

## *Flaws in Systems “B” and “C” Reconstructions*

The System “B” reconstruction makes a Sabbath year extend from Tishri (Sept./Oct.) of 68 until Tishri of 69 C.E.—falling just prior to the Tishri year in which the destruction of the Second Temple at Jerusalem took place (summer of 70 C.E.).<sup>1</sup> This view is widely held today as legitimate because of the works of Zuckermann (1857) and Emil Schürer (1901).<sup>2</sup> The System “C” reconstruction, on the other hand, advocated by Ralph Marcus and Ben Zion Wacholder,<sup>3</sup> makes a Sabbath year cover the period from Tishri (Sept./Oct.) of 69 until Tishri of 70 C.E.—the Tishri year in which the Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed. As pointed out in our Introduction, the supporters of each system hold to differing opinions regarding the term מוצאי (mutzai)—i.e., whether the term means that the destruction of the Temple took place in the year “immediately after” the Sabbath year (System “B”) or whether it took place during “the going-out” (i.e., last half) of the Sabbath year (System “C”). Nevertheless, the advocates of these two views do agree on one major point. Both believe that the ancient Israelites originally began the Sabbath year on Tishri 1, the 7th month of the year.

When scrutinized, the evidence for these two constructs are found to rest almost entirely upon their interpretation of a statement made for the first time in the mid- to late-2nd century C.E. Jewish work entitled *Seder Olam*,<sup>4</sup> written by the chronographer Rabbi Yose (Jose) ben Khalaphta. The opinion voiced in Rabbi Jose’s text, whichever interpretation one judges to be accurate, became the opinion of numerous Talmudic writers that followed Rabbi Jose. It was the tradition of the Geonim,<sup>5</sup> and, among others, the considered opinion of Moses Maimonides, a well-respected Talmudist of the 12th century C.E.

Proof for these constructs of the Sabbath year is believed found in a statement made by Josephus, while he was discussing the siege of Jerusalem by Herod the Great in 37 B.C.E. According to the Tishri-year view, Josephus would have this siege take place during a Sabbath year.<sup>6</sup> Another item of evidence brought forward comes from some documents produced during the

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1 Chart A.

2 TSCJ; GJV; HJP.

3 HUCA, 54, pp. 123–133; HUCA, 44, pp. 153–196; Marcus, *Jos.*, vii, pp. 196f, n. a, pp. 694f, n. a, viii, p. 5, n. e.

4 S.O., 30.

5 The Geonim were the rectors of the great Rabbinic academies of Sura and Pumbeditha in pre-Mohammedan Babylonia. The “Geonic period” lasted from the end of the 6th until the first half of the 11th century C.E. World Jewry recognized these men as their highest religious authorities.

6 For a full rebuttal of this view, see Chaps. XIX–XXII.

Bar Kochba revolt. The advocates of System “B,” for example, contend that the war continued from 132 to 135 C.E. for all of Judaea. A contract dated towards the end of the 2nd year of this Judaeian revolt mentions that after the completion of the next 5 years of harvesting there would be another *Shemittah* (year of release), i.e., Sabbath year. Having reasoned that the 1st year of the war for all Judaea began in the spring of 132 C.E., the year 138/139 C.E. (Tishri reckoning) is hailed as the oncoming Sabbath year intended by the documents.<sup>7</sup>

Beginning with many of the Jewish rabbis from the early 3rd century C.E., it is clear that the majority of the rabbinic and Talmudic writers believed in the validity of the interpretation of Rabbi Jose that the Sabbath and Jubilee years were to begin with Tishri 1. Authority has also been lent to this calendar system during the last 150 years due to the studies and concurrence made by more recent historians, beginning with Benedict Zuckermann. As Wacholder adds, “The prestige of Schürer’s agreement with this reckoning made Zuckermann’s calendar the mainstay of scholarship.”<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, as this study will demonstrate, a number of flaws exist in this popular view, mistakes which should cause a great deal of hesitation before either System “B” or System “C” should so eagerly be accepted. These defects arise from the following points.

