

THE ASHANTI/AKANS SABBATH IN CONTEXT/CONCEPT WITH THE BIBLICAL SABBATH: A MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Ashantis/Akans through their culture and traditional beliefs give valuable conceptual understanding on major areas of doctrinal issues. Their beliefs, observance and practices on the Sabbath are not an exception. The Sabbath is an important theological concept in the Bible. This article presents and contextually analyzes the biblical Sabbath in relation with the Sabbath beliefs and practice of the Ashantis/Akans. The missiological approach of the church to have greater impact in spreading God's word among the Ashantis is also discussed. In particular, Ashantis/Akans Christians, whose traditional belief encourages such practice, find a biblical confirmation in perspective. By engaging the Ashantis/Akans in their cultural and traditional beliefs, the church may enlarge its basis for outreach and evangelism thereby increasing its membership in Ghana.

1. Introduction

Both the Old and New Testament of the Bible contain several references to the Sabbath. While the opening chapters of the Bible affirms the establishment of the Sabbath for God's people (Gen 2:1-3), the aftermath chapters and books indicate that Sabbath-keeping will be an integral part of the restoration following the impending judgment (Isa 56:1-6; 58:1-14).

In fact, Sabbath-keeping bears an eschatological significance, for when God creates the "new heavens and new earth," the Lord will be worshipped on the Sabbath (Isa 66:23).¹ The connection between Sabbath-keeping in Bible and in the cultural beliefs of people has been an issue of interest especially to Seventh-day Adventists, even though other ques-

tions are often raised on the concept of Sabbath for missions. This study seeks to understand the concept of Sabbath in its context and other related issues. This article undertakes a survey of the concept of the Sabbath in Bible, and among the Ashantis/Akans, seeking to clarify meanings of the concept and how the church can capitalize on that to advance its mission among the Ashantis/Akan and Ghana as a whole. In what follows, the concept of Sabbath in the OT will be considered.

2. Concept of Sabbath in the Old Testament

The seventh-day Sabbath is importantly portrayed in the books of the Old Testament. The Sabbath is discussed in the various literature of the Old Testament. The Sabbath hinges on God's divine work of creation. Without creation the Sabbath cannot stand and will be meaningless and nonexistent. The Sabbath takes its roots from creation which is a major theme in the Old Testament and as such the Sabbath is a major theme in the Old Testament.

2.1 The Sabbath in the Pentateuch

The Old Testament contains several references to the Sabbath.² In its appearance in Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11, and exodus 31:12-17, biblical motivation and justification for the observance of the Sabbath is provided and a biblical view of the origin of the Sabbath is established. The Sabbath is grounded in the divine creation. The seventh day is the climactic apex of the whole story³ of creation. The goal of the whole creation and of man is God's Sabbath. The creation of the world reaches its completion only through the Sabbath, the seventh day.⁴ The Sabbath in the Old Testament is God's signature on creation (Gen 2: 1-3). Genesis 2: 1-3 forms the conclusion of the Biblical creation account.

Kenneth A. Strand argues that the expression "the seventh day" appears more than two times and four main ideas are associated with the

² Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 12.

³ Jiri Moskala, "The Sabbath in the First Creation Account," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 13/1 (Spring 2002): 57-58; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis, The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 14-17.

⁴ John H. Walton, *Genesis, NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 35-36, 39-41, 65, 163.

seventh day: (1) God had finished His creative work on the day; (2) God rested from all His creative work on that day; (3) God blesses that day; and (4) God made it holy.⁵ The separation from the seventh-day from the six working days is a gift from the creator of the whole world and creature like mankind in it. God has separated the seventh day and the seventh day is God's day for mankind as a whole and not merely His day for the Israelites. It is because of God's separation of the seventh day from the six working days and His assigning holiness to it⁶ that the Sabbath is designated a "holy Sabbath"⁷ (Ex. 16: 23; 31: 14, 15; 35: 2; Isa . 58:13).

Gerhard F. Hasel argues that the Sabbath is a divine and not a human invention and institution by giving out seven implication.⁸ These implications affirm divine institution of the Sabbath. Exodus 16 presents an occa-

⁵ Kenneth A. Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1982), 21-30; C. Westermann, *Genesis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1974), 231-233. Kenneth A. Strand, "The Sabbath," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, et al (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 495. See also Gerhard F. Hasel "The Sabbath in the Pentateuch," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1982), 23.

⁶ Westermann, *Genesis*, 236.

⁷ Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 25.

