

# **Evidence for Inerrancy from a Second Unexpected Source: The Jubilee and Sabbatical Cycles**

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## Introduction

In chapter 25 of Leviticus, the people were commanded to start counting the years on their entrance into Canaan. After six years of normal farming, the seventh year was to be a Sabbath rest for the land, reminiscent of the command to remember the weekly Sabbath that was given at Mt. Sinai. In the Sabbatical year there would be no sowing or reaping (Lv 25:4, 5). It was allowed, however, to eat the “Sabbath products of the land” (Lv 25:6; Hebrew *shabat ha-arets*). There is some discussion among commentators on the exact meaning of this term, and whether it is identical to or differs from what modern farmers refer to as “volunteer growth,” that is, produce that grows spontaneously from scattered seed of the previous year’s crop.

Israel came to Mt. Sinai two months after they left Egypt (Ex 19:1) and departed from the mountain almost a year later (Nm 10:11). Their time at the foot of Mt. Sinai was spent in making furnishings for the Tabernacle. It was during this period that the book of Leviticus was given to Moses (Lv 27:34; the views of scholars who think otherwise will be discussed later). Thirty-nine years later, near the end of the 40 years in the wilderness, Moses was given another command related to the Sabbatical year. At the start of each Sabbatical year, during the Feast of Tabernacles, the Law was to be read to all the people (Dt 31:10–13). This suggests that one of the activities that the people could engage in profitably during the year when no field-work was permitted would be the studying of the Word of God. Other legitimate activities would have been improvements to their house or developing some craft or skill. It was not to be a year of no arduous labor whatsoever, as on the weekly Sabbath; all that was forbidden was planting and harvesting in the fields and vineyards.

This concept of a year of release from ordinary duties has carried over into modern times. Many institutions of higher learning occasionally grant a Sabbatical year so that scholars can pursue intensively a line of interest without being encumbered by their usual day-to-day responsibilities.

In later years a third activity, the release of slaves, became associated with a Sabbatical year, although it was not specified in the Mosaic legislation. The Law of Moses stated that any Hebrew slave was to be released after six years of service, as measured from the day the service started (Ex 21:2). Perhaps because the Sabbatical year is called a year of release in Deuteronomy 15:9 (*shenat ha-shemita*, “year of release,” translated as “year for canceling debts” in the NIV), it became customary to think of the Sabbatical year as a release for all slaves, irrespective of when their service began (Sarna 1973: 148).<sup>1</sup> We thus have three activities that, if mentioned in Scripture or in some other source, might indicate that a Sabbatical year was being observed: the voluntary refraining from planting and reaping, the public reading of the Law, or the release of all slaves at one time, rather than on an individual basis as in the original statute given to Moses.

All of these activities are mentioned in Scripture. A year of voluntary refraining from sowing and reaping, the most distinctive and sure sign of a Sabbatical year, is mentioned in Isaiah 37:30 and its parallel passage 2 Kings 19:29. A reading of the Law to all the people occurred in the third year of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:7–9), the 18th year of Josiah (2 Kgs 22:3, 23:1–2), and in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh 8:1–8). A simultaneous release of all slaves is described in Jeremiah 34:8–10. This indicates that the activities

associated with a Sabbatical year were known in the ninth century BC (Jehoshaphat), the late eighth and early seventh centuries BC (Isaiah), the sixth century BC (Jeremiah), and in the fifth century BC (Ezra and Nehemiah).

These texts present an embarrassment to the classical Documentary Hypothesis, first made popular by Julius Wellhausen (1878) and regrettably still taught, in varying modifications, in most secular colleges and universities and in some seminaries and Christian colleges. The difficulty is that Wellhausen's "JEDP" theory placed the priestly phase of the development of Israel's religion as the last phase, to be dated to the exilic and post-exilic period. This was mandated by the evolutionary approach that Wellhausen and others imposed on the development of Israel's religion, in which the period when priests had control and supposedly produced all the legislation regarding the priesthood was the last phase in the development. The legislation regarding the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, as contained in Leviticus 25 and 27, was assigned by these scholars to the imagined priestly editor "P" or his fellow editors, and any reference to activities associated with a Sabbatical or Jubilee year, including those just cited, were classified as interpolations into the account of Israel's history, at an exilic or post-exilic date, by one of the P clan. Advocates of the "text-critical" or "historical-redaction" approach therefore divide passages that otherwise seem rational and orderly into P segments, D (Deuteronomic) segments, and so on. The arbitrary division of the text in this way is mandated by presuppositions about the development of Israel's religion that are contrary to the Bible's testimony about its sources. These presuppositions are anti-supernatural throughout, and we can only wonder why scholars with an anti-supernatural bias bother to write commentaries on the sacred text that proclaims the supernatural acts of God from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22.

The mention of activities associated with a Sabbatical year therefore requires critics who place the Sabbatical-year legislation in the exilic or post-exilic period to fragment the Biblical text in ways that, without their anti-supernatural presuppositions, appear as arbitrary and capricious. The Scriptural references to these activities are both clear and definite. The first of the three characteristics mentioned, the voluntary refraining from sowing and reaping, would never have happened simultaneously for all the land unless the year in question was a Sabbatical year. Consequently the prohibition of sowing and reaping in the "second year" of 2 Kings 19:29 (= Is 37:30) and is the most definite of these Scriptures indicating the actual observance of the Sabbatical-year legislation. The Assyrians had destroyed the crop in the first year, but the slaying of 185,000 of their soldiers came the night after the prophecy (2 Kgs 19:35), so that nothing would hinder agricultural activity in the next year unless it was a Sabbatical year. The prophecy says that it was only in the third year that sowing and harvest could be resumed.

