

EZEKIEL'S JUBILEE: REAL OR RABBINIC FICTION? PART 1: EZEKIEL 40:1 AND 1 KINGS 6:1

RODGER C. YOUNG*

Abstract: *This is the first of two articles dealing with the text and chronology of Ezekiel 40:1, showing that the verse implies the beginning of a Jubilee Year, and the timing of that Jubilee Year is in exact agreement with the date of the Exodus derived from 1 Kings 6:1 when the Kings text is taken as it was originally meant to be interpreted. Considerable attention is devoted to the five temporal phrases in Ezekiel 40:1, showing they all are consistent with Ezekiel's vision occurring on the first day of a Jubilee Year. It is also shown that 1 Kings 6:1 continues a tradition, started in the Pentateuch, of measuring time by means of an era: the Exodus Era.*

Key words: *Ezekiel 40:1, 1 Kings 6:1, Jubilee Years, Sabbatical Years, date of Exodus, Documentary Hypothesis*

Over twenty years have passed since there appeared in *JETS* my initial article dealing with the Hebrew text of Ezekiel 40:1, presenting the idea that the verse implies that Ezekiel saw the vision of chapters 40–48 at the beginning of a Jubilee Year.¹ It further maintained that the Jubilee calendar that this implies is in agreement—exact agreement—with the date of Israel's entry into Canaan as derived from 1 Kings 6:1 and the following forty years in the wilderness. In these twenty-plus years, new evidence, both inscriptional and archaeological, has appeared that agrees with this thesis, namely that a Jubilee, the seventeenth, was due at the time Ezekiel saw the vision of Ezekiel 40–48. If, in accordance with Leviticus 25:1–4, Israel counted from the beginning of the agricultural year after they entered the land in the spring of 1406 BC, “year one” of the first Sabbatical and Jubilee cycle

* Rodger C. Young is an independent scholar. He may be contacted at ryoung8@yahoo.com.

¹ Rodger C. Young, “When Did Solomon Die?,” *JETS* 46.4 (2003): 589–603. Subsequent articles dealing with Ezekiel's Jubilee include Young, “The Talmud's Two Jubilees and Their Relevance to the Date of the Exodus,” *WTJ* 68 (2006): 71–83; Young, “Ezekiel 40:1 as a Corrective for Seven Wrong Ideas in Biblical Interpretation,” *AUSS* 44.2 (2006): 265–83; Young, “Three Verifications of Thiele's Date for the Beginning of the Divided Kingdom,” *AUSS* 45.2 (2007): 173–79; Young and Bryant G. Wood, “A Critical Analysis of the Evidence from Ralph Hawkins for a Late-date Exodus-Conquest,” *JETS* 51.2 (2008): 234–39; Young, “Evidence for Inerrancy from a Second Unexpected Source: The Jubilee and Sabbatical Cycles,” *Bible and Spade* 21:4 (2008): 109–22. Articles for which I am sole or joint author are at <http://www.rcyoung.org/papers.html> and <https://oxford.academia.edu/RodgerYoung>. Other authors who have accepted Ezekiel's Jubilee as important in verifying the date of the Exodus include Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 48–53, and Scott Stripling, “The Fifteenth-Century (Early-Date) Exodus View,” in *Five Views on the Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications*, ed. Mark Janzen and Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 31, 77–78.

would have started in Tishri of 1406. The first Jubilee would start forty-eight years later (Tishri of 1358) and the seventeenth 16 x 49 years after that, Tishri of 574 BC, which was the time of Ezekiel's vision.² This reasoning assumes that Israel did indeed start the reckoning when they entered the land in 1406 BC as commanded in Leviticus 25:1–4. Although their subsequent history showed that the kings and people of Israel were not faithful in observing all the stipulations of the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years as given in the Torah, it nevertheless would have been the duty of the Levitical priests, including Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to know when the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years were due.

In addition to new evidence that will be presented, the counterarguments will be evaluated of those who do not accept the testimony of Ezekiel 40:1 as referring to a Jubilee Year and who generally reject a fifteenth-century Exodus. The study will be in two parts. The current article examines the biblical texts related to the decree, and it deals with the credibility or lack of credibility of rabbinical tradition that specified not only that Ezekiel saw his vision at the beginning of a Jubilee Year, but also that this Jubilee was, according to the rabbis, the seventeenth. The subsequent article will be concerned with biblical texts from which a Sabbatical Year may be inferred. In the second article it also will be shown that rabbinic chronology could not have calculated this exact match, with the consequence that it must have been based on historical remembrance, not rabbinic speculation. For the present, however, the emphasis will be on determining the meaning of each phrase of Ezekiel 40:1, showing that they are all consistent with marking the first day of a Jubilee Year. After that, the agreement of Ezekiel 40:1's chronology with the nine biblical texts that establish the Exodus Era will be demonstrated.

I. THE TEXT OF EZEKIEL 40:1 IMPLIES THE BEGINNING OF A JUBILEE YEAR

The last nine chapters of Ezekiel detail a vision of a rebuilt temple and a restored Israel. Although the vision is eschatological, no attempt will be made here to interpret the eschatology of these chapters. Instead, the current interest is the proper exegesis of the temporal phrases with which Ezekiel introduces his vision. The Hebrew of Ezekiel 40:1 reads as follows:

בְּעֶשְׂרִים וְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנָה לְגִלּוֹתֵנוּ בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ
בְּאַרְבַּע עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה אַחֵר אֲשֶׁר הִכְתָּה הָעִיר
בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הָיְתָה עָלַי יְדֵי־הוֹהוּ וַיִּבֵּא אֶתִּי שָׁמָּה:

² That the Jubilee Year was identical to the seventh Sabbatical Year, and hence the Jubilee cycle was forty-nine years, not fifty, will be demonstrated in Section II.4.

Translation (present author):

In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, on Rosh HaShanah, on the tenth of the month, in year fourteen after the city was smitten, on that very day, the hand of Yahweh was on me, and he brought me there.

The sentence has five temporal phrases that will be dealt with in turn. Though each is the subject of controversy, they all agree with dating Ezekiel's vision to the tenth of Tishri, 574 BC.

