no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called Hephzibah [literally, "My delight is in her"], and your land Beulah [literally, "married"]; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:1-5).

These Scriptures, of course, apply in a dual sense as well: They show that God will redeem His people, and His land, and the city of Jerusalem; but they also show that He will redeem His Church, the "bride of Christ," when He returns (I Cor.11:3; Eph.5:23-27; Rev.19:6-9).

Jerusalem and the Calendar

Jerusalem will soon be the capital city of the entire world. Jesus Christ -- Yeshua the Messiah -- will make it so. *At that time, all things will be restored.* Peter declared of the coming of the Messiah, to the Jews at the Temple,

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until THE TIMES OF RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world [or, "time"] began" (Acts 3:19-21).

Will this "restoration of ALL THINGS" not include GOD'S TRUE CALENDAR? Will it not also include God's true "International Date Line"? Exactly how and where Christ will rule the International Date Line will be placed, we can surmise, guess, and speculate -- but nevertheless, that is knowledge only He has at this time.

What Should We Do?

Certainly, when Christ returns, He will establish the International Date Line where He chooses -- He will be King over all the earth.

In the meantime, should WE as His people take it upon ourselves to repudiate the International Date Line established by the nations? If we think so, I ask, ON WHOSE AUTHORITY?

Who gave YOU the authority to set times and change times and dates?

God does not give authority to every Tom, Dick and Harry, to change His calendar or to take it upon themselves to switch the International Date Line to accommodate their own "pet theory"!

Balderdash!

To attempt to do so is to URSURP the authority of CHRIST HIMSELF! CHRIST will determine the decisions regarding the International Date Line when He returns to set up His Kingdom!

At this time, however, He has allowed the nations of the world, led by the British, French, Americans, and other trading nations to establish the International Date Line, and the Jewish rabbis and authorities have endorsed it in the determination of the weekly Sabbath Day. God expects His people to OBEY PROPERLY INSTITUTED authority! We do not have the right to decide for OURSELVES where to place the International Date Line! God forbid!

Notice!

Matthew 23:2-3

In the King James Version of the Bible, we read in Matthew 23:2-3, the following words of Jesus: “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.”

The NIV Bible has these verses: “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you to. But do not what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”

Moffatt has this passage: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses; so do whatever they tell you, obey them, but do not do as they do. They talk, but they do not act.”

Jesus certainly did not mean for His disciples to do EVERYTHING the scribes and Pharisees taught, regarding the Scriptures, the law of God, because they added many VAIN TRADITIONS and false interpretations to that LAW given by God through Moses!

What, then, did He mean in Matthew 23:2-3?

In Exodus 18.13 we read, “And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses SAT to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.” Now, let’s be honest with the Word of God. Moses sat, judging the people. Obviously, then, he was sitting down – in a “seat” of some sort, as he exercised his authority, given to him by God. What was this “authority? Well, he JUDGED among the people! How did he do this?

Let us read on, and see exactly what Moses did, while he “sat” in his seat! Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, was concerned that Moses would wear himself out, handling so many people's problems. He asked him why he did this.

It should be clear then that we must understand Jesus’ words in Matthew 23:2-3 in the light of the other Scriptures which bear on this subject of the authority of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus very plainly said, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever THEY bid you observe, *THAT OBSERVE AND DO*” (Matt 23:2-3). But He could not contradict Himself! He also called them a pack of wolves, a den of snakes, hypocrites and fools, and said to BEWARE of their doctrines!

So where do we draw the line?

The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* points out regarding these verses:

“**In Moses’ seat** that is, *AS INTERPRETERS OF THE LAW GIVEN BY MOSES*.

“All therefore – that is, all which, as SITTING IN THAT SEAT, and TEACHING OUT OF THAT LAW, they bid you observe, that observe and do. The word 'therefore' is thus, it will be seen, of GREAT IMPORTANCE, AS *LIMITING* THOSE INJUNCTIONS WHICH HE WOULD HAVE THEM OBEY TO WHAT THEY FETCHED FROM THE LAW ITSELF. In requiring *EXPLICIT OBEDIENCE* to such injunctions, He would have them to recognize the AUTHORITY BY WHICH THEY TAUGHT over and above the obligation of the law itself --

an important principle truly; but He who denounced the traditions of such teachers (chap. 15:3) cannot have meant here to throw His shield over these [traditions, and rules which were *not* “fetched from the law itself”] . . .” In other words, “Moses’ seat” meant authority to administer the LAW OF GOD – NOT their own humanly devised *traditions*, or man-made “laws,” because such “traditions of men” and “added” human commandments were NOT given to Moses and were never part of the Law of God!

“And Moses said unto his father in law, ‘Because the people come unto me to INQUIRE OF GOD: When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I *judge* between one and another, and I DO MAKE THEM *KNOW THE STATUTES OF GOD, AND HIS LAWS*’” (Exodus 18.15-16).

Do you see? Moses, in his seat, TAUGHT THE PEOPLE THE LAWS, COMMANDMENTS, AND STATUTES OF GOD! He was a ruler and a teacher. He expounded and interpreted God’s Laws, and helped people see HOW THEY APPLIED in specific, human and societal situations.

This was the primary function of those who later “sat in Moses’ seat.” This was what Jesus said plainly that the Pharisees were responsible for. He said they sat in Moses’ seat – so the responsibility of explaining, expounding, interpreting God’s laws, and issuing judgments based upon them, was theirs to handle. Jesus said so. BUT – did He really say we should do WHATEVER they tell us to do – *even if it disagreed with the words of Moses – and the Torah – the WRITTEN LAWS of GOD?*

God did give the scribes and rabbis authority to make decisions regarding the Laws of God, based on the Torah itself. We read in Deuteronomy 17, “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge . . . matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days and enquire of them’ they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce . . . And you shall be CAREFUL TO DO according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the LAW in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you” (Deut.17:8-11).

How clear! The civil, national, and rabbinical leaders have authority from God to hold councils and make decisions relating to commerce and jurisprudence, so long as it does not contradict the LAW or WORD of God itself!

Nowhere in God’s Word does He tell us where to put the International Date Line. He therefore left it up to the nations to decide. The Jews and Rabbis have accepted their decision Who are we to argue?

God is not the author of CONFUSION (I Cor.14:33). Do not allow apostate MEN to lead you off into doctrinal ERROR and spiritual destruction! Those who try to establish their own ideas where the International Date Line should be are bringing judgment upon themselves.