

Chapter XIV

# 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 Festival of Tabernacles in the 7th Israelite month, “day by day, from the 1st day until the last day, he read aloud in the book of the laws of the *eloahim*; and they kept the festival 7 days, and on the 8th (day) was the assembly, as from the judgment.”<sup>1</sup> This passage takes on important significance once we consider it in context with the commandment recorded in Deuteronomy:

In the last part of the 7 years, in the appointed time of the YEAR OF שְׁמִטָּה (*Shemittah*; RELEASE),<sup>2</sup> in the Festival 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.<sup>3</sup>

Ezra and the Levitical priests performed this duty just as prescribed by the judgment given in 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 1st day of the 7th month,” that is, when the Jews “come in” and are gathered together in Jerusalem to observe the festivals of the 7th month. He “read aloud” the Torah from a pulpit in the street.<sup>4</sup>

Afterwards, the Levitical priests continued the teaching, “and they gave the sense and caused (them) to understand the reading.”<sup>5</sup> The next day Ezra taught the chief of the fathers of all the people and the Levites so that they

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<sup>1</sup> Neh., 8:18.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew term שְׁמִטָּה (*Shemittah*) means, “remission (of debt) or suspension of (labor),” “release, acquittal” (SEC, Heb. #8059; CHAL, p. 374; HEL, p. 270). This release is ordained in the 7th year of the Sabbath cycle and is, thereby, equated with a Sabbath year itself (see below n. 3).

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

<sup>4</sup> Neh., 8:2–4.

<sup>5</sup> Neh., 8:8.

also could correctly “understand the words of the Torah.”<sup>6</sup> Ezra’s teaching was continued “day by day” throughout the entire Festival of Tabernacles,<sup>7</sup> 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 ארתחשטתא (*Arthkhshastha*), called by the Greeks “Arta-xerxes (I) Longimanus.”<sup>8</sup> 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 the Euphrates River in the land of Babylonia to go to Jerusalem “on the 12th day of the 1st month in the 7th year of the reign of Xerxes (Arta-xerxes I) and arrived at Jerusalem in the 5th month of the same year.”<sup>9</sup>

A little while after arriving at the city, the issue of the numerous marriages between Jewish men 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 20th day of the 9th month (December)”<sup>10</sup>

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.”<sup>11</sup> They resolved that they would begin to search and examine all such marriages “on the new moon of the 10th month” and that they would continue their inquiry until the new moon of a month to follow.”<sup>12</sup> According to Ezra’s own account, and that of 1 Esdras, this following month was the “1st day of the 1st month” of the next year.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, we have now reached the 8th year of Arta-xerxes I. After this problem was rectified, Josephus continues:

In the 7th month they celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles and, when almost all the people had gathered for it, they went up to the open court of the

<sup>6</sup> Neh., 8:13.

<sup>7</sup> Neh., 8:18.

<sup>8</sup> 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 heading, “Arta-xerxes, who is also called Longimanus,” that it was during his reign that Ezra and Nehemiah brought out the Hebrews (Eusebius, *Chron.*, p. 69; also see Jerome’s version in Helm, *Chronik*, pp. 110f). For a discussion, see DECJ; also see NBD, p. 89.

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

<sup>10</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:2–4; 1 Esdras, 9:5. Also see Chap. XXI, p. 294, n. 13.

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

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

<sup>13</sup> Ezra, 10:16–17; 1 Esdras, 9:17.

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.<sup>14</sup>

The book of 1 Esdras gives the same sequence of events as Josephus. After mentioning the removal of foreign wives on “the 1st day of the 10th month,”<sup>15</sup> 1 Esdras adds:

And the priests and Levites, and they that were of Israel, dwelt in Jerusalem, and in the country, on the 1st day of the 7th month: so the children of Israel were in their habitations.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup>

Josephus and 1 Esdras make it clear that Ezra arrived in the 5th month of the 7th year of Xerxes (Arta-xerxes I) and that the events of the 9th month and following were themselves succeeded by the reading of the Law in the 7th month of the next year, being the 8th year of Arta-xerxes I.

