

# PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

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# The Sabbath and Jubilee Years in Leviticus, 25:1–13

And Yahweh spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai saying, Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, Without a doubt you shall come into the land which I am giving to you and the land shall have a Sabbath,<sup>1</sup> a Sabbath for Yahweh. You shall sow your field 6 years and you shall prune your vineyard 6 years and shall gather the produce. And in the 7th year a Sabbath *sabbathon*<sup>2</sup> shall be for the land, a Sabbath for Yahweh. Your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune. That which grows of itself of your harvest you shall not harvest and the grapes of your unkept vine you shall not gather. A year of *sabbathon* it shall be for the land. And the Sabbath of the land shall be to you for food, to you and to your male servant and your female servant, and to your hired one and to your tenant, those living among you, and to your cattle and to the beast which is on your land, shall all the produce of it be for food.

And you shall count 7 Sabbaths of years, 7 years 7 times, and shall be to you the days of the 7 Sabbaths of years, 49 years. And you shall let sound a ram's horn, a signal in the 7th moon (month), on the 10th (day) of the moon. On the Day of Atonement the ram's horn shall sound in all your land. And you shall make sacred this year, the 50th year, and you shall proclaim liberty in the land to all its dwellers. A Jubilee it shall be for you. And you shall return a male to his possession; and each to his family you shall return him. A Jubilee it is, the 50th year. A year it is for you, not shall you sow it and not shall you harvest that which grows of itself and not gather the unkept vine, for a Jubilee it shall be. Sacred it shall be to you. Out of the field you shall eat its store in the year of this Jubilee. You shall return each one to his possession.

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word שבת (*Sabbath*) means, “ceased... intermission... cessation” (HEL, p. 260), “to repose... rest, interruption, cessation... intermission” (SEC, Heb. #7673–7676). The primary meaning of “Sabbath” is to “cease” or “rest” from some action or work.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word שבתון (*sabbathon*) derives from the term שבת (*sabbath*), i.e. to “cease” from some action or work, and means, “a time of rest” (HEL, p. 260), “a sabbatism or special holiday” (SEC, Heb. #7677). A *sabbathon* is defined in Scriptures as “a sacred Sabbath for Yahweh” (Exod., 16:23).

# CHART A

## The Four Sabbath Cycle Theories:

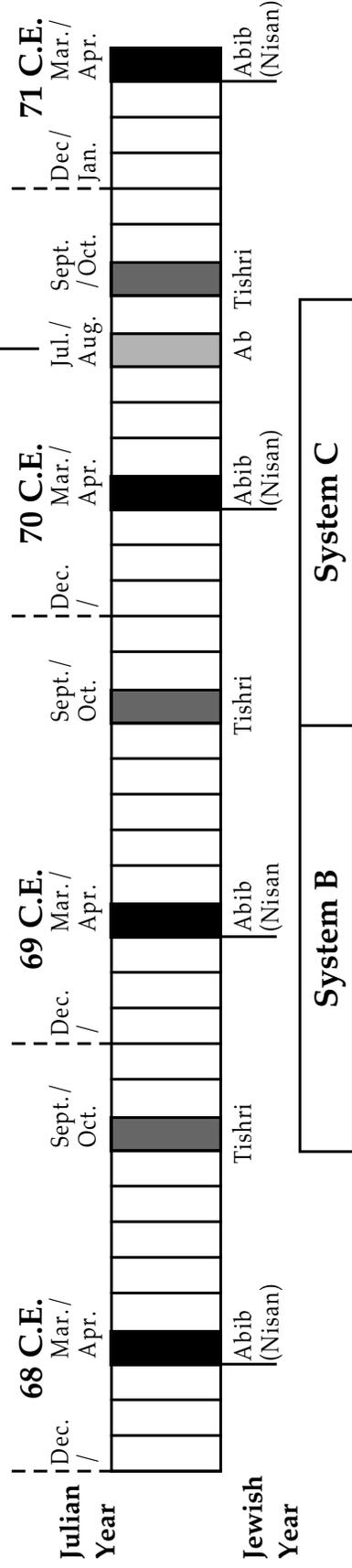
Their Proposed Sabbath Year at the Time of the Destruction of the Second (Herod's) Temple

System "A": Abib (Mar./Apr.) 1, 70 C.E. until Abib (Nisan) 1, 71 C.E.

