

Chapter II

The Tishri 1 New Year Question

The next issue we must contend with is the concept that the Jews, from the time of their return to Judaea from Babylon in 538 B.C.E. until the end of the Bar Kochba revolt (135 C.E.), officially began their sabbath years with Tishri (Sept./Oct.) 1 of the sixth year of the sabbath cycle, as had become their custom sometime after the Bar Kochba war. This view is held as gospel not only by those advocating system “B” but even by historians like Ralph Marcus and Zion Wacholder (system “C”).¹ This view, as we shall prove, is false.

The supposition that the sabbath year officially began with the first of Tishri arose as a Jewish Talmudic “interpretation” which had gained popularity among their chronographers during the second century C.E. As a preliminary to dispelling this error, the following facts must be considered.

The Seventh 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 seventh month of the preceding year.² The only time that the seventh month, later identified as Tishri, is mentioned in association with a sabbath year is in Leviticus, 25:8–13, and here it has only to do with the year of Jubilee. Furthermore, even in this passage from Leviticus it is specifically called “the seventh month,” not the first or the beginning of any year system. In fact, Scriptures specifically define the feast of the seventh month as occurring at “the going out of the year,” while events which happened during the spring are said to have taken place “at the return of the year.”³

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

And you shall count seven sabbaths of years, seven years seven times, and shall be to you the days of the seven sabbaths of years, forty-nine years. And you shall let sound a ram’s horn, a signal in the seventh

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

moon, on the tenth of the moon. On the Day of Atonement the ram's horn shall sound in all your land. AND YOU SHALL MAKE SACRED יָס (AYTH; THIS) YEAR, THE FIFTIETH 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 fiftieth 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. (Lev. 25:8ff)

This passage clearly states that 49 years had already been counted before one was to consider the seventh month, thereby placing the seventh month in the 50th year. Furthermore, the statement attaches to the duties of the seventh month the phrase, "and you shall make sacred this year, the 50th year, and you shall proclaim liberty in the land to all its dwellers." Also, on the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, a ram's horn or trumpet was to be sounded. The passage in no way implies that the trumpets were to be sounded because it announced the coming of the Jubilee, which would yet be six months off. Rather, it was to be sounded because one was in the seventh month of the Jubilee year and the nation was proclaiming "liberty." Further, the very fact that the seventh month is mentioned without a qualifying statement, such as, "being the first month of the sabbath year," demonstrates that this seventh month belongs to a year already in progress.

יֹבֵל (*Jubil*; Jubilee) literally means, "the *blast* of a horn (from its *continuous* sound)." ⁴ The year of Jubilee, therefore, is named from the fact that in that year the trumpet is blown. It would make no sense if the trumpet was blown in the middle of the 49th year, 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 *Jubil*; at that season debtors are absolved from their debts and slaves are set at liberty." ⁵ Philo adds clarification by noting that Yahweh "consecrated the whole of the 50th year." ⁶ 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 seventh month of the 49th year in the cycle is further manifested by the fact that many of the Talmudic Jews actually started this year not with the first day of the seventh month but with the tenth 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 first of Tishri? Surely (the New year for) Jubilees is on the tenth of Tishri, as it is written, On the day of Atonement shall you make proclamation with the horn." ⁷ 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.

⁴ SEC, Heb. #3104.

⁵ Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:12:3.

⁶ Philo, *Spec. Laws*, 2:22.

⁷ B. R.Sh., 8a.

The prophetic character attached to the year of Jubilee and the seventh month of that year further compels us to place the trumpet blowing of the seventh month within the 50th year. The seventh month, for example, brings with it the Feast of Trumpets on the first day, the Day of Atonement on the tenth, and the Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth to twenty-second days. These celebrations point towards the final atonement of man by his death, resurrection into the Judgment which follows,⁸ the final quickening of mankind into immortal beings, and the attainment of true liberty from sin after the Judgment. At that time the great inheritance of land will be parceled out to those attaining salvation. 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.⁹ The rightful time for “liberty” to be proclaimed, therefore, is within the seventh month of the Jubilee year.

