

EVENING OR MORNING: WHEN DOES THE BIBLICAL DAY BEGIN?

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Introduction

There has been significant debate over when the biblical day begins. Certain biblical texts seem to indicate that the day begins in the morning and others that it begins in the evening. Scholars long believed that the day began at sunset, according to Jewish tradition. Jews begin their religious holidays in the evening,¹ and the biblical text mandates that the two most important religious feasts, the Passover² and the Day of Atonement,³ begin at sunset. However, in recent years, many scholars have begun to favor a different view: the day begins in the morning at sunrise.

Although it may be somewhat foreign to the ancient Hebrew mind to rigidly define the day as a twenty-four-hour period that always begins and ends at the same time,⁴ the controversy has important implications for the modern reader. The question arises: When does the Sabbath begin and end? The purpose of this paper is to examine whether the day begins in the morning or in the evening by analyzing the sequence of events on the first day of creation (Gen 1:2-5), examining texts that are used to support both theories, and then determining how the evidence in these texts relates to the religious observances prescribed in the Torah. Because of time constraints, I do not explore the question of whether or not the days in Gen 1 are literal. For the purposes of this paper, I am assuming that the days described in Gen 1 are, in fact, twenty-four-hour periods.

When Does Genesis 1:2-5 State That the Day Begins?

Genesis 1:2 states that before God began his creative work, the earth was formless, void (תהו ובהו), and dark (חשך). Once the text establishes that the world was in a state of darkness and chaos, the biblical narrative records God's first creative work found in the Bible: "And God said, 'Let there be light.' Then there was light."⁵

¹U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams, 4th ed., 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 1:29; and H. Niehr, "עֶרֶב," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 338.

²Exod 12:18; Lev 23:5.

³Lev 23:32.

⁴P. J. Heawood, "The Beginning of the Jewish Day," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 36/4 (1946): 394.

⁵My translation.

In v. 4, God separates the light (which he had just created) from the darkness (which was already in existence). In v. 5, he names them day (יֹם) and night (לַיְלָה), respectively. A formula is then introduced that will be repeated after each day of creation: “And it was sunset, then it was sunrise, day *X*” (וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד). For centuries, scholars interpreted this statement to be a summary of what had just happened: first there was evening (darkness) and then there was morning (light), making one day. In recent years, however, this assumption has been called into question.⁶ Many scholars are moving toward the “morning theory.” P. J. Heawood argues that the Jewish day begins in the morning, as did A. Dillman fifty years before him.⁷ U. Cassuto interprets Gen 1:5 this way: “When day-time had passed, the period allotted to darkness returned (and there was evening), and when the night-time came to an end the light held sway a second time (and there was morning), and this completed the first calendar day (one day), which had begun with the creation of light.”⁸ N. Sarna believes that עֶרֶב signals the end of the creative activity and that בֹּקֶר signals the “renewal” of creative activity on the second day.⁹

Other scholars have been unwilling to take a firm stand because the biblical data is quite mixed. Victor P. Hamilton notes that “‘Day and night’ is much more frequent than ‘night and day.’ Thus it seems likely that this refrain in Genesis refers not to the computation of a day but rather the ‘vacant time till the morning.’”¹⁰ Kenneth A. Matthews feels that the biblical text as a whole is unclear about when the day begins and, therefore, the evening-morning pattern may be a rhetorical device to frame the six days of creation.¹¹ Still others, such as E. A. Speiser, Gordon J. Wenham, and H. R. Stroes, maintain the traditional position, though not without reservations on the parts of the latter two.¹² Stroes states that “Considering Genesis 1:5 in itself, it is justified, in my opinion, to conclude that the morning theory is the most obvious thing here, but that the evening theory is certainly not completely out of the question.

⁶H. R. Stroes, “Does the Day Begin in the Evening or Morning? Some Biblical Observations,” *V/T* 16/4 (1996): 460-461.

⁷Heawood, 394-395.

⁸Cassuto, 28.

⁹Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary Series (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 8.

¹⁰Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, ed. R. K. Harrison, NIV Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 121.

¹¹Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, 2 vols., New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 1:147-148.

