

SECTION IV

THE PERIOD OF HEROD

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The Siege of Jerusalem

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

Now we come to the evidence which, according to the advocates of Systems “B” and “D,” is the heart of the matter. The entire case for Systems “B” and “D” rests upon the popular interpretation and translation of Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14:16:2, par. 475, which is part of his discussion about Herod’s conquest of Jerusalem in the year 37/36 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning. As common translations would have it, Josephus writes:

And acting in desperation rather than with foresight, they (the people of Jerusalem) persevered in the war to the very end—this in spite of the fact that a great army surrounded them and that they were distressed by famine and the lack of necessities, for a ἑβδοματικὸν (*hebdomatikon*; 7th) year happened to fall at that time.¹

As observed by Professor Placid Csizmazia,² a noted expert in the ancient Greek language at the University of Dallas, the term ἑβδοματικὸν (meaning “7th”), which is utilized in this passage, means more than “the 7th year” in the general sense. If simply the “7th” year was intended, the term ἑβδομον would be used. Rather, it is “a formal, specific expression” denoting “the ritual, legal sense.”³ Josephus’ use of the Greek term ἑβδοματικὸν, therefore, is a specific reference to a sabbatical year. This term, as a result, is often simply rendered “sabbatical” by most translators.⁴

The advocates of Systems “B” and “D,” arguing from this premise, then concluded that at the time of Herod’s siege of Jerusalem a Sabbath year was in progress. Since the capture of the city is variously dated by these chronologists anywhere from the summer to the early autumn of 37 B.C.E., this evidence, it is claimed, proves System “B,” which would date this Sabbath year from Tishri 1 of 38 until Tishri 1 of 37 B.C.E., or System “D,” from Nisan 1 of 37 until Nisan 1 of 36 B.C.E.

A Contradiction?

All would seem well for the above interpretation except for the fact that shortly thereafter in *Antiquities*, 15:1:1–2, Josephus openly contradicts it.

1 Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:16:2.

2 For Professor Placid Csizmazia, see above Chap. XVI, p. 232, n. 24.

3 Letter to the author dated 09–08–87.

4 E.g., Whiston, *Jos.*, p. 313; Marcus, *Jos.*, vii, p. 689; etc.

While discussing the time shortly AFTER Herod the Great had taken the city of Jerusalem, Josephus makes the following comment (as translated by Ralph Marcus):

And there was no end to their troubles, for on the one hand their greedy master (Herod), who was in need (of money), was plundering them, and on the other hand the seventh year, WHICH CAME AROUND AT THAT TIME, forced them to leave the land unworked, since we are forbidden to sow the earth in that year.⁵

Although Ben Zion Wacholder, who advocates System “C,”⁶ and Don Blosser, who advocates System “B,”⁷ disagree with each other as to which year represents the *Shemithah* (year of release, rest), both do agree that this above passage from Josephus presents historians with a contradiction.

The Greek phrase “ἐνειστήκει γὰρ τότε (*eneistekei gar tote*),” translated by Ralph Marcus to mean, “which came around at that time,” refers to the approach of a Sabbath year after Herod took the city. Wacholder writes that the sentence “seems to suggest that the Shemithah fell not during the siege but after it had ended, i.e., while Herod was master of Jerusalem.”⁸

In fact, a fairer translation of this passage from Josephus is confirmed by experts in ancient Greek. Professor Juan Gamez of East Texas State University,⁹ after analyzing this verse, concluded that the meaning of the Greek phrase “ἐνειστήκει γὰρ τότε”, literally “for at hand then,”¹⁰ is much stronger than what Marcus and others would lead us to believe. Gamez states that Josephus used “the imperfect and not the aorist” and that the intent of the passage is to say that the Jews were “forced” or “compelled” to leave their fields unworked because “the 7th year was coming” or “was approaching.” In his mind there is no doubt that Josephus was announcing the approach of a Sabbath year shortly “after” Herod had mastered Jerusalem.¹¹ Professor Csizmazia of the University of Dallas likewise concurred that this was the most obvious meaning of the phrase.¹²

⁵ Jos., *Antiq.*, 15:1:2.

⁶ HUCA, 44, pp. 166f.