### **An Error in Chronology**

To begin with, all of the opinions held by the rabbinic and Talmudic writers from the mid-2nd century C.E. and forward are further colored by some flagrant and basic chronological errors. First, although it was popular to interpret that both the First and Second Temples were destroyed either in the year after each Temple was destroyed (System “B”) or in the latter half of a Sabbath year (System “C”),<sup>9</sup> not everyone agreed. For example, the Babylonian Arakhin reports that Rabbi Judah calculated that “it could not have happened the first time (the temple was destroyed) at the end of septennate (7-year Sabbath cycle)” (System “C” translation), or, “in the year following the end of a septennate” (System “B” translation), based upon each respective interpretation of the term *mutzai* (מִצַּי). The text continues:

But according to Rabbi Judah you must count the 17 years of the 17 jubilee (cycles), and add them to these (other numbers), so that it happened in the 3rd year of a 7-year cycle.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, all of these calculations are spurious, being built out of a faulty and imagined chronology invented by the rabbis during the 2nd century C.E. In reality, the First Temple was destroyed in the 11th year of King Zedekiah of Judah (587/586 B.C.E., Abib reckoning) while the Sabbath year

<sup>7</sup> For a full discussion of this issue, see Chaps. XXIX–XXXII.

<sup>8</sup> HUCA, 54, p. 123; cf. USUJ.

<sup>9</sup> See the discussion below in Chap. XXVIII.

<sup>10</sup> B. Arak., 12b.

actually took place in his 9th year (589/588 B.C.E., Abib reckoning).<sup>11</sup> The destruction of the First Temple, therefore, took place in the 2nd year of a Sabbath cycle, Nisan reckoning. It would fall in the 3rd year of System "B," Tishri reckoning, but in the 2nd year of System "C," Tishri reckoning.

Second, using a distorted interpretation of the prophecy in Daniel, 9:24–27 (i.e., 70 weeks being understood by the rabbis to mean 70 weeks of years—490 years),<sup>12</sup> their chronology was built upon the supposition that the Second Temple stood for 420 years, being destroyed in the 421st year.<sup>13</sup> Under this construct, the Second Temple began to be erected in 351 B.C.E.. It is obvious from reading the *Seder Olam* (29–30) that Rabbi Jose's chronology is based entirely upon this rabbinical interpretation of the prophecy from Daniel and that he purposely makes the destruction of the First Temple built by Solomon and the Second Temple (enhanced by King Herod) conform to its premise.

According to the prophecy in Daniel, 69 weeks (7 weeks plus 62 weeks) would pass before the appearance of the messiah, which was understood to mean 483 years—i.e., the messiah would appear in the 484th year. The 421st year of this chronology brings us to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., the 484th year becomes 133 C.E., the actual beginning of the Bar Kochba revolt.<sup>14</sup> During this revolt some of the important rabbis of that period declared Simeon bar Kochba to be the messiah. The drift of this evidence leads one to suspect that the chronology advocated by Rabbi Jose was in truth originally devised to support the claim of Bar Kochba as the messiah. After Bar Kochba failed, his claim as the messiah died, but the chronology which had been made popular during that time continued with a life of its own.

Unfortunately, Rabbi Jose's arrangement is impossible since the book of Ezra places the completion of the Second Temple in the 6th year of King Darius I of Persia (515 B.C.E.).<sup>15</sup> Ezra and Nehemiah, noted for their involvement in the activities of the Second Temple, lived in the 5th century B.C.E., long before 351 B.C.E. Furthermore, as history reveals, Bar Kochba was not the messiah, as many other rabbis of Bar Kochba's time had themselves argued. Nevertheless, the chronology continued as if it had been valid.

