

## **NO THURSDAY THIS WEEK!**

Graham Scott

IT was Wednesday, and we were sailing over the Pacific Ocean whose waters were incredibly blue, perhaps because of the bright blue of the cloudless sky above. There was just enough breeze to keep the sun from being unpleasantly hot, and our ship seemed alone in a peaceful world of blue and gold; but I was in trouble. That week was to be different from any I had had before and (since I never went that way again) different from any since. The problem was that there would be no Thursday.

This posed me a big problem. We were sailing with an Asian crew who, like me, had never traded in those waters before, and although I had been taught about the International Date Line, they hadn't. In fact they had never heard of it. My command of their language, Hindustani, though sufficient for the normal running of the ship, was not good enough for any complicated explanations. How was I to explain to them that there would be no Thursday?

Those who sail across the Pacific Ocean find nothing to mark the presence of the International Date Line, but though it is unseen, it is very real and is usually marked on maps as a red line. It has one or two zig-zags, as you can verify on a map, and this is to ensure that it does not pass through any islands, for it would be most confusing if two nearby villages were living in different days, and it is on this line that one day changes to the next.

Let me explain. When the sun is at its highest point overhead, we say that it is 'noon'. Suppose we think of noon on Monday in Britain and then keep steadily moving West for noon in all the different places as the sun is overhead there. If we keep on long enough we will arrive again in Britain and might think that it is still noon on Monday. But of course it would not be Monday any longer, but this time it would be Tuesday. So somewhere or other we would have to change from Monday to Tuesday. Years ago it was decided that this should happen in the Pacific Ocean because there are no big land masses there.

This means that when a ship sails across the International Date Line heading West it must skip a day. So on that special week I had to pass from Wednesday to Friday and lost my Thursday altogether. (Don't feel too sorry for me, for on the way back I had a week with two Tuesdays; so though in my life I missed a Thursday, I have had an extra Tuesday to make up for it!)

But back to my Asian crew. On Wednesday morning I made an attempt to break the news to them, speaking to the bosun as we walked round the ship together. I sent a man for a piece of chalk and began to draw diagrams on the hatch. Soon all the crew had stopped work and gathered round, struggling to understand in five minutes something I had learned over the years. Suddenly, noticing that the work had stopped, the bosun came to a decision. "All right," he said, "go back to work. If the Chief Officer says there is no Thursday then there is no Thursday." He still did not understand, but he was going to trust and [99/100] obey. It was the sensible thing to do, for if I hadn't known about such things I would not have been Chief Officer. We had worked together for some months and a sort of trust and comradeship had built up between us. To him it was strange, but he trusted me.

He could have done the opposite, saying that as he did not understand this which was so unexpected he would insist on having a Thursday, just the same as in every other week. If he had done so, he would have found how wrong he was when he reached the end of the journey, for his unbelief or disobedience would have made no difference to the facts, though it would have made a difference to him and made it very awkward for me. Fortunately he was ready to trust and obey.

God's ways sometimes seem strange to us. He appears to be robbing us of something even if not of a Thursday. But provided we learn the bosun's lesson of being willing to trust even though we do not understand, we shall arrive at journey's end finding that after all He was right, though at the time things did not seem to make sense. "Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." (Psalm 119:165).

From *A Witness And A Testimony*