⁸ Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Origin of the Biblical Sabbath and the Historical-Critical Method: A Methodological Test Case," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 4/1 (1993): 19-12. Hasel outlines the following seven implications. (1) Since the origin of the Sabbath is rooted and grounded in God and not in man, it follows that God has control over the Sabbath. (2) Since the Sabbath originated with God at creation, long before there were any Hebrews, or Jews, in existence, the Sabbath cannot be properly said to be originally a Hebrew day of worship or celebration. (3) Since the Sabbath has a creation origin, it is a creation order, a creation memorial, and a creation model. Anyone who interferes with this order, memorial, and model interferes with an institution of God's creation order and not with one man. (4) Since the origin of the Sabbath is linked with creation, anyone who changes, removes, alters, or abolishes that Sabbath engages in an alteration, abolishment, removal, or change of a divine creation institution. Such interference is an act of human hybris. (5) Because the Sabbath was first celebrated by God at the end of the six days divine creative activity, God himself provides the example of Sabbath observance for humankind to emulate. (6) The text reveals that the divine Exemplar "hallowed," "sanctified," and made the Sabbath "holy." Humans do not make a day holy by keeping it or resting in it. The Sabbath is made "holy," "sanctified," and "hallowed" by an act of God. (7) As the Sabbath originated in creation and is linked to the universality of creation, so the universality of the seventh-day Sabbath for all human beings is rooted in the universality of creation.

sion that show God's gift of the Sabbath. The gift of the manna from heaven as it also serves as a miracle from God to His people in times of distress. Sabbath here is seen in the forefront God instructed the Israelites through Moses that gives a bread would rain from heaven; on each of the first five days a portion had to be gathered in, but on the sixth day "it shall be twice as much as they gather daily (v. 5)."⁹ In verses 22-30 they were to gather twice as much as they take daily on the sixth day since the Sabbath God was not going to rain the manna. They are commanded by God to bake what they want to bake and boil what they want to boil (v. 23) for the holy Sabbath of the Lords comes. Moses tells the people to eat the manna on the Sabbath for they will not field some of the manna on the field (vv. 25, 26). Manna is given every day with exception of the Sabbath, with explicit instructions about how to relate to it (Exo 16).¹⁰ Strands explain it precisely by pointing out that "exodus 16 contains key notions regarding origin, purpose, function, and meaning of the Sabbath. It reveals that the Sabbath institution was known before the giving of the law on Mount Sinai."¹¹

In exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 the Sabbath is portrayed and emphasized in the Decalogue. The commandments of God are given to humanity in the form of a Decalogue. The fourth commandment speaks of the Sabbath which is to be remembered and to be kept holy (Exo 20:8; Deut 5:12). In both accounts God's Sabbath is to be kept holy. Ekkehardt Mueller convincingly states that "the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy agrees completely with the one found in Exodus 20 that the Sabbath should be kept holy and that after six days of labour on the specific seventh day, the Sabbath, humanity should rest."¹² It can therefore be stated that the fourth commandment provides the reaffirmation, from the very mouth of God, that the Sabbath had its origin in Him and through Him at creation.¹³

⁹ Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 26.

¹⁰ George W. Reid, "Faith under Pressure: The Sabbath as Case Study," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9/1-2 (1998): 142.

¹¹ Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 27.

¹² Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Sabbath Commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12-15," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/2 (Fall 2003): 149.

¹³ Hasel, *The Origin of the Biblical Sabbath and the Historical-Critical Method: A Methodological Test Case*, 24.

2.2 The Sabbath in the Writing

In the Old Testament writings, it is clear that the Sabbath remains a part of the covenant walk with God, designed as a blessing to God's ple.¹⁴ Strands posit that the Sabbath doubtlessly functions as a covenant sign of the Sinai covenant.¹⁵ He further correctly states "the Sabbath is a covenant sign through which God has pledged that the present proleptic experience of freedom, liberation, joy, and communion on the weekly Sabbath is but a foretaste of the ultimate reality in the glorious future."¹⁶ E. Edward Zinke eloquently states that "the Sabbath is a perpetual sign and everlasting covenant of relationship between God and His people in order that they might know who it is that created them (Exo 31:17) and sanctifies them (Exo 31:13) , and that they might recognize Him as the Lord their God."¹⁷

2.3 The Sabbath in the Prophets

The concept of the Sabbath is prominent in the prophetic books of the Old Testament especially the book of Isaiah. Daniel K. Bediako argues that Sabbath-keeping bears an eschatological significance, for when God creates the "new heavens and new earth," the Lord will be worshipped on the Sabbath (Isa 66:23).¹⁸ He further concludes giving four main concept of the Sabbath in the book of Isaiah.¹⁹ Hasel explains it precisely to the

¹⁴ Reid, 142.

