

Section II

The Post-Exile Period

Chapter XI

The Sabbath Year of 456/455 B.C.E.

The next datable sabbath year is overlooked by almost everyone dealing with the subject. In Nehemiah, 7:73–8:18, we find the story of how Ezra, the priest and scribe of Yahweh, during the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh Israelite month, “day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read aloud in the book of the laws of the eloahim; and they kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth (day) was the assembly, as from the judgment.”¹ This passage takes on important significance once we consider it in context with the commandment recorded in Deuteronomy:

In the last part of the seven years, in the appointed time of the YEAR OF שְׁמִטָּה (RELEASE),² in the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes in to see the face of Yahweh your eloahi in the place which he chooses, you shall proclaim this Torah before all Israel in their ears. Assemble the people, men and women and the little ones, and the aliens who are within your gates, so that they may hear and so that they may learn, and may respect Yahweh your eloahi, and be careful to do all the words of this Torah.³

Ezra and the Levite priests performed this duty just as prescribed by the judgment of the Torah (Law). The book of Nehemiah informs us that the people of Judah began by gathering “themselves together as one man before the Water Gate” and requested that Ezra “bring the book of the laws of Moses.” Ezra then read the Torah “before the assembly, from men and to women, and all having sense for the hearing, on the first day of the seventh month.” He “read aloud” the Torah from a pulpit in the street.⁴

Afterwards, the Levite priests continued the teaching, “and they gave the sense and caused (them) to understand the reading.”⁵ The next day Ezra taught the chief of the fathers of all the people and the Levites so that they also could correctly “understand the words of the Torah.”⁶ Ezra’s teaching

¹ Neh., 8:18.

² The Hebrew term שְׁמִטָּה (shemitah) means, “remission (of debt) or suspension of (labor),” “release, acquittal” (SEC, Heb. #8059; HEL, p. 270). This release is ordained in the seventh year of the sabbath cycle and is thereby equated with the sabbath year itself (see below n. 3).

³ Deut., 31:10–13; cf. Jos., *Antiq.*, 4:8:12; Deut., 15:1–9.

⁴ Neh., 8:2–4.

⁵ Neh., 8:8.

⁶ Neh., 8:13.

was continued “day by day” throughout the entire Feast of Tabernacles,⁷ as prescribed by the Law for the “year of release” (i.e. the sabbath year).

Dating this particular sabbath year is a bit tricky, which is probably the main reason no one has yet dared to accomplish the task. Nevertheless, it is datable (and easily so once all the available data is considered). We begin to piece the evidence together when we compare the different ancient accounts reporting Ezra’s arrival and subsequent reading of the Torah to the people. This reading took place during the reign of the Persian monarch אַרְתַּחְשַׁשְׁתָּא (Arthkhshastha), called by the Greeks “Arta-xerxes (I) Longimanus.”⁸ Our main sources are the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Josephus, and 1 Esdras.

The Versions of Josephus and 1 Esdras

The key to these events is found with Josephus and 1 Esdras. According to Josephus and 1 Esdras, Ezra set out from Babylonia and the Euphrates river to go to Jerusalem “on the twelfth day of the first month in the seventh year of the reign of Xerxes (Arta-xerxes) and arrived at Jerusalem in the fifth month of the same year.”⁹

A little while after arriving at the city, the issue of the numerous marriages between Jews and alien (i.e. pagan) women was brought to Ezra’s attention. After praying about this situation, Ezra called a meeting of the elders, which was held “on the twentieth day of the ninth month.”¹⁰

Upon hearing Ezra’s condemnation of these marriages, the elders agreed to solve the problem. They needed time, however, for the numbers of these marriages were great “and it was the wintry season of the year.”¹¹ They resolved that they would begin to search and examine all such marriages “on the new moon of the tenth month” and that they would continue their inquiry until the new moon of a month to follow.”¹² According to Ezra’s own account, and that of 1 Esdras, this following month was the “first day of the first month” of the next year.¹³ Therefore, we have now reached the eighth year of Arta-xerxes. After this problem was rectified, Josephus continues:

In the seventh month they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles and, when almost all the people had gathered for it, they went up to the open court of the Temple near the gate, which faced east, and asked Ezra to read to them the laws of Moses. So he stood in the midst of the multitude and read them, talking from early morning until noon.¹⁴

⁷ Neh., 8:18.