1. *Ezekiel's first temporal phrase: Was the twenty-fifth year of captivity 573 BC or 574 BC?*³ The determination of this matter depends on the much-debated question of whether Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in the summer of 586 BC or the summer of 587. In my 2004 *JETS* article devoted to this issue, Jeremy Hughes was cited as listing eleven scholars who preferred 587 and another eleven who preferred 586.⁴ The lack of consensus among scholars continues to this day, despite the rather exhaustive demonstration in my 2004 article that only 587 satisfies all the relevant scriptural and Babylonian texts. To my knowledge, no writer who holds to the 586 date has shown any error in the tables of that article, all of which are in harmony only if the city fell in 587 BC. Neither has anyone demonstrated any special pleading in showing that 587 is the proper year. I will, however, here demonstrate just one of the several arguments that show that 587 is the correct year and that 586 conflicts with both biblical and Babylonian records. That argument deals with the year in which Jehoiachin was released from Babylonian imprisonment.

Thiele's chronology, which advocates 586 for the capture of Jerusalem, is in conflict with the statement in 2 Kings 25:27 that reads, "And in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison" (ESV). Of the two date references given here, it is the latter, the accession year (Akkadian *resh-sharruti*) of Evil-merodach, over which there should be no controversy. Evil-merodach (Amel-Marduk), son of Nebuchadnezzar II, came to the throne upon the death of his father in early October, 562 BC.⁵ In the Babylonian system of Nisan-based regnal years, this means that his accession year was from Nisan 1 (April 17) 562 to the last day of Adar, 561 BC. The day that Jehoiachin was released from prison, the 27th day of Adar in this accession year according to 2 Kings, was thus

³ The 573 BC date is advocated in Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 188. Many other scholars, not cited here, also accept 586 BC for the fall of Jerusalem and hence 573 or 572 BC for Ezekiel's vision.

The 574 BC date is advocated in Young, *When Did Solomon Die?*, 602, and Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 169. Just as the many scholars who accept 586 BC for Jerusalem's capture are readily available and are not cited, neither are citations given for the many who accept 587 besides Steinmann and Young.

⁴ Young, "When Did Jerusalem Fall?," *JETS* 47.1 (2004): 21. Jeremy Hughes, *Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, JSOTSS 66 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 229.

⁵ Richard Parker and Waldo Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.—A.D. 75* (Providence: Brown University, 1956), 12.

just a few days before the beginning of Amel-Marduk's official year one that began on April 6, 561 BC. By Judean Tishri-based reckoning that is used throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles for Judah, Jehoiachin was released in the year that began on Tishri 1, 562 BC. "Years of captivity" or exile are always measured in a non-accession sense, in which "year one" is assigned to the year in which the exile began. Second Kings 25:27 therefore places the year in which the captivity began as $562t \text{ BC} + 36 = 598t \text{ BC}$ in terms of Tishri years (expressed by the 't' after the year figure). This agrees with the Babylonian Chronicle record relating that Nebuchadnezzar captured the city of Jerusalem the first time, along with its king (Jehoiachin), on Adar 2 (March 16) of 597 BC.⁶ The text of Ezekiel 40:1, which says it was both the twenty-fifth year of the exile that Ezekiel shared with Jehoiachin (i.e., $598t - 24 = 574t \text{ BC}$) and in year fourteen after the city fell puts the fall of the city in $574t + 14 = 588t$, that is, the summer of 587 BC, not Thiele's summer of 586. This is assuming that Ezekiel used Judean Tishri-based years, in harmony with Judah's reckoning for its kings in the books of Kings and Chronicles that Thiele acknowledged throughout *Mysterious Numbers*.

How did Thiele deal with this contradiction to his 586 date for Jerusalem's fall? His treatment has the characteristics of special pleading, that is, making exceptions to what otherwise seems an obvious conclusion so that a previously postulated position can continue to be maintained. Thiele acknowledged the Babylonian Chronicle's date for the first capture of Jerusalem by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar as 2 Adar, 597 BC, which is the most exact synchronism between an extrabiblical date and an OT date in all the literature of the ancient Near East. Although he cited this Babylonian record, Thiele said that Jehoiachin's captivity did not begin in Adar of 597, but a month later, in Nisan of 597.⁷ This is in apparent contradiction to the Babylonian Chronicle, which says, regarding Nebuchadnezzar, that "on the second day of the month of Adar he seized the city [Jerusalem] and captured the king."⁸ In addition to supposing that Jehoiachin's captivity began a month later than the Babylonian Chronicle's date, Thiele had to add another special argument to make his chronology work: that Ezekiel, when referring to the 37th year of Jehoiachin's exile (2 Kgs 25:27), was using Nisan-based years, despite Tishri-based years being used for all the Judean kings in the books of Kings and Chronicles, as Thiele himself recognized.

Thiele's logic falls apart when his assumptions (or special pleading) are applied to the time of Jehoiachin's release from captivity. If, according to Thiele, Jehoiachin's "year one" of captivity was 597n BC (i.e., his captivity is to be measured from Nisan 10, 597 BC, and Nisan years are to be used), then his year thirty-seven, in which, according to 2 Kings 25:27 and Jeremiah 52:31, he was released from captivity by Amel-Marduk, should be $597n - 36 = 561n$, not the 562n that is uni-

⁶ D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (626 – 556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1956), 73.

⁷ Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 187.

⁸ Wiseman, *Chronicles*, 73, my italics.

versally recognized as the accession year of Amel-Marduk. This reasoning and calculation regarding Jehoiachin's captivity was presented in my 2004 article dealing with the year of Jerusalem's fall, and I am not aware of any subsequent counterargument that has refuted it, despite the serious problem it poses to those who advocate 586 BC for the fall of Jerusalem.⁹

In short, the first of five time-related phrases in Ezekiel 40:1, "The twenty-fifth year of captivity," refers to a year beginning in Tishri of 574 BC. The next section addresses whether the vision came in the fall or spring of that year.

2. *Ezekiel's second temporal phrase: In Ezekiel 40:1, is ראש השנה, Rosh HaShanah, a general time in the spring or fall or a specific day—New Year's Day?* It seems there would be no controversy about this phrase if Ezekiel had left out the next temporal phrase, namely that it was the tenth day of the month, with the month name or number unspecified. In that case some modern translations—perhaps not a majority—would translate it in accordance with its modern meaning: New Year's Day (literally, "Head of the Year"). In modern Israel Rosh HaShanah is the first of Tishri. The Talmud, however, demonstrates that it is not possible to apply this modern usage to earlier ages unequivocally. Citing their earlier source, the Mishnah, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmudim muddy the issue by stating that there were four Rosh HaShanahs: first of Nisan for kings and festivals, first of Elul (some authorities say first of Tishri) for animal tithes, first of Tishri for counting years, and again the first of Tishri counting Sabbatical and Jubilee Years.¹⁰ These admittedly late sources are wrong on at least one issue: although the rule of kings was counted from the first of Nisan in Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and the northern kingdom during the divided kingdom period, Judah always used a Tishri-based year for its kings, as was established by Coucke and Thiele.¹¹ Josephus tells us that this practice for kings and matters of government continued down to the Herodian period in the first centuries BC and AD, again contradicting the later Mishnaic and Talmudic sources that the years of (presumably all) kings started in Nisan.¹²

⁹ Young, *When Did Jerusalem Fall?*, 25–28.

