

Chapter II

The Tishri 1 New Year Question

The next issue we must contend with is the belief that the Jews officially began their Sabbath and Jubilee years with Tishri 1 (about Sept./Oct.) beginning at least from the time that they returned to Judaea from Babylon in 538 B.C.E. This view is held despite the fact that there is no evidence for this official reckoning until sometime after the end of the Bar Kochba revolt (135 C.E.). Even then, the Tishri-year system is calculated as beginning with the “7th month” belonging to the 6th year of the Sabbath-year cycle reckoned by the Nisan-year system. This interpretation is held as gospel not only by those advocating System “B” but even by historians like Ralph Marcus and Ben Zion Wacholder (System “C”).¹ Nevertheless, this view, as we shall prove, is false. Rather, what we shall find is that the supposition that the Sabbath year officially began with the 1st day of Tishri arose as a rabbinic and Talmudic interpretation. It did not begin to gain popularity among Jewish chronographers until the mid-2nd century C.E. As a preliminary to dispelling this error, the following facts must be considered.

The 7th Month and the Jubilee

To begin with, a close examination of all the scriptural verses relevant to the Sabbath years (both regular and Jubilee) proves that there is no commandment to begin any of these years with the 7th month of the preceding year.² The only time that the 7th month, later identified as Tishri, is mentioned in association with a Sabbath year is in Leviticus, 25:8–13. Yet even here it has only to do with sounding the *shophar* (ram’s horn) on the 10th day of the 7th month of the year of Jubilee. This sounding proclaimed “liberty” to all the inhabitants throughout the land and was a formal announcement that all Israelite lands were now to be returned to their original Israelite owners. Furthermore, even in this passage it is specifically called “the 7th month,” not the 1st or the beginning of any year system. In fact, Scriptures specifically define the festivals of the 7th month as occurring at “the going out of the year,” i.e., the last half of the year.³ Meanwhile, events which occurred during the springtime are said to have taken place “at the return of the year,” i.e., the beginning half of the year.⁴

¹ HUCA, 44, pp. 153–196; Marcus, *Jos.*, vii, pp. 196f, n. a, pp. 694f, n. a, viii, p. 5, n. e. Also see Chart A.

² E.g., Exod., 23:10–11; Lev., 25:1–28, 27:16–24; Num., 36:4; Ezek., 46:16–18.

³ Exod., 23:16, “going out of the year.” NBD, p. 178, equates the “going out of the year” with the autumnal equinox. Also see THP, p. 116, n. 5.

⁴ 1 Kings, 20:26; 2 Chron., 36:10, “the return of the year”; NBD, p. 178, equates the “return of the year” with the spring or vernal equinox. Also see THP, p. 116, n. 5.

The rabbis and Talmudists misinterpreted Leviticus, 25:8–13, to mean that the observances of the Jubilee rituals designated for the 7th month belonged to the 49th year in the cycle (Nisan reckoning). Nevertheless, a careful reading proves that the 7th month spoken of actually belongs to the 50th year, not the 49th.

And you shall count 7 Sabbaths of years, 7 years 7 times, and to you shall be the days of the 7 Sabbaths of years, 49 years.

Then you shall let sound a ram's horn, a signal in the 7th moon, on the 10th of the moon. On the Day of Atonement the ram's horn shall sound in all your land. AND YOU SHALL MAKE SACRED **נָשָׁר** (AYTH; THIS PARTICULAR)⁵ YEAR, THE 50TH YEAR, AND YOU SHALL PROCLAIM LIBERTY IN THE LAND TO ALL ITS DWELLERS. It shall be a Jubilee for you.

And you shall return a male to his possession; and you shall return him each one to his family. A Jubilee it is, THE 50TH YEAR. A year it is for you, you shall not sow and you shall not harvest that which grows of itself and not gather the unkept vine, for it shall be a Jubilee. It shall be sacred to you.

