

Answer to Dr. Leslie McFall's Critique of 'The Time of the End'

Part 3 – The 50-Year Jubilee Cycle

By Tim Warner | June 2014

Dr. McFall denies my view that the Jubilee year was a full year (12 months) that entirely followed the previous full 49 years, being truly the "50th year."

"It is assumed that because Leviticus 25:8-10 refers to keeping the fiftieth year holy that this included the whole of that year. However, the Hebrew year began in April (on 1 Nisan) for all purposes and ran from April to April. This is the standard calendar year set by God when Israel came out of Egypt. However, the agricultural year ran from September to September, so that it overlapped two calendar years, the 49th and the 50th years. The months of the Sabbatical year are always numbered according to the calendar year, that is, from Nisan. Sabbatical years are embedded within the calendar year in much the same way that the tax year in some Western countries is embedded within the normal, calendar year. There was not a separate civil calendar running side by side with the religious calendar in Israel, with a six-month difference between their commencements. There was only one calendar. Ignorance of this fact has misled many budding chronologists to assume that there were two consecutive Sabbatical years at the end of the Jubilee cycle; one was the 49th and the other was the 50th year. TW did not realize, or understand, that years are always calendar years, and so the Jubilee year itself would have straddled the second half of the 49th year (September to April) and the first half of the 50th year (April to September). One can excuse a first-time reader assuming that 'the fiftieth year' meant a full year, but it is inexcusable to find this error in a biblical scholar."¹

One would have to conclude that Dr. McFall considers the majority of Jewish rabbis and scholars "first time readers." It must also be "inexcusable" for them to hold the view that Dr. McFall seeks to undermine. Here is what the Jewish Encyclopedia has to say on the subject of the 50th year's relation to the 49 years.

*"There is a difference of opinion in the Talmud as to whether the jubilee year was included in or excluded from the forty-nine years of the seven cycles. **The majority of rabbis hold that the jubilee year was an intercalation, and followed the seventh Sabbatical year, making two fallow years in succession. After both had passed,***

¹ p. 11

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the next cycle began. They adduce this theory from the plain words of the Law to "hallow the fiftieth year," and also from the assurance of God's promise of a yield in the sixth year sufficient for maintenance during the following three years, "until the ninth year, until her fruits come in" (Lev. xxv. 22), which, they say, refers to the jubilee year. Judah ha-Nasi, however, contends that the jubilee year was identical with the seventh Sabbatical year (R. H. 9a; Giṭ. 36a; comp. Rashi ad loc.). The opinion of the Geonim and of later authorities generally prevails, **that the jubilee, when in force during the period of the First Temple, was intercalated,** but that in the time of the Second Temple, when the jubilee was observed only "nominally," it coincided with the seventh Sabbatical year. In post-exilic times the jubilee was entirely ignored, though the strict observance of the shemittah was steadily insisted upon. This, however, is only according to a rabbinical enactment (Tos. to Giṭ. 36a, s.v. "Bizeman"), as by the Mosaic law, according to R. Judah, shemittah is dependent on the jubilee and ceases to exist when there is no jubilee (Giṭ. l.c. and Rashi ad loc.). That the Sabbatical year was observed during the existence of the Second Temple is evident from the history of the Maccabees (I Macc. vi. 51, 55). The Mishnah includes in the examination of witnesses questions as to dates, in giving which there must be specified the Sabbatical year, the year, month, week, day, and hour (Sanh. v. 1)." ²

We must also add to the list of those Dr. McFall considers "first time readers" the editors of the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. Their "inexcusable" opinion is as follows:

*"The Jubilee Year, being the crowning point of all sabbatical institutions, gave the finishing touch as it were to the whole cycle of sabbatic days, months and years. It is, therefore, quite appropriate that it should be a year of rest for the land like the preceding sabbatic year (Lev_25:11 f). **It follows, of course, that in this instance there were two years, one after the other, in which there should be no sowing or systematic ingathering.**"³*

Not to be left out of the company of "first time readers" are the editors of the Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament. Their "inexcusable" opinion is as follows:

*"It is quite evident from Lev_25:21 and Lev_25:22, according to which the sixth year was to produce enough for three years, and the sowing for the ninth was to take place in the eighth, that **not only the year of jubilee, but the sabbatical year also, commenced in the autumn,** when they first began to sow for the coming year; **so that the sowing***

² <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8943-jubilee> (bold and underline mine)

³ ISBE, Jubilee Year Article

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was suspended from the autumn of the sixth year till the autumn of the seventh, and even till the autumn of the eighth, whenever the jubilee year came round, in which case both sowing and reaping were omitted for two years in succession, and consequently the produce of the sixth year, which was harvested in the seventh month of that year, must have sufficed for three years, not merely till the sowing in the autumn of the eight or fiftieth year, but till the harvest of the ninth or fifty-first year, as the Talmud and Rabbins of every age have understood the law."⁴

In order for the Jubilee to be the "50th year" it must follow the "49th year." And in order for the "49th year" to actually be a "year" it must have 12 months, not six months as is the case in Dr. McFall's scheme.