Although the public reading of the Law in the third year of Jehoshaphat and the 18th year of Josiah suggests that these were Sabbatical years, there could have been special circumstances that brought this about in a non-Sabbatical year. Even if these years were not necessarily Sabbatical years, it is clear that the command to read the Law to all the people was known. This command is found in a passage that refers to the Sabbatical year (Dt 31:10–13).

Regarding the release of slaves in the time of Jeremiah, the extenuating circumstances of the Babylonian siege may have provided a reason for the release in a non-Sabbatical year. It is of some interest, however, that William Whiston in the 18th century and Cyrus

Gordon and Nahum Sarna in the 20th century thought that Zedekiah's proclamation of a release would have taken effect at the beginning of a Sabbatical year (Whiston 1964: 703; Gordon 1953: 81; Sarna 1973: 144–45).

## Jubilees

After the verses related to the Sabbatical year, chapter 25 of Leviticus introduces the Jubilee, as follows:

The Lord said to Moses on [at]<sup>2</sup> Mount Sinai, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them... ‘Count off seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields.

“‘In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property’” (Lv 25:1, 8–13).

The chapter continues with further regulations for the Jubilee concerning the value of property as related to the number of years until the Jubilee, along with other particulars. For the present purposes, however, the only matters of interest are (1) the Jubilee year is a year of no sowing or harvest, the same as a Sabbatical year, and (2) the year is announced on the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the month Tishri (roughly October).

Jewish tradition (*Rosh HaShanah* 1a in the Talmud) is that Sabbatical years and Jubilee years began in Tishri, even though this month is counted as the seventh month according to the religious calendar that starts in Nisan (roughly April). This is consistent with the text of Leviticus 25, which for both Sabbatical and Jubilee years speaks of sowing before mentioning reaping. In Israel, the sowing of the winter crops (barley and wheat) takes place in approximately November and reaping takes place in the spring. If the Sabbatical and Jubilee years started in Nisan, then the crop sown in the preceding fall could not be harvested, after which the fall sowing would be missed, thus resulting in two years without harvest rather than the one year that is intended in the legislation. Sabbatical and Jubilee years therefore started in Tishri, the month in which the Jewish *Rosh HaShanah* or New Year's Day was celebrated in the past and is celebrated in our own day.

## Length of the Jubilee Cycle

The language of Leviticus 25:8–13, when compared with the language of Leviticus 23:15–16, shows that the Jubilee year was identical to the seventh Sabbatical year. The latter passage established the Feast of Weeks (also called the Feast of Pentecost) as follows:

The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them... ‘from the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full

weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD” (Lv 23:1, 15–16).

Notice when the counting was to start: the day after a Sabbath. Counting ended “the day after the seventh Sabbath.” That makes 49 days. However, verse 16 says they were to count it as 50 days. This is commonly spoken of as inclusive numbering, in which the starting day is included in the total. It means that the 50th day is identical to the 49th day by non-inclusive numbering. The 50th or Jubilee year of Leviticus 25:10 is identical to the 49th year by the same reasoning.

Such a usage is common in both testaments. In Leviticus 23:34–36 the Feast of Tabernacles is to last for seven days, but the final day is called the eighth day. Perhaps the best known example is from the many statements that Christ was to rise on the third day, referring to the two days of elapsed time from Friday to Sunday.

There are also practical considerations that show that the Jubilee cycle was 49 years instead of 50. If the Jubilee was a separate year following the seventh Sabbatical year, then there would be two successive years of voluntary refraining from sowing and reaping, and there is no indication of such anywhere in Scripture. All these considerations establish that the Jubilee cycle was 49 years, and the Jubilee year was identical to the seventh Sabbatical year.<sup>3</sup>

## The Calendar of Jubilee and Sabbatical Years

In ancient Near Eastern societies it was the responsibility of the priests to determine when the months began and to otherwise regulate the calendar so that agricultural activities and religious festivals could be observed at their proper time. Israel’s priests had the additional responsibility of counting the years of the Sabbatical cycles in order to be ready to proclaim the Jubilee on the arrival of the seventh year of the seventh Sabbatical cycle.

At any given time, then, the priests would have known which year the current year was in a Sabbatical cycle and which Sabbatical cycle it was within a Jubilee cycle. It would not have taken long for someone to discover that this system was useful in dating events and in determining a long-term calendar. There is a record of just such a usage. In *Sanhedrin* 40a,b the Talmud says that in the time of the judges, the courts recorded legal dates (of a contract or a crime) by specifying the day of the month, the month, the year within a Sabbatical cycle, and the Sabbatical cycle within the Jubilee cycle. The Samaritan community also apparently used the Jubilee and Sabbatical cycles as a calendar as late as the 14th century AD, when an editor of the Samaritans’ *Tolidah* wrote that he finished editing his copy in the fourth year of the fifth Sabbatical cycle of the 61st Jubilee cycle (Loewenstamm 2007: 734).<sup>4</sup>

For the modern chronologist, the usefulness of the Jubilee and Sabbatical years is that once a single Sabbatical or Jubilee year can be fixed with certainty, then any other reference to activities associated with a Sabbatical year should fall in a year that was before or after that year by an integral multiple of seven years. This principle is used in the chronology of the inter-testamental period, since there are explicit mentions of Sabbatical years in Josephus and First Maccabees.<sup>5</sup> Dating these Sabbatical years has

been the occasion of considerable controversy, with basically two competing systems. The two systems are associated with the name of Benedict Zuckermann, whose calendar places the start of a Sabbatical year associated with Herod the Great's siege of Jerusalem in Tishri of 38 BC (1974: 61), and the calendar of Ben Zion Wacholder, which starts the Sabbatical year one year later, in Tishri of 37 BC (1976: 32).