⁸ That Arthkhshastha is Arta-xerxes (I) Longimanus is confirmed by the Greek text of the LXX, which translates the Heb. name Arthkhshastha as Arta-xerxes in Neh., Ezra, and 1 Esdras. Eusebius comments under the name “Arta-xerxes, who is also called Longimanus,” that it was during his reign that Ezra and Nehemiah brought out the Hebrews (Eusebius, *Chron.*, 1, p. 69; also see Jerome’s version in DCDH, pp. 110f). For a discussion see DECJ; also see NBD, p. 89.

⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:2; cf. 1 Esdras, 8:6, 61. Josephus uses the short form “Xerxes” for Arta-xerxes but clearly distinguishes him from Arta-xerxes (II) Mnemon (404–359 B.C.E.), see Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:7:1.

¹⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:2–4; 1 Esdras, 9:5. Also see Chap. XVIII, p. 240, n. 17.

¹¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:4; 1 Esdras, 9:6–13.

¹² Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:4; cf. 1 Esdras, 9:16f.

¹³ Ezra, 10:16–17; 1 Esdras, 9:17.

¹⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:5.

1 Esdras gives the same sequence of events as Josephus. After mentioning the removal of foreign wives on “the first day of the tenth month,”¹⁵ 1 Esdras adds:

And the priests and Levites, and they that were of Israel, dwelt in Jerusalem, and in the country, on the first day of the seventh month: so the children of Israel were in their habitations.¹⁶

The text then continues by noting that it was at this time that Ezra began to read the Torah to the multitude from the broad court before the sacred porch.¹⁷

Josephus and 1 Esdras make it clear that Ezra arrived in the fifth month of the seventh year of Xerxes (Arta-xerxes) and that the events of the ninth month and following were themselves succeeded by the reading of the Law in the seventh month of the next year, being the eighth year of Arta-xerxes.

Ezra’s Version

The book of Ezra reports much the same thing as Josephus. It states that Ezra left Babylon “in the seventh year of Arta-xerxes the king. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For on the first (day) of the first month he began to go up from Babylon, and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem.”¹⁸

After discussing details about who came with him and what items were brought, Ezra adds:

And we departed from the river of Ahaua on the twelfth of the first month to go (to) Jerusalem. (Ezra, 8:31)

Josephus and 1 Esdras, as already noticed, agree with this date of departure from Babylon.¹⁹ When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, he offered sacrifices and turned over various items for the Temple. “And at the end of these things, the leaders came near” and advised Ezra of the problem with the numerous marriages between Jews and aliens (i.e. those of alien religions).²⁰ Ezra then prayed about the matter, after which he requested a meeting of the council of the elders in three days.²¹ On the ninth month, the twentieth day, during a “heavy rain,” the elders met and agreed with Ezra, resolving to solve this problem.²²

These people sat down and began judging these cases “on the first day of the tenth month” and finished their workload “by the first day of the first month.”²³ When we arrive at the first month, the new year had begun, being the eighth year of King Arta-xerxes.

¹⁵ 1 Esdras, 9:16–36.

¹⁶ 1 Esdras, 9:37.

¹⁷ 1 Esdras, 9:38–53.

¹⁸ Ezra, 7:7–9.

¹⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:2; 1 Esdras, 8:6.

²⁰ Ezra, 9:1–15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10:8.

²² *Ibid.*, 10:9–15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10:16–17.

At this point the account in Ezra leaves off. Yet, as Josephus and 1 Esdras show us, this new year was the one in which Ezra publicly read the Law at the Feast of Tabernacles, indicating that this year was a year of release. One of the motives of Ezra and the Jewish elders would seem to be, therefore, the resolution of the problem of wives practicing pagan religions BEFORE the beginning of a sacred sabbath year. Indeed, based upon the Jubilee of Hezekiah's sixteenth year (700/699 B.C.E.), the ninth year of Artaxerxes (455/454 B.C.E.) would also be a Jubilee year. The arrival of this Jubilee year would have raised even more concerns over religious issues for the devout Jews.

Nehemiah's Version

We pick up the story of Ezra in the book of Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah compliments Ezra, Josephus, and 1 Esdras by beginning where the book of Ezra leaves off. What has puzzled historians about this version is that Nehemiah places the events surrounding Ezra's reading of the Law in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes rather than his eighth. This puzzle shall be solved as we proceed.