¹²E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 3d ed., ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, 2 vols., *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1987); Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, ed. David A. and Glenn W. Barker Hubbard, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), 19; and Stroes, 473-475.

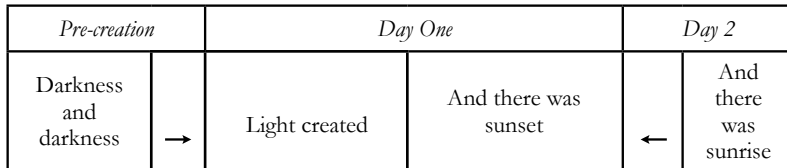
If we may link Gen. i 5 with ii 2, then the evening theory should be preferred.”¹³

The Hebrew of Gen 1:5 reads:¹⁴

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹרֶךְ יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קִרְיָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד׃	Then God called the light “day” and the darkness He called “night.” And it was sunset, then it was sunrise, day one.
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עֶרֶב is defined by the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament as “The close of day (יום) marked by sunset, . . . denotes the end of work, . . . [W]hen ‘ereb is used in combination with boqer, the time span denoted by the pair can be either day or night.”¹⁵ בֹּקֶר can mean “Morning, i.e., time of the sunrise, and ‘tomorrow morning’ [I]n some cases . . . this word can mean the whole day from morning to evening.”¹⁶ Because the words can also mean simply sunset and sunrise, some scholars doubt that their usages in Gen 1 are correctly rendered evening and morning.¹⁷ It may have been practical reasons, however, which caused the traditional rendering. The terms עֶרֶב and בֹּקֶר are used from the first day of creation, though the sun was not created until the fourth day. However, leaving this difficulty aside, it is still possible to interpret the words in a conceptually similar way as sunset and sunrise; for instance, when the light stopped and when the light began. In any case, עֶרֶב is associated with darkness (whether the beginning of it, or its entirety) and בֹּקֶר with light.

The argument made by the proponents of the morning theory is outlined here in a diagram:



Proponents of this position argue that because the creation begins with light, light marks the beginning of the first day, and then every successive sunrise begins a new day.¹⁸ The morning theory here is partly dependent on

¹³Stroes: 474-475.

¹⁴My translation.

¹⁵Niehr, 336-337.

¹⁶Ch. Barth, “בֹּקֶר,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 222, 225.

¹⁷Heawood: 395; Sarna, 8.

¹⁸Cassuto, 28; Sarna, 8; Heawood, 395; and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 1967.

a translation of וַיְהִי as “and there was” or “and then . . . came”¹⁹ Thus they believe that the phrase וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד records events that happen chronologically after vv. 3-5a. In this model, עֶרֶב and בֹקֶר come after the creation of light. As Jacob Milgrom puts it: “Obviously there was no evening preceding the creation of light.”²⁰ Is this the only way to interpret this phrase?

In the genealogy (תּוֹלְדוֹת) of Gen 5, it is interesting to note that the verb היה with the consecutive וַיְהִי (וַיְהִי) is used consistently throughout. Each section tells the events of a man’s life and then concludes with the following statement: “Thus the days of X were Y years.”

Comparing Gen 1:5 with Gen 5:23, we see some common elements. The use of וַיְהִי modifies a time element, which is quantified in the second part of the statement (see the chart below).²¹

<i>Genesis 1:5</i>	<i>Genesis 5:23</i>
וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:	וַיְהִי כָל־יְמֵי חֲנוּךְ הַמֶּשׁ וְשָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
Thus evening and (thus) morning were one day.	Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years.

Genesis 5:23 does not follow chronologically after vv. 21-22. Rather it gives a brief summary, clarifying exactly how long Enoch’s life was. When comparing Gen 1 with Gen 5, it becomes clear that the phrase

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד

is a summary that tells us exactly how much time it took for the events in 1:3-5a to happen, rather than telling about a new event that came afterward. Thus, the evening theory is to be preferred.

The evening theory can be summarized in the following diagram:

<i>Day One</i>	
Darkness and Chaos And it was עֶרֶב	Light And it was בֹקֶר

Arguments for this theory often stem from an assumption that God must have finished his creative work on the sixth day before dark and thus the Sabbath and the seventh day begin at sunset. This idea is then applied backward to the other days of creation. Others rely on the traditional view advocated above that וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד is a clause that summarizes the events of day one and sets up the grammatical formula to be used in the rest

¹⁹Stroes: 474; Niehr, 339.

