

Chapter XXVIII
***The Sabbath Year
of 70/71 C.E.***

It is unfortunate, indeed, that we possess no direct testimony by any contemporary historian or other similar record that can testify directly as to whether or not a Sabbath year was in progress during the period that Jerusalem was captured by the Romans (i.e., in the summer of 70 C.E.). Such documentation would end all speculation on the issue and would settle the question once and for all.

Nevertheless, Josephus, who was contemporary with that event, goes a long way towards proving that 70/71 C.E., Nisan reckoning, was a Sabbath year. In his history of the First Revolt, Josephus mentions an invasion of Judaeian Idumaea by Simon ben Gioras in the winter of 68/69 C.E. The fields of Idumaea, we are told, were cultivated at that time. This detail is important because the Idumaeans living in this region and during that period were Jewish by religion and would not have cultivated their fields in the few months prior to a Sabbath year or during a Sabbath year. Therefore, the evidence from Josephus strongly indicates that the Sabbath year could not have taken place until the next year (70/71 C.E., Nisan reckoning).

In addition, rabbis beginning from the mid-2nd century C.E. and forward provide us with important information regarding the Sabbath year at the time of the destruction of the Temple of Yahweh in the summer of 70 C.E. According to their records, the Romans began to destroy the Temple of Yahweh on a Sabbath day during a Sabbath year. As a result, when we combine these items of evidence, it proves that 70/71 C.E., Nisan reckoning, was a Sabbath year.

Chronology of Simon's Invasion

The sequence of events for Simon's invasion of Idumaea are as follows: Vespasian, the Roman general, was in Caesarea preparing to march against Jerusalem when word arrived of the death of Emperor Nero.¹ Nero died on or about June 9, 68 C.E. Since it was early summer, it would have taken approximately 3 weeks for news to arrive from Rome to Palestine (this being a reasonable estimate due to the urgency of the message of the emperor's death). Vespasian must have heard of Nero's death on or about the beginning of July, which is supported by comparing the statements of Theophilus and Dio.²

Vespasian, after hearing of Nero's death and the civil war that ensued, deferred his expedition against Jerusalem, "anxiously waiting to see upon

¹ Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:2.

² Theophilus, 3:27; Dio, 65:1, 66:17; also see above Chap. XXVI, pp. 349f.

whom the empire would devolve after Nero's death; nor when he subsequently heard that Galba was emperor would he undertake anything, until he had received further instructions from him concerning the war."³

In response, Vespasian sent his son Titus to the new emperor for instructions. Yet before Titus could arrive in Rome, while he was still sailing in vessels of war around Achaëa, it being the winter season, "Galba was assassinated" and Otho succeeded to the crown.⁴

Titus then sailed back from Greece to Syria and hastened to rejoin his father at Caesarea. "The two (Vespasian and Titus), being in suspense on these momentous matters, when the Roman Empire itself was reeling, neglected the invasion of Judaea, regarding an attack on a foreign country as unseasonable, while in such anxiety concerning their own."⁵

Otho had ascended to the throne on January 15, 69 C.E. It would have taken about 14 to 21 days for news of Galba's death to reach Greece where Titus was. Therefore, Titus must have started back for Syria in mid-February and rejoined his father at Caesarea in late February or early March of 69 C.E.

"But another war WAS NOW IMPENDING over Jerusalem."⁶ At this point Josephus backs up a little to tell the story of how the Jewish factional leader Simon ben Gioras came to lay siege against Jerusalem. The context of his discussion is that the siege of Simon ben Gioras against Jerusalem was about to occur at the same time that Titus made his return trip from Greece.

In the months before the siege Simon had collected a strong force and had overrun not only the province of Acrabetene but the whole district extending to the border of Idumaea. He then fortified himself in a city called Nain where "he laid up his spoils of corn" and "where most of his troops were quartered." Here he began training his men "for an attack upon Jerusalem."⁷

The Jewish Zealots, who were allied with and had many members from the Idumaeans, fearing an attack by Simon, made an expedition against him (unthinkable in a Sabbath year), but they lost the contest. In turn, Simon "resolved first to subdue Idumaea" and forthwith marched to the borders of that country. A battle was fought but no one was the victor. Each side returned home.⁸ "Not long after," Simon invaded that country again with a larger force. This time he took control of the fortress at Herodion (Herodium). Through a bit of trickery, Simon was able to convince the Idumaeans that he possessed a force far too great for them to thwart. The Idumaeans unexpectedly broke ranks and fled.⁹

Simon, thus, "marched into Idumaea without bloodshed," captured Hebron, "where he gained abundant booty and laid hands on vast supplies of corn," and then "pursued his march through the whole of Idumaea."¹⁰ On his

³ Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:2.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:3.

