

Addressing the Opposing View

*Part II of the Sabbath Years
of 133/134 and 140/141 C.E.*

Despite strong proof that the 1st year of the Bar Kochba revolt was 133/134 C.E., Nisan reckoning, those adhering to Systems "B," "C," and "D" object. To support their views, they point to the following items of evidence and interpretation:

- The Palestinian Talmud, in *Taanith*, 68d; some variant texts of *Seder Olam Rabbah*, 30; and *Lamentations Rabbah* report that the Jewish rebellion lasted 3½ years before the fall of Beth Thera rather than 2½ years. The advocates of Systems "B," "C," and "D" merely claim, as Wacholder does, that "the reading of 'two and a half' is erroneous."¹
- Using Ab (July/Aug.) of 135 C.E. as the date that Beth Thera fell, the advocates of Systems "B," "C," and "D" then count back 3½ years, which brings them to the spring of 132 C.E. This date conforms with a revolt which would have started just before Iyyar (April/May) of that year. The 2nd year of the revolt, therefore, would be 133/134 C.E., Nisan reckoning.
- In response to Eusebius' claim that the revolt began in the 16th year of Hadrian, which at its earliest reckoning began on August 10 of 132 C.E., they conjecture, as Kanael does, that the line in the *Chronicorum Canonum* dating the beginning of the revolt "has been transposed, and should have been registered with the events of Hadrian's 15th year."²
- Coins produced during the Second Revolt show that Jerusalem was occupied by the rebels long enough to strike coins for 3 separate years.³ Since the records remaining to us show that the main resistance held out at Beth Thera, the theory is advanced that Jerusalem fell a year earlier and that no further coins were struck thereafter.
- A document from this period has been found which dates the Second Revolt as late as the month of Tishri in "Year 4."⁴ This record, they argue, conforms with the evidence that the revolt must have lasted at least 3½ years, i.e., until October, 135 C.E.
- By placing the 1st year of the revolt in the spring of 132 C.E., those favoring Systems "B," "C," and "D" feel that the evidence supports their respective conclusions for the Sabbath cycle. The "corrected" date

¹ HUCA, 44, p. 179.

² IEJ, 21.1, p. 40, n. 7; Helm, *Chronik*, p. 200 (282F).

³ CGCP, pp. civ–cviii, 284–316; CP, pp. 40–41, 120–128; AJ, pp. 33–38, 60–66.

⁴ IEJ, 21.1, p. 45.

for the 1st year of the revolt, altered from the 16th to the 15th year of Hadrian, using Hadrian's *dies imperii*, becomes August 10, 131 until August 10, 132 C.E.

System "B" calculates that the 2nd Jewish year of the revolt was Tishri (Sept./Oct.), 132 until Tishri, 133 C.E. The 5 years mentioned in the rental contracts, then, extended from 133/134 to 137/138 C.E., Tishri reckoning. The Sabbath year would become 138/139 C.E., Tishri reckoning.

System "C" recognizes that the Jews of this period used a Nisan 1st year. The 2nd year of the revolt, therefore, would be 133/134 C.E., Nisan reckoning. The 5 years of the rental contracts would be 134/135 to 138/139 C.E., Nisan reckoning. The Sabbath years, on the other hand, are calculated by a Tishri 1 year. As a result, the next Sabbath year after the 5 years of harvest becomes 139/140 C.E., Tishri reckoning.

System "D" supports a Nisan 1st year as the correct Jewish reckoning. In this arrangement the 2nd year of the revolt would be 133/134 C.E., Nisan reckoning. The 5 years of the contracts are 134/135 to 138/139 C.E., Nisan reckoning. The Sabbath year is calculated as 139/140 C.E., Nisan reckoning.

The Flaws in the Popular Theory

On the face of it, the popular reconstruction for dating the beginning of the Second Revolt to the spring of 132 C.E. may seem plausible. Nevertheless, it is substantially flawed and built largely upon conjecture. These flaws are discovered in the following areas:

- The conclusion that the revolt began in the spring of 132 C.E. is based upon the assumption that the Sabbath year during this period must have been either 138/139 C.E., Tishri reckoning, System "B"; 139/140 C.E., Tishri reckoning, System "C"; or 139/140 C.E., Nisan reckoning, System "D." The evidence then becomes subject to selectivity, the chronologist picking and choosing which piece of evidence he wishes to utilize without full consideration of its source or usefulness. In short, the preconceived system becomes the judge of the evidence rather than the evidence being allowed to first build its own case, then comparing that result with the various Sabbath-cycle systems.
- There has been a failure to recognize the motive of the rabbis who originated the chronology system upon which popular rabbinic chronology is built. These rabbis were supporters of Bar Kochba, a man who claimed to be the promised messiah and who had a large following among the masses. Bar Kochba's supporters read into the Second Revolt a fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel, 9:24-27, which states that the messiah would come AFTER 483 weeks (incorrectly interpreted to mean 483 years), i.e., in the 484th year of the building of the Second Temple. In their calculations, the destruction of Jerusalem (70 C.E.) took place in the 421st year of this era.⁵

⁵ B. Arak., 12b; TSCJ, pp. 39-43; etc. Also see Chart C.