²⁰Milgrom, 1967.

²¹Gen 1:5 is my translation. All translations from Gen 5:23 are from ESV.

of the story.²² In regard to Milgrom's objection (that evening could not have preceded morning), Sarna uses Isa 45:7 to prove that God also created the darkness.²³ If this is so, the creative work did not then begin with light. Also, though it may seem illogical to say that evening preceded the creation of light, it is equally illogical to state that there was light before there was a sun.

One fault of the morning theory is that it ignores the phrase *יום אָהר*, which can be translated *day one*, or *one day*. If indeed *בֶּקֶר* begins the second day, it is strange for the author to designate that point in time as *יום אָהר*. *בֶּקֶר* is apparently included in *יום אָהר*, rather than the beginning of the second day. In fact, *בֶּקֶר* may even be in construct with *יום אָהר* since the masculine singular noun has no unique construct form. Though H. Niehr states that the use of *עֶרֶב* and *בֶּקֶר* together can simply mean *night*, it does not have to.²⁴ The use of the verb *הָיָה* with both *עֶרֶב* and *בֶּקֶר* suggests that they are separate periods of time rather than a way of stating night.

G. Von Rad offers a helpful statement, suggesting that every night is, in a sense, a return to the chaos and darkness of the precreation, and the morning is a reenactment of the first creative work.²⁵ Matthews suggests that the evening-morning pattern "Mimicked the initial interchange of 'darkness' followed by the appearance of 'light.'"²⁶ Although Sarna advocates the morning theory, he notes that the day-time was the period of divine creative activity.²⁷ The light is viewed as positive, but chaos is a threat.²⁸ Niehr states that "The menace of evening is clear when 'ereb marks the onset of terror . . . , or the coming of death,"²⁹ ideas similar to that of the Hebrew concept of chaos and darkness.³⁰ If these are indeed valid theological suppositions, it becomes clear that the evening comes logically before the sunrise of the same day, since to have creation first and then a return to chaos second in the day, would be to regress.

Genesis 1:5 supports the evening theory. Conceptually, the evening-morning pattern seems to be a reenactment of the initial state of the earth (*חָשֶׁךְ*) and then the creation of light. Grammatically, *sunset* and *sunrise* seem to belong to day one, and thus *בֶּקֶר* cannot be sunrise of the second day. Also, the clause in v. 5b imitates the *הוֹלִדָּת* formulas of Gen 5 that are used as a short summary of the life of an individual. However, if the day seemingly begins at sunset in Gen 1, what about in the rest of the Bible?

²²Stroes, 473-474.

²³Sarna, 6.

²⁴Niehr, 336-337.

²⁵Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed., ed. Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, Bernhard W. Anderson, and James L. Mays, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 52-53.

²⁶Matthews, 148.

²⁷Sarna, 8.

²⁸Von Rad, 51.

²⁹Niehr, 340.

³⁰Sarna, 6.

*When Does the Day Begin
in the Rest of Scripture?*

The biblical data is sometimes unclear about when the day begins. This has led many scholars to believe that there were different methods of calculating the days in different time periods of Israel's history. Though there is little historical evidence to support this view, scholars have examined the various Bible texts in the light of the Documentary Hypothesis and postulated several theories. One, by B. Jacobs, states that the method of counting the days morning to morning was used by the farmers for whom the day was more important than the night; but ever since the first Sabbath, days were calculated evening to evening in religious contexts.³¹ Cassuto similarly argues that though the day begins in the morning, cultic festivals begin on the preceding evening.³² Others suggest that both methods of calculating days were used at the same time.³³ Solomon Zeitlin believes that the Jews did not begin calculating their days from evening to evening until the postexilic period, when they began to use the lunar-solar calendar.³⁴

Milgrom unequivocally states that the biblical day begins in the morning, citing, for example, Gen 19:33-34; Lev 7:15; Num 9:11, and 33:3; Jdgs 19:4-9; and 1 Sam 19:11.³⁵ Because Stroes addresses each of these verses in his paper (in favor of the evening theory), we will examine them.