⁷ Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:3f, cf. 2:22:2.

⁸ Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:5.

⁹ Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:5f.

¹⁰ Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:7.

march through Idumaea, Simon made “havoc also of the country, since provisions proved insufficient for such a multitude; for, exclusive of his troops, he had 40,000 followers.” His cruelty and animosity against the nation “contributed to complete the devastation of Idumaea.”¹¹

Just as a forest in the wake of locusts can be seen stripped quite bare, so in the rear of Simon’s army nothing remained but a desert. Some places they burnt, others they razed to the ground; ALL VEGETATION throughout the country vanished, either trodden under foot or consumed; while the tramp of their march rendered ἐνεργὸν (CULTIVATED LAND) harder than the barren soil. In short, nothing touched by their ravages left any sign of its having ever existed.¹²

The land was ἐνεργὸν (*energon*), i.e., “cultivated,” “productive,” “active.”¹³ This evidence proves that the land in Idumaea was at the time planted with crops. It also places Simon’s invasion in the months after Khisleu (Nov./Dec.), when the fields are first sown. The Jews under Simon were also harvesting all consumable vegetation, something not done during a Sabbath year.

In turn the Zealots captured Simon’s wife and triumphantly entered the city of Jerusalem as if Simon himself had been captured. In response Simon laid siege to Jerusalem (which he would not have done in a Sabbath year), causing a great terror among the people there. Out of fear the citizens allowed Simon to recover his wife,¹⁴ but he was not yet able to take the city.

Josephus then backtracks to report the events occurring in Rome at that time. Galba was murdered (Jan., 69 C.E.), Otho succeeded to power, and Vitellius was elected emperor by his soldiers. The contest between Otho and Vitellius ensued, after which Otho died, having ruled 3 months and 2 days.¹⁵ Otho’s death took place in April of 69 C.E.¹⁶

This evidence demonstrates, since aggressive war was committed and crops were in production during the winter of 68/69 C.E., that System “B,” which would have the Sabbath year begin in Tishri of 68 C.E., is eliminated as a possibility. Also, since the Jews by custom did not plant crops during the six months prior to the beginning of a Sabbath year, System “D,” which would begin a Sabbath year in the spring of 69 C.E., must also be dismissed.

The Edomite Jews

Those who hold to Systems “B” and “D” object to our conclusion. They cannot deny the clear statements of Josephus. Instead, they argue, as Solomon Zeitlin

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:7.

¹³ GEL, p. 261; SEC, Gk. #1753–1756.

¹⁴ Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:8.

¹⁵ Jos., *Wars*, 4:9:9.

¹⁶ Tacitus, *Hist.*, 2:47–55.

does, that “the laws of the sabbatical year affected only the lands of Palestine, and had no application in Edom or in any other country that was annexed to Palestine.”¹⁷ Though this interpretation may at first seem reasonable, the attempt by the advocates of Systems “B” and “D” to circumvent the words of Josephus about the events during the winter of 68/69 C.E. cannot bear up against close scrutiny.

First, one must not confuse the original country of Edom (Greek “*Idumaea*”) with the country of Idumaea of the 1st century C.E. The Edomites had originally settled in the Khorite country of Seir, located southeast of the Dead Sea.¹⁸ The people of Edom are descendants of Esau, who was later called Edom (Red) because he sold his birthright to his brother, Jacob Israel, for a bowl of red soup.¹⁹ Before the death of Isaak, the father of both Israel and Edom, Edom migrated and settled in the Kanaani land of Seir the Khorite, located in the mountains southeast of the Dead Sea. Edom made this settlement permanent after Isaak’s death. Later, the Edomite nation killed off the Seiri and became the dominant tribe in that land.²⁰

In the days of Moses the country bordering south of Edom was Qadesh Barnea,²¹ properly identified by Josephus,²² Jerome, and Eusebius with the district near Petra.²³ On Edom’s north side lay Moab,²⁴ their borders touching at the Zered River: the modern Wadi el-Hasa.²⁵ Through Edom’s territory ran the famous King’s Highway, the main highway that today extends from the Gulf of Aqabah to Al Karak.²⁶ The ancient capital city of Edom was Bozrah.²⁷ It was located about 30 miles southeast of the Dead Sea in the mountains east of the Arabah (the long valley located south of the Dead Sea and on the west side of the Seir mountains).²⁸

At the time the Israelites divided up their shares of the Promised Land, Judah’s portion included the Arabah. Judah’s lot also retained Qadesh Barnea, which bordered on the south of Edom and extended southward towards the Gulf of Aqabah (Red Sea).²⁹ Importantly, the Israelites were not permitted to take any part of the land of Edom in their conquest.³⁰ After the Exodus, when the Israelites left the southern border of Edom in an effort to encompass that land so that they

¹⁷ JQR, 9.1/2, pp. 90, 101.