All attempts, however, to project post-exilic Sabbatical cycles back into pre-exilic times have failed, whether starting from a Sabbatical year beginning in Tishri of 38 BC (Zuckermann) or in Tishri of 37 BC (Wacholder). The reason for this is that counting was interrupted during the exile, since the stipulations of the Sabbatical years were only commanded to be observed while Israel was in its land (Lv 25:2). Even the regulations regarding the Feast of Tabernacles, which could be observed in a foreign land as is done in America today, had been forgotten by 445 BC (Neh 8:14). As part of the reforms under Ezra and Nehemiah, the observance of the Sabbatical years was reinstated (Neh 10:31). That counting was renewed at this time is stated explicitly in chap. 30 of the *Seder Olam* (second century AD) and the Talmud (*Arakin* 32b). We therefore should not expect that pre-exilic Sabbatical years can be back-calculated from those observed after the exile.

But there is a date to which the calendar of pre-exilic Jubilee and Sabbatical years can be anchored, and it is less ambiguous than Josephus's account of a post-exilic Sabbatical year in the days of Herod. This date has all the desirable qualifications: it is precise; it is derived from a Biblical text; and it marks both a Jubilee and a Sabbatical year, thus providing at one stroke the needed starting-point so that the timing of pre-exilic Sabbatical and Jubilee years can be determined. This all-important date can be determined from the Hebrew text of Ezekiel 40:1, the verse that Ezekiel gives to date the vision that occupies the last nine chapters of his book.

A literal translation of Ezekiel 40:1 is,

In year twenty-five of our exile, on *Rosh HaShanah* (New Year's Day), on the tenth of the month, in year fourteen after the city was smitten—on that very day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there.

What is striking here is the apparent inconsistency in saying it was both New Year's Day and the tenth of the month. In order to reconcile this, most English translations render *Rosh HaShanah* as an indefinite "beginning of the year," instead of the specific meaning that is familiar to all who are acquainted with the Jewish calendar, namely "New Year's Day." It seems that translators could not understand how "New Year's Day" could be on the tenth of the month, and so they used the more indefinite expression, indicating that it was sometime around the beginning of the year. This is in spite of the meaning that *Rosh HaShanah* bears down to modern times, as referring to a specific day.<sup>6</sup>

Although *Rosh HaShanah* at present is always celebrated on the first of Tishri, there was one time when it moved nine days later to the tenth of the month. That was in a Jubilee year. Leviticus 25:9 says that the Jubilee year was to be announced by the blowing of the *shofar* on the tenth of Tishri, the Day of Atonement. Since in all other years the (agricultural) year started on the first of Tishri, it follows that Ezekiel's vision was at the beginning of a Jubilee year. The Talmud agrees that Ezekiel saw his vision on the Day of Atonement<sup>7</sup> at the beginning of a Jubilee year (*Arakin* 12a). The Hebrew text of the *Seder Olam* (chap. 11) states that Ezekiel saw his vision at the beginning of a

Jubilee without citing the part of Ezekiel 40:1 saying that it was *Rosh HaShanah* and also the tenth of the month, indicating that the *Seder Olam's* statement may have been based on historical remembrance and not on just the textual argument.

The establishing of Ezekiel's vision as occurring at the beginning of a Jubilee year allows a complete calendar of Jubilee and Sabbatical years in BC terms to be constructed, once we determine the BC year of the vision. Ezekiel's statement that the year was both the 25th year of the captivity he shared with Jehoiachin and also 14 years after Jerusalem fell cannot be reconciled with a 586 date for the fall of the city. It is, however, consistent with a date for the fall in the summer of 587 BC and a date on the tenth of Tishri, 574 BC, for the vision. An earlier article in *Bible and Spade* by Ermal Allen (2005) argued for the 587 date for the fall of Jerusalem, contra those scholars who place the event in 586 BC. My own article on the date of Jerusalem's fall advocated 587, as did Allen's article, and it also used a technique called Decision Analysis to show that placing the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC contradicts the chronology of the Book of Ezekiel as well as the dates of the beginning and ending of Jehoiachin's captivity given in 2 Kings 24:12, 25:27 and Jeremiah 52:31 (Young 2004a: 21–38).<sup>8</sup>

## Applying the Jubilee Calendar to Sabbatical-Year Events

With this fixed date of Tishri, 574 BC, as marking the beginning of a Jubilee, the previous Sabbatical and Jubilee years can be calculated by going back in multiples of seven for the Sabbatical years and multiples of 49 for the Jubilee years. When this is done, each of the phenomena that were mentioned earlier as indicating a possible Sabbatical year falls in a year that was an integral multiple of seven years before Ezekiel's Jubilee. The only exception is the public reading of the Law in chapter 8 of Nehemiah, for which it has already been remarked that the rhythm of Sabbatical years was interrupted during the exile.