Morning-Theory Texts

<i>Genesis 19:33-34</i>	
<p>וַתִּשְׁקֹן אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יוֹן בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה וַתָּבֹא הַבְּכִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ וְלֹא־יָדָע בִּשְׁכָבָהּ וּבקִוְמָהּ: וַיְהִי מִקִּוְמָתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְעִירָה הֲיִשְׁכַּבְתִּי אִמָּשׁ אֶת־אָבִי נִשְׁקֶנּוּ יוֹן גַּם־הַלַּיְלָה וּבֹאִי שְׁכָבִי עִמּוֹ וְנַחֲיָה מֵאֲבִינוּ יָרָע:</p>	<p>So they made their father drink wine <i>that night</i>. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose. <i>The next day</i>, the firstborn said to the younger, "Behold, I lay <i>last night</i> with my father. Let us make him drink wine <i>tonight</i> also. Then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father."</p>

In this story, the daughters of Lot plan to lie with their father in order to produce heirs for him. This text is used to show that the first night was a

³¹Cited in Stroes, 460.

³²Cassuto, 29.

³³G. Barrios and G. von Rad, cited in Stroes, 461.

³⁴Solomon Zeitlin, "The Beginning of the Jewish Day During the Second Commonwealth," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 36/4 (1946): 405.

³⁵Milgrom, 1967.

separate day from the following morning and night,³⁶ as evidenced by the ESV translations highlighted above. Stroes, however, argues that the whole of v. 34 possibly occurs not the next morning but the next evening, which, according to the evening theory, would legitimately be the next day.³⁷ Although I agree with Stroes that this is a possibility, the argument is not very strong.

<i>Leviticus 7:15</i>	
וּבֶשֶׂר זֶבַח תּוֹדַת שְׁלָמִיו בְּיוֹם קָרְבָּנוֹ יֹאכַל לֹא־יִנְיַח מִמֶּנּוּ עַד־בֹּקֶר׃	And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on <i>the day</i> of his offering. He shall not leave any of it until <i>the morning</i> .

In the morning theory, the next morning is clearly seen as the next day, thus explaining why בֹּקֶר is the cut-off point for eating the sacrifice. The question is, would the Israelites have eaten of the sacrifice after sundown anyway? Stroes thinks not because the sanctuary was closed at that time. Thus either the evening theory or the morning theory could work in this instance.³⁸ Zeitlin also states that the temple day began at sunrise and ended with sunset,³⁹ which may indicate that eating sacrifices in the evening was not an issue. However, the text does not indicate that the sacrifice needed to be eaten in the temple courts or a “holy place,” therefore Stroes’s argument does not withstand scrutiny. I do not think that we can assume that the Israelites never ate sacrifices after sundown,⁴⁰ making the prohibition “he shall not leave any of it until evening” unnecessary. I agree with Milgrom that this text favors the morning theory.

<i>Numbers 9:11</i>	
בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בְּאַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר יוֹם בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ עַל־מִצּוֹת וּמִרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ׃	In the second month on <i>the fourteenth day at twilight</i> they shall keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

<i>Numbers 33:3</i>	
וַיֵּצְאוּ מִרַעְמֵסֶס בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בַּחֲמִישֵׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן מִמִּדְבַּר הַפָּסָח וַיֵּצְאוּ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיַד הָרְמָה לְעֵינֵי כָל־מִצְרַיִם׃	They set out from Rameses in the first month, on <i>the fifteenth day</i> of the first month. On <i>the day after the Passover</i> , the people of Israel went out triumphantly in the sight of all the Egyptians.

³⁶Cassuto, 28.

³⁷Stroes, 467.

³⁸Ibid., 470.

³⁹Zeitlin, 406.

⁴⁰See Num 9:11.