¹⁸ Deut., 2:5, 12, 22; Jos., *Antiq.*, 1:20:3, 2:1:1; Yashar, 28:20, 29:12–13, 36:15–37, 47:1, 30–32, 56:46f, 57:4–38, 84:5; cf. Gen., 36:20.

¹⁹ Gen., 25:19–34, 36:1–43.

²⁰ Gen., 32:3; Num., 24:18; Deut., 2:12, 22; Yashar, 47:1, 57:13–38.

²¹ Num., 20:16.

²² Jos., *Antiq.*, 4:4:7.

²³ Jerome, *Onom.*, p. 108, “*Cades*”; Eusebius, *Onom.*, p. 233, no. 103:3, “*Βαρνή*.”

²⁴ Deut., 2:1–5, 8–18; cf. Num., 21:10–12; Judg., 11:16–18.

²⁵ DB, p. 763; NBD, p. 1359; WHAB, p. 39a.

²⁶ Num., 20:14–21; cf. 21:21f; also see MBA, maps 9, 10, 52, 104, 126, 208; WHAB, p. 41, 65b; NBD, p. 700.

²⁷ Gen., 36:33; Isa., 34:6, 63:1; Jer., 49:13, 22; Amos, 1:12; Mic., 2:12.

²⁸ NBD, p. 165; MBA, maps 52, 104, 155.

²⁹ Josh., 10:16, 15:1–3, 18:18; Num., 34:3f.

³⁰ Deut., 2:4–5.

might gain access to the King's Highway without having to pass through Edom's territory, they went by way of the Arabah south of the Dead Sea.³¹

On their way north from the Gulf of Aqabah, the Israelites stopped off at Punon,³² identified with modern Feinan, an Edomite border district on Edom's western side, located on the east side of the Arabah about 25 miles south of the Dead Sea.³³ This evidence proves that the original country of Edom Proper laid north of Petra, east of the Arabah, and south of the Zered River (Wadi el-Hasa).

The Edomite families remaining in their original homeland were, by the beginning of the reign of King Darius I of Persia (521 B.C.E.), driven out of their country by the Nabataean Arabs. These exiled Edomites, in turn, resettled in southern Palestine (cf. 1 Esdras, 4:45–50). The historian Strabo writes:

The Idumaeans (Edomites) are Nabataeans, but owing to sedition they were banished from there, (and) joined the Judaeans.³⁴

The Nabataeans were an Arab tribe named after Nebaioth, the son of Ishmael, the brother-in-law of Edom.³⁵ In the post-exilic period this tribe came to dominate the ancient Edomite country on the southeast side of the Dead Sea. They made their capital the ancient city of Petra.³⁶

The Edomi were not actually Nabataeans. Nevertheless, after they and their original homeland came under the dominance of the Nabataeans during the late Babylonian period, the Greeks began to identify these Edomi with the latter. Strabo, accordingly, identified the Idumaeans with their kinsmen tribe because they had once dwelt with the Nabataeans in part of the land presently known to him as Nabataea.

The territory occupied by the Edomites in the 1st century C.E., on the other hand, was located in the southern half of Judaea and was part of the Holy Land. Josephus states that the land of Idumaea that existed from the 2nd century B.C.E. until the 1st century C.E. laid in "the latitude of Gaza" and was "conterminous with" the territory then held by the Jews.³⁷ Its cities included Hebron (formally an important Jewish city in the inheritance of Judah);³⁸ Adora (located 5 miles southwest of Hebron); Rhesa (8 miles south of Hebron); Marisa (1 mile south of Bit Jibrin); Thekoue (5 miles south of Bethlehem); Herodion (3 miles northeast of Thekoue); and Alurus (4 miles north of Hebron).³⁹

Josephus makes Idumaea one of the 11 districts of Judaea.⁴⁰ In his book on the *Jewish Wars*, Josephus reports a defection "in many parts of

³¹ Deut., 2:8; cf. Num. 21:21ff; Yashar, 85:14.

³² Num., 21:4–11; cf. 33:42ff.

³³ Jerome, *Onom.*, p. 123, "Fenon"; Eusebius, *Onom.*, p. 199, no. 123:9, "Φινών"; MBA, p. 182, map. 52; ATB, p. 160.