¹⁵ Strands, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 36.

¹⁶ Ibid., 37.

¹⁷ E Edward Zinke, "A Theology of the Sabbath," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 2/2 (1991): 149.

¹⁸ Bediako, "Sabbath in the Book of Isaiah," 162-175.

¹⁹ Ibid, 172-173. He concludes on his studies on the Sabbath in the that "The concept of the Sabbath appears four times in the book of Isaiah (1:13-15; 56:2-6; 58:13-14; 66:23 (1) Isaiah 1:13-15 indicates that merely formalistic Sabbath keeping is detestable to the Lord; by keeping the Sabbath without the requisite spiritual renewal, the people of Judah were inviting cursers upon themselves instead of blessings. (2) While Isa 1 contains an invective against improper Sabbath-keeping, in Isa 56 Sabbathkeeping sums up religiosity and fear of the Lord. It also takes on a universalistic tone, where foreigners are expected to join the covenant community in keeping the Sabbath. (3) As does Isa 56, Isa 58 reveals that Sabbath-keeping epitomizes righteousness, so that proper Sabbath-keeping will have to characterize the aftermath of the exile. That Sabbath-keeping encapsulates covenantal faithfulness explains why Judah's prosperity and continual inheritance of the land are contingent upon proper Sabbath-keeping (58:12-14). In this regard, Sab

point that “most significant aspects of prophetic proclamation regarding the Sabbath are its links with covenant, sign, and faithfulness, . . . eschatology and new creation. The inevitable impression is that the Sabbath will remain as God’s gift to man from the first creation even to the new heavens and the new earth (Isa. 66:22, 23).²⁰ Moskala asserts that the Sabbath can be seen as “a gift of God to humanity, allowing humanity to maintain its true human value. Sabbath is in essence God in relationship with man.”²¹

3. Concept of the Sabbath in the New Testament

The word *σάββατον*, “Sabbath,” occurs 69 times in the New Testament (NT) in seven different grammatical forms. Sabbath occurs 11 times in the Gospel of Matthew, 12 times in the Gospel of Mark, 30 times in Luke-Acts, and 13 times in the Gospel of John. It also occurs once each in 1Corinthians 16:2; Colossians 2:16; and Hebrews 4:9. Out of the 69 occurrences of Sabbath, 56 are in the Gospels (20 times in the Gospel of Luke and ten times in the Acts of the Apostles).²² It occurs 43 times in the Synoptic Gospels.

The Seventh-day Sabbath and its role in Christianity has been a battlefield for biblical scholars.²³ According to Bacchiocchi, three main views

bath-keeping plays an integral role in the future restoration and mission of God’s people (58:12-14; cf. 56:2-7; 66:18-24). (4) the universal significance of the Sabbath in Isa 56 reaches its climax in the ‘eschatological’ text of Isa 66, where “all flesh” will worship the Lord on the Sabbath day and the new moon. This might suggest that the Sabbath will be observed in the “new heavens and new earth” (vv.22-23).

²⁰ Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 53.

²¹ Moskala, “The Sabbath in the First Creation Account,” 59; Sakae Kubo, *God Meets Man: A Theology of the Sabbath and Second Advent* (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1978), 16.

²² Specht identifies sixty-seven occurrences of *σάββατον* in the Greek New Testament, fifty-six in the Gospels. He explains that *σάββατον* means *week* in six references, five references in connection with the *first day of the week*, and fifty references to the *seventh-day Sabbath*. See Walter F. Specht, “The Sabbath in the New Testament,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1982), 93.

²³ Herold Weiss, “The Sabbath in the Synoptic Gospels,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38 (1990): 13.

come up on the Sabbath in the New Testament.²⁴ These are (1) Abrogation of the Sabbath: sees that there is a radical discontinuity of the Sabbath between the Old and New Testaments. (2) Transference of the Sabbath: sees that the principle of Sabbathkeeping in the New Testament as transferred to Sunday rather than abrogated. (3) Permanence of the Sabbath – Sees the principle of seventh-day Sabbathkeeping in the New Testament as being not nullified but clarified and enriched by Christ's teaching and redemptive ministry.²⁵ The debate on the issue of the Seventh-day Sabbath in the

²⁴ Samuel Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath in the New Testament: Answers to Questions* (Berrien Spring, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1986), 19-27. The author has also authored several books on the Sabbath. See his *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome, Italy: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977); idem, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1988); idem, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire: A Biblical Analysis of Recent Sabbath/Sunday Developments* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1998).