⁷ HUCA, 52, p. 135.

⁸ HUCA, 44, p. 166.

⁹ Professor Gamez holds a Ph.D. in Spanish Language and Literature, with M.A.s in Theology and Philosophy, a second major in Latin and Greek, and B.A.s in English and Italian with minors in German and French. Professor Gamez is now retired from the University. He has been of great assistance to the author on a number of occasions for which we offer him our thanks.

¹⁰ The Greek verb ἐνειστήκει (*eneistekei*), 3 sing. pl. perf. act. indic. form of ἐνιστημι (*enistemi*), means “(prop. as it were to stand in sight, stand near) to be upon, impend, threaten . . . close at hand” (AGEL, p. 216); “to stand near, i.e. to be at hand, to impend” (GELNT, p. 254); “to stand by, be present, near at hand” (GED, p. 205).

¹¹ Taped interview with Professor Gamez, dated 09–06–1987.

¹² Letters to the author from Professor Csizmazia dated 09–26–1987 and 10–04–1987.

Jerusalem Captured during a Non-Sabbath Year

If the popular view of *Antiquities*, 14:16:2, is correct, that a Sabbath year was in process BEFORE Herod took Jerusalem, then Josephus has contradicted himself on the subject within just a few pages: on the one hand saying that during the siege the Jews were observing a Sabbath year, while on the other saying that, at sometime AFTER Herod took the city, a Sabbath year was approaching. Neither can there be two Sabbath years (i.e., a Sabbath followed by a Jubilee). Not only did the Jews abandon the observance of the Jubilee years by this date but the nearest Jubilee, based upon Hezekiah's observance of a Jubilee in his 16th year, occurred around 15 or 14 B.C.E., depending upon which Sabbath-cycle system one advocates.

The question is, "Does Josephus really contradict himself?" A close examination of the evidence proves that he did not. The error is actually made by the popular interpretation of *Antiquities*, 14:16:2, par. 475, not Josephus. What the chronologists have mistakenly assumed to have been a Sabbath year in progress was in truth only a statement that a Sabbath year was close at hand. In fact, the evidence from Josephus proves that a Sabbath year was not possible in the year that Herod captured Jerusalem.

First, the Jews in Jerusalem harvested crops in Judaea during the year of Herod's siege. This fact is expressly stated in Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14:16:2, shortly before the mentioning of the disputed "7th year":

And everything on the land outside the city had been carried off, so that nothing was left that could serve as food for men or beasts; and by secret raids also they caused a lack of provisions.

During a Sabbath year the Israelites are forbidden to plant or harvest their crops and those loyal to the Scriptures would not have done so under any circumstance. If it had been a matter of simply denying the enemy a source of food, the Jews of Jerusalem would not have carried it off (presumably to the city) but would have burned or otherwise destroyed it. Yet the clear impression left by Josephus is that crops were being produced in the fields and raids had to be made to gather this food or otherwise it would be used by Herod's forces to continue the siege. That crops would be in the field in Judaea during a Sabbath year within this period of Judaeian history strains credulity.

Second, and most importantly, Josephus confirms the fact that there were many Jews in the army of Herod who were actively involved in the siege of Jerusalem—clearly an aggressive act and one that was forbidden under Jewish law during a Sabbath year.¹³ Herod himself, although Edomite by family, had married several Jewish women and also belonged to the Jewish faith.¹⁴ If this had been a Sabbath year, the Jews in Herod's army would not have participated in the siege. As the *War Scroll* confirms: "But in the year of release

¹³ See above Chap. XVII, pp. 257–259.

¹⁴ See Chap. XXVIII, pp. 373–375, and p. 374, n. 60.