³⁴ Strabo, 16:1:34.

³⁵ Gen., 25:13, 28:9; Jos., *Antiq.*, 1:12:4.

³⁶ Strabo, 16:4:21.

³⁷ Jos., *Apion.*, 2:9.

³⁸ E.g., see Josh., 21:9–11, 11:21, 15:1–14, 14:6–15.

³⁹ Jos., *Wars*, 1:2:6, 1:13:8, 4:9:4–7, *Antiq.*, 13:9:1, 14:13:9; and so forth.

⁴⁰ Jos., *Wars*, 3:3:5.

Idumaea, where Machaeras was rebuilding the walls of the fortress called Gittha."⁴¹ In another version of this story, Josephus states it was "a good part of Judaea" that revolted when Machaeras fortified the place called Gittha.⁴² Therefore, the 1st century C.E. country of Idumaea is interchangeably used as part of Judaea.

In pointing out how the Holy Land was divided up amongst the 12 tribes of Israel in the days of Joshua the son of Nun (1394 B.C.E.), Josephus uses the place names of cities and regions in his own day (the 1st century C.E.). In the allotments that came to the Israelite tribes of Judah and Simeon (Simeon obtaining a share of Judah's territory),⁴³ Josephus gives the following description:

When, then, he had cast lots, that of Judah obtained for its lot the WHOLE OF UPPER IDUMAEA, extending (in length) to Jerusalem and in breadth reaching over to the lake of Sodom (Dead Sea); within this allotment were the cities of Ashkelon and Gaza. That of Simeon, being the second, obtained the portion OF IDUMAEA bordering on Egypt and Arabia.⁴⁴

Diodorus of Sicily states that the Dead Sea extends along the middle of the satrapy of Idumaea⁴⁵ (i.e., the Dead Sea laid on the eastern side of Idumaea about half way down the country of Idumaea). Pliny points out that "Idumaea and Judaea" were part of the "seacoast of Syria,"⁴⁶ i.e., they both border upon the Mediterranean Sea. He adds that Palestine begins with the region of Idumaea "at the point where the Serbonian Lake comes into view."⁴⁷ The Serbonian Lake is located along the Mediterranean Sea, forming the northeastern sector of the Sinai Peninsula. Pliny also makes Judaea proper lie between Idumaea and Samaria.⁴⁸

Strabo notes, "As for Judaea, its western extremities towards Casius are occupied by the Idumaeans and by the lake (Serbonia)."⁴⁹ The famous 2nd century C.E. geographer Ptolemy makes Idumaea one of the districts of greater "Palestina or Judaea." He writes that "all" of Idumaea lies "west of the Jordan River." Ptolemy describes and defines Idumaea and its cities as that district lying immediately south of Judaea proper.⁵⁰

This geographical data proves beyond any doubt that the country of Idumaea which existed during the 1st century C.E. occupied a portion of the Promised Land that had formally been given by allotment to the Israelite

⁴¹ Jos., *Wars*, 1:17:2.

⁴² Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:15:10.

⁴³ For the location of the inheritance of Judah and Simeon, see Josh., 15:1–63, 19:1–9. The tribe of Simeon took its portion out of the land allotted to Judah, see Josh., 19:1.

⁴⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 5:1:22.

⁴⁵ Diodorus, 19:98.

⁴⁶ Pliny, 5:13.

⁴⁷ Pliny, 5:14.

⁴⁸ Pliny, 5:15.

⁴⁹ Strabo, 16:2:34.

⁵⁰ Ptolemy, *Geog.*, 5:16 §1–10, Map 4 of Asia.

tribes of Judah and Simeon. The land they possessed, therefore, was part of the Holy Land. More specifically, it was part of greater Judah (Simeon's portion being extracted out of Judah's share). It stands to reason that if part of the Holy Land is occupied by those professing the Jewish faith, in the eyes of the Jews, it certainly would be subject to the Laws of Moses.

What then of the Idumaeen religious beliefs? In the reign of John Hyrcanus (134/133–105/104 B.C.E.), the Jews conquered the country of Idumaea.⁵¹

Hyrcanus also captured the Idumaeen cities of Adora and Marisa, and after subduing all the Idumaeans, PERMITTED THEM TO REMAIN in the country SO LONG AS they had themselves circumcised and WERE WILLING TO OBSERVE THE LAWS OF THE JEWS. And so, out of attachment to the land of their fathers, they submitted to circumcision and to making their manner of life conform in all other respects to that of the Jews. AND FROM THAT TIME ON THEY HAVE CONTINUED TO BE JEWS.⁵²

No other neighboring countries located outside of the lands anciently inhabited by the Israelites and conquered by the Jews in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C.E. were forced to meet the requirements of either becoming Jewish by religion and practice or suffer under the threat of being forced to vacate their land. Nevertheless, there are two extremely important questions that have not been asked in reference to this above cited passage: First, "Is this exemption true for those people living on territories anciently inhabited by the Israelites?" Second, "Why would the Jews demand compliance from these Idumaeans?"