This passage clearly states that 49 years had already been counted before one was to consider the 7th month, thereby placing the 7th month of this passage in the 50th year. In the 50th year, on the 10th day of the 7th month, being the Day of Atonement, a ram's horn or trumpet was to be sounded. This instruction is then followed by the phrase, “and you shall make sacred this particular year, the 50th year, and you shall proclaim liberty in the land to all its dwellers.” This statement explains why the horns were being blown. They were sounded because on the 10th day of the 7th month (the Day of Atonement) within the Jubilee year the nation was proclaiming “liberty” and the property rights of those Israelites who had sold their land were returned to the original Israelite owners. It was on this day during the Jubilee year that one would receive back possession of his indebted land and was set free from servitude.

This passage in no way implies that the trumpets were to be sounded because it announced a future coming of the Jubilee year, which would still be several months off if blown during the 49th year of the Jubilee cycle. Neither were they blown because it announced the beginning of the Sabbath year nor because it began the restrictions against sowing or harvesting. That definition follows later, when the above quoted passage states:

A Jubilee it is, THE 50TH YEAR. A year it is for you, you shall not sow and you shall not harvest that

⁵ The Hebrew direct object **נָשָׁר** is often left untranslated in English but is best understood in the sense of “this particular one” (HCLOT, pp. 92f; SEC, Heb. #853).

which grows of itself and not gather the unkept vine,
for it shall be a Jubilee. It shall be sacred to you.

The prophetic character attached to the year of Jubilee and the 7th month of that year further compels us to place the trumpet blowing of the 7th month within the 50th year.⁶ In that year, liberty is proclaimed. This liberty is symbolized by such things as the redemption of slaves and the land being freed from debt and returning to its original owner.⁷ The rightful time for “liberty” to be proclaimed, therefore, is within the 7th month of the Jubilee year.

Furthermore, the very fact that the 7th month is never mentioned with a qualifying statement, such as, “being the 1st month of the Sabbath year” or “Jubilee year,” demonstrates that the 7th month mentioned belongs to a year already in progress—the 50th year. The fact that the above passage jumped from the end of the 49th year to the 10th day of the 7th month or 50th year, the day of the blowing of the horns to announce “liberty” to the Israelites on their land, is consistent with this detail. For example, when the first month of the Israelite year was established as Abib, despite the fact that this month occurred in the midst of the Egyptian year, it was explained by saying that it happened because during this month—i.e., on the 14th day therein when the Israelites kept the Passover—the Israelites “came out of Egypt.”⁸ In this case the switch in year systems is clearly marked.

Next, the Hebrew term יובל (Yubil; Jubilee) literally means, “the *blast* of a horn (from its *continuous* sound).”⁹ The year of Jubilee, therefore, is named from the fact that during the Jubilee year a trumpet is blown. It would make no sense if the trumpet was blown in the middle of the 49th year, as the later Jews believed, for in that case the 49th year would be the year of Jubilee (trumpet blowing). Josephus, accordingly, pronounced that “the 50th year is called by the Hebrews *Iobel*; ἐν ὧ (en o; in which) debtors are absolved from their debts and slaves are set at liberty.”¹⁰ Philo adds clarification by noting that Yahweh “consecrated the whole of the 50th year.”¹¹ Nothing is said about consecrating the last six months of the 49th year as the beginning of the Jubilee.

The awkwardness created by the explanation that the Jubilee year began with the 7th month of the 49th year in the cycle is further manifested by the

⁶ Cf. Heb., 9:27; Rev., 20:11–15. The 1st day of the 7th month is the Day of Trumpets, warning us about what is to come. Then the 10th day, the Day of Atonement, signifies the death of mankind in order to make atonement for their sins. The 7-day Festival of Tabernacles, from the 15th to 21st days, speaks of the resurrection into the millennial Judgment Day and our tabernaciling with the messiah during that period. On the 22nd day comes the Festival of Ingathering, the universal gathering unto father Yahweh. Upon this day comes the final quickening and perfection of the saved of mankind and their attainment of true liberty from sin and death. At that time, the great eternal inheritance of land will be shared with all those who attain eternal salvation.

