

The Jubilee Cycle

By Larry Acheson

The Jubilee cycle is not something I have really had to worry about. The command doesn't really affect my personal life. If it did, I would have to sound the trumpet in a certain year and on a certain date so as to proclaim liberty throughout all the land (Lev. 25:10), plus I wouldn't be allowed to sow or reap that year. Since I'm not currently engaged in farming or raising a garden, this is not something I would do anyway, so the Jubilee year doesn't really apply to me personally. Nevertheless, some folks use the Jubilee cycle so as to introduce us to the timing of Scriptural events, including the first coming of Yeshua the Messiah, and to accomplish this chronological determination, I have found that they take some liberties with the plain instructions found in Yahweh's Word, and this concerns me to the point that I have decided to put my own thoughts into written form.

The question I am led to ask myself is, "If I were living in the days in which Sabbatical years and Jubilee years were observed, would I reckon them the way these Bible students teach that they should be determined?"

In order to answer the above question, let's first examine how some folks believe the Sabbatical years and Jubilee years should be determined. Here is how the author of an internet article explains it:

Also of importance is that the entry into the promised land occurred in 1406 BC. This means that we are currently half-way through the important 70th jubilee cycle, which will end in the spring of AD 2025. (70 x 49, which is 7 x 70 x 7 years, or 490 x 7 years. A jubilee is counted as 7 x 7 years in succession, with the 50th overlapping the first year of the next cycle of 49 years. Hence, the seven year Sabbaths and the 49-year jubilee cycles run uninterrupted in the same way as the regular weekly Sabbaths. God is consistent!)¹

The author of the above excerpt believes that the 50th year overlaps the first year of the next Jubilee cycle. In other words, "year 50" is *also* "year one" of the following cycle. I'm sure there are other ideas and explanations pertaining to how count to Jubilee years, but the above is the one I am most familiar with. Interestingly, I find that although most of the explanations I have come across agree with the one cited above, virtually each individual comes up with a different year in which the current jubilee cycle ends! The above individual, as revealed in his commentary, maintains that the current cycle will end in the year 2025. Another individual, whose comment is cited below, speculates that the next jubilee year will correspond to the year 2010:

I made my own chart, and guess what? The year 2010 AD came out as the Jubilee Year.

Sept. 9, 2010 is Tishri 1, 5771, the Feast of Trumpets that is Christ's Coronation Day in Heaven. It is also the day of the Marriage of the Lamb and the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is the Day of God's Wrath too. If this is correct, Jesus would return, as I thought, on the following Nisan 1, 5771 (April 5, 2011), during the Jubilee Year.²

I never cease to be amazed at how there seems to be no end to individuals offering their predictions of when the Messiah will return, even though Yeshua plainly stated, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." The above prediction is but one of many I have read over the years. Other prognosticators, a little more cognizant of Yeshua's words, but still perhaps a little too sure of themselves, say things like, "He said no man knows the *day and hour* ... He didn't say we can't know the *month and year*!" Their different conclusions notwithstanding, both individuals from whom I have quoted this far agree that "year 50" of the jubilee cycle overlaps the first year of the *next* cycle. In other words, "year 50" and "year 1" coincide.

From the internet article entitled *The Jubilee Cycles*, we read virtually the same "year 50 = year 1" rationale:

¹ <http://www.bible-codes.org/Geneva-peace-treaty-covenant-Israel.htm> (Notice that the author chose to remain anonymous).

² Taken from the Prophecy.com website, "Pro and Con 1209," 05-23-2005, by Marilyn J. Agee, located at the following URL: <http://www.prophecycorner.com/agee/procon1209.html>. Note: The author also wrote that she believed the rapture would occur on the day of Pentecost, 1998 (see "Pro and Con 2").

The jubilee cycle is 50 years long and begins every 49 years,³ so that the 50th, or jubilee, year of one cycle is also the first year of the next cycle.³

This same author also offers a “calendar” depicting how he believes the jubilee cycle should be reckoned:

Year 1 "Sunday"	Year 2 "Monday"	Year 3 "Tuesday"	Year 4 "Wednesday"	Year 5 "Thursday"	Year 6 "Friday"	Year 7 Sabbath
1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Sabbath (land rests)
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 Sabbath (land rests)
15	16	17	18	19	20	21 Sabbath (land rests)
22	23	24	25	26	27	28 Sabbath (land rests)
29	30	31	32	33	34	35 Sabbath (land rests)
36	37	38	39	40	41	42 Sabbath (land rests)
43	44	45	46	47	48	49 Sabbath (land rests)
50/1 Jubilee (land rests)	2	3	4	5	6	7 Sabbath (land rests)
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 Sabbath (land rests)
15	16	17	18	19	20	21 Sabbath (land rests)
22	23	24	25	26	27	28 Sabbath (land rests)
29	30	31	32	33	34	35 Sabbath (land rests)
36	37	38	39	40	41	42 Sabbath (land rests)
43	44	45	46	47	48	49 Sabbath (land rests)
50 Jubilee (land rests)						