Three divergent opinions were also expressed among the Jews as to what year represented the first celebration of a Sabbath and Jubilee after the Israelites entered the land of Kanaan under Yahushua (Joshua) the son of Nun. These opinions colored their interpretation of chronology and their understanding of which years represented Sabbath years.

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<sup>11</sup> For a full discussion, see below Chap. XIII.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel's prophecy literally means a period of 490 days. There is nothing in the prophecy to even suggest 490 years (e.g., as with Num., 14:34; Ezek., 4:6). To demonstrate, the expressions "70 weeks" and the "middle of the week" are used along with other references to weeks (Dan., 9:24–27). This detail clearly indicates that Daniel was counting by days forming weeks and not by days counted as years. The Jews, who originally twisted this prophecy so that it spoke of years, did so in an attempt to justify their own interpretations of when the messiah would appear.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., B. Arak., 12b; B. Yom., 9a; J. Meg., 1:12; TSCJ, pp. 39–43; TRC, pp. 9f, n. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Not in 132 C.E. as popularly assumed. Bar Kochba was involved in a local revolt in 132 C.E., but he was not recognized by all Judaea until the spring of 133 C.E. After formal recognition, coins and other documents for all Judaea began to be dated by the revolt (see Sect. VI).

<sup>15</sup> Ezra, 6:14–16.

- Most of the Talmudic writers claimed that the Israelites took 7 years to conquer Kanaan and 7 years to divide up the land. The 15th year in the land was a Jubilee.<sup>16</sup>
- The mid-2nd century B.C.E. Jewish work entitled *The Book of Jubilees*, on the other hand, argued that the Jubilee was celebrated in the 1st year that the Israelites entered Kanaan.<sup>17</sup>
- Josephus, Clement of Alexandria, and the *Sepher ha-Yashar* held a distinctly different position. Following the scriptural chronology establishing Caleb's age during these events, they calculated that there were 5 years of Israelite conquest of the Kanaani living west of the Jordan River.<sup>18</sup> The next year, the 6th year of this invasion era, was a year of rest (Sabbath year). Israel's war with the Emori (English "Amorites") living east of the Jordan River, thereby, was counted as the 1st in the Sabbath-cycle count. During the Sabbath year (their 6th year in Kanaan west of the Jordan), the land was distributed among the tribes of Israel. This Sabbath year was followed by 6 years of planting and harvesting in order to produce enough store for the next Sabbath year. The following year began the 49-year count leading up to the first Jubilee year in the land.

Next, beginning in the latter part of the 2nd century C.E., Jewish writers incorrectly established the 1st of Tishri of the 7th month in the 6th year of the Sabbath cycle as the start of the Sabbath year. In doing so, they abandoned the 1st of Abib (called "Nisan" by the Babylonians and post-exilic Jews), being the 1st month (March/April) in the calendar originally utilized among the Israelites.<sup>19</sup> This arrangement was the outgrowth of centuries of tradition intent upon building "a fence around the Law."<sup>20</sup> By putting into place Sabbath year precepts during the months just prior to the actual start of the Sabbath year, the religious leaders of Judaea believed they were preventing their followers from inadvertently breaking the Law (Torah). At first, this interpretation created a Sabbath year that extended from the 1st day of Tishri during "Year 6" until the last day of the last month of Adar (or Be-Adar),<sup>21</sup> the 12th month (Feb./March) of "Year 7."<sup>22</sup> In the 2nd century C.E., this long

<sup>16</sup> TSCJ, pp. 25–28.

<sup>17</sup> Jub., 50:1–4.

<sup>18</sup> Yashar, 89:54–90:1; Jos., *Antiq.*, 5:1:19; Clement, *Strom.*, 1:109:2 (cf. Josh., 14:1–15; and discussion in IC, chap. xii). The Hebrew work of *Sepher ha-Yashar* (also called Jasher) must not be confused with *The Book of Jasher* by Alcuin, which is a fraudulent work. In the citations from the Hebrew Yashar, we utilize the numbering system of Moses Samuel's English translation (Jashar); but, inasmuch as this edition has several flaws, we remind our reader to rely on the Hebrew text (e.g., SHJ).