The answers are easily unveiled. When the Jews dominated Samaria and the Trans-Jordan districts, once inhabited by the house of Israel, Jewish customs were also demanded. The Samaritans, for instance, had long practiced a form of Judaism and, for the Jews, were not an issue.⁵³ The Ituraean Arabs also provide us an excellent example. A tribe of Ituraeans lived in a Trans-Jordan district once inhabited by the Israelite tribe of Manasseh. When a portion of them were conquered by the Jewish king Aristobulus (104/103 B.C.E.), and their territory annexed, they were joined to the Jews "by the bond of circumcision."⁵⁴

The Idumaeans, meanwhile, were living in that part of the Holy Land which historically belonged to the Jews, who had occupied it centuries before the Jewish exile to Babylonia during the 6th century B.C.E. The Jews identified themselves with their own heritage in Judah yet they still saw reasons to require the conversion of the foreign nations now occupying the territory that had once belonged to the house of Israel. This requirement was even more stringent within

⁵¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:9:1, *Wars*, 1:2:6.

⁵² Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:9:1.

⁵³ Cf. 2 Kings, 17:24–28; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:14:1–3.

⁵⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:11:3.

territory traditionally considered Judahite. In the Torah, aliens dwelling with the Israelites were required to observe the Sabbath year.⁵⁵ As a result, either the Edomites, who were living in Judah proper and not just in greater Israelite territory, had to conform to Jewish law or they had to leave. The Idumaeans chose to stay in the land, "And from that time on they have continued to be Jews!"

In the days of King Herod the Great of Judaea an Idumaeen named Costobarus was appointed governor of Idumaea and Gaza. Costobarus held the belief that the Idumaeans should not have adopted the customs of the Jews, so he sent to Cleopatra of Egypt in an attempt to have Idumaea stripped from Judaea as a possession. The attempt failed, but in discussing this issue Josephus also comments that in earlier times the Jewish priest "Hyrcanus had altered their (the Idumaeans') way of life and made them adopt THE CUSTOMS AND LAWS OF THE JEWS."⁵⁶ Strabo writes:

The Idumaeans are Nabataeans, but owing to a sedition they were banished from there, joined the Judaeans, and SHARED IN THE SAME CUSTOMS WITH THEM.⁵⁷

Antipater, the father of Herod the Judaeen king (37–4 B.C.E.), was an Idumaeen held in high esteem among the Idumaeen people.⁵⁸ Although Herod's father was Edomite, the Jews themselves proclaimed that he "was a Jew."⁵⁹ Four of Herod's wives (Doris, Mariamme the daughter of Alexander, Mariamme the daughter of Simon, and Cleopatra) are known to be Jewish.⁶⁰ In fact, Mariamme the daughter of Alexander was the granddaughter of the Jewish high priest named Hyrcanus and the other Mariamme was the daughter of the high priest named Simon Boethus.⁶¹

It would not have been possible for Herod to have retained the Judaeen crown if he had not himself been Jewish by religion. Therefore, the king of Judaea, at the time that Yahushua the messiah was born, although Edomite by descent, was Jewish by religion. This fact symbolizes the general merger of the Jews of Judaea and Edomites of Idumaea during this and subsequent periods. Though up until the 1st century C.E. the Judahites and Edomites could distinguish between themselves, foreigners classed them all as Jews. In time even their own ability to distinguish one from the other had passed away.

⁵⁵ E.g., Lev., 25:2–7.

⁵⁶ Jos., *Antiq.*, 15:7:9.

⁵⁷ Strabo 16:2:34.

⁵⁸ Jos., *Wars*, 1:6:2, 1:13:7, 2:4:1, *Antiq.*, 14:1:3, 14:7:3, 14:15:2.

⁵⁹ Jos., *Wars*, 2:13:7.