(Sabbath) they shall mobilize no man to go into the army, for it is a Sabbath of rest to the sovereign (Yahweh)."¹⁵

From the time that Herod arrived in Palestine in the spring of 39 B.C.E., after being rewarded with the kingship of Judaea by the Romans,¹⁶ great numbers of Jews had joined his army. Josephus writes:

By this time Herod had sailed from Italy to Ptolemais and had collected a not inconsiderable force of both foreigners AND HIS COUNTRYMEN, and was marching through Galilee against Antigonus. . . . Nevertheless, Herod's strength increased day by day as he went forward, and all Galilee, except for a few of its inhabitants, came over to his side.¹⁷

After taking Masada, "the local inhabitants joined him."¹⁸ When he marched against Jericho, he took "ten companies, five Roman and five Jewish, and a mixed mercenary force."¹⁹ In 37 B.C.E., just before Herod laid siege to Jerusalem, we are told that "many people streamed to him from Jericho and the rest of Judaea" and "multitudes of Jews now joined him daily from Jericho and elsewhere."²⁰

That the Jews in Herod's army participated in the siege of Jerusalem is expressly stated by Josephus. He remarks that Herod took the city by storm and that, "soon every quarter was filled with the blood of the slain, for the Romans were furious at the length of the siege, while THE JEWS ON HEROD'S SIDE were anxious not to leave a single adversary alive."²¹ Their participation is simply unthinkable if this had been a Sabbath year.²² Meanwhile, in the year following the siege, we hear of no aggressive military activity by Herod or his army—indicative of a Sabbath year.

Another Factor

All of this evidence, plus the fact that the year 36/35 B.C.E. fits precisely in the Sabbath-cycle sequence established since the 15th year of Hezekiah, dismantles the popular interpretation of Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14:16:2, par. 475, which would have Herod's siege occur during a Sabbath year. How, for example, can the two seemingly contradictory statements from Josephus (1) while Herod was attacking Jerusalem, "for the 7th was at hand then," and (2) after Herod conquered the city, "the 7th (sabbatical) year WAS APPROACHING, forcing them to leave the land unworked," both be true at the same time?

¹⁵ 1QM, 2:8–9.

¹⁶ For the chronology of Herod, see below Chap. XX.

¹⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:15:1.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:15:2.

²⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:15:12, *Wars*, 1:17:6.

²¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:16:2 §479, *Wars*, 1:18:2 §351.

²² Cf. Chap. XVII, pp. 257–259.

The solution to this apparent contradiction lies in the period of Jewish history when there was a gradual shifting of the beginning date for the Sabbath year from the 1st of Nisan—its original starting point—to the 1st of Tishri. Wacholder and others, for example, speak of “the gradual shifting of the New Year from Nisan to Tishri, which has been formalized into our Rosh Hashanah.”²³ Although the exact date in which this shift began remains obscure, the evidence indicates that it made its first appearance after the Hasmonaeans came into power.

The change crept in during the period of Greek dominance over Judaea, especially encouraged by the attempted Hellenization of the Jews by the Seleucids. The Mishnah (c.200 C.E.) explains this period of change when it comments regarding the Nisan- and Tishri-year systems:

The one (Nisan) refers to Jewish kings, the other (Tishri) to kings of other nations—the year of other nations’ kings being counted from Tishri, and of Jewish kings from Nisan. Now, IN THE PRESENT TIME we count the years from Tishri; were we then to say that our Era is connected with the Exodus it is surely from Nisan that we ought to count. Does this not prove that our reckoning is based on the reign of the Greek kings (and not the Exodus)? That indeed proves it.²⁴

The Seder Olam (c.160 C.E.), as another example, while speaking of those Jews who were in exile after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., writes, “And in the Exile they write in documents according to the reckoning of the Greeks (i.e., the Seleucid era).”²⁵

As we shall demonstrate later on in our investigation, the Tishri year was not officially adopted until the 2nd century C.E. Nevertheless, the roots for this change extend backwards for several centuries. To begin with, opinion was strongly divided. The priestly families, represented by such groups as the Sadducees, continued using the older system of starting the year with Nisan. Nevertheless, the acceptance of a Tishri year for the beginning of the civil year, which eventually spilled over into their calculations of the Sabbath and Jubilee years, was first adopted by the liberal Pharisees. The Pharisees (a spin-off of the early Hasidic Jews) came into prominence during the time of the Maccabean leader Jonathan (159/158–143/142 B.C.E.).²⁶ They then grew in power under Selena Alexandra (76/75–68/67 B.C.E.).²⁷

By the 1st century C.E., the Pharisees formed two powerful schools, one founded by Hillel the elder and another by Shammai. Josephus points out that

²³ HUCA, 44, p. 155.

