Chapter XX
The 27 Years

*Part V of the Sabbath
Year of 36/35 B.C.E.*

It is often argued that Josephus made a gross error when he stated that Herod conquered Jerusalem "on the very same day" as Pompey "27 years later."[1] Ralph Marcus, for example, tries to correct Josephus by saying that this period was actually, "More nearly 26 years."[2] Yet, it can be proven that Josephus was correct, and in doing so the month that Herod conquered Jerusalem becomes even more firmly established.

Dating the 27 Years

Josephus dates the fall of Jerusalem into Herod's hands in the consul year of Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus (i.e. 37 B.C.E., Jan. 1, Late Roman Reckoning, or 37/36 B.C.E., March 1, Early Roman Reckoning). The tenth day of the Hebrew month of Tebeth in the year 37/36 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning, meanwhile, fell on January 2, 36 B.C.E. But since, as we have already demonstrated, Josephus uses the March 1 consul system, this date is easily accounted for as part of the consul year of 37 B.C.E. (March 1, 37 to March 1, 36 B.C.E.).

Josephus dates the fall of Jerusalem into the hands of Pompey "in the 179th Olympiad, in the consulship of Gaius Antonius and Marcus Tullius Cicero."[3] The consul year named is good for the year 63 B.C.E., Jan. 1 reckoning (the Senator system), or March 1 reckoning (the Varro system). The 179th Olympiad (first year) extended from July, 64 until July, 63 B.C.E., Attic system; or from November, 64 until November, 63 B.C.E., Macedonian system.

Ralph Marcus, who recognizes only the Attic-Olympiad, states:

> . . . the combination of the two dates gives us the
> first half of 63 B.C. for the capture of the city.[4]

It is argued that Josephus was wrong on two counts: first, Josephus dates the capture of the city to the period after June, and therefore it could not have been in the first half of the consul year for 63 B.C.E.; and second, there are no fast days in the spring of that year. Accordingly, the theory goes, Josephus meant that Pompey's victory took place in the latter half of 63 B.C.E. Deeming this as the true answer, they conclude that only 26 years transpired between Pompey's and Herod's respective victories.

This study begs to differ with the commonly held view that Josephus has erred. What has been ignored in the rush to raise a dispute with Josephus is

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[1] Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:16:4.
[2] Marcus, *Jos.*, vii, p. 700, n. d.
[3] Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:4:3.
[4] Marcus, *Jos.*, vii, p. 480, n. c.

that there was a major reformation of the Roman calendar in 46 B.C.E. This transition between the two Roman calendar systems must be taken into account when considering Josephus' use of the March 1 consul year and his Jewish method of counting the years between the two defeats of the city.

The early Roman calendar consisted of twelve months totaling 355 (or 354)[5] days—with an intercalary month of 22 or 23 days alternately thrown in every two years, and 24 days omitted in the last eight years of a 24-year cycle—this to keep the Roman year fairly even with the solar year.[6] The Roman year began with the month of *Martio* (March).[7] Varro, writing in about 45 B.C.E.,[8] proves that this was still the case in his day when he writes:

> The names of the months are in general obvious, if
> you count from *Martio* (March), as the ancients ar-
> ranged them; for the first month is from Mars.[9]

In 153 B.C.E. the consuls began to be elected for one year terms on January 1.[10] Under this influence the beginning of the year was eventually moved back from *Martio* (*Martius*) to *Januarius* (January); but not until the time of Augustus Caesar (27 B.C.E. to 14 C.E.). Varro, writing in 45 B.C.E. and publishing before 43 B.C.E.,[11] as shown above, reveals that the March 1 system was still in effect after the calendar reform of Julius Caesar in 46 B.C.E.