The Tishri Year

The Talmudic doctrine that the month of Tishri in the sixth year of a sabbath cycle should officially begin the sabbath year is not proclaimed in any writings before the end of the second century C.E. Important works from the first century C.E. and prior, which delve heavily into this subject, never even imply such an arrangement. They hold that the month of Abib (Nisan) is always the first month in determining scriptural practices.¹⁰

Josephus (c. 90 C.E.) states that before the Exodus the Israelites in Egypt, following Egyptian practice, observed the month of Marheshuan, called Dios (Oct./Nov.)¹¹ in Greek, as the second month making the first month Tishri, yet with Moses it became the eighth month. “Moses,” he points out, “appointed Nisan, that is to say Xanthicus (March/April), as the first 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.”¹²

Notice that the month of Tishri, the seventh month, was the beginning of a year system practiced among the pagans in Egypt. We also know that the month of Tishri was used by the pagan Macedonians as the first month of their year. Yahweh changed this system for the Israelites just before their famous Exodus out of Egypt during the month of Abib, 1439 B.C.E.¹³

Josephus, living in the latter part of the first century C.E., points out that even in his day, writing some 20 years after the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, “the ancient order,” which began with Tishri, was only “for selling and buying and other ORDINARY AFFAIRS.” Since the sabbath year is part of divine worship, and in no way is to be construed as in the category of

⁸ Cf. Heb., 9:27; Rev., 20:11–15.

⁹ Lev., 25:11–17.

¹⁰ E.g. Jub., 49:1–10, 50:1–4; Philo, *Spec. Laws*, 1:35(180–189), 2:17–23(71–119); Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:1–6, 3:8:4; a first century Jewish omen text (JNES, 48, pp. 201–214) and the Meg. Taan. (JQR, 10, pp. 237–243).

¹¹ For the equivalency between the Greek, Hebrew, and Roman months see Chart G.

¹² Jos., *Antiq.*, 1:3:3.

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

“ordinary affairs,” Josephus is here understood to mean that the sacred year was required to begin with the month of Nisan (Abib), roughly our April. His comment also reveals the seed for the later view of the Talmudic Jews, the transition from the 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 year began in the spring and that Moses “proclaimed a rest for the land and made the husbandman stay his work δι’ (di; after completing) six years.”¹⁴ He does not say “from the latter part of the sixth year” but “after completing six years.”

From the First Revolt (66–70 C.E.) against Rome, continuing through the Bar Kochba revolt (133–135 C.E.), the records show that the Jewish year was still reckoned from Nisan and not Tishri.¹⁵ As we shall later see, the sabbath year was still determined in this period by this same Nisan method.¹⁶

The first time that we notice the reckoning of a sabbath year as officially beginning with the month of Tishri in the year prior to the seventh year is from a passage in the Mishnah (about 200 C.E.):

There are four ‘New Year’ days: on the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings and feasts; on the first of Elul is the New Year for the Tithe of cattle (Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Simeon say: the first of Tishri); on the first of Tishri is the New Year for [the reckoning of] the years [of foreign eras], the Years of Release and Jubilee years, for the planting [of trees] and for vegetables; and the first of Shebat is the New Year for [fruit-]trees (so the School of Shammai; and the School of Hillel say: on the 15th thereof).¹⁷

This claim of four New Year days in one year is not substantiated in Scriptures, which proclaims only one New Year’s day, the first of Abib (Nisan).¹⁸ It is also important to notice that even in the Mishnah the first of Nisan was the New Year for “(Israelite) kings and feasts.” Tishri was used for “the years (of foreign eras).”¹⁹ There can be little doubt that the foreign era referred to means the Macedonian Seleucid era, which began its year with Hyperberetaeus (Sept./Oct.). Yet it was an era used by foreign peoples, not an early Israelite (i.e. from the time of Moses) or scriptural calendar system.

An important Talmudic work called *Abodah Zarah* confirms that the beginning month for the year had indeed been changed and that it now differed from the days when the Jews had their own kings. 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

¹⁴ Philo, *Spec. Laws*, 1:35, par. 180ff, 2:21, par. 104.

¹⁵ IeJ, 21, pp. 40f and n. 11.

¹⁶ See Chaps. XXVI–XXIX.

¹⁷ R.Sh., 1:1.

¹⁸ Exod., 12:1–19, 13:4, 23:15, 34:18; Deut., 15:1.

¹⁹ Danby, *Mishnah*, p. 188, n. 7; cf. Gitt., 8:5.

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.²⁰

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 has been previously noted, the Scriptures never claim that the seventh month began a regular 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,”²¹ merely extended their misreading 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 (*Antiq.*, 4:8:12) and the Mishnah (Sotah, 7:8). Deuteronomy commands that, “יְקַרְא (in the last part)²² of the seven years,” there would be a public reading of the Torah, “in the appointed time of the year of the shemithah (sabbath year),²³ in the feast of Tabernacles (i.e. in the seventh month).” Josephus (late first century C.E.) proves that this was still the understanding in his time. The Sotah (200 C.E.), meanwhile, contradicts it, making this public reading occur at the beginning of the eighth year.