²⁵ For full discussion see Ibid, 19-27; Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 82-84; Donald A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, 1982) 1-444; Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, PA: 1968); Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 223-235. Other scholars present these views as (1) Sunday sabbatarianism (transfer modification), (2) non-sabbatarianism (fulfilment transformation), and (3) Saturdaysabbatarianism (reformation continuation). Norman R. Gulley, "The Battle Against the Sabbath and Its Endtime Importance," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5.2 (Autumn 1994): 90. The Sunday sabbatarianism (transfer/modification) view considers Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. This view posits that the Sabbath of the Old Testament (OT) was transferred to Sunday in the New Testament (NT), with adjustment of Sabbath keeping rules. The non-sabbatarianism (fulfillment/transformation) view considers the Sabbath as fulfilled in Christ. This view consider the Sabbath of the OT as fulfilled by Jesus, and the symbolism of the Sinaitic Sabbath having been transformed into other symbols in the new covenant. The Saturday sabbatarianism (reformation/continuation) considers the Seventh-day (Saturday) as the continued Sabbath. This view, held by Seventh-day Adventists, consider the Sabbath of the OT as continued in the NT. The Seventh-day Adventists believes that Jesus Christ kept Jesus and reformed Sabbath keeping by disregarding the human regulations that bound it. "This reformed Sabbath of the OT continues to be the Sabbath of the NT." (Gulley, "The Battle Against the Sabbath and Its Endtime Importance," 90). However, Lutz Doering has six different scholarly views. These include the following: (1) Jesus was against the Sabbath commandment; (2) Jesus was against only the Pharisaic halakah and not the Sabbath commandment itself; (3) Jesus was not fundamentally against the Sabbath commandment but only against its universal and inflexible application; (4) the free stance of Jesus vis-à-vis the Sabbath is marked by the

NT, and its role in Christian today has become a major issue with diverging views.²⁶ The author of this article believes that the New Testament views the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping, not as being abrogated or transferred to Sunday, but as being valid and valuable for Christians.

3.1 Sabbath in the Gospel

The attitude of Jesus to the Law of Moses and specifically to the Sabbath observance has produced several theories and interpretations among the New Testament scholars. A careful study of the four Gospels reveals that the Seventh-day Sabbath was one of the main areas of controversy between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders of His time. A careful study

eschatological stamp of his teaching and work; (5) Jesus views the law not as a rigid ordinance but in terms of its intent; and (6) Jesus lived in full conformity to the Sabbath praxis of the day (Lutz Doering, *Sabbat: Sabbathalacha und -praxis im antiken Judentum und Urchristentum* (TSAJ 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 399–400, in Donald A. Hagner, "Jesus and the synoptic Sabbath controversies," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19.2 (2009): 215).

- ²⁶ In the *Perspectives on the Sabbath: 4 Views*, four scholars present exegetical, theological, and historical positions, each with a different perspective on the doctrine of the Sabbath. The first presented the seventh-day Sabbath as being in existence from the Creation of the earth, still useful and needed for the human race, and will closely connect with the images of the New Earth in both the OT and NT. (Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: 4 views*, 9–29, 99–118, 172–186, 262–277, 359–374.) The second presented the Sabbath as existing only in the Old Testament until the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which changed the Sabbath from the seventh-day to Sunday. (Ibid., 73–82, 119–171, 205–215, 277–285, 374–387.) The third presented the Seventh-day Sabbath as exclusively Jewish; the Christian should rest and worship any day. (Ibid., 90–99, 197–205, 216–261, 292–304, 387–396.) The fourth understands the Sabbath in light of Christology. All the regulations of the OT were fulfilled in Christ, and the Sabbath has acquired a new perspective. Since Jesus has brought the true Sabbath rest into the present, the Sabbath commands are no longer valid for believers. (Ibid., 82–90, 187–197, 286–292, 305–358, 396–411.) Christopher John Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: 4 views* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2011); Carson, and Ratzlaff endorse a non-sabbatarian view. They allege that in NT Christ fulfills and replaces the Seventh-day Sabbath. For them, the Seventh-day Sabbath was for Israel in the OT. They explain that the Seventh-day Sabbath, which is a type of the salvation-rest Christ brought, differs from the creation Sabbath. They allege that the Sabbath commandment met both its reality and fulfilment in Christ like the priesthood, sacrifices and Messianic prophecies. For them, the Seventh-day Sabbath has undergone transformation from physical rest to salvation instead of transference from Saturday to Sunday. Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis* (Applegate, CA: Life Assurance Ministries, 1989–1990); D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day, A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982).