System "B": Tishri (Sept./Oct.) 1, 68 C.E. until Tishri 1, 69 C.E.

System "C": Tishri 1, 69 C.E. until Tishri 1, 70 C.E.

System "D": Abib (Nisan) 1, 69 C.E. until Abib (Nisan) 1, 70 C.E.



System D

System A

# Introduction

This study presents the evidence from ancient biblical and secular sources for dating the Sabbath and Jubilee cycle.

There has been a long-standing debate over exactly which "Sabbath and Jubilee cycle" system represents the one that was actually practiced by the ancient Israelites. At first glance, this dispute may seem trivial to the novice. Nevertheless, there are two important reasons that make its solution extremely valuable. First, this cycle is an essential tool for any chronological framework of ancient Israelite historical events. The strong foundation it lays, in turn, also acts as a guide for determining the chronology of rulers from contemporary foreign dynasties who are mentioned in Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

Second, once the correct cycle is ascertained, it allows us to "clock in" and discover which years are presently Sabbaths and Jubilees. This possibility holds great significance for students of biblical eschatology. In this regard, the prophetic character of the Jubilee year is strongly attested. The book of Hebrews, for example, notes that, "The Law (Torah)," of which the Sabbath and Jubilee years are a part, is "a shadow of the coming good things."<sup>2</sup> The Sabbath day, likewise, was reckoned as a type of the great "sabbatism" of rest into which the messiah and the people of Yahweh would one day enter.<sup>3</sup>

In the same way, after Yahushua the messiah (whose name is often translated into English as "Jesus Christ") had been anointed by the sacred *ruach* (KJV "spirit") at the Jordan River, he was able to confirm by proclamation the promise of a future great year of "liberty," i.e., the great Jubilee year,<sup>4</sup> that was to come in the latter days. In that year, at the end of the time of Jacob's trouble, the Israelites would be released from their final captivity in the world and would return to the Promised Land, fulfilling the words regarding the Jubilee, "And you shall return a male to his possession; and each to his family you shall return him."<sup>5</sup> Quoting from Isaiah, Yahushua states:

The *ruach* of sovereign Yahweh is upon me, for  
Yahweh has anointed me to proclaim the good news  
to the meek. He sent me to bind up the broken of *leb*  
(mind), TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE

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<sup>1</sup> See our forthcoming books IC, APPC, GAE.

<sup>2</sup> Heb., 10:1. Also cf. Luke, 4:16–22, quoting Isa., 61:1–9, in reference to Lev., 25:8–17, where liberty is to be proclaimed to all the inhabitants of the land during the Jubilee year.

<sup>3</sup> Heb., 3:7–4:13; esp. v. 4:9, where the Greek term σαββατισμός (*sabbatismos*), meaning, "a sabbatism" (SEC, Gk. #4520, derived from 4521, σάββατον), i.e., "a keeping of sabbath, a sabbath rest" (ILT, *Lex.*, p. 88), is used.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lev., 25:10.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lev., 25:10. For the time of Jacob's troubles, see Jer., 30:7.

CAPTIVES and a complete opening to the bound ones; TO PROCLAIM THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF YAHWEH and the day of vengeance of our *eloahi*,<sup>6</sup> to comfort all mourners, to appoint unto the mourners of Zion, to give to them beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of the *ruach* of infirmity, and calling them “trees of righteousness,” a planting of Yahweh in order to beautify himself. And they shall build the world-age-lasting ruins, they shall raise up desolations of the former times, and they shall restore wasted cities, ruins of generations and generations.<sup>7</sup>

Notice carefully that Yahushua does not claim that the great Jubilee year prophesied by Isaiah had already arrived. Rather, with his anointing by the sacred *ruach* (designating him as the messiah), Yahushua could confidently “proclaim” that the prophecies regarding this future Jubilee year would be fulfilled.

