

# *The Seleucid Era in Judaea*

*Part I of the Sabbath  
Year of 162/161 B.C.E.*

Our next datable Sabbath year is revealed in the Maccabean books and the works of Josephus, with the story of the siege of Bethzura and Jerusalem by Antiochus Eupator (Antiochus V). According to these records, the 150th year of the Seleucid era was a Sabbath year (162/161 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning). This claim will not fit System “B,” which would make the 149th Seleucid year (Tishri, 164 until Tishri, 163 B.C.E.) a Sabbath year and must determine the first Seleucid year as beginning in October (Tishri 1), 312 B.C.E. Neither does it reconcile with System “C,” as proposed by Wacholder and others. They would also have the 149th Seleucid year be the Sabbath year but would instead begin the Seleucid calendar with October of the year 311 B.C.E., making the 149th year from October, 163 until October, 162 B.C.E.

The relevant ancient records are considered by present-day scholars to be confused and unreliable. The irony is that these records are among the most reliable and provide a solid foundation for the reconstruction of the Sabbath and Jubilee cycle. The problem is not with the evidence, which clearly sets forth the correct Sabbath cycle, but with the attempt by those interpreting these records to make them conform to System “B”—or, as in the case of Wacholder and those accepting his views, System “C.” Both cycles are based upon the false premise that the ancient Jewish year began with the month of Tishri (Sept./Oct.). In reality, as all the evidence demonstrates, the Jews of this early period began their year with the month of Abib (later called Nisan; i.e., March/April) 1, as commanded in the Torah.<sup>1</sup>

The conclusions of Systems “B” and “C,” therefore, entirely miss the mark, in that their proponents try to rearrange the evidence to fit their preconceived cycles. Evidence from the works of Josephus and 1 and 2 Maccabees prove that their authors calculated the Seleucid year based upon a Nisan 1 beginning. At no time do these records ever suggest that the Sabbath year began on the 1st day of Tishri.

## **The Seleucid Era Used in Judaea**

To understand the evidence from the Maccabean books and Josephus we must first grapple with the issue of the Seleucid era. Here we find two different reckonings anciently in use: one based upon the Babylonian calendar, which was dominant throughout the Middle East, and a second based upon the Macedonian calendar, which was in practice among the Greeks. When the

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<sup>1</sup> As Abib, see Exod., 12:1–20, 13:4, 23:15, 34:18; Deut., 16:1. As Nisan, see Esther, 3:7.

Seleucid era was adopted within the Greek Empire in Asia, the Babylonian system was used. Yet later on, when the Seleucid ruling house transferred its base of power to Syria, the Greeks of Syria adopted the Macedonian method. Thereafter, the choice of which method was used varied from place to place.

The Seleucid era was named after Seleucus Nicator (321–281 B.C.E.), one of the generals of Alexander the Great, who after Alexander's death was part of the Diadochi (successors). He ruled as the satrap of Babylon. The Seleucid era was not only one of the most widely used calendar systems in the ancient world but it also was among those that remained in use the longest. It continued as a system with the exiled Jews for a long time, being called "the Greek era" and "the era of contracts" because legal documents were dated by it.<sup>2</sup>

In the long struggle for power that ensued, Seleucus fled to Egypt where he allied himself with Ptolemy Soter. Later, Seleucus and Ptolemy together defeated Demetrius Poliorcetes in a decisive battle at Gaza. Castor mentions the battle near Gaza between Ptolemy and Demetrius, stating that it "was fought after 11 years (after the year) of Alexander's death, in the 117th Olympiad," Macedonian reckoning, Alexander having died "in the 114th Olympiad."<sup>3</sup> Alexander's death took place on June 13, 323 B.C.E., which indeed was in the 1st year of the 114th Olympiad (Oct., 324 to Oct., 323 B.C.E.). "After 11 years" brings us to the 1st year of the 117th Macedonian Olympiad (Oct., 312 to Oct., 311 B.C.E.), the war being fought early in the 12th year of that period.