Since the 421st year of this period equals 70 C.E., the rabbis began this era in 351 B.C.E. (cf. Chart C). In reality, this construct is impossible. The era starts when the command went forth to build the Second Temple; yet the first stages of the Second Temple were already completed in the 6th year of King Darius I of Persia (515 B.C.E.).⁶ Therefore, the early construction of the Second Temple was actually completed some 164 years before the rabbis calculated that the work to build it had even started. Neither can the rabbinic understanding be a reference to a later building phase, for the Second Temple was not enlarged until the 18th year of King Herod (20/19 B.C.E.).⁷

The clear intent of the contrived chronology from this period is to prove that Bar Kochba was the promised messiah. The 484th year of this era, the year in which their messiah was to appear, becomes 133/134 C.E. This date, therefore, proves that the Second Revolt would have actually begun in 133 C.E. not 132 C.E. (133 C.E. being the year in which the messiah's appearance was expected). Other contemporary rabbis and later rabbis dismissed the Bar Kochba messianic attachment to the chronology but inaccurately continued its use as if it was a factual framework for the past.

- The claim of 3½ years for the length of the revolt—as found in some variant texts of the *Seder Olam Rabbah* and a couple of Talmudic writings—is, in fact, of much later origin than either the earliest copies of the *Seder Olam* or Eusebius. The figure of 3½ years is actually derived from still another attempt to read into the Second Revolt some of the prophecy of Daniel, 9:24–27; i.e., the statement that in the “middle of the week” (interpreted to mean 3½ years) the evil one shall “cause the sacrifices and offerings to cease.” As a result, these writings superimposed their own chronological interpretation on that event.
- The belief that somehow the coins and documents from the Bar Kochba revolt support a theory that the war lasted 3½ years is based upon negative proof, dismissal of sound testimony, and a selective interpretation of the evidence. The evidence only proves that Jerusalem fell in the 3rd year of the revolt. It is then merely assumed that there was a year’s time between the fall of Jerusalem and the fall of Beth Thera. The extra year is required only because it is needed to fill in the gap created by the assumption that the war had to last 3½ years. These coins and documents will be fully analyzed in Chapters XXXI and XXXII.
- As we have shown in our previous chapter, both Eusebius and the best manuscripts of the *Seder Olam* directly point to the 16th year of Hadrian as the specific year in which the Jewish revolt began. Furthermore, these records allow for only 2½ years until Beth Thera

⁶ See Ezra, 6:14–16.

⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 15:11:1.

was overthrown in Ab (July/Aug.) of 135 C.E., which event effectively broke the back of the resistance. The dates given by Eusebius and the best manuscripts of the *Seder Olam* are simply rejected by the advocates of Systems "B," "C," and "D" without due consideration. In their place is substituted a formula built upon the assumption that for their respective Sabbath-cycle system to work it requires a Sabbath year in 138/139 C.E., Tishri reckoning, System "B"; or 139/140 C.E., Tishri reckoning, System "C"; or 139/140 C.E., Nisan reckoning, System "D."

To demonstrate, Emil Schürer points to the rental contracts that report a sabbatical year after 5 years of harvest. He simply concludes along with M. R. Lehmann and others that, "The first year [of the revolt] will therefore be A.D. 132/3."⁸ The 5 years are simply adjusted to fit the assumed date of the Sabbath year.

Wacholder, System "C," makes the same kind of assumption. He concludes, based upon his own calculations, that the last *Shemitah* prior to the rental contracts of the Bar Kochba period "took place not in 131/32, as Zuckermann says, but in 132/33."⁹ From this date he calculates the next Sabbath year by shaping the 5-year period of the rental contracts to support that conclusion.

In short, the chronologists start from the premise that their own particular Sabbath-cycle system is accurate and then set out to correct the evidence so that it will conform.