The Roman calendar was far from perfect. Macrobius informs us that in the period prior to the reformations of Julius Caesar, "religious scruples at times led to the omission of all intercalations." He adds:

> And sometimes indeed the number of days in a year
> was increased or reduced through the influence of
> the priests, who deliberately lengthened or short-
> ened the year in the interest of the tax collectors,
> with the result that a pretence of exactly observing
> the calendar in fact added to the confusion in it.[12]

Jack Finegan writes:

> By the end of the Roman republic the calendar had
> come into a state of confusion, particularly due to
> difficulties and inaccuracies in the system and prac-
> tice of intercalation.[13]

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5   Macrobius, 1:13:1–2, 11; notes that at first the Romans followed the Greek method of 354 days but later added one day "out of respect for the odd number." See HBC, pp. 74f, for the days for each ancient Roman month.

6   Macrobius, 1:13:8–21; Schlesinger, *Livy*, xiii, pp. 87f.

7   Ovid, *Fasti*, 1:39; and Macrobius, 1:12:5, who comments that, "March was the first month of the year" on the ancient Roman calendar. The order of the Roman months is also demonstrated by their names: *Septembris* (seventh), *Octobris* (eighth), *Novembris* (ninth), and *Decembris* (tenth). July and August were orginally known as *Quintilis* (fifth) and *Sextilis* (sixth). See HBC, pp. 74f.

8   Kent, *Varro*, i, p. ix.

9   Varro, 6:33.

10   Senator, 384; MGH, p. 130.

11   Kent, *Varro*, i, p. ix.

12   Macrobius, 1:14:1.

13   HBC, p. 76.

Answering complaints to this issue, Julius Caesar undertook a major reform of the calendar in 46 B.C.E. In order to bring the calendar into the so-called Julian form, Caesar took drastic measures:

> He added 23 days of an intercalary month after Februarius, and he added two months of 34 and 33 days between November and December, so that the year contained 445 days and was called the year of confusion.[14]

The next year, 45 B.C.E., the present normal length of a 365 day calendar year began, with a leap year allowed so that the solar year could more accurately be followed. Augustus Caesar later made minor corrections and it was in his day that the official beginning of the Roman year was altered from March 1 to January 1.[15]

To bring the calendar nearer to its current status Caesar added 90 days to one Roman year of 355 days. This fact alone shows that, prior to the calendar reforms of 46 B.C.E., the first of January (the day on which the consuls were elected) and the first of March (the beginning of the year and the day that the consuls officially took office) did not occur during the same time of the solar year as the first of January or the first of March after the year 46 B.C.E. Furthermore, when Pompey had invaded Judaea in 64/63 B.C.E., it was but 18 years before the calendar was reformed, at a time when this great discrepancy had already developed in the system.

It is certain that, in the time of Pompey's invasion, the first of January actually fell at least some 67 (33 + 34) days—if not 90 or more days (if this year lacked an intercalary month)—prior to what the Julian calendar later considered to be the first of the year. This detail is forcefully supported in the Roman records of Livy. Livy reports that, in the consul year of Lucius Cornelius Scipio and Gaius Laelius (i.e. Julian year 190 B.C.E.), there was an eclipse of the sun seen at Rome in the morning on "the fifth day before the Ides of *Quinctiles*," i.e. July 11.[16] This eclipse, if we anachronistically apply the Julian reckoning, would have taken place on March 14, 190 B.C.E.[17]

Accordingly, the Roman date of July (*Quintilis, Quinctiles*) 11, 190 B.C.E. was actually March 14 by later calculation! This means that the first of March in the consul year commonly held as 190 B.C.E. occurred 117 days

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14 CE, 5, p.138. Also see Macrobius, 1:14:2–12.