The exactness of the matches of the activities specified with the pre-exilic Jubilee and Sabbatical year calendar can be seen by examining the dates for all these events, as derived from the regnal dates of the kings of Judah given in Table 1. In order to appreciate the precision of these matches, it must be remembered that the Judean regnal year began in the fall month of Tishri. This is made explicit in the table by placing a “t” after each year figure, denoting that the year started in Tishri of the BC year indicated and then continued into the next BC year, ending the day before Tishri 1 of that year. In some cases, synchronisms with the northern kingdom allow the dates for a Judean king to be narrowed to the first half or second half of the Tishri-year indicated, but this is not shown in the table.<sup>9</sup>

The dates in Table 1 can be determined independently of any consideration of the Sabbatical and Jubilee cycles. Yet all the phenomena earlier mentioned as associated with a Sabbatical year agree with them, with the exception of the post-exilic reading of the Law under Ezra and Nehemiah. The dates match up as follows:

- (1) The release of slaves by King Zedekiah (Jer 34:8-10) took place in Tishri of 588 BC, as shown by Sarna (1973: 144–45). The release was therefore in a Sabbatical year, two Sabbatical cycles before Ezekiel's Jubilee and Sabbatical year in 574t.
- (2) That 588t was a Sabbatical year is consistent with an ancient and well-documented tradition that the First Temple was burnt by the Babylonians in the

- “latter part” (Hebrew *motsae*) of a Sabbatical year.<sup>10</sup> This happened in the summer of 587 BC, in the latter part of the Judean year 588t.
- (3) The 18th year of Josiah, in which there was a public reading of the Law, was 623t. This was seven Sabbatical cycles (49 years) before Ezekiel’s Jubilee. Notice that this would place the event in a Jubilee year.
  - (4) In agreement with this, the *Seder Olam* (chap. 24) and the Talmud (*Megillah* 14b) preserve the tradition that Josiah’s 18th year was a Jubilee year.
  - (5) Jehoshaphat’s third year, in which there was another public reading of the Law, was 868t, which was 42 Sabbatical cycles before Ezekiel’s Jubilee. Jehoshaphat’s third year is measured from the start of his sole reign, consistent with the synchronisms to his reign given in 1 Kings 22:51 and 2 Kings 3:1.
  - (6) If the Assyrian invasion described in chapters 36 and 37 of Isaiah and chapters 18 and 19 of 2 Kings began in 701 BC, as accepted by the majority of scholars, then the slaying of the 185,000 would have happened at sometime after the fall planting of that (BC) year (this explains why there was no harvest in the following spring since the Judeans had no opportunity to plant in 701 BC). The “second year” of the prophecy, the year in which the people were voluntarily not to sow or reap, would then start in Tishri of 700 BC, which was 126 years, or 18 Sabbatical cycles, before Ezekiel’s Jubilee.

## The Difficulties This Presents to Late-Date Theories of Biblical Composition

It was mentioned earlier that references to activities associated with Sabbatical years that occurred before the exile are an embarrassment to theories that do not accept that the Sabbatical-year legislation was instituted by divine command to Moses at Mt. Sinai, as plainly stated in Exodus 23:10–11, Leviticus 25:1, and Leviticus 27:34. If the mention of these activities is an embarrassment, then the fact that their dates all fit exactly into the Jubilee and Sabbatical-year calendar that can be derived from Ezekiel 40:1 is more than an embarrassment; it is a major setback, a stumbling block of the first order. No late-date editor could have invented these activities in an attempt to show that the Sabbatical-year legislation dated from early times. Such an editor could not have assigned the right dates, due to the complexity of the dating methods of the Biblical historians. The mention of these activities as found in Scripture, along with the incidental mention of when the activities occurred, must be genuine history.

## The Date When Counting Started

Previously it was stated that the timing of all Jubilee years can be calculated by going back in 49-year intervals from Ezekiel’s Jubilee that started in Tishri of 574 BC, i.e. 574t in the notation of Table 1. The first year of this Jubilee cycle must have been 48 years earlier, in 622t, which is consistent with the tradition of the *Seder Olam* and the Talmud that the prior year (Josiah’s 18th year, 623t) was a Jubilee. If we go back 16 Jubilee cycles ( $16 \times 49 = 784$  years) from 622t, we find that the year beginning in Tishri of 1406 BC was the first year of a Jubilee cycle. According to the religious calendar that started the year in Nisan (Ex 12:2), this was in the year beginning on Nisan 1 of 1406 BC. This



is identical to the date for the entry into Canaan that is customarily derived from 1 Kings 6:1, the verse that synchronizes Solomon's fourth year with the 480th year of the Exodus-era. When used in conjunction with Edwin Thiele's date for the beginning of the divided kingdom, 1 Kings 6:1 places the Exodus in 1446 BC and the beginning of the Conquest, 40 years later, in 1406 BC.<sup>11</sup>

There is only one chance in 49 that 1406 BC, the date for the entry of Canaan that is derived from 1 Kings 6:1, would start a Jubilee cycle if it is maintained that the Book of Leviticus was not in existence at that time. The calendar of Jubilee and Sabbatical years therefore establishes the accuracy of the time of the Exodus and entry into Canaan as derived from 1 Kings 6:1, since these dates fit in exactly with the Jubilee/Sabbatical-year calendar.

Earlier, it was demonstrated that the timing of the Sabbatical years was known as early as the time of Jehoshaphat in the ninth century BC. But the Jubilee cycles now give evidence that their timing goes all the way back to 1406 BC. For those who hold to the non-Mosaic authorship of Leviticus, the situation has gone from embarrassing (the mention of activities associated with a Sabbatical year long before the exile) to a major setback (all the mentioned activities fit exactly into the Jubilee/Sabbatical-year calendar), to inexplicable. Late-date theories of the composition of the Pentateuch cannot explain how 1406 BC, when Israel entered Canaan according to 1 Kings 6:1, just happens to fall at the beginning of a Jubilee cycle, as derived from the Jubilee beginning at the time of Ezekiel's vision (Ez 40:1).<sup>12</sup>

## For Late-Date Theories, It Gets Worse

The *Seder Olam* (chap. 11) and the Talmud (*Arakin* 12b) give the number of Ezekiel's Jubilee: the 17th. This is in exact agreement with the entry into Canaan in 1406 BC. The authors of the *Seder Olam* and the Talmud could not have done the calculation to get this accuracy, because their known calculation methods were not adequate to solve the chronological problems of the kingdom period and the time of the judges. Their methods were even incapable of correctly calculating the 49 years between Josiah's Jubilee and Ezekiel's Jubilee, which indicates that the Jubilees at these times, as well as the number of Ezekiel's Jubilee, were historically remembered, not calculated by later writers (Young 2006c: 77).