The Bar Kochba Chronology

Let us first examine in more depth the origin of the Bar Kochba chronology. A major error of the advocates of Systems "B," "C," and "D" has been their failure to take into account the source of the chronology used by the authors of the *Seder Olam* and other Talmudic works. This chronology originated from the supporters of Bar Kochba who read into the Bar Kochba revolt the prophecy of Daniel, 9:24–27, which foretold of the appearance of the messiah.

First, it can be no mere coincidence that the year 133 C.E., year 16 of Hadrian, is the 484th year of the era of building the Second Temple—the year 351 B.C.E. being the date determined by the rabbis as the time when the building of the Second Temple began.¹⁰ Why did these rabbis calculate a date so far from the truth (i.e., over 164 years) if it had not arisen for some religious and political purpose?

The very fact that the chronology that had been agreed upon by the rabbis from the time of Rabbi Yose (about 160 C.E.) was based upon the prophecy of Daniel, 9:24–27—and then finding that his chronology fulfills the messianic expectation at the time of Bar Kochba's insurrection—clearly indicates its original source and intent. In fact, Rabbi Yose, who wrote the *Seder Olam* (the

⁸ HJP, 1, pp. 542f, n. 126.

⁹ HUCA, 44, p. 179.

¹⁰ Also see Chap. I, pp. 14f.

text upon which Talmudic chronology is built) only about 25 years after the end of that revolt, also lived at the time of the Second Revolt. Nevertheless, he was not the originator of the chronology but only its transmitter.

Rabbi Yahanan, who lived in the next century after Rabbi Yose, and the Babylonian Talmudic works *Yebamot* (82b) and *Niddah* (46b) report that Rabbi Yose “taught” *Seder Olam*.¹¹ Rabbi Yose (Jose) is himself cited nine times in the *Seder Olam*,¹² while other Rabbis, all of them Tannaim, appear altogether ten times.¹³ Chaim Joseph Milikowsky concludes from this evidence:

With SO [[*Seder Olam*]], there is good reason to believe that R. Yose’s central role was that of a transmitter who edited (revised?) and added his own comments to the text. Only in this way can we explain the statements attributed to R. Yose in SO: a later editor when re-editing the chronography R. Yose transmitted added R. Yose’s name to those comments which the latter had added (in the first person?) to the text. Not only does this solve our problem, i.e. how is it possible for R. Yose to be cited in SO if it is his work, but it is also the only way to explain why R. Yose is cited in SO almost as much as all other Sages together: since he transmitted SO, his notes and comments were more numerous than the statements of other Sages which were attached to the text.¹⁴

It is clear from this evidence that Rabbi Yose (Rabbi Jose) transmitted a chronology that had been in vogue during the Bar Kochba period only 30 years before. It was a chronology that he “taught,” not originated. The political and messianic attachments made during the Bar Kochba revolt were dropped but the scheme of things was continued as if this chronology represented the true chronology of the ancient Jewish people.

Bar Kochba represented himself as the messiah. His appearance in Jewish history at the precise time that the Jewish chronology of the rabbis would indicate the appearance of the messiah cannot be a mere coincidence. His official title was נָשִׂיא (Nashia) or נָסִיא (Nasia), denoting chief, prince, or king. The name Kochba, meaning “star,” was a reference to the messianic prophecy in Numbers, 24:17.¹⁵ Rabbi Akiba specifically calls him the “King Messiah.”¹⁶ Bar Kochba is often considered one of the “gibborim” or “mighty warriors” of Jewish history in later Talmudic works. He is described as catching stones flung from Roman catapults and hurling them back with deadly results.¹⁷

¹¹ SORC, 1, pp. 12–24.

¹² S.O., 1:16, 11:13, 11:15, 17:39, 23:42, 27:38, 28:53, 30:38, 30:50.

¹³ See SORC, 1, p. 14, & p. 20, n. 12.

¹⁴ SORC, 1, pp.15f.

¹⁵ J. Taan., 68d; HJP, 1, pp. 543f.

¹⁶ J. Taan., 68d; HUCA, 46, p. 217.

¹⁷ HUCA, 54, pp. 183, 185.

According to this legend, it was for that reason that Rabbi Akiba declared him to be the messiah.¹⁸

The majority of coins from the 1st year of the revolt bear Bar Kochba's name and his title "Nasia of Israel."¹⁹ These coins clearly reflect the messianic aspirations of Bar Kochba. The "star which appears above the Temple facade on the obverse of most tetradrachms of the second and third years [of the revolt-coins] again alludes to the messianic aspirations of Ben Kosiba [Bar Kochba]."²⁰ This star is still held up among the Jews today as the star of David.