15 CE, 5, p.138. Cf. Ovid, *Fasti*, 1:11f. Macrobius, 1:14:13–15, discusses the reasons that Augustus became involved in calendar reforms. Dio, 55:6:1–6, cf. 55:5:1, informs us that during the consul year of Asinius Gallus and Gaius Marcius (8 B.C.E.), Augustus, his second period of ten years having expired, "once more accepted the supreme power." He adds that it was during this year, among many other things, that Augustus "changed the name of the month called Sextilis to August." This item of evidence indicates that it was in this year that Augustus was involved in calendar reforms. It is supported by the fact that Augustus initiated the 14 year tax census as a regular calendar feature of the Roman empire during this same year (AATB, pp. 553–558; Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:2:1; Tertullian, *Ag. Mar.*, 4:19; Expositor, ser. 8, iv, p. 25). The year 8 B.C.E., therefore, was the starting point of a new calendar era.

16 Livy, 37:4:4.

17 Sage, *Livy*, x, pp. 300f, n. 4.

prior to what was later considered the first of March.[18] The first of January previous to that March, likewise, actually took place 117 days earlier, i.e. in early October of 191 B.C.E.

If we calculate back 27 Hebrew years from the date that Herod took Jerusalem (i.e. Tebeth 10 of the year 37/36 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning, being January 2 of 36 B.C.E. on the Julian calendar) we arrive at the date of Tebeth 10 in the year 64/63 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning, or January 1 (the anachronistic Julian date) of what we call 63 B.C.E. This day, accordingly, was the date that Pompey conquered Jerusalem.

But a Julian beginning for the year we call 63 B.C.E., as we have seen, was not in effect during this period. Because of the calendar problems, the first of January actually began at about the end of what the later Julian calendar called *Octobris* (October), in the year we now call 64 B.C.E. The beginning of their year, being the first of March, occurred in the last days of what was later called December, 64 B.C.E.

Therefore, the consuls for 63 B.C.E. actually were elected at the end of October, 64 B.C.E. and officially took office at the end of December, 64 B.C.E. As a result, Pompey conquered Jerusalem exactly 27 Hebrew years before Herod, on January 1 of 63 B.C.E. (Julian reckoning), but the consuls then in office were the consuls for the year we call 63 B.C.E., having come to office on their March 1 (a Julian date of late Dec.), some 67 days or so prior to what was later labeled March 1.

Finally, the first year of the 179th Olympiad was 64/63 B.C.E., November reckoning (Macedonian system). The last year of the 185th Olympiad was 37/36 B.C.E., November reckoning. These are the Olympiads given by Josephus for the overthrow of Jerusalem by Pompey and then Herod. These Olympiads are correct since there does exist 27 complete Hebrew years between Tebeth 10 of the 179th Olympiad, year 1 (Jan. 1, 63 B.C.E.), and Tebeth 10 of the 185th Olympiad, year 4 (Jan. 2, 36 B.C.E.).

The Death of Mithridates

Confirmation that Pompey conquered Jerusalem on January 1, 63 B.C.E.—i.e. in the early part of the March 1 consul year of 63 B.C.E. (late Dec., 64 to late Dec., 63 B.C.E., Julian dates)—is found in the records dealing with the death of Mithridates, king of Pontus on the Black Sea.

As Pompey was marching south through Syria and Palestine in an effort to come against the Arabs of Petra, the Jews backed out of an agreement they had reached to pay tribute. Pompey, as a result, decided to divert his war effort and come against the Jews first. At the same time, word came to him of the death of Mithridates.

> A further impetus to his (Pompey's) pace was given
> by the death of Mithridates, news of which reached
> him near Jericho. . . . At this spot (Jericho) Pompey
> encamped for an evening only and at daybreak
> pressed on to Jerusalem. (Jos., *Wars*, 1:6:6)

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18 See calendar days in HBC, pp. 74f.

