

Notes on the Jewish concepts of time....

Days

The Jerusalem Post....

The Jewish day begins after sunset and not at sunrise

In many parts of the world the day begins at sunrise. While it does make sense, this is not the case in traditional Judaism.

There are a few places in the Bible that refer to the day as the period of time between one evening and the next one.

To be exact, the start of the day begins after three stars come out.

It should be noted that in ancient times there were several cultures in the Near East in which the day began at night; one of them was the Babylonian. So this tradition is not solely Jewish.

See Image 1....

Hours

-According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was crucified on the “third hour” ([Mark 15:25](#)).

-The Gospel of John, however, says Pilate sentenced Jesus to crucifixion on “about the sixth hour” ([John 19:14](#)).

To answer this, we have to review some basics about how “time” was thought of in the first-century Mediterranean world.

First, we should bear in mind that in the Western world we are extremely time conscious, keep tracking of time down to the second.

Time notations from the time of Christ and before were very inexact, bearing little or no resemblance to the modern concept of punctuality.

Sundials were not in common use in the first century, and there was no unit of time used smaller than the “hour.”

Second, Jews thought of a *day*—from sunrise to sunset—as represented by “12 hours.”

As Jesus asks his disciples rhetorically, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” ([John 11:9](#)).

Third, Jews usually divided the day with three reference points.

In Jesus’s parable of the vineyard and the labourers [Matt. 20:1-9](#) he refers to

- About “the third hour [from sunrise],”
- About “the sixth hour [from sunrise],”
- About “the ninth hour [from sunrise]”
- About “the eleventh Hour” one hour before evening the end of the day.

These were general references for, respectively:

- mid-morning,
- mid-day, and
- mid-afternoon.

These are the only time markers listed in the crucifixion accounts ([Matt. 27:45](#); [Mark 15:25, 33](#); [Luke 23:44](#); [John 19:14](#)).

Fourth, we see something similar with how a first-century Roman or Jew would understand the night.

When discussing his impending return [Mark 13:35](#), Jesus commands his disciples to stay awake,

“for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning” .

Here we see “night” —from sunset to sunrise—divided into four watches:

- evening,
- midnight,
- rooster-crow, and
- morning.

See image 2....

When we come to passage like [Mark 15:25](#), it is probably best to understand the expression “**the third hour**” not as a precise reference to 9 a.m., but as an **approximate reference to midmorning**—from 7:30 until 10 or 10:30 am.

Likewise, the “**sixth hour**” could refer to any time from 10:30 am to 1 pm.

(Remember that the “hours” were rough approximations of the sun’s position in a quadrant of the sky.)

The Jewish Change of Day: The Twilight