⁷ Lev., 25:11–17.

⁸ E.g., Exod., 12:1f, 39, 13:4, 23:15, 34:18; Deut., 16:1, 6.

⁹ SEC, Heb. #3104; HEL, p. 102; HELOT, p. 392; DB, p. 324.

¹⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:12:3. Thackeray, *Jos.*, iv, p. 455, renders the phrase “at that season”; Whiston, *Jos.*, p. 81, gives “wherein.” The text clearly states that it was only within the 50th year that the liberty was given.

¹¹ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:22.

fact that many of the Talmudic Jews actually started this year not with the 1st day of the 7th month but with the 10th day—the day that the trumpets of Jubilee were actually sounded. The Babylonian Rosh ha-Shanah, for example, argues: “(Is the New Year for) Jubilees on the 1st of Tishri? Surely (the New year for) Jubilees is on the 10th of Tishri, as it is written, On the day of Atonement shall you make proclamation with the horn.”¹² It is clear that the original scheme of the Jubilee and Sabbath cycles came to be obscured by inventive over-interpretations of later ill-informed theologians.

The Tishri Year

The rabbinic and Talmudic doctrine that the month of Tishri in the 6th year of a Sabbath cycle should officially begin the Sabbath year is not proclaimed in any writings before the mid-2nd century C.E. Important works from the 1st century C.E. and prior, which delve heavily into this subject, never even imply such an arrangement. They always held that the month of Abib (Nisan) was the 1st month for everything determining religious practices.¹³

Josephus (c.90 C.E.) states that before the Exodus, while the Israelites were still living in Egypt, they followed the Egyptian calendar and observed the month named Marheshuan in Hebrew, called Dios (Oct./Nov.) in Greek,¹⁴ as the 2nd month (thereby making the 1st month of the Egyptian year equivalent to the 7th Hebrew month called Tishri). Yet with Moses, Marheshuan became the 8th month. “Moses,” he points out, “appointed Nisan, that is to say Xanthicus (March/April), as the 1st month for the festivals, because it was in this month that he brought the Hebrews out of Egypt; he also reckoned this month as the commencement of the year FOR EVERYTHING RELATING TO DIVINE WORSHIP, but for selling and buying and other ordinary affairs he preserved the ancient order.”¹⁵

Notice that the month of Tishri, the 7th month, was the beginning of a year system anciently practiced among the pagans of Egypt at the time that the Israelites were dwelling in that land. We also know that the month of Hyperberetaeus (= Tishri) was used by the pagan Macedonians as the 1st month of their year. Under Moses, Yahweh changed the Israelite year system back to the divine order, which began with the month of Abib (Nisan), a change which took place just before the Israelites made their famous exodus out of Egypt in 1439 B.C.E., Abib 1 reckoning.¹⁶

According to Josephus, Moses permitted the Israelites to continue using the ancient calendar system of the Egyptians for the ordinary things of life. It is also important to remember that several of the ancient nations of Shem, the

¹² B. R.Sh., 8a.

¹³ E.g., Jub., 49:1–10, 50:1–4; Philo, *Spec.*, 1:35 §§180–189, 2:17–23 §§71–119; Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:1–6, 3:8:4; a 1st century Jewish omen text (JNES, 48.3, pp. 201–214) and the Meg. Taan. (see JQR, 10.2/3, pp. 237–243).

¹⁴ For the equivalency between the Greek, Hebrew, and Roman months, see Chart B.

¹⁵ Jos., *Antiq.*, 1:3:3.

¹⁶ Exod., 12:1–20, 13:4–10. For the date of the Exodus, see our forthcoming book entitled *Israelite Chronology*.

son of Noah, from whom the Israelites descended, continued from a very early date to utilize the older divine calendar. Thus, nations like the Assyrians, Babylonians, Chaldaeans, and Persians all employed the year system that began in the spring (Nisan). Meanwhile, during the days of Josephus, the pagan nations surrounding the Jews, such as Macedonians and others practiced a year system that began in the autumn (Tishri). For that reason, those Jews who remained in Judaea continued their familiarity with a Tishri year in order to trade with their neighbors.