Not only does Dr. McFall disagree with all of these "first time readers," but it is apparent that he is using a double standard. He argues that the "calendar year" always begins in the Spring. Yet, in his own work on the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah he acknowledged that the calendar year for kings of Judah was autumn to autumn.

*"First, Israel and Judah did not use the same calendar. The New Year began in September (Tishri) in Judah, but in Nisan (March/April) in Israel. Because their New Year's days were six months apart this will often account for the synchronisms between them being one year out."*⁵

Dr. McFall has no problem arguing for two distinct, overlapping calendars 6 months apart when it suits him. Yet, he claims just the opposite in his critique of my work: "There was not a separate civil calendar running side by side with the religious calendar in Israel, with a six-month difference between their commencements. There was only one calendar."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains the truth of the matter, and how the two overlapping calendars worked:

*"The year (שָׁנָה, *shānāh*) originally began in the autumn, as appears from Exo_23:16 and Exo_34:22, where it is stated that the feast of Ingathering should be at the end of the year; the Sabbatic year began, also, in the 7th month of the calendar year (Lev_25:8-10), indicating that this had been the beginning of the year. This seems to have been a reckoning for civil purposes, while the year beginning with Nīṣān was for ritual and*

⁴ Keil & Delitzsch Commentary, Lev. 25:20-22 (bold & underline mine)

⁵ McFall, Leslie, Has the Chronology of the Hebrew Kings been finally settled? p. 6
<http://lmf12.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/themelios.pdf>

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*sacred purposes. This resulted from the fact that the great feast of the Passover occurred in this month and the other feasts were regulated by this, as we see from such passages as Exo_23:14-16 and Dt 16:1-17. Josephus (Ant., I, iii, 3) says: "Moses appointed that Nīṣān, which is the same with Xanthicus, should be the first month of their festivals, because he brought them out of Egypt in that month; so that this month began the year as to all solemnities they observed to the honor of God, although he preserved the original order of the months as to selling and buying and other ordinary affairs." A similar custom is still followed in Turkey, where the Mohammedan year is observed for feasts, the pilgrimage to Mecca and other sacred purposes, while the civil year begins in March O.S."*⁶

The Jewish Encyclopedia explains that the original calendar year was from autumn to autumn, and this continued as the means of reckoning the reigns of the kings.

"In the earliest times the Hebrew year began in autumn with the opening of the economic year. There followed in regular succession the seasons of seed-sowing, growth and ripening of the corn under the influence of the former and the latter rains, harvest and ingathering of the fruits. In harmony with this was the order of the great agricultural festivals, according to the oldest legislation, namely, the feast of unleavened bread at the beginning of the barley harvest, in the month of Abib; the feast of harvest, seven weeks later; and the feast of ingathering at the going out or turn of the year (; see Ex. xxiii. 14-17; xxxiv. 18, 22-23; Deut. xvi. 1-16).

"This system of dating the New-Year is that which was adopted by the Semites generally, while other peoples, as the Greeks and Persians, began the year in spring, both methods of reckoning being primarily agricultural and based on the seasons of seed-time and harvest.

"The regnal year was evidently reckoned in the same way as late as the end of the seventh century B.C. This is evident from the account of the eighteenth year of King Josiah, in which only by such a reckoning can sufficient time be allowed for the events of that year which precede the celebration of the Passover, assuming, of course, that the Passover was celebrated at the usual time in the spring (II Kings xxii. 3, xxiii. 21-23). Only in the same way can the fourth year of Jehoiakim be made to synchronize with the twenty-first year of Nabopolassar, in which the battle of Carchemish was fought, and also with the first year of Nebuchadrezzar, the Babylonian year having been reckoned from the spring (Jer. xxv. 1, xlvi. 2). The second half of the Hebrew year would thus correspond to the first half of the Babylonian year. In Ezek. xl. 1 the prophet has his vision at the beginning of the year, apparently in the month of Tishri. The Levitical law places the beginning of

⁶ ISBE, Article on "Calendar"

