

When Does God's Day Begin?

The Bible quotations here are mainly from the New King James version.

Recently, one of the emails I received challenged our belief that God's Sabbath, and indeed all days in God's eyes, start at sunset. Its implication was that a day should be counted from one dawn to dusk. Certain scriptures were used to 'prove' that a day in the Bible, can also include the evening, beyond sunset to make up the 24 hours eg. John 20:19. Let's look at that. "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." At first glance that seems to imply that the time beyond sunset is part of the same day.

The word evening here is the Greek 'opsios', Strong's 3798, "from 3796, late (as noun) afternoon (early evening) or nightfall (later evening). Mark 1:32 helps us to understand what the word 'evening' means. The Greek here, in that verse reads "the evening being come, when set the sun."

So, we see that the word 'evening' in the New Testament can mean part of the daylight up to and including sunset. Certainly such verses cannot be used to prove that God's day includes the later dark part – the following night.

The original challenge to our belief was backed up by quotations from several Bible Dictionaries or Encyclopaedias. For example Holman's Bible Dictionary : "Early on the Israelites counted the day from morning till evening, or, counting the night in between, from one morning to the next."

Actually the very first time God mentions the word "day" in the Bible provides the Bible definition of a day, - Genesis 1:5, "God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. *So the evening and the morning were the first day.*"

So, the evening and the morning make up a day, not just the daylight part of the day, which, one would think would be enough, but Holman's Bible Dictionary continues – "Because of the growing importance of the rising moon for festival observance, they *later* came to count the day from the evening, and this is the Jewish custom today." Article Time, p.1347.

The suggestion here is that the Holy Days did not exist from Genesis chapter 1, but were only introduced at Sinai.

Now such reasoning implies that God allows changes to His Laws, that such important laws like the 4th commandment about the Sabbath instituted in Genesis 2:3 can be changed. Does God make changes to the 10 Commandments? Malachi 3:6: 'For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.' No.

God's 10 commandments are immutable. Fixed. Eternal.

What God established in Genesis 1 defines the true meaning of a day, including the Sabbath and we will find that the rest of the chapters of the Bible confirm that, right up to the evidence provided by Jesus Christ Himself four thousand years later!

Not only that, but we can clearly see from Genesis 1 that the sun and moon were to serve as signs to determine God's Holy Days and that some of the dates of the flood events coincide with days mentioned in Leviticus 23, the Holy Days chapter. These points indicate that the Holy Days picturing God's Plan existed from Adam, as of course did God's Laws, long before Sinai, - Genesis 26:5 : 'because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.'

Despite this verse many Bible writers imply that the Laws of God were first given at Mount Sinai, as indeed does Holman's Bible Dictionary.

So, let's get down to the Biblical evidence for the true start of God's days. Regarding some points of Hebrew grammar, we find this quotation in Fred Coulter's book 'The Christian Passover' : "When God set the earth in rotation he did not choose to begin marking time with the rising of the sun at the first dawn. Rather, He chose to begin counting from the first sunset, so that the evening of the day preceded the morning."

"And the evening (geh'rev Strong's 6153, sunset) and the morning (bohker 1242, sunrise) were the first day – Genesis 1:5, 'God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.'

The Hebrew actually says "And he was evening and he was dawn first day," – a pretty clear Bible definition of God's day.

Coulter continues '[This] verse also states : "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night." Some have interpreted the fact that "Day" is listed first as evidence that Day precedes Night. However, the structure of the Hebrew text shows that the action of naming the Night was completed before God named the Day. The Hebrew verb that is translated "called" is imperfective in the first clause, (showing ongoing action) but is perfective (showing completed action) in the second clause. The use of the perfective form in the second clause confirms that the night had already been named when God named the Day .." . From Appendix A, "The Christian Passover" by Fred R. Coulter which continues ...', "The English verb [here] is translated from the Hebrew hay-yah, 1961, a Qal stem in the imperfective form ... prefaced with a consecutive waw [and], which describes a series of consecutive events, so that the Schocken Bible translates this verse "There was a setting, there was a dawning."