### **Ezra’s Version**

The book of Ezra reports much the same thing as Josephus. It states that Ezra left Babylon “in the 7th year of Arta-xerxes the king. And he came to Jerusalem in the 5th month, which was in the 7th year of the king. For on the 1st (day) of the 1st month he began to go up from Babylon, and on the 1st of the 5th month he came to Jerusalem.”<sup>18</sup> After discussing details about who came with Ezra and what items they brought, Ezra adds:

And we departed from the river of Ahaua on the 12th of the 1st month to go (to) Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup>

Josephus and 1 Esdras, as already noted, agree with this date of departure from Babylon.<sup>20</sup> 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 foreign women (i.e., those of pagan religions).<sup>21</sup> Ezra then prayed about the matter, after which he requested a meeting of the council of the elders in 3 days.<sup>22</sup> On the 9th month, the 20th day, during

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<sup>14</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:5.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Esdras, 9:16–36.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Esdras, 9:37.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Esdras, 9:38–53.

<sup>18</sup> Ezra, 7:7–9.

<sup>19</sup> Ezra, 8:31.

<sup>20</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:2; 1 Esdras, 8:6.

<sup>21</sup> Ezra, 9:1–15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:8.

a “heavy rain,” the elders met and agreed with Ezra, resolving to rectify this problem.<sup>23</sup>

These people sat down and began judging these cases “on the 1st day of the 10th month” and finished their workload “by the 1st day of the 1st month.”<sup>24</sup> When we arrive at the 1st month, the new year had begun, being the 8th year of King Artaxerxes I.

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 Festival 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 16th year (700/699 B.C.E.), the 9th year of Artaxerxes I (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 who were returning to Jerusalem.

### **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 20th year of Artaxerxes I rather than his 8th. This puzzle shall be solved as we proceed.

In this version of the story, Nehemiah, the cup bearer of King Artaxerxes I, hears of the desperate need for repair of the walls of Jerusalem. The news came to him in the month of Khisleu (Nov./Dec.),<sup>25</sup> the 9th month. Later on, Nehemiah writes, “in the month of Nisan, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes the king,” he, for the first time, appeared sad before the king while serving the wine.<sup>26</sup> When questioned why Nehemiah was so troubled, Nehemiah told Artaxerxes I 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 sacred city of Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup>

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 20th year and until the 32nd year of Artaxerxes—12 years—I and my brothers did not eat the bread of the governor.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 10:9–15.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 10:16–17.

<sup>25</sup> Neh., 1:1–11. See Chart B.

<sup>26</sup> Neh., 2:1.

<sup>27</sup> Neh., 2:2–8.

<sup>28</sup> Neh., 5:14.

Josephus notes that Nehemiah was sent on his expedition to Judaea by the Persian monarch on the very next day.<sup>29</sup> This detail accords with the other known facts, since it took 4 full months to make the journey from nearby Babylon to Jerusalem,<sup>30</sup> and according to Nehemiah, the walls were subsequently repaired in 52 days, being finished on the 25th of Elul (Aug./Sept.), the 6th month of that year.<sup>31</sup>

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.<sup>32</sup> At this time contributions were made by the Jews to support the Temple:<sup>33</sup>

So the priests, and the Levites, and the gatekeepers, and the singers, and (some) of the people, and the temple-servants, and all the Israelites (Jews of Judaea) lived in their cities. AND WHEN THE 7TH MONTH CAME, THE SONS OF ISRAEL WERE IN THEIR CITIES.<sup>34</sup>

As a result, we have now arrived at the 7th month of the 20th year of Artaxerxes I. 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 Festival of Tabernacles), from the 1st day until the last day, he read in the book of the Law of the *eloahim*."<sup>35</sup> This evidence conclusively shows that Ezra read the Law in the 7th month of the 20th year of Artaxerxes I.