⁶⁰ Doris was of Herod's "own nation," i.e., an Edomite (Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:12:1), yet she is said to be "a native of Jerusalem" (Jos., *Wars*, 1:22:1) and "a Jewess of some standing" (Jos., *Wars*, 12:3). Mariamme, the daughter of Alexander, the son of Aristobulus, was the granddaughter of the high priest Hyrcanus (Jos., *Wars*, 1:12:3, 1:17:8, *Antiq.*, 14:12:1, 14:15:14). The second Mariamme was the "daughter of Simon the high priest" (Jos., *Antiq.*, 15:9:3, 18:5:4). Cleopatra is also called "a native of Jerusalem." Regarding the 10 wives of Herod the Great, see Jos., *Antiq.*, 17:1:1–3; *Wars*, 1:24:2, 1:28:4; HJP, 1, pp. 320f.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

In religious matters the Idumaeans were generally in alliance with the Zealots, one of the strictest religious sects in ancient Judaism.⁶² The Idumaeen Jews attended the major religious festivals at Jerusalem and were also a bulwark in the First Revolt against the Romans (66–70 C.E.).⁶³

Second Temple Destroyed in a Sabbath Year

There is no contemporary record referring to the Sabbath year of 70/71 C.E., Nisan reckoning (or, for that matter, any other year around this time). Yet 70/71 C.E. was an important year for the Jews. It was during this year that the Romans captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Temple of Yahweh. For this reason, the destruction of the Second Temple was still painfully remembered by the mid-2nd century C.E. rabbis. In addition, only a few decades after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Judaeen nation again heavily suffered from another devastating defeat by the Romans. This calamity came as the result of the Bar Kochba revolt against Rome, which ended in 135 C.E.⁶⁴ At this time the Romans carried off and enslaved thousands of Jews, exiling many more. Those that remained in Judaea fell under the iron boot of the Romans and were forbidden to even come near the district surrounding the city of Jerusalem.⁶⁵ From this time forward, the Romans no longer allowed the Jews to keep the Sabbath years. These dire straits forced the remaining Judaeen population to accommodate to their new circumstances. For example, it was after the collapse of the Jewish kingdom in 135 C.E. that the rabbis created a new reckoning for the Sabbath year, one that began both the Sabbath and Jubilee years with Tishri 1 rather than with Nisan 1.⁶⁶

Unfortunately, when the rabbis living in the mid-2nd century C.E. and beyond took it upon themselves to discuss past events in Jewish history, they anachronistically superimposed their new interpretation of when to begin the Sabbath year upon these historical events—a rather self-serving effort meant to justify their new reckoning. Nevertheless, once we take into account this anachronism, the late rabbinic interpretation actually proves that a Sabbath year took place in 70/71 C.E., Nisan reckoning. The rabbinic version of the Sabbath year, for example, reckoned a Sabbath year from Tishri 1 of 69 until the beginning of Tishri 1 of 70 C.E. (System “C”) rather than by the scriptural method by using Nisan 1 of 70 until the beginning of Nisan 1 of 71 C.E. (System “A”). As previously demonstrated, the rabbis first lengthened their Sabbath year by adding 6 months prior to the beginning of the actual Sabbath year. They were encouraged to make this adjustment by their own self-imposed requirement that they must build a fence around the Torah.⁶⁷ After the Bar Kochba revolt,

⁶² E.g., Jos., *Antiq.*, 4:4:1–4:5:2.

⁶³ E.g., Jos., *Antiq.*, 17:10:2, *Wars*, 2:3:2, 5:6:1, 6:8:2.

⁶⁴ See a detailed discussion below in Chaps. XXIX–XXXII.

⁶⁵ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 4:6.

⁶⁶ See above Chap. II.

⁶⁷ Ab., 1:1, “the men of the great assembly” said “make 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.” Also see TNTB, p. 140.

the Jews of Judaea were oppressed by the prolonged observance of their contrived version of the Sabbath year and by their Roman overlords, who forced the Jews to work their fields during a Sabbath year. As a result, the rabbis were forced to shorten their observance of the Sabbath year from 1½ years to 1 year by adopting the Greek system of beginning the year with the month of Hyperberetaeus, called Tishri in Hebrew. Thus, these rabbis created the Tishri 1 year system for every year, calling Tishri 1 “Rosh ha-Shanah (Head of the Year),” a definition that is nowhere found in Scriptures. The reckoning of the Tishri 1 year system remains for those practicing Judaism until this day.