¹⁰ b. Roš Haš. 2a.; y. Roš Haš. 1. The Jerusalem Talmud agrees with the Babylonian Talmud that there were four New Years, but it combines them differently so that the first (Bet Hillel says fifteenth) of Shevat was Rosh HaShanah for fruit trees.

¹¹ Valerius Coucke, "Chronologie des rois de Juda et d'Israël," *RBén* 37 (1925): 327; Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 51–53. Thiele writes (p. 51) that chronologists who assume a Nisan-to-Nisan year for Judea are generally just following the statement in the Mishnah and Talmud quoted above, but accepting the authority of the Mishnah and Talmud on this matter cannot explain the examples that Coucke and Thiele cite to support a Tishri-to-Tishri year for Judean kings.

¹² Josephus, *Ant.* 1.81/1.3.3. Josephus writes that Moses instituted Nisan as the first month for festivals and matters related to divine worship, but "concerning, however, buying and selling and other administration (διοίκησις) he [Moses] preserved the earlier arrangement" of Tishri-based years. LSJ, s.v. διοίκησις, gives the meaning "control, government, administration, treasury department." It is unfortunate that Whiston, followed by Thackeray in the Loeb series, translated this word as "ordinary affairs." By so doing they obscured Josephus's meaning that in matters of government, which would include the time when regnal years began, the year began in Tishri. For the difficulty that Josephus's statement presents to Schürer's chronology that puts the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, see Andrew E. Stein-

Although the Mishnah and the Talmudim therefore cannot be historically accurate in this one matter (unless the kings being considered are foreign kings, not Judean), one piece of information in their statement is of interest to the present attempt to determine the meaning of Rosh HaShanah in Ezekiel 40:1: The Mishnaic and Talmudic sources always, as shown in the four instances cited, refer to Rosh HaShanah as a day, whether the month was Nisan, Elul, or Tishri. It is not referred to as a vague “beginning of the year,” which could be as imprecise as modern expressions like “springtime” or “the beginning of fall.”

Nevertheless, almost all translations of Ezekiel 40:1 into English render Ezekiel’s Rosh HaShanah, not as a specific day, but as an ambiguous “the beginning of the year” (KJV, RSV, NIV, ESV, CSB, NET, etc.).¹³ Since the Scripture, starting with Exodus 12:2, always recognizes Nisan as the first month of the year, even when calculating the reigns of kings by a Tishri-based year, it is natural that most readers will assume this to mean sometime in the spring, most likely the month of Nisan (and so Thiele’s Nisan 10 for the date of Ezekiel 40:1).

However, in the other texts of Ezekiel in which the prophet wanted to unambiguously designate the spring month of Nisan, he used a different phrase: בְּרֵאשִׁיטוֹן.¹⁴ Thus Ezekiel 29:17: “In the twenty-seventh year, in the first month (בְּרֵאשִׁיטוֹן) ...”; 30:20: “In the eleventh year, in the first month (בְּרֵאשִׁיטוֹן) ...” But this is not the phrase used in Ezekiel 40:1, which, at the minimum, suggests that Ezekiel was not referring to a general “beginning of the year” when, in that verse, he employed ראש השנה, Rosh HaShanah, accentuated by the following specific phrases “the tenth of the month ... that very day,” to describe the time of his vision.

None of this proves that the “Rosh HaShanah” of Ezekiel 40:1 could not have meant something different in the time of Ezekiel as compared with later centuries, and so those who advocate the more general meaning can cite in their support the many translations that so render it. What has been demonstrated is that the rabbinic literature always interpreted it as referring to a specific day, an understanding that has carried over to our own times, namely the New Year’s Day that occurs at the start of the fall month of Tishri. The purpose of the present section has been to show that, despite the majority of modern renderings, interpreting Ezekiel’s Rosh HaShanah as referring to a specific day rather than a general time of year is consistent with later rabbinic usage of the phrase. It was also shown that Ezekiel had other phrases to use when referring to a general time of year in the spring, including the בְּרֵאשִׁיטוֹן that he used in Ezekiel 29:17 and 30:20. Section I.5 below will

mann and Rodger C. Young, “Elapsed Times for Herod the Great in Josephus,” *BSac* 177 (2022): 313, 314, 316, 319, 324.

¹³ Guggenheimer translates the Rosh HaShanah of Ezekiel 40:1 that is cited by the Seder ‘Olam, chapter 28, as “New Year’s Day,” with capitalization as shown. *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology*, trans. and ed. Henrich Guggenheimer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 230.

¹⁴ If Ezekiel had intended to say that his vision was in the general time of the spring (turn of the year), he could also have used the phrases referring to that time elsewhere in the OT. Thus in 2 Samuel 11:1, 1 Kings 20:22, 26, and 2 Chronicles 36:10 the phrase used for the general time of the spring or “the turning of the year” is תְּקוּפַת הַשָּׁנָה. In 2 Chronicles 24:23 and Exodus 34:22 it is תְּקוּפַת הַשָּׁנָה.

show that the fifth temporal phrase used in Ezekiel 40:1 is consistent with Ezekiel's specific day being the Day of Atonement, which, if true, has ramifications beyond producing a more accurate translation that brings out the proper sense and true dating of Ezekiel 40:1.

