
United Church of God, *an International Association*



Beginning of the Sabbath

In Extreme Northern and Southern Regions

Statement from the Council of Elders
August 2004

All scriptures are quoted from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee) unless otherwise noted.

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Regarding His Sabbaths, God commands that they be observed “from evening to evening” (Leviticus 23:32). Throughout biblical times this was the way of determining the beginning and ending of days (Exodus 12:18).

In the Bible, evening began when the sun went down (Joshua 8:29; 2 Chronicles 18:34; Nehemiah 13:19) and at which time a new day began. In New Testament times, days were calculated the same way. Mark 1:32 records that, after the sun had set, marking the end of the Sabbath, crowds brought many ailing people to Jesus to be healed, having waited until after the Sabbath had ended to come to Him.

The Gospel accounts also record that Joseph of Arimathea entombed Jesus’ body before evening to avoid any conflict with an approaching annual Sabbath (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54).

God, Creator of the Sabbath, determines when the Sabbath day begins and ends. Internal evidence shows that the Sabbath was observed from sunset to sunset throughout the Bible. Thus the biblical Sabbath today begins Friday evening at sunset and ends Saturday evening at sunset. Similarly, each of the annual Holy Days begins the evening before at sunset.

For all areas between the Arctic and Antarctic Circles where there is a rising and setting of the sun, members should keep the Sabbath from sunset to sunset. For the past 30 years, members in Alaska have proven that it is possible to live in northern areas and observe the Sabbath from sunset to sunset and maintain their employment.

Members living above the Arctic Circle (66 degrees, 33 minutes north latitude) live in a region where there is no sunset or sunrise for about three months in the winter. Similarly, there is no sunset or sunrise for about three months in the summer. There is no specific biblical instruction for people living in such an area. No one in the Church can change what God has set, but in extreme situations like this the Church must make administrative recommendations. To adhere to scriptural principles, it is the view and recommendation of the Church that a member use the time of sunset at the nearest latitude directly south of his location where a sunset actually occurs, in order to mark the beginning and ending of the Sabbath day. (The same principles would apply to individuals living south of the Antarctic Circle.)

In the past the Church has encouraged members in these remote areas to use a designated time such as 6 p.m. to begin the Sabbath and 6 p.m. the next afternoon to end the Sabbath. However, we believe that this recommendation was arbitrary and has no relationship to the biblical designation of sunset beginning the Sabbath. It is the current recommendation of the Church that a member who lives in an area north of the Arctic Circle observe the Sabbath (and the Holy Days) from the sunset time as determined by the nearest latitude directly south of his location where there is actually a sunset. We believe that this is more consistent with the biblical designation for the beginning and ending of the Sabbath.

If a member feels there are extenuating circumstances affecting his situation, he should consult with his pastor. If a local pastor is not available, he may contact Ministerial Services at the home office in Cincinnati for more direction.