The arrival of this future Jubilee year was also an expectation among the Jewish people of Yahushua’s time. The ancient book of Jubilees (161–140 B.C.E.), for example, notes that the Sabbath and Jubilee cycle would continue “until the sanctuary of the sovereign (Yahweh) is created in Jerusalem upon Mount Zion.”<sup>8</sup> The text of 11Q Melchizedek, found in the caves at Qumran, explains the Jubilee statutes of Leviticus, 25, by stating:

1. [saying to Zion] “your *eloahim*<sup>9</sup> reigns.” . . . [
2. [ ] . . . and where it says, “In [this] year of Jubilee you shall return, each man to his possession.”
3. [and where it says, “Let] every holder of a debt [let drop] what he loans [to his neighbor. Let him not exact payment from his neighbor nor from his brother, for there is proclaimed a] remission
4. [of el.” Its interpretation concerns the e]nd of days as regards “those taken captive” who [. . . etc].<sup>10</sup>

“Those taken captive,” as already pointed out, are a reference to the future captivity of the Israelites among the nations during the latter days. The

<sup>6</sup> The generic term *eloah* (אלה), its plural form *eloahi* (אלהי) and collective noun form *eloahim* (אלהים), and the title *el* (אל) are indiscriminately translated into English by the single word God. Each term actually has its own unique meaning (see SNY, pp. 5–14). To avoid any confusion, we shall continue throughout our study with the proper transliterations.

<sup>7</sup> Isa., 61:1–4; Luke, 4:16–22; cf. Lev., 25:8–17. The “acceptable year” refers to the great Jubilee year, during which year the First Resurrection of the 24 elders and the 144,000 elect of Israel occurs and the remaining population of the house of Israel and the house of Judah will return to join them in the Promised Land (e.g., Ezek., 37:15–28; Jer., 31:31–34).

<sup>8</sup> Jub., 1:29.

<sup>9</sup> See above n. 6.

<sup>10</sup> MTCE, p. 67.

prophets foretold that out of this captivity a remnant of the house of Israel and house of Judah would return to the Promised Land and the elect would eternally dwell with Yahweh.<sup>11</sup> This return was symbolized by the Israelites regaining their “liberty” during the Jubilee year. The coming of the messiah during the latter days, at which time he will save Israel and Judah from their captivity and return them to their homeland, was, by extension, understood as occurring during one of these future Jubilee years.<sup>12</sup>

In either case, whether for an accurate Israelite chronology or for eschatological purposes, a precise knowledge of this ancient cycle is required. Therefore, we must take the utmost care in uncovering the true and original years of the Sabbath and Jubilee cycle.

## Four Systems

There are four possible Sabbath-cycle systems we must consider (see Charts A & B, the latter of which provides the names and equivalencies of the Hebrew months).<sup>13</sup> For simplification purposes, this study shall utilize the following labels for these four systems. Our “key” or “example” date will be the Sabbath year determined in each system that either lies with or nearest to the year that Jerusalem and Herod’s Temple (the Second Temple of Yahweh) were destroyed (the summer of 70 C.E.).<sup>14</sup>

**System “A”:** Abib (March/April)<sup>15</sup> 1, 70 C.E. until Abib 1, 71 C.E. The month of Abib was later called Nisan. System “A” is advocated by this study.

**System “B”:** Tishri (Sept./Oct.)<sup>16</sup> 1, 68 C.E. until Tishri 1, 69 C.E. The Zuckermann-Schürer system.

**System “C”:** Tishri 1, 69 C.E. until Tishri 1, 70 C.E. The Marcus-Wacholder theory.

**System “D”:** Abib 1, 69 C.E. until Abib 1, 70 C.E. A possibility based upon the evidence of an Abib 1 beginning for the year coupled with the claim of Rabbi Jose and some other Talmudic writers that the year (possibly part of the year) before the fall of Jerusalem was a Sabbath year.