of the gospels, also, seems to reveal the Sabbath conflicts as deliberate, and meant for the instruction of the church on Sabbath keeping.²⁷ The issue of the Sabbath, therefore, is important in the theological frame of the Gospels, particularly in the Synoptic Gospels.²⁸

Two main events are taken into consideration in determining the Christian position about the Sabbath observance in NT. These are (1) the accounts related to the resurrection of Jesus, and (2) the stories about the Sabbath controversies in the Gospels.²⁹

3.2 Sabbath in the Acts

The concept of the Sabbath is prominent in the prophetic books of the New Testament especially the book of Acts of the Apostles. Ringe posits that in Acts the Sabbath is also acknowledged as a proper day on which to gather for prayer (often, but not only, in the synagogue) and to hear Torah read and interpreted.³⁰ He further states that "The writer of Acts describes Paul as beginning his ministry in the various cities by going to the synagogues on the Sabbath to teach (Acts 13:13-43; 17:2; 18:4). In Philippi, he is said to have sought out a women's gathering for Sabbath prayers "outside the gate by the river" (Acts 16:13) as the site for his initial teaching in that city."³¹ This emphasizes the importance placed on the Sabbath by the apostles and the fact that the Sabbath was observed by them.

On his comments on the observance of the Sabbath in the letters of Paul, Ringe asserts that:

²⁷ Ibid., 94.

²⁸ Tonstad, "The Seventh Day in the New Testament," 182.

²⁹ Some scholars use this event to support the Sunday Sabbath observance, whereas others consider the event as strengthening the observance of the Seventh-day Sabbath. For full discussion see Karen Pidcock-Lester, "John 5:1-9," *Interpretation* 59.1(2005): 63; John P. Meier, "The Historical Jesus and the Plucking of the Grain on the Sabbath," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66.4 (2004): 561. For the Sabbath healing stories in the gospels see (1) Mark 3:1-6//Matt. 12:9-14//Luke 6:6-11: Man with a Crippled Hand, (2) Luke 13:10-17: Afflicted Woman, (3) Luke 14:1-6: Man with Dropsy, (4) John 5:1-18: Crippled Man, (5) John 9:1-41: Man Born Blind, among others Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; 9:1-41; Mark 3:1-6; Matthew 12:9-14. See Daryl D. Schmidt, "The Sabbath Day: To Heal or Not to Heal," *Dialogue* 27.4 (1994): 125.

³⁰ Sharon W. Ringe, "'Holy, as the Lord Your God Commanded You', Sabbath in the New Testament," *Interpretation* 59.1 (2005): 18.

³¹ Ibid., 19.

The letters unquestionably attributed to Paul do not mention Sabbath observance. In fact, Col 2:16 is the only epistolary reference to the Sabbath, and it simply urges the addressees of the letter to let no one condemn them "in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths." Nothing is specified about their practices in those matters, but the suggestion is that those groups follow patterns different in some way from those of other groups of Jews in their communities.³²

4. Concept of the Sabbath to the Ashantis/Akan

Who are the Ashantis/Akans? What is their culture and traditional belief in congruence with the biblical Sabbath? The Akans are a nation and indigenous ethnic group residing on the Gulf of Guinea in the southern regions of the former Gold Coast region in what are today the republics of Ghana and the Ivory Coast in West African. Akans are the largest ethnic group in both countries and have a population of roughly 20 million people. Akans are not a racially homogenous ethnicity and they encompass a range of phenotypes.³³ The Ashantis/Akans of Ghana are traditionally accustomed to celebrating different rituals which are enshrined in their cultural life.

Seventh day Sabbath observance is the eternal covenant sign between God and His people (Ex. 31:16–17). The seventh day Sabbath is traditionally acknowledged and observed in Ghana and some parts of West Africa among the Akans because it remains for the people of God (Heb. 4:4, 9; cf Luke 4:16, 31). The Akan have two names for Saturday. One of the Akans name for Saturday "Memeneda" which literally means "the day of I am that I am" and the other is "Homeda" which literally means "a day of rest." The "memeneda" is in congruence with God's name "I am that I am" which He revealed to Moses when God had encounter with Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:14), while the "homeda" is in congruence with the Sabbath as a day of rest (Gen. 2:1–3; Exo. 20:8; Deut. 5:12).