At the same time, Rabbinic records agreed with Josephus and other historical sources that the date for the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple of Yahweh occurred on the 9th of Ab (July / Aug.). They also calculated that the destruction of both the First and Second Temples occurred on a Sabbath day during a Sabbath year. The reckoning of Ab 9 is true for the year 70 C.E., whether utilizing System “C” or System “A.” Systems “B” and “D,” on the other hand, are both eliminated since both calculations would have finished their version of the Sabbath year well before Ab 9 of 70 C.E. At the same time, these mid-2nd century C.E. rabbis erred in their chronology when they tried to force an interpretation that the First Temple—the destruction of which took place on Ab 9 and 10 but in the year 587 B.C.E.—like the Second Temple, fell on a Sabbath day during a Sabbath year. It did not.⁶⁸ They even misdated the fall of the First Temple by 176 years.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the template upon which they built their false chronology and conclusions was the destruction of the Second Temple, about which they were much more familiar. Recognizing that the reference to the destruction of the First Temple was believed to be a duplicate of the destruction of the Second Temple, we possess strong evidence that the Sabbath year was ongoing in the summer of 70 C.E. To begin with, we read in the Seder Olam (160 C.E.):

Rabbi Yose used to say: Propitiousness is assigned to a propitious day and calamity to a calamitous day. As it is found said, When the Temple was destroyed the first time, that day the Sabbath (day) was מוצאי (mutzai; going-out),⁷⁰ and it was the מוצאי (mutzai; going-out) of the Sabbatical year. It was (during the service of) the priestly division of Jehoiarib, and it was the 9th day of Ab; ALSO IT HAPPENED THE SECOND TIME (that the Temple was destroyed). In

⁶⁸ A Sabbath year occurred in the 9th year of King Zedekiah of Judah, but the First Temple was destroyed in the 11th year of King Zedekiah, see above Chap. XIII.

⁶⁹ See our discussion above in Chap. I, pp. 14–17. The Jews of the post-Bar Kochba period wildly misdated the destruction of the First Temple to the year 421 B.C.E.

⁷⁰ HCLOT, p. 458, “a going out . . . that which goes out”; NBDBG, p. 425, 1, “c. way out, exit . . . 2. that which goes forth”; CHAL, p. 187, “what comes out (of lips, mouth) . . . going out”; SEC, Heb. #4161, “a going forth, i.e. (the act) an egress, or (the place) an exit; . . . outgoing, proceeded out”; SHL, p. 341, “a coming or going forth, exit”; HEL, pp. 141, “go out, go forth.”

this one and that one (i.e., the two Temple destructions) the Levites stood upon their platform and recited a song.⁷¹

The date of Ab 9 for the beginning of the destruction of the second Temple is supported by other Jewish writers. In both the Mishnah (c.200 C.E.) and the Babylonian Talmud, for example, we read:

On the 9th of Ab . . . the Temple was destroyed the first and second time.⁷²

For these writers, the destruction of both the First and Second Temples were connected with the 9th of Ab, when their respective fires were started, although the final destruction in each case is said to have occurred on the 10th of Ab. The Babylonian Talmud, as another example, states that “the second time” that the Temple was destroyed, like the first, occurred on Ab 9.⁷³ The Chronicles of Jerahmeel also correctly informs us that the 9th of Ab during the year that the Second Temple was destroyed (70 C.E.) was a Sabbath day during a Sabbath year:

The banishment brought about by Titus, Vespasian, and Hadrian occurred on the ARAB (AFTERNOON) OF THE 9TH OF AB, ON THE OUTGOING OF THE SABBATH (DAY) AND THE SABBATICAL YEAR. The Levites were then occupied with their ministrations, and, with their harps in their hands, were singing their hymns. Yet Scriptures state, “He has brought upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own evil.” The words, “He shall cut them off,” were not yet fully uttered before their enemies came upon them, slaughtered many of them, and sent the rest into exile.⁷⁴

By saying that Ab 9 occurred during the מוֹצַאֵי (mutzai; going-out) of the Sabbatical year rather than at the “return of the year,” that is to say, the first half of the year,⁷⁵ it is clear that these rabbis were placing their own later interpretation of the Tishri 1 year upon the historical records. Nevertheless, in combination with all of the other evidence we have presented, it is also clear that they merely retained the information that Ab 9 of that year fell during a Sabbath year.

⁷¹ S.O., 30.

⁷² Taan., 4:6; B. Taan., 26b.

⁷³ B. Taan., 29a.

⁷⁴ Chron. Jerah., 61:1.

⁷⁵ Cf. 1 Kings, 20:22, 26; and see NBD, p. 178, “The observation of the autumnal equinox, i.e. ‘the going out of the year’ (see Ex. xxiii. 16) and the spring or vernal equinox, called ‘the return of the year’ (1 Ki. xx. 26; 2 Ch. xxxvi. 10) was important for controlling the calendar and consequently the festivals. Thus the year began with the new moon nearest to the vernal equinox when the sun was in Aries (Jos., *Ant.* iii. 8. 4), and the Passover on the fourteenth day of Nisan coincided with the first full moon (Ex. xii. 2–6).” Also see THP, p. 116, n. 5.

