

Chapter XXVII

Nero's "Year 2" in Judaea

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

According to the advocates of Systems "B" and "C," there are four ways other than a Nisan (March/April) year by which Nero's 2nd year could have been judged in the works of Josephus and Eusebius.

- The reign of Nero could have been reckoned by the Roman *dies imperii* which calculates the regnal year from the day the king achieved power to his anniversary date in the next year: i.e., from October 13 until October 13 of each year for Nero. His 1st year, therefore, would be from October 13, 54 to October 12, 55 C.E., his 2nd from October 13, 55 to October 12, 56 C.E.
- The reign of Nero could have been counted by the Macedonian-Seleucid method, from the 1st of Tishri, which again gives us roughly an October to October year.
- His reign could have been determined on the basis of the Greek Macedonian Olympiad calendar, which would have begun on Dius 1. The result would be the first of Dius (Oct./Nov.), 54 until the 1st of Dius, 55 C.E. for Nero's 1st year. His 2nd year would be Dius 1, 55 until Dius 1, 56 C.E.
- Nero's reign could have been dated from January 1st, the beginning of the Roman year since 8 B.C.E.,¹ the year Augustus Caesar changed the starting point of the Roman calendar. Year 1 would be January 1, 55 until January 1, 56 C.E.; Year 2 would be January 1, 56 until January 1, 57 C.E.

Nisan 1 Regnal Years used by Josephus for Nero

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

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

Even as late as the beginning of the 3rd century C.E. the Mishnah tells us that "on the 1st of Nisan is the New Year for kings."³

¹ See above Chap. XXIII, p. 315, n. 15.

² Jos., *Antiq.*, 1:3:3, 2:14:6, 3:8:4, 3:10:5, 11:4:8; Philo, *Spec.*, 1:35 §181, 2:27–28.

³ R.Sh., 1:1.

If a Jew of Judaea during the period of Nero was dating a contract by the name and year of a king it would seem only logical that he would do so by the traditional Jewish method.

This method, which was used in Judaea during the 1st century C.E., would begin to change after the Jews lost their homeland with the collapse of the First Revolt, thereby forfeiting their right to make such determinations. Yet even as late as the Bar Kochba revolt (133–135 B.C.E.), the Jews were still known to be using a Nisan beginning for their year.⁴ After the Bar Kochba revolt, the Jews were scattered about the world and under the total dominance of foreign kings. A foreign reckoning would naturally follow. Yet in the time of Nero (October, 54–June, 68 C.E.) Judaea still existed as a country with its own Jewish rulers, an established Jewish priesthood, and Jewish customs. Its people had no reason to use a foreign reckoning on internal Jewish documents.

The works of Josephus are reflective of this custom. Josephus, writing to a Greek-speaking audience, never dated events by the Macedonian-Olympiad system or by Roman consulships unless he specifically stated that he was doing so. In the relevant passages about Nero's reign, Josephus never referred to an Olympiad or consul year. That Josephus would date Nero by the Macedonian Olympiad or a consulship beginning on the 1st of January, yet not define it as such, is highly implausible.

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

- The “war opened, in the 12th year of the principate of Nero, and the 17th of the reign of Agrippa, in the month of Artemisius (Iyyar; April/May)” (Jos., *Wars*, 2:14:4).

This statement shows that Nero's 12th year was in progress during this 2nd Jewish month. Agrippa, by the way, was a Jewish ruler. Josephus would naturally date Agrippa's reign based upon the Jewish method. In this passage Josephus importantly equates Agrippa's 17th year in Judaea with the 12th year of Nero, strongly indicating that the same method of dating was used for both.

- Riots broke out in Jerusalem “on the 16th of the month Artemisius” (Iyyar)” (Jos., *Wars*, 2:15:2).
- On the “15th of the month Lous (Ab; July / Aug.)” an assault was made upon Antonia and the garrison was besieged (Jos., *Wars*, 2:17:7).

⁴ IEJ, 21.1, pp. 39–46.

- On the "6th of the month Gorpiaeus (Elul; Aug./Sept.)" the king's palace at Jerusalem was captured (Jos., *Wars*, 2:17:8).
- On the "30th of the month Hyperberetaeus (Tishri; Sept./Oct.)" Cestius made an assault upon Jerusalem (Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:4).
- On "the 8th of the month of Dius (Marheshuan; Oct./Nov.), in the 12th year of Nero's principate," the defeat of Cestius took place (Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:9).

We have now passed beyond the months of August and October, as well as beyond the 1st day of Dius (Marheshuan), yet it is still the 12th year of Nero. This detail proves that Josephus did not use the Roman *dies imperii* for Nero, which would start his year in October; nor did he use the October Seleucid year or the Macedonian-Olympiad year, which started with the 1st of Dius, in determining the regnal years of Nero.

- On the "21st of the month Artemisius (Iyyar; April/May)" Josephus came from Tiberias and went to Jotapata (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:3).

