

CALENDAR AND CHRONOLOGY, JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN

Biblical, Intertestamental and Patristic Studies



Roger T. Beckwith

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To

Wayne Hankey
David Ousley
Jeffrey Steenson

Followers of the Truth
Who is also the Way and the Life

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Roger Beckwith.

INTRODUCTION

Calendars and chronologies are both concerned with time. Calendars relate time to recurring events, particularly in the realm of worship. Chronologies relate time to once-for-all events, in the realm of history. Calendars are concerned with days, weeks and months, and often do not extend beyond a year (though the ancient Jewish calendar extended further, to year-weeks and jubilees). Chronologies extend to long periods of years, and seldom concentrate on short periods except when the sequence of events is significant and open to doubt. Chronologies and calendars inevitably overlap, and sometimes the calendrical dates of historical events are important (as with the calendrical date of the Last Supper, discussed here in chapter 9). Occasionally, chronologies and calendars are deliberately combined (as by the Essenes, who structured their chronology on years, year-weeks and jubilees, in the way explained here in chapter 8). All in all, the two have sufficient in common to justify considering them together, as is done in this book, where chapters 1-6 are on calendrical questions, chapters 7 and 10 on chronological questions, and chapters 8 and 9 on both.

Since Christianity began as a school of thought within Judaism, and since both alike had their setting at that stage within a Hellenistic world, there is no need to apologise for including here both ancient Jewish and ancient Christian topics. They have much in common. Again, the fact that some of the topics are biblical (chapters 1-2, 9-10), some intertestamental (chapters 5-8), one patristic (chapter 3) and one a mixture of intertestamental and patristic (chapter 4), hardly needs defending, since these bodies of literature are all ancient and are interconnected. Indeed, the author hopes that he will have made the interconnection still more clear by the way he has been able to apply intertestamental data to the illumination of the Bible (as in chapters 2, 8 and 9) and to the illumination of patristic practice (as in chapters 3 and 4).

What may not be so self-evident is why this particular selection of topics has been made. Obviously, no attempt has been made to cover the whole field of ancient Jewish and Christian calendars and chronologies, and there are many other topics which could have been chosen. The reason for selecting these is their difficulty. Each chapter addresses a perplexing issue which is commonly left unsolved or (the author ventures to think) is solved in a facile or mistaken way; and though the solutions offered here can seldom claim to be more than probable, it is hoped that they will often be found more probable than rival solutions. If, in some cases, they turn out to

be only a farther step on the way to a final solution, the author will be well satisfied to have achieved this limited degree of progress.

Two of the four biblical chapters deal with questions which have often been discussed before, though this is less the case with chapter 1, on the Day, and chapter 10, on a Time, Times and Half a Time. Chapter 1 argues that there are two (and probably only two) reckonings of the beginning and ending of the day in the biblical and intertestamental literature, but that they are complementary, not mutually exclusive. Chapter 10 argues that the three and a half times, or half a year-week, which are used to measure prophetic time in Daniel 7 and 9, are interpreted by the Revelation of John as meaning the period of the church's witness and sufferings between Christ's two comings. The chapters on more familiar themes (chapter 2, on the Sabbath and Sunday, and chapter 9, on the Date of the Crucifixion) are conservative in their conclusions but more original in their method of argumentation, making much use of intertestamental and rabbinical evidence to illustrate the statements of the New Testament.

The two patristic chapters are again on well-worn topics: chapter 3, on Easter and Whitsun, and chapter 4, on Christmas. Chapter 3 attempts to resolve the vexed question whether Easter and Whitsun are of apostolic or post-apostolic origin, arguing that (despite superficial indications to the contrary) New Testament, Jewish and patristic evidence all point to the latter conclusion. Chapter 4 shows the antiquity of the belief that Christ was born in mid-winter, being well over a century older than the festivals of Christmas and Epiphany at that season, and suggests that this could be a historical tradition, the strenuous arguments to the contrary notwithstanding.