These texts demonstrate that the Passover began on the fourteenth of Nisan in the evening. The next day, the fifteenth of Nisan, is called *the day after the Passover*. Morning-theory proponents would argue that because this feast was especially stipulated to begin in the evening, the evening is seen as a different date than the following morning, making the evening-evening cycle of Passover the exception rather than the rule.⁴¹ Also Exod 12:10 stipulates that the Passover lamb must be eaten on the evening of the fourteenth and the leftovers must be burned up by the next morning. However, as Stroes reminds us, Lev 23:6 tells us that the fifteenth of Nisan is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is equated with the evening of the fourteenth in Num 9:11.⁴² Thus we seem to have a discrepancy here. If the feast began on the fourteenth day, then why do other texts say that the feast began on the fifteenth? Timothy R. Ashley tries to reconcile this by claiming that Exod 12 prescribes the fourteenth as the Passover and the fifteenth as the Feast of Unleavened Bread;⁴³ however, in Exod 12:18 the Feast of Unleavened Bread goes from the evening of the fourteenth until the twenty-first. I propose that because the Israelites had just come out of Egypt, they were calculating their days according to the sunrise, as the Egyptians did,⁴⁴ but that this law intends to show that the Passover day begins at sunset. By switching between the fourteenth and fifteenth, the Torah intends to demonstrate that the evening really belongs to the following morning.

<i>Judges 19:9</i>	
<p>וַיָּקָם הָאִישׁ לָלֶכֶת הוּא וּפְלִגְשׁוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ חָתְנוֹ אָבִי הַנְּעֻרָה הִנֵּה נָא הַפֶּה הַיּוֹם לָעֶרֶב לִי־נָא הִנֵּה חָנוּת הַיּוֹם לַיָּן פֹּה וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבָבָהּ וְהִשְׁפִּימָתָם מִחֵר לְדַרְכָּכָם וְהִלְכֶתָ לְאַהֲלֶךָ:</p>	<p>And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold, <i>now the day has waned toward evening</i>. Please, spend the night. Behold, <i>the day draws to its close</i>. Lodge here and let your heart be merry, and <i>tomorrow</i> you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home."</p>
<i>1 Samuel 19:11</i>	
<p>וַיִּשְׁלַח שָׂאוּל מַלְאָכִים אֶל־בֵּית דָּוִד לְשֹׁמְרוֹ וְלְהַמְיָחוֹ בְּבֹקֶר וַתִּגַּד לְדָוִד מִיָּכָל אִשְׁתּוֹ לֵאמֹר אִם־אֵינְךָ מִמָּלֶט אֶת־נַפְשְׁךָ הַלַּיְלָה מִחֵר אֵתָהּ מוֹמָתָ:</p>	<p>Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the <i>morning</i>. But Michal, David's wife, told him, "If you do not escape with your life <i>tonight, tomorrow</i> you will be killed."</p>

⁴¹Milgrom, 1967.

⁴²Stroes, 471.

⁴³Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, ed. R. K. Harrison, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 626.

⁴⁴Milgrom, 1967.

These texts are used by “morning theorists” to show that the night and the daytime were two different days. Though this is possible, I question the interpretation of the word *מָחָר* as meaning *tomorrow* in the sense of the next calendar day. G. André says that *מָחָר* “Usually has the sense ‘tomorrow’ = ‘on the following day,’ although it can sometimes be translated with ‘in the future.’”⁴⁵ I suggest that *מָחָר* means the next period of daylight, not necessarily tomorrow in the sense of the next date on the calendar. (This argument may also be applied to Gen 19:34.)

In reference to Jdgs 19:9, Stroes notes that there must have been some time between the father-in-law’s statement and the time of sunset when the travelers lodged at Gibeah for the night. If that is the case, and if *מָחָר* does mean *the next calendar day*, the text would still not conflict with the evening theory.⁴⁶ The phrases *הַיּוֹם לָעֶרֶב* and *הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה* can be translated as “the day has collapsed to setting” and “the decline of the day,” respectively.⁴⁷ Although *הַיּוֹם* here means the period of daylight, it may also mean a twenty-four-hour period.⁴⁸ The sense of the text then comes from interpreting *מָחָר* and *הַיּוֹם* either from the perspective of the morning theory or the evening theory.