<sup>19</sup> See for example R.Sh., 1:1, and B. A.Zar., 10a.

<sup>20</sup> Ab., 1:1–5. As C. K. Barrett points out, the Jews understood that by this fence making they were to, "Make additional commandments in order to safeguard the original commandments; for example, certain acts should be avoided towards the approach of evening on Friday lest one should forget and inadvertently continue to do them on the Sabbath" (TNTB, p. 140).

<sup>21</sup> Adar was the 12th month of the year and Be-Adar (Second Adar) was the 13th month which was added about every 3 years (see Chart B).

<sup>22</sup> Or the last day of Adar II, the 13th month of an intercalated year.

period was shortened so that the Sabbath year ended with the arrival of Tishri in the 7th year. The 8th year (or 1st year of the next cycle) was, in turn, made to begin on the 1st day of Tishri of "Year 7."<sup>23</sup>

Modern-day chronologists have assumed that this 1st of Tishri beginning was used as the official start of the Sabbath year not only from the time of the Mishnah, when the oral laws of the rabbis were first put into writing (about 200 C.E. forward) but during the Halakoth (oral laws) period, which started in about the mid-2nd century B.C.E. and continued until around 200 C.E. Indeed, many apply this reckoning not only to the Sabbath year but for every year in the post-exilic period. Yet as this investigation will demonstrate, evidence from the pre-destruction era (i.e., before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 C.E.) and even as late as the Bar Kochba revolt (133–135 B.C.E.) proves that the early Jews of Judaea observed an Abib (Nisan) 1 beginning for all of their years, including the Sabbath year.

We will have more to say regarding these particular subjects in our next chapter and throughout our study. The point to be considered here is that the shifting of the beginning of the year from the spring to the autumn by the Jews in the post-Halakoth period added to the confusion already in process.

It is evident that well before the Bar Kochba revolt, which for all intents and purposes ended with the fall of Jerusalem and Beth Thera in Ab (July/Aug.) of 135 C.E., there had already arisen various opinions about chronology among the different Jewish factions. These opinions became very divisive after the chronological works of Demetrius were published (3rd century B.C.E.). Demetrius, for example, established the notion that the Israelite sojourn in Egypt lasted only 215 years rather than the full 400 years as stated in Genesis and elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> A simple comparison between the works of Josephus, the book of Jubilees, and later Jewish works clearly demonstrate these various views. This debate and the subsequent confusion it caused was further exacerbated by the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 C.E., after which the Jews came to believe that the messiah must surely come now to recover their city and to rebuild the Temple. This messianic dream found its expression in the Bar Kochba revolt of 133–135 C.E.

## **Other Factors**

The destruction of Jewish records by the Romans created a situation where only partial documentation was able to survive. Indeed, the Romans were notorious for destroying the records and cultures of the people whom they hated and conquered (e.g., the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus besieged Carthage for 3 years. After it fell and the city was sacked, the Romans, just as they did with Jerusalem, burned the city to the ground. They did not even leave one stone on top of another).<sup>25</sup> The decimation of Jewish documents especially

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<sup>23</sup> E.g., *Sot.*, 7:8.

<sup>24</sup> *ESJ*, pp. 98–104; *OTP*, 2, pp. 851f; Demetrius, frag. 2:16–18.

<sup>25</sup> Appian, *Punic*, 19:127–132.

took its toll with the burning and the ruination of both the Second Temple and the city of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Damage was again done with the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem and the surrounding area by the Romans after the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 C.E. No doubt the records found in the Qumran caves were hidden there in order to avoid their destruction by the Roman conquerors during this period.

