

## When Does the Scriptural Day Begin?

Midnight ? Sunrise ? Sunset?

Which starts the day and how can we know Scripturally?

Most countries in our industrialized world have accepted midnight as the beginning of our 24-hour "day." Although 12:00 p.m. is in the middle of the night, our society dictates that the night or dark period before midnight ends one day. The remainder of the night or dark period after midnight is the beginning of the next 24-hour day.

The present worldly calendar begins the counting of "days" with about six hours of darkness first, followed by twelve hours of light, and ends with six hours of darkness. The midnight-to-midnight system came from pagan Rome, along with many other heathen customs of today.

Other cultures determined the start of their day in various ways. The Babylonians and Egyptians reckoned it from sunrise to sunrise; the Umbrians from noon to noon; the Athenians, Numidians, and Phoenicians reckoned a day from evening to evening (sunset to sunset). The Hebrews also started their day at sunset (*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 2, p. 702).

The following excerpt from *Eerdman's Bible Dictionary* explains how the Israelites determined their day:

"The Israelites, who divided the year according to a lunar calendar, considered the day to start in the evening and end the following evening. Accordingly, they celebrated the Passover at sunset (Exod. 12:18 and Lev. 23:32; Neh. 13:19). To them a 24-hour day consisted of a night followed by a day ('evening and morning,' Dan. 8:26; 'a night and a day,' 2 Cor. 11:25)," p. 266.

In colonial New England the mode of determining the Sabbath at sundown was common. The Jewish civil day today still begins at sundown, continuing the practice of their ancient forefathers.

Some contend that Biblical days begin at sunset; while others say that sunrise starts the new day as did the Egyptians and Babylonians.

Comprehensive and reliable sources reveal that the Hebrew week days as well as Feast days begin at sunset, for example, under day, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* states: "The civil day was reckoned by the Hebrews from sunset to sunset, so that the day began at that time both on ordinary occasions and on Sabbaths and feasts."

It is vital that we learn correct Biblical principles of counting time so that we faithfully follow Yahweh's calendar in observing His Sabbaths. We cannot go by man's erroneous time, thus worshiping in vain (Isa. 29:13, quoted by the Savior in Matt. 15:8-9).

Let us begin where the word "day" first appears in the Scriptures.

Some of the confusion as to when the day begins comes from the various definitions of "day" in the dictionary:

- A 24-hour period including night and day.
- The time between the rising and setting sun known as daylight.
- The time (24 hours) that it takes the earth to revolve once on its axis.
- The civil or legal day is from midnight to midnight; the astronomical day from noon to noon.

We are focusing on the 24-hour calendar day here, so that we can keep Yahweh's observances correctly.

## **Darkness Comes First, Scripturally**

Scripture says that Elohim called the light DAY, and the darkness he called NIGHT. At creation the night or darkness preceded the light or day, demonstrating that it comes first in the creative order: *And the earth was without form, and void; and DARKNESS was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of Elohim moved upon the face of the waters. And Elohim said, "Let there be light: and there was light,"* Genesis 1:2-3.

Darkness was already present and therefore came first on day one of creation. Darkness came first on each succeeding day as well. Yahweh's Spirit moved in darkness to create light.

The modern-day practice of designating midnight as the close of the calendar day is not in harmony with Bible usage. In the Bible, sunset marks the end of one day. The onset of sundown signifies the beginning of the next day.

The Biblical convention is not all that different from today's practice of relating the oncoming of darkness more or less with the end of the day—even though six hours of darkness remain until midnight, when our calendar day actually ends.

The word "even" is from the Hebrew *ereb* (No. 6153 in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance Hebrew Dictionary*). It means dusk and is translated variously as evening, dusk, and night. That days begin with darkness is apparent from Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31, where we read, "the evening and the morning" were the first day, the second day, etc.

This particular phraseology is used of the first six days of creation. As Yahweh created the world, He was also creating time and its proper determination.

Each period of 24-hours had an evening and a morning. The hours of darkness, called evening, came first; the hours of daylight, called morning, came second.