Diodorus of Sicily comments that Demetrius had "summoned his soldiers to Old Gaza from their winter quarters on all sides" and "awaited the approach of his opponents."<sup>4</sup> In this battle Demetrius was defeated, "and Cassander, who had lost many soldiers," returned to Macedonia because he "saw that winter was at hand."<sup>5</sup> This major battle, therefore, took place in the wintertime and must be dated to the early half of the winter of 312/311 B.C.E.

After this battle, Seleucus "set out for Babylon."<sup>6</sup> In Jerome's translation of Eusebius' *Chronicorum Canonum*, the beginning of the reign of Seleucus is placed in the 1st year of the 117th Olympiad, a Greek era which began on July 1, 312 B.C.E. and continued to June 30, 311 B.C.E.<sup>7</sup> Jack Finegan writes:

The victory and triumphant return to Babylon were evidently considered to mark the real beginning of his reign; the first regnal year of Seleucus was dated accordingly as beginning with the ensuing New Year's day in Babylon, namely the following Nisanu 1, which was Apr. 3, 311 B.C.E.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> HBC, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Jos., *Apion*, 1:22, par. 184–186. For Castor and the Macedonian Oly., see JQR, 10.1, pp. 58f.

<sup>4</sup> Diodorus, 19:80:5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 19:89:2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19:90:1.

<sup>7</sup> Helm, *Chronik*, p. 126 (208F:15–21); HBC, p. 123.

<sup>8</sup> HBC, p. 120.

Later on, when Seleucid rule was centered in Syria, the Greek kings living there adopted the Macedonian calendar, which began with the month of Dios (equivalent to the Jewish month of Tishri in the earlier correlation; but becoming the Macedonian month of Hyperberetaeus in the later correlation).<sup>9</sup> Under this determination the 1st year of the Seleucid era began with Dios 1 (i.e., Oct. 7) of 312 B.C.E., the Macedonian year in which the battle at Gaza was won. Since both calendars were observed in the area around Judaea, the question arises, “Which one of these calendars was utilized by the authors of Maccabees and Josephus?”

### **The Year Begins with Abib (Nisan)**

In an effort to force the records to accommodate a Sabbath year in the 149th Seleucid, chronologists—whether from the Zuckermann-Schürer school (System “B”) or the Marcus-Wacholder interpretation (System “C”)—boldly claim that the ancient post-exilic Sabbath years began on the 1st day of Tishri (the 7th month) of the 6th year in the scripturally designated cycle.

Yet they do so entirely on the basis of one comment made in one of the books of the Mishnah,<sup>10</sup> their earliest source, written at the end of the 2nd century C.E., centuries after the fact. Indeed, the Rosh ha-Shanah text is very weak evidence that the Sabbath year began with the month of Tishri before the 2nd century C.E. The Mishnah was part of the developing traditions that would form the Talmud and, as such, the most that anyone can infer is that its Tishri 1 New Year date had only been part of those more recent developments.

As we have already stated, there is not one shred of evidence before the end of the 2nd century C.E., when the Mishnah was composed, that suggests that the Sabbath year officially began with Tishri 1.<sup>11</sup> More important to our discussion, the evidence from the books of Maccabees and Josephus clearly proves that their authors calculated the Seleucid year by the so-called Babylonian method, which began the year in the month of Nisânu (Jewish “Nisan”). At no time do any of these texts even suggest an exception for the Sabbath year. If such an unusual starting date did exist these writers surely would have been compelled to say something. What we find is just the opposite. They clearly demonstrate that the Sabbath year began with the month of Abib (Nisan).

### **First Two Books of Maccabees**

The year system followed in the first two books of Maccabees (early- and mid-1st century B.C.E.) begins with Nisan 1. This fact is first indicated by the obvious: since the Exodus, the Israelites had practiced a Nisan (Abib) beginning for their year. Furthermore, the Judaeans of the post-exilic period were descendants of the exiles who had lived in Babylonia, a region where they also utilized the Nisan calendar. It was from the Babylonians that these Jews acquired their individual

<sup>9</sup> HBC, pp. 72–73. Also see Chart B.