We have looked at several texts used in favor of the morning theory and though these may be plausible interpretations, they are not as concrete as some scholars would like to believe. There are also many texts that are used by the advocates of the evening theory to prove their point, such as Lev 22:6-7; 23:5-6, 32; Neh 13:19; Luke 23:54; Mark 16:1-2; and John 20:1. We will look at these and evaluate them in the same manner in which we examined the previous texts.

Evening-Theory Texts

<i>Leviticus 22:6-7</i>	
<p>נֶפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּנְעִיבוּ וְטָמְאָה עֲרֵהָ עֶרֶב וְלֹא יֹאכַל מִן־הַקֹּדְשִׁים כִּי אִם־רָחַץ בְּשֶׁרָו בַּמַּיִם: וְכֵן הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְטָהַר וְאַחַר יֹאכַל מִן־הַקֹּדְשִׁים כִּי לַחֲמוּ הוּא:</p>	<p>the person who touches such a thing shall be unclean until the <i>evening</i> and shall not eat of the holy things unless he has bathed his body in water. When <i>the sun goes down</i> he shall be clean, and afterward he may eat of the holy things, because they are his food.</p>

This passage, along with many others, is cited by Niehr as proof that the postexilic cultic day began and ended with evening.⁴⁹ If persons become ritually unclean, they must bathe in water and then be unclean until evening.

⁴⁵G. André, “Mahar,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 238.

⁴⁶Stroes, 468.

⁴⁷Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 526.

⁴⁸M. Saebø, “Yom,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 20.

⁴⁹Niehr, 338-339.

If the day begins in the morning, why is the person unclean until evening? Surprisingly, Milgrom offers no insight into this question, skimming over the phrase “until the evening.”⁵⁰ Zeitlin, as already noted above, believes that the temple day was really only half a day, from sunrise to sunset, which may answer this question;⁵¹ but, although useful, it, in and of itself, does not support either theory. A morning theorist could also argue on practical grounds that by remaining unclean only until evening, it would prevent the person from defiling their bed (possibly again), permit him to have sexual relations or, as in the case of Lev 22, allow him to eat of the holy sacrifice before the morning time. However, these arguments cannot be substantiated. It is then clear that this text strongly favors the evening theory.

<i>Leviticus 23:5-6</i>	
בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים פָּסַח לַיהוָה: וּבַחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה הֵנּוּ הַמִּצְוֹת לַיהוָה שֶׁבַע יָמִים מִצֹּת תֹּאכְלוּ:	In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at <i>twilight</i> , is the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

<i>Leviticus 23:32</i>	
שַׁבַּת שְׁבִתוֹן הוּא לָכֶם וְעֲנִיתֶם אֲחִינְפְשֵׁיכֶם בַּחֲשֵׁה לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעֶרֶב מִעֶרֶב עַד־עֶרֶב תִּשְׁבֹּתוּ שַׁבְּתֵכֶם:	It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from <i>evening</i> to <i>evening</i> shall you keep your Sabbath.”

We have already discussed the Passover; however, because the Passover text in Lev 23:5-6 is in close proximity with another “evening theory text” (Lev 23:32) we will discuss them together. As previously noted above, Milgrom finds that the prescriptions for the start of the Passover and the Day of Atonement are exceptions to, rather than based on, the idea that the day begins in the evening. In regard to the Passover, he says that “If the day began in the evening, there would be no need to state, not once, but twice, that the termini are the evening.”⁵² He believes that the Passover began in the evening because the paschal lamb needed to be eaten at night to protect the family from the Angel of Death (see Exod 12).⁵³ He feels the reason that the Day

⁵⁰See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. William Foxwell Albright, and David Noel Freedman, *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); and idem, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

⁵¹Zeitlin: 406.

⁵²Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 1967.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 1969.

of Atonement begins in the evening was for practical reasons: “To limit the fast to twenty-four hours.”⁵⁴ Although both of these feasts clearly begin in the evening, and thus seem to be strong support for the evening theory, it must be noted that Lev 23:27 speaks of the Day of Atonement beginning on the tenth of the month, whereas v. 32 says it begins on the ninth of the month. Stroes argues that because other Day of Atonement passages tell us it begins on the tenth (e.g., Exod 30:10; Lev 16:29), Lev 23 may reflect a difference in what he calls “the ordinary day notion” and “the correct day division.”⁵⁵

Many have tried to connect Lev 23:32 with the weekly Sabbath.⁵⁶ However, Heawood and Zeitlin disagree with this reasoning. Heawood states that “It is sometimes ignored that this has nothing to do with the weekly Sabbath.”⁵⁷ I agree that, in and of itself, this text does not prove that the Sabbath begins in the evening, so we must look to the next texts.