In this version of the story, Nehemiah, the cup-bearer of King Artaxerxes, hears of the desperate need for repair of the walls of Jerusalem. The news came to him in the month of Khisleu (Nov./Dec.).²⁴ Later on, Nehemiah writes, "in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king," he, for the first time, appeared sad before the king while serving the wine.²⁵ When questioned why Nehemiah was so troubled, Nehemiah told Artaxerxes of the need for the repairs to Jerusalem. As a result, the king gave letters to Nehemiah ordering the neighboring regions to assist in this rebuilding effort and sent Nehemiah to the Holy City.²⁶

At this time, Nehemiah was also made governor of Judaea, as he confirms when he writes:

And from the time I was chosen to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year and until the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes—twelve years—I and my brothers did not eat the bread of the governor. (Neh., 5:14)

Josephus notes that Nehemiah was sent on his expedition to Judaea by the Persian monarch on the very next day.²⁷ This detail accords with the other known facts, since it took nearly four months to make the journey from nearby Babylon,²⁸ and according to Nehemiah, the walls were subsequently repaired in 52 days, being finished on the twenty-fifth of Elul (Aug./Sept.), the sixth month of that year.²⁹

²⁴ Neh., 1:1–11. See Chart G.

²⁵ Neh., 2:1.

²⁶ Neh., 2:2–8.

²⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:7.

²⁸ Ezra, 8:31.

²⁹ Neh., 6:15. See Chart G.

Important to our investigation is what is said to have happened next. After the wall was built, the doors set up, the gatekeepers and singers and Levites chosen, and Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, was placed as ruler over the palace at Jerusalem, Nehemiah found the registry of genealogy of those who had returned from the Babylonian exile and who had resettled in Jerusalem. From this registry he counted the people.³⁰

At this time contributions were made by the Jews to support the Temple:³¹

So the priests, and the Levites, and the gatekeepers, and the singers, and [some] of the people, and the temple-slaves, and all the Israelites (Jews of Judaea) lived in their cities. AND WHEN THE SEVENTH MONTH CAME, THE SONS OF ISRAEL WERE IN THEIR CITIES. (Neh., 7:73)

As a result, we have now arrived at the seventh month of the twentieth year of Arta-xerxes. It was at this moment, we are told, when all the people had gathered themselves together, that Ezra read aloud to them the Law, "day by day (of the Feast of Tabernacles), from the first day until the last day, he read in the book of the Law of the eloahim."³² This evidence conclusively shows that Ezra read the Law in the seventh month of the twentieth year of Arta-xerxes.

The book of Nehemiah has caused much consternation and confusion because it dates Ezra's reading of the Law to the twentieth year of King Arta-xerxes (amenable to system "B" if the accession-year method is used). Yet, according to Josephus and 1 Esdras (cf. Ezra), Ezra's reading should have taken place in Arta-xerxes' eighth year, not his twentieth. Seeing no way out of the dilemma, historians throw their hands into the air and forget the entire proposition. Yet there is no contradiction. The eighth year of Arta-xerxes was simply the same as his twentieth year. The entire problem is easily rectified once we take into consideration the particular details and the history of this period. In doing so we must deal with the accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah separately, each man within his own context.

The Reckoning of Ezra

To understand the reckoning of Ezra we must first consider his circumstance. Ezra was a Jew among the exiles living in Babylon.³³ The Babylonians used the regnal year (or accession-year) system, i.e. the first year was counted not from the time the king came to the throne but from the first day of the first month of Nisan (March/April) after he began ruling.³⁴ The period from when the king mounted the throne until the first of Nisan was the king's "accession year." That time was not officially accredited to the new king because it was already allotted to the king who preceded him.

³⁰ Neh., 7:1-69.

³¹ Neh., 7:70-72.

³² Neh., 8:18.

³³ Ezra, 7:1-10.

³⁴ HBC, pp. 85ff; MNHK, p. 43; CAW, p. 7.

Xerxes the Great, the father of Artaxerxes, was murdered on December 16, 465 B.C.E. by a usurper named Artabanus.³⁵ In this insurrection Artaxerxes barely escaped with his life. Artabanus, we are told, subsequently enjoyed the throne of Persia for seven months.³⁶ This detail means that Artabanus ruled from December 17, 465 to about June, 464 B.C.E. This fact is confirmed by archaeological evidence which shows that Artaxerxes began to reign on or about June 12, 464 B.C.E.³⁷ Therefore, Artabanus would be considered king of Babylon, then under the power of Persia, for the year 464 B.C.E., having held the throne on the first of Nisan of that year. In June of 464 B.C.E., Artaxerxes defeated Artabanus and regained the throne of the Persian empire for himself. On the first of Nisan in the year 463 B.C.E., Artaxerxes would have been officially recognized as king of Babylon.