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

- On the "20th of the month Daesius (Siwan; May/June)" the first assault was made upon Jotapata, also called Japha (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:29).
- On the "25th of the month Daesius" Japha was captured (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:31).
- On the "27th of the month Daesius" Gerizim was captured (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:32).
- The city of Jotapata was taken by the Romans "in the 13th year of the principate of Nero, on the new moon of Panemus (Tammuz; June/July)" (Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:36).

We have now arrived at the 1st day of the 4th Jewish month, and we find ourselves in "Year 13" of Nero.

Since it was still "Year 12" of Nero on the 8th of Dius (Marheshuan; Oct./Nov.) of the previous year, it is clear that a new year began between the month of Dius (Marheshuan, the 8th Jewish month) and the following Panemus (Tammuz, the 4th Jewish month; June/July).

Josephus' dating of Nero is further narrowed by the fact that the 12th year of Nero was still in progress during the month of Artemisius (Iyyar), the 2nd Jewish month.⁵ The 13th year, therefore, had to be in effect during Artemisius (Iyyar; April/May) of the following year. This fact, in turn, shows that there was a change in year between the end of Marheshuan, the 8th month, and the beginning of Iyyar, the 2nd month (Chart B).

⁵ Jos., *Wars*, 2:14:4.

This information demonstrates that Josephus must have been using a Nisan year for the Roman emperors. It is true that a January 1st year is also possible; but, since Josephus does not label Nero's reign by a consulship or refer to a Roman year, this supposition is weak. Furthermore, Josephus determined the consul years by the 1st of March and not by the 1st of January.⁶

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

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

It is also known from ancient coins that during the First Revolt (66–70 C.E.) the Jewish year began with the month of Nisan.⁷ This detail adds even more weight to the fact that the Jews of Nero's time observed a 1st of Nisan beginning for their regnal years, and counted from this month in their internal documents. Furthermore, we have two sources (the coins of the First Revolt and the early 3rd century C.E. Mishnah) proving that the Jews of Judaea during the period of Nero and for some time afterwards determined the beginning of the year for their kings by the month of Nisan.

Therefore, we must conclude that in the entire body of the works of Josephus, unless he specifically labels it as not applying, he used a Nisan beginning for his year. In the list of events during the 12th and 13th years of Nero, Josephus does not label the years as an exception to his normal Nisan reckoning. He shows that a year of Nero included the 2nd through 8th Jewish months (Iyyar through Marheshuan; roughly May through November). Indeed, the very fact that Josephus couples the 12th and 13th years of Nero with Macedonian month names, which he clearly equates throughout his work with the Jewish months, is a strong indication that he has reckoned Nero's reign based upon a 1st of Nisan New Year.

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

⁶ See Chap. XX, pp. 287–289, and cf. Chaps. XXI–XXIII.

⁷ IEJ, 21.1, p. 40 and n. 11, p. 42; BA, 26.2, pp. 57–59.

Dating the First Revolt

Our attention must now turn towards determining which year represents the 2nd year of Nero in Judaea. This detail is gleaned from the information dealing with the length of the First Revolt and which year it started.

Historical evidence proves that the First Revolt, which began in the 12th year of Nero, raged for 5 years. Jewish coins produced during this revolt, for example, bear only the dates from "Year 1" to "Year 5."⁸ In Josephus' history about the First Revolt, he clearly sets forth that the war lasted until the 5th year (using a Nisan 1 regnal reckoning but counting the length of the war from the time it started in Iyyar [April/May]). The flow of events in his history of the war with Rome is as follows (cf. Chart B):

YEAR 1 (66 C.E.)

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

YEAR 2 (67 C.E.)

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

YEAR 3 (68 C.E.)

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

YEAR 4 (69 C.E.)

- Simon became master of Jerusalem "in the 3rd year of the war, in the month of Xanthicus (March/April)" (Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:12).

Counting the years from the month the war began, i.e., from the month of Artemisius (April/May) of 66 C.E., the 4th year of the war began in Iyyar (April/May) of 69 C.E.

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

⁸ AJ, pp. 28–33, 57–59; AJC, pp. 259–263.

YEAR 5 (70 C.E.)

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

Tacitus also reveals that the Judaeian revolt lasted 5 years.⁹ He writes that in the 1st year of the revolt Cestius Gallus, governor of Syria, tried to stop it, but “he suffered varied fortunes and met defeat more often than he gained victory.”¹⁰ Cestius endured a great defeat at the hands of the Jews “on the 8th of the month Dius (Nov.) in the 12th year of Nero’s principate.” On the death of Gallus, Tacitus continues:

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

When Tacitus states, “as I have said above,” he is making reference to the fact that after “the 1st of January”¹¹ of the year that Vespasian assumed the consular office,¹² i.e., 70 C.E., “At the beginning of that same year,” Titus, the son of Vespasian, was “selected by his father to complete the subjugation of Judaea.”¹³ Later that same year, Jerusalem fell into his hands. The words of Tacitus reveal the following:

YEAR 1

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

⁹ Tacitus, *Hist.*, 4:39–5:13.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Hist.*, 5:10.

¹¹ Tacitus, *Hist.*, 4:39.

