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Chronology of Jubilees



In the late Second-Temple Era, Judeans celebrated each 7th year as a Sabbatical year. At an earlier time, a 50th year may additionally have been celebrated.

Sabbatical years

In the late Second-Temple Era, the custom of letting the land rest in each 7th year was an important tenet of Jewish law. Flavius Josephus, a priest-historian who lived in the first century CE, described the Jewish custom of observing the Sabbatical law in some detail. The writings of the rabbis and certain ancient contracts also make it clear that Jews living under the late Second Temple were careful to observe each of the Sabbatical years.

The law concerning the keeping of a Sabbatical year was complied with at a national level. Throughout the territory of Judea, it would have been mandatory--as a tenet of the constitution--for farmers to observe each 7th year as a Sabbatical year. The requirement to celebrate Sabbatical years throughout Judea would have been in force until the Second Temple fell (in 70 CE).

The jubilee year

Some ancient sources tend to indicate that the late Second-Temple practice of observing 7th years sprang from an earlier practice of celebrating a 50-year cycle. It seems that after 7 sets of Sabbatical years had been celebrated, each 50th year (called the jubilee) was also celebrated. The more primal practice of celebrating 7 sets of 7 years and a jubilee year is described in biblical texts--as follows.

"Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land... That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land... And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound ... And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land... A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubile; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field." (from Leviticus, Chapter 25: 3-12 - English language translation based upon the KJV).

It then seems that a 50th year (like the Sabbatical year) was once specially celebrated (perhaps at some time prior to the late Second Temple).

According to what appears to be a more original practice, 7 sets of 7 years were first celebrated and then a jubilee year (or a 50th year) was additionally celebrated. The 50th--like the 7th--was specially observed (where in each 50th, crops were not sown, tended, or reaped).

Influence of the Greeks

The prospect that a 50th year was more anciently observed raises the question as to why/when a jubilee year was no longer celebrated under the late Second Temple. The point in time when a jubilee year was last observed appears to have been sometime within a rather lengthy period when the Greeks and then the Romans were in control of Judea (as is further explained below).

It seems that Judea was at first subjugated by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE. Afterwards, Judeans were required to pay tribute or taxes to the more powerful Greeks. The requirement to pay taxes was tightened under the subsequent rule of the Romans (who likewise imposed taxes upon the Judeans).

Thus, the time and the reason for why a jubilee year was not observed under the late Second Temple was surely related--at least in part--to a requirement on the part of the Judeans to pay tribute to the Greeks and later to the Romans.

The Greeks appear to have given the Judeans an exemption from paying taxes in those years that were Sabbatical years. (as per Josephus and the Maccabees). The Romans likewise were generous enough to reduce taxes in each 7th year.

Even through tax concessions were granted, it is apparent the jubilee year was no longer celebrated in the late Second-Temple Era. Sources from this era make it clear that by the time of the 177th year Seleucid, Judeans were no longer celebrating a jubilee year. As shown below, these several sources make it unmistakably clear that a 50th year was not officially observed after the second century BCE.

The possibility that a jubilee year was not officially celebrated in the region of Judea after the 177th Seleucid year is made manifest from late Second-Temple sources. These several sources confirm that--by the end of the Temple Era--Judeans celebrated only an unbroken cycle of 7th years.

The late Second Temple

The chronology of Sabbatical years under the late Second Temple can rather satisfactorily be determined--as follows:

The year 135-134 BCE (or the year 177 of the Seleucid Era) was noted to be a 7th year in the writings of Flavius Josephus. In 'Antiquities of the Jews' he noted: "... there came around the year in which the Jews are wont to remain inactive, for they observe this custom every seventh year, just as on the seventh day." (Book 13:8:1).

The same year (135-134 BCE) was also noted to be a year of 'rest' in 'Wars of the Jews'. In this book, Josephus noted the following: "the year of rest came on, upon which the Jews rest every seventh year as they do on every seventh day".

