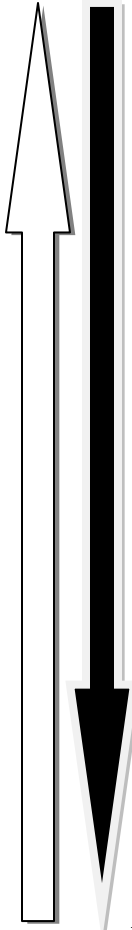


TWENTY FOUR HOURS IN A DAY

By G. E. Gorfu


Many have written on the differences between the Ethiopian and Gregorian and/or Julian system of calendars in counting dates and years and have commented at length as to which one is right or correct/incorrect. I recently read an Amharic article on this very topic and even though I have no intention to add one more voice to that chorus, there is another Ethiopian scale of measuring time which is different from all others, but has received far less attention, and which I would like to address here. And that is the way of counting the twenty four hours that there are in a day.



In our Ethiopian system of counting the hours in a day we start in the morning with sunrise as 1am and count 12 hours of daylight. After sunset, we say 1pm and start counting night time. Thus we have 12 hours of night and twelve hours of day time. I have tried to illustrate this with the two long arrows 12 hours each, shown on the left here.

In much of the western world however, time is measured starting at midnight and up to 12 hours noon at which time one would start at 1PM (Post Meridian) and concludes at 12pm midnight. Each 12 hour period will then have six hours of night time and six hours of daylight time, as I have tried to show with the four shorter arrows on the right.

The origins and history of measuring time is lost in antiquity, and we may never find out when or who started to measure the time of day. And since both methods of measurement, the Ethiopian and the western, give us a 24 hour day, it is not my intention here to say which one is right and which one is wrong. I personally think it is rather awkward to wake up at midnight and start counting. Don't you think so? I think the Ethiopian way is more elegant, and I prefer our way of counting time! That is all.



But I would also like to point out the method of counting hours of day as recorded in the Gospels in the story of the Crucifixion of Jesus, and show that it is the same as we have it in Ethiopia, and not as they count in the western world. Here is how it is recorded: - ***“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”— which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** Mathew 27: 45 - 46

Clearly, Jesus was crucified in the late morning hours and not at night, and was on the cross at midday, ***“the sixth hour”*** when it is recorded that darkness came over all the land. If they were counting time according to the western method, the Crucifixion would be taking at night, and there would be no point to state ***“...darkness came over all the land.”*** as the sixth hour would be midnight. Furthermore, the ninth hour in the Ethiopian way of counting time would be 3PM in the afternoon by the western mode of counting time. Isn't that interesting?

It is good to know that Ethiopia has kept this ancient way of counting time and we Ethiopians can directly relate to a lot of what is written in the Bible far more than many people in the world can. Time counting is one more thing we should treasure and hold, and not copy from the west.