

# **When Does The Sabbath Begin?**

## **Morning or Evening?**

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Historically, there has existed a controversy over the *terminus a quo* (i.e. the starting point) of a new day. Two views have predominated the discussion: **(1) A new day begins at morning;** or **(2) A new day begins at evening.** However, within each of these major views there are even further distinctions. On the one hand, if one holds that a new day begins in the morning, does it begin at midnight or sunrise? On the other hand, if one affirms that a new day begins in the evening, does it begin at noon or sunset?

These are questions that may seem to be quite trivial at first glance. What difference does it make to God when I reckon a day to begin and end? There are certain duties I must perform each day in order to be faithful to the Lord and I must perform the same duties whether I reckon a day to begin in the morning or in the evening. Right? Wrong!

The significance of this study revolves around the necessary issue of Sabbath keeping. It is a necessary and binding obligation upon all people everywhere to keep the Sabbath day holy unto the Lord. This moral duty rests upon the following warrant from God's holy Word: **(1) It is a creation mandate** just as is marriage, procreation, labor, and dominion (Gen. 2:1-3); **(2) It is a moral commandment** from the Judge of the universe just as is the prohibition against worshipping other gods, murdering, committing adultery, stealing, or lying (Ex. 20:1-17); **(3) It remains a binding duty** upon "man" (not simply upon Israel) for the Son of Man continues to be Lord of the Sabbath (Mt. 12:8; Mk. 2:27-28); and **(4) It marks the beginning of the new creation** at the Lord's resurrection (Mk. 16:9; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Heb. 4:9; Rev. 1:10). For further study on matters related to the Sabbath, you will find resources listed in the **Bibliography** (pp.28-29).

Since it is a necessary and binding obligation to keep the Sabbath, one first must know which day to keep. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (XXI:VII) accurately summarizes the view of Scripture as follows:

As it is of the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture

is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

There is good and necessary inference from the pages of the New Testament to deduce that the Sabbath of the Lord God has been changed from the seventh day of the Old Covenant to the first day of the New Covenant by the resurrection of the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 16:9; Jn. 20:1,19,26; Acts 2:1 cf. with Lev. 23:15-16; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 4:9; Rev. 1:10).

However, even when one concludes that the first day of the week is the Christian Sabbath, one must pursue the issue one step further. When does the first day of the week begin? Does it begin Saturday evening or Sunday morning? This question has both theological and practical implications. Theologically, all unnecessary work and employment of people is to cease on the Sabbath. Does working Saturday evening or Sunday evening constitute Sabbath breaking? That depends upon when the Christian Sabbath begins. Furthermore, the corporate worship of God's people on the Sabbath is required by God (Lk. 4:16; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Heb. 4:9; Rev. 1:10). Can one be required to attend a worship service on Saturday evening or on Sunday evening? That depends on when the Sabbath begins. Practically, the government and discipline of a church within its congregations, presbyteries, and general assembly will have conflicting standards which will produce much confusion if there is not agreement on this issue. One can imagine a discipline case coming before the presbytery which involves Sabbath breaking due to a family going out to eat at a local restaurant on Sunday evening rather than coming to the worship service (or place the same circumstances on a Saturday evening). Think of charges being brought against a graduate student who missed a Sunday evening worship service in order to study for an exam on Monday morning because he believed the Sabbath ended Sunday at 6:00 p.m. Such cases could be multiplied. For those churches which take the Sabbath seriously, the issue as to when a day begins has both theological and practical significance. Thus, curiosity into the trivial is not the purpose of this study, but rather faithfulness in pursuing the individual's as well as the church's duty in Sabbath keeping.

The evidence presented in this study is not based upon extrabiblical testimony. There has been a conscious effort to seek first the testimony of Scripture before appealing to resources outside the Bible ("Let God be true, but every man a liar" Rom. 3:4). Certainly, extrabiblical evidence is helpful in such a study, but helpful in corroborating the testimony of Scripture not in interpreting Scripture ("The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself. . . ." *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, I:IX).

The position set forth in this study is that the Scripture teaches the *terminus a quo* (i.e. the start) of a new day to be at morning rather than at evening. The following evidence from Scripture is brought forth in order to demonstrate that a new day begins at morning.

**1. When expressions like “tomorrow”, “that night”, “the next day”, or “the same day” are used in Scripture, the context in certain texts indicates that the night is a continuation of “the same day” that preceded it (and not the beginning of a new day). Whereas the following morning is distinguished from the previous night by being designated as “tomorrow” or as “the next day.”**

**a. Genesis 19:33-35**

All the incestuous events of Gen. 19:33 occur on “**that night.**” However, the recounting of the events of the previous night actually occurred “**on the morrow**” (Gen. 19:34). Also note that the dialogue between the daughters of Lot “**on the morrow**” (Gen. 19:34) occurred before nightfall (“**that night also**”, Gen. 19:35), and yet what occurred the night before (Gen. 19:33) and what occurred the day after (before nightfall) are reckoned as two different days (“**the morrow**”, Gen. 19:34). This chain of events can only be reckoned as two separate days if the following morning begins a new day. If the previous evening begins a new day (as the evening view affirms), then one could not refer to the following morning and afternoon (before night) as “**the morrow.**” For the previous night, the next morning, and the next afternoon (before night) would all be the same day and not two separate days.

**b. Exodus 16:23-25**

This passage is significant for it refers to the Sabbath. In preparing for the Sabbath, God commanded Israel to gather twice as much manna on the morning of the sixth day because they were not to gather manna at all on the seventh day (Ex. 16:22, 26). On the sixth day, Moses declared, “**Tomorrow** is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD” (Ex. 16:23). When is “**tomorrow**”? That same evening or the following morning? The text makes it clear that they were to bake and to boil all that they needed for food on that same day (the sixth day), and the manna they did not need for that day would be preserved from spoiling until the next morning (unlike other days, cf. Ex. 16:19-20). Moses states what is to be done with the manna that did not spoil on the morning of the seventh day: “Eat that **today**, for **today** is a sabbath unto the LORD; **today** ye shall not find it in the field” (Ex. 16:25). The text does not indicate that leftover manna bred worms or became spoiled immediately before sunset on the sixth day (which would be the beginning of a new day according to the evening view), but rather that all leftover manna became spoiled before morning. Why? Because morning was the beginning of a new day. It is also significant to note that the text does not associate the start of the Sabbath with the evening, but rather Moses declared, “**Tomorrow** is the rest of the holy sabbath” (Ex. 16:23). The “**tomorrow**” when the Sabbath began was the following morning (Ex. 16:23). On the

morning of the seventh day Moses stated, “**Today** is a sabbath unto the LORD” (16:25). There is no indication that the Sabbath began the night before. Is there even one example in Scripture where “**tomorrow**” refers to the evening that immediately follows the morning and afternoon that precedes it? I have not yet found such a passage.

**c. Leviticus 7:15**

The following morning cannot be accounted the same day as the previous evening for all of the peace offering must be eaten “**the same day**” it is offered and none of it can be eaten the following morning (Lev. 7:15). Why? Because the following morning is a new day. If a new day begins in the evening, one would expect that the text should say that the peace offering must be eaten “**the same day**” and none of it left until “evening.”

**d. 1 Samuel 19:11**

This text distinguishes between two days: “**tonight**” and “**tomorrow**” (which according to the text is the following “**morning**”). Again, if a new day begins in the evening, one would expect Michal to have said, “If you do not save your life tonight, **today in the morning** you will be dead.” To the contrary she refers to the following morning as “**tomorrow**.”

**e. Jonah 4:7**

This passage identifies the following morning as “**the next day**.” I have been unable to find even one text that would speak in a similar fashion of the “**next day**” beginning in the evening that immediately follows morning and afternoon (e.g. “in the evening on the next day”).

**f. Mark 4:35**

Not only do we not find a text that reads, “in the evening on the next day;” to the contrary, I find this passage saying, “**And the same day, when even had come**.” Again, I ask where is there a text which would indicate morning as being the same day as the previous evening using language similar to Mk. 4:35 (e.g. “On the same day, when morning had come”)?