Is the above definition of a Jubilee cycle Scriptural? Can we find in Scripture a teaching that the 50th year is also the first year of the next cycle? In a word, the answer is no. The above definition does not come from Scripture; rather, it comes from an *interpretation* of Scripture. In order to get a firm grasp of what Scripture actually *does* say, let’s review the text in question. The only place in Scripture we can turn to in order to find the instructions pertaining to the Jubilee year is Leviticus 25. This same chapter offers the explanation for determining the Sabbatical years, often referred to as the *land Sabbaths*. These years are critical to our study because in order to understand the determination of the *Jubilee year*, we must first understand the reckoning of the *Sabbatical years*. With this in mind, let’s read the first portion of Leviticus 25:

¹And Yahweh spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying,

³ http://www.danielrevelation.com/sda/reference/jubilee_cycles.html (Again, notice that the author chose to remain anonymous). Also, see *The Chronology of the Old Testament: Solving the Bible's Most Intriguing Mysteries*, Floyd Nolen Jones, New Leaf Publishing Group, Green Forest, AR, November 2004, p. 288, where the author writes, “Whereas the Year of Jubilee is regarded as the 50th year (Lev. 25:10), there are only 49 years from one Jubilee to the next.”

²Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto Yahweh.

³Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof;

⁴But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for Yahweh: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.

⁵That 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.

⁶And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee.

⁷And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.

According to the above instructions, the Israelites were to sow and reap for six years, then let the land lay fallow the seventh year. In the verses that follow, we are given the instructions pertaining to the reckoning of the Jubilee year:

⁸And 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.

⁹Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land.

¹⁰And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.

¹¹A jubilee 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.

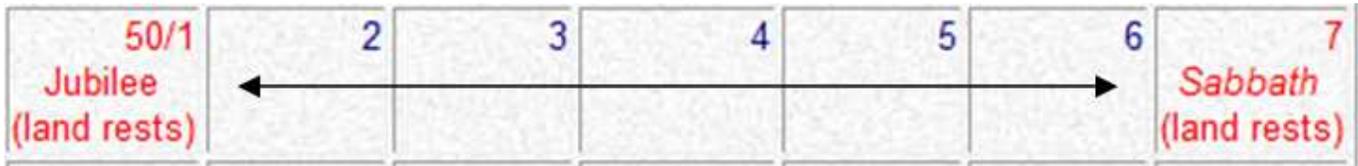
¹²For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field.

I am aware of two interpretations of the above passage, but from my perspective, the wording is very clear. This is how I understand the intent of the Author: A Sabbatical cycle is seven years long, six of which are spent sowing and reaping, and the final year the land is to lay fallow. We are to count seven of these cycles (7 x 7), which comprises a total of 49 years. During the seventh month of the 49th year, the trumpet is sounded to announce the approaching 50th year—the year of Jubilee. Once that 50th year has ended, the Sabbatical/Jubilee cycle is reset. That is my understanding of how Yahweh intends the Jubilees to be determined. Notice that the instructions are the same for the 50th year as they are for the seventh year concerning sowing and reaping. The bottom line is, if the ancients did not start sowing their fields until the 51st year, then the 50th year could not have been the first year of the next seven year cycle of sowing and reaping. Thus, even though there is a cycle of “7x7” involved in the Jubilee cycle, it is actually a 50-year cycle, not a 49-year cycle.

The opposing view maintains that the Jubilee cycle is only 49 years in length, and that *year one* of the next Sabbatical cycle coincides with *year 50* of the preceding cycle.⁴ Where do they glean this understanding? Certainly not from the text itself, because the simple fact that a 50th year is mentioned proves that it is a 50-year cycle, not a 49-year cycle. In a nutshell, we are told to follow a certain pattern every seven years, and that after following that pattern seven times (i.e., for 49 years), the following year is a special year. That following year is year #50. Once year #50 is over, we repeat the cycle, and that is what makes it a 50-year cycle, our opponents’ view notwithstanding. Moreover, if we carefully reexamine the instructions found in Leviticus 25, there is no mention that *year one* of the following Jubilee cycle must coincide with *year 50* of the previous cycle. This is a problematic fact for which the proponents of this belief have offered no satisfactory answers, at least none that I have ever read. Nevertheless, as we can observe from the calendar reproduced above, the proponent of that calendar believes that year 50 and year one must coincide.

Another difficulty arising from the belief that year 50 coincides with year one is the fact that this effectively disrupts the “six years of sowing and reaping” required for each of the seven sabbatical cycles. Here is an excerpt from the above calendar that vividly illustrates the obstacle faced by proponents of the “year 50 = year one” method of reckoning the Jubilee year:

⁴ Cf., Moore, W. Glenn, “Jubilee Cycles—49 or 50 Years?”, pp. 1-2, where he writes, “First, we need to consider that in the context of this statement [Lev. 25:1-11] it speaks only of 7-year and 49-year cycles—it does not speak of 50-year cycles. Clearly, context already implies that the cycles are of a continuous nature and that they are based upon multiples of 7 and 49.”



