

Midday in the Bible: Was God Confused?

By Neil Gardner

The majority of Sabbath observing Christians believe that the 7th day Sabbath mentioned in the Bible begins on Friday at sunset and continues until the following sunset on Saturday. This tradition also has a long history within Judaism.

A growing number of Christians who had observed sunset to sunset for many years now begin their observance at dawn or sunrise on Saturday morning. Some of these people observe the Sabbath for a 24 hour period from sunrise to sunrise. Others observe it from dawn to dark.

The question I want to explore in this study is: *When does the middle of a day arrive in the scriptures?* Shortly, we will discover how “midday” in the Bible ties in with the three different beliefs held by the Sabbath observing Christians mentioned above.

With a little research it will become evident that God considers “midday” to be “*the brightest part of the day...noon*”¹ and the time “*when sun mounts its highest.*”²

In 1Kings 18:26 we read:

“And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from *morning even until noon...*” The word rendered as “*morning*” in this verse is the same word found in Genesis 1:5 and its primary meaning is “*...dawn (as the break of day)*”³ The word translated as “*noon*” in verse 26 is also found in verse 29 and there it is translated as “*midday*” (*KJV*

¹ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (“Midday”) - (www.e-sword.net.)

² The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (by F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs - Francis Brown, D.D., D. Litt., with the cooperation of S.R. Driver, D.D., Litt.D. and Charles A. Briggs, D.D., D. Litt. --Reprinted from the 1906 edition originally published by Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston - Strong's numbering was added by Hendrickson Publishers, fourth printing -- January 1999) p. 843.

³ Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries (“morning”) - (www.e-sword.net.)

throughout.) This same word appears as “noon” once again in Psalm 55:17. The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary*⁴ points out that “noon” in this scripture is equivalent to the “sixth...hour” in the New Testament and according to our modern clocks approximately “twelve...o’clock.” They compare Psalm 55:17 to Acts 10:9 where we read:

“On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the *sixth hour . . .*” The commentary continues: “*the sixth hour--noon.*” Please note that “noon” is considered the 6th hour of the day and not the 18th hour as it should be if a day began with the previous sunset. In fact the scriptures are silent about the so called hours of 13 through 24. Twelve is the highest numbered hour mentioned in the Bible (John 11:9). In addition, there was no such thing as our 60 minute hour in Biblical times. ‘The New Bible Dictionary’ reveals that “an hour is one-twelfth of the period of daylight”⁵ Thus a day was always 12 hours long in any season. If noon (*twelve o’clock*) is the 6th hour of the day and we subtract 6 hours from twelve o’clock we discover that a new day begins at approximately six o’clock in the morning (*or more precisely at dawn and varies with the season.*)

Bible commentaries, dictionaries and encyclopedias agree that “midday” = “noon” and “noon” = “midday” in *both Testaments*.

Was God confused when He decided to make midday arrive at noon? If a day was 24 hours long and it began at sunset, then midday should arrive around six o’clock in the morning. Obviously, none of us believe that God was confused or that He was off by about six hours with His placement of midday.

The sunset to sunset approach places “noon” way past the middle of its presumed day. Likewise, the sunrise to sunrise reckoning does not add up to God’s calculation. This view assumes that midday is about six hours later than noon. Clearly, these two pieces do not fit the Biblical puzzle.

In Genesis 1:5, God calls *only* the “*light day.*” *Darkness* is a completely *different season* and it is called “*night*” (*Genesis 8:22, Psalm 22:2, 104:20.*) Genesis 1:16 tells us that God appointed *only* the *sun* (“*greater light*”) to “*rule the day.*” We can easily observe that the sun is still ruling beyond sunset until dark. This explains why a day simply declines and does not end at sunset as we see in places

⁴ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary (Notes on Dan. 6:10) - (www.e-sword.net.)

⁵ The New Bible Dictionary - Second Edition, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, U.S.A. c 1962, 1982. (p. 495)

such as Jeremiah 6:4 and Mark 4:35.