3. *Ezekiel's third temporal phrase: Is the tenth of the month the tenth of Nisan or the tenth of Tishri?* The previous section showed that, if Ezekiel meant to indicate that his vision was in the month of Nisan, he could have used the phrase that he uses elsewhere (Ezek 29:17; 30:20) to designate that time, בְּרֵאשִׁוֹן, or the תְּשִׁיבַת הַשָּׁנָה or תְּקִיפַת הַשָּׁנָה used in the historical books to refer unequivocally to the springtime. Although this favors the only viable alternative, Tishri, for the otherwise unnamed month, other considerations also favor Tishri over Nisan.

a. *The use of Tishri-based years throughout Ezekiel.* As demonstrated with careful (some would say tedious) analysis in my 2004 article on the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel used Tishri-based years not only for Judean regnal years, but also for the years of captivity he shared with Jehoiachin.¹⁵ This suggests, but does not prove, that he would also have used the Rosh HaShanah of Ezekiel 40:1 as referring to New Year's Day in Tishri, not a New Year's Day in Nisan.

b. *The theological argument.* Another argument, also not conclusive but at least more harmonious with a Tishri date, has to do with the theology of the last chapters of Ezekiel. If Ezekiel's Rosh HaShanah referred to the month of Nisan, that date, the 10th of Nisan, would be consistent with a time just before the Passover season, and thus looking backward in time to the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. However, the vision of these last nine chapters of Ezekiel is eschatological, that is, looking forward in time to a restored Jerusalem and its temple that has not yet been fulfilled. If the vision was on both Rosh HaShanah and the 10th of Tishri, as advocated here, then the vision must have marked the start of a Jubilee Year. It was only in a Jubilee Year that Rosh HaShanah coincided with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, as stated explicitly in Leviticus 25:8–12. William Baur writes the following regarding the eschatological overtones of the biblical Jubilee:

It was part of the Divine plan looking forward to the salvation of mankind. "The deepest meaning of it (the Jubilee Year) is to be found in the ἀποκατάστασις τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ . . . , i.e. in the restoring of all that which in the course of time was perverted by man's sin, in the removing of all slavery of sin, in the establishing of the true liberty of the children of God, and in the delivering of the creation from the bondage of corruption to which it was subjected on account of man's depravity" (Rom 8 19 ff) (cf. Keil, *Manual of Bib. Archaeology*). In the Year of Jubilee a great future era of Jeh's favor is foreshadowed, that period which, according to Isa 61 1–3, shall be ushered in to all those that labor and are heavy laden, by Him who was anointed by the spirit of the Lord Jehovah.¹⁶

¹⁵ Young, *When Did Jerusalem Fall?*, 25–28.

¹⁶ "Jubilee Year," *ISBE* 3.1756.

c. The phrase “on that very day,” the fifth temporal phrase in *Ezekiel 40:1*, is consistent with the Day of Atonement, and thus also argues for “on the tenth of the month” in *Ezekiel 40:1* as being the tenth of Tishri. This will be explained in detail in Section I.5 below, which deals explicitly with the fifth and last temporal phrase of *Ezekiel 40:1*. Once again, the argument by itself will not be conclusive for some, and we will have to wait for Section I.5 to show the full force of this argument, namely that Ezekiel is through-out referring to the day that began a Jubilee Year.

d. An early rabbinic testimony that restricts itself to this specific question (*Nisan vs. Tishri for Ezekiel 40:1*) says that Ezekiel saw his vision in the month of Tishri. This testimony is in the Talmud, as follows:

Is it not written [Ezek 40:1] “In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, on Rosh HaShanah, on the tenth of the month, in year fourteen after the smiting of the city”? But which year is it when Rosh HaShanah is on the tenth of the month? It must be said that this is a Jubilee.¹⁷

It would seem incumbent on those who maintain that Ezekiel saw his vision in Nisan, not Tishri, to either produce an example earlier than this from the rabbinic literature that supports their case, or, alternatively, give some explanation of how the tradition arose that is behind the statement in ‘Arakhin 12a and why that statement is in error. Merely stating that “later scholars do not agree” as an appeal to authority would show, not the reasonableness, but the weakness, of an argument in favor of Nisan. For whichever rabbi was the original source of the idea expressed in ‘Arakhin 12a, the meaning of *Ezekiel 40:1* was plain, either based on his reading of the text, or, possibly, also based on the historical remembrance that a Jubilee really was due to begin on 10 Tishri in the twenty-fifth year of Ezekiel and Jehoiachin’s captivity. The various details showing that there was such historical remembrance will be deferred to the second part of this two-part series. For the present purposes, however, the statement in ‘Arakhin 12a is not being offered as an absolute proof that Ezekiel saw his vision in Tishri. The argument, instead, is that this statement agrees with the preceding three points on this issue, 3a through 3c, and also with Section I.5 below. The thorough agreement of all five of these arguments and citations should weigh heavily in favor of the basic thesis: Ezekiel saw his vision in the month of Tishri. Once that is established, then it follows that his vision was on the first day of a Jubilee Year, as ‘Arakhin 12a explains. Even though the people had not faithfully observed the stipulations of the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years over their checkered history, nevertheless Ezekiel, as a priest, would have known when the timing of those years was due, and he uses language from the book of Leviticus to emphasize that “that very day” had come, as will be shown in Section I.5 below.

¹⁷ B. ‘Arak. 12a, author’s translation. Left unstated in the ‘Arakhin passage, because assumed known by the reader, is that Leviticus 25:8–10 says that the Jubilee Year was to be announced as starting on the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement.

4. *Ezekiel's fourth temporal phrase: "When was 'year fourteen after the city was smitten'?"*

It was shown in Section I.1 above that Thiele's chronology that postulated both that Ezekiel used Nisan-based years in his reckoning, and also that the captivity of Jehoiachin was to be measured from Nisan 10 of 597 BC instead of from the previous month, led to irreconcilable conflict with the year that Jehoiachin was released from prison as given in 2 Kings 25:37 and Jeremiah 52:31. The only system that brings harmony to all the biblical and Babylonian data is that Ezekiel was using Tishri-based years throughout, and that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 587 BC, not Thiele's 586. Ezekiel's fourth temporal phrase is consistent with this. Jerusalem fell in the summer of 587 BC, which was in 588t by Ezekiel's (and Judah's) Tishri-based calendar. Fourteen years after this was 588t – 14 = 574t BC, in agreement with the first of Ezekiel's five temporal phrases that said it was the twenty-fifth year of captivity, 598t – 24 = 574t BC.¹⁸

5. *Ezekiel's fifth temporal phrase "on that very day," בְּעֵצָם הַיּוֹם הַהוּא.* Thiele took notice of this phrase, and it became important in his argument that Jehoiachin's captivity was not to be measured from the date of Adar 2, 597 BC, given in the Babylonian Chronicle, but at some time in the following month, Nisan. As was demonstrated, this was essential to his position that Ezekiel reckoned by Nisan-based years. But at least Thiele provided an explanation of why Ezekiel, in 40:1, thought there was something special about the day. He tied it to Ezekiel's "tenth day of the month" for the vision in the following words: "It is clear from the numerical sequence involved that the writer of Ezekiel 40:1 has in mind a Nisan-to-Nisan year; 'that very day' of the month marking the beginning of the year when Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon was 10 Nisan."¹⁹

This interpretation of "that very day" would be appealing if it were not for all the other evidence, biblical and Babylonian, against Thiele's thesis that the years of Jehoiachin and Ezekiel's captivity began in Nisan and that Ezekiel measured years by a Nisan-based calendar. This was demonstrated in Section I.1 above. But is there another interpretation of why Ezekiel would use the expression "that very day" as if there was something special about the day?