One of the traditional Akan names for the Almighty God of creation is "Tweaduaupon Kwame", that is, "Saturday-born God." The name "Kwame" is a personal name given to a male born on Saturday. The

³² Ibid.

³³ "Akans," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akan_people.html (accessed 15 December 2014)

Akans belief that God completed his work of creation on Saturday, hence God is named "Kwame" among the Akans. Again, this traditional belief is in congruence with the Biblical truth of the seventh day as a special day of God. It must be said that "Akan religion recognizes only one Supreme Deity, Onyamee or Onyankopon Tweadumpon Kwaame, the...God of Saturday, synonymous with the Jehovah of the Jews."³⁴ The seventh day Sabbath, the only divine commandment dating to creation (Gen. 2:1-3) which the Creator commands men to "remember to keep holy" (Ex. 20:8-11; Mark 2:27), is almost intrinsic to the African and is etched deep in his consciousness. Among the Akan people, the seventh day of the week is a day when no work, no funeral, no marriage, no festivities, should be performed. They are known as the forbidden day which is reserved for the creator God. Bradford maintains that:

There is growing evidence from the African continent that a Sabbath consciousness exists among its peoples, and has from time immemorial. This consciousness long predates Christianity, and certainly does not derive from the European ecclesiastical establishment, which apparently strove mightily to suppress it.³⁵

Jacob Nortey posits that, in the Ghanaian context, and especially within the people forming the Ashanti or Akan nation, Saturday has been a traditionally holy day, a day for worship of God.³⁶ The history of the seventh day Sabbath is deep-rooted in the culture of the Ashanti/Akan people. This experience of Sabbath rest enables Akans to keep and maintain contact with the invisible world of the Supreme Being (God), gods and ancestors. Owusu-Mensa eloquently points that:

Oral traditions and modern scholars and research into Akan traditions and customs affirm Saturday as Onyamee Kwaame's special day in Akan land. Writing in the early twenties, Rattray, the British anthropologist, discovered that the Ashante name for God is Onyamee or Onyankopon Kwaame 'whose day of service is a Saturday' adding

³⁴ Kofi Owusu-Mensa, *Saturday God and Adventism in Ghana*. (New York, NY: P. Lang, 1993), 2.

³⁵ Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots The African Connection* (Barre, VT: L. Brown and Sons, 1999), 25-27.

³⁶ Jacob J. Nortey, *Independent African Churches-Are they Genuinely Christian?* *Spectrum*, Dec. 1989, 30.; Bradford, *Sabbath Roots The African Connection*, 25-26.

that, 'this Ashante God is the same as the Jehovah of the Israelites, whom they worshipped on the Sabbath or Saturday'.³⁷

Interestingly Akans call the White man "Akwasibronii," which literally the one who brought Sunday worship, instead of the traditionally acknowledged Seventh day Sabbath. The Akan people of Ghana treasure a great African heritage in Onyamee Kwaame, the God of Saturday. Long before the European Akwasi Bronii anchored at the shores of Ghana in 1471 A.D.³⁸ The Akan peoples of Ghana worshiped the Creator on Saturday long before the first Portuguese ship anchored off the coast in 1471. So prior to the coming of the Portuguese the Akans knew God.³⁹ Akans, however, did not know Jesus but they knew God. It was the missionaries who brought the Gospel of Jesus to Akans but not the knowledge of God.

In the 1920's Asante records have it that the queen mother and women of Asante presented a silver stool as a gift, through the British governor in the Gold Coast (Ghana's colonial name), to Princess Mary of Britain.⁴⁰ The message that accompanied the gift were:

We pray that the great God Nyakopon, on whom men lean and do not fall, whose day of worship is a Saturday, and whom the Ashanti serve just as she [Princess Mary] serves Him, that He may give the king's child and her husband long life and happiness, and finally, when she sits upon this silver stool, which the women of Ashanti have made for their White queen mother, may she call us to mind.⁴¹

The queen mother's allusion to the Akan God of Saturday, Onyame Kwame, indicates their knowledge and belief in God and the Sabbath as the day of the Lord.

5. Missiological Implication

Since the introduction of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) in Ghana in the late 19th century, the Church has made tremendous strides in the country. The church is stronger among the Ashantis because some

³⁷ Kofi Owusu-Mensa, *Onyamee Kwaame, the Akan God of Saturday* (Accra, Ghana: Advent Press, 1990), 17-20; Kofi Owusu-Mensa, *Saturday God and Adventism in Ghana* (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 32.