The date for the entry into Canaan based on the Jubilee calendar is derived by a method that is independent of the method of deriving this date from the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1.<sup>13</sup> However, the dates given by the two methods are identical. This affirms the correctness of the 1446 date for the Exodus. But it does more: it shows that Thiele's date for the beginning of the divided monarchy (the date that is essential for determining Solomon's fourth year) is assured because it can be established by two independent methods.<sup>14</sup> Since Thiele's date for the division was derived by a careful study of the exact chronological data for the kingdom period found in Kings and Chronicles, the fact that the date has been independently verified gives confidence not only in that date, but in all other dates, reign lengths, and synchronisms that Thiele used to derive it. This is similar to balancing one's checkbook against the ending balance shown in the bank's statement: when our ending total agrees with the bank's, then we can have confidence that all our individual figures and calculations that went into deriving our ending total are correct.

My previous article in *Bible and Spade* (Young 2008) established that the Scripture's abundant chronological data for the time from Solomon to Zedekiah and Jehoiachin could not have been assembled into a coherent and exact chronological scheme, as they have been, unless all the data were authentic—i.e. true to history. These 124 specific and precise statistics are contained in five major books of the Bible (1 and 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) and cover more than 400 years of history. Their accuracy has now been verified by another method. Working backwards in time through these figures gives dates for the reign of Solomon that can be independently verified from the Jubilee calendar, thereby authenticating all the individual figures that went into the derivation of Solomon's dates. The accuracy of the Scripture's chronological data was completely unanticipated by liberal scholarship. But the result has a theological explanation in the doctrine of the inerrancy of all Scripture.

The calendar of Jubilee and Sabbatical years now joins its support to the earlier argument that was given as evidence in favor of inerrancy, which was that the 124 exact statistics for the chronology of the kingdom period fit into a coherent chronological scheme that matches Assyrian and Babylonian history at several critical points. Simultaneously, these two findings are testimony against all doctrines of limited inspiration, that is, doctrines which say that the Bible may have some spiritual truths, but it is too much to expect it to be accurate in all historical and scientific matters.

## The Authorship of Leviticus

Thirty-one times the Book of Leviticus says that the words of the passage about to be given were spoken by the Lord to Moses. Four times it is said that the words of the text were spoken to Moses and Aaron. Only once is it said that "The Lord spoke to Aaron" (Lv 10:8), but in a context where Moses apparently was present. The colophon<sup>15</sup> that is the last sentence of Leviticus assigns the entire book to Moses: "These are the commands the Lord commanded Moses at Mount Sinai for the people of Israel."

How are we to understand these statements, plus at least 22 additional statements in Leviticus that say that the commands written there are from the Lord? At the risk of appearing simplistic, there are only two possible interpretations: Leviticus has Moses as its human author—the traditional view of Judaism and Christianity—or it was written by someone else. Some interpreters have attempted a mediating position, saying that, although Moses did not write Leviticus, a person in the "Mosaic school," or various persons who were imbued with the intellectual and spiritual "spirit of Moses" gave us the text of Leviticus. The authors then attributed their own writing to Moses because they were sure that their thoughts were in line with what Moses "would have thought," and consequently they felt justified in assigning the name of Moses to their own composition. (Advocates of the non-Mosaic views sometimes allow that a few of the words may have originated with a semi-legendary figure named Moses.)

The honest reader will not hesitate to call this fraud. A pious fraud, a religious fraud, to be sure—but religious fraud, as found in the false prophets who appear throughout the OT, is presented in Scripture as the worst kind. Therefore there are only two possible broad classifications of the 36 statements in Leviticus that name Moses as the recipient of the words written there: either these statements are true and Moses was the author, or they are a deception from some unknown later personage or personages.

In support of the second of these opinions it could be said that the author “protests too much,” to borrow an expression from Shakespeare. According to this thinking, the author or authors have repeated to the point of monotony that these words are from Moses in order to persuade the reader, by multiple repetition, that a lie is the truth, a tactic well known to demagogues. Advocates of the post-Mosaic authorship of Leviticus therefore have a tentative explanation of the book’s repeated statements about who was receiving the words of the Lord: the repetitions are an attempt to repeat a falsehood enough times so that it will be accepted as the truth.

If, on the other hand, the words of Leviticus are really from Moses, then there is another explanation for the repetition. It is for the purpose of impressing upon the reader the seriousness of understanding and accepting that these really are the words of God spoken to His servant Moses. If this position is true, then it is a matter of no small consequence which of the two viewpoints we take; it is a matter that the Lord apparently thinks is of major significance for us, so much so that He repeated who the author was often enough to risk uniform disapproval from all teachers of English composition.<sup>16</sup> If we concede that there is even a possibility that the author of these words is who the text emphatically says is the author, then it becomes a matter of great importance to determine whether this is the case, or whether the “pious fraud” alternative is the truth.