Today the most popular of these theories is System “B.” Both Systems “B” and “C” arise from a late Jewish interpretation that makes the Sabbath year begin with Tishri 1.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Lev., 16:14–45; Deut., 29:10–30:20; Jer., 30:10–31:34; Ezek., 37:1–28; Hos., 1:1–3:5; Amos, 9:11–15; etc., cf. Acts, 1:1–7; Heb., 8:8–13.

<sup>12</sup> See the study in HUCA, 46, pp. 201–218.

<sup>13</sup> For Chart A, see above p. 4; for Chart B, see below p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> In our study the abbreviations C.E. (Common Era) and B.C.E. (Before Common Era), the scholarly, religiously neutral designations, shall be utilized rather than the corresponding A.D. and B.C.

<sup>15</sup> See Chart B. The Hebrew month generally begins during the latter part of the first or the early part of the second Gregorian (Julian, Roman) month-name mentioned as its equivalent.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Yet these two views differ as to application of the evidence regarding how the Sabbath year relates to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. The supporting documents they use begin with the Seder Olam (c.160 C.E.), the Mishnah (composed near the end of the 2nd century C.E.), and other Jewish writings made during the Talmudic period.

More precisely, the debate between Systems “B” and “C” arises from a difference of opinion regarding the phrase “it was the מוצאי (mutzai) of the Sabbatical year” when the Second Temple was destroyed. Those advocating System “B” argue that the term מוצאי (mutzai) should be interpreted to mean “immediately after,” i.e., the Temple was destroyed in the year “immediately after” the Sabbatical year (Tishri 1st reckoning). System “C,” on the other hand, understands the term מוצאי (mutzai) to mean that the destruction occurred at the “going-out” of the Sabbath year, i.e., in the last half of a Sabbath year (Tishri 1 reckoning). System “C” has been advocated since the time of the *Gemara* portion of the written Talmud,<sup>17</sup> but it has become the lesser sister to the more recently developed System “B.” Nevertheless, System “C” has again gained some popularity in recent years due to the work of Ralph Marcus and Ben Zion Wacholder.

System “B” fails in that its advocates incorrectly interpret the term מוצאי (mutzai) to mean “immediately after” rather than its correct rendering “at the going-out” of the Sabbath year.<sup>18</sup> It also uses the late Jewish interpretation that the Sabbath and Jubilee years begin with Tishri 1. They then anachronistically applied their new view to previous historical events. As we shall demonstrate throughout our investigation, this interpretation is not only late but completely wrong. Originally, the Sabbath and Jubilee years began in the spring with the month of Abib (later called Nisan).

System “C” takes into account that the year Jerusalem fell to the Romans (70 C.E.) was a Sabbath year, correctly understanding the term מוצאי (mutzai) to mean that the destruction of Jerusalem occurred during the “going-out” of the Sabbath year. Yet its advocates err in that they continued the late and, what we shall prove to be, false practice of reckoning the beginning of a Sabbath year from Tishri 1.

System “D” is merely a modified form of System “B” in that it incorrectly interprets the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. as occurring in the year “immediately after” the Sabbatical year. Yet it differs from System “B” in that it takes notice of the fact that the earlier Israelites actually began their Sabbath year in the spring with Abib and not in the autumn with Tishri 1.

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<sup>17</sup> For the purposes of our study, Talmudic times, which essentially represent Pharisaic traditions and interpretations of Scriptural laws, can be divided into three phases. First is the *halakoth* or oral laws period (mid-2nd century B.C.E. until the last years of the 2nd century C.E.). Second is the period when these oral laws were codified in written form. This event took place in about 200 C.E. with the composition of the *Mishnah*. It continued until about 500 C.E. with the *Gemara*, comments by the Rabbis on the *Mishnah*. The post-*Gemara* era is also called the post-Talmudic period. It represents the third phase of Talmudic times. Jewish scholars during this phase advocated the earlier codified Talmudic laws and traditions.

<sup>18</sup> See our discussion below in Chap. XXVIII.