**2. The phrases, “the evening and the morning” or “the morning and the evening”, do not necessarily indicate the order in which a day begins and ends.**

a. The phrase, “**the evening and the morning**”, (and similar expressions) occurs in Gen. 1:5,8,13,19, 23, 31; Ex. 27:21; Lev. 24:3; Num. 9:21; Ps. 55:17 and Dan. 8:14,26. Consider the discussion below under **Creation** (pp.6-7).

b. However, the phrase, “**the morning and the evening**”, (or similar expressions) occurs in Ex. 18:13,14; 1 Sam. 17:16; 1 Chron. 16:40; 2 Chron. 2:4; 2 Chron. 13:11; 2 Chron. 31:3; Ezra 3:3; Job 4:20; Ps. 65:8; Is. 21:12; Is. 28:19; and Acts 28:23.

c. It is rather obvious that neither “**the evening and the morning**” nor “**the morning and the evening**” can specifically indicate the time in which a day begins without contradicting one another.

### 3. The phrases, “**night and day**” and “**day and night**”, do not necessarily indicate the order in which a day begins and ends.

a. The phrase, “**night and day**”, (and similar expressions) occurs in 1 Sam. 25:16; 1 Kgs. 8:29; Est. 4:16; Ps. 19:2; Ps. 91:5; Is. 27:3; Is. 34:10; Jer. 14:17; Mk. 4:27; Mk. 5:5; Lk. 2:37; Acts 20:31; Acts 26:7; 2 Cor. 11:25; 1 Thess. 2:9; 1 Thess. 3:10; 2 Thess. 3:8; 1 Tim. 5:5; 2 Tim. 1:3.

b. Whereas the phrase, “**day and night**”, (or similar expressions) occurs in Gen. 1:18; Gen. 7:4; Gen. 8:22; Gen. 31:39,40; Ex.10:13; Ex. 13:21,22; Ex. 24:18; Ex. 34:28; Lev. 8:35; Num. 9:21; Deut. 9:9,11,18,25; Deut. 10:10; Deut. 28:66; Josh. 1:8; 1 Sam. 30:12; 2 Sam. 21:10; 1 Kgs. 8:59; 1 Kgs. 19:8; 1 Chron. 9:33; 2 Chron. 6:20; Neh. 1:6; Neh. 4:9; Neh. 9:12,19; Job 2:13; Ps. 1:2; Ps. 32:4; Ps. 42:3; Ps. 55:10; Ps. 74:16; Ps. 88:1; Ps. 121:6; Ps. 136:8-9; Eccl. 8:16; Is. 28:19; Is. 38:12,13; Is. 60:11; Is. 62:6; Jer. 9:1; Jer. 16:13; Jer. 33:20,25; Lam. 2:18; Jonah 1:17; Zech. 14:7; Mt. 4:2; Lk. 18:7; Acts 9:24; Rev. 4:8; Rev. 7:15; Rev. 12:10; Rev. 14:11; Rev. 20:10.

c. It should be obvious that neither “**night and day**” nor “**day and night**” specifically identify when a new day begins. For example, note how Solomon in the same prayer uses “**night and day**” (1 Kgs. 8:29) and “**day and night**” (1 Kgs. 8:59).

### 4. Creation (Genesis 1)

a. Many have concluded from Gen. 1:5,8,13,19,23,31 that the phrase, “**the evening and the morning**”, definitively sets the *terminus a quo* (i.e. the beginning) of a new day in the evening.

b. However, we ought not to look at “**the evening and the morning**” in Gen. 1 as an equation: evening + morning = 1 day. The phrase “**the evening and the morning**” is not defining the constituent parts of a 24 hr. day. Nowhere in Scripture does the phrase, “**evening and morning**”, (or for that matter “**morning and evening**”) specifically designate a 24 hour period of time (cf. the discussion under **Refutation of Argument #1**, pp.17-19).

c. Noted Hebrew scholar, C. H. Leupold (*Exposition of Genesis*, Vol. 1, pp. 57-58) explains:

The verse [Gen. 1:5], however, presents not an addition of items but the conclusion of a progression. On this day there had been the creation of heaven and earth in the rough, then the creation of light, the approval of light, the separation of day and night. Now with evening the divine activities ceased: they are works of light not works of darkness. The evening (‘erebh), of course, merges into night, and the night terminates with morning. But by the time morning is reached, the first day is concluded, as the account says succinctly, ‘the first day,’ and everything is in readiness for the second day’s task. For ‘evening’ marks the conclusion of the day,

and ‘morning’ marks the conclusion of the night. It is these conclusions, which terminate the preceding, that are to be made prominent.”

Leupold’s point is simply that after each day’s creative activity there followed “**evening**” and when “**morning**” arrived another day of creative activity began.

d. Similarly, renowned Old Testament scholars, Keil and Delitzsch (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 51) understand the Hebrew text to teach:

The first evening was not the gloom, which possibly preceded the full burst of light as it came forth from the primary darkness, and intervened between the darkness and full, broad daylight. It was not till after the light had been created, and the separation of the light from the darkness had taken place, that evening came, and after the evening the morning . . . .

The important idea conveyed here is that “**the evening and the morning**” of Gen. 1:5 are not specifically the light and darkness that are separated in Gen. 1:5. “**The evening and the morning**” of Gen. 1:5 chronologically follow the separation of the light from darkness. “**The evening and the morning**” of each successive day (1:8,13,19, 23,31) likewise follows that day’s creative activity (“then came evening, then came morning” Leupold’s translation of the Hebrew phrase).

e. Finally, highly esteemed Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, Edward J. Young (*Studies in Genesis One*, p. 89) summarizes the Hebrew text as follows:

When the light was removed by the appearance of darkness, it was evening, and the coming of light brought morning, the completion of a day. The days therefore, are to be reckoned from morning to morning. . . .

f. Therefore, we may conclude that since a new day began on the morning of each of the six days of creation week, it would follow that God sanctified the Sabbath on the morning of the seventh day (not on the evening of the sixth day). Thus, the first Sabbath (Gen. 2:1-3) began in the morning rather than in the evening.

## 5. The Passover (Exodus 12)

a. According to Ex. 12:6, the Passover lamb was to be killed on the fourteenth day of the first month “**in the evening**” (literally, “**between the evenings**”). Likewise, the Passover meal was to be eaten on the fourteenth day of the first month “**in that night**” (Ex. 12:8) “**at even**” (Ex. 12:18).

b. Some who hold the view that a new day begins **at evening** place the slaying of the Passover lamb between noon (the first evening) and sunset (the second evening).

However, this interpretation of the events of the Passover conflicts with certain details of the text. Note that the Passover meal was to be eaten on the same day as the slaying of the Passover lamb (cf. 2 Chron. 35:10-16 where the sacrificing of the Passover lamb and the celebrating of the Passover meal occur on “**the same day**”), namely, the fourteenth day “**in that night**” (Ex. 12:8) “**at even**” (Ex. 12:18). Therefore, the eating of the Passover meal is obviously after sunset. Thus, we have two events occurring on the same day (the fourteenth day), one allegedly before sunset (the slaying of the Passover lamb) and one certainly after sunset (the eating of the Passover meal). Thus, sunset cannot begin a new day, otherwise the text would have indicated that the slaying of the Passover lamb was on the thirteenth day and the Passover meal on the fourteenth day, or that the slaying of the Passover lamb was on the fourteenth day and the Passover meal on the fifteenth day.

c. The view that a new day begins **at morning** has no difficulty including the slaying of the Passover Lamb and the eating of the Passover meal on the same day (the fourteenth day) for a new day does not begin until the next morning. The phrase, “**between the evenings**”, (cf. the discussion under **Refutation of Argument #4**, pp.21-23) refers to the period of time between sunset (the first evening) and darkness (the second evening). Also observe that whatever was left over from the Passover lamb until the next morning was to be burned. Why? Because the next morning was no longer the Passover (the fourteenth day), but rather the day of **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** (the fifteenth day), cf. Ex. 12:15-20; Lev. 23:5-6.

d. The reference to eating unleavened bread from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day (Ex. 12:18) does not define when the day begins, but the time of day when the initial holy convocation was to be celebrated (the evening of the fourteenth day), and the time of day when the final holy convocation was to be celebrated (the evening of the twenty-first day), cf. Ex. 12:14-16.

e. Concerning **the Feast of Unleavened Bread**, God told Moses that it was to be observed on the “**selfsame day**” that I bring you out of the land of Egypt (Ex. 12:17; Ex. 13:3; Num. 33:3). What day did God bring Israel out of the land of Egypt? On the fifteenth day of the first month (Num. 33:3, i.e. **the day after Passover**) “by night” (Deut. 16:1). Thus, **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** commemorates the exodus from Egypt. When did the exodus occur? The fifteenth day of the first month began **at midnight following the Passover meal** according to the morning view, whereas the fifteenth day began **at sunset almost 24 hrs. after the Passover meal** according to the evening view. Which view best comports with the events of Exodus 12?