It is here that the discoveries about the Jubilee and Sabbatical years become useful. The Jubilee/Sabbatical-year calendar provides a way of deciding between the two competing viewpoints for the authorship of Leviticus. The idea that Leviticus was written later than the time of Moses cannot account for the fact that Israel’s priests were keeping track of the Sabbatical and Jubilee calendar all the time that Israel was in its land, and their counting started in 1406 BC. But if counting started in 1406 BC, so far no other explanation has been given for why the priests should start then except the explanation that the book of Leviticus, which contains the command to start counting the years when Israel entered Canaan, was written just before that time. If that is true the only plausible candidate for authorship is Moses, in agreement with the multiple statements made in Leviticus about its origin.

For many years, Biblical scholars of a non-conservative persuasion have played the game of assigning the writing of the Pentateuch to late-date editors, including the imaginary P, P1, P2, PH (or H) and their ephemeral rivals D, Dtr, dtr1, and dtr2.<sup>17</sup> But late-date theories have no explanation for the evidence that has been presented showing that the calendar of Jubilee and Sabbatical years was known all through Israel’s time in its land, and the counting for these years started in 1406 BC. It would be tempting to say to those who have spent so much effort in multiplying late-date authors for the first five books of the Bible: “the game is over”!

This, however, would be unrealistic, given human nature. Opinions held throughout a scholar’s career are not easily relinquished. The most we can do is to wait to see if those who do not believe the Scripture’s statements about its authorship can offer any explanation of how their hypothetical late-date authors could have matched all the details given above for the Jubilee and Sabbatical-year calendar. The best scholarly tradition is to accept the simplest explanation that accounts for all verifiable observations, i.e., the hypothesis that has the most explanatory power. Nothing that the scholarly community has yet produced explains the various phenomena associated with the Jubilee calendar

except the traditional view that Moses was the author of Leviticus, and its legislation was known all the time that Israel was in its land, starting in 1406 BC.

The Jubilee cycles therefore show which of the two competing ideas for the authorship of Leviticus is true. The book of Leviticus is the only credible source for the legislation of the Jubilee cycles that has ever been postulated.<sup>18</sup> Therefore at least this one book of the Pentateuch must have been in the possession of Israel when it entered Canaan. This simple statement explains all the references to Jubilee and Sabbatical years found in Scripture. Until a better explanation is given for the many phenomena that have been cited, the traditional explanation that this legislation is from God, as it says it is, and was given by revelation to Moses at Mt. Sinai in 1446–1445 BC, as dated from both the Jubilee cycles and a literal reading of 1 Kings 6:1, is the most intellectually satisfying explanation, even if it is not likely to be accepted by those afflicted with a terminal case of anti-supernatural bias.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sarna cites the *Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan* for this custom.

<sup>2</sup> “At Mount Sinai” is a better translation of *be-har Sinai* than the NIV’s “on Mount Sinai” or the KJV’s “in mount Sinai.” The first verse of Leviticus says that Moses was at the Tent of Meeting when the Lord spoke to him. The Tent was not on the mountain, but at its foot.

<sup>3</sup> A recent book dedicated to the Biblical Jubilee also concluded that the Jubilee was the same as the seventh Sabbatical year. See Lefebvre 2003: 154–66. Prior to Lefebvre’s book, the two most important publications on the Jubilee were those by Zuckermann (1974) and North (1954). Both Zuckermann and North concluded that the Jubilee cycle was 49 years, although their reasoning in this matter differs from that of Lefebvre.

<sup>4</sup> A member of the Samaritan community told me that the counting of the Jubilees was lost some hundreds of years ago, but that an effort is underway to determine the year when the calculations were stopped in order to start counting again. The Samaritans observed a 49 year cycle for the Jubilee.

<sup>5</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* XII.9.5, XIII.8.1, XIV.16.2, XV.1.2; *Wars* I.2.4; 1 Macc 6:49, 53.

<sup>6</sup> See an extended discussion of why *Rosh HaShanah* must have meant the same to Ezekiel as it meant to Talmudic scholars and as it means at the present day in Young 2006a: 271–73. Also note that this explains why Ezekiel had no need to name the month in which the vision occurred, since *Rosh HaShanah* was always in the month of Tishri.

<sup>7</sup> In Leviticus 23:28, 29, and 30, the phrase “on that very day” (Hebrew *be-etsom ha-yom ha-zeh*) is applied three times to the Day of Atonement. This phrase from Leviticus is used by Ezekiel (40:1) in specifying the time of his vision; it was the tenth of Tishri, “on that very day,” the Day of Atonement of 574 BC. There are several passages in Ezekiel where the prophet shows his familiarity with the book of Leviticus.

<sup>8</sup> The capture of Jerusalem and its king Jehoiachin by Nebuchadnezzar’s army is established by the Babylonian Chronicle as occurring on the second of Adar (March 16), 597 BC, which is the most exact synchronism to an external fixed date of any Biblical event. Other Babylonian records state that Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach) came to the throne in October of 562 BC (Parker and Dubberstein 1956: 12). It was a few months later, in the 12th month of what was still his accession year and in the Judean king’s 37th year of captivity, that he released Jehoiachin from prison (2 Kgs 25:27, Jer 52:31). The dates just given for Jehoiachin, firmly anchored to Babylonian records, conflict with chronologies that place the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. In an endeavor to get around this, advocates of the 586 date have attempted to start Jehoiachin’s captivity one month later than the date given in the Babylonian Chronicle. Edwin Thiele assumed a one-month delay until the start of the trip to Babylon (1983: 187), whereas Gershon Galil conjectured that Israel’s calendar was one month ahead of that of Babylon because Babylon had inserted an intercalary month and Israel had not yet done so (1991: 373–77). This would make Adar (the twelfth month) in the Babylonian records correspond to Nisan (the first month) in Judean counting. Both Thiele and Galil then assumed that the years of captivity were to be measured from Nisan, rather than according to the Judean calendar for kings that always started the year in Tishri. With these conjectures (either Thiele’s or Galil’s), the first year of captivity of Jehoiachin would be the year starting in Nisan of 597 BC and the