³⁸ Owusu-Mensah, *Saturday God and Adventism in Ghana*, 29.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Bradford, *Sabbath Roots The African Connection*, 25-26.

⁴¹ Ibid., 27.

beliefs, teachings and practices of the Church are similar to the Ashanti culture and lifestyle.⁴² Out of the 24 million population of Ghana, more than four hundred thousand are seventh-day Adventists. Ghana has more than 100 ethnic groups. Out of over four hundred thousand Seventh-day Adventist in Ghana, about half are Ashantis. The similarities of the Ashanti culture and practices with the beliefs, doctrines and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church presents missiological prospects and challenges for the SDA in Ghana.

5.1 Prospects in Mission

5.1.1 *Common Grounds for Evangelism*

Seventh-day Adventist evangelism among the Ashantis has recorded greater numbers of baptisms than other areas of the country due to similarities of SDA beliefs, teachings and practices.⁴³ There are prospects for speeding up church evangelistic activities among the Ashantis in Ghana. Friendship evangelism may serve as an effective means of reaching the Ashantis. Church members should be trained to do personal evangelism, introducing their friends, relatives, and love ones to Jesus. They would better be able to answer questions, enquiries and concerns of their close friends and relatives about Jesus and the Church. Other types of evangelism should also be engaged to complement the friendship evangelism for efficient and effective missionary endeavour to the Ashantis.

5.1.1 *Church Schools and Hospital*

Since the Ashantis are industrious they take initiatives to establish church schools and hospitals. There are six senior high schools, one college of education, and one nurses training college. There are many Junior High, and basic schools in the area. The aim of SDA philosophy of education is to

⁴² Some of these include belief in the Trinity, non-communicable attributes of God (Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, Eternal, Immutable), ornaments like earrings, and the Sabbath.

⁴³ As at today, there are six local conferences of the church in the Ashanti territory. There is large number of Ashantis in the other parts of the country.

redeem and restore the student and provide them salvation. These students later become means of reaching their communities for Christ. Their changed lives bear living testimonies to the power of God. Their positive influence in the community and society at large encourage other parents to enrol their wards in SDA schools. They bear living testimonies that no sermon could accomplish. They go out to live Christ in their homes, workplaces, and in the community. They become living epistles to the world.

There are eleven SDA hospitals and clinics in the Ashanti territory in Ghana.⁴⁴ The existence of church schools and hospitals facilitate evangelism of the areas of operations. These hospitals and clinics are evangelistic tools to reach the community. Church health workers introduce their clients (patients and relatives) to Jesus. They teach them about health reform to improve their lives. Since sick people are generally open to the gospel, SDA health facilities are effective means of evangelism. With the SDA health messages, people in the community patronize Adventist health facilities in Ghana. Their presence in the Ashanti communities helps spread the gospel to people in their catchment areas.

Experience in Ghana has shown that communities where SDA schools and hospitals are located tend to become SDA dominated communities within some period of operations. One reason seems to be the annual evangelistic efforts sponsored by these schools and hospitals in the community. The presence of these SDA facilities with dominant SDA workers seems to be another reason. These SDA workers impact positively on the communities that, within some time, the communities tend to be won to the church. Most children who attend SDA schools later become church members or church sympathisers. They tend to become means to reach the families with the Adventist message.

5.2 Challenges to Mission

5.2.1 *Seventh-day Adventist as an Ashantis' Church*

The use of the Twi (Asante) dialect as a medium of instruction and worship in most churches in Ghana deters most people of other dialects (and)

⁴⁴ These are Dominase, Konkoma, Asaaman, Obuase, Wiampoase, Kwadaso, Apaa, Akomaa, Noboam, Namon, and Anyinasoso. There are 13 clinics, 10 hospitals, 2 nurses training colleges, one University in Ghana. There are about 916 Seventh-day Adventist operated schools and hospitals in Ghana.

tribes from becoming Seventh-day Adventist in Ghana.⁴⁵ New converts and visitors, who are from the other tribes other than Asante, tend to be put off from attending the church after some time.

5.2.2 Church Schools and Hospitals

There seems to be an uneven distribution of SDA schools and hospital in the country. Since the existence of church schools and hospitals facilitate evangelism of the areas of operations, their sparse distribution or non-existence adversely affect church evangelistic efforts in these areas of the country. Since church members have no schools to attend or send their children, they are enrolled in other faith-based schools or public schools. Since the aim of SDA philosophy of education is to redeem and restore the student and provide them salvation, these unfortunate students may later leave the church. If they remain in the church, their influence seems minimal. These eventually affect their education.