How many years of sowing are permitted within this Jubilee cycle? How many are commanded (Lev. 25:3)?

As I mentioned previously, I have heard attempts at explaining the above conundrum, but none of them are satisfactory. A common explanation is that the above scenario is an “exception,” just as the Day of Atonement presents an “exception” to the “work six days, rest on the seventh” command. The Day of Atonement is commanded to be observed on the 10th day of the seventh Scriptural month. Since the 10th day of the month may fall on any day of the week, during that particular week there will be two days of rest, not one (unless the Day of Atonement happens to fall on the day of the weekly Sabbath, as it does in 2008). Thus, although Yahweh commands His people to work six days, then rest on the seventh day, the week during which the Day of Atonement falls presents a necessary exception to the “work six days, rest the seventh” command. However, since Yahweh specifically commands that the Day of Atonement be observed on the 10th day of the seventh month, this makes it a *specified exception*. For the Jubilee cycle, Yahweh makes no command stipulating that one sabbatical cycle will only consist of *five* years of sowing and reaping.

In fact, the year of Jubilee is, in and of itself, presented as an exception. During the sabbatical cycles of six years of reaping and sowing, followed by the seventh year of land rest, if Yahweh said nothing further, those cycles would continue on and on, ad infinitum, without stopping. However, Yahweh *does* say something further. He stipulates that after seven cycles are completed (i.e., 49 years), the 50th year is a Jubilee year ... another year of not sowing or reaping. Thus, if we are going to focus on *exceptions*, the year of Jubilee is the exception Yahweh gives us, not “five years of sowing and reaping.”

If it is true, as we believe it is, that year 50 and year one of the next Jubilee cycle do *not* coincide, there will *always* be six years of sowing and reaping, as illustrated below:

43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (land rests)	Jubilee (land rests)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (land rests)	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (land rests)	

A common argument that I hear with regard to the above reckoning is the stark contrast between it and the weekly cycle. I have heard such remarks as, “Your proposal cannot be correct because ‘year 50’ disrupts the ‘cycle of sevens!’” Only when “year 50” and “year one” coincide is there a seamless transition from one Jubilee cycle to the next (i.e., no need to have “year 50” jutting out from the sabbatical cycle as it does with my illustration). How do I answer such criticism?

First of all, in view of the fact that Scripture offers no indication that “year 50” and “year one” coincide with each other, this only leaves room for the understanding that they do *not* coincide, which in turn leaves room for the understanding that the Jubilee year falls *outside* of the sabbatical cycle. Secondly, for those who insist that there must be a seamless transition from one Jubilee cycle to the next (without disrupting the Sabbatical cycle in the process), I can only ask, “Why?” For all we know, each Jubilee cycle represents the generation of mankind, with the final Jubilee “year” being representative of eternity, and eternity certainly falls *outside* of what we understand as “time.” Since that 50th year is only *representative* of eternity, this means we can only observe that Jubilee year here on earth during what is known as “the time side of eternity.” As such, once that year ends, we begin a new count to the next Jubilee ... a new countdown representative of the dawn of man moving towards the goal of eternal life. With each new “countdown,” the cycle resets itself, so there is certainly no need for a seamless transition requiring “year 50” and “year one” to coincide with each other.

Although I believe I have sufficiently addressed the “exception to the rule” argument presented by those who teach a 49-year Jubilee cycle, I would like to present an example of this argument for review purposes:

In the case of the repeating pattern of “sow six years . . . rest one year” the five years following the Jubilee year would simply be the “exception to the rule.”⁵ Actually, this was the same argument given by Rabbi R. Jehudah.⁵ We know, for instance, that there is a rule that says “work six days” then “rest” on the seventh day—and it is in regard to the weekly cycle. However, this rule does not apply in situations which require the keeping of special feast days, which also contain “high-day” Sabbaths. These special Sabbaths interrupt the regular rule of “work six days. . . rest the seventh.” Some may argue that these “exceptions” (like the feasts) are specifically identified in Scripture, but the year of Jubilee is (supposedly) not specifically identified as an “exception.” However, I have to disagree: the year of Jubilee is specifically identified as an “exception” by its very mention in the text of Scripture, just as the other special Sabbaths are commanded to be kept on certain days of the Jewish calendar. And the fact that the cycles of 7 years is listed as repeating (whereas the 50th year is not listed as repeating) strongly implies that the main focus is on the cycles of seven (since a repeating cycle of 50 years is not mentioned in the text).⁶