The extreme anti-Jewish sentiment that had developed in the Roman attitude, due to the Jewish revolt of 66–70 C.E., led to the suppression of the practice of keeping the Sabbath years. The observance of a Sabbath year during the Bar Kochba revolt was only a momentary interlude in this suppression. There can be little doubt, as North observes,<sup>26</sup> that the rabbinical ruling in the Mishnah, which allowed for cultivation during Sabbath years when such sowing was commanded by foreign conquerors, came into existence during this post-Second Temple period. It is also known that during the 3rd century C.E. greedy Roman proconsuls used force and threats of severe punishment to extract land-taxes from the Jews during the Sabbath years. These conditions led Yannai (called Rabbah), a chief Rabbinic authority of that time, to issue a proclamation abrogating the Sabbath-year laws.<sup>27</sup>

The loss of records and other sources of documentation for keeping the Sabbath year was complicated by the dispersion of the Judaeen population after the demise of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. It was further aggravated during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, after the Romans began to build a temple dedicated to Jupiter on the site of the ancient Temple of Yahweh. As Dio points out, this sacrilege “brought on a war of no slight importance nor of brief duration.”<sup>28</sup> The Jews, deeming it intolerable that a foreign people should be settled in their holy city and worship a pagan deity there, looked for a messianic deliverance from the evil. They believed they found one in Bar Kochba. The prophecy of 70 weeks found in the book of Daniel was interpreted by the followers of Bar Kochba to mean 70 weeks of years (490 years); and the Sabbath year arriving in the Julian year 133 C.E.<sup>29</sup>—which was followed the next year by a Jubilee—was set forth as the time of deliverance per this prophecy. Records from the time of the Bar Kochba revolt reveal the detail that the Jews had re-established the practice of keeping the Sabbath year.<sup>30</sup>

By August of 135 C.E., the Bar Kochba revolt had collapsed and Jerusalem was, again, under full Roman control. The Roman leaders now deemed it necessary to issue an edict that would permanently ban any of the Jews from even coming near their ancient capital city. As a result, the Roman government made “a legal decree and ordinances” that “the whole nation (of the Jews) should be absolutely prevented from entering from thenceforth even the

<sup>26</sup> *Biblica*, 34.4, pp. 512f.

<sup>27</sup> BJK, p. 382.

<sup>28</sup> Dio, 69:12.

<sup>29</sup> For the evidence of this Sabbath year, see Chaps. XXIX–XXXII.

<sup>30</sup> See Chap. XXIX.

district around Jerusalem,"<sup>31</sup> and "the whole of Judaea was made desolate."<sup>32</sup> For the most part, the Jews were now scattered throughout the world. Once more, Jewish practices, including the observance of the Sabbath year, were suppressed and important records destroyed. This condition not only opened the door for minority opinions but allowed misinformation to flourish.

With the forced non-observance of the Sabbath year, combined with a lapse of time, Jewish scholars, beginning in the mid-2nd century C.E., were left to determine the Sabbath and Jubilee cycle by chronographical considerations, largely derived out of their own devices. The school that rose to dominance calculated that there was a Sabbath year followed by a Jubilee year in the 14th and 15th year after the Israelites entered into the land of Kanaan. Remaining in the possession of this school were the calculations used by the supporters of Bar Kochba.

The following is the Talmudic chronology that became popular and was assumed to be correct:

Exodus to building the Temple	480 years
Existence of First Temple	410
Babylonian Exile	70
<u>Existence of Second Temple</u>	<u>420</u>
Exodus to end of Second Temple	1380

Except for the figure of 480 years,<sup>33</sup> the remaining calculations are all spurious. For example, from the end of the First Temple, destroyed in 587 B.C.E., until the destruction of the Second Temple (which had been refurbished and enhanced by King Herod) in 70 C.E., there are 658 years, not 490 (70 plus 420) years as calculated above—a difference of 168 years. The error was further complicated by the formula that 483 years had passed from the rebuilding of the Temple to the appearance of Bar Kochba as the messiah.