Josephus, writing in about 90 C.E., points out that even in his day, being some 20 years after the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, "the ancient order" followed by the pagans, which began with the month the Hebrews called Tishri, was only "for selling and buying and other ORDINARY AFFAIRS." Since the Sabbath year is part of divine worship, and in no way can be construed as part of the category of "ordinary affairs," Josephus understood that the sacred calendar required a beginning with the month of Nisan (Abib), roughly our April. His comment also reveals the seed that gave rise to the later view of the Talmudic Jews, a transition from the pagan system used for "ordinary affairs" to things of "divine worship" being but a short step.

Philo (c.40 C.E.) indicates the same thing as Josephus. He writes that the first month of the year began with the "springtime and its equinox,"¹⁷ and that Moses "proclaimed a rest for the land and made the husbandman stay his work AFTER 6 YEARS."¹⁸ He does not say "from the latter part of the 6th year" but "after" the completion of 6 years.

From the First Revolt (66–70 C.E.) against Rome, continuing through the Bar Kochba revolt (133–135 C.E.), as Baruch Kanael points out, the records show that the Jewish year was still reckoned from Nisan in the spring and not from Tishri.¹⁹ As we shall later see, the Sabbath year was still determined in this period by this same Nisan method.²⁰

Only a number of years after the Bar Kochba revolt do we find our first indication of a Tishri (Sept./Oct.) reckoning for the Sabbath year. This passage is found in the *Seder Olam* (c.160 C.E.). While discussing the destruction of the Second Temple, which took place in the month of Ab (July/Aug.), this text defines the month of Ab as belonging to the "going out of the year," i.e., the last half of the Tishri year.²¹ The first official mentioning of a Sabbath year that would begin with the 7th month (Tishri) of the previous calendar year that began with Nisan 1 comes from a passage in the *Mishnah* (composed about 200 C.E.):

¹⁷ Philo, *Spec.*, 1:35 §181.

¹⁸ Philo, *Spec.*, 1:35 §§180ff, 2:21, §104, "δι' ἐξαετίας (*di eksaetias*)," indicating the completion of six years. Colson, *Philo*, vii, p. 369, renders the verse, "stay his work after six years"; Yonge, *Philo*, p. 578, translates it to mean that there would be a restraining of farming "after each six years' incessant industry."

¹⁹ IEJ, 21.1, pp. 40f and n. 11.

²⁰ See Chaps. XXIX–XXXII.

²¹ S.O., 30. Also see the discussion below in Chap. XXVIII.

There are four 'New Year' days: on the 1st of Nisan is the New Year for kings and festivals; on the 1st of Elul is the New Year for the Tithe of cattle. Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Simeon say: the 1st of Tishri; on the 1st of Tishri is the New Year for [the reckoning of] the years [of foreigners],²² the Years of Release and Jubilee years, for the planting [of trees] and for vegetables; and the 1st of Shebat is the New Year for [fruit-]trees (so the School of Shammai; and the School of Hillel say: on the 15th thereof).²³

This claim of four New Year days in one year is not substantiated in Scriptures, which proclaims only one New Year's day, the 1st of Abib (Nisan).²⁴ It is also important to notice that even in the Mishnah the 1st of Nisan was the New Year for "(Israelite) kings and festivals." Tishri was used for "the years (of foreigners)." ²⁵ There can be little doubt that the foreign era referred to is the Macedonian-Seleucid reckoning, which began its year with Hyperberetaeus (Sept./Oct.), equivalent to the Hebrew month of Tishri. Yet this was an era used by foreign peoples, not by the early Israelites (i.e., from the time of Moses) or by the scriptural calendar system.