The year 44-43 BCE could have been a 7th year. In 'Antiquities of the Jews', Josephus stated that the Jews had a legal agreement with the Romans concerning a reduction of taxes in 7th years. In substantiation of this, he cited a decree from one of the Roman emperors. The decree stated when Caius Caesar was consul for the fifth time he ordered in the 2nd year of the current land-use agreement that a deduction in the amount of taxes that land users paid to the Romans should be granted to the Jews (refer to Antiquities, Book 14:10:5-6). If the current year (44-43 BCE) did correspond to the cited 2nd year of the land-use agreement then it might be possible to interpret this passage to mean that the respective year did correspond to a 7th year (as celebrated by the Jews).

Josephus rehearsed another Roman decree concerning a grant to Jews allowing celebration of the 7th years. This respective decree substantiates that Jews--under the late Second Temple--positively were celebrating Sabbatical years. "[Judea should pay a tribute yearly]... excepting the seventh, which they call the Sabbatical year, because thereon they neither receive the fruits of their trees, nor do they sow their land... [taxes are to be paid] every year, the seventh year, which they call the Sabbatic year, excepted, whereon they neither plough, nor receive the product of their trees." (Antiquities, Book 14:10:6).

The year 37-36 BCE appears to have been both a 7th year and 70th year (as noted by Josephus). This year--the year when Herod was declared king at Jerusalem--is referred to as a 'hebdomatikon' year as follows: "Now the Jews that were enclosed within the walls of the city fought against Herod with great alacrity and zeal (for the whole nation was gathered together); they also gave out many prophecies about the temple, and many things agreeable to the people, as if God would deliver them out of the dangers they were in ... this happened to be a Sabbatic year [or literally, a 'hebdomatikon' year]" ('Antiquities of the Jews', 14:16:2).

The year 37-36 BCE is noted to have been both a 7th year and a 70th year in a second passage of 'Antiquities of the Jews'. This instance is recorded in the next book as follows: "At this time Herod, now he had got Jerusalem under his power... the Sabbatic year [or literally, a 'hebdomatidon' year]... was still going on, and forced the country to lie still uncultivated, since we are forbidden to sow our land in that year." (Book 15:1:2).

The year 55-56 CE (autumn-to-autumn) was almost surely a 7th year--based on an ancient Deed of Loan. This paper was recovered at Wadi Murabba near Bethlehem. This legal note is explicit in stating that a 'year-of-release' was underway in the 2nd year of Nero Caesar. Because Nero ascended to the throne in autumn of the year 54 CE, the cited Sabbatical year (autumn-to-autumn) would have largely corresponded to 2nd year of the reign of Nero.

The year 69-70 CE (autumn-to-autumn) is shown to have been a 7th year by the early rabbis. The Taanith indicates that the Second Temple was destroyed in a post-Sabbatical year (B. Taan., 29a). The Arakin has "thus it is found that it [= the destruction of the Second Temple] happened during the last part of a septennate" (B. Arak., 12 b). A third century rabbi (Hunna) computed the Sabbatical cycle based upon the fact that the Second Temple was destroyed in a sabbath year (B. Azar., 9b). Rabbi Jose (Yose) ben Khalapha commented that the year prior to the destruction of the Second Temple was a Sabbatical year (Seder Olam, 30). Because the Second Temple was destroyed in autumn of the year 70 CE then it's easy to recognize from the rabbis that a Sabbatical year occurred immediately prior to the destruction of the Temple. Essentially, the Temple is indicated to have been destroyed in autumn of the year 70 CE very close to the boundary of a 7th year (at the end of the respective 7-year cycle).

The year 139-140 CE (autumn-to-autumn) also appears to have been a 7th year--as based upon another legal paper recovered at Wadi Murabba. This respective contract (Mur 24E) was written in late autumn of the year 134 CE. This sub-lease agreement describes what appears to be a 5-year lease term. The respective lease was to last until the 'eve of the Sabbatical year'. It is clear that 5 years from autumn in the year 134 CE ends with autumn of the year 139 CE. Then, this respective year (139 CE) would have corresponded to the very beginning of a year-of-release.