The remaining chapters, chapters 5-8 (with which the latter half of chapter 4 may be grouped), are on more novel themes than the others, derived in whole or part from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Chapter 5 offers the most comprehensive examination, yet attempted, of the Qumran calendar, interpreting it with careful attention to its real historical setting. Chapters 4 and 6 reconstruct the operation of the 24 courses of the priests and Levites, both according to the Temple cycle and according to that of Qumran, and the latter chapter applies this reconstruction to provide a possible explanation of the eccentric Psalms scrolls among the Qumran finds. (See also chapter 5). Chapter 7 offers a revised history of the development of Jewish religious thought between the Testaments, following the altered chronology which the Qumran discoveries seem to demand, and re-examining the probable relationship between the different schools of thought, as indicated by their real tenets and aims. It considers and rejects the currently popular view that the Qumran community were Sadducees, in favour of the conventional view that they were Essenes. Chapter 8 examines the rival chronologies of past and sometimes future time, developed in the different Jewish schools and

among early Christians, including that found in the Book of Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and notes their frequent use of Daniel 9 to determine the time of the coming of the Messiah, dating this event round about the beginning of the Christian era.

Calendars and chronologies both involve mathematics and astronomy, and it has not therefore been practicable to exclude such issues from the studies in this book, though technical language has as far as possible been avoided. The men of Qumran were ardent students of arithmetic, as chapters 4, 5, 6 and 8 show, and they were not entirely alone in this among their Jewish contemporaries. They also had strong, though mistaken, notions about astronomy, discussed in chapter 5; and the contemporary state of astronomical knowledge among the Jews is, in addition, very relevant to the question of the date of the crucifixion—the subject of chapter 9. Again, the advance of astronomical knowledge among Christians from the third century onwards is one of the topics covered in chapter 3.

All the essays in this book except the last one have in some form been published before, but several of them are now very considerably revised and all are updated. Chapter 1 first appeared in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, chapter 2 in the book *This is the Day* (with Wilfrid Stott, published by Marshall, Morgan and Scott), chapter 3 in *Studia Liturgica*, chapters 4-8 in the *Revue de Qumran*, and chapter 9 in the book *Chronos, Kairos, Christos* (ed. Vardaman and Yamauchi, published by Eisenbrauns). They reappear here with due acknowledgements and thanks to the original publishers.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DAY: ITS DIVISIONS AND ITS LIMITS IN BIBLICAL TIMES

I. THE DAY AND ITS DIVISIONS

In the Hebrew and Greek of the Old and New Testaments, as in the English of the twentieth century, the same term is used for the "day" in the sense of the complete circuit of the sun and in the sense of the period of light (as distinguished from the period of darkness) included within that circuit. The basic division of the "day", in the broader sense, is thus into the "day", in the narrower sense, and the "night". The "day", in the narrower sense, is itself divided by the Old Testament into three periods, "morning", "noonday" and "evening". That "noonday" can be a period and not just a point of time appears from the phrase in Isa. 16:3 "in the midst of the noonday", though the point within it at which midday or "noon" was reached would be roughly indicated by the position and shadow of the sun. The "night" is similarly divided by the Old Testament into three periods, or "watches", of which the second and third, the "middle watch" and the "morning watch", are named (Exod. 14:24; Judg. 7:19; 1 Sam. 11:11); and the expression "midnight" is also used, to indicate the middle point of the night and of the middle watch. No sub-division of the three periods of day or night into "hours" is traceable in the Old Testament, unless reference to the "ten degrees" on the dial of Ahaz (2 Kgs. 20:9-11; Isa. 38:8) implies it. Neh. 9:3, which divides the day into four, does not apparently reflect a normal practice.

The name of the first watch of the night is not given in Scripture, but it may be that, by way of correspondence with the "morning watch", it was called the "evening watch" (a sort of "second evening"). If so, this would explain the mysterious phrase "between the evenings" (Exod. 12:6; 16:12; 29:39, 41; 30:8; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:3, 5, 11; 28:4, 8) which has caused so much uncertainty both in ancient and in modern times. A consideration of the passages cited shows that the hour in question was for Old Testament Law nightfall, since it was the time at which the lamps in the Tabernacle were to be lit, and also the time at which the Passover lamb was to be slain, which we know from Deut. 16:6 was sunset. It was likewise the hour at which the evening sacrifice and the incense were to be offered, and as such was a suitable time for prayer (1 Kgs. 18:36, Ezra 9:5ff; Ps. 141:2; Dan. 9:20f; Judith 9:1; Luke 1:10). Since it was a time between day and night, it

could with equal propriety be reckoned as the end of one or as the beginning of the other.¹ In Targum Neofiti on Gen. 49:27, alluding to Exod. 29:39, 41 and Num. 28:4, 8, the phrase is rightly interpreted as meaning "between the day and the night".