The belief that Bar Kochba was the messiah and that he fulfilled the requirements of Daniel, 9:24–27 (rabbinic interpretation) necessitates that his appearance after 483 years must occur on a Sabbath year, i.e., in the 484th year.²¹ Wacholder, in his study on *Chronomessianism*, for example, presents an outline of the ancient evidence proving that "at one time" there existed among the Jews a "widespread belief, that the inevitable coming of the messiah would take place during the season when Israel celebrated the sabbatical year."²² And indeed, this circumstance is exactly what the records from the Bar Kochba period indicate.

The rental contracts found at Murabba'at were written toward the end of the month of Shebat (the eleventh month of the Jewish year) of the 2nd year of the redemption. They reveal that the eve of a Sabbath year was to follow after 5 coming, complete harvest years. Therefore, the 1st year of the revolt (133/134 C.E., Nisan reckoning) was in fact a Sabbath year!

Just as important to our research is another overlooked fact. Based upon the date for Hezekiah's 16th year, the 2nd year of the Bar Kochba revolt (134/135 C.E., Nisan reckoning) was a Jubilee year (Chart C). What better time for someone claiming to be the messiah to exert his claim? Even though during this period the rabbis claimed that the Jubilee was abolished by "rabbinic"—though definitely not by "scriptural"—ordinances,²³ the Jubilee was still calculated and its prophetic connection with the messiah clearly understood.

This detail also explains why no rental contracts were found that showed a harvest during the 1st and 2nd years of the Second Revolt. The 12 contracts under discussion for this period merely point to the fact that in the coming 5 years there would be 5 harvests before the next Sabbath year.

These facts demonstrate that these 12 contracts, written on the 20th day of Shebat (Jan./Feb.), must be understood to mean that the 5 producing years referred to would actually commence with the 1st of Nisan, which was only 40 days away. These 5 years were to end on the eve of the next Sabbath year.

Finally, we must account for the fact that Bar Kochba seized Jerusalem and other Roman outposts during his 1st year, even though this year was undoubtedly a Sabbath year and despite the fact that military expeditions

¹⁸ J. Taan., 4:8; Mid. 'Ek. Rab., 2:5, on 'Ekhah, 2:2.

¹⁹ IEJ, 21.1, p. 42.

²⁰ IEJ, 21.1, p. 44, n. 37.

²¹ See Chap. I, pp. 14f.

²² HUCA, 46, p. 201.

²³ HUCA, 44, p. 154, n. 4.

were forbidden under Jewish law in that season. Again we must return to the fact that Bar Kochba's followers saw Bar Kochba as the messiah. The messiah was to war against the enemies of Israel. In the eyes of the rabbis, when the messiah came to war for the freedom of Israel, it was expected that he would do so during a Sabbath year. Therefore, normally forbidden aggressive military activity during a Sabbath year was permissible under this exceptional circumstance.

3½ Years

Next, let us examine the evidence used to support a period of 3½ years for the war. To begin with, the figure “שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים וּמִחְצָה” (*shalosh shinim u-makhatsah*; 3 years and a half) found in some of the variant texts of the *Seder Olam Rabbah* instead of “בְּשָׁנִים וּמִחְצָה” (*be shinim u-makhatsah*; 2 years and a half),²⁴ as footnoted in Neubauer's translation,²⁵ does not change the beginning year for the revolt, as the advocates of Systems “B,” “C,” and “D” would have us believe. Even in the variant texts referred to by Neubauer we still find 80 years from the conflict of Asvarus (Varus) to the conflict of Vespasian; 52 years more to the conflict of Quietus; and 16 years more to the Bar Kochba war. These figures bring us to the spring of 133 C.E. as the outbreak of the war. The ending figure, on the other hand, is changed to the middle of the year 136 C.E., not 135 C.E.!²⁶

When the chronologists supporting Systems “B,” “C,” and “D” use the 3½ years from some of the variant texts of the *Seder Olam Rabbah*, they misuse it by subtracting that number from the confirmed date for the fall of Beth Thera in the late summer of 135 C.E. If this figure is correct and original, as claimed, then they should appropriately begin counting from the 16th year after the conflict with Quietus as directed in the text.

Neubauer's edition of the *Seder Olam* and his citations of variant texts, found in his *Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles*,²⁷ are cited by Emil Schürer and others as proof of a war lasting 3½ years. Yet this text is described by Milikowsky's more recent edition of that work as falling short because of its “selectivity in citing variants, the insufficient care in copying editions and manuscripts, and the method used in the text and apparatus.” These details, he continues “preclude its being considered an adequate utilization of the materials he had available. Additionally, there are many manuscripts of SO [[*Seder Olam*]] to which he had no access, and others to which he had only limited access.”²⁸

Chaim Milikowsky's edition of the *Seder Olam*, which far better utilizes all the variants, declares that 2½ years for the Second Revolt is the true and earliest figure supplied by the best texts.²⁹ More important, even Neubauer's edition leaves the figure of 2½ years in his main text, showing that he too found this number to be from the earliest and best manuscripts to which he was familiar.

