

“Evening” in the Scripture

The phrase “even” or “evening” in the Scripture has long been the source of debate. You would think that such a simple concept as evening, should not be so hard to understand or define.

The reason it has been the topic of such debate, is due to the pharisaic re-definition of it. The Pharisaic Rabbis have their own definition of “evening”, which is different from the Bible’s definition and use of it. This should be no big surprise, due to the fact that the Pharisees have pretty much always defined things according to their own tradition, in opposition to God’s. This was of course, one of the great areas of contention between them and Jesus.

Two evenings

What has added to the confusion, is that there are two different phrases that are translated as “even” or “evening” in the Bible. These two phrases actually are signifying two different times or portions of the evening, but are translated in the same way. The two phrases are *ba erev* and *ben ha arbaryim*.

These two phrases are usually both translated as “even” or “evening” in the Old Testament, but they mean different things. What adds to the confusion to those studying the Bible, is that they both come from the same root Hebrew word. So Strong’s treats them as having the same basic meaning. This is where the trouble starts.

ba erev

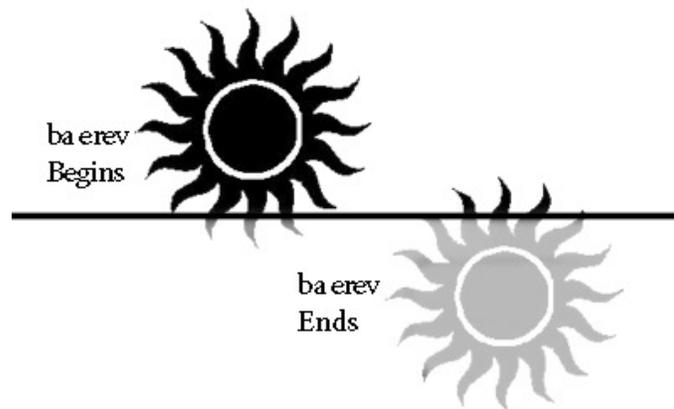
This aspect of evening signifies the time of sunset, the actual time of the sun going down below the horizon. It is the time when one day ends and the next day begins. The best example we have of this is found in Leviticus 23.

God gave instructions concerning the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur. This was to be observed on the tenth day of the seventh month. In verse 32, He says this,

It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.

All of God's people were to observe this day. They were to afflict their souls and do no kind of work. If they transgressed these prohibitions, the penalty was to be cut off from the people of God, i.e., killed. Now this is some very serious stuff.

God told them exactly when to begin the observance of this day, and when to end it. He told them that the beginning of this day was on the ninth day at even, or ba erev. This time of ba erev points to the time of sunset, i.e., from the time the sun touches the horizon to the time it sinks or disappears below it.



The Schocken Bible actually gives us the precise meaning of *ba erev* in this passage of Leviticus 23:32. “it is Sabbath, a Sabbath-ceasing for you, you are to afflict your selves; on the ninth (day) after the New-Moon, at sunset [ba erev], from sunset[ba erev] to sunset[ba erev], you are to make-a-ceasing of your ceasing!”

Understanding that according to the Bible/Hebraic usage, each day begins and ends at sunset. Hence when the Israelites are commanded to observe the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month, they are told specifically when it begins and when it ends. It begins at sunset on the ninth day, i.e., when the ninth day ends and when the tenth day begins. They are also told specifically when it ends, at sunset on the tenth day, i.e., when the tenth day ends and the eleventh day begins.

behn ha arbayim

This phrase, although translated in the KJV as “even”, is understood to mean *between the evenings*. This is where the confusion for many set in. This is where the pharisaic infusion of their own meaning, muddies the clean, clear water of the Living Word.

The Pharisees, according to their own tradition, taught that this between the evenings signified from the afternoon of the daytime portion of the 14th until sunset on the 14th. This automatically places the observance of the Passover on the night of the 15th, which is in direct opposition to the Biblical account of Exodus. It is the tradition to this very day to follow the pharisaic/rabbinic tradition of holding the Passover meal/seder on the night of the

15th. As already stated, this is in direct violation of the instructions of the Mighty One of Israel, found in Exodus 12.

I can do no better than to quote the significant and thorough research found in the book, *The Christian Passover* by Fred Coulter.

“Authorities in early Hebrew culture, Hebrew syntax and the etymology of Hebrew words, as well as other Semitic languages of ancient times, define *behn ha arbayim* as “time between day and night”(Waltke, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, p. 118). This description limits *behn ha arbayim* to the time of twilight, which ends with the coming of darkness.

The literal meaning of *behn ha arbayim* is “time between the two enterings.” Waltke describes these two “enterings” as entering of sunset and entering dark (Ibid. p. 200). This definition of the two “enterings” (*arbayim*) is confirmed by the command for the slaying the lambs (Ex. 12:6), which designates the arrival of the 14th as the beginning of *behn ha arbayim*. The whole congregation of Israel was commanded to slay the lambs at this time—immediately after sunset—not any time of their choosing during the next twenty-four hours.

There is no basis in the Hebrew text for the claim that *behn ha arbayim* extends through the entire day, from sunset to sunset. The ordinances of God required not only the killing of the lambs but the entire Passover observance to be completed before the night of Nisan 14 ended (Ex. 12:6, 8, 10, 12-13). And if, as some erroneously claim, *behn ha arbayim* did not end until the coming of dawn, this reasoning

would still not allow an extension of *behn ha arbayim* into the afternoon.”¹

¹ Coulter, Fred R. The Christian Passover, What does it mean? When should it be observed-the 14th or the 15th? 2nd ed. Holister, CA. York Publishing Co. 1993,1999. Appendix J, p. 415.