In intertestamental times, we find the division of the day and night each into three periods being maintained by the Book of Jubilees and by the related literature of the Dead Sea community (see Jub. 49:10-12; *Schemaryahu* 'Amon, "The Manual of Benedictions of the Sect of the Judaean Desert", in *Revue de Qumran*, vol II, no 8, Nov. 1960). The threefold division is also reflected in the Book of Judith (12:5). It is not, however, mentioned in the New Testament, where we read only of midday and midnight, not of noonday and the middle watch, and find the Roman division of the night into four watches substituted for the Jewish division into three (Matt. 14:25; Mark 6:48; 13:35f.; Acts 12:4).² Since this fourfold division is found not only in narrative but in a discourse of Christ's, as also in Josephus (*Antiquities* 18 9:6, or 18:356), it is likely that it was in common use among the Jews in New Testament times. Another innovation, probably of Greek or Egyptian origin, which is found in the intertestamental literature, the New Testament, Philo and Josephus, is the subdivision of the day and night into hours.³ In the New Testament, periods of three hours, two hours, one hour and half an hour are mentioned, and on a score of occasions the time at which an event took place is given by the number of the hour, some fifteen of which occurrences refer to different events on different occasions. Since the occurrences are as numerous as this, it is of interest to note that in no instance is the hour given a higher number than eleven, or is any statement made whether the hour specified is before or after noon. These facts must be taken in conjunction with the statement of John 11:9f. that there are twelve hours in the day (here distinguished from the night), with the clear inference in Matt. 20 3-12 and Acts 2:15 that the hours are numbered

By the time of Jesus, the slaying of the Passover had probably been moved to a time earlier in the afternoon, for Philo says that it took place between midday and evening (*De Speculationibus Legibus* 2:145f. or, more precisely, between the ninth hour and nightfall) (*Questions of Solonides in Exodus* 1:11), and Josephus, still more precisely, that it took place between the ninth hour and the eleventh (*War* 6:9:3, or 6:423), i.e. between about 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. Similarly the offering of the evening sacrifice had, according to the Mishnah, been advanced to a time between half past the eighth hour and half past the ninth hour (*Pesahim* 5:1), or, as Josephus has it, a time round about the ninth hour (*Antiquities* 14:4:3, or 14:65); and the New Testament tells us that in apostolic times the Jewish hour of evening prayer was the ninth hour (Acts 13:1, 16:16).

² The older division of the night into three watches seems, however, to be reflected in Luke 12:38, and the Western text of that verse interestingly calls the first of the three "the evening watch".

³ For the intertestamental literature, see Letter of Aristeus 303; Testament of Joseph 8.1, 2; *Macc.* 5:14. For Philo and Josephus, see the passages cited in note 1, together with Josephus, *War* 6:1:7, or 6:68:79; *Antiquities* 6:14:6, or 6:364; *Life* 54, or 279f.

from daybreak to nightfall, and with the absence of contemporary extra-biblical evidence (Jewish or non-Jewish) which does anything other than confirm this mode of numbering the hours. Altogether, the evidence makes it highly precarious to attempt to reconcile John 19:14 with Mark 15:25 by postulating that in the Fourth Gospel the hours are numbered from midnight, either on a twenty-four hour clock, or on a twelve hour clock which begins again from noon. What makes this still more precarious is the evidence, at which we shall later look, that the Fourth Gospel begins its day not from midnight but from nightfall and daybreak—times which are perfectly normal for the books both of the Old and of the New Testament.