An important Talmudic work called the *Abodah Zarah* (c.500 C.E.) confirms that the beginning month for the Jewish year had indeed been changed in the years after the Jews had been governed by their own kings, i.e., after 100 C.E.²⁶ While commenting upon the issues presented by the above passage from the Mishnah, it states:

The one refers to Jewish kings, the other to kings of other nations—the year of other nations' kings being counted from Tishri, and of Jewish kings from Nisan. Now, IN THE PRESENT TIME we count the years from Tishri; were we then to say that our Era is connected with the Exodus it is surely from Nisan that we ought to count. Does this not prove that our reckoning is based on the reign of the Greek kings (and not the Exodus)? That indeed proves it.²⁷

The Transition to the Tishri Year

The New Year date of Tishri 1 for the Sabbath year is an offshoot of late Talmudic interpretation. As previously noted, the Scriptures never claim that

²² Cf. *Gitt.*, 8:5.

²³ *R.Sh.*, 1:1.

²⁴ *Exod.*, 12:1-19, 13:4, 23:15, 34:18; *Deut.*, 15:1.

²⁵ Danby, *Mishnah*, p. 188, n. 7; cf. *Gitt.*, 8:5.

²⁶ The "last king of the Jews" was Agrippa II. According to Photius, *Biblio.*, 33, King Agrippa II died childless in the 3rd year of Trajan (100 C.E.).

²⁷ B. A. Zar., 10a.

the 7th month began a Sabbath year. The deduction that Tishri began a Jubilee year was itself a misreading of Leviticus, 25:8–13. The rabbis of the post-Bar Kochba period, in an effort to “build a fence around the Law,”²⁸ merely extended their mischaracterization of Leviticus 25:8–13, which dealt only with the year of Jubilee, to the regular Sabbath year.

Nowhere is the superimposition of a Tishri year by the Jews of the post-Bar Kochba period (after 135 C.E.) more self-evident than when we compare Deuteronomy, 31:10–13, with Josephus and the Mishnah. Deuteronomy commands that, “מִקְצָת (ma-qatz; from the last part)²⁹ of the 7 years,” there would be a public reading of the Torah, “in the appointed time of the year of the *Shemitah*, in the Festival of Tabernacles (i.e., in the 7th month), when all Israel arrives to see the face of Yahweh your *eloahi* in the place which he shall choose.”³⁰ A *Shemitah* refers to the suspension of labor, the land lying fallow, and the release of debt which is to occur during a Sabbath year.³¹ Josephus (late 1st century C.E.) proves that this was still the understanding during his time.³² The Mishnah (200 C.E.), meanwhile, contradicts it, making this public reading occur at the beginning of the 8th year,³³ which is only possible under a Tishri-year system. The fact is, there is no record of a Tishri beginning for a Sabbath year until a number of years after the Bar Kochba revolt. Earlier records make no such claim. As a result, there is no justification for assuming that it was common practice before the post-Bar Kochba period.

There can be little doubt that part of this transition from an Abib (spring) to a Tishri (autumn) New Year date was influenced by dominance of foreigners and pagans in Jerusalem and Judaea after the Bar Kochba revolt, and by the decrees and ordinances then established by Hadrian. These foreigners utilized the Macedonian version of the Seleucid era, which began the year with the Macedonian month called Hyperberetaeus, i.e., the Hebrew month of Tishri (Sept./Oct.). The Seder Olam, as another example, while speaking of those Jews who were in exile after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., writes, “And in the Exile they write in documents according to the reckoning of the Greeks (i.e., the Seleucid era).”³⁴ After the rabbis had determined that the Sabbath year should begin with Tishri, it was an easy step to determine every year as starting from this same point.

²⁸ Ab., 1:1–5, e.g., 3:1–4.

²⁹ HEL, p. 234, מִקְצָת, “from the end” or “at the end (of time),” meaning *in the last part* of something. The preposition מִ(ma-) also carries the connotation “besides . . . among . . . some of, part of” (HEL, p. 147), thus, *some part of the end of the 7th year*.