Yahweh began His work with darkness, which was upon the face of the deep. How long His Spirit hovered ("brooded like a mother hen") upon the waters, we don't know (perhaps for 12 hours of darkness).

## **New Day Examples in the Bible**

Let us examine what the Bible says about the beginning or ending of the day:

Leviticus 23:32 tells us to observe the Atonement Sabbath "from even to even [even in Hebrew is *ereb*, meaning dusk] shall you celebrate your sabbath."

On the Sabbath in Mark 1:21 Yahshua taught in the synagogue. When a man with an unclean spirit tried to disrupt the gathering, Yahshua rebuked the spirit. Later, Yahshua went to visit Simon's mother-in-law and lifted her up, ridding her of the fever. Immediately she began ministering unto them.

Verse 32 clearly tells us that when the Sabbath was over, "at even when the sun did set," Yahshua went to work curing all who were brought unto Him. Except for emergencies, He did not habitually heal during the Sabbath. But after the sun had set and the Sabbath had ended, Yahshua healed all their diseases.

The people would not carry the sick and infirm on the Sabbath, but waited until the Sabbath ended at sunset when the day of rest was over. They then carried the sick and infirm to the Savior for His healing touch.

The account in Luke 4:40 describes the incident with these words, "Now when the sun was setting..." showing that the day began at sunset. One day had ended and another had begun at the setting of the sun. During the twilight hours, Yahshua still had enough light for healing of the people.

As we see from Matthew 12:10, the Jews were against healing on the Sabbath: "And, behold, there was a man which had [his] hand withered. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days?" that they might accuse Him." After He healed the withered hand, the Jews planned to destroy Him, verse 14.

The following Scriptures deal with the time at Yahshua's death and show that sundown marked the new day.

**Matthew 27:57**—When the evening was come, Joseph took the body of Yahshua and laid it in the tomb. This was just before the High Sabbath began. One day was ending and the Sabbath was about to begin at sunset, at the close of the day, when another day began.

**Luke 23:54** — That day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on. They had to hurry to get the body down and removed as the sun was going down in the western sky and the high Sabbath was about to begin.

**Mark 15:42** — "Now when the even was come ["So as evening approached," NIV], because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the [high] Sabbath..."

**John 19:31** — The bodies should not remain on the tree over the Sabbath, therefore, Yahshua was taken off the tree and laid in the tomb before the [high] Sabbath began at sunset.

**Matthew 28:1** — "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn [draw on, Greek *epiphosko*] toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre." They came during the closing daylight hours before sunset as the Sabbath day was ending (not beginning).

*Epiphosko* does not necessarily mean to dawn or grow light at the breaking of the day or at sunrise. *Epiphosko* consists of the prefix *epi* from No. 1909 which in essence means "placed before in time, place or order..." The suffix *phosko* is from No. 5316 and is translated appear, seem, be seen, shine or think. *Epiphosko* has the sense of the day about to arrive or about to begin or appear at sunset.

*Epiphosko* is used in one other place where it is translated "draw on," Luke 23:54.

**Matthew 28:1-7** — *Rotherham's Bible* says that three days later, late in the week when it was at the point of dawning into the first of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to view the sepulchre. The angel said to them, "He is not here, for He has risen." This was as the Sabbath was ending, and the first day was beginning at sunset.

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* (vol. 3, p. 501), reveals that the Jewish calendar reckons the days from evening to evening. See Genesis 1:5, Exodus 12:18, and Leviticus 23:32.

### **A Person Unclean Until Sunset**

Evidence is found for the sundown to sundown measuring of a day in Leviticus 11:24-25, where anyone touching or carrying the carcass of any unclean creature would be "unclean until the even." A new day began at even (sundown) when the person would be considered clean.

To show when the person would be considered unclean, note Leviticus 22:6-7, "The soul which has touched any such shall be unclean until even... And when the sun is down, he shall be clean..." Note carefully that the Bible does not say a person shall be unclean until midnight or until sunrise. Bible days change at sunset, not midnight or sunup.