I find the above explanation to be very confusing. First, the author explains the Rabbi R. Jehudah agreed with his argument that, following the year of Jubilee, there are only five years of sowing and reaping, not six. He even tells us where he read Rabbi R. Jehudah’s argument (see his footnote) . . . but he doesn’t feel his reading audience needs to read the actual words penned by the rabbi! Presuming the rabbi did indeed make such a statement, I am inclined to disagree with him.⁷ Next, notice that the author has the impression that those of my persuasion may argue that the year of Jubilee is not identified as an “exception.” Since I have already previously written that the year of Jubilee *is* identified as an “exception,” and since I have previously cited this as further evidence validating a 50-year cycle, I’m not sure I follow the above author’s line of reasoning that I must somehow believe that it is *not* an exception. In fact, when I examine the Jubilee cycle, I find *two* exceptions. In order to identify those exceptions, let’s take a look at the “formula” prescribed by Torah for reckoning the Jubilee cycle. In mathematical terms, it goes like this:

$$6 + 1 = 7; \quad 7 \times 7 = 49; \quad 49 + 1 = 50; \quad \text{repeat.}$$

As I review the above “formula” prescribed by Torah, I see *two* exceptions. The first “exception” is year seven of the Sabbatical cycle. There are six years of reaping and sowing, but then along comes an “exception to the rule” . . . the seventh year, which is a year of “land rest.” After that seventh year, the cycle begins again. In fact, it goes through seven of those cycles, and then along comes another “exception” . . . the 50th year. Once the 50th year has come and gone, that 50-year cycle begins again. There is no mention of an exception requiring a “5 + 1” count to the Sabbatical year. Moreover, please notice

⁵ *A Treatise on the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee*, p. 12, Benedict Zuckermann, Hermon Press, NY., 1866 (Reprinted in 1974).

⁶ Cf., Moore, W. Glenn, “Jubilee Cycles—49 or 50 Years?”, p. 2.

⁷ In fact, some authors have expressed their disagreement with Rabbi R. Jehuda in no uncertain terms. Henry Browne, M.A., in his book *Ordo Saeculorum: A Treatise on the Chronology of the Holy Scriptures*, published by John W. Parker, London, 1844, p. 288, writes, “The numerical definition of the jubilee is plain: it is the 50th or 7 x 7 + 1st year, just as the day of Pentecost is the 7 x 7 + 1st day from the 2nd day of unleavened bread. The jubilean period, each and every period, contains just 50 years reckoned from a fixed epoch, the 10th day of the 7th month. It is surprising that any careful reader should have misunderstood these very plain expressions; yet such is the fact. It appears from the Talmud *Erichin*, fol. 12, 2. 13, 1. 32, 2. 33, 1. (cited by Ideler, 1. 503), that a certain rabbi Jehuda was the first to maintain, contrary to the established opinion and the plain sense of the words, that the jubilean period consists of 49 years, the jubilee-year being (as he said) itself the 49th, and identical with the 7th sabbatical year. His opinion, Ideler informs us, was subsequently adopted by the Gaonim, certain learned Rabbins, who lived after the completion of the Talmud, and expounded it in the academies over which they presided. Maimonides, however, rejects this view as a novelty: ‘The 49th year,’ says he, ‘is the sh’mittah (or sabbatical year), the 50th is the jubilee, the 51st is the 1st of the new sh’mittah.’”

Another author, Ray Summers, in his book *Chronos Kairos Christos II*, Mercer University Press, 1998, p. 283, wrote, “Zuckermann’s work (in chronological dating) has stood the test of time, but advances in Qumran studies and archaeological research call for revisions of some of his conclusions. His table identifying sabbatical years runs from 535/534 B.C. to A.D. 2238/2239. He comes down on the side of the view (that of Rabbi Jehudah) that the jubilee period consisted of forty-nine and not fifty years. (We need to call attention to the fact that not all Jewish groups in Jesus’ day, nor all of the later rabbis, followed Zuckermann’s view of a forty-nine year cycle for both sabbatical and *jubilee* observances; some preferred a cycle of fifty years.)”

that the “6 + 1” rule sets the standard for the “49 + 1” rule. Just as “year 7” is not also “year 1,” in the same way, “year 50” does not coincide with “year 1” of the next Jubilee cycle.

The above-cited author goes on to compare the Jubilee cycle with the count to Pentecost:

An even better example of an exception to the rule is the count to Pentecost. The 50 day count to Pentecost is a direct parallel to the 50 year count to Jubilee—and yet, when the day of Pentecost comes it does not force us to alter the regular weekly cycle as some suggest we should do in regard to the Jubilee cycles. If such is true for Pentecost, it would also be true in regards to the year of Jubilee—the keeping of that special year does not alter the regular Sabbatical cycle.⁸

