

The Seder Olam

Interestingly, the Orthodox rabbis (and even the Karaites) do not determine their chronology by the record found in the Tanach. Rather, the rabbis determine time based upon Orthodox rabbinic custom, as recorded in a book called the 'Seder Olam.'

The name 'Seder Olam' translates approximately to 'The Order of Eternity.' Scholars do not agree as to exactly when the Seder Olam was written. However, it is dated to approximately 169 CE, or some 136 years after Yeshua's death and resurrection.

Most scholars agree that the Seder Olam is not accurate, and that it was written to justify the rabbinical position that Yeshua was not the Messiah. But how did this come about? And how does the Seder Olam allegedly justify the rabbinical position that Yeshua is the Messiah?

About Simon Bar Kochba

Since they also study prophecy, the rabbis were aware that the Messiah was supposed to be born in the Hebrew year 4000 (0 CE). However, the Jewish conception of a messiah is that of a great military leader, who vanquishes the enemies of Israel, and brings the lost and scattered of Israel back to the Torah. Since Yeshua did not throw off the Roman army, and since many misunderstood His teachings that the rabbinical customs were not part of the Torah, the rabbis did not see how Yeshua could be the prophesied messiah. For this reason, they looked for a great military leader to come.

In 133 CE (i.e., in the original Hebrew calendar year 4133), some 100 years (+/-) after Yeshua Messiah's death, burial and resurrection, there was a man by the name of Shimon ben Cosiba. Shimon ben Cosiba's name was later changed to Shimon Bar Kochba (Simon, son of the star) due to the rabbinical belief that he was the messianic fulfillment of Numbers 24:17.

***Bemidbar (Numbers) 24:17
17 "I see Him, but not now;
I behold Him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,
And batter the brow of Moab,
And destroy all the sons of tumult.***

When the Romans outlawed physical circumcision and forbade the Jews to come to Jerusalem more than one day a year, the Jews rose up in violent protest. Shimon ben Cosiba unified the Jewish forces, bringing them together as one army. Shimon ben Cosiba then won several key decisive military battles against the Romans. So great was the Jewish revolt, and so great were the Roman losses that the Romans committed twelve Roman legions against the Jews, which constituted something like a third to a half of the Roman military at that time. Even with all of these forces, the Romans were badly outnumbered, and took heavy losses. Therefore they resorted to a 'scorched earth' policy that eventually eroded the Jews' ability to fight.

Rabbi Akiva declared that Simon Bar Kochba (Simon Cosiba) was the Messiah, because he was successfully throwing the Romans off. However, since the rabbis were aware that the Messiah was supposed to be born in the year 4000 (0 CE), the rabbis decreed that 240 years had to be subtracted from the Jewish calendar to make it look like Shimon ben Cosiba (Simon Bar Kochba) fit the prophecies over the Messiah.

The details are complex, but by subtracting 240 years out of the calendar, the rabbis hoped to make it look like Simon Bar Kochba was fulfilling Daniel's seventieth week prophecy of Messiah's coming (9:24-27). The year changed from 4133 to 3893 overnight.

Somewhat astonishingly, modern Judaism acknowledges that the Seder Olam is inaccurate. Under the heading 'Seder Olam,' the Encyclopedia Judaica tells us that there is some "significant confusion" in the author's calculations, including several places where the amount of time attributed to the 'Persian Period' was 'compressed' from ten kingships, to just four.

"Yose b. Halafta, the presumed author of Seder Olam Rabbah, probably had access to old traditions that also underlay the chronological computations of the Jewish Hellenistic chronographer Demetrius (third century B.C.E.). The most significant confusion in Yose's calculation is the compression of the Persian period, from the rebuilding of the Temple by Zerubbabel in 516 B.C.E. to the conquest of Persia by Alexander (331 B.C.E.) to no more than 34 years."

What is the Encyclopedia Judaica saying?

Historians tell us that the 'Persian Period' lasted approximately 185 years, and spanned ten kingships. It started in 516 BCE, and lasted until the conquest of Judea by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE. This equates to 185 years. In contrast, the Seder Olam tells us that the Persian Period lasted only 34 years, which is 151 years short of the real total.

516 BCE Start of the Persian Period (Persian control)

-331 BCE Alexander the Great ended the Persian Period (Persian control)

=151 Years difference between the actual history, and the Seder Olam

This is just one example of the kinds of 'compressions' and 'inaccuracies' found in the Seder Olam.

In essence, the author of the Seder Olam subtracted a number of years from the Persian Period, and from other historical periods, to subtract 240 years from the overall chronology, thus making it look like Simon bar Kochba fit the prophecies over the Messiah better than Yeshua did.

Simon Bar Kochba was ultimately forced out of Jerusalem, and he was defeated by the Romans, and killed. Ironically, even though he was proven to be a false messiah, the rabbis still refuse to correct the 240 year subtraction, probably because they still feel it is important to make it appear as if Yeshua (who had also been killed) was/is not the prophesied Messiah.

May YHWH restore the true calendar to His people, soon and in our day.