Anyone touching an unclean thing would be considered unclean until even, when the sun had set, which started a new day. Then he would be considered clean again. He was not unclean until midnight or dawn, but until sundown, when a new day began at the start of evening.

To prepare for the time of cleansing, one was to wash and cleanse oneself while the sun was still up, and after sunset there would be sufficient light for him to find his way back to the camp.

Deuteronomy 23:11 gives us two definite points of time: *But it shall be when evening comes on, he shall wash himself with water; and when the sun is down, he shall come into the camp again.*

Notice that the unclean man was to wash himself as sundown approached in anticipation of the new day. Then after the sun had set he was free to return to the camp, clean once more because the new day had arrived with sunset.

Pay special attention to the first part of Deuteronomy 23, beginning with verse 10, where the rite of cleansing was for "uncleanness that chances him by night." Now if a new day begins at sunrise, it would be perfectly acceptable for the unclean man to return to camp at dawn. But Yahweh said he was to wait: *But it shall be, when evening comes on, he shall wash himself with water: and when the sun is down, he shall come into the camp again,* verse 11.

### **Many Sunset Beginnings in Scripture**

Judges 19:9 reads, "Behold, now the day draws toward evening...the day grows to an end." Clearly, this teaches that a day ends at the setting of the sun.

This observance existed in the New Testament times as well, for we read in Luke 24:29, *Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.* The word evening is from the Greek *hesperos* meaning "evening or the eve." The new day began at sundown.

In Judges 14:12 Samson proposed a riddle at his wedding feast that his enemies were to answer within the seven days of the feast. In verse 18 the men gave him their answer "on the seventh day before the sun went down." Clearly the seven days ended at that seventh day sundown. They solved the riddle just before the seven days had fully expired — at sunset.

Joshua hanged the King of Ai "...until eventide; and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree," Joshua 8:28-29. Deuteronomy 21:23 does not allow a dead body to remain hanging overnight, but is to be taken down that day before the sun sets lest the land be defiled. A new day began at sundown, and the bodies were to be removed by that time.

In Joshua 10:26 we learn that Joshua had the dead kings hung on five trees until evening. Verse 27 says that at the going down of the sun Joshua commanded that they be taken down from the trees and thrown into a cave.

Nehemiah 13:19 tells us, "And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath..." Notice that it "began to be dark before the Sabbath." The Sabbath had not yet arrived, but late afternoon shadows covered the streets and Nehemiah commanded the gates to be shut before the Sabbath started, which was before it was completely dark.

Mourning for the death of general Abner, king David refused food, for he had made an oath not to eat until the setting sun ended the day (2 Sam. 3:35).

A New Testament illustration is given us in John 19:31, where the impaled bodies of the Savior and the malefactors were not to remain on the stake after sundown. Defilement of the land would result (Deut. 21:23). Note that they were to bury the corpse that day, which would be before the sun had set.

*"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath."* We are not to carry a grudge or let our anger carry over to another day. He did not tell us, "Let not midnight come upon your wrath," nor did he say, "Don't let the sun arise upon your wrath." He referred to sundown.

## **Biblical Reckoning in Our Day**

There are some vestiges still with us from the Biblical way of determining the beginning of days at sundown. For example, after sunset on December 24, many act as if the 25th has already arrived and open gifts they gave to one another on Xmas eve. Church programs are often held after sunset on December 24 in anticipation of December 25th. (This is not an endorsement of Xmas, which is firmly rooted in pagan, unscriptural worship. Write for information on Xmas.)

We also have New Year's Eve, which is the beginning of the celebration of the pagan new year the evening before. We are aware of Halloween or "All Hallows Eve," the pagan time when the All Saints Day celebration begins — at sundown the prior evening.

In all of these festivities of man the celebration begins the previous evening at sundown. Even the expression "fortnight," meaning fourteen nights, is a carryover from earlier times when time was counted beginning with the night.

In spite of the fact that we have been using a Roman calendar for centuries, the influence of Biblical timekeeping is still evident.