The book of Nehemiah has caused much consternation and confusion because it dates Ezra's reading of the Law to the 20th year of King Artaxerxes I (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 Artaxerxes I's 8th year, not his 20th. 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 8th year of Artaxerxes I was simply the same as his 20th 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.

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<sup>29</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:7.

<sup>30</sup> Ezra, 7:8f, cf. 8:31.

<sup>31</sup> Neh., 6:15. See Chart B.

<sup>32</sup> Neh., 7:1-69.

<sup>33</sup> Neh., 7:70-72.

<sup>34</sup> Neh., 7:73.

<sup>35</sup> Neh., 8:18.

### **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.<sup>36</sup> The Babylonians used the regnal year (or accession-year) system, i.e., the 1st year was counted not from the time the king came to the throne but from the 1st day of the 1st month of Nisânu (= Jewish "Nisan," March/April) after he began ruling.<sup>37</sup> The period from when the king mounted the throne until the 1st 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.

Xerxes the Great, the father of Artaxerxes I, was murdered on December 16, 465 B.C.E. by a usurper named Artabanus.<sup>38</sup> In this insurrection Artaxerxes I barely escaped with his life. Artabanus, we are told, subsequently enjoyed the throne of Persia for 7 months.<sup>39</sup> 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 I began to reign on or about June 12, 464 B.C.E.<sup>40</sup> 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 1st of Nisan of that year. In June of 464 B.C.E., Artaxerxes I defeated Artabanus and regained the throne of the Persian Empire for himself. On the 1st of Nisan in the year 463 B.C.E., Artaxerxes I 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 I's 1st year began on the 1st of Nisan, 463 B.C.E. As such, his 7th year was 457 B.C.E., the year Ezra arrived at Jerusalem; the 8th 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 15th 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 I and lived, not in Babylon, but in Shushan (Susan, Susa), a capital city of Persia.<sup>41</sup> In calculating Artaxerxes I's reign, Nehemiah would have used an entirely different interpretation.

According to ancient records, Artaxerxes I 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 of Greece 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

<sup>36</sup> Ezra, 7:1–10.

<sup>37</sup> HBC, pp. 85ff; MNHK, p. 43; CAW, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Diodorus, 11:69.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., Sec. Hier. Cod., pp. 28f; Manetho, frag. 70; etc.

<sup>40</sup> BC, p. 15. No record of an AY is found for Artaxerxes I in either Persia or Babylonia, only in south Egypt at Aswan (dated XI/18 = Jan. 3) where Artabanus was not recognized.

<sup>41</sup> Neh., 1:1; Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:6.

and was ostracized. In fear for his life, he fled to Asia Minor.<sup>42</sup> At that time, Themistocles made contact with the Persian king seeking political asylum.

What has confused later historians is the fact that there were two different versions of the story regarding Themistocles' contact with the Persian king. 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 Heraclides 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.<sup>43</sup>

Nepos, the 1st 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 Artaxerxes.<sup>44</sup>

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

Themistocles arrived in Asia Minor in 473 B.C.E. Diodorus of Sicily, 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.<sup>45</sup> 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 "1 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.<sup>46</sup> He then "came to the king," i.e., visited Persia, as an advisor.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Diodorus, 11:55–56.

<sup>43</sup> Plutarch, *Them.*, 27.

<sup>44</sup> Nepos, *Them.*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Diodorus, 11:58, cf. 11:54–59.

<sup>46</sup> Diodorus, 11:57; Thucydides, 1:138; Plutarch, *Them.*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> Thucydides, 1:138.

Adding to this information is a notation found in Jerome's edition of the *Chronicorum Canonum* of Eusebius. Under the 1st 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)."<sup>48</sup> Themistocles did not leave Asia Minor for his visit to Persia until after his trial. Counting 1 year back for him to prepare for the trial 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 Artaxerxes I, 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 Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes, who had lately come to the throne."<sup>49</sup> This notice places Artaxerxes I on the throne of Persia not long before 473 B.C.E., which was already a full 9 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 Artaxerxes I had ruled as co-regent with his father for at least 11 years. Our arrangement would prove that his 1st 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 1st regnal year of Artaxerxes I 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 20th year, and I was in the palace at Shushan . . .<sup>50</sup>

The chapter goes on to explain 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 20th year of what?" It cannot mean the 20th regnal year of Artaxerxes I, 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 20th year of Artaxerxes, 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."<sup>51</sup>

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 9th month of the

<sup>48</sup> Helm, *Chronik*, p. 109 (191F:20).