There is indeed another explanation of why Ezekiel used this phrase. It is an expression that is used three times in Leviticus 23:26–30, which is given here in the

¹⁸ The text of Ezekiel 40:1, by using the word "after" (אַחֵר), implies that 14 years had passed since the year of the destruction of the city (588t in Judean reckoning), not that it was the 14th year of an era that began with the destruction of the city. In Genesis 5:3–5, Seth was born in Adam's 130th year, and Adam lived after (אַחֵר) Seth was born another 800 years, so that his total number of years was 930, whereas the total would have been 929 if the year of Seth's birth was included as the first of the 800 years after the birth of Seth. Similarly, Genesis 5:6–8: Seth had Enosh in his 105th year and lived after 807 years for a total of 912 years, and in Genesis 5:9–11, Enosh's son Kenan was born in his father's 90th year, after which Enosh lived 815 years for a total of 905 years.

¹⁹ Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 187. There is no evidence that Jehoiachin was deported on Nisan 10 except Thiele's guess that the deportation occurred then, which he made in order to support his Nisan-based chronology for Ezekiel.

ESV translation, supplemented with the transliterated Hebrew expression “that very day” that Ezekiel echoed in Ezekiel 40:1:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the Lord. And you shall not do any work on that very day [*be-’etsem hayom hazeh*], for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. For whoever is not afflicted on that very day [*be-’etsem hayom hazeh*] shall be cut off from his people. And whoever does any work on that very day [*be-’etsem hayom hazeh*], that person I will destroy from among his people.

Could Ezekiel have had this passage referring to the Day of Atonement in mind when he mentioned, in 40:1, that there was something special about the day, “that very day,” when he saw his vision? In a provocative study of the book of Ezekiel, Risa Levitt Kohn argued that Ezekiel was not only familiar with the book of Leviticus, but he paraphrased it in multiple places in his writing. Although Levitt Kohn basically accepted the Documentary Hypothesis placement of the “priestly” or P sections of the Hebrew Bible, which includes most of the book of Leviticus, as an addition much later than the time of Moses, she nevertheless demonstrated that the hypothesized P source must precede Ezekiel. After citing several passages that show a distinct relationship between the so-called P and Ezekiel, she summarized as follows:

In each of these examples, the direction of influence apparently moves from P to Ezekiel. A term or expression with a positive connotation in P takes on a negative overtone in Ezekiel: the special relationship between Yahweh and Israel (*בְּיָמֵי וּבִינִיכִים*), a Nazirite’s sacred separation to Yahweh becomes Israel’s idolatrous separation away from Yahweh. Ezekiel parodies P language by using terms antithetically. It is virtually impossible to imagine that the Priestly Writer would have composed Israelite history by transforming images of Israel’s apostasy and subsequent downfall from Ezekiel into images conveying the exceptional covenant and unique relationship between Israel and Yahweh.²⁰

Although we need not be bound by the interpretations of those who follow the ever-changing theories of the Documentary Hypothesis, nevertheless for our purposes Levitt Kohn’s study has made one point well: Ezekiel was familiar with the book of Leviticus. That book, therefore, or at least parts of it, was in existence before his writing. That being so, it is not unreasonable to surmise that the otherwise enigmatic “that very day” in Ezekiel 40:1 is taken from the passage in Leviticus, where it is applied three times in five consecutive verses to the Day of Atonement. By itself, this argument may not seem overly convincing, but when combined with the other evidence offered in the present study that Ezekiel associated his vision with the beginning of a Jubilee, and hence on the tenth day of the month

²⁰ Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah*, JSOTSup 358 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 77–78.

Tishri (Lev 25:7), Ezekiel's use of this otherwise puzzling phrase—wrongly construed by Thiele as referring to the start of captivity—lends credence to the idea that Ezekiel saw his vision on the first day of a Jubilee Year, “on the tenth day of the month . . . on that very day.” With this interpretation, the fifth of Ezekiel's time expressions, “on that very day,” agrees with the reasons that will be next addressed, showing that chronological considerations related to the Jubilee indicate that Ezekiel's vision was at the beginning of a Jubilee Year.

II. ACCORDING TO THE BIBLICAL DATES FOR THE EXODUS AND CONQUEST, EZEKIEL WOULD HAVE SEEN HIS VISION AT THE BEGINNING OF A JUBILEE YEAR

1. *The Exodus Era as a technical phrase.* Section I above showed that each of the five temporal expressions that Ezekiel employed to date the time of his eschatological vision was consistent with, and could be interpreted as alluding to, his vision occurring on the first day of a Jubilee Year. If that is the proper interpretation, then the most compelling evidence in favor of this exegesis would be a demonstration that the year beginning in Tishri, 574 BC, was indeed the year when a Jubilee was due. That such was the case was already cited as being stated explicitly in b. 'Arakhin 12a. If it was a Jubilee Year, as b. 'Arakhin 12a says it was, then it follows that Ezekiel's vision was on the tenth of Tishri, since, according to Leviticus 25:8–10, the only time that Rosh HaShanah coincided with the Day of Atonement was the initiation of a Jubilee Year. Although everything in Section I was meant to show the reasonableness of this assumption, based on the analysis of Ezekiel's five temporal phrases, there is another, independent, line of approach that shows that b. 'Arakhin 12a gives the correct understanding of Ezekiel 40:1. That is the chronological argument.