From the cited late Second-Temple sources, the chronology of the once observed cycle of 7 years is rather easy to reconstruct. It is clear that a continuous run of 7-year cycles was counted between about 135 BCE and 139 CE. This period of history straddles some 273 years (or contains 39 cycles of 7 years). During this lengthy stretch of history, Sabbatical years were observed in the years 135 BCE, 44 BCE, 37 BCE, 55 CE, 69 CE, and 139 CE. For more information, refer to the following online publication:

Significance of 70 Years

Based upon the indicated unbroken chronology of 7 years after about the 177th Seleucid year (as cited), it is quite clear that Judeans did not officially celebrate a jubilee year (or a 50th year).

Clearly, Sabbatical years were celebrated in an unbroken cycle throughout the late Second-Temple Era. It is of special interest that if the cycle of 7 years was extended from the first century into this twenty-first century then a 7th year would have occurred in correspondence with the year 2001-2002 CE (from autumn-to-autumn). Essentially, the year 2001-2002 CE corresponded to the occurrence of a Sabbatical year--as an extension of the same cycle of 7 years as was once celebrated in the late Second-Temple Era.

Chronology of jubilees

The chronology of jubilee years is a bit more difficult to determine. This is because a jubilee year was not routinely celebrated in the late Second-Temple Era (as cited).

Even though a jubilee year has not been celebrated in the land of Israel for quite some time now, the topic of the once observed jubilee year continues to hold considerable interest among both Jews and Christians alike. The ancient custom of celebrating a very special year--a time when liberty was once proclaimed throughout the land--paints a vision of an early society that was truly grand.

As is shown in the prior section, it was surely at a time earlier than the late Second Temple when a jubilee year was last celebrated.

It here seems of some considerable significance that a monumental change in the priesthood and the Temple system came about in the year 167 BCE. In this respective year, the Greek ruler Antiochus IV assumed control of the Temple. (The current dynasty of high priests was eventually deposed).

The actions of Antiochus IV are detailed at length in the books of the Maccabees, and also in the writings of the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus.

Judeans almost immediately took up arms in opposition to Greek control of the Temple. The Jewish armies were under the leadership of the family of Asamoneus, or the Maccabees.

The initial part of the revolt was largely successful in that Judeans soon regained control of the Temple. Even with the revolt ongoing, the Temple building was cleansed and rededicated in 164 BCE.

Eventually a deal was worked out between the Judeans and Antiochus (and his son). This truce agreement granted the revolutionary forces--headed up by the Maccabees--the governorship of Jerusalem and all of Judea.

Thus, it was at the time of the Jewish revolt from under Antiochus IV that the government of Judea underwent a major change. A new dynasty of priest-kings (the lineage from Asamoneus) ascended to the office of both King and High Priest (160 BCE).

The occupation of the civil and religious governments by the descendants of Asamoneus then seems to have been one of the leading factors that resulted in the ultimate observance of an unbroken 7-year cycle. It is probable that the new ruling dynasty elected to eventually modify the celebration of the 50-year cycle.

Because the dynasty of Asamoneus assumed control of the Temple system in 160 BCE, and because it is very clear that a jubilee year was not observed under the late Second Temple (as cited), it is logical to believe that the last time a jubilee cycle was celebrated may have been prior to the cited Jewish revolt.

A jubilee year may have no longer been celebrated in Judea after about the time the Maccabees ascended to the throne of Jerusalem.

Locating the jubilee year

The Israelite celebration of a year-of-liberty (a 50th year) can only implicitly be determined from the historical record (as is further shown below).

To begin a sketch of just when early Israel might have once celebrated a 50th year (or a jubilee year), the biblical book of Ezekiel can be recited.

The author of the book of Ezekiel seems to indicate that a 50th year could have occurred in about the year 572 BCE.

The author of Ezekiel--a priest--was living at the very time when the First Temple was sacked and destroyed by the Babylonians (587-586 BCE). Consequently, this author was almost surely acquainted with the celebration of the jubilee cycle (as it was celebrated by the early order of high priests).

The first chapter of Ezekiel can be recited to substantiate that a jubilee cycle of 50 years might have been tracked by adherents of the primal Temple. This respective chapter shows that the 30th year of an unspecified epoch did correspond with the 5th year of the captivity of the Judean king (Jehoiachin). Based upon the cited notation of a 30th year, it seems logical to interpret that the chronology intended by the author

could have pertained to that of 50 years. Essentially, the 30th year noted in the first chapter of Ezekiel may have corresponded to a 30th year of the once celebrated jubilee cycle.