Further, there is no record of Tishri as the official beginning of the sabbath year until some 65 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 (fall) New Year date was influenced by the dominance of foreigners and pagans in Jerusalem and Judaea after the overthrow of the Bar Kochba revolt, and the decrees and ordinances established by Hadrian thereafter. These foreigners utilized the Macedonian version of the Seleucid era, which began the year in Hyperberetaeus (Sept./Oct.; Tishri). The Seder Olam, for example, states, “And in the Exile they write in documents according to the reckoning of the Greeks (i.e. Seleucid Era).”²⁴ 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.

A further indication that the sabbath and Jubilee years, up until the Bar Kochba revolt, continued among the Judaeans to begin with the month of Abib (Nisan) can be drawn from these facts. It is inconceivable, for example, that the Jews of the late sixth century B.C.E., having left their Babylonian exile

²⁰ B. A.Zar., 10a.

²¹ Ab., 1:1–5, e.g., 3:1–4.

²² HEL, p. 234, יְקַרְא, “from the end” or “at the end,” meaning *in the last part* of something.

²³ That the shemithah is the sabbath year see below Chap. XI, p. 159, ns. 2, 3.

²⁴ S.O., 30.

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 faithful 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.²⁵ When a portion of the Jews returned from their Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C.E., this older generation was available for guidance.

In the mid-fifth 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) settled in Judaea. The devout prophets of Yahweh named Haggai and Zechariah, among others, also lived 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.²⁶ That they continued to keep the sabbath year 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 first century B.C.E.²⁷

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, that were later to be codified in the Mishnah. 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 tradition. 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 power over Judaea.²⁸

At the time of King Herod, 37–4 B.C.E., the legitimate line of Hasmonaean high priests was removed and in their place Herod set up “some insignificant persons who were merely of priestly descent.”²⁹ This degenerated priesthood, combined with the rise of the scribes as a religious power (who brought into being the Pharisee sect and the Talmudic traditions), 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 (whose name is often translated into English as “Jesus Christ”) as actually being opposed to sound scriptural doctrine.³⁰ It was by these lower ranked, “insignificant” priests and the new

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Neh., 10:31.

²⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:8:5–6, 14:10:5–6.

²⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:10:5, 13:16:1–3, *Wars*, 1:5:2.

²⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:16:4, 20:10:5.

³⁰ E.g. Matt., 15:1–9; Mark, 7:1–13; Col., 2:8; 1 Pet., 1:18.

scribe class that Yahushua the messiah was wrongfully tried and executed.

Josephus refers to a Judaeen high priest of the first century C.E., named Ananus, as “rash in his temper and unusually daring” and tells of his conspiracy to kill Jacob (James) the brother of the messiah, Yahushua.³¹ The servants of a subsequent priest named 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.”³²

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 (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.”³³ Yet their perception of this “gradual shifting,” at least for the sabbath years, assumes that it occurred shortly after the return of the exiles in 538 B.C.E. In turn, this view leads them to interpret passages from the book 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 Mishnah (about 200 C.E.) do we find this interpretation, and historians admit that this late text does not prove ancient practice.³⁴

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 died, 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, while the Zealots and other extremists had come to power, yet not truly fashionable until 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 a winter planting season in Judaea, which had need of harvesting in the spring and summer. It was much more

³¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 20:9:1.

³² Jos., *Antiq.*, 20:9:1–2.

³³ HUCA, 44, p. 155.

³⁴ See CKII, p. 70; and OOGA, pp. 439, 454f; MNHK, p. 51.

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 to reinterpret Leviticus, 25:9, to mean that the seventh month of the 49th year of the Jubilee cycle represented the beginning of the year of Jubilee, and by extension the seventh month of every sixth year of the sabbath cycle represented the start of the sabbath 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 sixth 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-second 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 sixth year of the cycle in an effort to protect the sabbath year. It was believed that, by prohibiting harvesting and sowing in the months just before the sabbath year had actually begun, they could prevent people from inadvertently crossing over the time line and defiling the sabbath year. The few months prior to the sabbath year, therefore, conformed with the practices of the oncoming sabbath year. The later Talmudic Jews (second 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 seventh year, the sabbath year, with Abib (Nisan) 1. 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 came under even heavier influence of foreign kings and cultures utilizing a year reckoned from the fall. This transition was further facilitated by the preservation of a Tishri year among the Jews themselves. Josephus poignantly reminds us that a Tishri year was still used during the first century C.E. for things not related to divine worship, such as “selling and buying and other ordinary things.” The agricultural season was also an influence.

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 Talmudic interpretation and more recent theory. In turn, important items of evidence from the pre-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 Talmudic writers really did agree with the more ancient records but that their works have been misunderstood (Wacholder, system “C”).