(1) It was about midnight that the firstborn child in each house was slain (Ex. 12:29).

(2) It was after midnight while it was yet “night” that Pharaoh and all the Egyptians rose to see their firstborn slain (Ex. 12:30).

(3) It was still after midnight and yet “night” that Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and urged them to leave “in haste” (Ex. 12:31,33).

(4) The Israelites were to be ready to leave in a moment's notice (Ex. 12:11,33, 39).

(5) The Israelites left Raames while it was yet night (Num. 33:3; Deut. 16:1).

(6) All these events occurred during the night after midnight (Ex. 12:42).

(7) The view that best comports with the events of Ex. 12 is the morning view.

Israel did not yet have the benefit of the pillar of fire to lead them by night (Ex. 14:19,24). Thus, it is more likely they left Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month (Num. 33:3) with a full day of light ahead of them rather than a full day of light behind them.

(7) **The evening view** cannot reconcile the slaying of the Passover lamb (before sunset) and the eating of the Passover meal (after sunset at night) with the fact that both events happen on the same day (i.e. the fourteenth day) rather than on two separate days (as would be the case if a new day began at sunset). Nor can **the evening view** reconcile the eating of the Passover meal (at night on the fourteenth day) and the exodus from Egypt on the following day (the fifteenth day) with the fact that these two events are not on the same day (as would be the case if a new day began at sunset), but on two separate days.

## 6. The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32)

a. Much emphasis is placed on Lev. 23:32 (“**from even unto even**”) by many who uphold the view that a new day begins at evening (cf. the discussion under **Refutation of Argument #5**, pp.23-24).

b. However, it is clear from the text that the Day of Atonement is on “the tenth day” of the seventh month (Lev. 23:27), rather than on “the ninth day” of the seventh month.

c. Apparently, **a time of preparation** for the Day of Atonement began on the previous evening of “the ninth day” (just as there had developed a day of preparation the day before the Sabbath by the time of Christ, cp. Mt. 27:62; Mk. 15:42; Lk. 23:54; Jn. 19:14,31,42). From the evening of the ninth day (the day before the Day of Atonement) to the evening of the tenth day (the Day of Atonement), there was to be observed a ceasing from all work and a solemn fast. This is a unique command that relates **only** to the Day of Atonement (i.e. this unique feature of the Day of Atonement is an aspect of the ceremonial law of the Old Covenant which was temporary and not binding upon believers in the New Covenant). Thus, this unique command in no way defines for us the ordinary time at which a day begins or even at which time the weekly Sabbath would ordinarily begin.

## 7. The Day of Preparation (Matthew 27:57-62; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:38-42)

a. These passages speak of Joseph of Arimathea preparing the body of Jesus for burial on the Friday evening following the death of Christ (which “**even**” is not designated the Sabbath, but “the Day of Preparation” for the Sabbath). The practice of preparing for the Sabbath the evening before the Sabbath can be traced back to at least the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 13:15-22). Nehemiah forbade the gates of Jerusalem to remain open to

merchants after it had grown dark not because the Sabbath began at evening, but because there should be a due time of preparation the evening before the Sabbath was to begin (on the following morning). Joseph of Arimathea found himself in this period of preparation for the Sabbath (the evening before the Sabbath day began). Joseph knew that the body of Jesus could not be left hanging overnight according to the Law of God (Deut. 21:22-23; Josh. 8:29; Josh. 10:26-27). Thus, he was forced to prepare the body of Jesus for burial as quickly as possible on Friday evening.

b. As one considers the above passages, it is important to observe that the word “**even**” (or “**evening**”) as it is used throughout Scripture refers to a period of time at sunset or thereafter (Josh. 10:26-27; Judg. 19:10-16; 2 Chron. 18:34; Mt. 20:1-12; Mt. 26:20 cf. Ex. 12:8; Mk. 1:32; Mk. 6:47 cf. John 6:17). I am unaware of even one text in Scripture which would clearly identify “**evening**” with a period of time before sunset (e.g. at noon or 3 p.m.).

c. Though both “**the sixth hour**” (noon) and “**the ninth hour**” (3 p.m.) are mentioned in the context in relation to Christ’s death (Mt. 27:45-46; Mk. 15:33-34; Lk. 23:44-45), neither of these hours is designated as “**evening**.” Where in Scripture do we find noon or 3 p.m. designated as “**evening**?” To the contrary, “**noon**” (the sixth hour) and “**the ninth hour**” (3 p.m.) are distinguished from “**evening**” in Scripture (Psalm 55:17; Matthew 20:1-8).

d. It was already “**evening**” (sunset or thereafter) on the Day of Preparation (i.e. Friday evening) when Joseph left the scene of the crucifixion and entered the Praetorium in order to request permission from Pilate to take the Lord’s body (Mt. 27:57-58; Mk. 15:42-43). The text indicates that the following events occurred even after Joseph first sought permission from Pilate at “**evening**” to take the Lord’s body.

(1) Pilate sent for the centurion who had supervised and witnessed the crucifixion in order to verify that Christ was dead (Mk. 15:44-45). Since he was responsible for the crucifixion, the centurion would have yet been at Golgotha (outside of Jerusalem) with the bodies. Thus, the message was sent from Pilate to the centurion, and the response was then sent back to Pilate by the centurion.

(2) Joseph then left the Praetorium and purchased linen strips in order to wrap the body of Jesus (Mk. 15:46).

(3) Joseph returned to the site of the crucifixion outside of Jerusalem to remove the body of Jesus from the cross (Mk. 15:46). The nails had to be carefully removed from Christ’s hands and feet before the body could be lowered from the cross (Ps. 22:16; Jn. 20:27).

(4) Nicodemus appeared at Golgotha with about 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes in order to give the Lord a royal burial (Jn. 19:39). The process Nicodemus followed in preparing the body for burial was according to the custom of the Jews (Jn. 19:40). This process would normally involve thoroughly washing the body, wrapping the body with

many individual pieces of linen, and placing the myrrh and aloes between each of the linen pieces.

(5) Finally, the mummified body of the Lord was taken to the tomb nearby and a large stone was rolled in front of the entrance (Mk. 15:46; Jn. 19:41).

(6) If it was already evening when Joseph first sought permission from Pilate to take the body, it was now hours into the evening by the time the body of Christ was actually laid in the tomb, and the Sabbath (which began the next morning) was indeed drawing near (Lk. 23:54).