In response to the above, I would first point out that nowhere in Scripture are we ever told that we should compare the count to Pentecost to the Jubilee cycle. Nor is there an approved Scriptural example of anyone ever doing so. Nevertheless, authors such as the one cited here have taken it upon themselves to state that “the 50 day count to Pentecost is a direct parallel to the 50 year count to Jubilee.” This brings us to the author’s contention that those of my persuasion are faced with the “dilemma” that reckoning the Jubilee cycle the way we would do it requires “altering the regular Sabbatical cycle.” As I mentioned previously, for those who insist that there must be a seamless transition from one Jubilee cycle to the next (without disrupting the Sabbatical cycle in the process), I can only ask, “Why?” For all we know, each Jubilee cycle represents the generation of mankind, with the final Jubilee “year” being representative of eternity, and eternity certainly falls *outside* of what we understand as “time.” Since that 50th year is only *representative* of eternity, this means we can only observe that Jubilee year here on earth during what is known as “the time side of eternity.” As such, once that year ends, we begin a new count to the next Jubilee ... a new countdown representative of the dawn of man moving towards the goal of eternal life. With each new “countdown,” the cycle resets itself, so there is certainly no need for a seamless transition requiring “year 50” and “year one” to coincide with each other. Even with the count to Pentecost, once the day of Pentecost comes and goes, the cycle is over, and the next “count to Pentecost” won’t take place until the following year. If the above author wants to remain consistent with his “Pentecost/Jubilee” analogy, he will need to immediately begin another count to Pentecost as soon as Pentecost arrives ... with “day 50” also being representative of “day 1” of the count to the next day of Pentecost.

Over the years, I have found myself in the middle of some intense discussions pertaining to the calendar. In the course of some of those discussions, I have occasionally been accused of elevating historical evidence above Yahweh’s Word. The most frequent accusers have been lunar sabbatarians who are displeased with the fact that the historical record just happens to agree with my interpretation of Scripture. The issue of determining the jubilee years, however, proves that when “push comes to shove,” I will put Yahweh’s Word above the record of history. It seems that everywhere I turn, chronologists and Bible students alike are validating that, historically, the jubilee year coincided with “year 1” of the following jubilee cycle.⁹ At the same time, I believe it should be noted that there is disagreement among scholars with regard to the historical record. For example, according to medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1135 - 1204), “the jubilee period was of 50 years, the 51st year commencing a new period.”¹⁰ We should also bear in mind that the scholastic community is constrained to admit that

⁸ Cf., Moore, W. Glenn, “Jubilee Cycles—49 or 50 Years?”, p. 2.

⁹ Cf., Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, “The Pentateuch,” by C. F. Keil, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2001 (originally published T. & T. Clark, Edinburg, 1866 – 91). Keil writes, “This grand year of grace was to return after seven times seven years, i.e., as is expressly stated in v. 10, every fiftieth year was to be sanctified as a year of jubilee. By this regulation of the time, the view held by *R. Jehuda*, and the chronologists and antiquarians who have followed him, that every seventh sabbatical year, i.e., the 49th year, was to be kept as the year of jubilee, is proved to be at variance with the text, and the fiftieth year is shown to be the year of rest, in which the sabbatical idea attained its fullest realization, and reached its earthly temporal close.” Note: It is my understanding that these chronologists did not actually regard the 49th year as being the year of jubilee. Rather, since they believed that year 50 and year one of the next cycle coincide, the “49th year” is actually the 49th year after the previous “year 50/1.” It is thus that those of this persuasion reckon jubilee cycles in terms of 49-year cycles instead of 50-year cycles. As affirmed by Keil, this view represents the “majority view.” However, in terms of faithful adherence to the text, June and I agree with Keil’s position that it “is proved to be at variance with the text.”

¹⁰ Cf., *Dr. William Smith's Dictionary of the Bible: Comprising Its Antiquities, Biography, Geography, and Natural History*, Vol. 1, by William Smith, William George Smith, Horatio Balch Hackett, Ezra Abbot, Published by Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., Boston, MA, 1888, page 438. This page may be read online by accessing the following URL:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=4tkMAAAIAAJ&pg=PA438&lpg=PA438&dq=>

Note: According to this same reference, Maimonides also mentioned that “The Jews had a tradition that after the destruction of the first Temple only sabbatical years, and no jubilee years, were observed.”

“There is no positive record of any jubilee year having been kept at any time.”¹¹ Nevertheless, the historical record does reveal that at least one sect of Jews regarded “year 50” as coinciding with “year one” of the following Jubilee cycle. This understanding is made manifest in *The Book of Jubilees*, an ancient document found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. While *The Book of Jubilees* proves that certain Jews regarded the 50th year to coincide with the first year of the next cycle, at the same time, it should be noted that both Judaism and Christianity, as a whole, rejected this work by the 4th century CE. According to the online reference *Wikipedia*, “In the 4th century, after Bishops had been appointed by the Roman Emperor Constantine, they similarly rejected many of the same books that had been rejected by the Jews, including *Jubilees*. It is only through the canons of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, that were outside the jurisdiction of Rome, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, that the book has managed to survive at all.”¹² We read the following in *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*: “Given the probable date of *Jubilees*, it is best to see it as a proto-Essene writing which was produced before the split which led to the formation of the Qumran community.”¹³

The following information is taken from *The Jewish Encyclopedia*:

Fifty-and Forty-nine-Year Cycles.