With this error in hand, the rabbis, based upon their incorrect date for the Exodus, determined what they believed to be the Sabbath-year cycle and first Jubilee practiced by the Israelites upon their entering Kanaan. This cycle was then extended down until their own time. The rabbis simply subtracted from their figures the 40 years the Israelites spent in their wilderness sojourn. From here, one school determined that the 15th year of entry into Kanaan was the first Jubilee. Those who held to a complete 50-year Jubilee cycle before a new 50-year cycle started, as a result, found that there were 850 years from the

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.*, 4:6.

<sup>32</sup> Dio, 69:14.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Kings, 6:1. The existence of the First Temple was actually 372 years. The period of the Babylonian exile, beginning the year after the destruction of the First Temple, was 49 years; and from the time that the Jews returned from their Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C.E. until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. was 608 years. For details, see our forthcoming text entitled *Israelite Chronology* (IC).

Israelite entrance into Kanaan until the end of the First Temple.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the First Temple, they argued, was destroyed during a Sabbath year.

Rabbi Judah and those of his school, meanwhile, who believed in a 49-year Jubilee cycle, the 50th year being the 1st year in the next 49-year cycle, found that the 850th year was the 3rd year in the Sabbath cycle. Herein lies the source for the differences between these two systems (as mentioned above).

There is yet one other method of calculation that appears to have been used. Almost without a doubt, the rabbis in the mid-2nd century C.E. knew what years had been celebrated as a Sabbath and a Jubilee during the Bar Kochba revolt. These dates, as shall be proven later on, were 133/134 and 134/135 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning. Yet no exact record was known for the observance of the Sabbath year around the time of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

The debate over the exact cycle (whether it was 50 years or 49 years) was very strong during the late Halakoth and early post-Halakoth period, as their records show. Those who adhered to a 50-year cycle were also those who voiced the opinion that the first Sabbath and Jubilee observed by the Israelites in Kanaan took place in the 14th and 15th years upon their coming into that land.

Some Jews, meanwhile, continued to observe the Jubilee years long after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. (a fact clearly indicated by the Babylonian Rosh ha-Shanah,<sup>35</sup> which not only gives opinions on how the Jubilee should be kept but argues that “it must be kept even outside of Palestine”). This view, by the way, did not interfere with the opinion, held by many of the rabbis since the latter part of the 2nd century B.C.E., that after the fall of Samaria, until the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the Jubilee was no longer required.<sup>36</sup> This abstinence was allowed, so they claimed, by “rabbinical”

<sup>34</sup> TSCJ, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> B. R.Sh., 8b–9b.

<sup>36</sup> It was the opinion of the rabbis, who were dominated by the sect of the Pharisees, that after the fall of Samaria the Jubilee was no longer observed or required (B. Arak., 32; HUCA, 44, p. 154, ns. 4, 6). For two reasons this interpretation is manifestly an error. First, the leadership of the post-exilic Jews, up until the mid-5th century B.C.E., was in the hands of leading Yahwehists, like Ezra the scribe, Nehemiah the governor, and the high priest Yahushua (Joshua), as well as important prophets of Yahweh, e.g., Haggai and Zechariah. The people during this period even formally agreed to observe the Sabbath years (Neh., 10:31). It is extremely unlikely that during a period of restoration and strong adherence to the Torah that these Jews would, in contradiction to their purpose, find a reason to avoid the Jubilee, itself a Sabbath year. Second, exemption was argued only by the Pharisees and the agreement to set aside the Jubilee was certainly not universal among the Jews. This fact is demonstrated by the book of Jubilees, which was composed in the latter half of the 2nd century B.C.E. by a non-Pharisee (OTP, 2, pp. 43f). It goes to great lengths to promote the Jubilee cycle. This text clearly reflects the debate, then raging, over whether or not the Jews were still required to continue their observance of the Jubilee cycle. Later on, the Qumran community bewailed the fact that Israel had in their own time turned “a blind eye” to the issues of the Jubilee and Sabbath years. They believed that men should return to the Torah of Moses (DR, 16:2–4).