5.3 Strategies

5.3.1 Intensification of evangelism among the Ashantis.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church should maximize her successes in reaching the Ashantis in Ghana. The marked similarities of her teachings and practices with the Ashantis should spur the Church to reinvigorate her evangelistic effort in the Ashanti communities. Friendship evangelist may serve as an effective means of reaching the Ashantis. Church members should be trained to do personal evangelism, introducing their friends, relatives, and love ones to Jesus. They would better be able to answer questions, enquiries and concerns of their close friends and relatives about Jesus and the Church. Other types of evangelism should also be engaged to complement the friendship evangelism for efficient and effective missionary endeavour to the Ashantis.

⁴⁵ A Seventh-day Adventist Pastor and lecturer at Valley View University recounts his ordeal when he converted to the church. As a Ga (Adangbe), an old woman called him and warned him not to become a member of an Ashantis' church since he was a Ga (Adangbe). Friends and relatives jeered at him because he has joined an Ashantis' church.

5.3.2 Maximise the benefits of church schools and hospitals in the Ashanti areas.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church should take advantage of the industrious nature of the Ashantis to establish more schools and hospitals in their communities. The success of the existing schools and hospitals give the Church an urge to compete for more students and patients, and establish more schools and hospitals among the Ashantis in Ghana. The success stories of former students of Seventh-day Adventist schools have made these schools a first choice for many parents and students who seek admission for their wards or for themselves in the country. The Church's educational philosophy which aims to redeem and restore students, have Seventh-day Adventist schools a desired choice for many Christians and even people of other religious faiths. The changed lives of students of Seventh-day Adventist schools bear living testimonies to the power of God. Their positive influence in the community and society at large encourage other parents to enrol their wards in SDA schools. They bear living testimonies that no sermon could accomplish (1T, 190-191). They go out to live Christ in their homes, workplaces, and in the community. They become living epistles to the world. The Church should, therefore, take advantage of the goodwill already established in the Ashanti areas to establish more schools in these communities.

The Church should take advantage of the eleven already-existing SDA hospitals and clinics in the Ashanti territory in Ghana to establish more hospitals and clinics. These hospitals and clinics should be encouraged to expand and multiply themselves in the country. Other communities in the Ashanti territory, where these hospitals and clinics are not located, should also be encouraged to initiate their establishment some in their respective communities. Since the existence of church schools and hospitals facilitate evangelism of the areas of operations, it could further boost the Church's evangelistic efforts.

5.3.3 Debunk the notion that Seventh-day Adventist Church is an Ashanti church among the other tribes in Ghana.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a universal movement, ordained by God to gather the remnant to meet their lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This should be made plain in the church's efforts to reach every nation, tribe, tongue, and people (Rev 14:6). Whilst she makes maximum use of the similarities of her teachings and practices with the Ashantis, the Seventh-

day Adventist Church should also endeavour to identify with the other people groups in the country by finding identifiable similarities with the other tribes and emphasizing on them in their respective communities. This could also be evangelistic means of reaching these people groups in the country.

5.3.4 The use of other languages for church instruction and worship (in context)

Language, they say, is powerful. The use of local language in the church would reduce the notion that Seventh-day Adventist Church is an Akan Ashanti Church. When the local languages are used, it would enhance the image of the churches in their communities. Native visitors and new converts would feel at home in the church. The possibility of their continual visits and membership retention would improve. It would also ensure the participation of the natives in church programmes and activities.

5.3.5 Establishment of church schools and hospitals among other tribes in Ghana to ensure fair and equitable distribution.

Churches in other areas of the country should be encouraged to initiate church projects like schools and hospital in their areas of operations. The other local conferences and the local mission on the Northern Ghana should be encouraged to make such projects their priorities. Districts, Zones, organized churches, and companies that should be endeavour to mobilize resources for such projects. Since experience has shown that communities where church schools and hospitals are located later become Seventh-day Adventist concentrated communities, effective education and encouragement of church members would enlist their support for such projects.

6. Conclusion

This paper attempted to study the concept of the Biblical Sabbath with the Ashanti/Akan Sabbath. The study established that Sabbath as a biblical concept is a theological statement of both the OT and the NT which is in congruence with the cultural beliefs of the Ashanti/Akans. Prior to the introduction of Christianity to the Ashantis/Akans, the Sabbath was observed and accorded the dignity as the Bible presents. It is in this sense that the Seventh-day Adventist church should maximise and strategize in

mission along this cultural beliefs to increase its membership and its impact among the Ashantis/Akans and Ghana as a whole.