²⁴ B. A.Zar., 10a.

²⁵ S.O., 30.

²⁶ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:5:9 §171, in context with 13:5:1–8.

²⁷ Jos., *Wars*, 1:5:2 §§110–114.

during the 1st century C.E., the Pharisees, who followed the regulations passed down by “former generations,” became the dominant influence over Judaism, having gained “the support of the masses.”²⁸ Even the Sadducees were often forced to submit unwillingly to the formulas of the Pharisees (especially to those practices outside the Temple grounds where the Pharisees held sway) “since otherwise the masses would not tolerate them.”²⁹

After the fall of the Temple in 70 C.E., for all practical purposes, the Sadducees and other more conservative Jewish religious institutions ceased to exist and the Pharisees (who formed the Rabbinic Jews) became the dominant element in Jewish religious life. As a result, although the calculations for the festival days were still counted by the Nisan year, the Tishri-year system was adopted for the civil year and, subsequently, for the Sabbath and Jubilee years.

Josephus, himself a Pharisee, for example, informs us that Nisan “was the 1st month for the festivals” and was reckoned “as the commencement of the year for everything relating to divine worship,”³⁰ which surely would include the sacred Sabbath year. Even as late as the time of the Rosh ha-Shanah (written near the start of the 3rd century C.E.), “the 1st of Nisan is the New Year for kings and festivals.”³¹ Yet in the days of the Rosh ha-Shanah a change had been officially established. Now “the 1st of Tishri” was not only “the New Year” of foreign kings (i.e., the Greek or Seleucid era) but was extended to include the Jewish years “for שְׁמִיטָה (Shemition; releases, i.e., Sabbaths) and for יוֹבֵלֹת (Yubeluth; Jubilees).”³²

Under the strained interpretations of the Pharisees, the Jubilee year only applies while “all the inhabitants” of Israel are living in the land of Kanaan. As a result, it was the opinion of the rabbis that after the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians the Jubilee year was no longer required.³³ As Wacholder points out, “since Lev., 25 ordained the Jubilee and *Shemittah* as a unit, it follows, the Rabbis say, the *Shemittah* without the observance of the Jubilee falls under ‘rabbinic’ rather than ‘biblical’ ordinances.”³⁴ Having given themselves this authority, after the collapse of the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 C.E., the rabbis not only permitted themselves complete exemption from the Jubilee year but shifted the beginning date for the Sabbath year back from Nisan 1 to the previous Tishri 1, being formalized in the Rosh ha-Shanah.³⁵ Finally, under pressure from the political and taxing authorities of the Roman government and others, the rabbis determined that the observance of the Sabbath year would only apply while the Jews controlled their land in Judaea. In time, the Sabbath years were either dismissed as not being relevant or were simply allowed to fall into disuse.

²⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:10:6 §298.

²⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:1:4.

³⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 1:3:3.

³¹ R.Sh., 1:1.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ B. Arak., 32b; HUCA, 44, p. 154, ns. 4 & 6.

³⁴ HUCA, 44, p. 154, n. 4.

³⁵ HUCA, 44, p. 155.

This late 2nd century C.E. Jewish Talmudic interpretation, nevertheless, is replete with errors. The rabbis of this late period misread Leviticus, 25:8–10, to mean that the trumpet of “liberty” was to be sounded in the 7th month of the 49th year in the Jubilee cycle, when in reality it was to be in the 7th month of the 50th year. The conclusion of this late rabbinic view naturally resulted in the interpretation that the 7th month of the 49th year was calculated to be the 1st month of the Jubilee celebration.³⁶

To this initial error the rabbis added yet another. In an effort to “build a fence around the Torah (Law),”³⁷ they extended their interpretation for the Jubilee rituals to the regular Sabbath years as well, thereby making the 7th month of the 6th year in the Sabbath cycle the beginning of the Sabbath year. There is no authority in Scriptures for this rather strained understanding.