Of the method by which time was actually determined in the biblical period, we know a little. The division of time into hours was a late refinement, which can only have become general when the use of some sort of sundial or hourglass became general. Before this, the day was divided simply into three broad periods, and the night likewise, and these were doubtless determined simply by observing the heavenly bodies. Morning began with the beginning of the day, evening ended with the ending of the day, and noonday began and ended as the sun approached and declined from its zenith, being also marked as the period of intense heat. Since the moon and the stars "ruled" the night, just as the sun "ruled" the day (Gen. 1:16; Ps. 136:7-9), it seems more than likely that time was measured at night by the moon and stars. The fixed points most readily ascertained would be daybreak, nightfall and midday.⁴

2. THE DAY AND ITS LIMITS

The problem when the "day", in the broader sense, began and ended, can only be answered by careful attention to the language of Scripture. Theoretically, it could have begun and ended at any ascertainable juncture—at daybreak, midday or nightfall, or even at the beginning or end of noontide, at the beginning or end of the middle watch, or at midnight. The actual evidence, however, converges on two of these times, daybreak and nightfall.

The evidence is of four kinds. In the first place, there are statements that the day, in the broad sense, begins or ends at a particular juncture—either at daybreak or at nightfall. In the second place, there is language reflecting the order in which "morning" and "evening" occur within the limits of the day. In the third place, there is language reflecting the order in which "day" and "night" occur within the same limits. In the fourth place, there are expressions like "today", "tomorrow", "yesterday", "the same day", "the

⁴ On the question discussed in this paragraph, see E. W. Maunder, *The Astronomy of the Bible* (ed. 3, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), pp. 269-282.

next day", from which it can sometimes be seen whether the night belongs with the period of daylight preceding or with the period of daylight following.

(A) EVIDENCE OF THE DAY BEGINNING AND ENDING AT NIGHTFALL

In Exod. 12:18 we are told that the seven days of the festival of *Unleavened Bread* run from the evening of Nisan 14 to the evening of Nisan 21, thus beginning and ending in the evening. It follows that the one-day festival of the *Passover*, which falls on Nisan 14 (v.6), and thus immediately precedes the festival of *Unleavened Bread*, also ends in the evening. It does not end early in the evening, since it lasts until the time "between the evenings" when the *Passover* is slain (*ibid*), and this expression, as we have seen, means sunset. On the other hand, it does not last after sunset, since after sunset comes night, the time for eating the *Passover* with unleavened bread (Exod. 12:8; Num. 9:11f; Deut. 16:3-7), which consequently falls within the festival of *Unleavened Bread*. From one point of view it seems strange that the sacrifice should be on Nisan 14 and the feast upon the sacrifice on Nisan 15, but the fact that the feast includes unleavened bread provides the explanation. The night which began Nisan 15 was in addition the time of the Exodus (Exod. 12:29-42), and this is specifically stated to have occurred "on the fifteenth day of the first month", on the "selfsame day" as (the first day of) the festival of *Unleavened Bread*, but on the "morrow after the *Passover*" (Exod. 12:17; Num. 33:3). See also Jubilees 49:1.⁵

Like the festival of *Unleavened Bread*, the *Day of Atonement* also runs from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32). Doubtless it begins and ends at the same hour as the festival of *Unleavened Bread*, i.e. at sunset.

Evidence that the *Sabbath* begins and ends at this hour does not begin so early, but it later becomes very abundant. The Old Testament seems to give a hint of it in Neh. 13:19, and the New Testament gives clear indications of it in the references to the time of Jesus's burial in Luke 23:54 and John 19:31, 42. Intertestamental evidence is supplied by 2 Macc. 8:25f. and the *Damasene Document*, CD, III: 14ff., and Jewish evidence from the first two centuries A.D. is to be found in Josephus (*War* 4:9:12, or 4:582; *Antiquities* 16:6:2, or 16:163, *Life* 32, or 159-161) and in the tractate *Shabbath* of the Mishnah.

It can also be inferred that the *New Moon* begins and ends at sunset. This would be natural because the sickle of the crescent moon, when it makes its

⁵ In the New Testament Nisan 14 and not Nisan 15 is reckoned the first day of unleavened bread (Matt. 26:17, Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7), but this doubtless reflects the later custom, recorded in the Mishnah, of preparing beforehand for the feast of *Unleavened Bread* by removing all leaven from the house on the fourteenth (Pesachim 1.1-5; 3.6. 5-4). On the evidence of Jubilees, see also I. M. Baumgarten, *Studies in Qumran Law* (Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 24, Leiden: Brill, 1977), pp. 124-130.

first appearance, always does so in the evening, shortly after sunset. The inference is confirmed by the Mishnah (Rosh ha-Shanah 3:1).