The Pharisees were unable to press their interpretation until they had gained great influence among the masses, which circumstance did not become evident until the reign of Hyrcanus (134/133–105/104 B.C.E.), see Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:10:5. During the reign of Queen Alexandra (76/75–68/67 B.C.E.), they even acquired political power (see Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:16:1–3, *Wars*, 1:5:2). The influence of the Pharisees over the masses, beginning in the latter half of the 2nd century B.C.E., became so great that it made the more conservative sect of the Sadducees “submit unwillingly and



rather than "scriptural" ordinance;<sup>37</sup> i.e., the rabbis had no scriptural authority but had invested themselves with the power to make such a decision.

In accordance with this 50-year cycle view, these rabbis counted 50 years back from the last known Jubilee in 134/135 C.E. = 84/85 C.E. (Nisan reckoning). The year 84/85 C.E., therefore, was determined to be a Jubilee and the year prior, 83/84 C.E., a Sabbath year. Continuing the 7-year cycle back from 83/84 C.E., they arrived at 69/70 C.E., Nisan reckoning, as a Sabbath year. When the calendar using a Tishri reckoning for the beginning for the Sabbath year was applied, this year was moved back 6 months, beginning with the 1st of Tishri in 68 and ending before the 1st of Tishri of 69 C.E. The result of this calculation is the System "B" cycle.

What then of those Jews who claimed that the year in which the Second Temple was destroyed was a Sabbath year? This conclusion is certainly not explained by popular Talmudic chronology. It is suggested by the evidence that this lesser-known understanding was based either upon some actual piece of data about the destruction or, as is more likely the case, upon the correct calculation of the Sabbath cycle (i.e., a 49-year cycle wherein the 50th year represents the 1st year of the next 49-year period; a calculation deemed accurate even by Zuckermann).<sup>38</sup> Using a correct calculation they could easily count back from 133/134 C.E., when the Sabbath was observed during the Bar Kochba revolt, to the year that Jerusalem fell. From this method they could easily conclude that the city's demise occurred during a Sabbath year. System "C," like System "B," counted back to the previous Tishri 1. As a result, they came up with the 1st of Tishri in 69 until the 1st of Tishri in 70 C.E.

Unfortunately, the Talmudists of this minority view continued to use the same flawed chronology as their brothers and when they calculated backwards from their date for the destruction of the Second Temple their figures showed that the First Temple would also have been destroyed in a Sabbath year (which is impossible as any accurate chronology for this period will demonstrate).

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perforce, yet submit they do to the formulas of the Pharisees, since otherwise the masses would not tolerate them" (Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:1:4). It may very well be that the severity of the famine suffered during the Jubilee of the 151st Seleucid year (161/160 B.C.E.) (see 1 Macc., 9:23f, cf. 9:1–18) served to convince these rabbis and the masses that continual observance of the Jubilee was unnecessary, since it resulted more in divine punishment than in a national blessing. With the attainment of political power for the Pharisees in the early part of the 1st century B.C.E., the setting aside of the observance of the Jubilee year became a *fait accompli*.

<sup>37</sup> HUCA, 44, p. 154, ns. 4, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Zuckermann notes that, "The fiftieth year forms no part of the past period of the Jubilee, but opens a *new series* of a Jubilee-cycle of 49 years. This Jubilee-year appears to be independent, but is really included in the subsequent period. This has been correctly conceived by R. Jehudah, who maintains that '*the Jubilee-year is reckoned to the following Sabbatical cycle and to the following period of the Jubilee.*' The year of Jubilee, moreover, is not celebrated as the conclusion of a period, but as the commencement of a new series of years" (TSCJ, p. 23.). This 50-year calculation holds the same relationship to Sabbath years that the Festival of Weeks holds to Sabbath days. The Festival of Weeks is calculated by counting 7 weeks of days (49 days) from the weekly Sabbath that falls during Passover, then celebrates the next day, the 50th day, which is the 1st day of the week (cf. Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:8:4), as a festival and high Sabbath (Lev., 23:9–21). The normal cycle of a 7-day week never changes because of the Festival of Weeks. Neither does the normal cycle of the Sabbath years.