³⁰ The reading begins when the people “come in,” i.e., “arrive” at the appointed place. In the early period the appointed place was at the Tabernacle of Yahweh, at whatever place it happened to be located. Later, it was Jerusalem. In either case, the arrival of the people was counted from the 1st day of the 7th month, as demonstrated in Neh., 8:1–18, esp. v. 2f.

³¹ SEC, Heb. #8059; CHAL, p. 374; HEL, p. 270. That a *Shemitah* refers to the Sabbath year, see below Chap. XIV, p. 207, ns. 2, 3.

³² Jos., *Antiq.*, 4:8:12.

³³ Sot., 7:8.

³⁴ S.O., 30.

A further indication that the Sabbath and Jubilee years among the Judaeans, up until the Bar Kochba revolt, continued to begin with the month of Abib (Nisan) can be drawn from the following facts. It is inconceivable, for example, that the Jews of the late 6th century B.C.E., having left their Babylonian exile in 538 B.C.E. to resettle Judaea, would not have known the correct way of observing scriptural years. Several Sabbath years and a Jubilee year transpired during this exile and those trustworthy Yahwehists who returned to Judaea, such as the high priest Yahushua (Joshua), the son of the high priest Yahuzadaq (Jozadak), would certainly have continued to count them. Also, many who lived in Judah before the destruction of the First Temple and their exile into Babylonia in 587 B.C.E. were still alive. One noted example was the prophet Daniel.³⁵ When a portion of the Jews were preparing to return to Judaea from their Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C.E., this older generation was available for guidance. Indeed, those who saw the grandeur of the First Temple cried out in disappointment when they saw the far inferior foundation laid down for the Second Temple.³⁶

As a result, in the mid-5th century B.C.E., the knowledge and timing of the Sabbath and Jubilee years would still be known. It was during this period that the scribe Ezra (author of the books of Chronicles and Ezra) and Nehemiah (of the book of Nehemiah fame), the Jewish governor of Judaea, settled in Judaea. The devout prophets of Yahweh named Haggai and Zechariah, among others, were also living there. These men, well-versed in scriptural knowledge and inspired of Yahweh, would undoubtedly be aware of which years and seasons represented the Sabbath and Jubilee years. In full support of this view, we know that the Jews who returned from their Babylonian captivity took a pledge to keep the Sabbath year.³⁷ That they continued to keep the Sabbath year for a long time thereafter is verified in the records of Josephus, who points out that Alexander the Great (331 B.C.E.) permitted them to continue this practice, as did the Romans in the 1st century B.C.E.³⁸

Interpretations with regard to the understanding of the laws of the Torah began to change when Antiochus Epiphanes tried to hellenize Judaea (169–165 B.C.E.). At this time there arose a Jewish party called the Pharisees. They believed in a system of oral laws, based upon rabbinic traditions, which were later codified in the Mishnah (c.200 C.E.). This sect was opposed by the older and more conservative party of the Sadducees, who held to a strict understanding of the Torah and gave no regard to oral traditions. In the reign of Hyrcanus (134/133–105/104 B.C.E.), the Pharisees had already gained great influence among the masses and, during the reign of Queen Alexandra (76/75–68/67 B.C.E.), they rose to a position of power within Judaea.³⁹

At the time of King Herod, 37–4 B.C.E., the legitimate line of Hasmonaean high priests was removed and in their place he set up “some insignificant

³⁵ Dan., 1:1–21, 5:1–31, 8:1, 9:1–2, 10:1; 2 Kings, 24:1–25:21; 2 Chron., 36:5–23; Ezra, 1:1–3:13.

³⁶ Ezra, 3:10–13; Hag., 2:1–9; Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:4:2.

³⁷ Neh., 10:31.

³⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:8:5–6, 14:10:5f.

³⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:10:5, 13:16:1–3, *Wars*, 1:5:2.

persons who were merely of priestly descent.”⁴⁰ This degenerated priesthood, combined with the rise of the scribes (who brought into existence the Pharisaic sect and later the Talmudic traditions) as a religious power, soon perverted the sound doctrines originally practiced. Traditions and interpretations replaced the authority of Scriptures and from the time of Herod onwards the doctrine of “traditions” dominated Jewish life. These numerous traditions were condemned by Yahushua the messiah as actually being opposed to sound scriptural doctrine.⁴¹ It was by these lower ranked, “insignificant” priests and the new scribe class that Yahushua the messiah was wrongfully tried and executed.

In this regard, Josephus refers to Ananus, a Judaean high priest of the 1st century C.E., as “rash in his temper and unusually daring” and tells of his conspiracy to kill Jacob (James) the brother of Yahushua the messiah.⁴² The servants of another priest of this period, whose name was Ananias, are called “utter rascals” who combined their operations with “the most reckless men.” These men “would go to the threshing floors and take by force the tithes of the priests. Neither did they refrain from beating those who refused to give. The high priests were guilty of the same practices as their slaves, and no one could stop them.”⁴³

Out of this degenerated class of priests and the tradition-believing rabbis and scribes there arose support for the Bar Kochba revolt. It was thought that Simeon bar Kochba (also known as Simeon ben Kosiba) would restore the rabbis to power in Judaea. Many of the rabbis, of course, did not believe in the messianic attributes of Bar Kochba, but they nevertheless supported the rebellion in his name as a political quest for freedom.

Wacholder and others speak of “the gradual shifting of the New Year from Nisan to Tishri, which has been formalized into our Rosh ha-Shanah.”⁴⁴ Yet their perception of this “gradual shifting,” at least for the Sabbath years, assumes, without any evidence, that it occurred shortly after the return of the Babylonian exiles in 538 B.C.E. In turn, this view led these scholars to interpret passages from the books of Maccabees, Josephus, and other early records as if the month of Tishri had long been the official beginning for the Sabbath year. Many others go so far as to assume that the month of Tishri began every year, not just the Sabbath year.

Contrary to this view, nothing in these records even suggests such an early change. Most likely, the alteration did not become official until long after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Indeed, one cannot even find evidence that the Jewish Sabbath year officially began with Tishri during the Bar Kochba revolt (133–135 C.E.). Not until the Seder Olam (c.160 C.E.) and the Mishnah (about 200 C.E.) do we find this interpretation, and historians admit that this late text does not prove the ancient practice.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:16:4, 20:10:5.

⁴¹ E.g., Matt., 15:1–9; Mark, 7:1–13; Col., 2:8; 1 Pet., 1:18.

⁴² Jos., *Antiq.*, 20:9:1.

⁴³ Jos., *Antiq.*, 20:9:1–2.

⁴⁴ HUCA, 44, p. 155.

⁴⁵ See CKIJ, p. 70; OOGA, pp. 439, 454f; MNHK, p. 51.

The change in the beginning of the year could only start to occur after the degenerated priesthood had been put into place (in Herod's day) and after a substantial period of time had elapsed, when memories of the correct observances under a more honorable priesthood had waned, had become grossly misunderstood, or were wrongly overturned by an ill-considered notion that the former leaders had been in error. Its growth would more properly have mushroomed after the First Revolt, when the Zealots and other extremists had come to power. Yet it would not be truly fashionable until well after the Second Revolt, when the vision of Bar Kochba as a "messiah" had been crushed. Foreign domination of Jerusalem and Judaea after the Bar Kochba revolt necessitated contracts and other civil matters to be conducted with the Macedonian version of the Seleucid year (beginning in Tishri). This reality would certainly contribute to the movement towards a Tishri calendar.

There was also a problem created by the winter planting season in Judaea, which had need of harvesting grain in the spring and summer. It was much more convenient to begin a Sabbath year with the planting season and end it before the next planting season began. Discontinuing the Sabbath year in the midst of an agricultural season would have been construed by many rabbis as a hardship. It became a simple matter of reinterpreting Leviticus, 25:9, to imply that the 7th month of the 49th year of the Jubilee cycle represented the beginning of the year of Jubilee, and by extension the 7th month of every 6th year of the Sabbath cycle represented the start of the Sabbath year. Soon, the entire scriptural calendar year was converted to a Tishri year.