In effect, at the time this ever-expanding interpretation of building “a fence around the Torah” was first adhered to, the Sabbath-year ritual was extended so that it would last 1½ years: from the 7th month of the 6th year until the end of the 12th month of the 7th year. Much later, when the 1st of Tishri became the official New Year’s day even for regular non-Sabbath years, the ritual was again altered, being reduced to only a year. Yet this time it began and ended with the 1st day of Tishri.

Important for our discussion is the fact that, prior to the 2nd century C.E., the first of every year, including the Sabbath year, began with the 1st of Nisan (a fact to which every Jewish document concerned with the subject prior to the 2nd century C.E. testifies). Another tradition existed, however, which might be germane to the issue of the Sabbath year in Herod’s reign. The Mishnah, in that part called the *Shebiith*, written about 200 C.E., asked:

Until what time will a tree-planted field be plowed in the year before the 7th year? The School of Shammai says: So long as this benefits the produce (of the 6th year). The School of Hillel says: Until Pentecost. And the opinion of the one is not far from the opinion of the other.³⁸

Until when will a white (unshadowed by trees)³⁹ field be plowed in the year before the 7th year? Until the ground has dried (about May or June), [or] such time as the ground is still plowed for planting out beds of cucumbers and gourds. Rabbi Simeon said: You put the law for each man into his own hand!—but, rather,

³⁶ See our comments in Chap. II.

³⁷ Ab., 1:1, “the men of the great assembly” said “make/build a fence round the Torah”; cf. B. Pes., 2b, “The Rabbis erected a safeguard for a Scriptural law”; B. Sanh., 46a, “not with the intention of disregarding the Torah but to make a fence around it”; B. Ab., 3:13, “tradition is a fence to the Torah.”

³⁸ Shebi., 1:1.

³⁹ The expression “white fields” refers to fields unshaded by trees, see Danby, *Mishnah*, p. 40, n. 5.

a white field will be plowed until Passover and a tree-planted field until Pentecost. Beds of cucumbers or gourds will be dunged and hoed until New Year,⁴⁰ so, too, irrigated fields . . . (etc.).⁴¹

The school of Hillel existed in the 1st century C.E. at the time of Josephus and Philo. Therefore, we can conclude that, despite the fact that the 1st of Nisan was the beginning of the Sabbath year, the Jews had by this time established the custom of observing the Sabbath-year ritual of not sowing or harvesting their fields during the last half of the 6th year in order to “build a fence around the Torah.” The entire ritual of the Pharisaic groups, therefore, was actually 1½ years long! In time this lengthy period for the rituals associated with the Sabbath year would prove to be too heavy of a burden on the Jews and would eventually be modified. The important point is that when this new custom arose, the actual Sabbath year was still considered to extend from Nisan 1 to Nisan 1. It must also be remembered that when the Sabbath years were first implemented there was no requirement to stop planting and harvesting crops at any time before the first of Abib (Nisan). Yet from the latter part of the 2nd century B.C.E., the Pharisees built up interpretations around the Law that went far beyond scriptural commands.⁴² These interpretations included added rules and regulations for both the Sabbath day and the Sabbath year. As Wacholder observes:

The Pharisaic halakha required that the observance of the seventh year, like that of the seventh day, begin during the sixth year, in order to build a fence around the law.⁴³

In effect, they had “built a fence” around the Sabbath year by beginning the observance of not planting the fields during the several months prior to the commencement of the 7th year. The theory was that it was unnecessary to plant crops during the latter part of the 6th year which were intended to be harvested in the first part of the Sabbath year. The intent, no doubt, was to prevent someone from crossing the Sabbath-year line, something one might be tempted to do if they were allowed to plant and harvest right up until the eve of the Sabbath year.

An example of this theory is pronounced in the Babylonian Rosh ha-Shanah. It asked the question, “And how do we know (from the Scriptures) that we add from the profane on to the sacred,”⁴⁴ i.e., add from the last part of the ordinary 6th day of the week or from the last months of the 6th year of the Sabbath cycle on to the sacred Sabbath day or Sabbath year. It answers by stating:

⁴⁰ The R.Sh., 1:1, defines the New Year for vegetables (e.g., cucumbers) as beginning on the 1st of Tishri (Sept./Oct.).

⁴¹ Shebi., 2:1.

⁴² Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:10:6.

⁴³ HUCA, 54, p. 128.

