

Chapter XXIV

## Nero's "Year 2" in Judaea

*Part II of the Sabbath  
Year of 56/57 C.E.*

According to the advocates of systems "B" and "C," there are four ways other than a Nisan (March/April) year by which Nero's second year could have been judged in Josephus and Eusebius.

- The reign of Nero could have been reckoned by the Roman *dies imperii* which calculates the regnal year from the day the king achieved power to his anniversary date in the next year: i.e. from October 13 until October 13 of each year for Nero. His first year, therefore, would be from October 13, 54 to October 12, 55 C.E., his second from October 13, 55 to October 12, 56 C.E.

- The reign of Nero could have been counted by the Macedonian Seleucid method, from the first of Tishri, which again gives us roughly an October to October year.

- His reign could have been determined on the basis of the Greek Macedonian Olympiad calendar, which would have begun on Dius 1. The result would be the first of Dius (Oct./Nov.), 54 until the first of Dius, 55 C.E. for Nero's first year. His second year would be Dius 1, 55 until Dius 1, 56 C.E.

- Nero's reign could have been dated from January first, the beginning of the Roman year since 8 B.C.E.,<sup>1</sup> the year Augustus Caesar changed the starting point of the Roman calendar. Year one would be January 1, 55 until January 1, 56 C.E.; year two would be January 1, 56 until January 1, 57 C.E.

### The Nisan 1 Regnal Years in Josephus for Nero

These theories must be rejected on the grounds that there is not one shred of evidence that during this period the Jews of Judaea ever utilized any of these methods to register the reign of a king over the land of Judaea.

Both Josephus and Philo observe that the year in Judaea began with Nisan and the spring.<sup>2</sup> At no time does any writer from this period say that a king's reign listed on Judaeian documents and contracts written between Jews was normally dated from an era used by foreign kings.

Even as late as the beginning of the third century C.E. the Mishnah tells us that "on the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings."<sup>3</sup>

If a Jew of Judaea during the period of Nero was dating a contract by the

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<sup>1</sup> See above Chap. XX, p. 261, n. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 1:3:3, 2:14:6, 3:8:4, 3:10:5, 11:4:8; Philo, *Spec. Laws*, 1:35(181), 2:27-28.

<sup>3</sup> R.Sh., 1:1.

name and year of a king it would seem only logical that he would do so by the traditional Jewish method.

This Judaeian method would begin to change after the Jews lost their homeland with the collapse of the First Revolt, thereby forfeiting their right to make such determinations. Yet even as late as the Bar Kochba revolt (133–135 B.C.E.), the Jews were still known to be using a Nisan beginning for their year.<sup>4</sup> After the Bar Kochba revolt, the Jews were scattered about the world and under the total dominance of foreign kings. A foreign reckoning would naturally follow. But in the time of Nero (October, 54–June, 68 C.E.) Judaea still existed as a country with its own Jewish rulers, an established Jewish priesthood, and Jewish customs. Its people had no reason to use a foreign reckoning on internal Jewish documents.

The works of Josephus are reflective of this custom. Josephus, writing to a Greek-speaking audience, never dated events by the Macedonian Olympiad system or by Roman consulships unless he specifically stated that he was doing so. In the relevant passages about Nero's reign, Josephus never referred to an Olympiad or consul year. That Josephus would date Nero by the Macedonian Olympiad or a consulship beginning on the first of January, yet not define it as such, is highly implausible.

Another important factor in this investigation is that Josephus—the primary source for the history of the First Revolt—was a Judaeian who lived in his homeland at the time of Nero; and his work reflects that the first of the year for Nero's reign began sometime after Marheshuan (Oct./Nov.) 1, yet before Iyyar (April/May) 1. This fact is demonstrated by his dating of events in the First Revolt. Josephus' sequence is as follows (cf. Chart G):

- The “war opened, in the twelfth year of the principate of Nero, and the seventeenth of the reign of Agrippa, in the month of Artemisius (Iyyar; April/May)” (Jos., *Wars*, 2:14:4).

This statement shows that Nero's twelfth year was in progress during this second Jewish month. Agrippa, by the way, was a Jewish ruler. Josephus would naturally date Agrippa's reign based upon the Jewish method. In this passage Josephus importantly equates Agrippa's seventeenth year in Judaea with the twelfth year of Nero, strongly indicating that the same method of dating was used for both.

- Riots broke out in Jerusalem “on the sixteenth of the month Artemisius” (Iyyar)” (Jos., *Wars*, 2:15:2).

- On the “fifteenth of the month Lous (Ab; July/Aug.)” an assault was made upon Antonia and the garrison was besieged (Jos., *Wars*, 2:17:7).

- On the “sixth of the month Gorpiaeus (Elul; Aug./Sept.)” the king's palaces were captured (Jos., *Wars*, 2:17:8).

- On the “thirtieth of the month Hyperberetaeus (Tishri; Sept./Oct.)” Cestius made an assault upon Jerusalem (Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:4).

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<sup>4</sup> IEJ, 21, pp. 39–46.

- On "the eighth of the month of Dius (Marheshuan; Oct./Nov.), in the twelfth year of Nero's principate," the defeat of Cestius took place (Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:9).

We have now passed by the months of August and October, as well as beyond the first day of Dius (Marheshuan), yet it is still the twelfth year of Nero. This detail proves that Josephus did not use the Roman *dies imperii* for Nero, which would start his year in October; nor did he use the October Seleucid year or the Macedonian Olympiad year, which started with the first of Dius, in determining the regnal years of Nero.

- On the "twenty-first of the month Artemisius (Iyyar; April/May)" Josephus came from Tiberias and went to Jotapata (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:3).

This detail reveals that we have now passed by the month of Nisan (Abib) and have entered into a new Jewish year.

- On the "20th of the month Daesius (Siwan; May/June)" the first assault was made upon Jotapata, also called Japha (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:29).

- On the "25th of the month Daesius" Japha was captured (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:31).

- On the "27th of the month Daesius" Gerizim was captured (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:32).

- The city of Jotapata was taken by the Romans "in the thirteenth year of the principate of Nero, on the new moon of Panemus (Tammuz; June/July)" (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:36).

We have now arrived at the first day of the fourth Jewish month, and we find ourselves in "Year 13" of Nero.

Since it was still "Year 12" of Nero on the eighth of Dius (Marheshuan; Oct./Nov.) of the previous year, it is clear that a year change occurred between the month of Dius (Marheshuan, the eighth Jewish month) and the following Panemus (Tammuz, the fourth Jewish month; June/July).

Josephus' dating of Nero is further narrowed by the fact that the twelfth year of Nero was still in progress during the month of Artemisius (Iyyar), the second Jewish month.<sup>5</sup> The thirteenth year, therefore, had to be in effect during Artemisius (Iyyar; April/May) of the following year. This fact, in turn, shows that there was a change in year between the end of Marheshuan, the eighth month, and the beginning of Iyyar, the second month (Chart G).

This information demonstrates that Josephus must have been using a Nisan year for the Roman emperors. It is true that a January first year is also possible; but, since Josephus does not label Nero's reign by a consulship or refer to a Roman year, this supposition is weak. Further, Josephus determined the consul years by the first of March and not by the first of January.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jos., *Wars*, 2:14:4.

<sup>6</sup> See Chap. XVII, pp. 233–236, and cf. Chaps. XVIII–XX.

The last time Josephus uses an Olympiad to date any event was for the year that Herod completed his building of Caesarea Sebaste, which took place in the 192nd Olympiad, being the 28th year of Herod (i.e. 10/9 B.C.E., Nisan Jewish reckoning; 11/10 B.C.E., Dius [Oct./Nov.] Macedonian reckoning). The last consulship used for dating an event was that of Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus (37/36 B.C.E., March 1 to March 1 reckoning). These dates importantly all fall prior to the changes made for the beginning month of the Roman calendar by Augustus Caesar, who in 8 B.C.E. altered the first of the year from March first to January first.

Nowhere else in the works of Josephus can it be demonstrated that he used a January 1 year to date anything, which casts a dark shadow of doubt that he did so with Nero (or for that matter any of the other Roman emperors).

It is also known from ancient coins that during the First Revolt (66–70 C.E.) the Jewish year began with the month of Nisan.<sup>7</sup> This detail adds even more weight to the fact that the Jews of Nero's time observed a first of Nisan beginning for their regnal years, and counted from this month on their internal documents. Further we have two sources (the coins of the First Revolt and the early third century C.E. Mishnah) proving that the Jews of Judaea during the period of Nero and for some time afterwards determined the beginning of the year for their kings by the month of Nisan.

Therefore, we must conclude that in the entire body of the works of Josephus, unless he specifically labels it as not applying, he used a Nisan beginning for his year. In the list of events during the twelfth and thirteenth years of Nero, Josephus does not label the years as an exception to his normal Nisan reckoning. He shows that a year of Nero included the second through eighth Jewish months (Iyyar through Marheshuan; roughly May through November). Indeed, the very fact that Josephus couples the twelfth and thirteenth years of Nero with Macedonian month-names, which he clearly equates throughout his work with the Jewish months, is a strong indication that he has reckoned Nero's reign based upon a first of Nisan New Year.

The weight of the evidence, as a result, points to the fact that the other Jews of Judaea, during the days of Nero, would have also dated Nero's reign by a Nisan year. We will not overlook the remote possibility that Josephus used a January 1 reckoning for Nero; but, as we shall demonstrate, it will not change the final result.

### **Dating the First Revolt**

Our attention must now turn towards determining which year represents the second year of Nero in Judaea. This detail is gleaned from the information dealing with the length of the First Revolt and which year it started.

Historical evidence proves that the First Revolt, which began in the twelfth year of Nero, raged for five years. Jewish coins produced during this revolt, for example, bear only the dates from "Year 1" to "Year 5."<sup>8</sup> In Josephus' history about the First Revolt, he clearly sets forth that the war lasted until the fifth year (using a Nisan 1 regnal reckoning but counting the length

<sup>7</sup> IEJ, 21, p. 40 and n. 11, p. 42; BA, 26, pp. 57–59.

<sup>8</sup> AJ, pp. 28–33, 57–59; AJC, pp. 259–263.

of the war from the time it started in Iyyar [April/May]). The flow of events in his history of the war with Rome is as follows (cf. Chart G):

### YEAR 1 (66 C.E.)

- The war began in the 12th year of Nero in the month of Artemisius (Iyyar; April/May) (Jos., *Wars*, 2:14:4, 2:15:2).
- The Feast of Tabernacles observed (Tishri; Sept./Oct.) (Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:1).
- Events in the "month of Dius (Marheshuan; Oct./Nov.) in the twelfth year of Nero's principate" (Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:9).

### YEAR 2 (67 C.E.)

- Events in the month of Artemisius (April/May) (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:3).
- Events in the month of Daesius (May/June) (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:29).
- Events in the month of Gorpiaeus (Aug./Sept.) (Jos., *Wars*, 3:10:10).
- Events in the month of Hyperberetaeus (Sept./Oct.) (Jos., *Wars*, 4:1:9–10).
- Events in the month of Dystrus (Feb./March) (Jos., *Wars*, 4:7:3).

### YEAR 3 (68 C.E.)

- Events in the month of Daesius (May/June) (Jos., *Wars*, 4:8:1, 4:9:9).

### YEAR 4 (69 C.E.)

- Simon became master of Jerusalem "in the third year of the war, in the month of Xanthicus (March/April)" (Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:12).

Counting the years from the month the war began, i.e. from the month of Artemisius (April/May) of 66 C.E., the fourth year of the war began in Iyyar (April/May) of 69 C.E.

- Events in the month of Apellaios (Nov./Dec.) (Jos., *Wars*, 4:11:4).
- Winter (Jos., *Wars*, 4:11:5).

### YEAR 4 (69 C.E.)

- Events of the month of Xanthicus (March/April) (*Wars*, 5:3:1).
- Events of the month of Artemisius (April/May) (Jos., *Wars*, 5:7:2, 5:11:4).
- The destruction of the Temple by Titus on the 10th day of Lous (July/Aug., i.e. the Hebrew month of Ab) "in the second year of Vespasian's reign" (Jos., *Wars*, 6:4:5, 8).

Tacitus also reveals that the Judaeen revolt lasted five years.<sup>9</sup> He writes that in the first year of the revolt Cestius Gallus, governor of Syria, tried to stop it, but “he suffered varied fortunes and met defeat more often than he gained victory.”<sup>10</sup> Cestius endured a great defeat at the hands of the Jews “on the eighth of the month Dius (Nov.) in the twelfth year of Nero’s principate.” On the death of Gallus, Tacitus continues:

. . . Nero sent out Vespasian, who aided by his good fortune and reputation as well by his excellent subordinates, within TWO SUMMERS occupied with his victorious army the whole of the level country and all the cities except Jerusalem. THE NEXT YEAR was taken up with the civil war, and thus was passed in inactivity so far as the Jews were concerned. When peace had been secured throughout Italy, foreign troubles began again; and the fact that the Jews alone had failed to surrender increased our resentment; at the same time, having regard to all the possibilities and hazards of a new reign, it seemed expedient for Titus to remain with the army. Therefore, as I have said above, Titus pitched his camp before the walls of Jerusalem and displayed his legions in battle array. (Tacitus, *Hist.*, 5:9–10)

When Tacitus states, “as I have said above,” he is making reference to the fact that after “the first of January”<sup>11</sup> of the year that Vespasian assumed the consular office,<sup>12</sup> i.e. 70 C.E., “At the beginning of that same year,” Titus, the son of Vespasian, was “selected by his father to complete the subjugation of Judaea.”<sup>13</sup> Later that same year, Jerusalem fell into his hands. The words of Tacitus reveal the following:

## YEAR 2

The revolt (which started in May) found success for the Jews in November of that year when they defeated Cestius.

## YEARS 2 & 3

After the defeat of Cestius, Nero appoints Vespasian to the war, who “within two summers” occupies all the cities of Judaea except Jerusalem. This sequence perfectly matches what Josephus says on the matter.<sup>14</sup> Vespasian makes his first attack on the Jewish rebels at the city of Jotapata a few days after “the twenty-first of the month of Artemisius (Iyyar; May)” and takes the city “on the thirteenth year of the principate of Nero, on the new moon of Panemus (Tammuz; June/July).”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.*, 4:39–5:13.

<sup>10</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.*, 5:10.

<sup>11</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.*, 4:39.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Dio, 66:1.

<sup>13</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.*, 5:1.

<sup>14</sup> Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:9–3:1:3.

<sup>15</sup> Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:3–36.

**YEAR 4**

This year was taken up with the civil war at Rome, which saw the quick succession of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. As has been demonstrated in our last chapter, this civil war consumed the year 69 C.E. The Judaeian war was inactive as far as Roman involvement was concerned.

**YEAR 5**

In the year after the civil war at Rome, after the first of January, Titus was sent to capture the city of Jerusalem.

The first year of the revolt is determined by the following facts:

- The war ended in the second year of Vespasian,<sup>16</sup> with the destruction of the Temple on the tenth of Lous (Ab; July/Aug.).<sup>17</sup> As shown above in our section on the reign of Vespasian, Vespasian became emperor in the latter half of 69 C.E., recognizing himself as emperor in July of that year while he was in Judaea. The second year of Vespasian, the fifth year of the war, therefore, is the year 70 C.E., the year Vespasian was first elected consular and the year he sent Titus to capture Jerusalem.

- The revolt began in the twelfth year of Nero, in the month of Artemisius (Iyyar; April/May), the second month of the Jewish year.<sup>18</sup>

- Since the year 70/71 C.E., Nisan reckoning, was the final year of the war, we must count back to the first year from this point. Therefore, the revolt began in the second Jewish month, Iyyar, of the year 66/67 C.E., being the twelfth year of Nero. Further, the twelfth year of Nero was still in progress during the eighth Jewish month of Marheshuan (Oct./Nov.) of that same year.<sup>19</sup>

This evidence compels us to equate the twelfth year of Nero, as recorded by the Jewish priest Josephus and supported by Eusebius, with the year 66/67 C.E., Nisan reckoning. In the second Jewish month of that year (Iyyar; April/May) the revolt in Judaea began.

**Dating "Year 2" of Nero**

The second year of Nero, counted by the Judaeans of the first century C.E., is derived as follows:

Counting backwards from this 66/67 C.E., Nisan reckoning, "Year 1" of Nero in Josephus is equal to the year 55/56 C.E., Nisan reckoning. "Year 2," as a result, is 56/57 C.E., Nisan reckoning.

This dating is also confirmed by the aforementioned coins of Agrippa, governor of Judaea when the First Revolt broke out. His coins bear the imperial effigy. They begin with one that gives the name and likeness of Nero and is

<sup>16</sup> Jos., *Wars*, 6:10:1; Eusebius, *H.E.*, 3:7.

<sup>17</sup> Jos., *Wars*, 6:4:5.

<sup>18</sup> Jos., *Wars*, 2:14:4, *Antiq.*, 20:11:1, 20:12:1, *Wars*, 2:14:4.

<sup>19</sup> Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:9.

dated "Year 6" = "Year 11,"<sup>20</sup> i.e. the sixth year of Nero = the eleventh year of Agrippa. These coins, being Judaeian, are therefore based upon a first of Nisan year. Josephus, meanwhile, specifically tells us that the twelfth year of Nero was the same as the seventeenth year of Agrippa, and that in turn this year was the year that the First Revolt began,<sup>21</sup> i.e. 66/67 C.E., Nisan reckoning.

"Year 2" of Nero in Judaea, therefore, is the year 56/57 C.E., Nisan reckoning. This date perfectly matches the sabbath cycle sequence of system "A." Yet for the sake of argument, let us also grant the possibility of an October, November, or January system for the Note of Indebtedness at question. The first year of Nero, accordingly, would either be October, 54 until October, 55 C.E.; November, 54 until November, 55 C.E.; or a January 1, 55 until January 1, 56 C.E. year.

With any of these systems the last six or more months of a year belonging to Nero would fall within the first six or more months of the Jewish year. The Jewish revolt would still fall in the month of Iyyar in the twelfth year of Nero, i.e. the spring of 66 C.E., and for the Jews of Judaea, like Josephus, this twelfth year continued beyond Marheshuan (Oct./Nov.) of this same year.

The Jewish year would still begin with the spring and a king's year in Judaea would still have been counted from that time. The greater part of Nero's second year would include the sabbath year of 56/57 C.E., Nisan reckoning.

## Conclusion

It is clear from this evidence that the second year of Nero, mentioned in the Judaeian Note of Indebtedness found in the cave at Wadi Murabba'at, must have begun with the month of Nisan in the year 56/57 C.E. This year, according to that same document, was a sabbath year.

Even using the variant arrangements of an October, November, or January year, system "B" is eliminated from consideration because it requires a sabbath year from Tishri (Sept./Oct.) of 54 until Tishri of 55 C.E. This year would have been the first for Nero not his second.

System "C," which demands a sabbath year from Tishri, 55 until Tishri, 56 C.E., is still faced with the evidence that the sabbath years during this period began with the month of Abib (Nisan). For this reason it also falls out of consideration.

System "D," which would have a sabbath year from Nisan, 55 until Nisan, 56 C.E., is lacking since it would place the second year of Nero in the year before its proper Jewish reckoning. It must likewise deal with the problem that previous years in its cycle have already been eliminated as possibilities.

The only viable solution is the system "A" sabbath cycle. The sabbath year represented by Nero's second year over Judaea has provided us with one more item of proof confirming the cycle already demonstrated by the known sabbath years from the fifteenth year of Hezekiah until the second year of King Herod over Jerusalem (see Chart B).

<sup>20</sup> IEJ, 12, p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Jos., *Wars*, 2:14:4.