Clearly from the Bible, days begin when the sun sets and the evening begins. It is a time everyone around the world can determine without a clock, which is needed now to know when midnight arrives. After sunset there is still a short period of twilight when a few simple tasks can still be done. This period is known as the time "between the evenings" (Hebrew *ben ha arbayim*), from sunset to dark. This twilight is actually the beginning of the new day.

Christianity also recognizes that the impaled Savior was taken down from the tree before the sun set to comply with Yahweh's law. His body was not to remain on the tree beyond sunset, the beginning of the new day.

*His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged [is] accursed of Elohim ;) that your land be not defiled, which Yahweh your Elohim gives you [for] an inheritance, Deuteronomy 21:23.*

Passover was to be at a precise time. Luke 22:14 reveals, "And when the hour was come..." What hour was that? The Savior was observing Passover at the beginning of the fourteenth, just after sunset, but the Jews kept it a day later. Notice the actual wording of Exodus 12:6 in *The Interlinear Bible* dealing with the lamb: *And it shall be for you to keep until the fourteenth day of this month and shall kill it all the assembly of the congregation of Israel twixt the evenings.*

The lamb was to be kept until the fourteenth, which means to kill it after the thirteenth ends and not after the fourteenth ends. The exact hour is perfectly plain that the time changes at sunset and the early part of the new day is between the two evenings (sunset and total darkness) and not dark as some teach.

Passover is held as soon as the sun sets ending the thirteenth and as the fourteenth begins. The Jewish *Tanakh* refers to the time as "dusk." The NIV and other versions read "twilight."

Some seek texts that mention day and night — in that order — to give credence to a sunrise beginning of a day. There are many, many instances where night is mentioned first.

One of the former is 1 Samuel 30:12. It says the man did not eat or drink for "three days and three nights." The reason he puts the "day" before the "night" in his reckoning is that verse 11 says he was an Egyptian. *The Companion Bible* note says, "In ancient Egypt the day 'began at sunrise' (see *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th { Cambridge } ed., vol. ix, p. 17, note).

Esther requests, "fast you for me, and neither eat nor drink three days" (Est. 4:16), she defines her meaning as being three complete days. Being a Jewess, she says "night or day," showing that the night precedes the day.

Paul tells of "my prayers night and day" (2 Tim. 1:3). In 2 Corinthians 11:25b he explains, "A night and a day I have been in the deep."

The conclusion is clear. From a variety of Biblical perspectives, the scriptural day begins at sundown.

The most significant proof is in Genesis 1, the very creation of our days, when "evening and morning" made up the day. There is nothing in the Bible that changes the basic truth that days end — and begin — at sunset, a time that even a child can discern.

Thus, the Bible Sabbath begins as the sun sinks into the horizon, ending the sixth day (Friday) and marking the beginning of the Sabbath. There is still some 40 minutes of twilight or dusk of this new day before complete darkness sets in.

We can know the Sabbath we are currently keeping is the same as Yahweh taught Adam, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Savior would certainly know which day was the Sabbath, for He was Master of it, *Therefore the Son of Man is Sovereign also of the Sabbath*, Mark 2:28.

The Catholic Church takes complete credit for changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, and boasts "the whole world follows in obedience" to their changing to Sunday. We have calendar records of the days and years since the Savior and there has not been a change of days. Time has not been lost. The Catholic Church has changed the day of obligation from Saturday to Sunday.

Mankind is to work six days and rest the Seventh or Sabbath day. This refutes the argument by those misguided ones who claim the new moon day of each month changes the Sabbaths for that month to be the same as the new moon day.

Months and new moons come and go, but humans are told to work six days and rest the Sabbath, which is Saturday. It starts at Friday evening and ends Saturday evening. It has been that way since creation.

The Sabbath is a holy time and one we are to keep even today. It is the same day we will be keeping in the Millennium. Keep it now and be able to help others keep it in the coming Kingdom!

*And it shall come to pass, [that] from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, says Yahweh, Isaiah 66:23.*

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