¹² Cf. Dio, 66:1.

¹³ Tacitus, *Hist.*, 5:1.

YEARS 2 & 3

After the defeat of Cestius, Nero appoints Vespasian to the war, who "within two summers" occupies all the cities of Judaea except Jerusalem. This sequence perfectly matches what Josephus says on the matter.¹⁴ Vespasian makes his first attack on the Jewish rebels at the city of Jotapata a few days after "the 21st of the month of Artemisius (Iyyar; May)" and takes the city "on the 13th year of the principate of Nero, on the new moon of Panemus (Tammuz; June/July)."¹⁵

YEAR 4

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

YEAR 5

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

The 1st year of the revolt is determined by the following facts:

- The war ended in the 2nd year of Vespasian,¹⁶ with the destruction of the Temple on the 10th of Lous (Ab; July/Aug.).¹⁷ As shown above in our section on the reign of Vespasian, Vespasian became emperor in the latter half of 69 C.E., recognizing himself as emperor in July of that year while he was in Judaea. The 2nd year of Vespasian, the 5th year of the war, therefore, is the year 70 C.E., the year that Vespasian was first elected consular and the year he sent Titus to capture Jerusalem.
- The revolt began in the 12th year of Nero, in the month of Artemisius (Iyyar; April/May), the 2nd month of the Jewish year.¹⁸
- Since the year 70/71 C.E., Nisan reckoning, was the final year of the war, we must count back to the 1st year from this point. Therefore, the revolt began in the 2nd Jewish month, Iyyar, of the year 66/67 C.E., being the 12th year of Nero. Further, the 12th year of Nero was still in progress during the 8th Jewish month of Marheshuan (Oct./Nov.) of that same year.¹⁹

This evidence compels us to equate the 12th year of Nero, as recorded by the Jewish priest Josephus and supported by Eusebius, with the year 66/67 C.E., Nisan reckoning. In the 2nd Jewish month of that year (Iyyar; April/May) the revolt in Judaea began.

¹⁴ Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:9–3:1:3.

¹⁵ Jos., *Wars*, 3:7:3–36.

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

¹⁷ Jos., *Wars*, 6:4:5.

¹⁸ Jos., *Wars*, 2:14:4, *Antiq.*, 20:11:1, 20:12:1.

¹⁹ Jos., *Wars*, 2:19:9.

Dating “Year 2” of Nero

The 2nd year of Nero, counted by the Judaeans of the 1st century C.E., is derived as follows:

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

This dating is also confirmed by the aforementioned coins of Agrippa, governor of Judaea, when the First Revolt broke out. His coins bear the imperial effigy. They begin with one that gives the name and likeness of Nero and is dated “Year 6” = “Year 11,”²⁰ i.e., the 6th year of Nero = the 11th year of Agrippa. These coins, being Judaeans, are therefore based upon a 1st of Nisan year. Josephus, meanwhile, specifically tells us that the 12th year of Nero was the same as the 17th year of Agrippa, and that in turn this year was the year that the First Revolt began,²¹ i.e., 66/67 C.E., Nisan reckoning.

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

With any of these systems the last 6 or more months of a year belonging to Nero would fall within the first 6 or more months of the Jewish year. The Jewish revolt would still fall in the month of Iyyar in the 12th year of Nero, i.e., the spring of 66 C.E., and for the Jews of Judaea, like Josephus, this 12th year continued beyond Marheshuan (Oct./Nov.) of this same year.

The Jewish year would still begin with the spring and a king’s year in Judaea would still have been counted from that time. The greater part of Nero’s 2nd year would include the Sabbath year of 56/57 C.E., Nisan reckoning.

Conclusion

It is clear from this evidence that the 2nd year of Nero, mentioned in the Judaeans Note of Indebtedness found in the cave at Wadi Murabba’at, must have begun with the month of Nisan in the year 56/57 C.E. This year, according to that same document, was a Sabbath year.

Even using the variant arrangements of an October, November, or January year, System “B” is eliminated from consideration because it requires a Sabbath year from Tishri (Sept./Oct.) of 54 until Tishri of 55 C.E. This year would have been the 1st for Nero not his 2nd.

System “C,” which demands a Sabbath year from Tishri, 55 until Tishri, 56 C.E., is still faced with the evidence that the Sabbath years during this

²⁰ IEJ, 12.1, p. 34.

²¹ Jos., *Wars*, 2:14:4.

period began with the month of Abib (Nisan). For this reason it also falls out of consideration.

System "D," which would have a Sabbath year from Nisan, 55 until Nisan, 56 C.E., is lacking since it would place the 2nd year of Nero in the year before its proper Jewish reckoning. It must likewise deal with the problem that previous years in its cycle have already been eliminated as possibilities.

The only viable solution is the System "A" Sabbath cycle. The Sabbath year represented by Nero's 2nd year over Judaea has provided us with one more item of proof confirming the cycle already demonstrated by the known Sabbath years from the 15th year of Hezekiah until the 2nd year of King Herod over Jerusalem (see Chart C).

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