This evidence shows that under the Babylonian reckoning, with which Ezra was familiar and had been living under, Artaxerxes' first year began on the first of Nisan, 463 B.C.E. As such, his seventh year was 457 B.C.E., the year Ezra arrived at Jerusalem; the eighth year, the sabbath year, began with Nisan 1, of 456 B.C.E. This date is correct and matches the cycle established in the records dealing with Hezekiah's fifteenth year.

The Reckoning of Nehemiah

Nehemiah's situation was far different from that of Ezra. To begin with, Nehemiah was the cup-bearer of King Artaxerxes and lived, not in Babylon, but in Shushan (Susan, Susa), the capital of Persia.³⁸ In calculating Artaxerxes' reign, Nehemiah would have used an entirely different interpretation.

According to ancient records, Artaxerxes ruled as co-regent with his father, Xerxes the Great, for a number of years. To demonstrate, in Greek histories we read about their famous general named Themistocles. During the Persian invasion by Xerxes the Great in 480 B.C.E., Themistocles forced the Greeks to make a stand at Salamis and fight it out with the Persian fleet. A few years later Themistocles fell into disrepute among his countrymen and was ostracized. In fear for his life he fled to Asia Minor.³⁹ At that time Themistocles made contact with the Persian king seeking political asylum.

What has confused later historians is the fact that two different versions of this contact with the Persian king are given. Plutarch writes:

Now Thucydides and Charon of Lampsacus relate that Xerxes was dead, and that it was his son Artaxerxes with whom Themistocles had his interview; but Ephorus and Dinon and Clitarchus and Heracleides and yet more besides have it that it was Xerxes to whom he came. With the chronological data Thucydides seems to me more in accord, although these are by no means securely established.⁴⁰

³⁵ Diodorus, 11:69.

³⁶ E.g. Hiero. Codices, pp. 28f; Manetho, frag. 70; etc.

³⁷ BC, p. 15. No record of an acc. year is found for Artaxerxes I in either Persia or Babylonia, only in south Egypt at Assuan (dated XI/18 = Jan. 3) where Artabanus was not recognized.

³⁸ Neh., 1:1; Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:6.

³⁹ Diodorus, 11:55–56.

⁴⁰ Plutarch, *Them.*, 27.

Nepos, the first century B.C.E. Roman historian, supports Thucydides in this dispute, writing:

I know that most historians have related that Themistocles went over into Asia in the reign of Xerxes, but I give credence to Thucydides in preference to others, because he, of all who have left records of that period, was nearest in point of time to Themistocles, and was of the same city. Thucydides says that he went to Arta-xerxes.⁴¹

This confusion is easily resolved once we recognize that both Xerxes the Great and his son Arta-xerxes shared the throne of Persia, or more precisely, Arta-xerxes was co-regent. When Themistocles made contact he did so with both kings.

Themistocles arrived in Asia Minor in 473 B.C.E. Diodorus, for example, who reports that Themistocles was granted an interview with Xerxes, refers to the death of this Greek general as part of his discussions about events of the year 471 B.C.E.⁴² Prior to his death, Themistocles enjoyed a period of friendship with the Persian king. Yet before this friendship began the Greek general had to face opposition among certain nobles in Persia. Faced with this opposition, the king of Persia granted Themistocles “one year” to prepare for the trial, during which time Themistocles learned the Persian language in an effort to personally defend himself. At the trial Themistocles was acquitted and became friends with the monarch.⁴³ He then “came to the king,” i.e. visited Persia, as an advisor.⁴⁴

Adding to this information is a notation found in Jerome’s edition of the *Chronicon* of Eusebius. Under the first year of the 77th Olympiad, being the 14th year of King Xerxes the Great (i.e. 472 B.C.E.), it states, “*Themistocles in Persas fugit* (Themistocles was a fugitive in Persia).”⁴⁵ Themistocles did not leave Asia Minor for his visit to Persia until after his trial. Counting one year back for his trial preparation brings us to 473 B.C.E., the year for his arrival in Asia Minor. Those writers who held records reporting that this contact was made with Arta-xerxes, therefore, have merely assumed that Xerxes the Great had died. In reality, Xerxes the Great did not die until 465 B.C.E.