## 8. The Resurrection (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20)

a. Christ was raised from the dead “**early on the first day of the week**” (Mk. 16:9). The first visitor to the tomb came on “**the first day of the week . . . when it was yet dark**” and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb (Jn. 20:1).

b. Women arrived at the tomb “**very early in the morning the first day of the week**” to find the stone rolled away from the tomb (Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1). Incidentally, if these women intended to bring spices in order to anoint the Lord’s body as soon after the Sabbath as they could (Lk. 23:55-56; Mk. 16:1-2), why did they not come Saturday after sunset when according to the evening view the Sabbath would have already ended? Rather the parallel passages indicate that when the Sabbath was over (Mk. 16:1), they came “**very early in the morning the first day of the week**” (Mk. 16:2).

c. The “**evening**” of “**the same day**” in which Christ was resurrected is still “**the first day of the week**” (Jn. 20:19). According to the view that a new day begins at evening, it would be more appropriate to designate the time as “the **next** day at evening, being the **second** day of the week.” There is no good and necessary inference to conclude that the “**evening**” mentioned in Jn. 20:19 is before sunset (cf. the discussion of “**evening**” under **The Day of Preparation, #7b and c**, p.10). Thus, the only reasonable way to explain how Christ’s resurrection on the first day of the week before sunrise and His appearance to the disciples later that evening after sunset could be on “the same day” is to adopt the view that a new day begins in the morning sometime before sunrise while it is yet dark.

d. The “**evening**” of Jn. 20:19 should be considered in the light of Lk. 24:29.

(1) Even before Jesus sat down to have a meal with these two believers, the text indicates that it was “**toward evening**” and that the day was “**far spent**” (literally, “already declined”). This is surely a reference to sunset quickly approaching, and yet the text states they were still only “**nigh**” to the village, not in the village or in the home where they were to eat.

(2) They made preparations for the meal, and while eating, the Lord manifested Himself to them (Lk. 24:30-31).

(3) Now upon realizing what had happened, they traveled some seven miles back to Jerusalem (Lk. 24:13,33) in order to relate these amazing events to the disciples of Christ

(even running a 10 minute mile for seven miles is 1 1/4 hours--a very conservative estimate).

(4) Then as Jn. 20:19 explains, “**the same day at evening, being the first day of the week**” the Lord appeared to His disciples. By the time Christ appeared to His disciples “**at evening**”, at least 2 hours had surely elapsed since it was already “**toward evening**” and the day was already “**far spent**” when he had first met the two disciples traveling to Emmaus.

(5) The language that is used in Lk. 24:29 and in Jn. 20:19 is parallel with the language used in Judg. 19:11-16 where one finds in v.11 “**the day was far spent**”, in v.14 “and **the sun went down** upon them ”, and in v.16 “And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field **at even.**”

## 9. Historical Testimony

a. In citing evidence from **rabbinic writings** to support the evening view, one must be cautious.

(1) **Rabbinic tradition is far from reliable.** It was the very rabbinic tradition of the elders that Christ condemned as making empty the commandments of God (Mk. 7:1-13). This is no doubt what Paul had in mind when he commanded Timothy and Titus not to give heed to “Jewish fables and commandments of men” (Titus 1:14 cf.

1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 4:4). Milton Terry in his classic work, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, has demonstrated why much of the rabbinic tradition is unreliable:

According to Jewish tradition Moses received at Sinai, in addition to the Pentateuch, an unwritten oral law, and afterward delivered it over to Joshua. Joshua delivered the same to the elders, and they to the prophets, from which it came into the possession of the men of the Great Synagogue, the last of whom was Simon the Just, who was a contemporary with Alexander the Great (B.C. 325). Simon transmitted it to Antigonus of Soco, and so it was passed onward until it came into possession of the schools of Hillel and Shammai. . . . These schools, especially that of Hillel, sifted and preserved these laws, until Rabbi Judah the Holy (about A.D. 200) compiled and codified them in six Sedarim . . . thenceforth known as the Mishna (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, p.615).

Similarly, it was rabbinic tradition which taught Jewish men to cover their heads while praying (and this is still practiced by orthodox Jews), yet this is clearly in violation of Scripture (1 Cor. 11:4,7). Because of the biblical evidence cited above and because of the unreliability of rabbinic tradition, I believe that rabbinic tradition (and even the practice of orthodox Jews today) which supports a view that the Sabbath begins at evening is in error.

(2) **Rabbinic tradition** on this subject **is in fact mixed.** Harold Hoehner demonstrates from the *Mishnah* that there were actually two systems of reckoning a day at the time of Christ:

The Galileans and Pharisees used the sunrise-to-sunrise reckoning whereas the Judeans and Sadducees used the sunset-to-sunset reckoning. . . . This view not only satisfies the data of the Synoptics and the Gospel of John, it is also substantiated by the Mishnah. It was the custom of the Galileans to do no work on the day of the Passover while the Judeans worked until midday [the footnote reference is to *Mishnah* : Pesahim iv.5]. Since the Galileans' day began at sunrise they would do no work on the entire day of the Passover. On the other hand the Judeans' day began at sunset and they would work the morning but not the afternoon" (*Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, p.87,88).

Thus, if one is to lean heavily on the testimony of rabbinic tradition, he is even confronted with the question: Which rabbinic tradition should be followed?

(3) **Rabbinic tradition** should not interpret Scripture, but only corroborate it.

b. The following divines are both adherents to the Westminster Standards and adherents to the view that the Lord's Day begins at morning. As will be noted, some of the divines cited were either directly or indirectly connected with the Westminster Assembly, thus making the case (unless evidence to the contrary can be produced) that the position of the Westminster Assembly was that the Sabbath begins in the morning.

(1) **Samuel Rutherford** (1600-1661) was one of the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly. The following is an excerpt from his *Ane Catachisme Containing the Soume of Christian Religion* (cited in *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, by Alexander Mitchell, James Nisbet & Co., 1886, p.232). The original English of Rutherford has been preserved.

Q. Quhat [What] is it to sanctifie the Sabbath?

A. It is to sett all apairt from the dawning of the day untill midnight (Jn. 20:1; Acts 20:7) for Godis service.

(2) **Thomas Vincent** (1634-1678) was a Puritan pastor in London and first published his *Explanation of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* in 1674. In "An Epistle To The Reader" the following words of commendation are found as an introduction to Vincent's work:

For such reasons as these, we highly approve the labours of this reverend brother, in his 'Explanation of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism.' And having to our great satisfaction, perused it ourselves, in whole or in part, do readily recommend it to others: for though he

composed it at first for his own particular congregation, yet we judge it may be greatly useful to all Christians in general, especially to private families” (*The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture* , The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980, p.v).

This epistle was signed by 40 divines including stellar Puritans such as John Owen, Thomas Manton, Thomas Brooks, Thomas Watson, and three surviving commissioners of the Westminster Assembly (Joseph Caryl, Edmund Calamy, and Thomas Case). Needless to say, Vincent’s work was highly prized as a faithful tool in explaining the Shorter Catechism. In his discussion of Question 58 of the Shorter Catechism, Vincent asks and answers the following question:

Q. 6 When doth this holy day or Sabbath begin, in the evening before [midnight] or that morning from midnight?

A. In the evening before [midnight], by virtue of that word, “Remember to keep holy the seventh day,” we ought to begin to prepare for the Sabbath; but the Sabbath itself doth not begin until the evening is spent, and midnight thereof over, and the morning after twelve of the clock beginneth (*The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture* , Banner of Truth Trust, 1980, p.139; cf. pp.139-141 for Vincent’s biblical defense of his view) .

(3) **Thomas Ridgeley** (1667-1734) was an assistant minister in London to Thomas Gouge, a commissioner to the Westminster Assembly. Ridgeley composed a massive work entitled *The Doctrines Of The Christian Religion Explained And Defended* . This work is a commentary on the Larger Catechism. In it Ridgeley declares:

Hence, the Lord’s day begins in the morning, before sun-rising; or, according to our usual way of reckoning, we may conclude, that it begins immediately after midnight, and continues till midnight following (*Commentary On The Larger Catechism* , Still Waters Revival Books, 1993, Vol.2, p.352; cf. pp.352-353 where Ridgeley articulates his position from Scripture).

(4) **Thomas Boston** (1676-1732) in his classic work on the Shorter Catechism, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion Upon the Plan of the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism Comprehending A Complete Body of Divinity* , states the following:

The day to be kept holy, is one whole day. . . . This day we begin in

the morning immediately after midnight; and so does the Sabbath begin, and not in the evening. . . . (*Commentary On The Shorter Catechism* , Still Waters Revival Books, 1993, Vol.2, p.189; cf. pp.189-190 for his biblical defense of the position).