37th year would be the year starting in Nisan of 561 BC. But this is one year too late, because 2 Kings 25:27 and Jeremiah 52:31 say that Jehoiachin's release was in Evil-Merodach's accession year, a year that began in Nisan of 562 BC, not 561. These methods of trying to justify the 586 date for the fall of Jerusalem must therefore be rejected, and the better-attested Tishri-based years should be used for the captivity of Jehoiachin. When this is done, there is agreement with the Babylonian records. More than that, a comparison of Ezekiel's dates related to Jehoiachin's captivity and the fall of Jerusalem with corresponding dates for the fall in Jeremiah, 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles shows that Zedekiah's years were reckoned in a non-accession sense, whereby the year he was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar was counted as his first full year in office. All Scriptures in Ezekiel, Jeremiah, 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles related to the fall of Jerusalem are then in harmony, and all place that event in the summer of 587 BC. Every scheme that places the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC ends up contradicting several of these Scriptures, as well as the Babylonian records.

<sup>9</sup> For this finer detail, see Young 2005: 246 (Table 2). For an online version of the table, go to <http://home.swbell.net/rcyoung8/frame4.html> and choose "Kings of Judah."

<sup>10</sup> *Seder Olam* (chap. 30), *Tosefta* (*Taanit* 3.9), Babylonian Talmud (*Arakin* 11b, 12a; *Taanit* 29a), Jerusalem Talmud (*Taanit* 4.5). Unfortunately, some English translations of these passages on the burning of the First (and Second) Temples mistranslate the texts to say that their destruction occurred in the year after a Sabbatical year. For a discussion of the proper translation see Young 2006b: 176–78.

<sup>11</sup> Edwin Thiele showed that the kingdom divided into two at some time in the year beginning in Nisan of 931 BC (1983: 78). My own work (2003) established that Solomon died at some time before the midpoint of that Nisan-based year, so that his 40th and final year, by Judean reckoning, was 932t. His fourth year, 36 years earlier, began in Tishri of 968. Temple construction began in the spring of the next BC year, i.e. in the spring of 967 BC, one month after the start of the religious calendar year in Nisan. The Hebrew text of 1 Kings 6:1 says this was in the 480th year of the Exodus-era, meaning that 479 full years had passed since the Exodus, thus placing the Exodus in Nisan of 1446 BC (Young 2003: 601–602).

<sup>12</sup> The majority of rationalist scholars date chapters 25 and 27 of Leviticus, the chapters that introduced the Jubilee and Sabbatical year legislation, to the exilic or post-exilic period. This is in spite of the fact that this legislation addressed the same problems that resulted in the issuance of clean slate decrees by Gudea of Lagash (about 2130 BC; see front cover) and Hammurabi (18th century BC) and Ammisaduqa (17th or 16th century), both of Babylon. These second-millennium BC (and earlier) antecedents to the economic problems addressed in Leviticus 25 and 27 suggest a much earlier date for the Jubilee and Sabbatical year laws. Criticizing views which date the legislation to the exilic or post-exilic period, John Bergsma writes, "the jubilee legislation *never addresses the situation of exile*" and "the interpretation of the jubilee as an invention of the Judean priesthood in the late exilic or early post-exilic period to justify the return of their property must be regarded as essentially baseless" (2007: 77; italics in original). The historical situation shows that the exilic and post-exilic period is the most illogical time in which to place the writing of this legislation. Irrational conclusions like this regarding the time of writing must be traced ultimately to anti-supernatural presuppositions that hinder scholars from assessing fairly the various lines of evidence show the early (15th century) origin of the book of Leviticus.

<sup>13</sup> Young 2007: 178–79 demonstrates the independence of the two methods. This article also discusses (pp. 179–87) another independent verification of the date of the division of the kingdom, as derived from the list of Tyrian kings given in Josephus (*Against Apion* I.17–18).

<sup>14</sup> Three when the Tyrian King List is considered.

<sup>15</sup> A colophon, or summary-line at the end of a discourse, is used repeatedly in Leviticus, and to a lesser extent in Numbers and Deuteronomy. The colophon is a literary convention that was written at the end of clay tablets, as found in the records of ancient Mesopotamia dating from the time of Moses and before. The colophon usually had the title of the writing, and often the writer's name. The first 36 chapters of Genesis follow this convention, using the phrase "These are the histories (*toledoth*) of . . ." (KJV: "These are the generations of . . .") to conclude the various accounts. To make this clear to the modern reader, the phrase would better be translated "This concludes the histories of . . ." This usage ends at Genesis 37:2a, just before the story of Joseph and the descent into Egypt, after which the writing material would have been papyrus or parchment. Probably Moses was the one who translated the tablets of the first part of Genesis into Hebrew, thus beginning the formation of the Biblical canon. His familiarity with the use of colophons carried over into his style of writing in the Pentateuch, even though he almost certainly would have written on animal skins, not clay tablets. In Leviticus, a colophon appears at 14:32 and also at the end of chaps. 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 26, and 27. See Wiseman 1953, and an excellent summaries of Wiseman's work in DeWitt 1977 and Sewell 1994.