<sup>49</sup> Thucydides, 1:137.

<sup>50</sup> Neh., 1:1.

<sup>51</sup> Neh., 2:1.

year) in the 20th year, when Nehemiah first heard of the problems in Jerusalem, was not the same as the 20th year during which Artaxerxes I questioned Nehemiah in the month of Nisan (the 1st 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 20th year and until the 32nd year of Artaxerxes the king—12 years,"<sup>52</sup> where 13 years of rule are indicated but only 12 regnal years are claimed).

Therefore, when at the beginning of his book Nehemiah makes mention of "the month of Khisleu (the 9th month), in the 20th year," he was making reference not to the king's reign but his own service in the palace. A service beginning 20 years ago would be equal to Artaxerxes I's accession year. As a result, the subsequent events—which happened "in the month of Nisan (the 1st month), in the 20th year of Artaxerxes the king"—refer to the 20th regnal year of the king, that is counted from the year after his accession year.

### **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 25th year of Xerxes (Artaxerxes I).<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

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 25th year of Artaxerxes I is indeed equivalent to his 20th year.

Counting back 5 years from 475 B.C.E., when Artaxerxes I 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 associate his son with the throne at this important occasion. If Xerxes the Great 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., Artaxerxes I was made co-regent—476 B.C.E. also being the year of his accession.

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<sup>52</sup> Neh., 5:14. That the Persians of this period used the accession-year method, see BC, pp. 6–17; JNES, 13.1, pp. 4–20.

<sup>53</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:6f.

<sup>54</sup> Marcus, *Jos.*, vi, p. 390, n. f, and also see pp. 400f, n. b.

## 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 Artaxerxes I should begin, not with his 1st 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 20th year of Artaxerxes 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.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, as we have previously shown, every source prior to the mid-2nd century C.E. declares only a Nisan (Abib) year reckoning in official use by the Jews of Judaea.

Systems “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?

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 non-accession-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 I 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 C).

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 I’s 8th year, but use the accession-year system—the 20th year of Artaxerxes I (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 I’s 8th year, we are still faced with the fact that all of our sources declare that Ezra publicly read the Torah during the Festival of Tabernacles in the 7th month.<sup>56</sup> Not one of these writers qualifies his statement by indicating that this 7th 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.

<sup>55</sup> E.g., Zech., 1:7, 7:1; Esther, 2:16, 3:7, 8:12; and see below n. 56; cf. Chart B.

<sup>56</sup> Neh., 7:73–8:18; LXX Neh., 7:73–8:18; Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:5; 1 Esdras, 9:37–53.

## **Conclusion**

Simply put, Nehemiah's reference point for King Artaxerxes I was seen from a Persian perspective. Nehemiah's term of office as the king's cup bearer started with Artaxerxes I's accession year, the year he began to reign as coregent with his father, King Xerxes the Great. 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 belonged only to Xerxes the Great until his death in 465 B.C.E. It would go next 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 1st of Nisan, 463 B.C.E., when for the first time he actually "took the hand of Bel"<sup>57</sup> and ruled as sole monarch.

As a result, the book of Nehemiah placed Ezra's public reading of the Torah (Law) during the Festival of Tabernacles in the 7th month of the 20th Persian year of Artaxerxes I, thereby signifying that his 20th year was a Sabbath year for the Jews. Meanwhile, Josephus, 1 Esdras, and the book of Ezra all place the event in Artaxerxes I's 8th 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 year. 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.

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<sup>57</sup> CAW, p. 7; MBA, p. 480; cf. HBC, pp. 85f.

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