Jesus informs us, "...*Are there not twelve hours in the day?*" (*John 11:9*.) Nowhere in the scriptures does Jesus or anyone else (*including His enemies*) state that there is 24 hours in a day.

Christians, who have changed their minds on this issue, could no longer come to terms with the fact that *they believed there was twice as many hours in a day than our Lord and Savior stated*. After all, how do people invent or accept a non-Biblical religious tradition? They disagree with God (*unintentionally or intentionally*.)

No matter how we may maneuver this Biblical puzzle, only one piece fits. The 12 hour day that begins at dawn and ends at dark. This is the only position whereby "midday" (*noon*) falls perfectly into place.

Biblical writers express this understanding (*12 hour days of light*) not only in a literal sense, but figuratively as well. In Paul's Damascus narratives he states that suddenly a great light came from heaven and that it was *above the brightness of the sun*. In one of his narratives he said that this event happened at "*about noon*" (*Acts 22:6*) and in the other, "*at midday*" (*Acts 26:13*.) While Luke wrote the words of Paul in Acts, Paul himself wrote:

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of *light*, and the children of the *day*: we are not of the *night*, nor of *darkness*" (*1Thessalonians 5:4-5*.)

As mentioned earlier, Judaism has a long history of sunset to sunset Sabbath observance. Although Judaism promotes a number of official teachings, a multitude of Jewish writings admit that many of their traditions do not come from the Bible.

In the book, *What is a Jew?*⁶ the author writes, "*It is not easy to draw any rigid lines separating Jewish law and Jewish custom. There is an ancient saying that in Judaism custom becomes law. And the history of Judaism will reveal many religious laws widely recognized and observed, which had their origin in long-accepted folk practices.*" (p. 105)

⁶ *What is a Jew?* (by Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer -- Collier Books, N.Y., c 1960, 1953, The World Publishing Co.)

Finally, please review the following quotes from the *Jewish Encyclopedia*,⁷ the *Encyclopedia Biblica*⁸ and *Life and Language in the Old Testament*⁹:

"In order to fix the beginning and ending of the *Sabbath-day and festivals* and to determine the precise hour for certain religious observances it becomes necessary to know the exact times of the rising and setting of the sun. *According to the strict interpretation of the Mosaic law, every day begins with sunrise and ends with sunset*" (*The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 591.)

"Day" (Hebrew, "yom"): In the *Bible, the season of light (Gen. 1:5), lasting "from dawn [lit. "the rising of the morning"] to the coming forth of the stars"* (*The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 475.)

"Among the ancients the day was reckoned in a great variety of ways...'*From dawn to dark*'...*was the ancient and ordinary meaning of a day among the Israelites....*

...The Israelites regarded the morning as the beginning of the day; in the *evening the day declined 'or' went down,* and until the *new day ('morning')*...*it was necessary to 'tarry all night' (cp Judg. 19:6-9)...Nu. 11:32 'all that day and all the night and all the next day'). Not till post-exilic times do we find traces of a new mode of reckoning which makes day begin at sunset and continue till the sunset following...*

...Thus it was in the *nature* of things that morning, ...midday,...and evening...should be distinguished, and equally so that *morning should be spoken of as the rising of the morning, the breaking of the day (Gen. 19:15)"* (*Encyclopedia Biblica*, 1035-1036.)

"When Hebrew writers refer to the *only times of day recognized by them*, they do so in terms of the *natural divisions* of morning, noon and evening, times which, of course, varied in length depending upon the actual seasons of the year." (*Life and Language in the Old Testament*, 33, 36, 37.)

⁷ *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901 - 1906)

⁸ *Encyclopedia Biblica*, Vol. 1, A to D, (Edited by T. K. Cheyne, M.A., D.D. and J. Sutherland Black, M.A., LL. D., -- New York, The Macmillan Company, 1899, London: Adam and Charles Black.

⁹ *Life and Language in the Old Testament* (Mary Ellen Chase, W. W. Norton & company, New York, 1962. c. 1955 by Mary Ellen Chase.)