It has sometimes been held that only on special occasions like the festival of Unleavened Bread or the Day of Atonement does the celebration run from evening to evening. We come on now, however, to evidence which does not concern special occasions, but which nevertheless reflects the same conception of the beginning and end of the day.

Two of these pieces of evidence concern the order in which morning and evening are mentioned. They are passages where "*evening*" is mentioned before "*morning*". Normally the Bible mentions morning before evening, this being the order in which they come in the waking and working day, and nothing therefore can be deduced from this order as to whether the "day" (in the broader sense) begins from daybreak or from nightfall. When, for example, in the law of the continual burnt offering the morning sacrifice is mentioned before the evening sacrifice (Exod. 29:39-41), this is simply to be expected. Likewise, in the Mishnah, when the three hours of daily prayer are given in the order morning, noonday, evening (Berakoth 4:1), this is entirely natural. What is surprising is that Dan. 8:14, 26 tells us that the period for which the continual burnt offering is to be interrupted will extend to 2,300 "evening-mornings"; and that the psalmist in Ps. 55:16f. says that he will offer his daily prayers "evening and morning and at noonday". The order here is not natural, and seems to imply something about the hour at which the day begins, i.e. at the hour of the evening sacrifice and evening prayer, in other words at sunset. Of course, the order in which evening and morning (or, for that matter, night and day) are mentioned will not inevitably have this significance, as the context may supply a clear reason why one may have been mentioned first, e.g. because for present purposes it is more significant (cp. 3 Macc. 5:11), because it was already under discussion (cp. Job 24:13f.), because a period between two limits is being marked out (cp. Num. 9:21), because the first of certain events in question occurred at the one time rather than at the other (cp. Exod. 16:6-8, 12-15), or because both really belong to a sequence which began earlier (cp. Gen. 1:3-5). But where none of these conditions is present, it is a fair inference that the order "evening, morning", "night, day", implies something about the hour at which the "day", in the broader sense, begins: and the same is true of "day, night", which is arguably not, like "morning, evening", a more natural order than the reverse, for night is not only the time of rest after the toil of the day that is past, but also the time of refreshment for the toil of the day ahead.

Passages in which "*night*" is mentioned before "*day*", though there is no clear reason present why either order should be preferred, are much less common in the Old Testament and intertestamental literature than passages in which "day" is mentioned before "night". The former kind does, however,

occur: see Deut. 1:33; 28:66; 1 Sam. 25:16; 1 Kgs. 8:29; Esth. 4:16; Ps. 91:5f.; Isa. 27:3; 34:10; Jer. 14:17; Song of the Three Holy Children 47. In the New Testament, on the other hand, passages of this kind are both more numerous and more widely distributed than passages of the other: see Mark 4:27; 5:5; Luke 2:37; Acts 20:31; 26:7; 2 Cor. 11:25; 1 Thess. 2:9; 3:10; 2 Thess. 3:8; 1 Tim. 5:5; 2 Tim. 1:3. There is also a passage of the kind in Josephus (*Antiquities* 16:8:5, or 16:260). Such passages are suggestive of a reckoning whereby the day begins and ends at nightfall.

The same reckoning is probably implied in the many passages of the Mosaic Law where a single day's ceremonial uncleanness ends at evening (Lev. 11 *passim*; 14:46; 15 *passim*; 17:15; 22:6; Num. 19 *passim*), i.e. at sunset (Deut. 23:11). The purpose of setting this end to the period of uncleanness can hardly be a reluctance to exclude anyone from the camp overnight, since in some cases uncleanness is extended to seven days or even longer, and it is noteworthy that in such cases also uncleanness ends at evening (Num. 19:19), which is therefore the end of the day.

One final passage may be mentioned, which like two of those cited in connection with the festival of Unleavened Bread uses the language of "the same day", "the next day" etc. This is 1 Sam. 11:9-11, where the morning watch (i.e. the third part of the night) and the morning, up to the time the sun is hot, are both included in the "morning", which therefore begins not at daybreak but at the previous nightfall.