a. *The usefulness to societies, past and modern, of the establishment of an era for the measurement of time.* The calendar of Sabbatical and Jubilee Years could have been used for keeping track of the years over a long period of time, in the same way that the repeating nature of the Olympiads was often used by the Greeks and Romans to date an event. There is a record of such a procedure in the Talmud, b. Sanhedrin 40a, b, where it is related that in the time of the judges the courts made a formal record of an event (a crime or contract) by asking in which Sabbatical cycle of a Jubilee, and in which year of that Sabbatical cycle, the event occurred. Although modern skepticism will doubt that this was done (primarily because of the prevailing prejudice that claims that the Levitical laws were not known as early as the time of the judges), for those who are not convinced of the hypothesis for the late-date invention of everything priestly, the idea would seem both practical and reasonable: Contracts and obligations must be dated in some way, and both the Jubilee/Sabbatical cycles and the Exodus Era would have fulfilled the necessary requirement of any legal system that required contractual relations among the members of society.

b. *The establishment of the Exodus Era.* In Exodus 12:1–2, the Lord instructed Moses and Aaron that the current month, called Nisan after the Babylonian captivity, was to be reckoned as the first month of their calendar. A logical consequence

was that it would also mark year one of a longer-term calendar, such as the previous paragraph showed to be useful to civilizations ancient and modern. Did Israel so reckon? That they did indeed establish an Exodus Era, in which the year the Exodus happened was counted as “year one” of that era, is established by eight texts in the Pentateuch and one text in 1 Kings. These texts are listed in Table 1. Analyzing, or merely considering, these texts should leave no question but that Israel, following the lead of Exodus 12:1–2, had established an era by which to measure the passage of time, thereby providing the necessary timeframe for contracts and the observance of religious festivals. This would include the Jubilee and Sabbatical Years. The usage of that era, the Exodus Era, continued at least until the time of Solomon. It was in his reign that we have the last recorded year-determination in terms of the Exodus Era, when it is said that Solomon began building the temple in the 480th year of the “going-out,” that is, of the Exodus Era. The Hebrew of 1 Kings 6:1, by putting **תצא** in the construct state, necessarily implies that the preceding “480 year” figure is an ordinal number: 479 years had passed since the Exodus, not 480 as erroneously implied by all translations that insert an “after” that is not in the Hebrew text. In this regard, Andrew Steinmann writes regarding 1 Kings 6:1, “The Hebrew expression here indicates that Israel’s Exodus initiated a chronological era in which the Exodus itself occurred in year one of that era, and temple construction began in year 480 of that era, that is, 479 years after the departure from Egypt.”²¹ Thus temple construction began in the 480th year of the Exodus Era, not 480 years after the Exodus.

A suggested way in which modern translators could make it clear to readers that Israel employed era-reckoning, the same way we do with the present Anno Domini system, would be to supply the word “era” in those chronological texts that are expressed in terms of that era. That would better convey the sense in which these verses were understood by their original authors and readers. One way of doing this is suggested in Table 1, where “Era of the Exodus” is capitalized, just as we capitalize the Roman era Anno Urbis Conditaе and our own Anno Domini. Adding the word “Era,” though not strictly in the Hebrew text of these verses, avoids the implication that the Exodus was still going on in phrases like “year two of the going-out (Exodus)” (Num 1:1); the Exodus itself was a one-time event that happened when Israel left Egypt in Nisan of 1446 BC, not an ongoing process.

²¹ Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 46n87. Steinmann then provides this suggested translation of the 1 Kings text: “In the four hundred eightieth year beginning with the year that the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year.”

| Text | Hebrew | Suggested Translation |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Exod 16:1 | וַיִּסְעוּ מֵאֵילִם וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל־עֵדֻת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מִדְבַר־סִין אֲשֶׁר בֵּין־אֵילִם וּבֵין סִינַי בַּחֹמֶשֶׁת עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי לְצֵאתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם | They set out from Elim, and the whole community of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month of the Era of their Exodus from the land of Egypt. |
| Exod 19:1 | בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדְבַר סִינַי: | On the third new moon ²² of the Era of the Exodus of the people of Israel from the land of Egypt, on that day they came to the wilderness of Sinai. |
| Exod 40:17 (implicit) | וַיְהִי בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בַּשָּׁנָה הַשֵּׁנִית בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַיּוֹמָם הַמִּשְׁכָּן: | The tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month of the second year. |
| Num 1:1 | וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי בְּאַהֲל מוֹעֵד בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בַשָּׁנָה הַשֵּׁנִית לְצֵאתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר: | The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month of the second year of the Era of their Exodus from the land of Egypt, saying, |
| Num 9:1 | וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר־סִינַי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשֵּׁנִית לְצֵאתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן לֵאמֹר: | In the second year of the Era of their Exodus from the land of Egypt, in the first month, the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying, |
| Num 10:11 (implicit) | וַיְהִי בַשָּׁנָה הַשֵּׁנִית בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בְּעָשְׂרִים בַּחֹדֶשׁ נִעְלָה הָעַנָּן מֵעַל מִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדֻת: | In the second month of the second year, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud was lifted from the tabernacle of the testimony. |
| Num 33:38 | וַיַּעַל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־הַר הָהָר עַל־פִּי יְהוָה וַיָּמָת שָׁם בַּשָּׁנָה הָאַרְבָּעִים לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּחֹדֶשׁ | At the command of the Lord, Aaron the priest went up on Mount Hor, and he died there. It was the first day of the fifth month in the fortieth year of the Era of the Exodus from the land of Egypt by the people of |

²² The word for “new moon” here is *חֹדֶשׁ*, related to the verb *חָדַשׁ*, to be new or (Piel) to renew. *חֹדֶשׁ* by itself can mean either “month” or “new moon,” the latter being the meaning in 1 Samuel 20:5. The present translation follows the ESV in translating this as referring to the day of the new moon, that is, the first of the month, a rendering that is to be preferred because of the phrase *בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה*, “on this day” in the latter part of the verse.

| | הַחֲמִישִׁי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ: | Israel. |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Deut 1:3 (implicit) | וַיְהִי בְּאַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂתֵּי־עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ אֲלֵהֶם: | In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the Lord had commanded him to say to them. |
| 1 Kgs 6:1 | וַיְהִי בְּשָׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה וָאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם בְּשָׁנָה הָרְבִיעִית בְּחֹדֶשׁ זוֹ הוּא הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי לְמִלְךְ שְׁלֹמֹה עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבֶן הַבַּיִת לַיהוָה: | In the 480th year of the Era of Israel's Exodus from Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord. |

Table 1. Suggested translations of all Bible verses that relate the current year to the time of Israel's departure from Egypt. The purpose of these translations is to convey to the modern reader that Israel measured their years in terms of an era that began with their departure (Exodus), and that this era was intended to be understood in a technical and exact sense.