In pursuit of the hypothesis that the author of Ezekiel had firsthand knowledge of the once tracked and celebrated cycle of 50 years, it is significant that the 5th year of the captivity of the Judean king (Jehoiachin) would have closely corresponded with the year 592 BCE.

The respective Jewish king (Jehoiachin) was taken into custody in the 8th year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign (refer to Jeremiah, Chapter 29, and to 2 Kings, Chapter 24:12). Because the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (Nabuchodonosar II) began in 605-604 BCE, the event of the captivity would have occurred in the year 597-596 BCE (or in the 8th year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign). It then follows that the 5th year of the captivity of Jehoiachin did correspond with the year 592 BCE.

If a 30th year of the once celebrated jubilee cycle did properly correspond with the year 592 BCE then it is manifest that a jubilee year could have been celebrated in the year 572 BCE (20 years later than the stated 30th year of the jubilee cycle).

This respective hypothesis (that the year 572 BCE might have closely correspond with an instance of the once celebrated jubilee year, a 50th year of the jubilee cycle) can further be substantiated from certain of the Bible sources. For example, in the last part of the book of Ezekiel, the author gives a futuristic description of a restored Temple system.

Throughout 9 full chapters (40 through 48) the author of Ezekiel meticulously describes a number of details concerning a revived Temple.

What appears to be unusual about the cited vision of a new Temple is that the author-priest was cautious to explicitly date the year in which the vision was received:

"In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth [day] of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten, in the selfsame day the hand of the LORD was upon me... ". (AV text of Ezekiel, Chapter 40:1).

Because the Babylonians ultimately burned the city of Jerusalem late in the year 586 BCE, the respective year that Ezekiel received his vision--14 years afterward--would have corresponded to the year 572 BCE (the approximate time of a jubilee year).

Here, it is significant that in other portions of this book, the respective author appears to use a kingly dating system--or a time track pegged to the time of the cited king's captivity. (Note that the king's captivity is indicated to have commenced in the year 597 BCE--as previously has been cited). Consequently, the year that corresponded to 25 years after the captivity would probably have been the year 572 BCE (reckoned spring-to-spring).

The double dating tends to confirm that Ezekiel received his vision of the new Temple in about the year 572 BCE.

Based upon the subsequently presented analysis, it can more firmly be established that Ezekiel could have received his vision of a new Temple around the time of a 50th year of a 50-year cycle. Essentially, the year 572 BCE hypothetically did correspond with around the time of a jubilee year.

The epoch of a jubilee year perhaps explains why the respective author of Ezekiel (a priest) drew such special attention to the year date of his receiving the vision. (Perhaps this year date would have been specially understood by the priest class--or by those who had maintained the Temple system--as pertaining to a jubilee year). It was also noted by some among the rabbis that Ezekiel's vision was received around the time of a jubilee year.

In substantiation of the hypothesis that Ezekiel's Temple vision was received in association with the epoch of a jubilee year, the books of Haggai and of Zechariah can also be recited.

The authors of both Haggai and Zechariah were prophets and they both recorded a divinely received message concerning the construction of the new Temple (just beginning).

The respective authors--like the author of Ezekiel--were careful to record the calendar date when their respective messages were received.

It is here of related interest that many of the messages concerning the construction of a new Temple were received in the year 521 BCE. (For example, Chapter 1 of Zechariah has 'the 2nd year of Darius' [II]).

Thus, it is clear that if a jubilee year did occur in the time of Ezekiel (around 572 BCE) then the cited 8 chapters recorded by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were likewise written around the time of a jubilee year (in 521 BCE).

It then becomes significant that the latter occurrence of a hypothetical jubilee year in the time of Haggai-Zechariah (521 BCE) occurred about 50 years later than did the occurrence of a jubilee year in the time of Ezekiel (572 BCE).

These alignments (located about 50 years apart and spaced in approximate alignment with other Sabbatical years--as explained below) perhaps point to the basic structure of the once adhered to jubilee cycle of 50 years.