<sup>10</sup> R.Sh., 1:1.

<sup>11</sup> See above Chap. II.

month names.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the Jews who resettled Judaea were taught by such noted biblical scholars as Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah, as well as the scribe Ezra—all prophets of Yahweh who would have closely adhered to the sound scriptural teaching and doctrine which began the year with the month of Abib (later called Nisan from the Babylonian month-name “Nisânu”).

With the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek generals who served under him carved up the empire and set up monarchies of their own. Among these royal families, the Seleucid line was established in Syria and the Ptolemies laid hold of Egypt. At first, Judaea fell under Egyptian authority and remained an Egyptian vassal until 198 B.C.E. In that year control over Judaea was rent away by the Syrian Seleucid Empire.

Even more important for our concerns, the writers of the Maccabean books basked in the glory of the Judaeian victory over the Greek king of Syria, Antiochus (IV) Epiphanes (175–163 B.C.E.), and his ruling house. This victory was especially important to the Jews of this period because Antiochus Epiphanes tried to Hellenize Judaea by force. In this effort, Epiphanes was very brutal and vicious to the Jews, not only denying them their ancestral laws but enforcing the death penalty if any Jew dared practice them. He even defiled the Temple at Jerusalem. Subsequently, why these Jewish patriots would endear themselves to a native Greek form of the calendar, especially one rooted in Greek-dominated Syria, the hated enemy of the Jews,<sup>13</sup> would be hard to reconcile.

Undeniable proof that the writers of the Maccabean books followed a Nisan Seleucid year comes from the internal data of the texts. In 1 and 2 Maccabees, for example, we have the following statements:<sup>14</sup>

Now on the 25th day of the 9th month, which is called Khasleu (Khisleu), in the 148th year (i.e., of the Seleucid era).<sup>15</sup>

So in the 7th month of the 160th year, at the Festival of Tabernacles, Jonathan put on the sacred robe.<sup>16</sup>

Now Simon was visiting the cities that were in the country, and taking care for the good ordering of them; at which time he came down himself to Jericho with his sons, Mattathias and Judas, in the 177th year, in the 11th month, called Shebat.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> HBC, pp. 38ff.

<sup>13</sup> Josephus points out that in the time of the Jewish ruler Alexander Jannaeus (103/102–77/76 B.C.E.), the Jewish king did not allow Syrians into his mercenary army—even to help quell a revolt by the Jewish people against him. This prohibition was “on account of their (the Syrian-Greeks) innate hatred of his nation” (Jos., *Wars*, 1:4:3). The Syrian-Greeks, therefore, hated the Jews as much as the Jews hated the Syrian-Greeks.

<sup>14</sup> Siwan is the 3rd month (Esther, 8:9); Khasleu is the 9th month (Zech., 7:1); Tebeth is the 10th month (Esther, 2:16); Shebat is the 11th month (Zech., 1:7); Adar is the 12th month (Esther, 3:7, 8:12). For a complete month equivalency list, see Chart B.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Macc., 4:52.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Macc., 10:21.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Macc., 16:14.

And they ordained all with a common decree in no case to let the day pass without solemnity, but to celebrate the 13th day of the 12th month, which in the Syrian tongue is called Adar, the day before Mardocheus' day.<sup>18</sup>

These passages leave the chronologists in a quandary because they clearly spell out that the Seleucid year is reckoned by the Nisan or Babylonian system. Finegan, for example, concludes: "Here [[in Maccabees]] where both number and name are cited it is evident that the months are numbered from the spring and it may be supposed that the year references in the same verse are also reckoned from spring, i.e., are years of the Seleucid era according to the Babylonian-Jewish calendar."<sup>19</sup> Wacholder (System "C") also admits the discrepancy:

A number of scholars have maintained that the festival now known as Rosh Hashanah, which falls on the first of Tishri (September-October) was regarded then as the beginning of the year. But the Maccabean books, like all other biblical sources, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, take it for granted that Nisan was the first month.<sup>20</sup>