There is a difference of opinion in the Talmud as to whether the jubilee year was included in or excluded from the forty-nine years of the seven cycles. The majority of rabbis hold that the jubilee year was an intercalation, and followed the seventh Sabbatical year, making two fallow years in succession. After both had passed, the next cycle began. They adduce this theory from the plain words of the Law to “hallow the fiftieth year,” and also from the assurance of God’s promise of a yield in the sixth year sufficient for maintenance during the following three years, “until the ninth year, until her fruits come in” (Lev. xxv. 22), which, they say, refers to the jubilee year. Judah ha-Nasi, however, contends that the jubilee year was identical with the seventh Sabbatical year (R. H. 9a; Git. 36a; comp. Rashi *ad loc.*). The opinion of the Geonim and of later authorities generally prevails, that the jubilee, when in force during the period of the First Temple, was intercalated, but that in the time of the Second Temple, when the jubilee was observed only “nominally,” it coincided with the seventh Sabbatical year. In post-exilic times the jubilee was entirely ignored, though the strict observance of the shemittah was steadily insisted upon. This, however, is only according to a rabbinical enactment (Tos. to Git. 36a, s.v. “Bizeman”), as by the Mosaic law, according to R. Judah, shemittah is dependent on the jubilee and ceases to exist when there is no jubilee (Git. *l.c.* and Rashi *ad loc.*).¹⁴

As our study continues, we will focus on some objections raised by those of the persuasion that the Jubilee cycle is only 49 years long. One common argument is that the prophecy of Daniel chapter nine validates 49-year Jubilee cycles. We will address this argument with our next update. In the meantime, please bear in mind that we need to be careful not to read too much into any texts ... including the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. The word “Jubilee” does not appear in this prophecy, yet it is argued that the prophecy “proves” a 49-year Jubilee cycle. We urge great caution when it comes to interpreting Scripture and infusing our interpretations into any text.

¹¹ Ibid. Also, from *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3, David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, Doubleday, New York, NY, 1992, pp. 1027-28, we read, “But did it ever happen? Were the jubilee regulations real and practicable legislation, or were they academic and utopian? While there is evidence that kinship redemption was practiced (Jeremiah 32, Ruth 4), there is simply no evidence of a national jubilee in the extant historical documents of Israel (though some would discern an illusion to a jubilee year in Isa 37:30, where a double year of fallow seems to be envisaged; but it may refer merely to the disastrous effect of invasion). This silence does not, of course, prove that it never did happen. Nor can we say that it was economically impossible and so could not have happened, because there is evidence from other ANE (Ancient Near Eastern) civilizations of periodic nationwide remissions of debt in connection with the accession of a new king. However this ANE evidence comes from centuries earlier than the origins of OT Israel (Gordon 1953; Finkelstein 1961; Lewy 1958).”

¹² From *Wikipedia*, the Free Encyclopedia, article entitled “Jubilees.” The article may be read in its entirety by accessing the following URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jubilees>.

¹³ From *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, Watson E. Mills, General Editor, Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 1997, p. 474.

¹⁴ Taken from the *Jewish Encyclopedia* article “Sabbatical Year and Jubilee.” This article may be read in its entirety by accessing the following URL:
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=18&letter=S>

CHRONOLOGY

that they came to signify the two grand divisions of the year, both from their use together as the two seasons, and from the mention of "the winter house," *בֵּית הַחֹרֶף*, and "the summer house," *בֵּית הַקֵּץ* (Am. iii. 15). The latter evidence is the stronger, since the winter is the time in Palestine when a palace or house of different construction would be needed to the light summer pavilion, and in the only passage besides that referred to in which the winter-house is mentioned, we read that Jehoiakim "sat in the winter-house in the ninth month:" that is, almost at mid-winter: "and [there was a fire] on the hearth burning before him" (Jer. xxxvi. 22). It is probable, however, that *בֵּית הַחֹרֶף*, when used without reference to the year, as in Job xxix. 4, has its original signification. The phrase *בֵּית הַחֹרֶף*, "cold and heat," in Gen. viii. 22, is still more general, and cannot be held to indicate more than the great alternations of temperature, which, like those of day and night, were promised not to cease. (Comp. Ideler, *Handbuch*, i. p. 494). There are two agricultural seasons of a more special character than the preceding in their ordinary use. These are *עֵת הַזֵּרַע*, "seed-time," and *עֵת הַקָּצִיר*, "harvest." Ideler (*loc. cit.*) makes these equal to the foregoing seasons when similarly used together; but he has not proved this, and the passage he quotes (Gen. i. c.) cannot be held to afford any evidence of the kind, until some other two terms in it are proved to be strictly correspondent. [SEASONS.]