So, when we understand the true meaning of Genesis 1:5 from the Hebrew text, we find four distinct and consecutive units of time set in motion by God: evening – night – morning – daylight. These periods make up a Biblical day, as we read in the 7 Biblical days of Genesis chapter one.

It is for that reason that we find the confirming definition of a day in Leviticus 23:32, "It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; *on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening*, you shall celebrate your Sabbath"

The Day of Atonement is the 10th day – verse 27 'Also on the tenth *day* of this seventh month *there shall be* a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.'

The Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the 7th month, begins "in the ninth day of the month at even." Any modern translation makes this clear. Verse 32 tells us that we must celebrate it from evening (sunset) on the 9th.

New King James : "It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at even [bah gehrev or ba erev – sunset], from evening to evening you shall celebrate your Sabbath.

NIV: "It is a Sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your Sabbath." That too could hardly provide a plainer definition of one day!

The reason why Atonement gets such a specific instruction from God is found in verse 30. No other Holy Day carries such a serious warning from God, but God's instructions about Atonement leave no doubt whatsoever that all days begin and end at sunset, covering a period of 24 hours – not 12 hours.

Let's remember from Genesis 1 that the "two great lights" God made, were to act as signs to determine God's Holy Days – verse 14. Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years."

NIV: "and let them serve as signs to mark seasons" [moed, 4150- an appointed assembly]. Several times I have watched the moon appear over Jerusalem soon after sunset, and one Holy Day – the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24), starts with the sighting of the first crescent of a new moon in Israel, because it occurs on the first day of the seventh month, and then progresses West around the world, as do all God's days, after starting at Jerusalem, (Isaiah 2:3).

Those who suggest day only starts at dawn would have to explain a delay of twelve hours or so after God's sign has been provided!

Another key to understanding when God begins His days is found in the Biblical term "evening" Confusion has arisen over this word, which, in the Hebrew is found to be two separate and distinct terms, both of which the King James translates "evening". This is then compounded by the fact that Strong's only lists one of the Hebrew words and omits the other altogether. Strong's mentions only "ereb" and makes no mention of "ben ha arbayim" which is often translated evening, though they have quite different meanings.

"Ereb" means sunset. It marks the end of one day, and also the start of the next. In its first biblical appearance ereb marks the "opening of a day": "And the *evening* and the morning were the first day" (genesis 1:5 – Strong's no 6153).

However in Exodus 12 for example, we find both words used. First we see 'ben ha arbayim' used in verse 6. Note the marginal note in the King James, "between the two evenings". Modern translations use the term "dusk" or "twilight", for ben ha arbayim (which is mentioned here as 'evening') because it describes the period after sunset, but before dark.

Next in verse 18 we see the term 'ereb' translated "even" which of course is the more specific time of sunset, which lasts only a few minutes from the sun touching the horizon. The difference is important because 'ereb' ends and begins the day and ben ha arbayim is the first part of the next.

This point is well illustrated in Exodus 16. Here in this chapter God is teaching the people that they must rest on the Sabbath. His use of the two different terms for "even" here reveals their true meaning, as well as the time of the end of the Sabbath and the start of the next day.

We can tell from verse 13 and then verses 22 and 23 that God is here speaking to Moses on the Sabbath day (verse 4).

Verse 13 – the quails come and next dawn manna appears. That was on the 1st day of the week because

Verse 22 on the 6th day (Friday) there was twice as much because

Verse 23 next day was the Sabbath once again.

The Sabbath was to be a test to see if they would obey. Verses 6,8 and 13 include the word 'ereb' because God would wait until after sunset before bringing the quails, and at 'even' verse 12 [twilight, ben ha arbayim] in the New King James, the Israelites could catch, kill and eat flesh, while the next morning (Sunday) they would find manna for the first time.

This lesson from God is clear. 'Rest on the Sabbath, and after sunset I will reward you with meat to eat – you may then chase, capture, kill and cook the quail, for the Sabbath is over.' So that shows *the end of the Sabbath*.

Also, one verse in the book of Nehemiah makes *the start of the Sabbath* very clear: Nehemiah 13:19, “So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day.”

The Hebrew says : “And he was **as when they became shadowed** gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath then I ordered ...”

The NIV says :”When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbathth ...”