Wacholder, like most other chronologists, then overrides all this evidence by citing (1) Leviticus, 25:9, which, as we have already shown, has nothing to do with the regular Sabbath year but only with the year of Jubilee (and then only with the 7th month of the 50th year itself) and (2) the early 3rd century C.E. text of the Mishnah called Rosh ha-Shanah,<sup>21</sup> the latter being far removed from the events under consideration! With this illusion of evidence in hand, Wacholder makes the following non sequitur: "There is no doubt, however, that the season of *Shemithah* [[the Sabbath year]] commenced on the first of Tishri and ended on the last day of Elul."<sup>22</sup>

In reality, there is no evidence at all that a Tishri reckoning was ever officially recognized until shortly before the mid-2nd century C.E. Indeed, the evidence only proves that their official year previously began with Abib (Nisan).

Chronologists, in a vain attempt to "interpret" the evidence in order to have some grounds for their proposed systems, then look for dates in the Maccabean books that can be construed as belonging to the Greek method of the Seleucid year (i.e., an Oct. until Oct. reckoning). Finegan's *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, as an example, presents this popular approach.<sup>23</sup> In the first class he gives a long list of various citations which clearly prove a Nisan

<sup>18</sup> 2 Macc., 15:36.

<sup>19</sup> HBC, pp. 121f.

<sup>20</sup> HUCA, 44, pp. 161f.

<sup>21</sup> R. Sh., 1:1.

<sup>22</sup> HUCA, 44, p. 162.

<sup>23</sup> HBC, p. 122.

reckoning in the book of 1 Maccabees (namely: 1:29, 54, 59; 2:70; 4:52; 9:3, 54; 10:21; 13:41, 51; 14:27; 16:14).

In the second class Finegan lists, "Dates which MAY come" from a source using the October year (i.e., 1:10; 3:37; 6:16; 7:1; 10:1, 57, 67; 11:19; 14:1; 15:10). A close examination of these citations proves there is no justification for such a conclusion. Not one citation even remotely demonstrates that it was based upon a Tishri beginning for the year. The fact that these verses by themselves lack definition and are inconclusive for any year system does not automatically mean that an October year "may" be justified, as Finegan and others conjecture. In fact, to suggest that these sources would indiscriminately jump back and forth between different year systems without explanation is not only illogical but mischaracterizes the high quality of the literary work they represent.

In the third class are four citations (namely: 1:20; 4:28; 6:20; 9:58) that Finegan claims "COULD fall in either class," a meaningless statement and merely a duplicate of the second class; and finally, "one (6:20) is regarded as erroneous in either case." 1 Maccabees, 6:20, is the passage which claims that the 150th Seleucid year was a Sabbath year! For Systems "B" and "C" to work the Sabbath year must be in the 149th Seleucid year. Therefore, based upon their own construction, they presume that the year 150 is an error and dismiss the historical record.

### **The Book of Josephus**

In the book entitled *Antiquities of the Jews* by Josephus, in that section which discusses the events surrounding the siege of Bethzura and Jerusalem, we also find a Nisan reckoning for the Seleucid year.

To preface this data we should point out that Josephus was himself a Jewish "priest and of priestly ancestry," who considered himself "well versed in the philosophy" of the "sacred books."<sup>24</sup> His book, *Antiquities of the Jews*, was translated into Greek from an account that he had "previously composed" in his own "vernacular tongue (Jewish Aramaic) and sent to the barbarians in the interior."<sup>25</sup> These barbarians are then defined as the "Parthians and Babylonians and the most remote tribes of Arabia with our countrymen beyond the Euphrates and the inhabitants of Adiabene."<sup>26</sup> The people beyond the Euphrates, in Parthia, Babylon, Adiabene, etc., also utilized a Nisan year. Therefore, our initial indications are that Josephus would have based his original report on this same year system that all held in common.

Next, when one compares the account of the Syrian and Judaeian conflict as given by Josephus with that from the first book of Maccabees, it becomes apparent that, for the events surrounding the siege of Bethzura and Jerusalem in the 149th through 150th Seleucid years, Josephus used 1 Maccabees as his

<sup>24</sup> Jos., *Apion*, 1:10.