Festivals and holy days. — Besides the sabbaths and new moons, there were four great festivals and a fast in the ancient Hebrew year, the Feast of the Passover, that of Weeks, that of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of the Passover, *פֶּסַח*, was properly only the time of the sacrifice and eating of the paschal lamb, that is, the evening, *בֵּין הָעֶרְבַיִם*, "between the two evenings" (Lev. xxiii. 5) — a phrase previously considered — of the 14th day of the first month, and the night following, — the Feast of Unleavened Bread, *חֹמֶת הַפִּינֹחִים*, commencing on the morning of the 15th day of the month, and lasting seven days until the 21st inclusive. The 15th and 21st days of the month were sabbaths, that is, holy days. [PASSOVER.] The Feast of Weeks, *בֵּן עֵת*, or Pentecost, was kept at the close of seven weeks, counted from the day inclusive following the 16th of the 1st month. Hence its name means the feast of seven weeks, as indeed it is called in Tob. (*ἀγία ἑπτά εβδομάδων*, ii. 1). As the ears of barley as first-fruits of the harvest were offered on the 16th day of the 1st month, so on this day thanksgiving was paid for the blessing of the harvest, and first-fruits of wheat offered as well as of fruits: hence the names *חֹמֶת הַקָּצִיר*, Feast of Harvest, and *יְוֹם הַבְּרִיּוֹת*, Day of First-fruits. — The Feast of Trumpets, *יְוֹם הַתְּרֻפָּה* (lit. of the sound of the trumpet), also called *זְמַרְוֹן זְמַרְוֹן הַתְּרֻפָּה*, "a great sabbath of celebration by the sound of the trumpet," was the 1st day of the 7th month, the civil com-

CHRONOLOGY

mencement of the year. The Day of Atonement, *יְוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים*, was the 10th day of the 7th month. It was a sabbath, that is a holy day, and also a fast, the only one in the Hebrew year before the Babylonish Captivity. Upon this day the high-priest made an offering of atonement for the nation. This annual solemn rite seems more appropriate to the commencement than to the middle of the year, and the time of its celebration thus affords some evidence in favor of the theory of a double beginning. — The Feast of Tabernacles, *חֹג הַסֻּכּוֹת*, was kept in the 7th month, from the 15th to the 22d days inclusive. Its chief days were the first and last, which were sabbaths. Its name was taken from the people dwelling in tabernacles, to commemorate the Exodus. It was otherwise called *חֹג הַקָּצִיר*, "the Feast of Gathering," because it was also instituted as a time of thanksgiving for the end of the gathering of fruit and of the vintage. The small number and simplicity of these primitive Hebrew festivals and holy days is especially worthy of note. It is also observable that they are not of an astronomical character; and that when they are connected with nature, it is as directing the gratitude of the people to Him who, in giving good things, leaves not Himself without witness. In later times many holy days were added. Of these the most worthy of remark are the Feast of Purim, or "Lots," commemorating the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's plot, the Feast of the Dedication, recording the cleansing and re-dedication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus, and fasts on the anniversaries of great national misfortunes connected with the Babylonish Captivity. These last were doubtless instituted during that period (comp. Zech. vii. 1-5). [FESTIVALS, &c.]

Sabbatical and Jubilee Years. — The sabbatical year, *שָׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה*, "the fallow year" or possibly "year of remission," or *שְׁמִטָּה* alone, also called a "sabbath," and a "great sabbath," was an institution of strictly the same character as the sabbath, — a year of rest, like the day of rest. It has not been sufficiently noticed that as the day has a side of physical necessity with reference to man, so the year has a side of physical necessity with reference to the earth. Every seventh year appears to be a very suitable time for the recurrence of a fallow year, on agricultural grounds. Besides the rest from the labors of the field and vineyard, there was in this year to be remission, temporary or absolute, of debts and obligations among the people. The sabbatical year must have commenced at the civil beginning of the year, with the 7th month, as we have already shown. Although doubtless held to commence with the 1st of the month, its beginning appears to have been kept at the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. xxxi. 10), while that of the jubilee year was kept on the Day of Atonement. This institution seems to have been greatly neglected. This was prophesied by Moses, who speaks of the desolation of the land as an enjoying the sabbaths which had not been kept (Lev. xxvi. 34, 35, 43). The seventy years' captivity is also spoken of in 2 Chr. (xxxvi. 21) as an enjoying sabbath; but this may be on account of the number being sabbatical, as ten times seven which indeed seems to be indicated in the passage. After the lapse of seven sabbatical periods, or forty