Considering that the year 572 BCE did closely correspond to the time of a jubilee year, a chronology for the jubilee time cycle can be tabled for a wide number of centuries.

Beginning with the jubilee year that occurred in about 572 BCE (in the time of the priest Ezekiel) and ending with the year in 122 BCE (as the time of the last possible jubilee-year celebration) a hypothetical chronological sequence is indicated--as follows:

- A 50th year corresponded to 572 BCE
- A 50th year corresponded to 522 BCE
- A 50th year corresponded to 472 BCE
- A 50th year corresponded to 422 BCE
- A 50th year corresponded to 372 BCE
- A 50th year corresponded to 322 BCE
- A 50th year corresponded to 272 BCE
- A 50th year corresponded to 222 BCE
- A 50th year corresponded to 172 BCE
- A 50th year corresponded to 122 BCE

The rabbis noted that both Sabbatical years and jubilee years were celebrated in correspondence with a year that was reckoned from autumn to autumn. Thus, jubilee years appear to have been offset by 6 months relative to civil year dating. Essentially, civil years commenced in the spring season but jubilee years did not commence until the fall season. This offset of 6 months between the beginning of the civil year and the beginning of the jubilee year makes the determination of the jubilee chronology a bit more uncertain. For example, if it can be determined that a jubilee year occurred in the year 572 BCE--as per civil year dating--then when did the respective jubilee celebration begin? If the respective jubilee year is assumed to have begun with a minus offset of 6 months then the celebration would have commenced in autumn of the year 573 BCE. Conversely, if the respective jubilee year is assumed to begin with a plus offset of 6 months then the celebration would not have commenced until autumn of the year 572 BCE.

The indicated jubilee chronology (as diagrammed above) generally agrees with records left by the earliest among the Christian historians. In example, a passage from '**The Chronicle of St. Jerome**' does show that a "jubilee according to the Hebrews" was acknowledged in the 2nd year of Probus (when Anatolius was bishop of Laodicea). This specific reference points to the possibility that a jubilee year was then specially memorialized among at least a segment of period Christians and Hebrews (those contemporary with the 3rd century CE).

In addition to the jubilee year that was commemorated in the reign of Probus, several other instances of jubilees are listed with corresponding numbers throughout pages of Jerome's chronicle. Some of the 50th year jubilees that were listed for "the Hebrews" can be cross-referenced to the Common Era--as follows:

- A 41st Hebrew Jubilee is listed
- A 51st Hebrew Jubilee is listed
- A 61st Hebrew Jubilee is listed
- A 71st Hebrew Jubilee is listed (572 BCE)
- An 81st Hebrew Jubilee is listed (29 CE)
- An 86th Hebrew Jubilee is listed (279 CE)

A jubilee "according to the Hebrews" was additionally noted by Jerome but without any corresponding number. This other instance can be cross-referenced to the year 354 CE. Of special interest is that this instance of a jubilee memorial appears to represent a 25th year of the stated jubilee cycle (not a 50th year).

Of related significance is that several other instances of the celebration of 25th years can be recognized from passages of Jerome's chronicle. For example, the 12th year of Severus and the 251st of the city of Antioch (204 CE) is shown to have been "a jubilee observed by most". In addition, a jubilee according to "most people" is again listed for years that can be cross-referenced to 254 CE and 304 CE respectively.

A composite jubilee chronology; as interpreted among 3rd century Hebrews and Christians; for 25th years, and for 50th years, can ultimately be tabled from the content of Jerome's chronicle--as follows:

- 25th year of the cycle = 204 CE (listed by Jerome but not numbered)
- 50th year of the cycle = 229 CE (not listed)
- 25th year of the cycle = 254 CE (listed by Jerome but not numbered)
- 50th year of the cycle = 279 CE (listed by Jerome as the 86th Jubilee)
- 25th year of the cycle = 304 CE (listed by Jerome but not numbered)
- 50th year of the cycle = 329 CE (not listed)
- 25th year of the cycle = 354 CE (listed by Jerome but not numbered)

The noted celebration of each 25th year of the 50-year cycle by Jerome seems to also reflect the content of the preface text of an early-written paschal canon attributed to Anatolius of Alexandria. (This passage can likewise be recited to show that a 25-year cycle might have been time tracked among a segment of period astronomers). The memorialization of each 25th year of the jubilee cycle (of 50 years) among primal priests seems to furthermore be reflected in a tenet followed by modern Catholicism.