⁴⁴ B. R.Sh., 9a.

As it has been taught: In plowing time and in harvest time you shall rest. Rabbi Akiba (early 2nd century C.E.) said: There was no need (for Scriptures) to specify the plowing and harvest of the Sabbatical year, since this has already been mentioned [in] “your field you shall not sow,” etc. What must be meant therefore is the plowing OF THE YEAR BEFORE THE 7TH which is passing into the 7th, and the harvest of the 7th year which is continuing into the period after the 7th year.⁴⁵

This effort to readjust the starting point of the Sabbath year was in full harmony with their new interpretation for the observance of the Sabbath day. Jewish records extending from those found at Qumran up until those produced during the Talmudic era claim the rabbis altered the observance of the Sabbath day so as to include the latter part of the 6th day of the week. In the *Damascus Document* (sometime before 70 C.E.) for instance, which was found among the Dead Sea scrolls, we read:

Concerning the Sabbath, to observe it according to its ordinance: Let not a man do work on the 6th day (of the week) from the time when the sun’s disk is its full width away from the gate, for that is what it says: “Observe the Sabbath day to keep it sacred.”⁴⁶

In short, just as one would discontinue work in the late afternoon of the day before the weekly Sabbath, the Pharisees—who were the dominant sect among the Jews and to whose formulas the others would submit⁴⁷—established that one must also discontinue planting and harvesting crops of the field in the latter part of the 6th year before the Sabbath year actually began. Yet a year and a half of not planting placed a great burden on the people. So later, in the mid- to late 2nd century C.E., this interpretation was transformed into an official change of the New Year’s day for the Sabbath year, altering it from the 1st of Nisan back to the 1st of Tishri of the previous year. In this way, it allowed them to sow their crops after the 1st of Tishri during the 7th year in order to harvest them during the 1st year of the next Sabbath cycle.

Back to *Antiquities*, 14:16:2

Now these circumstances return us to the events of the year 37/36 B.C.E. when Herod captured Jerusalem. In *Antiquities*, 14:16:2, par. 475, Josephus discusses the period just before the capture of Jerusalem by Herod. It is true that the term ἑβδοματικὸν (7th), as used in this passage, is to be understood in a

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ DR, 13.

⁴⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:1:3f.

“ritual, legal sense” and implies a Sabbath year. Yet what has seemingly gone unnoticed is the fact that the term *κατὰ ταῦτ’* (*kata taut*), also used here, has been commonly translated to mean, “to fall at that time.” *Κατὰ ταῦτ’*, as Professor Csizmazia points out, is “a vague, approximative formula of time: ‘about the time of these events.’ So it can be rightly assumed that Josephus did not say explicitly that the year of the siege was the sabbatical year but it was ‘about’; and so the thought of its coming added to the misery and mad desperation of the citizens, namely that the hardships of the siege would be followed by the restrictions of the sabbatical year.”⁴⁸

Ralph Marcus also allowed that Josephus could have been “referring, rather vaguely, to a sabbatical year that began soon after the fall of Jerusalem.”⁴⁹ Marcus, an advocate of System “C,” nevertheless, assumes that Jerusalem fell in the summer and that this approaching Sabbath year arrived with Tishri 1 of 37 B.C.E. In reality, Jerusalem actually fell into Herod’s hands well after October, as we shall see in Chapter XXII. Nevertheless, Marcus makes the proper point that, “If the inhabitants of Jerusalem were distressed by famine” during the siege, “they would not be able to lay in an extra supply of provisions for the latter part of the sabbatical year.”⁵⁰

Even more to the point, as this study shall demonstrate in Chapters XXII and XXIII, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were already suffering from shortages and famine in 37 B.C.E. due to the fact that Herod’s army had brought a long siege against the city. This siege began towards the end of the winter of 38/37 B.C.E. and continued until the winter of 37/36 B.C.E. First, the blockade kept the Jews within the city from either planting and harvesting their spring vegetables or their spring and summer barley and wheat crops. In addition, their plight was further aggravated by the fact that the Jews of the city were unable to plant any crops either during the year of the siege or after the war’s close. Not only were they unable to plant because of the blockade but recent innovations in Jewish customs prevented them from planting, even inside the besieged city, during the last months of the 6th year of the Sabbath-year cycle. Their inability to raise new food added severely to their distress.