<sup>25</sup> Jos., *Wars*, Pref.:1. The language of the Jews during this period was called "Hebrew" by both the Jews and many other writers of that time and afterwards, but it was actually a form of Aramaic that was brought back to Judaea from Babylonia by the Jews returning from their Babylonian exile.

<sup>26</sup> Jos., *Wars*, 1:2.

major source. It is also clear by amplifications and other details in the story that Josephus relied heavily upon other Jewish sources as well. The story is basically a Jewish one, told from a Jewish perspective.

It is not hard to conclude that a Jewish priest relying on Jewish sources would reflect a calendric system then popular among the Jews. As we have already seen, the Maccabean books adhere to a Nisan year. Josephus does likewise. Proof that Josephus used a Nisan-based calendar is demonstrated by the following citations (cf. Chart B):

- The month of Nisan is specifically called “the 1st month” of the year and Josephus says it “begins the year.” It is equated with the Macedonian Greek month of Xanthicus (March/April).<sup>27</sup>
- The month of Tishri is explicitly called “the 7th month,” the month in which the Festival of Tabernacles is held. Josephus equates Tishri with the equivalent month in the Macedonian calendar of Hyperberetaeus (Sept./Oct.).<sup>28</sup> At no time does Josephus ever state that Tishri or the 7th month began any official Jewish year (Sabbath or not).
- The month of Marheshuan (Oct./Nov.) is made equivalent to the Macedonian month of Dios (Dios), and Josephus specifically states that, when the Israelites lived in Egypt, it “was ONCE the 2nd month,” but this system was altered when Moses “appointed Nisan, that is to say Xanthicus, as the 1st month for the festivals,”<sup>29</sup> thereafter making Marheshuan the 8th month.
- The month of Adar (Feb./March) is referred to as “the 12th month” and the “last month of the year.” It is equated with the Macedonian month of Dystros (Feb./March).<sup>30</sup>

An important detail is that, even though Josephus uses Macedonian month-names, he clearly makes them equivalent to the Jewish lunar months. The days of the month are also the same. For example, the 1st of Xanthicus is the same as the 1st of Abib (Nisan).<sup>31</sup> The 10th and 14th of Xanthicus are the same as the 10th and 14th of Abib.<sup>32</sup> The 10th and 15th day of Hyperberetaeus are equivalent to the 10th and 15th day of Tishri.<sup>33</sup> These facts led Jack Finegan to conclude, “In Josephus, therefore, the Macedonian months may be taken as fully and exactly equivalent to the Jewish months.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 1:3:3, 2:14:6, 3:8:4, 3:10:5, 11:4:8. (Josephus uses the “Later Correlation” of Macedonian and Hebrew months. (See HBC, pp. 59–68).

<sup>28</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:2, 8:4:1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:3:3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:8:49, 11:4:7, 11:6:2, 12, 12:10:5.

<sup>31</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:8:4; cf. Exod., 40:17.

<sup>32</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:5, 2:14:6; cf. Exod., 12:1–6.

<sup>33</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:2–4; cf. Lev., 23:26–36.

<sup>34</sup> HBC, p. 73.

Josephus also dates years in the Seleucid era by Olympiads:

- *Antiquities*, 12:5:4, states, “in the 145th year, on the 25th day of the month which by us is called Khasleu (Khisleu; Nov./Dec.), and by the Macedonians Apellaios, in the 153rd Olympiad.”
- *Antiquities*, 12:7:6, reports, “it was in the 145th year that these things befell the Temple, on the 25th of the month of Apellaios (Nov./Dec.), in the 153rd Olympiad. And the Temple was renovated on the same day, the 25th of the month Apellaios, in the 148th year, in the 154th Olympiad.”