Sabbatical years

The hypothetical chronology for the 50th year that was celebrated in early Israel (as documented) seems more certain on the basis of the recorded instances of Sabbatical years (or 7th years) that were celebrated among Hebrews throughout the first part of

the Second-Temple Era. Essentially, the stated chronology seems to somewhat agree with the earliest historical instances of Sabbatical years.

One of the earliest instances of the celebration of a Sabbatical year can seemingly be interpreted from a certain passage recorded in the accounts of the Jewish kings. This respective passage indicates that crops were not sown during a certain year (or years).

This indicated time when crops were not sown existed when Jerusalem was shut in by Assyrian armies. At this time, the prophet Isaiah delivered a prophecy that the siege would soon be ended:

"... ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof." (2 Kings 19:29).

Based upon Assyrian records, it appears that the cited seige of Jerusalem did correspond with the third campaign of Sennacherib (in 701 BCE).

The wording of Isaiah's promise implies that crops were not to be sown in the year of the siege nor in a portion of the subsequent year. The specific prediction that crops would not be sown could then possibly mean that a Sabbatical year was celebrated in that respective time range.

One of the Sabbatical years (perhaps a 7th year of the jubilee cycle) can seemingly be identified from the writings of certain among the early rabbis.

Even through the rabbi sources aren't in complete agreement, it appears that the First Temple may have been destroyed in a Sabbatical year.

"It is said, The day on which the First Temple was destroyed was... at the end of the seventh [Sabbatical] year..." (Arakin 11b).

"The First Temple was destroyed... in the year following the Sabbathical year..." (Ta'anith 29a).

Because the First Temple was looted by the Babylonians in 587 BCE and the complex was subsequently destroyed in the year 586 BCE then the Sabbatical year cited by the rabbis did most probably corresponded with a time range that straddled the year 587 BCE.

Another series of Sabbatical years--that presumably occurred in the original jubilee cycle--can be identified in the era when Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor officiated at Jerusalem.

Ezra is indicated to have arrived at the capital city Jerusalem in 457 BCE (the 7th year of Artaxerxes 1).

Because a jubilee year could have been celebrated in about the year 422 BCE (as shown above) then the year when Ezra arrived at Jerusalem may have corresponded with a Sabbatical year of the once celebrated 50-year cycle (around the time of the 2nd Sabbatical of the cited jubilee cycle).

It is of special interest that the year 457 BCE did likewise correspond with the epoch of a 70th year of the kingly cycle as is shown in the online document entitled:

Significance of 70 years

The actions of Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor can be ultimately constructed from the writings of Josephus, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and from the Apocrypha.

The several accounts of the actions of Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor all indicate that a special festival was held at the time when Ezra (a ranking priest) read from the books of Moses.

It is here significant--according to a certain passage in the book of Deuteronomy--the law was to be read in public at a certain festival (but only in each 7th year or Sabbatical year).

From the indicated requirement to publicly read the books of Moses in each 7th year, it can be recognized that the time of the priestly reading of the law books corresponded to one of the sets of 7 years (presumably leading up to the celebration of a jubilee year).

The year when this unique festival was held would probably have closely corresponded to the year 443 BCE (or the 21st year of Artaxerxes I).

Nehemiah is noted to have become governor of Jerusalem in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I. Moses was then read in that year or more probably in the following year--as the book of Nehemiah seems to indicate (refer to Nehemiah, Chapter 8).

An additional instance of a Sabbatical year can possibly be identified from those sources that contain accounts of the actions of Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor. In 'Antiquities of the Jews' (by Josephus) is the description of the celebration of an additional feast.

The version of the actions of Ezra and Nehemiah by Josephus is a bit different from the version shown in the biblical books. The description of Josephus is much more

plausible in that his description seems to more properly account for the time that would have been required for Nehemiah to receive the office of governor from Artaxerxes I, travel to Jerusalem, rebuild the walls of the city, and ultimately participate in the celebration of a festival.