> . . . Pompey was angry and took the army that he had prepared against the Nabataeans, and the auxiliaries from Damascus and the rest of Syria, as well as the Roman legions already at his disposal, and marched against Aristobulus (high priest of Judaea). . . . And not long afterward Pompey led his army against him; and on the way there came to him messengers from Pontus, who informed him of the death of Mithridates at the hands of his son Pharnaces. He then encamped near Jericho . . . and at dawn set out for Jerusalem. (Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:3:4–14:4:1)

To begin with, we should note that the Nabataean Arabs of Petra lived in an area that is extremely hot during the summer months. The weather is most pleasant there only during the fall and winter time. There seems little doubt, due to the difficulty of the weather and the terrain, that Pompey's expedition against these people would have been scheduled for the fall or winter.[19] We also know that Pompey's original intent was not to attack Jerusalem but the Arabs of Petra. It was only as the result of the refusal of the partisans of Aristobulus to pay the promised tribute that Pompey turned his forces aside and struck at Jerusalem first.[20] This detail indicates that Pompey came against Jerusalem in the autumn or winter.

Dio also helps us to date the death of Mithridates. He remarks:

> For, when Marcus Cicero had become consul with Gaius Antonius, Mithridates no longer caused any injury to the Romans, but had destroyed himself, Catiline undertook to set up a new government, and by banding together the allies against the state threw the people into fear of a mighty conflict. (Dio, 37:10.)

Dio (c. 150–235 C.E.), following the custom of his day, marked the more ancient consul years from the time of their elections on the first of January. The consul year named, therefore, is for 63 B.C.E., January 1 reckoning, but the months he uses belong to the pre-Julian reformations to the calendar.

In this statement of Dio's, we are informed that "when" Cicero and Antonius "had become" the consuls for 63 B.C.E., "Mithridates no longer caused any injury to the Romans, but had destroyed himself." This statement reveals that at the beginning of this consul year—which as we have already shown actually started in late October, 64 B.C.E., of the Julian calendar—the final days of Mithridates had already occurred.

Dio's words also indicate that it was AFTER the death of Mithridates that the Catiline conspiracy was set in motion. Sallust meanwhile writes:

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[19] Nebuchadnezzar's, for example, warred against these same Arab tribes from Kislimu (Nov./Dec.) until Addaru (Feb/March) during his sixth year, see ABC, p. 101, ℓ. 9–10.

[20] Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:3:2–14:4:1, *Wars*, 1:6:1–1:7:1.

> Accordingly, when the elections (for consul) had been held Marcus Tullius (Cicero) and Gaius Antonius were proclaimed consuls, and this at first filled the conspirators with consternation. And yet Catiline's frenzy did not abate. On the contrary, he increased his activities every day, made collections of arms at strategic points in Italy, and borrowed money on his own credit or that of his friends, sending it to Faesulae to a certain Manlius, who afterwards was the first to take the field (in battle). (Sallust, 24)

Sallust proves that the conspiracy of Catiline to form a new government by being elected consul for the year we call 63 B.C.E. had failed.[21] Upon losing the election, Catiline immediately transferred his method to fomenting an armed uprising. After various intrigues throughout that year, Catiline again tried to gain the office of consul, but he "perished at the very opening of the year in which Junius Silanus and Lucius Licinius held office," (i.e. the consul year of 62 B.C.E.).[22]

It is clear from this evidence that the Catiline conspiracy came into being shortly after Catiline lost the election for consul at the beginning of the year 63 B.C.E. (those consuls being elected in late Oct. of 64 B.C.E., Julian reckoning). Yet the death of Mithridates occurred prior to that conspiracy. Further, Catiline was dead and the conspiracy was well over when the consuls of the next year were elected to office, i.e. in late October, 63 B.C.E., Julian reckoning. The death of Mithridates, therefore, could not have taken place towards the end of 63 B.C.E. but rather in the last months of 64 B.C.E., Julian reckoning.

Pompey received word of the death of Mithridates just before he attacked Jerusalem. His siege of Jerusalem was in its third month when he took the city (Jan. 1; Tebeth 10): "τρίτῳ γὰρ μηνὶ τῆς πολιορκίαν (Because of three months of the siege);"[23] "τρισὶ γοῦν μησὶ πολιορκηθέντες (Yet, three months of siege) they surrendered."[24] Accordingly, the siege must have begun late in the Hebrew month of Tishri (Sept./Oct.). We can conclude that Pompey received word of Mithridates' death in late October of 64 B.C.E., just before he began the siege.