System "A," on the other hand, is based upon the in-depth research into the ancient evidence provided in this study. In reality, System "A" has merely allowed the evidence to present its own case. Under the System "A" construct, the year in which the Second Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed was a Sabbath year based upon a Nisan 1 reckoning. With so much disruption and upheaval of the Jewish kingdom during the last half of the 1st century C.E. and the first half of the 2nd century C.E., many of the rabbis, beginning in the mid-2nd century C.E., lost touch with an accurate chronology of Israelite history. This loss of information was compounded by the adoption of the Greek year system by the rabbis, which began the year in the autumn with Tishri 1 rather than the spring. As a result, they incorrectly calculated the Sabbath year as beginning with Tishri 1 and then anachronistically applied their interpretation to previous historical events.

All three alternate Systems ("B," "C," and "D") are faced with important obstacles. Advocates of these various theories have often been forced to harshly criticize ancient records, such as provided by the books of Maccabees and Josephus, because the historical data is inconsistent with their present theories. Robert North, for example, takes Josephus to task by challenging his historical year as exhibiting "internal inconsistencies which invalidate their use for chronology." North concludes, "It should be abundantly clear that the sabbath year dates of Josephus are either palpably incommensurate, or else insolubly obscure."<sup>19</sup>

This study disagrees. It is not Josephus or any other pre-2nd century C.E. ancient report that is the source for the confusion. Indeed, we find them all remarkably accurate. Rather, it is the attempt to force these ancient records to conform with one of the three erroneous Sabbath-cycle theories, thereby creating an illusion of historical error. System "A" does not start from the premise of a prevalent theory, as the other three systems do. It is not built upon the interpretation of one or two historical events or an acceptance of a late Jewish tradition. Instead, it allows the evidence to build its own structure. The results of this method reveal that the ancient sources are in perfect harmony and reflect an entirely different Sabbath and Jubilee cycle than heretofore presented. As is to be expected, the fact that System "A" is a new and radical departure from the three alternate theories demands that it must submit in every detail to very close scrutiny. Yet there is no doubt that System "A" not only survives meticulous scrutiny but its solution is compelling.

As part of our **Preliminary Discussion** we shall review some major flaws in the Systems "B" and "C" chronologies. These observations will be followed by some initial comments with regard to the question about which month served as the beginning of the ancient Sabbath year during the post-exilic period. These two chapters will set the stage for other numerous proofs presented throughout which shall conclusively show that the 1st day of the Hebrew month of Abib (later called Nisan) was the true New Year date used

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<sup>19</sup> Biblica, 34.4, pp. 503, 511.

in Scriptures and was followed by the Judahites in the land of Judaea up and until the time of the Bar Kochba revolt (133–135 C.E.). The month of Abib, which began with the new moon whose cycle contained the first full moon after the spring equinox,<sup>20</sup> therefore, finds its beginning sometime during the Gregorian (Roman or Julian) month-name defined as either late March or early April.

With this preliminary discussion accomplished, we shall begin a detailed look at the evidence for the Sabbath and Jubilee years. This study has divided this examination into six Sections, each representing the evidence for a specific historical period.

In **Sections I** and **II** of our text, the records for a Sabbath year and a Jubilee year which occurred during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah shall be thoroughly discussed. It shall be demonstrated that the 15th and 16th years of the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah (701/700 and 700/699 B.C.E.,<sup>21</sup> Abib or spring reckoning) were respectively observed as a Sabbath year and a Jubilee year. The complexities of this evidence demand a full investigation of the conflict between the Assyrian king Sennacherib and the Judahite king Hezekiah, as well as the important involvement of the Kushite king named Tirhaqah. The results of this investigation will, in turn, lay the groundwork for what will prove to be the true and correct Sabbath and Jubilee cycle, which for our study has been dubbed System “A.” This conclusion will be amply supported by the remainder of our work.

In **Section III** we shall examine the records from the post-Hezekiah period. These documents shall reveal the observance of a Sabbath year (Abib reckoning) in the 9th year of King Zedekiah (589/588 B.C.E.); in the 8th year of the Persian king Artaxerxes I (456/455 B.C.E.); in the 150th Seleucid year (162/161 B.C.E.); in the 178th Seleucid year (134/133 B.C.E.); and, finally, in the year following the 5th consulship of Gaius Julius Caesar (43/42 B.C.E.).