Based upon a composite analysis of the diverse accounts of Ezra-Nehemiah, it seems that the cited festival (held around 443 BCE) was not a single occurrence. Essentially, two festivals are mentioned in Antiquities, and the occurrence of only one festival is mentioned in Ezra-Nehemiah. The two festivals were obviously celebrated at different times.

Josephus mentioned that Ezra did read the book of Moses at a respective feast. Though the year date of this respective feast cannot be determined from the Josephus' record alone, the year date of this festival can be identified to be in about the year 443 BCE (as cited above).

The Josephus account then becomes of special interest in that the observance of a subsequent festival (in the 28th year of Artaxerxes) can be identified. The year of this latter feast would then have corresponded to the year 436 BCE.

It is then of significance that this respective 8-day festival (a second feast) described by Josephus may likewise pertain to the cited jubilee chronology of 50 years.

Thus, from amid the accounts of Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor the identification of 2 or 3 Sabbatical years can possibly be identified. The cited years of 457 BCE, 443 BCE, and 436 BCE all align according to a chronological sequence of 7 years. This respective sequence of years is within a year of being in agreement with the cited hypothesis that a 50th year (a jubilee year) was celebrated in the year 422 BCE.

Some other possible instances of Sabbatical years can be identified from certain other ancient sources.

In the year 536 BCE, a Persian monarch named Cyrus is indicated to have issued a significant decree to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem (refer to 2 Chronicles 36:22 and Ezra 1:1).

Most agree that the decree to rebuild the Temple was issued when Cyrus ascended to the throne over the Chaldeans in 536 BCE.

It is thus significant that the year 536 (when the decree to rebuild the Temple was issued) may have closely corresponded with the event of a Sabbatical year.

A more certain instance of an early celebrated Sabbatical year can be recited from '**Antiquities of the Jews**'--as follows:

"... they [the Samaritans] petitioned that he [King Alexander] would remit the tribute of the seventh year to them because they did not sow thereon" (Book 11, 8:6).

Alexander the Great assumed control of Judea in the year 331-330 BCE. Thus, it would appear from the quoted passage that a Sabbatical year was in close proximity with that respective time range.

Another instance of an early celebrated Sabbatical year is noted to have occurred in the 150th year of the Seleucid Era. (The celebration of this respective Sabbatical year is mentioned in both the book of 'Antiquities of the Jews', and also in the books of the Maccabees).

The equivalency of the 150th year Seleucid to modern dating depends upon the epoch of Seleucid chronology (which apparently began in the autumn of the year 312 BCE). Thus, 150 years from the epoch is equivalent to the year 162-161 BCE (autumn-to-autumn). The problem here is that this time range doesn't quite align with 7-year chronology (as it was reckoned in the late Second-Temple Era after 135 BCE).

The noted Sabbatical year (celebrated in the 150th year--Seleucid) should either exactly align with subsequent 7-year chronology, or perhaps exceed it by the distance of 1 year earlier. In this period of history, it seems to be significant that the high priest had been deposed (167 BCE) but the Maccabees had not yet ascended to the office of the high priest (160 BCE). Therefore, the method by which this respective Sabbatical year was reckoned could have been by the old-style, jubilee-year determination. (Note that in the year 162 BCE, the new dynasty of ruling priests had not yet officially ascended into office).

The probable reason a Sabbatical year was celebrated in the 150th year of the Seleucid Era (a year later than subsequent instances of Sabbatical years indicate) may be due to Greek influence. It appears from the accounts of the Maccabees that for two or three years prior to the 150th year (Seleucid) the Greeks had prohibited participation in customs and traditions by the Jews.

In the late Second-Temple Era, the jubilee year (or the 50th year) appears to have no longer been celebrated in the region of Judea--as previously cited. Instead, a version of the original king's 70-year schedule came to be used to determine the occurrence of Sabbatical years.

Of related interest is that one of the years in which Jesus ministered could have corresponded with the time of a jubilee year (a 50th year). In fact, there are passages in the New Testament from which it can be inferred that the beginning of Jesus' ministry did coincide with the time of a jubilee year.