Thucydides importantly notes that when Themistocles came to Asia Minor, “he sent a letter to King Arta-xerxes, son of Xerxes, who had lately come to the throne.”⁴⁶ This notice places Arta-xerxes on the throne of Persia not long before 473 B.C.E., which was already a full nine years before he recovered the throne from the usurper Artabanus. Since his father Xerxes the Great was not slain until December, 465 B.C.E., the evidence concludes that Arta-xerxes had ruled as co-regent with his father for at least eleven years.

⁴¹ Nepos, *Them.*, 9.

⁴² Diodorus, 11:58, cf. 11:54–59.

⁴³ Diodorus, 11:57; Thucydides, 1:138; Plutarch, *Them.*, 29.

⁴⁴ Thucydides, 1:138.

⁴⁵ DCDH, p. 109 (191F:20).

⁴⁶ Thucydides, 1:137.

Our arrangement would prove that his first regnal year as co-regent would have been in 475 B.C.E., which accords with the statement in Thucydides.

Confirmation of the date 475 B.C.E. for the first regnal year of Arta-xerxes on the Persian throne is also found in the records of Nehemiah. In Nehemiah we read the otherwise mystifying statement:

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month of Khisleu in the twentieth year, and I was in the palace at Shushan (etc.). (Neh., 1:1)

The chapter goes on to tell of how Nehemiah received the report of the desperate condition of the city of Jerusalem and how the Jews living in Judaea were under great afflictions. The question stands, “The twentieth year of what?” It cannot mean the twentieth regnal year of Arta-xerxes, for a little later on, AFTER Nehemiah had already received this dire report about the Jews, we read the following:

And it happened, in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of Arta-xerxes, that wine was before him. And I took the wine and gave to the king. And I had never been sad in his presence. And the king said to me, “Why is your face so sad, since you are not sick.” (Neh., 2:1)

The story goes on to tell how Nehemiah related to the king the desperate conditions of the Jews in Judaea and how the king granted him leave to go to them. The Persians, like the Babylonians and Jews, counted their year from the month of Nisan. Therefore, the month of Khisleu (the ninth month of the year) in the twentieth year, when Nehemiah first heard of the problems in Jerusalem, was not the same as the twentieth year during which Arta-xerxes questioned Nehemiah in the month of Nisan (the first month).

Meanwhile, Nehemiah, following Persian custom, counted years by the accession-year system (see for example Nehemiah’s statement about his own rule as governor over Judaea, “from the twentieth year and until the thirty-second year of Arta-xerxes the king—twelve years,”⁴⁷ where thirteen years of rule are indicated but only twelve regnal years claimed).

Therefore, when at the beginning of his book Nehemiah makes mention of “the month of Khisleu (the ninth month), in the twentieth year,” he was making reference not to the king’s reign but his own service in the palace. Twenty years ago would be equal to Arta-xerxes accession year. As a result, the subsequent events which happened “in the month of Nisan (the first month), in the twentieth year of Arta-xerxes the king” refer to the twentieth regnal year of the king, counted from the year after his accession year.

⁴⁷ Neh., 5:14. That the Persians of this period used the accession-year method see BC, pp. 6–17; JNES, 13, pp. 4–20.

The Reckoning of Josephus

In the story of Nehemiah, as given by Josephus, we have yet another set of numbers. Specifically, Josephus makes Nehemiah leave Persia in the twenty-fifth year of Xerxes (Arta-xerxes).⁴⁸ As Ralph Marcus, in his translation of Josephus, correctly comments:

Josephus' account of Nehemiah's history differs in so many details from the Scriptures that most scholars assume, with some reason, that he had before him a text differing considerably from the extant Heb. and Gr. texts.⁴⁹

A different text, nevertheless, does not mean that the figures of Josephus are in error or corrupt. With our reconstruction of the chronology from Ezra and Nehemiah, we find that Josephus' source makes perfect sense. The twenty-fifth year of Arta-xerxes is indeed equivalent to his twentieth year.

Counting back five years from 475 B.C.E., when Arta-xerxes began his official reign, we reach the year 480 B.C.E. This was the year that Xerxes the Great set out on his famous expedition against Greece. It would be quite natural for Xerxes the Great to somehow associate his son with the throne at this important occasion. If Xerxes would have been killed during his campaign, the association of his son with the throne would have assured a proper transfer of power. The usual procedure was to give the heir a realm of his own within the kingdom and to designate him as heir apparent. Later on, in 476 B.C.E., Arta-xerxes was made co-regent—476 B.C.E. being the year of his accession.