(5) **James Fisher** (1697-1775), a minister in the Associate Presbyterian Synod, was appointed by the Associate Presbyterian Synod (together with Ebenezer Erskine and Ralph Erskine) to compose what is now known as *Fisher's Catechism* (1760) which is an exposition of the Shorter Catechism. Under the exposition of Question 58 of the Shorter Catechism, the following question and answer appear:

- Q. 10. When should we begin and end this day [i.e. the Sabbath]?  
 A. We should measure it just as we do other days from midnight to midnight, without alienating any part of it to our own works (an extract from *Fisher's Catechism* , cited in *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature* , Naphtali Press, Vol.5, p.198, 1992).

(6) **John Brown of Haddington** (1722-1787) a Scottish minister in the Associate Presbyterian Synod expounds the following in his explanation of the Shorter Catechism:

- Q. When doth the weekly Sabbath begin?  
 A. In the morning, immediately after midnight.  
 Q. How prove you that?  
 A. As Christ rose early in the morning, and the evening after is called the evening of the same day; and Moses said, "Tomorrow (not this night) is a Sabbath to the Lord, Jn. 20:1,19; Ex. 16:23.  
 Q. How then is it said, Lev. 23:32, "From evening to evening shall ye celebrate your Sabbath?  
 A. That related to the ceremonial, not to the weekly Sabbath (*An Essay, Towards an Easy, Plain, Practical, and Extensive Explication of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* , printed by Henry Frick, 1818, p.255).

(7) **William S. Plumer**, a nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian minister wrote the following in an exposition of the ten commandments entitled, *The Law of God, as Contained in the Ten Commandments, Explained and Enforced* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864, pp.309-310):

When does the Sabbath begin?

There is some diversity in the Christian world respecting the time, at which the Sabbath begins. Some date it from sunset on Saturday till sunset on Sabbath. When asked for their authority, they refer to a phrase which occurs several times in the first chapter of Genesis: “And the evening and the morning were the first day.” This has not been considered sufficient proof by the great mass of the Christian world. Nor ought it to be, as all the world knows that no day of creation began in the evening; but all of them began in the morning. That saying of Moses therefore only declares that the day was made up of two parts, the after part, and the fore part. Indeed the evidence in the New Testament seems to be clearly against this view. “Our Sabbath begins where the Jewish Sabbath ended; but the Jewish Sabbath did not end towards the evening, but towards the morning. Matt. 28:1. ‘In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week,’ etc. In the New Testament, the evening following, and not going before this first day of the week, is called the evening of the first day, John 20:19. ‘The same day, at evening, being the first day of the week,’ etc. Our Sabbath is held in memory of Christ’s resurrection, and it is certain that Christ rose early in the morning of the first day of the week.”

## 10. Conclusion

- a. The overwhelming testimony of Scripture supports the view that **the terminus a quo for a new day is morning rather than evening.**
- b. However, what time of the morning does a new day begin?
- c. On the one hand, certain passages do identify the morning with **the rising of the sun** (1 Sam. 14:36; 1 Sam. 25:22,34,36; 2 Sam. 17:22; 23:4; 2 Kgs. 7:9; Jonah 4:7; Micah 2:1; Mk. 16:2).
- d. On the other hand, other passages identify morning with **darkness** (Mk. 1:35); or still other passages identify the period of darkness before sunrise as being the early part of the day that follows: Christ arose very early on the first day of the week long before sunrise (Mk. 16:9) since the first visitor to the tomb came early on the first day of the week “while it was still dark” and found the tomb empty (Jn. 20:1).
- e. There are actually two methods in the New Testament of reckoning the hours of a day and both of them begin the day in the morning: (1) The new day begins after midnight so that 6 a.m. is the sixth hour of the day (Jn. 19:14), and 10 a.m. is the tenth hour of the day (Jn. 1:39); (2) The new day begins after 6 a.m. so that 9 a.m. is the third hour of the day (Mk. 15:25), noon is the sixth hour of the day (Mk. 15:33), and 3 p.m. is the ninth hour of the day (Mk. 15:33). These two different methods of reckoning the hours of the day might even be used by the same author as in the case of John in his gospel (where Jn.

1:39 and Jn. 19:14 support the view that a new day begins after midnight , whereas Jn. 4:6 and Jn. 4:52 support the view that a new day begins after 6 a.m.).

f. Though Scripture does not specifically state when morning **precisely** begins, there is sufficient evidence that a new day does begin in the morning and that the morning begins “a great while before day” (Mk. 1:35), when it is yet dark (Jn. 20:1). g.

Thus, this study concludes that **the *terminus a quo* for the Sabbath is morning and that the morning of a new day most likely begins at midnight.**

# Appendix

## Does the Sabbath Begin at Noon?

There exists a variation of the evening view that proposes a new day to begin at noon. I am not personally aware of any church fathers or theologians (past or present) who have endorsed this view. However, this position is being promoted by some within the Identity Movement (for further information about the Identity Movement you may want to read my article “An Open Letter To Those In The Identity Movement” which can be obtained from Still Waters Revival Books). In the following pages, I will seek to summarize the arguments for this position and offer biblical refutation as well.

**Argument #1:** The phrase “the evening and the morning” in Genesis 1 indicates that the days of creation began in the evening rather than in the morning (Gen. 1:5,8,13,19, 23, 31).

1. Here it is contended that the phrase “the evening and the morning” in Genesis 1:5 gives a summation of the first full day (i.e. evening + morning = one 24 hour day).

2. Furthermore, it is maintained that the precise order of the words (“the evening and the morning”) indicates that the new day began at evening on that first day (as well as on all succeeding days of creation).

3. Finally, it is presumed that God’s creative activity within each day was during the hours of light; and thus, the only period of time in a day in which evening has light is the period of time from noon to sunset.

**Refutation of Argument #1:** The phrase, “the evening and the morning”, in Genesis 1 does not indicate that a new day begins in the evening.

1. The phrase, “the evening and the morning”, is not an equation that when added together equals one 24 hour day. In none of the uses of this phrase throughout Scripture can it be demonstrated that evening + morning = one 24 hour day. Had God intended to indicate the two constituent parts of a day that together equal a 24 hour day, He would have used the common expressions, “night and day” or “day and night”, (cf. the discussion under #3 above, pp. 5-6 where all the uses of these phrases in Scripture are listed). In fact, when God divided the first day into two halves, He did not identify the two halves as “evening” and “morning”, but rather as “day” and “night” (“And God called the light **Day**, and the darkness He called **Night**” Gen. 1:5, emphasis added). It is certainly

true that “night and day” or “day and night” may refer to a 24 hour period (cf. 1 Sam. 25:16 where “night and day” is further explained by the phrase “all the time”; also cf. all the biblical references under #3 above, pp. 5-6), but it is not true that the phrase, “the evening and the morning”, ever refers to a 24 hour day in the Word of God. It might be contended that two passages demonstrate that the phrase, “evening and morning”, does in fact refer to a 24 hour day.

- a. Some may be tempted to appeal to Leviticus 24:1-4 (cf. Ex. 27:20-21) where it is stated that the lamps within the Tabernacle were to burn “continually” “from the evening unto the morning” which might seem to indicate at first glance that the lamps were to be lit 24 hours a day (thus lending support to the view that the Scripture does use “evening” and “morning” to refer to a 24 hour day). To the contrary, the lamps within the Tabernacle were lit each evening and burned only until the next morning, remaining unlit until the next evening when the process was repeated (Ex. 30:7-8; 2 Chron. 13:11). Thus, the phrase, “from the evening unto the morning”, refers only to a part of a 24 hour day rather than to a whole 24 hour day.
- b. Similarly, Daniel 8:14 speaks of 2,300 days (literally “evenings and mornings”) during which time the holy place would be polluted. The actual length of time can legitimately be reckoned to be 2,300 days, but not because an evening and a morning equal one 24 hour day. Here the evening and morning refer to the evening sacrifice and the morning sacrifice which constituted the “regular sacrifice” offered by the priests in the Temple (Dan. 8:11-14 cf. 1 Chron. 16:40; 2 Chron. 2:4; 13:11; 2 Chron. 31:3; Ezra 3:3). Thus, when 2,300 evenings (the time at which the regular sacrifice should have been offered in the Temple) and 2,300 mornings (the time at which the regular sacrifice should have been offered in the Temple) have passed, then the Temple shall be cleansed. Neither the evening sacrifice nor the morning sacrifice were offered for 12 consecutive hours, but rather both of these sacrifices were offered at a specific hour in the evening and at a specific hour in the morning. Thus, again the phrase, “evening and morning”, cannot be stretched to mean a 24 hour period. This is made abundantly clear when the holy Word of God records that Goliath “presented himself forty days, morning and evening” (1 Sam. 17:16). Now we are not to understand that Goliath presented himself for 24 hours a day for forty consecutive days (so that “morning and evening” equal one 24 hour period). To the contrary, he presented himself for forty days, appearing on the field of battle at one specific hour in the morning and at one specific hour in the evening for forty days in succession (so that “morning and evening” represent a part of a 24 hour day rather than equaling one whole 24 hour period). Likewise, the references to “the evening and the morning” in Genesis 1 do not represent a 24 hour period of time, but rather they speak of the “evening” that followed God’s acts of creation on the first day (and all successive days of creation thereafter), and of the following “morning” when the next day of creation began (cf. the discussion under **Creation** above, pp. 6-7).

2. The precise order in which the phrase, “the evening and the morning”, appears (Gen. 1:5,8, 13,19,23, 31; Ex. 27:21; Lev. 24:3; Num. 9:21; Ps. 55:17; Dan. 8:14,26) no more demonstrates that a new day commences with evening than the precise order of the phrase, “the morning and the evening”, demonstrates that a new day commences with morning (Ex. 18:13,14; 1 Sam. 17:16; 1 Chron. 16:40; 2 Chron. 2:4; 2 Chron. 13:11; 2 Chron. 31:3; Ezra 3:3; Job 4:20; Ps. 65:8; Is. 21:12; Is. 28:19; Acts 28:23).

3. There is no passage in Scripture that specifically identifies “noon” or “midday” as being that part of the day denoted by the word “evening.” Rather than finding passages in God’s Word that would indicate “noon” to be in that part of the day called “evening”, we find passages that specifically distinguish noon (or the sixth hour) from the evening (Ps. 55:17; Mt. 20:1-12).

**Argument # 2:** The Hebrew phrase, “the going down of the sun”, does not necessarily refer to sunset, but may refer to the period of the day between noon and sunset.

1. Questions such as these are asked by proponents of the noon view: When does the sun begin to go down? Does the sun begin to decline at sunset or at noon?

2. It is contended that the sun begins its downward movement at noon, so that the Hebrew phrase, “the going down of the sun” may refer to any period of the day between noon or sunset.

3. The following premises are asserted: (1) A new day begins at evening (Gen. 1: 5,8,13,19,23,31); (2) The Scripture associates “the going down of the sun” with the onset of evening (Lev. 22:6-7; Deut. 23:11; Josh. 8:29; Josh. 10:26-27; 1 Kgs. 22:35-36; 2 Chron. 18:34; Mk. 1:32); (3) “The going down of the sun” begins at noon.

4. Thus, this conclusion follows: Therefore, a new day begins at noon (and the Sabbath begins at noon).

**Refutation of Argument #2:** The Scripture nowhere identifies “the going down of the sun” with midday or noon.

1. The questions asked by those who hold the noon view begin with a false assumption, namely, that the point of reference against which the sun goes down is the meridian (i.e. noon hour). To the contrary, the biblical point of reference against which the sun goes down is not the meridian, but the horizon. In other words, “the going down of the sun” speaks of the sun going down below the horizon, not its going down below the noon hour. If “the going down of the sun” refers to the falling of the sun below the meridian, then why doesn’t “the rising of the sun” (Gen. 19:23; Gen. 32:31; Ex. 22:3; Judg. 9:33; 2 Sam. 23:4; Ps. 50:1; Ps. 104:22; Ps. 113:3; Eccl. 1:5; Is. 45:6; Is. 59:19; Jonah 4:8; Nahum 3:17; Mal. 1:11; Mt. 5:45; 13:6; Mk. 4:6; Jms. 1:11) refer to the forward movement of the sun toward the meridian? Thus, if “the going down of the sun” indicates the time of day when the sun **begins** to set (i.e. at noon), then “the rising of the sun” indicates the time of day when the sun **begins** to ascend (i.e. at midnight). If “the

going down of the sun” **begins** at noon, then “the rising of the sun” **begins** at midnight. Confusion would indeed reign upon hearing someone say, “I was awakened shortly after sunrise when I heard the clock strike 12:30 a.m.” Not only is it unbiblical to associate “the rising of the sun” with midnight, but it is equally unbiblical to associate “the going down of the sun” with midday. Just as the Scripture associates “the rising of the sun” with light and heat (Judg. 9:32-33; 2 Sam. 23:4; Jonah 4:7-8; Mt. 13:6; Mk. 4:6; Jms. 1:11) so it associates “the going down of the sun” with night and darkness (Gen. 15:17; 28:11; Judg. 19:10-16; 2 Sam. 3:35). However, where in Scripture will one find a specific reference to either “the rising of the sun” beginning at midnight, or “the going down of the sun” beginning at midday?

2. The Hebrew phrase, “the going down of the sun”, corresponds directly to the English term “sunset” (i.e. the time of day when the sun sets below the horizon). Nowhere in Scripture can it be demonstrated that “the going down of the sun” refers to the period of the day beginning at noon and continuing until sunset. However, there are biblical passages that associate “the going down of the sun” with the darkness or the night that falls upon the earth at sunset (Gen. 15:17; Gen. 28:11; Judg. 19:10-16; 2 Sam. 3:35). Moreover, note that a garment that is taken as collateral for a debt must be returned each day “before the sun goes down” because the garment is needed by the debtor for a blanket to keep him warm at night (Ex. 22:26-27; Deut. 24:12-13). The inference being that the garment should be returned to the man not before noon while it is yet warm in the middle of the work day, but before sunset when the temperature will drop and when the poor man will have need of a blanket to keep him warm at night. Furthermore, a man’s wages were to be paid him by the time “the sun goes down” (Deut. 24:15), thus implying that a man’s wages were to be paid him at the end of a day’s labor (i.e. at sunset), but certainly not at the midpoint of a day’s labor (i.e. at noon). The Lord in His parable of the landowner (Mt. 20:1-12) indicates that laborers worked until about 6 p.m. (i.e. until the 12th hour, cf. Mt. 20:6,9,12) and wages were paid at the conclusion of the day (when the sun fell below the horizon at sunset), not at midday (when the sun began to fall below the meridian at noon). In fact, God does speak of the sun going down at noon only once in all the pages of Holy Writ. There God declares in figurative language that when the sun goes down at noon, it is an extraordinary sign of a great day of judgment (Amos 8:9). The sun going down at noon according to Scripture is not an ordinary, daily occurrence, but rather a unique and extraordinary occurrence in figurative terms (i.e. this figure of speech can only have such momentous impact because a normal day never sees the sun go down at noon). Furthermore, even in the use of this figurative language to portend this unique day of judgment, God still associates the going down of the sun with darkness and not with light when He declares: “I will **cause the sun go down** at noon, I will **darken the earth** in the clear day.” Thus, it is clear that the going down of the sun at noon is neither a daily event nor a biblical perspective, but a view imposed upon the pages of Scripture.

3. The first premise is false--a new day does not begin in the evening (cf. **Argument #1 and Refutation of Argument #1**, pp.17-19). To the contrary, a new day begins in the morning. The second premise is true-- “the going down of the sun” does indicate the onset of evening (Lev. 22:6-7; Deut. 23:11; Josh. 8:29; Josh. 10:26, 27; 1 Kgs. 22:35-36; 2 Chron. 18:34; Mk. 1:32). Finally, the third premise is false-- “the going down of the sun” does not begin at noon (cf. the discussion under **Refutation of Argument #2**, pp.19-20).

4. Therefore, since the premises are invalid, the conclusion drawn from those premises is false--a new day does not begin at noon.

**Argument #3:** There is evidence that the Sabbath begins at noon even in the English word “evening” itself.

1. “Evening” is derived from the word “even” which means that which is equal in measure or quantity. The hour of the day that “evenly” divides the day is noon. Thus, noon, the “even” hour of the day, is the hour at which “evening” begins.

**Refutation of Argument #3:** There is absolutely no lexical evidence to conclude that the word “evening” places the commencement of evening at noon.

1. On the one hand, it is true that “evening” is derived from “even.” On the other hand, it is not true that the “even” from which “evening” is derived has anything at all to do with that which is “evenly” divided. There are in fact two different lexical meanings and derivations to the one English word “even.” (1) “Even” from the Old English word *efen* means that which is equally measured. (2) “Even” from the Old English word *aefen* means the period of time preceding an event; and this use of the word “even” actually means the “eve” that precedes a new day (e.g. “New Year’s Eve” refers to the day, but especially to the night before New Year’s Day). The lexical derivation of “evening” is from the word “even” (*aefen*) meaning the “eve” before a new day. **Argument #3** is built entirely upon a false understanding of the lexical derivation of the words “evening” and “even.”

**Argument #4:** Events surrounding the Passover indicate that a new day begins at noon.

1. It is contended that the Passover Day began with the slaying of the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month “between the evenings” (Ex. 12:6) i.e. between noon (the first evening) and sunset (the second evening).

2. Furthermore, it is asserted that the Passover lamb had to be slain long before sunset because the yearling lamb then had to be roasted and eaten that same night before midnight. There simply would not have been enough time to kill, to roast, and to eat the Passover lamb had the slaying of the Passover lamb not occurred until sunset.

3. Finally, it is assumed that the death of Christ, our Passover Lamb and the slaying of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12 occurred at precisely the same time of the day (3 p.m.).

**Refutation of Argument #4:** Events surrounding the Passover do not indicate that a new day or a Sabbath day begins at noon.

1. It is a false assumption to conclude that the fourteenth day of the first month (Passover Day) began with the slaying of the Passover lamb. The slaying of the Passover lamb was one of the events that occurred on that day, but the text nowhere indicates nor implies that the day began with that event. Because of the evidence cited earlier as to when a day begins (cf. the discussion under **Refutation of Argument #1**, pp.17-19), we should assume the Passover began in the morning like any other day (unless the text states the contrary). Furthermore, the Scripture does not state that the phrase, “between the evenings”, (Ex. 12:6) is to be understood to mean between noon and sunset. “Between the evenings” is actually used eleven times in the Old Testament (In Ex. 12:6; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:3,5,11 the phrase refers to the Passover; Ex. 16:12 speaks of the quail to be gathered in the camp “between the evenings”; Ex. 29:39,41; Num. 28:4,8 mandate daily sacrifices appointed by God to be offered “between the evenings”; and Ex. 30:8 stipulates that incense is to be offered and the golden lamps lit within the Tabernacle “between the evenings”). There are three observations to be made concerning the phrase “between the evenings” that will guide us in understanding to what period of the day this refers. (1) According to Ex. 12:6 the slaying of the Passover lamb occurred “between the evenings.” Now Deut. 16:6 gives us the time of the day when the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed: “at even, at the going down of the sun.” I have established previously (cf. the discussion under **Refutation of Argument #2**, pp.19-21) that “the going down of the sun” refers to the period of the day when the sun sets below the horizon. Thus, the slaying of the Passover lamb occurred between the first evening (sunset) and the second evening (nightfall). Sunset is identified as “evening” in the Scripture (Lev. 22:6-7; Deut. 16:6; Deut. 23:11; Josh. 8:29; Josh. 10:26-27; Judg. 19:14-16; 2 Chron. 18:34; Mk. 1:32), and the darkness of nightfall is identified as “evening” as well (Ex. 12:8,18; Prov. 7:9; Ez. 12:3-7; Mk. 6:47-48; Jn. 6:16-17). Moreover, God declares in figurative language concerning the extraordinary Day of the Lord that “at evening time it shall be light” (Zech. 14:7). The unusual character of that Day is presented in terms of evening being light. Therefore, the usual character of a normal day is that evening is darkness. Thus, we see that the only two periods of a day that are specifically identified as being “evening” are sunset and nightfall. Never is noon identified as being “evening” in the Word of God. (2) According to Ex. 16:12 there would be quail to eat in the camp of Israel “between the evenings.” Now the manna would fall in the morning so that families could be fed breakfast before the work day began; and the quail would fall in the evening (Ex. 16:13) so that families could be fed supper after the work day was completed. Again, this “evening” when the quail was to be gathered was most likely at the end of the day when the heat of the sun was abated rather than at midday when the sun was at its strength. (3) Finally, we are informed that it was “between the evenings” that the golden lamps within the

Tabernacle were lit (Ex. 30:8). The lighting of the lamps most likely served not only a typical significance, but also served a very practical benefit in providing light for the ministry of the priests at evening in the burning of incense to the Lord. This practical benefit of light is made clear in that once the light of morning dawned, the golden lamps were extinguished until the following evening (Ex. 30:7-8; 2 Chron. 13:11). There would be no more need for light at noon than there would be need for light in the morning. Thus, the time of day in which the lamps were lit was at sunset (“between the evenings”).

2. Since “between the evenings” refers to the period of the day immediately following sunset (as demonstrated in **Refutation of Argument #4**, pp. 21-22), then the practical concern of having sufficient time to roast the Passover lamb becomes a moot point for the Passover lamb was actually slain after sunset and was eaten before midnight (Ex. 12:6-8,29).

3. The fact that Christ our Passover Lamb died shortly after “the ninth hour” (i.e. 3 p.m. according to Mk. 15:33-37) does not necessarily tell us when the Passover lamb of Ex. 12:6 was sacrificed. First of all, Christ was not crucified on the day of the Passover meal, but rather on the day after Passover; for He and His disciples had slain the Passover lamb of the Old Covenant and celebrated the Passover meal the night before His death at the Last Supper (Mt. 26:17-19; Mk. 14:12-14; Lk. 22:1, 7-13). Second, since Christ was not crucified on the day of the Old Covenant Passover, neither was there any significance (in regard to Old Covenant typology) tied to the precise time of His death. He was not the Old Covenant Passover. He is the New Covenant Passover. Thus, He was not seeking to keep any Old Covenant Passover timetable either with regard to the precise day or with regard to the precise time of the day in which He was slain. Any such reading into the significance of the specific time of His death is pure speculation (unless it can be positively demonstrated from Scripture that the Old Covenant Passover lamb was slain at precisely 3 p.m.). Finally, it has already been established that the Old Covenant Passover lamb was slain after sunset not at 3 p.m. (cf. the discussion under **Refutation of Argument #4**, pp.21-23).

**Argument #5:** The Sabbath is explicitly stated to begin at evening and to continue until the following evening.

1. Lev. 23:32 specifically designates the boundaries of the Sabbath to be “from even to even.”

**Refutation of Argument #5:** This specific directive has nothing to do with weekly Sabbath keeping; and therefore, relates only to the Day of Atonement.

1. The annual Day of Atonement was an Old Covenant shadow of Christ and His redemptive sacrifice for His people (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 9:7-15). Because the Day of Atonement was an Old Covenant shadow pointing to Christ, it no longer binds us to its specific details ( Heb. 8:13; 10:1,9). Thus, the fact that a Sabbath was celebrated “from

even to even” in conjunction with the Day of Atonement in no way defines for us the ordinary time at which a day begins or at which time the weekly Sabbath would ordinarily begin.

2. It is clear from the text in Lev. 23:26-32 that a day did not begin at evening for the Day of Atonement fell on “the tenth day of the seventh month” (Lev. 23:27); whereas the **evening** before the Day of Atonement was “the ninth day of the month” (Lev. 23:32). The Day of Atonement was specifically stated to occur on “the tenth day” not “the ninth day.” So what was the event that began on “the ninth day of the month at even” (Lev. 23:32)? The evening before the Day of Atonement was “Atonement Eve” and was apparently a time of preparation for the sacred Day of Atonement. “Atonement Eve” (“the ninth day of the month at even”) passed into the actual Day of Atonement (“the tenth day of the seventh month”). Thus, it is clear that God Himself distinguishes between two separate days (Atonement Eve on the ninth day and the Day of Atonement on the tenth day). All that the text indicates is that beginning with “Atonement Eve” at evening, there was to be a Sabbath of fasting and solemn rest from all work which was to last until the evening of the Day of Atonement.

3. As concerns the weekly Sabbath, there is biblical warrant to conclude it was observed from morning to morning: at creation (cf. the discussion under **#4 Creation**, pp.6-7); and in the wilderness (cf. the discussion under **#1b. Exodus 16:23-25**, p.4).

**Argument #6:** The Scripture identifies the period of the day shortly after morning (i.e. noon) as “evening.”

1. According to 1 Sam. 20:5 David gave the following directions to Jonathan concerning his plan to determine whether king Saul was a friend or foe: “that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even.”

2. But as it turns out, David hid himself until “the morning” of the third day at which time “Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David” (1 Sam. 20:35).

3. It is contended that the time appointed by David was “at even” (1 Sam. 20:5), but that the time they actually met was “in the morning” (1 Sam. 20:35) which must have been a late morning meeting that lapsed over into early evening (at noon). Thus demonstrating that the noon hour is designated by the word “even” in Scripture.

**Refutation of Argument #6:** It is not true that the period of the day shortly after the noon hour is designated as “even” in 1 Sam. 20:5,35.

1. David states that he will hide himself in the field “unto” (literally, “until”) the even of the third day (1 Sam. 20:5). The implication being that David would only remain in his hiding place **until** “the third day at even” and after that he would depart. It is significant to note that no specific time of the day was appointed by David for Jonathan to convey his

message to David. David simply stated that the message must be delivered to him by “the third day at even”, otherwise David would not be there to receive it.

2. According to 1 Sam. 20:35 Jonathan did not meet David “at even”, but rather met him “in the morning.” To conclude that this means that Jonathan met David late in the morning (just before noon) and that their meeting lapsed into the noon hour, is certainly reading into the text something that is entirely absent from the text. The text (1 Sam. 20:35) clearly says they met “in the morning.” It says nothing about a meeting at noon or a meeting at even. But the text (1 Sam. 20:35) does state that “Jonathan went out into the field **at the appointed time** with David” (emphasis added). If we maintain that the meeting actually occurred “in the morning” (1 Sam. 20:35), does this not contradict what David said, “that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even” (1 Sam. 20:5)? It certainly does not. Two lines of argument will demonstrate that there is no contradiction between the two texts when one passage states that David would remain in hiding until the evening of the third day (1 Sam. 20:5) while the other passage states that the meeting between David and Jonathan actually occurred in the morning (1 Sam. 20:35).

- a. First, there was no appointed time specifically stated for a meeting between Jonathan and David in 1 Sam. 20:5. David only indicated how long he would remain in hiding (**until** “the third day at even). If there was a specific time that both David and Jonathan agreed upon, it is not mentioned until 1 Sam. 20:35 (“And it came to pass **in the morning**, that Jonathan went out into the field **at the time appointed** with David”, emphasis added). Thus, if one maintains that there was an appointed time to meet, the only appointed time specifically stated in the text for the meeting was “in the morning” not “at even.”
- b. Second, it is far from certain that the best translation of 1 Sam. 20:35 is “at the **time** appointed with David” (emphasis added). The Hebrew word translated “the time appointed” (*moed*), may refer to an “appointed time, place, meeting” (*Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by Brown, Driver, and Briggs, p.417). In other words, it is the context of the passage that determines the specific thing that is “appointed” (whether **an appointed time**, or **an appointed place**, or **an appointed meeting**). On the one hand, there is no contradiction if the meaning of the text is “a time appointed” (as argued above). On the other hand, since there was no appointed **time** specifically stated for the meeting, and since there was an appointed **place** to meet (“by the stone Ezel” according to 1 Sam. 20:19) and an appointed **meeting** agreed upon in order to deliver the message (1 Sam. 20:19-23), the context makes it clear that the more accurate translation of 1 Sam. 20:35 should read: “And it came to pass in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the **place** (or **meeting**) appointed with David.” This is the way in which many versions (ancient and modern) render the passage:
  - (1) “And morning came, and Jonathan went out to the field, as he appointed to do for a signal to David” (The Greek Septuagint);

- (2) “And it came to pass in the morning, Jonathan went out into the field to meet David” (The Syriac Peshitta);
  - (3) “And it cometh to pass in the morning, that Jonathan goeth out into the field for the appointment with David” (Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible);
  - (4) “In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David” (The Revised Standard Version);
  - (5) “Next morning Jonathan went out into the fields for the agreed meeting with David” (The Jerusalem Bible);
  - (6) “Now it came about in the morning that Jonathan went out into the field for the appointment with David” (The New American Standard Bible);
  - (7) “In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David” (The New International Version).
2. c. Thus, there is nothing in 1 Sam. 20:5,35 that would demonstrate the evening to begin at noon.

**Argument #7:** Only the Old Testament will provide the information needed to determine when a new day begins because the New Testament writers were influenced by cultural considerations which led them to measure a day differently than Israelites of the Old Testament had measured a day.

1. It is asserted that while in Babylonian exile, Israelites had learned a different way to measure a day. Before the exile, Israelites commenced a day at noon. Whereas after the exile, they commenced a day at sunset.

2. Thus, one cannot look to the New Testament in order to determine when the Sabbath begins (or for that matter when any day begins), he must turn his attention to the Old Testament.

**Refutation of Argument #7:** It is simply not true that the New Testament commences a new day at a different time than that of the Old Testament. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament agree that a new day (and a Sabbath day) begins in the morning.

1. It is simply an unfounded assertion that the Israelites before the exile commenced a day at a different time than the Israelites after the exile. There is absolutely **no biblical warrant** for such an assertion. Neither Israelites before the exile nor Israelites after the exile reckoned a new day to begin at noon, for the Scripture gives no support (neither Old Testament nor New Testament) to the contention that a new day commences at noon. I have demonstrated that from creation to the giving of the law to the resurrection of Christ (i.e. all periods of biblical revelation), God’s holy Word authorizes a new day to begin in the morning and not in the evening (cf. pp.4-16). It appears this is the only way to discredit the strong New Testament evidence that the Christian Sabbath (and every day) begins in the morning. If a new day begins in the evening (at noon), how can Christ be raised **early on the first day of the week** (Mk. 16:9) **while it is yet dark** (Jn. 20:1), and

yet appear to His disciples **on the same day at evening, being the first day of the week** (Jn. 20:19)? If evening begins a new day then the inspired text is clearly wrong for it should have stated: “Then the **next** day at evening, being the **second** day of the week.” This one verse unravels the view of all who believe a new day to begin in the evening for it clearly teaches that evening does not begin a new day, but rather continues the same day that began in the morning. It is interesting that in my research I did not see this verse (Jn. 20:19) addressed by those advocating the view that a new day begins at noon (except to undermine its credibility due to the influence of the Babylonians and Romans who allegedly introduced this new way of reckoning a day).

2. Furthermore, the novel idea that after the exile a new way of reckoning a day was introduced into biblical revelation (apart from God’s approval) undermines the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. How can one maintain that all of Scripture is inspired and yet contend that a different way of reckoning a day was introduced into biblical revelation by the prophets and apostles apart from the divine sanction and approval of the Holy Spirit? Or how can one maintain the authority and sufficiency of Scripture and yet contend that the Old Testament presents the case accurately while the New Testament presents the case inaccurately? Such a view leads one to the position that certain parts of Scripture are of divine origin while other parts of Scripture are of human origin. Such a position is dangerous to the very soul of a man.

**Conclusion:** The view that the Sabbath begins at noon has neither the support of God’s inspired Word nor the corroboration of Christians throughout church history. It is a novel view that in the end undermines the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

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