The book of Luke recounts that Jesus was sent to release captives in association with an acceptable year (refer to Luke 4:18-19). If the beginning of the ministry of Jesus coincided with a 50th year of the original jubilee cycle then the duration of the ministry (at least 3 years) would have overlapped a jubilee year.

The time frame of the ministry of Jesus may then have straddled a 50th year. Essentially, if Jesus was crucified in spring of the year 31 CE then the crucifixion would have occurred in the vicinity of a jubilee year (about 2 years after). Here it seems pertinent to take into account that jubilees were not officially celebrated in the time of Jesus.

Josephus wrote of a great cycle of 600 years--refer to Antiquities, 1, 3:9. (This 'great cycle' is equal to 12 jubilee cycles). It is here of special interest the jubilee year that may have been celebrated in or prior to the year 572 BCE (the time of Ezekiel's vision) and the jubilee year that marked the commencement of Jesus' ministry occurred in pace with a time span that encompassed 12 jubilee cycles or 600 years. (Note that year zero corresponds to year 1 CE when computing time spans that extend into the Common Era).

Conclusions

The following (implicit and explicit) instances of 7th years in the once observed jubilee cycle can be identified and dated from various of the ancient sources:

- 701 BCE (Sennacherib's attack)
- 587 BCE (1st Temple sacked)
- 536 BCE (Cyrus' proclamation)
- 457 BCE (Ezra's ministry)
- 443 BCE (Ezra's ministry)
- 436 BCE (Ezra's ministry)
- 331 BCE (Alexander controls Judea)

In addition to the cited string of Sabbaticals, the epoch of a jubilee year (the 50th year) can seemingly be located along the historical timeline in approximate correspondence with the following years:

- 572 BCE (Ezekiel's vision)
- 572 BCE (71st Hebrew Jubilee)
- 521 BCE (Haggai and Zechariah)
- 28 CE (Jesus' ministry begins)
- 29 CE (81st Hebrew Jubilee)
- 279 CE (86th Hebrew Jubilee)

If the cited instances of jubilee years (or 50th years) and the related instances of Sabbaticals were all splined, condensed, and projected into a single 50-year span (say for the jubilee cycle extending from 172 BCE to 122 BCE) then an outline for the once observed jubilee schedule can be pieced together--as follows:

- 172 BCE (+ or - 1 year) = Jubilee Year
- 165 BCE (+ or - 1 year) = 1st Sabbatical
- 158 BCE (+ or - 1 year) = 2nd Sabbatical
- 151 BCE (+ or - 1 year) = 3rd Sabbatical
- 144 BCE (+ or - 1 year) = 4th Sabbatical
- 137 BCE (+ or - 1 year) = 5th Sabbatical
- 130 BCE (+ or - 1 year) = 6th Sabbatical
- 123 BCE (+ or - 1 year) = 7th Sabbatical
- 122 BCE (+ or - 1 year) = Jubilee Year

From the cited projection of jubilee years (or 50th years) and Sabbaticals into the pivotal second century, an outline of the original jubilee schedule can consequently be reconstructed. Historical cases can be recited to roughly establish a time chronology for both jubilee years and also for a number of the intervening Sabbatical years.

The historical cases and their indicated chronological spline (to within + 1 year or - 1 year) point to the veracity of certain interpretations held among the early rabbis. Essentially, the year of Ezekiel's Temple vision is proven to have closely corresponded with the occurrence of a jubilee year.

The last time a jubilee year was officially celebrated in Judea may then have been as late as about the year 122 BCE--and no later. If not as late as the year 122 BCE then a jubilee year would more certainly have been celebrated prior to the time of the Jewish revolt. From this premise, a jubilee year may have been celebrated in Judea about the year 172 BCE (give or take the span of a year).

If a jubilee year was celebrated in this modern era--as a projection of jubilees celebrated in the Temple Era--it is probable that the next jubilee year would correspond to about the year 2029 CE (+ or - 1 year). Due to some uncertainty inherent in the assumptions currently made and due to the antiquity of the cited source material, the current analysis should be considered to be very speculative.

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