ESV: As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath,...”

Why did Nehemiah close the gates when the rays of the setting sun fell on them, obviously before sunset? Because at that point the Sabbath was about to start. He could have waited well into “ben ha arbayim”, twilight, just as easily, but that would have infringed upon the holy Sabbath day, which starts at sunset. God has included this verse to make the start of His days plain!

Finally lets look at Passover and the example of Jesus Christ.

In God’s instructions about Passover in Exodus 12, the Israelites were told to keep their lambs “up until” the fourteenth day ...and kill it at twilight. When does twilight occur on the fourteenth, bearing in mind that twilight occurs AFTER sunset? At the earliest part of the 14th, hence “**until** the fourteenth day ..[arrives],” implying at the very start of the 14th!

Now lets look at the actual fourteenth day when Jesus Christ was crucified. The Jews traditionally made sure that they removed all leaven from their homes by the end of the 13th, so that by the 14th they were unleavened. Jesus had been in Bethany, and as he walked down the path past the houses at the top of the Mount of Olives, sunset arrived and Mark 14:12 tells us something not readily apparent in the King James but evident from the original Greek. “Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb*, His disciples said to Him, “Where do you want us to go and prepare, that you may eat the Passover?”

The margin provides a clue, where there is a note referring to the sacrifice of the paschal lambs. The Greek verb “killed” here is *ethuon*, in the imperfect tense, - an action still going on. The locals were just starting to kill their paschal lambs, because the 14th had arrived at sunset. This verse should be translated “while they were killing” rather than “when they killed”, as the disciples were prompted to then ask Christ where **they** would eat the passover? This was not the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as this verse suggests in the King James. The Jews had always removed all leaven from their houses by the end of the 13th so the 14th was the “first of the unleaveneds”. Neither the domestic sacrifices nor the temple sacrifices ever took place on the 15th, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Half the Jews held a domestic Passover and killed their lambs at home at the beginning of the 14th, while the rest took their lambs to the Temple to be killed next afternoon, still the 14th.

If the fourteenth day only started at dawn, as some mistakenly believe, then Jesus sinned by eating the Passover at the wrong time – a ludicrous suggestion.

In Luke 22:18, Christ tells them where they should “go and prepare us the Passover, that we may eat.” Time and again in this chapter Christ mentions that this meal he will eat that evening with his disciples is the Passover.

verse 8 And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.

verse 11 And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?

verse 13 And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.

verse 15 And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.

To deny Christ's clear and repeated words here is to deny our Saviour, but our main point is that Christ shows that this day (twilight at the start of the 14th) was already the 14th, the day upon which he knew He would die, as **our** Passover lamb, which the day pictures.

Our Saviour was simply following the instructions given in Exodus 12:6, which we have read. It had to be the 14th that evening, for Christ never sinned and he ate the passover then with His disciples, proving without any doubt that the fourteenth day started at sunset, as do ALL days!

No further evidence could improve upon this witness from our Saviour. God's days start and end at sunset and always have, from Genesis chapter one verse 5, no matter what some may say. To think otherwise is to deny the words and example of the one who has saved us by His loving sacrifice, Jesus Christ our Saviour!

Finally lets return to Genesis 1 & 2. Read Strongs definition of 'day', no. 3117, Hebrew 'yowm' section (6) and all (7). In six days God made all, but rested for us on the seventh (2:1-3), and so blessed the Sabbath and hallowed it. God had no need to rest during half of each 24 hours, for He needs no sleep, so when it says "And the evening and the morning were the 1st day (2nd, 3rd, etc in later verses) it refers to the whole 24 hours. It follows then that God rested for the same period of time during the 7th day, that the whole of the 7th 24 hour period was sanctified and so became our Sabbath day.

When we put all of the scriptures together then, it becomes clear that we have a 24 hour Sabbath that has always started at sunset.

If this subject has seemed complicated and difficult to understand, just follow the example of Jesus Christ, who showed by keeping the passover the evening before He died, that the Feast of Passover began at sunset – the start of the fourteenth day upon which he would die, just as all God's Holy Days, Sabbaths and weekly days start. (1 Peter 2:21)