In this case, Ab 9 of 70 C.E. fully accommodates the original Nisan 1 Sabbath-year reckoning (System “A”).

Some recent authors, like Benedict Zuckermann and Chaim Joseph Milikowsky (System “B”),⁷⁶ in an effort to force an interpretation in order to support their own version of the Sabbath-year cycle (making it fall a year before the construct that was even advocated by the early rabbis) translated the phrase, “When the Temple was destroyed the first time, that day the Sabbath was going-out, and it was the going-out of the Sabbath year” to instead read, “When the Temple was destroyed, the first time, that day was immediately after the Sabbath, it was immediately after the Sabbatical year.”⁷⁷

Heinrich W. Guggenheimer and Ben Zion Wacholder, on the other hand, would strongly disagree.⁷⁸ The interpretation of Zuckermann and those following him is not only strained but has absolutely no historical or linguistic support. Rodger C. Young, for example, correctly assessed the term מוצאי (mutzai; going-out), as found in the above passage from the Seder Olam, by stating:

Motsa (plural construct *motsae*) is the participial form of the common verb *yatsa*, which has the basic meaning “to go out, to go forth.” A literal rendering of *motsa* is therefore “the going-out” or “the going-forth.” This understanding definitely favors Guggenheimer’s translation, since it is easy to see how the “goings-out” of a year or a day could express the latter part of the time-period, but a time still within the period. The only way that the meaning “after” would be justified would be if there were some idiomatic usage that could be found which suggested this meaning.⁷⁹

Rodger C. Young then continues by providing various items of evidence which prove the correctness of the “going-out” view.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt. The year 70/71 C.E., Nisan reckoning, was a Sabbath year. First, the Idumaeans of the 1st century C.E. were not only Jews by religion but were living in the Holy Land—and not in just any part of the Holy Land but in that portion which had historically belonged to the tribe of Judah. Under Jewish domination they were required to adhere to the Jewish faith or else be forced to abandon the country. At the same time, the Idumaeans were in close alliance with the Zealots, a strict Jewish sect, and demonstrated their loyalty to their faith in the Jewish war against Rome that ended in 70 C.E. With these details we are compelled to the conclusion that the Edomites living

⁷⁶ USUJ, pp. 28–30; SORC, 2, p. 547.

⁷⁷ E.g., SORC, 2, p. 547.

⁷⁸ RVBC; HUCA, 44, pp. 153–196.

⁷⁹ JBQ, 34.3, p. 177.

in southern Judaea were strict adherents to Jewish law. If they had not been, an alliance with the Zealots would have been impossible and the other Jews would have found grounds to expel them from the country.

These facts force us to conclude that when Simon invaded the country of Idumaea in the winter of 68/69 C.E.—an act of war which was not committed during a Sabbath year—there was no possible way that these Idumaeans would have avoided the Sabbath-year laws. Yet since they did cultivate their fields, we are presented with clear evidence that the winter of 68/69 C.E. was not part of a Sabbath year. In addition, since the crops of this planting season would normally be harvested after the beginning of the next year (69/70 C.E., Nisan reckoning), we have evidence that this next year was also not a Sabbath. The attack upon Jerusalem by the Jewish factional leader Simon ben Gioras and the crops grown in Idumaea during the winter of 68/69 C.E. eliminates the cycles of both Systems “B” and “D” from consideration (see Chart A). System “C” retains the problem of beginning with a Tishri year.

Finally, the evidence shows that the rabbis of the mid-2nd century C.E. devised a new year-system which began the year with Tishri 1. They then anachronistically imposed this year-system on earlier historical records. Nevertheless, they still confirmed that Ab 9 of the year that the Second Temple was destroyed (70 C.E.), fell during a Sabbath year. Since they began their new reckoning by pushing the beginning of the Sabbath year from Nisan 1 back to Tishri 1, it proves that we only need to return the beginning of the year to its proper place on Nisan 1. Since the later rabbis calculated the beginning of the year on Tishri 1, they wrote that Ab 9 occurred in the “going-out” of the year. Yet the evidence shows that during this period the Jews still determined the beginning of the year with Nisan 1. Ab 9, accordingly actually occurred during the return of the year. Therefore, by default, the Sabbath-year cycle once again conforms to System “A.” We are left with the conclusion that 70/71 C.E., Nisan reckoning, the year that Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, was a Sabbath year (see Charts A & C).

This page intentionally left blank.