Our problem of chronology is solved once we understand that Josephus was trying to convey the idea that the Jewish custom of not planting their fields in the latter part of the 6th year was now in effect and the Sabbath year was close at hand. The Sabbath year, which fell “about the time of these events,” was to arrive in the next few months. Regardless of their inability to resupply themselves—even though a great army surrounded them and they were in distress because of the famine and lack of necessities created by the long siege—they persevered in the war. The passage in question, therefore, should actually be translated as follows:

And acting in desperation rather than with foresight,
they persevered in the war to the very end—this in

⁴⁸ Letter to the author dated 09–26–87.

⁴⁹ Marcus, *Jos.*, vii, p. 695, n. a.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

spite of the fact that a great army surrounded them and they were distressed by famine and lack of necessities, for there was a 7th (Sabbatical) year about the time of these events.⁵¹

Support for this interpretation is actually found in the other important passage of *Antiquities*, 15:1:2, par. 7, which discusses the plight of the Jews in a period AFTER Herod took the city.

And there was no end to their troubles, for on the one hand their greedy master, who was in need (of money), was plundering them, and on the other hand the 7th (sabbatical) year was approaching, forcing them to leave the land unworked, since we are forbidden to sow the earth in that year.

These two passages clearly demonstrate that the Jews who were defending the city of Jerusalem were already in desperate straights before the beginning of the Sabbath year of 36/35 B.C.E. Under siege by Herod, they had been prevented from either harvesting or planting any crops. Even if they had been free to plant, planting season for many crops, such as barley and wheat, in this region occurred during the months of Khisleu (Nov./Dec.) through Adar (Feb./March)⁵² and Herod still had the city blockaded during that period. By the time the new year arrived, Herod had already conquered the city but the Sabbath year made it impossible to plant even vegetable gardens. Therefore, because of Jewish laws, the Jews at Jerusalem did not have the benefit of their crops before the Sabbath year began. They were (1) held within the city under siege, and (2) “forbidden to sow the earth” both in the last months of the year prior to the approaching Sabbath year, as well as during the Sabbath year that followed, when Herod held the city.

Conclusion

When placed in historical context, we find that both passages from Josephus, dealing with the Sabbath year at the time of Herod’s conquest of Jerusalem, are true. The ritualistic practices of the Sabbath year that were associated with the latter part of the 6th year were in effect during Herod’s siege of Jerusalem (37/36 B.C.E.). As we shall see in Chapter XXII, Herod actually conquered Jerusalem on the 10th of Tebeth (Jan. 2), 36 B.C.E. This detail speaks to the desperate fanaticism of the defenders of Jerusalem. They continued in spite of their inability to harvest their crops after the army of Herod arrived outside the walls of the city or to plant crops during the latter part of the siege.⁵³ Nevertheless, the Sabbath year of 36/35 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning, was still rapidly approaching after Herod took the city.

⁵¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:16:2.

⁵² HBC, pp. 33f.

⁵³ Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:16:2.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that the Jews were harvesting crops in the summer of 37/36 B.C.E. (before the month of Tishri [Sept./Oct.]) in the early stages of the siege against Jerusalem. The events of Herod's 13th through 17th years will also verify that the year 36/35 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning, was a Sabbath year.⁵⁴ It is clear from this evidence that there is no contradiction between *Antiquities*, 14:16:2 and 15:1:2.⁵⁵ The year that Herod besieged Jerusalem was not a Sabbath year, but the 6th year in the Sabbath cycle. In the latter part of this 6th year, as part of an effort to build a fence around the Sabbath-year laws, the Jews observed the custom of not planting or harvesting any crops. Then, after Herod captured Jerusalem, the Sabbath year arrived. This Sabbath year began on the 1st of Nisan, 36 B.C.E., in full accord with the System "A" cycle established by our other documented Sabbath years (Chart C).

⁵⁴ See Chap. XXIV.

⁵⁵ See App. M.

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CHART G

THE CHRONOLOGY OF HEROD'S REIGN