2. *The time of the Exodus, based on 1 Kings 6:1: Spring, 1446 BC.* The calculation is straightforward: According to 1 Kings 6:1, construction on Solomon's temple began in the month Ziv (later called Iyyar) in Solomon's fourth year. By Judean Tishri-based reckoning, that year began on Tishri 1 of 968 BC, so that the month of Ziv was in the spring of 967 BC.²³ Since Solomon's fourth year was the 480th year of

²³ Young, "When Did Solomon Die?," 589–603, showed that Thiele's years for the reign of Solomon were one year too late, so that his chronology put the start of temple construction in Ziv of 966 rather than Ziv of 967. Thiele established well (*Mysterious Numbers*, 67–78) that the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom occurred at some time in the year that began in Nisan of 931 BC, so that he wrote, "We thus secure the date 931/930 B.C. as the year of Jeroboam's accession and of the schism between Judah and Israel" (p. 78). Notice his inexact notation; he would have done better to write the year in a manner showing whether it was a Nisan-based year or a Tishri-based year, rather than the ambiguous 931/930 that implies our Roman-initiated Julian calendar. Indeed this ambiguous notation seemed to be the source of an error that was to cause him some trouble down the line. Without explaining why, Thiele, having correctly established 931n as the time of Solomon's death, went on to assume that Solomon, whose reign Thiele recognized was according to a Tishri-based calendar, died in the latter half of the year that is expressed as 931n in the Nisan/Tishri notation, with no consideration that it could have been in the first half of that year and still be in 931n. Thiele's unstated assumption then meant that, according to Judah's Tishri-based year, Solomon died in 931t, his fourth year 36 years earlier would have been 967t, putting the start of temple construction in the spring of 966 and the Exodus, 479 years earlier, in 1445. However, Thiele's unstated assumption that Solomon died in the latter half, not the first half, of 931n led to problems in the reign of Jehoshaphat that Thiele attempted to fix in his changes between the second and third editions of *Mysterious Numbers*, but the result was only to move the one-year error down to the time of Athaliah. In his chart on page 101 of *Mysterious Numbers*, Thiele gives Athaliah's final year as 836t, which is (correctly) the accession year of Joash. The trouble is that on page 104, Thiele wrote, "That gave Athaliah a reign of seven years, nonaccession-year reckoning, or six actual years." So six actual years before Athaliah's final year on the chart, 836t, gives 841t for her first full year of reign and 842t for her accession year, but the chart shows Ahaziah dying in 841t instead of in Athaliah's accession year, 842t. This error is avoided when we realize that Thiele's years for Solo-

the Exodus Era (not 480 years *after* the Exodus, as explained above), the Exodus, according to this verse, occurred in 968t BC + 479 = 1447t BC according to a Tishri-based calendar. But since the Bible—and the undeniable celebration of Passover in the spring—indicate that the Exodus took place in Nisan in the spring, as did the entry into Canaan, we have the Exodus in Nisan of 1446 BC and the start of the conquest, 40 years later, in Nisan of 1406. This would also be true if a Nisan-based calendar was used for the Exodus Era; the 480th year of the Exodus Era would then have started in Nisan of 967, one month before start of temple construction in the second month.

3. *The timing of the Sabbatical and Jubilee cycles, based on Leviticus 25:1–3.* Leviticus 25:1–3 says that counting for the Sabbatical Years was to start “when you [Israel] enter the land.” Various schemes do not take this phrase literally, and one of those schemes, the rabbinic, will be considered in the second article in this series. Nevertheless, a straightforward reading would indicate that year one of the first Sabbatical- and Jubilee-Year cycle began in 1406 BC, more specifically on Tishri 1 of that year, since for agricultural purposes and for Sabbatical and Jubilee Years there is general agreement that the year was reckoned to start in Tishri. With this understanding, the first Jubilee would have been observed forty-eight years later, starting in Tishri of 1358 BC (1406t – 48 = 1358t BC), and Jubilees would have been due (even though their stipulations were not observed) every forty-nine years after that. The seventeenth Jubilee would have started 16 x 49 years after the first Jubilee, that is, in 1358t BC – (16 x 49) = 1358t – 784 = 574t BC; more specifically Tishri 10 of that year, *be-'etsem hayom hazeh*. This agrees with the various arguments made in Section I above, that consideration of the text of Ezekiel 40:1, by itself, indicates that Ezekiel saw his vision at the beginning of a Jubilee Year. Ezekiel, as a priest, would have known when Sabbatical and Jubilee Years were due, even though the people were not observing their stipulations.

mon through Athaliah need to be moved back just one year in Judah's Tishri-based calendar. I was gratified to learn that, before his untimely death in 2015, Leslie McFall accepted this correction to Thiele's chronology for Solomon through Athaliah. In an article in *JETS* 52:4, McFall graciously wrote “I am indebted to Rodger Young for this precise dating of the Division; see his essay ‘When Did Solomon Die?’ *JETS* 46 (2003) 599–603” (690n43). It was also gratifying to learn, after my 2003 article was published, that Coucke (*Chronologie Biblique*, col. 1251) had also put Solomon's years of reign one year earlier than Thiele later did, and that Coucke also put the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC instead of Thiele's 586 (*Chronologie Biblique*, col. 1268). My intention in going over these details is not to disparage Thiele, to whom all of us who write in this field owe a great debt of gratitude for solving the basic problems of the Hebrew monarchic period. Thiele's basic success was because he dealt with the complex data of this time by using an inductive (i.e., scientific) method of approach, rather than the deductive method that starts with an assumption and makes everything fit that assumption, as demonstrated in the popular Documentary Hypothesis approach to interpreting the Bible. The purpose of the present footnote, then, is to give credit to Thiele where credit is due and also to show that the one-year adjustment that Coucke and I provide for Thiele's years for Solomon is not a matter of special pleading in order to make the years of the Exodus and Conquest agree exactly with Ezekiel's vision occurring in Tishri of 547 BC. Once we get the chronology correct, it falls out automatically that 574t BC would be a Jubilee Year, the seventeenth.