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*the Sabbatical year in the autumn, on the tenth day of the seventh month, according to the later reckoning (Lev. xxv. 9). It has been pointed out also that the story of the Flood places the beginning of the deluge on the seventeenth day of the second month, which would, on an autumn reckoning, coincide with the beginning of the rainy season (Gen. vii. 11; Josephus, "Ant." i. 3, § 3)."*⁷

The regular calendar year was always from autumn to autumn. However, for the purposes of calculating the seven Feasts of God, they were to reckon the month of the first Passover as the "first month." This numbering of months, however, was exclusively for holy convocations, and was intended to keep the seven feasts in the correct order because they tell a prophetic story that must be told in order. The Passover and firstfruits celebrations (which speak prophetically of Christ's death and resurrection)⁸ must be viewed first before the autumn Feasts of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot (which speak prophetically of Christ's second coming and Kingdom). If God did not tell Moses to reckon Nisan to be the first month for calculating the Feasts, then they would symbolically portray Christ's second coming and Kingdom before his death and resurrection. Thus, counting Nisan (Abib - April) as the first month was only for this purpose, not to completely reorder the entire calendar. The autumn to autumn (Tishri to Tishri) original calendar – the one used by Moses to date Noah's flood and all of the Genesis genealogies – was used for everyday civil affairs, including the agricultural year and the reigns of the kings of Judah.⁹

One of my main proofs that the 50th year followed the end of the 49 year cycle was Isaiah's record of a Sabbatical year followed by a Jubilee year in the 14th and 15th years of Hezekiah. *"This shall be a sign to you: You shall eat this year such as grows of itself, And the second year what springs from the same; Also in the third year sow and reap, Plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them."*¹⁰ In this instance, as a sign to Hezekiah, God restored the

⁷ Jewish Encyclopedia, New Year Article

⁸ 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Cor. 15:20,23

⁹ Dr. McFall, in supporting the work of Edwin R. Thiele in dating the kings, insists that the autumn to autumn year was used in the southern kingdom of Judah, but a spring to spring calendar was used in the northern kingdom of Israel. Nothing in Scripture directly indicates that the northern kingdom ever used a spring to spring calendar. This is a scheme used by Thiele to try to bring forced harmony between the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel and align the secular dates. However, the new spring to spring calendar adopted at the time of the exodus was clearly intended for calculating all the Feasts, when all males were required to return to Jerusalem to worship three times a year. It was a special calendar for use by the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem. Yet, when the dispute over Solomon's successor began, and the northern kingdom split away from Judah, Jeroboam immediately abandoned all Temple worship at Jerusalem, the Levitical priesthood, and all of the festivals delivered by Moses. Jeroboam instituted his own sacred feast in November (1 Kings 12:25-33). In order to consolidate his power over the northern kingdom, he did everything in his power to keep his people from observing the sacred year (spring to spring). Why then would his government use that very calendar to date his reign and the kings that followed him? It seems that Dr. McFall is simply juggling his calendars in whatever way suits his purposes at the moment.

¹⁰ Isa. 37:30

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promise of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years which had been abandoned, that they would eat of what grows of itself in the Sabbatical year, and also in the following (50th) Jubilee year, and then in the year after that they would resume planting and harvesting.¹¹ This demonstrates that the original promise in Lev. 25 required that the Jubilee year follow the 49th year, proving a 50-year cycle. Dr. McFall did not deal with this proof.

Dr. McFall claims that Josephus supports a 49-year Jubilee cycle, but that statement is simply not true. Josephus never mentioned any Jubilee years or Jubilee cycle being observed. In fact, there is no record in secular history or the Bible of the celebration of any Jubilee years after the one during Hezekiah's reign. As the Jewish encyclopedia explains, the intercalation of the 50th year was abandoned in the second Temple era. This completely explains Josephus' chronological statements which show unbroken Sabbatical cycles with no observance of Jubilee years. Failing to intercalate the Jubilee 50th year does not prove a "49-year Jubilee cycle" was observed. Rather, a continuous stream of Sabbatical cycles remained that was no longer interrupted. Dr. McFall has misrepresented Josephus.

Some might wonder why the Jubilee intercalation of the 50th year was stopped in practice after the Davidic dynasty was disbanded by Nebuchadnezzar. The reason is simple: Israel and Judah were never again self-ruling. They were under the dominion of the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Syrians, and finally the Romans. While some of these powers allowed the Jews to observe their Sabbatical cycle, and thus not tax them on the 7th year because they had no produce, the intercalation of a "50th year" would not permit the taxation tables (free year every 7th year) to continue after 7 cycles. Also, the Jubilee law required the transfer of ownership of all lands back to their original owners. Yet, when the land was under foreign control, all land rights were subject to the foreign governments. Besides, how could they blow the Jubilee trumpet and "proclaim liberty" throughout all the land on Yom Kippur of the 50th year when they were being ruled by a foreign power? There was no "liberty" to be proclaimed.