The Macedonian reckoning (Oct. year) for the 145th Seleucid year extended from the autumn of 168 to the autumn of 167 B.C.E. The Babylonian reckoning would have it extend from the spring of 167 to the spring of 166 B.C.E. Therefore, the 25th of Khasleu (Apellaios; Nov./Dec.) would fall in the winter of 167 B.C.E. by the Macedonian reckoning, but in the winter of 166 B.C.E. by the Babylonian. The 153rd Attic Olympiad began with July of 168 B.C.E.

Yet a comparison of the various dates utilized by Josephus indicates that Josephus used what Solomon Zeitlin refers to as the “Olympian year of the Macedonian calendar.”<sup>35</sup> The Macedonian-Olympic year began in November. The 153rd year of this calendar would range from November, 168 to November, 167 B.C.E. If the Attic-Olympiad year was used, then either system might work. If, instead, the Macedonian-Olympiad year was used (which the records of Josephus clearly indicate),<sup>36</sup> then only the Babylonian reckoning will work for the Seleucid year that he named.

Our second date is quite another matter. The Seleucid year 148, by Macedonian reckoning, extended from the autumn of 165 to the autumn of 164 B.C.E., and by Babylonian reckoning, from the spring of 164 to the spring of 163 B.C.E. As a result, Khasleu (Khisleu) 25 in the Macedonian system is in December of 165 B.C.E., while in the Babylonian it is in December of 164 B.C.E.

The 154th Attic Olympiad did not begin until July of 164 B.C.E. and the Macedonian Olympiad started in November of 164 B.C.E. The December 165 B.C.E. date is thereby eliminated under both systems. Therefore, Josephus’ statement is only correct by using the Babylonian reckoning, and once we grant that he used such a reckoning, he is correct in both synchronisms.

There is yet one other proof that conclusively shows that the Sabbath year itself was determined to have begun on the 1st day of Nisan by Josephus. This evidence has to do with events in the 177th and 178th Seleucid years. In this story, Simon the Hasmonaean is murdered by his son-in-law, Ptolemy, “in the 11th month, which is called Shebat, of the 177th year.”<sup>37</sup> His son, John Hyrcanus, escaped the assassin’s hands and, as Josephus informs us, tried to avenge the crime. Soon after the assassination, John besieged Ptolemy who

<sup>35</sup> JQR, 10.1, pp. 58f.

<sup>36</sup> Our study will have more to say about the Macedonian-Olympian calendar of Josephus in Chap. XXII, pp. 309–311.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Macc., 16:14.



was in the fortress of Dagon (Dok). Shortly after the siege started, “there came round the year in which the Jews are wont to remain inactive, for they observe the custom every 7th year, just as on the 7th day.”<sup>38</sup>

This record shows that the Sabbath year, being the 178th Seleucid year, shortly followed the month of Shebat (Jan./Feb.), the 11th month of the year. There will be more said on this subject in the chapter dealing with this particular Sabbath year (Chapter XVII). For now this detail is mentioned only to prove that both the writers of Maccabees and Josephus calculated the 1st of Nisan as the beginning of the Judaeian year (including the Sabbath year).

### Did They Count from Nisan, 312 B.C.E.?

Finally, we must ask ourselves, “Is it possible that the Jews used a non-accession-year method and counted the 1st year of the Seleucid era from Nisan 312 B.C.E., since the victory of Seleucus over Demetrius would have occurred within that year?” This theory conforms to the construction we have labeled System “D.”

The evidence strongly opposes this reconstruction. To begin with, old Jewish sources affirm that the destruction of the Second Temple, known from Josephus and other writings to have occurred in the 5th month, called Ab (July/Aug.) of 70 C.E., took place in the 381st Seleucid year.<sup>39</sup> Finegan correctly notes the 381st Seleucid year corresponds “to the year from the spring of A.D. 70, to the spring of A.D. 71 according to the Babylonian calendar.”<sup>40</sup>

Second, the Jewish priest and historian Josephus—who relied on important Jewish sources such as the Maccabean books, using their dates for the Seleucid era—informs us that the Hasmonaean priesthood “came to an end after 126 years” with the death of Antigonus. Antigonus died shortly after Herod conquered Jerusalem and became the Jewish king.<sup>41</sup> Josephus also informs us that there were 107 years from the year that Herod captured Jerusalem and became king until the Roman general named Titus took the same city (70 C.E.).<sup>42</sup> Therefore, Herod became king in the year 37/36 B.C.E.