<i>Nehemiah 13:19</i>	
<p>וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צָלְלוּ שַׁעֲרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לִפְנֵי הַשַּׁבָּת וְאִמְרָה וַיִּסְגְּרוּ הַדְּלָתוֹת וְאִמְרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִפְתְּחוּם עַד אַחַר הַשַּׁבָּת וּמִנְעֵרֵי הַעֲמֻדוֹתַי עַל-הַשַּׁעֲרִים לֹא יָבֹאוּ מִשָּׂא בְיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת:</p>	<p>As soon as it began to <i>grow dark</i> at the gates of Jerusalem <i>before the Sabbath</i>, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until <i>after the Sabbath</i>. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day.</p>

According to some commentators, this text seems to clearly indicate that the Sabbath (at least at the time of Nehemiah) began at sundown.⁵⁸ However, others have suggested that the gates were going to be shut at night anyway, so it doesn't mean that the Sabbath began in the evening.⁵⁹ Because the phrase *אַחַר הַשַּׁבָּת* may not mean *Saturday night*, and because, in general, city gates were not normally opened in the nighttime, the gates may not have been opened until Sunday morning. This works against the evening theory.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, “There is no explanation for the fact that such a routine matter as shutting the gate at

⁵⁴Ibid., 2025.

⁵⁵Stroes, 472.

⁵⁶Niehr, 339.

⁵⁷Heawood, 395. See also Zeitlin, 404-405.

⁵⁸F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, ed. R. K. Harrison, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 264; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*, 1st ed., ed. Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, Bernhard W. Anderson, and James L. Mays, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 360; and Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 1st ed., ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 216.

⁵⁹Stroes, 464.

⁶⁰Blenkinsopp, 360; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 1968.

nightfall should be mentioned so emphatically.⁶¹ Stroes also suggests that in the case of Neh 13:19, they were shutting the gates earlier than normal, because the Sabbath was coming that evening.⁶²

<i>Luke 23:54</i>	
καὶ ἡμέρα ἦν παρασκευῆς καὶ σάββατον ἐπέφωσκεν.	It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath <i>was beginning</i> .

According to Joseph A. Fitzmyer, the phrase *the day of Preparation* means the day before the Sabbath. He states that καὶ σάββατον ἐπέφωσκεν cannot refer to the dawn of Sabbath morning, and that the phrase *beginning to dawn* may refer to Venus or the Sabbath candles.⁶³ Heawood finds this argument unjustifiable since the word has a meaning associated with the dawn and sunrise.⁶⁴ Of Luke's use of ἐπιφώσκω, John Nolland says: "Though Luke clearly intends to point to the near arrival of sundown, when Sabbath would begin . . . he could have erred because of a wish to adopt an 'elegant' word from his second source," and the word is "Better adapted to expressing the dawning of a new day reckoned to begin at first light."⁶⁵ Though this text seems, at first glance, to support the evening theory, upon closer examination the verdict becomes unsure. However, if the Sabbath begins at sunrise in this text, that means that the events of vv. 50-56 then happened during the night and early morning, which would be unusual.⁶⁶

<i>Mark 16:1-2</i>	
Καὶ διαγενομένου τοῦ σαββάτου Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία ἡ [τοῦ] Ἰακώβου καὶ Σαλώμῃ ἠγόρασαν ἀρώματα ἵνα ἐλθοῦσαι ἀλείψωσιν αὐτόν. καὶ λίαν πρῶτῃ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων ἔρχονται ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον ἀνατελείαντος τοῦ ἡλίου.	When <i>the Sabbath was past</i> , Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And <i>very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen</i> , they went to the tomb.

As C. S. Mann notes, this is a very confusing passage. According to him, the phrase *after the Sabbath* indicates a time period after six o'clock p.m. The phrase "very early" is usually associated with a time frame of around three to

⁶¹Stroes, 464.