¹¹ Some might suppose that these cannot be Sabbatical and Jubilee years because here God said they would eat "what grows of itself," yet God told them not to harvest the produce that grew on its own in His Sabbatical – Jubilee instructions: "You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land" (Lev 25:4-5). Yet the very next verse says: "And **the sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you**: for you, your male and female servants, your hired man, and the stranger who dwells with you, for your livestock and the beasts that are in your land — **all its produce shall be for food.**" (vss. 6-7). The prohibition was not against eating the food that grew of itself, but against farming (planting and harvesting it for storage). "Rest" meant no work of farming. On the other hand, taking produce from the field freely as needed to eat was part of what God instructed them to do on the Sabbatical years: "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, **that the poor of your people may eat**; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove" (Ex 23:10-11). The Sabbath year was a free-food year. Anyone could take as much as he wanted from any field. But the farmers were forbidden from planting or harvesting their crops into storehouses.

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Such a thing would bring an immediate and harsh response by the ruling government. Thus, in reality, once Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the Davidic dynasty disbanded, and the Jews were then continuously forced to live under foreign rule, the Jubilee cycle was simply impossible to keep and was completely abandoned. Josephus' chronology does not support a 49-year Jubilee cycle. It only supports a continuous stream of uninterrupted Sabbath years.

That the 50th year of Jubilee follows after the full completion of 49 years (seven full weeks of years) has its own prototype or microcosm in the Feast of Pentecost. Notice the similarity of language:

Pentecost:

*"And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD."*¹²

Jubilee:

*"And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. ... And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; ... That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you."*¹³

The 50th day (Pentecost) was the day following the 7th Sabbath. It did not overlap the Sabbath, but was distinct from it. So it is with the "50th year" of Jubilee. It is a distinct year following the seven Sabbatical cycles, rounding out the 49 years to an even 50.

The Jubilee calendar was instituted by God. It was God's own calendar which He shared with Israel through Moses. When He began to lay out the various requirements related to the calendar in Leviticus 23 – 25, He said, *"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, **these are My feasts.**'"*¹⁴ The very first "holy convocation" listed in the following verses was the weekly observance of the Sabbath day. In Exodus, God said it was *"a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."*¹⁵ It is evident from such language that God was inviting Israel to join Him in celebrating His own calendar. After giving them the

¹² Lev. 23:15-16

¹³ Lev. 25:8-11

¹⁴ Lev. 23:2

¹⁵ Exod. 31:17

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festivals, God then gave the instructions for the Sabbatical years and Jubilee years. It should not be surprising that the Sabbatical – Jubilee Calendar is God’s own calendar.

If the 120 Jubilee chronology shows anything, it is that God has chosen to intervene in Israel’s history, “proclaiming liberty,” on critical Jubilee years on His own calendar:

- the birth of Abraham in the 40th Jubilee
- the birth of Isaac (the child of promise) in the 42nd Jubilee
- the exodus in the 50th Jubilee (a Jubilee of Jubilees)
- the release from 70 years of exile in the 70th Jubilee

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a God of order. All previous chronologies that rely on a mixture of secular and biblical chronological data produce nothing but chaos and randomness. There is no pattern, order, symmetry, or beauty in those chronologies. The 120-Jubilee chronology, however, displays a God of order and precision. It announces that He alone is guiding Israel’s history for His own purposes. It also says something very profound about His nature. What man does is chaotic. But God’s intervention in human history is with precision. Within the chronological data in the Bible we find these two separate streams: The history of Israel in rebellion against God has no order or symmetry to it. But when God intervenes in human history according to His calendar there is precision and symmetry. God has used His own Jubilee year to “reset” history several times, bringing His own people back into synchronization with His calendar. He did this at the exodus. He did it again when Joshua and all Israel first began to observe the Jubilee cycle after defeating the Canaanites. He did it again in Hezekiah’s 15th year. And He did it again with the decree of Cyrus, while at the same time providing the countdown on His Jubilee calendar to the coming of the Messiah. Each time, Israel failed to keep God’s calendar. As soon as they stopped intercalating the Jubilee years, their calendar lost synchronization with God’s calendar. But God has not lost track of time. He is about to intervene again with the greatest Jubilee of all.