Since this news was deemed as vital for Pompey, it is also safe to assume that the death of Mithridates took place no more than about 10 to 15 days before Pompey heard of it, i.e. mid-October. Word would have reached Rome about three or four weeks after the fact and would have been reported to the new consuls. Therefore, the details agree quite well with a conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey on the tenth day of the month of Tebeth (Jan. 1, 63 B.C.E. Julian reckoning), in the year 64/63 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning, 27 Jewish years to the day before Herod captured the same city.

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[21] Sallust, 16.
[22] Dio, 37:11–39.
[23] Jos., *Wars*, 1:7:4.
[24] Ibid., 5:9:4.

The Reign of Aristobulus

Further confirmation for the date that Pompey took the city of Jerusalem, and therefore for the date that Herod accomplished the same feat, is found in the records dealing with the length of the reign of Aristobulus, the Jewish high priest at the time of Pompey's invasion. Josephus informs us that Aristobulus fell into the hands of Pompey and was arrested JUST BEFORE the siege of Jerusalem was started.[25] In another place, Josephus writes:

> And having met with such ill fortune, Aristobulus was sent to Rome a second time; and there he was kept in chains, after being king and high priest three years and six months. (Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:6:1)

This data shows that Aristobulus had completed six months of reign during his fourth year before Pompey arrested him and began to lay siege to the city of Jerusalem. It is therefore indicated that the siege began sometime during the seventh month of that year, i.e. the month of Tishri (Sept./Oct.). The three months of siege, accordingly, were Tishri, Marheshuan, and Khisleu. Just ten days into the next month (Tebeth) the city was captured.

A different length for the reign of Aristobulus is found in a summary list located at the end of Josephus' work. In this account we read:

> For after her (Alexandra's) death, Hyrcanus' brother Aristobulus made war upon him, defeated him, deprived him of his office and himself became both king and high priest of the nation. When he had reigned three years and as many months,[26] Pompey came, and took the city of Jerusalem by storm, and sent him with his children to Rome in bonds. (Jos., *Antiq.,* 20:10:4)

Both Schürer and Bloch have recognized that Josephus has utilized another handbook of chronology or official list to compose this summary.[27] Nevertheless, its calculation is easily understood. Hyrcanus, the brother of Aristobulus, held the high priest's office while their mother, Alexandra, sat on the throne. Hyrcanus and Alexandra are said to have reigned "an equal period," namely nine years.[28] Yet Hyrcanus did not give up his position without a fight. Upon his mother's death he also took the throne and "held it for three months, but was driven from it by his brother Aristobulus."[29]

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[25] Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:4:1–2.

[26] Feldman's translation of the phrase "ἔτει δὲ τρίτῳ τῆς Βασιλείαςκα ὶ πρὸςμησ ὶν τοῖ ἴσοις" as, "When he had reigned two years and three months," or, "In the third year of his reign and after as many months," is clearly an error (Feldman, *Jos.*, x, p. 130, n. d, and p. 131). The phrase literally means "Year three of the reign and forward months the same." Therefore, Whiston's translation, "and when he had reigned three years and three months" (Whiston, *Jos.*, p. 425), which is also the understanding of Marcus (*Jos.*, vii, pp. 450f, n. c), is superior.

[27] GJV, 1, p. 256, n. 1; DQFJ, pp. 149f.

[28] Jos., *Antiq.,* 20:10:4.

[29] Jos., *Antiq.*, 15:6:4.

An analysis of this evidence shows that Alexandra died in the last month of the ninth year of her reign. Hyrcanus succeeded her but was immediately thrown into a civil war with his brother, Aristobulus. This war lasted three months before Hyrcanus surrendered his power. The above passage from *Antiquities*, 20:10:4, agrees with this presentation, and thereby determines the reign of Aristobulus without including the three months of civil war. Each year of his reign was counted from the month that Aristobulus came to power (i.e. in Tammuz; June/July). The three remaining months represent the time from his third anniversary on the throne until the month that he was arrested by Pompey (i.e. Tishri; Sept./Oct.). When we add these three months of civil war back into this calculation we arrive at a reign that lasted three years and six months, which is in perfect agreement with *Antiquities*, 14:6:1. Since all of these figures are provided to us by Josephus, it is also apparent that he saw no contradiction and understood them in the same way.

The Planting Season

All of the evidence points to the fact that Herod conquered Jerusalem on Tebeth 10 of the year 37/36 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning. Yet there is one more detail that not only proves that our dating is correct but that the sabbath year of 36/35 B.C.E. began with the first of Nisan. This evidence comes when we compare the words of Josephus, about the planting season, with the information on the ancient Gezer calendar discovered at Tell Jezer in Palestine.

As we have already demonstrated above, the events that occurred after Herod captured Jerusalem prove that it was but a short time until the sabbath year arrived. More importantly, according to Josephus, it was also that time of year when the Jews normally planted their fields, but were unable to do so this time because of the approaching sabbath year.

Josephus makes this following statement in the framework of Herod now being in charge of the city and the Roman soldiers of Sossius having already departed:

> And there was no end to their troubles, for on the one hand their greedy master, who was in need (of money), was plundering them, and on the other hand the seventh year, which was approaching, FORCED THEM TO LEAVE THE LAND UN-WORKED, since we are forbidden to sow the earth in that year. (Jos., *Antiq.*, 15:1:2)

This evidence from Josephus proves that a time normally set aside for planting was now unavailable to the Jews because of the approaching sabbath year. Since one was not able to harvest in the sabbath year, it also meant that he would not sow just prior to the beginning of that year, for such efforts were considered to be in vain. The question is, "When would this presabbath sowing normally take place."

Our answer is found on the Gezer calendar. According to the information

on this calendar, there are two months of planting: Khisleu (Nov./Dec.) and Tebeth (Dec./Jan.); and two months of "late planting," which in the sequence of the calendar prove to be the months of Shebat (Jan./Feb.) and Adar (Feb./March).[30] From the late planting of the last two months, one would harvest barley in the second month of the next year, Iyyar (April/May).[31]

There seems little question that it would take Herod about 30 days to fully master the city of Jerusalem after its capture, enabling him to pay off and send the Roman troops of Sossius away. Since Herod conquered Jerusalem on the tenth of Tebeth (Jan. 2), the tenth Hebrew month, the words of Josephus are only appropriate about 30 days later, i.e. in the eleventh month, Shebat (Jan./Feb.). In full confirmation of Josephus, we find that the month of Shebat is the time when the Jews would have normally been sowing their "late planting" for the spring harvest. In any regular year it would have been their last chance to plant before the new year.

The first month of the sabbath year, therefore, had to be Abib (Nisan). It could not have been the month of Tishri because the planting season was already at hand. The rapidly approaching sabbath year mentioned during the planting season compels us to place the overthrow of Jerusalem in the period that followed the first of Khisleu, when the planting season began, and not before that date.

Conclusion

The evidence demonstrates that Herod conquered Jerusalem on the tenth of Tebeth, a national Jewish fast day, in the year 37/36 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning (i.e. Jan. 2, 36 B.C.E.)—27 years to the day after Pompey accomplished the same feat. After mastering the city and sending the troops of Sossius away (in Shebat of that year), Antigonus being sent off to Antony at the same time, the Jews of the city found themselves not only suffering from Herod's plundering but forced to abandon their "late planting" because of the approach of the sabbath year, now only about 45 days away. The sabbath year, accordingly, was the year 36/35 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning, which is in perfect agreement with the system "A" cycle.

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30 HBC, pp. 33f.
31 Ibid.
32 See Chart B.