Conclusion

Based upon this preliminary evidence, it is the conclusion of this study that one cannot automatically assume that the early pre-Mishnah records (i.e., before 200 C.E.) are to be read with the understanding that the month of Tishri in the 6th year of the Sabbath cycle was utilized by the Jews of those times as the official beginning of the Sabbath year. Each record must be analyzed in context to determine when the beginning of the Sabbath year actually took place.

As this study proceeds, the evidence will prove that late-Talmudic interpretations misunderstood certain earlier Jewish agricultural practices that came into existence after the mid-2nd century B.C.E. These earlier Jewish practices, which built "a fence around the Law," required the observance of the Sabbath year during the latter part of the 6th year of the 7-year Sabbath cycle in an effort to protect the actual Sabbath year. It was believed that, by prohibiting harvesting and sowing of grain in the months just before the Sabbath year had begun, they could prevent people from inadvertently defiling the Sabbath year.⁴⁶ This restriction being in place a few months prior to the actual beginning of the Sabbath year, therefore, conformed with the

⁴⁶ A good demonstration of the rabbinic practice of building a fence around the Torah comes when they begin their Sabbath day observance 3 hours before sundown on Friday.

practices of protecting the oncoming Sabbath year. The later Talmudic Jews (2nd century C.E. and after) simply misinterpreted these previous safeguards and falsely assumed that the Sabbath year should begin at the time of the year when the above-mentioned prohibitions started.

Nevertheless, all of the pre-Mishnah records demonstrate that the earlier Jews officially began their 7th year, the Sabbath year, with the 1st day of Abib (Nisan). The decision to change was encouraged by the loss of official records, the loss of Jewish governmental authority, and circumstance. For example, after the failure of the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 C.E., the Jews of the East came under even heavier influence of foreign kings and cultures utilizing a year reckoned from the autumn. This transition was further facilitated by the preservation of a Tishri year among the Jews themselves. As demonstrated earlier, Josephus poignantly reminds us that a Tishri year was still being used by the Jews during the 1st century C.E. for things "NOT" related to divine worship, such as "selling and buying and other ordinary things." There can be little doubt that this secondary custom arose from their political and commercial dealings with the Greeks, Egyptians, and others in the Near East. The agricultural season in Judaea—planting in the late autumn and harvesting in the spring and summer—during this period was also an important influence.

Today, the Jews refer to Tishri 1 as *Rosh ha-Shanah* ("head/beginning of the year"). Few realize that this definition is nowhere found in Scriptures nor is it used by any Jewish source prior to the Mishnah (the final redaction and publication by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi coming in about 200 C.E.).⁴⁷ It was a late invention with no bearing on the much more ancient scriptural practice. In turn, the "need" of most present-day chronologists to interpret a "Tishri" beginning for the Sabbath year is pursued in order to make the earlier records conform with late-rabbinic and Talmudic interpretation as well as with more recent theory. In turn, important items of evidence coming from the pre-Seder Olam and Mishnah period are adjusted to fit either the System "B" scenario, as with the Zuckermann-Schürer calendar, or to pursue the idea that the later rabbinic and Talmudic writers really did agree with the more ancient records but that their works have been misunderstood (Wacholder, System "C").

As we advance through the evidence for each known Sabbath and Jubilee year, our investigation will prove that the scriptural year, including the Sabbath and Jubilee years, always began with the 1st of Abib (Nisan). The 1st of Tishri reckoning is post-Bar Kochba, invented for convenience sake, and has nothing to do with the original scriptural year system.

⁴⁷ JE, vol. 8, p. 609, "the beginning of the third century of the common era"; TABD, 3, "Judaism: The Mishnaic Period," by Tzvee Zahavy, pp. 1083–1089, "a third-century Hebrew compilation of traditions," and, "The Mishnah, published after the turn of the third century."

This page intentionally left blank.