Counting back 126 years from 37/36 B.C.E. brings us to 162/161 B.C.E. (inclusive). That year is equivalent to the 150th Seleucid year, Nisan reckoning. It was in that year that Antiochus Eupator besieged Judas Maccabaeus at Jerusalem, and after a long siege made peace with him, recognizing him as the legitimate ruler of Judaea.<sup>43</sup> The 150th Seleucid year, therefore, is indeed the 1st year of the fully recognized government of the Hasmonaean line. It was from Judas that the Hasmonaean line also came to be called the “Maccabees.”

<sup>38</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:8:1, *Wars*, 1:2:4.

<sup>39</sup> TSCJ, p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> HBC, p. 124.

<sup>41</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:16:4.

<sup>42</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 20:10:5.

<sup>43</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:9:3–7; 1 Mac., 6:19–63.

Later on, Josephus reports that the Hasmonaeans ruled 125 years.<sup>44</sup> In this case, though, the dynasty is being compared with its successor Herod (37/36 B.C.E.). The 1 year's difference from the 126-years figure, which we mentioned above, was allotted to Herod's reign. Once again we are brought back to the year 162/161 B.C.E. As a result, these calculations confirm our construction of the Seleucid era as used both by Josephus and by the other Jews of the pre-2nd century C.E. period.

We also have evidence of the correct length of the Seleucid year from the Talmudic work entitled *Abodah Zarah*.<sup>45</sup> In this work we are told that for 206 years the Jews were under the dominion of the Romans. For 103 years of this period the Hasmonaeans ruled and for 103 years the house of Herod ruled. The house of Herod ended its authority over the Jews in 66 C.E., when the Jews revolted from Rome and discontinued the authority of Agrippa, son of Herod Agrippa. Counting 103 years back from 66 C.E. places the 1st year of the house of Herod in 37/36 B.C.E., which is correct. Therefore, another 103 years prior to Herod brings us to the date 140/139 B.C.E.

Meanwhile, in 1 Maccabees, 14:16–29, we read that in the Seleucid year 172, being the 3rd year of Simon the high priest, the Jews came into an alliance with the Romans. The equation between these two sets of figures proves that the year 140/139 B.C.E. (Nisan reckoning) is the same as the Seleucid year 172. In turn, the beginning of the Seleucid era would be 311 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning.

## Conclusion

The evidence that the authors of Maccabees and Josephus utilized the Abib (Nisan) year in calculating the Seleucid era is clear. Indeed, since these writers were Jewish, descendants from a people with a long history of observing a Nisan year, and offspring of Jewish exiles who sojourned in Babylon where the Nisan year was also observed, it would be far-fetched to claim otherwise.

Neither is there any evidence that the authors of Maccabees or Josephus used records which utilized the Macedonian (Oct.) or Tishri reckoning for the Seleucid era. Josephus reserved a Macedonian reckoning only for his choice of the Greek-Olympian calendar, and this particular reckoning began in November. Furthermore, he always notifies his reader when he is using this system. The “divergent calendar” theory, often presented to justify mixing Tishri Seleucid years with Nisan Seleucid years in these early records, has never been proven and is unwarranted by the evidence.

It is also an interesting leap in logic which concludes that because the Jews living in the days of the Rosh ha-Shanah text (i.e., at the end of the 2nd century C.E.) began the Sabbath year on the 1st of Tishri of the 6th year in the scriptural cycle, that every year from post-exilic times on (i.e., from 538 B.C.E.) should, therefore, also be calculated as beginning with Tishri. Yet this mindset is unfortunately still held by numerous chronologists.

<sup>44</sup> Jos., *Antiq.*, 17:6:3.

<sup>45</sup> B. A.Zar., 8b–9a.