In **Section IV** we shall delve into the evidence for two Sabbath years observed during the reign of King Herod of Judaea who reigned from 40–4 B.C.E. In these chapters we shall provide an in-depth examination of which year and month Herod conquered Jerusalem. This conquest is very important for our study since a Sabbath year came around at that time. Systems “B” and “C” both make their interpretations of this particular Sabbath year a good part of their respective arguments. The evidence from Herod’s 13th through 17th years shall add further definition as to which of the four possible Sabbath-cycle systems can plausibly work.

In **Section V** we shall deal with the evidence for the Sabbath years in the post-Herod period, extending up until the end of the First Revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. This investigation will include proof that there could not have been a Sabbath year in 40/41 C.E.—which will verify that System “B” (Zuckermann’s view) and System “D” are inaccurate. We

<sup>20</sup> See Chap. XXXI, pp. 409–412.

<sup>21</sup> See above n. 14.

shall also show proof of a Sabbath year in the 2nd year of Emperor Nero (56/57 C.E., Abib reckoning) and shall demonstrate that a Sabbath year could not have occurred in the winter of 68/69 C.E. (which again disproves Systems "B" and "D"). These records will reveal that the year Jerusalem fell to the Romans (i.e., 70/71 C.E., spring reckoning) was a Sabbath year.

In **Section VI** we shall analyze the evidence demonstrating a Sabbath year for 133/134 C.E., Abib reckoning, during the Bar Kochba revolt. In doing so, the references will demonstrate an upcoming Sabbath year in 140/141 C.E. The Sabbath year of 133/134 C.E., was the last official Sabbath year observed by the Judaeen state. With the traumatic defeat of the Jews by the Romans in the summer of 135 C.E., the practice of observing the Sabbath year was thereafter suppressed. It was abolished altogether as a requirement for Judaism by its leaders during the 3rd century C.E.

# CHART B

## MONTH EQUIVALENCY CHART

No. OF MONTH	KNOWN ANCIENT ISRAELITE MONTH-NAMES	JEWISH (BABYLONIAN-ASSYRIAN) MONTH-NAMES	EQUIVALENT MACEDONIAN MONTH-NAMES IN JOSEPHUS	APPROX. MODERN DAY EQUIVALENT
1ST	ABIB	NISAN (NISĀNU)	XANTHICUS (XANTHIKOS)	MARCH / APRIL
2ND	ZIU	IYYAR (AIARU)	ARTEMISIUS (ARTEMISIOS)	APRIL / MAY
3RD		SIWAN (SIMĀNU)	DAESIUS (DAISIOS)	MAY / JUNE
4TH		TAMMUZ (DUZU)	PANEMOS (PANEMUS)	JUNE / JULY
5TH	TSACH (?)	AB (ABU)	LOUS (LOOS)	JULY / AUG.
6TH		ELUL (ULULU)	GORPIAEUS (GORPIAIOS)	AUG. / SEPT.
7TH	ETHANIM	TISHRI (TASHRITU)	HYPERBERETAeus (HYPERBERETAIOS)	SEPT. / OCT.
8TH	BUL	MARHESHUAN (HESHUAN ARAHSAMNU)	DIUS (DIOS)	OCT. / NOV.
9TH		KHISLEU (KISLIMU)	APELLAIOS (APPELLAEUS)	NOV. / DEC.
10TH		TEBETH (TEBETU)	AUDYNAIOS (AUDYNEUS)	DEC. / JAN.
11TH		SHEBAT (SHABATU)	PERITIOS (PERITUS)	JAN. / FEB.
12TH		ADAR (ADDARU)	DYSTROS (DYSTRUS)	FEB. / MARCH

(13TH): EVERY FEW YEARS AN INTERCALARY MONTH WAS REQUIRED. THIS EXTRA MONTH WAS LABELED "BE-ADAR" OR THE "SECOND ADAR."