<sup>16</sup> It is unwise to impose modern cultural conventions on ancient literature. Repetition is a regular feature of the Biblical style. It is the essential characteristic of the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, and also of “chiastic” structures where a series of statements is repeated, in modified form, in reverse order. All doctrines essential to our spiritual well-being recur repeatedly in Scripture. Examples of this are the frequent admonitions against idolatry in the Old Testament and the many warnings in both testaments of the dangers of not believing what God has written. An instance of the latter that is pertinent to the present discussion is the remark of the Savior: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Lk 16:31).

<sup>17</sup> All of these designations have been used in serious scholarly studies.

<sup>18</sup> There have been numerous attempts to derive the legislation of Leviticus 25 and 27 from the practices of surrounding nations. A recent review of these attempts is found in Bergsma (2007: 28–51). None of these studies has produced a source from which the legislation of the Jubilee and Sabbatical years was derived. What they have shown is that these chapters in Leviticus address social problems that were experienced in the ancient Near East long before the time of Moses. The basic problem was the tendency of small landholders to become hopelessly in debt to their creditors, leading to the enslavement of the populace and the accumulation of all arable lands into the hands of a few wealthy landowners. To deal with this tendency, the king occasionally issued an edict for the cancellation of debts, the release of slaves, or the restoration of lands to their original owners. These various edicts from kings of the surrounding nations addressed the same problems that are dealt with in Leviticus, but it does not follow that they are the source of Leviticus 25 and 27, any more than the fact that because Hammurabi’s Code addressed the problems of murder and theft, it therefore was the source of the Ten Commandments. What does follow is that these socio-economic problems were well recognized in the ancient Near East, so that special measures needed to be taken to deal with them. Prior to the writing of Leviticus, such special measures were usually enacted on the whim of the king. In Leviticus, however, the cancellation of debt, freeing of fellow Hebrews from bondage, and the return to ancestral estates were regulated by law, not the king’s whim, thereby providing a major advance in justice and the rights of the people (Hudson 1992: 35–37). These various activities were set in a framework of interlocking Sabbatical and Jubilee years so that everyone knew when the releases (*shemītot*) would occur, thus giving equity and fairness to both debtor and creditor. The regulations of Leviticus, in addressing these well-known problems, provided a practical and fair solution to them, contra those interpreters who have stated that the Jubilee and Sabbatical-year legislation presents a utopian goal that could never have been put into practice. Neither was this legislation put together in a piecemeal fashion over the centuries, as claimed by most writers who deny the Mosaic authorship of Leviticus. The demonstration that the Jubilee and Sabbatical-year calendar was known all the time that Israel was in its land shows that this legislation went into effect as a whole at one time in history, in 1406 BC.

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Table 1: Chronology of the Kings of Judah.

<i>King</i>	<i>Years reigned</i>	<i>Began co-regency</i>	<i>Began sole reign</i>	<i>Ended</i>	<i>Start and end by Judah's Tishri years</i>
Solomon	40* (39)	971t	969t?	932t	971t – 932t = 39
Rehoboam	17		932t	915t	932t – 915t = 17
Abijah	3		915t	912t	915t – 912t = 3
Asa	41		912t	871t	912t – 871t = 41
Jehoshaphat	25* (24)	873t	871t	849t	873t – 849t = 24
Jehoram	8* (7)	854t	849t	842t	849t – 842t = 7
Ahaziah	1* (0)		842t	842t	842t – 842t = 0
Athaliah	7* (6)		842t	836t	842t – 836t = 6
Joash	40* (39)		836t	797t	836t – 797t = 39
Amaziah	29		797t	768t	797t – 768t = 29
Uzziah	52* (51)	791t	768t	740t	791t – 740t = 51
Jotham	16* (15)	751t	740t	736t (732t) <sup>†</sup>	751t – 736t = 15
Ahaz	16	736t	732t	716t	732t – 716t = 16
Hezekiah	29	729t	716t	687t	716t – 687t = 29
Manasseh	55* (54)	697t	687t	643t	697t – 643t = 54
Amon	2		643t	641t	643t – 641t = 2
Josiah	31		641t	Jun/Jul 609	641t – 610t = 31
Jehoahaz	3 mo.		Jun/Jul 609	Sept/Oct 609	610t – 609t
Jehoiakim	11		Sept/Oct 609	9 Dec 598	609t – 598t = 11
Jehoiachin	3 mo. 10 d.		9 Dec 598	16 Mar 597	598t
Zedekiah	11* (10)		16 Mar 597	29 Jul 587	598t – 588t = 10

The “t” after the year in this table means that the official regnal year began in Tishri (roughly October) of the BC year indicated. In many cases it is possible to narrow the date to the first or second half of the year. As an example, Abijah began his reign in the latter half of 915t, that is, some time on or after Nisan (roughly April) 1 of 914 BC but before Tishri 1 of 914, and his reign ended between Tishri 1 of 912 and Nisan 1 of 911. This finer detail is not shown in the present table.

\* Indicates non-accession reckoning, which means that the year the king came to the throne, instead of his first full year in office, was counted as his “year one.” In calculating elapsed time, one year must be subtracted from all non-accession figures, as is done in the last column. Reign lengths measured from the start of a coregency are assumed to be non-accession lengths, as are those for Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Joash during the time of rapprochement when Judah adopted Israel’s non-accession system. The chronology of Ezekiel shows that Zedekiah’s years are also by this method.

<sup>†</sup> Jotham’s 16 (15) years ended when his son Ahaz was installed by the pro-Assyrian faction in 736t, although some considered him the rightful ruler until his death in 732t, thus giving him the twenty years of 2 Kings 15:30. See Young 2004b: 585–86.