It is the charge of this study that the underlying reason that the Talmudic Jews, from the time of the mid-2nd century C.E., expounded System “B” or System “C” is the fact that they calculated their answers from flawed and misinformed chronographical data developed just prior to or during the outbreak of the Bar Kochba war and as expanded upon in later centuries.

### **Conclusion**

System “B” and “C” calculations were based upon a flawed chronological system which must have been created several years after the First Revolt of Judaea against Rome and (based upon their interpretation of the prophecy in Daniel, 9:24–27) seems to have served as an added impetus for the Second Revolt. The rabbis relied far too heavily upon their religious traditions and scribal interpretations and did not adequately utilize sound historical documentation. Later, the calculations left over from the rabbis living during the Bar Kochba revolt were combined with a Tishri (Sept./Oct.) beginning for the Sabbath year to create a new interpretation—far different, for example, than the chronology found in Josephus (c.90 C.E.).

For those who believed in a full 50 years for each Jubilee cycle, the Second Temple was destroyed in a post-Sabbath year. For some of those who adhered to a 49-year cycle (e.g., Rabbi Judah), it occurred in the 3rd year of a Sabbath cycle. Those who opposed these views and contended that Jerusalem and the Temple fell during a Sabbath year did so because they either had retained some vague tradition that such had been the case or correctly calculated the cycle, which achieved for them the correct answer. They simply adjusted their chronology to reflect this solution.

In time and despite the fact that the debate as to whether the Jubilee cycle had originally been a complete 50-year unit or one of 49 years (with the 50th year also acting as the 1st year of the next 49-year cycle), the unsupported arguments that the First Temple had been destroyed in the 3rd year of a Sabbath cycle or in a Sabbath year itself were eventually suppressed by the advocates of System “B” and “C.”

The problem was made even more acute when the rabbis changed the New Year date for the beginning of a Sabbath year. This date had previously been the 1st of Abib, later called Nisan (March/April), but sometime after the conquest of Jerusalem in 135 C.E. and before 200 C.E., as reflected in the Mishnah, officially became Tishri 1—at least for the Sabbath year and the 1st year of the next Sabbath cycle. This change, though, was by no means immediate and had been in process over a long, drawn-out period of time. At first, apparently beginning in the last part of the 2nd century B.C.E., Tishri 1 was introduced as a *de facto* beginning only for the practice of not planting or sowing crops in the last part of the year before the Sabbath year. Shortly before the Mishnah was written (c.200 C.E. or soon thereafter) every Sabbath year officially started with Tishri 1.

The background of the Systems "B" and "C" scenarios is suspect and their arrangements are flawed. Therefore, it would be unwise to simply accept their premise as valid without a thorough and close examination of earlier and much more reliable records. A judicious approach is to set aside the Talmudic speculations of Rabbi Jose and others who followed his lead and to examine the records from the period prior to the composition of the Seder Olam (composed about 160 C.E.). These earlier records should first be judged on their own merits. Only then, if these earlier records agree with the conclusions of Systems "B" or "C," should we bring the Talmudic documents into the picture as added support.

Yet what our investigation has discovered is quite to the contrary. The earlier records actually disagree with the later opinions, such as the one expressed by Rabbi Jose and the Talmudic writers who followed him. The evidence clearly establishes a cycle of its own. Accordingly, it is time to dismiss the calculations set forth by the advocates of System "B" and other System arrangements and return to the original understanding, which we define as System "A."

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