(B) EVIDENCE OF THE DAY BEGINNING AND ENDING AT DAYBREAK

The evidence of a second and different reckoning is not so full and distinct as that which we have been considering hitherto, but it cannot be ignored. With the exception of one passage, it consists wholly of statements in which the "day" precedes the "night", or in which "the same day", "the next day" and similar phrases are used in such a way as to include the night with the period of daylight preceding, not with that following.

Passages in which "day" is mentioned before "night", though there is no clear reason present why either order should be preferred, are numerous in the Old Testament and the intertestamental literature: see Gen. 1:14, 16, 18; 8:22; 31:40; Num. 14:14; 2 Sam. 21:10; 1 Kgs. 8:59; 1 Chron. 9:33; Neh. 1:6; 4:9; 9:12, 19; Pss. 22:2; 42:3, 8; 55:10; 74:16; 78:14; 88:1; 136:7-9; Isa. 28:19; 38:12f.; 60:11, 62:6; Jer. 9:1; 16:13; 31:35; 33:20, 25; 36:30; Lam. 2:18; Tobit 10:7; Judith 11:17; Wisdom 10:17; Baruch 2:25; 2 Macc. 13:10. For the Qumran literature, see Community Rule, 1Q S, 10-1f. In the New Testament, however, such references are confined to the book of Revelation and the writings of St. Luke: Luke 18:7; Acts 9:24; Rev. 4:8; 7:15; 8:12; 12:10; 14:11; 20:10.

Passages in which significant use is made of expressions like "the same day", "the next day" are Gen. 19:34; Lev. 7:15; 22:30; Judg. 19:9; 1 Sam. 19:11; 28:8, 19; Judith 6:71-7:1; John 6:22; Acts 4:3; 20:7-11; 23:32. In each of these places, it will be observed, the night is reckoned with the previous day, and in some of them it is the complete night that is so reckoned, not simply the period up to midnight. This applies to 1 Sam. 19:11, where "tonight" refers to the whole of the night, at any point in which David can make his escape, whereas "tomorrow" is equated with "in the morning"; to Judith 6:21-7:1, where it is explicitly stated that the Jews prayed for deliverance "all that night" before their enemies advanced "the next day"; to Acts 4:3, where the imprisonment of Peter and John "unto the morrow" clearly means imprisonment for the night; to Acts 23:32, where the march to Antipatris before "the morrow" (a march of about thirty miles, begun at the third hour of the night) must have taken almost until daybreak; and perhaps to John 6:22, where, since evening and before "the morrow", the disciples had rowed three or four miles against a contrary wind, which very likely implies that Jesus did not come to them till a time like that given by St. Mark, i.e. the fourth watch of the night (Mark 6:48). It has sometimes been supposed that the Acts of the Apostles reflects the Roman legal reckoning, whereby the day began and ended at midnight (though it does not appear that the Romans numbered the hours from midnight); but in view of Acts 4:3 and Acts 23:32 it seems fairly certain that what is actually reflected is a Jewish reckoning, whereby the day began and ended at daybreak.

There is a passage of the same kind in the writings of Josephus, and one of particular interest because it concerns *the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread*. It is hardly conceivable that Josephus was ignorant of the fact that, according to the Pentateuch, the dividing line between the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread, and between the seven days of the latter, falls in the evening. Josephus is very clear that the Sabbath begins and ends in the evening, and, if the tractate Pesahim in the Mishnah is anything to judge by, Pharisaic tradition (which Josephus, as a self-confessed Pharisee, would have accepted) was equally clear that the same is true of the Passover. Yet when Josephus comes to record the law that the flesh of the Passover lamb is to be wholly consumed during the night, and none of it left till the morning (Exod. 12:8-10; 34:25; Deut. 16:4), the way he puts it is that none is left "till the next day" (*Antiquities* 3:10:5, or 3:248). This shows that Josephus is equally happy with a second way of reckoning the days of these festivals, according to which they begin and end at daybreak.⁶

⁶ Since the tradition of the Mishnah requires the Passover meal to be finished by midnight (Pesahim 10.9; Zebachim 3.8), it is just conceivable that Josephus is thinking of midnight as the hour at which the new day begins; but this is very unlikely since the Mishnah itself explains that the rule is only a precautionary measure, and that "the same day" in such cases ends at

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