CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 THE JEWISH 364-DAY CALENDAR TRADITION

The Jewish sources which attest to the 364-day year form a quite coherent and continuous tradition. While such an assertion does not ignore the considerable changes and modifications which took place during the various stages of the tradition, it does suggest that the former need to be viewed from the proper perspective—namely, as the natural outcome of a living process.

The various Jewish sources which refer to the 364DY are unified by prominent thematic threads, already present to a large extent in 1 Enoch 82. These include:

1. The hierarchy of time, the various time periods of which are led by supernatural “leaders”—whether stars, angels, or priests.

2. The fourfold-division of the year and the importance of the cardinal days. This concept remains central, despite differing views regarding the exact position of the cardinal days within the yearly ephemeris.

3. The septenary structure of the year and of related phenomena.

The Jewish 364DY is an essentially schematic year. Jewish authors and scholars found it particularly attractive due to the septenary order it imposed on the course of time. On the one hand, apocalyptic thinkers sought to ground the harmony of the cosmos within an eternal and divinely-ordained scheme. On the other, halakhic practitioners were concerned with preventing the Jewish festivals and sacrifices from falling on the Sabbath day. As these two interests coalesced in the communities related to Qumran (the Damascus covenanters and the yahad), the 364DY gained increasing prominence. This development helps explain why the Dead Sea Scrolls constitute the earliest literary attestation for counting the days of the week—much earlier than any references found in other Jewish writings. When the septenary scheme was eventually linked to priestly motifs via its
association with the mišmarot cycle, it corresponded perfectly with the interests of the sect dwelling at Qumran.

Rather than any count of lunar phases or other astronomical elements, the 364DY became normative primarily due to its convenient schematic structure. Despite the centrality of astronomical calculations in the Scrolls—as well as in the present book—the calendrical principles noted above were held in too high regard to permit any change in actual practice. Nor did any fixed mechanism of intercalation exist in the 364-day calendar tradition. Modern scholars have frequently assumed that the lunar texts from Qumran, in particular, indicate ideological and halakhic differences within the 364DCT. However, even had a certain author devised a new theory of lunar visibility or cycle of priestly courses, instituted a new festival, or presented the yearly account in a different literary genre, such an action would have affected neither the principles underlying the year nor the essential unity of the practices which it dictated.

Furthermore, the 364-day calendar—constructed according to the above-mentioned principles—constituted the exclusive normative system for all the authors who dealt with it. Whatever lunar calculation is promulgated in the Scrolls, no competing lunar calendar, which would have changed the calendrical practice, is attested at any point.

7.2 THE COMPOSITION OF AB

The earliest Jewish document to include an explicit depiction of the 364DY is the Astronomical Book, which was later incorporated into 1 Enoch. While this text parallels the models of traditional Mesopotamian astronomy quite closely, it also exhibits concrete Jewish traits. The earliest textual witness for AB is the Aramaic composition we have termed here the “Expanded Model of Lunar Visibility” (EMLV; formerly named the “Synchronistic Calendar” by Milik), attested in 4Q208 and parts of 4Q209. Although this composition contains most of the astronomical elements of the scientific worldview of AB, it does not include them all. Thus, for example, the EMLV does not indicate the length of daytime and night time, nor does it supply detailed information concerning the sun’s position on the horizon, measured by the system of twelve heavenly gates. The latter two elements are fully explicated in 1 Enoch 72,