²⁴ MJC, 2, p. 66.

²⁵ For a reconstruction and analysis of the variants in this chronology, see App. N.

²⁶ MJC, 2, pp. 26–67.

²⁷ SORC, 1, p. 87.

²⁸ SORC, 2, p. 547.

In the Talmudic text entitled *Lamentations Rabbah*, “3½ years” is given for the siege of Beth Thera by Hadrian. What usually goes unnoticed is the fact that 3½ years is also given in this text for the length of the siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian. Yet Vespasian did not besiege Jerusalem for 3½ years. His son Titus did not begin laying siege against Jerusalem until the spring of 70 C.E.,²⁹ and the war was over in the month of Elul (Gorpiaeus; Aug./Sept.) of that same year.³⁰

Neither can the 3½ years represent the duration of the entire war, since the First Revolt began in the spring of 66 C.E. and lasted until late summer of 70 C.E., a span of 4½ years. The 3½ years can only work as an approximate time for the period of Vespasian’s and his son Titus’ involvement in the entire Judaean war, which for them actually got under way in May of 67 C.E.

Jerome (early 5th century C.E.) gives the view of some of the Jewish scholars in his day that the last septennium of Daniel, 9:27, is to be divided between the siege of Vespasian and the siege of Hadrian.³¹ That is, 3½ years are to be allotted to each event. It is clear from Jerome that the underlying idea of some of the Jews in the Talmudic period was to apply the calculations of the end-time prophecy of Daniel to the two destructions of Jerusalem, which occurred during the First and Second Revolts.

The figure of 3½ years, therefore, is a chronographical interpretation. One can no more trust this calculation for the length of the Bar Kochba revolt until the fall of Beth Thera than he can for the supposed length of the siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian given in the same text. The rabbis may well have included the year before the formal declaration of war by all of Judaea as part of their calculation (i.e., the time when Bar Kochba had established his own power but prior to the major outbreak of hostilities in 133 C.E.).³² Then again, it may have arisen as pure speculation in an attempt to read prophecy into that important defeat in Jewish history.

It is also certain, by the fact that some of the variations of the *Seder Olam Rabbah* substituted 3½ years for 2½ years, that the rabbinic interpretation (of 3½ years) was used to replace the original calculation. At the same time, when faced with the credibility of the figure of 3½ years from the Palestinian Talmud,³³ as well as the *Lamentations Rabbah*, even Emil Schürer was forced to admit that “these sources are not of great weight.” Yet after making this admission, he then concludes:³⁴

. . . it is in fact correct that the war lasted about three and a half years (the late sources confuse the duration of the war with that of the siege of Bether [Beth Thera]).³⁵

²⁹ Jos., *Wars*, 4:10:12–4:11:5.

³⁰ Jos., *Wars*, 6:8:4.

³¹ Jerome, *Com. in Dan.*, 9:24 (PL, 25, pp. 552–553); CChr.SL, ccl, lxxva, p. 888.

³² We shall have more to say about this earlier period below in Chap. XXXII.

³³ J. Taan., 68d.

³⁴ HJP, 1, p. 552, n. 172.

³⁵ This city’s name is variously rendered Beth Thera, Betar, Beth Thor, Bethar, etc..

The truth of the matter is that Emil Schürer and those following Systems "B," "C," and "D" have only "assumed" that the duration of the war for all Judaea until the collapse of Beth Thera was 3½ years. This assumption is necessary only because it is required if their respective calculations are to be upheld.

Conclusion

It is necessary for the proponents of Systems "B," "C," and "D," in order to accommodate their arrangements of the Sabbath cycle, to overlook the strong evidence for a 2½-year conflict for all Judaea during the Second Revolt. For their systems to work, they require that the war for all Judaea begin 1 year earlier than stated by Eusebius and the best editions of the *Seder Olam*. In an effort to find support for this view, they are forced to fall back on a late Talmudic interpretation, which tries to frame both the First and Second Revolt in such a way as to fulfill a prophecy found in Daniel, 9:24–27. System "A," on the other hand, relies on the best and most reliable of the ancient sources. These sources prove that the Second Revolt lasted only 2½ years for all of Judaea, from the spring of 133 until Ab (July/Aug.) of 135 C.E.

This page intentionally left blank.