The Opposing Views

Though this investigation would seem to have correctly uncovered the dating systems used by Ezra and Nehemiah, those who adhere to systems "B," "C," and "D" will still assert exceptions. Systems "C" and "D" will simply claim that Ezra's dating for Arta-xerxes should begin, not with his first regnal year in 463 B.C.E., but with his accession year in 464 B.C.E. System "B" will insist that some of the evidence should be dismissed as errors or mistakes. They will accept only the evidence that dates Ezra's reading of the Torah to the twentieth year of Arta-xerxes I.

All three of these theories face severe difficulties. Systems "B" and "C," for example, have no contemporary evidence whatsoever which would demonstrate the use of a Tishri year by the Jews during this early period. Indeed, the relevant Jewish records from Judaea actually confirm a Nisan (Abib) year.⁵⁰ Furthermore, as we have previously shown, every source prior to the mid-second century C.E. declares only a Nisan (Abib) year in official use by the Jews of Judaea.

System "B" and "D," meanwhile, are also faced with the difficulty that their sabbath cycle calculations will not work for the sabbath year occurring at the time of Sennacherib's third campaign. If it will not work for that period how can it work in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah?

⁴⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:6–7.

⁴⁹ Marcus, *Jos.*, vi, p. 390, n. f, and also see pp. 400f, n. b.

⁵⁰ E.g. Zech., 1:7, 7:1; Esther, 2:16, 3:7, 8:12; and see below n. 51; cf. Chart G.

The view espoused by the advocates of systems “C” and “D,” that the records dealing with the dates for Artaxerxes I should be understood by the nonaccession-year system, is also without support. In fact, it is much more plausible that Ezra, a Babylonian Jew, would have used the Babylonian accession-year system. In turn, use of the accession-year system for Artaxerxes results in a precise fit for the calculations of the sabbath and Jubilee cycle established in the records dealing with the destruction of Sennacherib’s army at Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. (Chart B).

System “B” has several other problems as well. It is true that—if we ignore any co-regency of the Persian monarchs, disregard the evidence that Ezra read the Torah in Artaxerxes’ eighth year, but use the accession-year system—the 20th year of Artaxerxes (Abib reckoning) would overlap with the first part of a sabbath year as determined by system “B” (i.e. 444/443 B.C.E., Tishri reckoning). Yet, even if we did set aside the evidence, both for a co-regency of the Persian kings and for Ezra’s reading of the Torah in Artaxerxes’ eighth year, we are still faced with the fact that all of our sources declare that Ezra publicly read the Torah during the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month.⁵¹ Not one of these writers qualifies his statement by indicating that this seventh month was the beginning of any Jewish year system. The numbering of this month, therefore, proves that the year was determined by the Abib (Nisan) reckoning and not by a Tishri reckoning—as would be required if either system “B” or “C” are to work.

Conclusion

Simply put, Nehemiah’s reference point for King Artaxerxes was a Persian one. It started from the time when this king began to reign as co-regent with his father, Xerxes the Great—a term of office for which Nehemiah had served as cup-bearer from the accession year. The short interlude during the usurpation by Artabanus would not play any role in this calculation.

Ezra, on the other hand, came from Babylon. At Babylon the accession-year system was utilized and only one king at a time was recognized. At first, this honor would belong to Xerxes the Great until his death in 465 B.C.E. Next it would go to Artabanus, who was in control of the empire on Nisan 1, 464 B.C.E.; and finally to Artaxerxes I who retook the throne in June of 464 B.C.E. Artaxerxes I would have been recognized on the first of Nisan, 463 B.C.E., when for the first time he actually “took the hand of Bel” and ruled as sole monarch.

As a result, the book of Nehemiah places Ezra’s public reading of the Law during the Feast of Tabernacles, thereby signifying a sabbath year, in the seventh month of the twentieth Persian year of Artaxerxes I, while Josephus, 1 Esdras, and the book of Ezra place it in his eighth Babylonian year. Nevertheless, both dates represent the same year, 456/455 B.C.E. The next year, 455/454 B.C.E., was a Jubilee. As we proceed with the evidence for subsequent sabbath years, it will become quite apparent that these above dates are correct and represent the original sabbath and Jubilee cycle.

⁵¹ Neh., 7:73–8:18; LXX Neh., 7:73–8:18; Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:5; 1 Esdras, 9:37–53.