4. *But was the Jubilee cycle length not fifty years instead of forty-nine, so that the Jubilee Year followed the seventh Sabbatical Year, not coincided with it?* Two arguments are generally used to support a fifty-year cycle: the appeal to Leviticus 25:10, 11, where a fiftieth year is mentioned, and an interpretation of Isaiah 37:30 // 2 Kings 19:29 that refer to two successive years in which the people could not harvest their crops. Before the demonstration that the Isaiah and 2 Kings texts are not properly interpreted as a Sabbatical Year followed by a Jubilee Year, the historical evidence that the Jubilee Year was identical to the seventh Sabbatical must be established. The historical confirmation of this was presented in my 2006 *WTJ* article where evidence was provided from the Book of Jubilees (second century BC), the Qumran sources, and the Samaritan community that the Jubilee cycle was forty-nine years, not fifty.²⁴ In agreement with this, the two most important monographs devoted to the biblical Jubilees are, arguably, those of North and Lefebvre, and both authors agree that the Jubilee cycle was forty-nine years, not fifty. Thus North: “The jubilee is therefore the seventh shemitta [Sabbatical year].”²⁵ Lefebvre argued that the text of Leviticus 25:21–22 does not allow for two fallow years in succession, which would be the case if the Jubilee Year was a separate year following the seventh Sabbatical year.²⁶ Regarding the “fiftieth year” of Leviticus 25:10, 11, he writes, “The method of counting the days for the Feast of Pentecost (Lev 23:15–16) confirms this point of view. Fifty is used as a round number, a multiple of ten.”²⁷

The second argument of those who say that the Jubilee cycle was fifty years comes from an interpretation of the text of Isaiah 37:30 // 2 Kings 19:29 (ESV):

And this shall be the sign for you: this year you shall eat what grows of itself [*sāpiah*], and in the second year what springs from that [*sāhiš*]. Then in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit.

It is granted that these texts speak of two fallow years in succession. But there is an obvious explanation of why there was no harvesting in year one: the Assyrians had taken the crops of that year for their own use, and whatever they did not need they would have destroyed in order to afflict those they were besieging with hunger, a practice of aggressors that continues to the present day. If we assume consistency in the Bible, this first year of no harvest could not have been a Sabbatical Year, because the “what grows of itself” that the people were allowed to eat in the first year is expressed by the Hebrew word *sāpiah*. But the harvesting of the *sāpiah* is forbidden for a Sabbatical Year in Leviticus 25:5. Allowed food for a Sabbatical Year is “the Sabbath produce of the land” (Lev 25:6), which apparently answers to

²⁴ Young, “Talmud’s Two Jubilees,” 75, 76.

²⁵ Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, AnBib 4 (Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 1954), 185.

²⁶ Jean-François Lefebvre, *Le jubilé biblique: Lv 25—exégèse et théologie*, OBO 194 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 158.

²⁷ Lefebvre, *Jubilé biblique*, 157. Also North, *Sociology*, 110: “We shall show how several convergent lines of evidence indicate that the *forty-ninth* year is intended, for which fiftieth is used as a round number.” North also appeals to Leviticus 23:16 (p. 131), as does Lefebvre, in explaining the “fiftieth year” of Leviticus 25:10–11.

“what grows of itself” (Heb. *sāhiš* in 2 Kings 19:29, spelled *šāhis* in Isaiah 37:30) that the people could eat in the second year of the Isaiah and 2 Kings texts. In the first year, the crop was devastated by the Assyrians, but the only reason for not sowing and harvesting after the Assyrians left would have been because that second year was a Sabbatical Year. These passages therefore do not speak of a Sabbatical Year followed by a Jubilee Year, despite the seemingly innumerable “discoveries” of a Jubilee Year here that are presented on the Web. A discussion of how the second year of Isaiah 37:30 and 2 Kings 19:29 fits with the calendar of Jubilee and Sabbatical Years that began in 1406t BC will be deferred to the second article in this series. For present purposes, however, it was essential to establish that the Jubilee cycle was forty-nine years, and the Jubilee Year coincided with the seventh Sabbatical Year.

III. CONCLUSION: WHY IS ALL THIS IMPORTANT?

The main issues addressed in the present study may be summarized as (1) establishing the correct date of the vision of chapters 40–48 of Ezekiel as Tishri 10 of 574 BC; (2) showing that several considerations are consistent with that date being the first day of a Jubilee Year; and (3) proposing the proper interpretation of the nine Exodus Era verses in the Bible, demonstrating in particular that each of these verses was meant to be understood in a technical and exact sense. There seems little doubt that these three points will be challenged, or, judging by the experience of the past twenty years, more commonly simply ignored by those who deny the historicity of a fifteenth-century Exodus. The problem for such scholars is that, if the Exodus Era is a genuine concept and time-keeping scheme that carried down to the time of Solomon, and if the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years really did begin in 1406 BC, consistent with Ezekiel 40:1, then two independent lines of evidence establish that the Exodus occurred in 1446 BC. Why has there not been any demonstration given by those who disagree with this conclusion, showing how these two chronological calculations are not really independent in their witness? Is it simply easier to ignore addressing the issue because any serious attempt to explain this coincidence might require a revision in one’s view of the inspiration, and date of composition, of the first chapters of the Bible? Currently there has not been a well-reasoned attempt to explain the agreement of the date of the Exodus as 1446 BC, as derived from 1 Kings 6:1, with the calendar of Jubilee and Sabbatical Years. Instead, critics of the idea that Ezekiel 40:1 refers to the start of a Jubilee Year, thus supporting the Bible’s chronology for a fifteenth-century-BC Exodus, address side issues such as whether the overall rabbinical chronology given in the Talmudim and the earlier Seder ‘Olam can be trusted.

But there is an even more serious consequence for the world of biblical interpretation for those who deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. It is almost universally agreed among such scholars that the so-called “priestly” or P portions of the Hebrew Bible are among the last portions to be written. Even Levitt Kohn’s demonstration that P or most of it had to be written before the time of Ezekiel was quite a blow to those who held this position. There is also fairly common agree-

ment that the regulations of the Jubilee and Sabbatical Years are taken from the book of Leviticus. But if the counting of those years started in 1406 BC, the logical implication is that the book of Leviticus, and probably the whole of the Pentateuch, was in existence in 1406 BC. It is this conclusion that apparently must be avoided at all costs by those who deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. It would seem that those who hold such a view should present an explanation of why the chronology of 1 Kings 6:1 and the chronology of the Sabbatical/Jubilee Years agree so exactly, as explained above and will be explained more fully in the forthcoming Part 2.