⁶²Ibid., 465.

⁶³Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (10–24): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1529.

⁶⁴Heawood, 400.

⁶⁵John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, ed. David A. and Glenn W. Barker Hubbard, *WBC* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 1165.

⁶⁶Stroes, 462.

six o'clock a.m., but this conflicts with the phrase *when the sun had risen*.⁶⁷ Craig A. Evans suggests that perhaps the word οὐπω was dropped from the text, having originally read "the sun had not yet risen."⁶⁸ Although these are real problems for NT commentators, they pose no difficulty for us. Though the text does not precisely establish the end of the Sabbath, we know it was probably before three a.m., and certainly before the rising of the sun on the first day of the week, since the women were unlikely to buy spices and then rush to the tomb between sunrise and a time designated as "very early . . . when the sun had risen."

<i>John 20:1</i>	
Τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἔρχεται πρῶτὴ σκοτίας ἔτι οὕσης εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ βλέπει τὸν λίθον ἠρμένον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου.	<i>Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.</i>

This text is very important for our discussion because of the phrase *while it was still dark*. Raymond E. Brown thinks that the time period in this text is sometime between three and six a.m.,⁶⁹ and though it is not important for our discussion to establish the exact hour, the text is useful. It establishes that even before the sun had risen, it was already considered the first day of the week, or Sunday. Thus the day began sometime before the three to six o'clock a.m. window. This plainly contradicts the morning theory and shows that the writer of the Gospel of John, at least, believed that the day began sometime before sunrise.

There are many Bible texts that are used to support the morning theory and others to support the evening theory. Of the texts we examined, many cannot be used to firmly establish either theory (Gen 19:33-34; Num 9:11, and 33:3; Jdgs 19:9; 1 Sam 19:11; Lev 23:5-6, 32; and Luke 23:54). However, Lev 7:15 favors the morning theory and Gen 1:5; Lev 22:6-7; Neh 13:19; Mark 16:1-2; and John 20:1 favor the evening theory. There are many other texts that could have been discussed, but the length of this article does not allow it. Now that we have looked at this evidence, we are back where we started. When does the biblical day begin?

Conclusion

The first day, found in Gen 1:2-5 started in the evening. God had created the darkness, and then he created the light. We cannot argue that the darkness was not a part of God's creative work. The word יָמָא belongs to day one grammatically, and it is therefore illogical to argue that the יָמָא began day two. The structure of v. 5b is similar to a formula used extensively in the

⁶⁷C. S. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 664.

⁶⁸Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, *WBC* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 534.

⁶⁹Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (13–21): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 980.

הולֵדוֹה section of Gen 5 that closes the account of a man's life by summarizing how long he lived. Conceptually, the *evening-morning* motif ties in with Gen 1:2-5, which demonstrates that the world was covered first in darkness and chaos, but then light was created. Each subsequent day is a reenactment of that sequence of events that moves from darkness (chaos) to light (order). Clearly, the evidence shows that the morning theory is weak if it uses Gen 1:5 as its foundation.

The rest of the biblical data is inconclusive as to when the Jewish day begins, though the texts that we have examined either support the evening theory or only weakly support the morning theory. The concept of cultic cleanness and certain festivals are strongly associated with evening. There are texts that may be interpreted according to the morning theory, though these are unclear. Heawood reminds us that "The very idea of time marked out mathematically into periods of twenty-four hours would be foreign to an age when the night was divided into watches, while the day was divided into hours, and those hours, it would seem, were of variable length."⁷⁰

Why, then, does the beginning of the day matter? The most important and practical reason is that it has implications for religious observances, especially the Sabbath. Does the Sabbath begin on Friday night and go until sunset Saturday, or is it from sunrise Saturday to sunrise Sunday? As we have seen, using Lev 23:32 to prove that the Sabbath begins in the evening is rather unsound. However, the evidence from Gen 1:5, as well as texts such as John 20:1, demonstrate that the day begins before sunrise. Thus I believe that the traditional position of the Sabbath beginning and ending at sunset is still valid, and unless any other evidence comes to light, it will remain so.

⁷⁰Heawood, 394.