five years, a year of jubilee was to be kept, immediately following the last sabbatical year. This was called *שנת ה'תרועה*, "the year of the trumpet," or *שנת יובל* alone, the latter word meaning either the sound of the trumpet or the instrument itself, because the commencement of the year was announced on the Day of Atonement by sound of trumpet. It was similar to the sabbatical year in its character, although doubtless yet more important. In the jubilee year debts were to be remitted, and lands were to be restored to their former owners. It is obvious from the words of the law (Lev. xxv. 8-11) that this year followed every seventh sabbatical year, so that the opinion that it was always identical with a sabbatical year is untenable. There is a further question as to the length of each jubilee period, if we may use the term, some holding that it had a duration of 50, but others of 49 years. The latter opinion does not depend upon the supposition that the seventh sabbatical year was the jubilee, since the jubilee might be the first year of the next seven years after. That such was the case is rendered most probable by the analogy of the weekly sabbath, and the custom of the Jews in the first and second centuries *n. c.*; although it must be noted that, according to Maimonides, the jubilee period was of 50 years, the 51st year commencing a new period, and that the same writer mentions that the Jews had a tradition that after the destruction of the first Temple only sabbatical years, and no jubilee years, were observed. (Ideler, *Handbuch*, i. pp. 503, 504.) The testimony of Josephus does not seem to us at all conclusive, although Ideler (*l. c.*) holds it to be so; for the expression *ταῦτα πενήκοντα μὲν ἔστιν ἔτη τὰ πάντα* (*Ant.* iii. 12, § 3) cannot be held to prove absolutely that the jubilee year was not the first year of a sabbatical period instead of standing between two such periods. It is important to ascertain when the first sabbatical year ought to have been kept; whether the sabbatical and jubilee periods seem to have been continuous; what positive record there is of any sabbatical or jubilee years having been kept; and what indications there are of a reckoning by such years of either kind. 1. It can scarcely be contested that the first sabbatical year to be kept after the Israelites had entered Canaan would be about the fourteenth. (Jennings, *Jewish Antiquities*, bk. iii. cap. 9: and *infra*, *Historical Chronology*.) It is possible that it might have been somewhat earlier or later; but the narrative will not admit of much latitude. 2. It is clear that any sabbatical and jubilee years kept from the time of Joshua until the destruction of the first Temple, would have been reckoned from the first one, but it may be questioned if any kept after the return would be counted in the same manner: from the nature of the institutions, it is rather to be supposed that the reckoning, in the second case, would be from the first cultivation of the country after its re-occupation. The recorded sabbatical years do not enable us to test this supposition, because we do not know exactly the year of return, or that of the first cultivation of the country. The recorded dates of sabbatical years would make that next after the return to commence in *B. C.* 528, and be current in *B. C.* 527, which would make the first year of the period *B. C.* 534-3, which would not improbably be the first year of cultivation: but in the case of so short a period his cannot be regarded as evidence of much weight. 3. There is no positive record of any jubilee year

having been kept at any time. The dates of three sabbatical years have, however, been preserved. These were current *B. C.* 163, 135, and 137, and therefore commenced in each case about three months earlier than the beginning of these Julian years. (Joseph. *Ant.* xii. 9, § 5; xiii. 8, § 1; xiv. 16, § 2; xv. 1, § 2; *B. J.* i. 2, § 4; and 1 Macc. vi. 49, 53.) 4. There are some chronological indications in the O. T. that may not unreasonably be supposed to be connected with the sabbatical system. The prophet Ezekiel dates his first prophecy of those in the book "in the thirtieth year," &c., "which [was] the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity" (i. 2); thus apparently dating in the former case from a better known era than that of Jehoiachin's captivity, which he employs in later places, without, however, in general again describing it. This date of the 30th year has been variously explained: some, with Ussher, suppose that the era is the 18th year of Josiah, when the book of the Law was found, and a great passover celebrated. (See Hävernick, *Commentar über Ezech.* pp. 12, 13). This year of Josiah would certainly be the first of the reckoning, and might be used as a kind of reformation-era, not unlike the era of Simon the Maccabee. [Eras.] Others suppose that the thirtieth year of the prophet's life is meant; but this seems very unlikely. Others again, including Scaliger (*De Emendatione Temporum*, pp. 79, 218, ed. 1583) and Rosenmüller (*Schol. ad loc.*), hold that the date is from the commencement of the reign of Nabopolassar. There is no record of an era of Nabopolassar; that king had been dead some years; and we have no instance in the O. T. of the use of a foreign era. The evidence therefore is in favor of Josiah's 18th year. There seems to be another reference to this date in the same book, where the time of the iniquity of Judah is said to be 40 years, for the final captivity of Judah (*Jer.* lli. 30) was in the 40th year of this reckoning. In the same place the time of the iniquity of Israel is said to be 390 years, which sum, added to the date of the captivity of this part of the nation in the *A. V.* *n. c.* 721, goes back to *n. c.* 1111 (*Ez.* iv. 5, 6). This result leads to the indication of possible jubilee dates, for the interval between *n. c.* 1111 and *n. c.* 623-2 is 488-9 years, within two years of ten jubilee periods; and it must be remembered that the seventy weeks of the prophet Daniel seem to indicate the use of such a great cycle. In the latter case, however, as in that of the seventy years' captivity, it is probable that the year of 360 days is used, so that the agreement is not absolute. (Year.) It remains to be asked whether the accounts of Josiah's reformation present any indications of celebrations connected with the sabbatical system. The finding of the book of the Law might seem to point to its being specially required for some public service. Such a service was the great reading of the Law to the whole congregation at the Feast of Tabernacles in every sabbatical year (*Deut.* xxxi. 10-13). The finding of the book was certainly followed by a public reading, apparently in the first month, by the king to the whole people of Judah and Jerusalem, and afterwards a solemn passover was kept. Of the latter celebration it is said in Kings, "Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the Judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah" (2 K. xxiii. 22); and, in Chronicles, "There was no passover like to this kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet