

EZRA-NEHEMIAH



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Chapter 1

The Historical Context for Ezra's Return

In Ezra 7 a large caravan of people led by Ezra leaves Babylon and returns to Judea under the sponsorship of King Artaxerxes.¹ This fact seems understandable enough. In an earlier generation the ancestors of these Jews had been taken forcibly from their homeland. That they would now want to return causes no surprise.

But curiously we have no evidence that either they or Ezra ever asked to return. There is no passage in the book of Ezra comparable to Neh 1:4-2:10.² This fact is all the more notable when we consider that Ezra lived some 220 miles (350 kilometers) from the Persian capital of Susa and had no contact with the king.³ Nevertheless Ezra was granted a number of economic privileges (Ezra 7:13-24) and a position of civil authority (vss. 25-26), and could have had a guard of soldiers if he had not turned it down (Ezra 8:22). Nehemiah, on the other hand, lived in the capital and saw the king personally on a regular basis. When Nehemiah made his request to return at a later time he took his life in his hands by

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doing so and felt fortunate to have his request granted (Neh 2:1-6). It is as though, in Ezra's case, the desire of the Jews to return was exceeded by Artaxerxes' desire to send them. We are left to assume on the basis of what Ezra 7 says that Artaxerxes had his own reasons for wanting the Jewish return not only to occur but to meet with success. This fact is not immediately understandable. It requires explanation.

Two questions that arise are: First, what reasons would Artaxerxes I have had for wanting to send a Jewish deputation back to its ancestral homeland in 457 BC? And second, granting now that he had his reasons, why should Ezra be the man chosen to lead such a group? The additional matter of explaining the king's reasons for withdrawing his support after it was once given (Ezra 4) must be reserved for a later paper.

Ezra and Artaxerxes

There were two kings named Artaxerxes. If Ezra came to Jerusalem before Nehemiah, his return occurred under Artaxerxes I Longaminus (465-424) in 457.⁴ If he came after Nehemiah, his return occurred under Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404-359) in 398.⁵ It should be clear that whether there was no Ezra at all, or whether he lived and came to Jerusalem but did so in 398 rather than 457, the text of Nehemiah would be unacceptable because in either case contact between the two men is precluded, whereas the face value evidence of the book of Nehemiah is that they were contemporaries (Neh 8:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, [18]; 12:26, 33, 36).

In my view Ezra returned under Artaxerxes I and the text of both books is correct just as it reads. I do not, however, set out to prove this assertion. What I show is that a number of important insights follow from this starting point. It would be circular to argue from the assumption to the truth of the assumption, but it is not circular to point out that a single coherent solution to a set of seemingly unrelated problems follows from a given starting point. I submit that the value of a theory must be measured by the number and quality of insights that accepting it makes possible. If this is the case, then the theory that Ezra and Nehemiah both mean exactly what they say has considerable value.

A paper that has materially influenced my thinking on this topic is “The Political Role of Ezra as Persian Governor,” by Othniel Margalith.⁶ Below, following Margalith, I suggest that it would be entirely reasonable for a Persian king to send a deputation of Jews to Judea shortly after 460, since in that year a revolt broke out in Egypt. Judea shares a common border with Egypt and the king did not want it to join the revolt. The natural momentum of a revolt starting in Egypt and spreading to Judea would be northward into Phoenicia. Persia was at war with Greece at this time and relied on Phoenician ships and naval expertise to control Cyprus and the southern coast of Anatolia. Without Phoenician sailors and shipwrights there could be no Persian presence among the Aegean islands opposite the Greek mainland. Artaxerxes had every reason for wanting to confine his Egyptian problems to Egypt. He did not want them to spread. And so he attempted to show himself well disposed toward the Jews. He needed them and at this juncture they needed him. It was an uneasy relationship but for both parties it was a necessary one.⁷

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The king clearly had his own political motives for wanting to secure Jewish support between 460 and 454 and we must understand what these motives were if we wish to understand the actions that followed from them. As for Ezra, I suggest that he was chosen to head the king’s delegation because he already occupied a senior statesman role within the Jewish community of Babylon and would be sure to command the respect of fellow Jews anywhere he went.

One does not achieve such stature in a day. The fact seems obvious and yet its implications have not figured in previous discussions of Ezra’s return. There is a reason for this. If Ezra approached the king, his age would not be a factor. If, on the other hand, the king approached Ezra, choosing him to administer certain privileges and honors because of his acknowledged status among Jews, it is unlikely that he would have been a young man.⁸ In this event, another part of the story that takes on special significance is the fact that Ezra came from a major city of the realm (Ezra 7:9). Artaxerxes was attempting to pick a prominent man from a prominent city to perform this important task.⁹

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How old was Ezra when he set out from Babylon in chap.7? Unfortunately we are not told. But a correct answer to this question will help us answer a number of others. It explains, for example, how Ezra could occupy such an important leadership role in Jerusalem early in the reign of Artaxerxes I and yet be politically invisible compared to Nehemiah some thirteen years later. It also explains why Ezra figures as he does in honorary roles at the celebration of the Day of Atonement in Neh 8 and at the dedication of the wall in Neh 12. I suggest that Ezra was already an older man when he left Babylon. How old I cannot say, but old enough that the thirteen additional years between 457 and 444 took him beyond the point where an active life in public affairs was practical for him. If my hypothesis is correct, then some of the things that have puzzled us most in such chapters as Ezra 7 and Neh 3, 8, and 12 make perfectly clear sense just as they read. The problem is not that these chapters say what they do but that we have not understood them.

Why Did Artaxerxes Send Anyone to Judea in 457 BC?

When Xerxes died, approximately August 4-8, 465, there was a period of uncertainty about the succession. One evidence of this is the fact that following Tishri 1 of that year Jewish scribes in Egypt continued dating their documents to the reign of Xerxes, despite the fact that he had died, because they did not know for sure who would replace him and did not want to make an incorrect guess.¹⁰

In a difficult situation he [Artaxerxes] showed creditable energy. Within six months Artabanus, his father's murderer, had been removed, and by 462 he had crushed his brother Hystaspes in Bactria. But, while the position in Persia was still unsettled, Egypt seized the opportunity to revolt.¹¹

The revolt of Egypt was led by a Lybian named Inaros. It began in 460 and lasted six years until 554. Thus, Ezra's return came precisely midway through the revolt. When the new revolutionary government came to power it needed all the allies it could get and so immediately appealed to Athens for military help. Note that the appeal was to Athens rather than Sparta. Athens was dominant in Greece: "in 460 her battle-fleet outnumbered the combined fleets of Corinth, Sicyon, and Sparta."¹² And elsewhere she was head of the Delian League, soon to be transformed into an outright empire.

There is a question of who joined whom in the war. When Inaros rebelled, Athens was already fighting Persia with a fleet of 200 allied ships off Cyprus.¹³

Early successes in Egypt

Initially Artaxerxes had considered coming to Egypt to lead his armies in person, but his counselors rejected the idea so he sent Achaemenes—a son of Darius and therefore an uncle of Artaxerxes.¹⁴ Achaemenes arrived in Egypt at the head of an army numbering either 300,000 (Diodorus) or 400,000 (Ctesias) and eighty ships. Weary from the long march the Persian army encamped near the Nile and allowed themselves some rest. The opposing force of Egyptians and Lybians refrained from joining battle until the Athenians could join them.

The entire allied fleet of 200 ships was ordered to leave Cyprus and sail up the Nile. The ensuing battle took place in 459 near Memphis, whose present day ruins are located on the west bank of the Nile just south of modern Cairo, fifteen miles (twenty-four kilometers) from the apex of the delta. The Persians, who appeared to have the initial advantage, had to fall back. Achaemenes died in the fighting and his body was sent back to Artaxerxes in Persia. The surviving Persians and their Egyptian supporters took refuge in the citadel of Memphis called the Leukon Teichos, or White Fortress, where they remained under siege for the next three years from 459 to 456.¹⁵ Although 200 Greek ships participated in the battle against Achaemenes it is likely that only forty ships and their crews stayed by to help Inaros maintain the siege of Memphis, the rest of the fleet being reassigned elsewhere.¹⁶

This, of course, was not the end of the war but merely a successful beginning. After this point the war in Egypt remained at a stalemate until Artaxerxes was able to send in a second army under the joint command of Artabazus and Megabyzus in 456.¹⁷

Possible Successes outside Egypt

Greek involvement in the war against Persia was not confined to Egypt. “In the year 458, for instance, Athenians were killed in Egypt and in the approaches to Egypt along the coasts of Cyprus and Phoenicia.”¹⁸

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If Greeks raided the coast of Phoenicia as well as going ahead with their invasion of Cyprus, then the fighting was more extensive than the present account of the war in Egypt would indicate and the question becomes how much more extensive. One person who has attempted to address this issue is Margalith. Margalith suggests that the Greeks were so successful that Persia temporarily had to forfeit control of the coastline from Palestine to Phoenicia, just as they had been forced earlier to abandon the coastline of Ionia.

In 460 BC the confederation of Greek cities under Athenian leadership known as the Attic-Delic League sent a fleet of 200 war galleys against Persia in the Cypriot seas. This fleet sailed to Egypt, gained a great victory over the Persian army there and captured Memphis in the autumn of 459. This placed the coast of Palestine and Phoenicia into Greek hands as the only possible route from Ionia to Egypt. An inscription dated to 459-8 BC commemorates in Athens those soldiers “of the Erechtheid tribe... who died in the war in Cyprus, in Egypt, in Phoenicia...” This line of supply and communication of the Greek expeditionary force relied upon the cities of the Philistines who were of Greek descent, and on the district of Dor which extended from the Philistine to the Sidonian border.¹⁹

The argument that Athens temporarily controlled the coast of Palestine and Phoenicia is exaggerated out of all proportion. An overland supply route would be counterproductive. It would be slower, farther, and more dangerous than bringing the same materials in by sea. And yet Greeks did die in Phoenicia in 458 and they did receive tribute from the region of Dor, on the Judean coast south of Carmel, in 454.²⁰ “During these events the new radical leaders Ephialtes (soon assassinated) and the young Pericles conducted sweeps in the Levant with modest forces, profiting by Kimon’s victory.”²¹ This probably accounts adequately for the deaths in the inscription and the tribute from Dor.

Persian diplomatic Initiatives

Persia made at least two diplomatic efforts to minimize its losses in Egypt and to prevent the spread of revolt. One was to Sparta, the other to Judea. Sparta was close to Athens and Judea was close to Egypt. The king’s motives were clear. Sparta must be persuaded to attack and distract Athens, thus shortening the war,

and Judea must be persuaded not to join Egypt in revolt, which would only prolong it.²²

Embassy to Sparta. The fall of Memphis was a turn of events that Artaxerxes took seriously. Both his father Xerxes (486-465) and his grandfather Darius (522-486) had made the mistake of underestimating Greek military ability-Darius at Marathon (490), Xerxes at Thermopylae (480).²³ It may have looked like he was beginning to repeat the same error himself. To avoid doing that, and hopefully to avoid the problem altogether, he tried to draw on the hostility between Athens and Sparta by bribing Sparta into mounting an invasion of Athens so as to force her to defend the homeland rather than campaign in Egypt. Sparta refused.²⁴ The year was probably still 459.

The Persian attempt to influence both opinion and policy in Sparta is instructive. Artaxerxes was not above using his wealth to buy influence in Sparta, although it was a city with whom Persia had recently been at war. The present object was to relieve the besieged garrison at Memphis and get Athens out of Egypt. If this could be achieved by circuitous rather than direct means, all well and good, just so Egypt stayed inside the empire. Here is one part of the context for Persia's later embassy to Judea.

Embassy to Judea. Artaxerxes had not yet lost Judea. But he did not want to lose it and so took what might be called preemptive measures to ensure that he would continue to have a loyal Jewish following there and a reliable tax base.²⁵

There is some additional background for the king's actions that must not be forgotten. While Cyrus had let the Jews return home after their Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1:2-4), not all Persian kings had ingratiated themselves to their Jewish subjects in this way. In April/May of 474-just seventeen years before Ezra arrived in Jerusalem-Xerxes (Ahasuerus) had signed a death warrant for the entire Jewish race (Esth 3:7). The order had been counteracted by a second decree in the Jews' favor and in the end the results were so good that they are still celebrated today as the feast of Purim (Esth 9:20-32). But in all of this the Jews' owed more to Mordecai than to Xerxes, who had agreed to exterminate them on little more than a whim. Now a historic Jewish ally (Isa 36:6, 9), sharing a common border with the Jewish

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homeland, was in a fair position to liberate itself from Persia altogether and it would not be unreasonable to suppose that, given an opportunity, Judea might opt to go the same way as Egypt and secede from the empire. At least it was a possibility that Artaxerxes had to reckon with and take seriously. We have a record of the way he did this in Ezra 7.

Artaxerxes' embassy to Sparta took place as early as 459.²⁶ Whether one argues for a spring-to-spring calendar in Ezra or a fall-to-fall calendar, the mission of Ezra came later than this-in 458 (spring-to-spring) or 457 (fall-to-fall). A strong case can be made for the latter.²⁷

It is my interpretation that if Sparta had accepted Artaxerxes' offer to invade Athens, no further measures would have been required to get what the king wanted. The Greeks of the Delian League would have been forced to withdraw from Egypt in order to defend their capital, tipping the balance of power even farther against Inaros, and the war would have ended in a short time. With no rebellion in neighboring Egypt there could be no threat from Judea and, in the absence of any such threat, no effort to secure Jewish popular support would have been called for. An important implication of this fact is that the king would have had no reason to send Ezra. There would be no mission for him to perform. And without Ezra the history of the Old Testament, not to mention the history of Judaism, would be radically different from what we know today.

But the Spartans did not accept Artaxerxes' offer. They did not invade Athens. The war showed every sign of lasting a long time and the final outcome was far from clear. Instead of extending his empire through Greece into Europe, Xerxes had lost Ionia. The same sort of thing could happen to Artaxerxes as well in Egypt. It was a real possibility. The young king would be foolish not consider every means at his disposal to bring the war to a successful end. One of these was diplomacy. We now return to the other.

The end of the War

After his attempt to influence Sparta failed Artaxerxes had no choice but to launch a second all out invasion of Egypt. With this object in view he commissioned two generals, Artabazus and

Megabyzus, who either brought with them from Persia or assembled en route an army of 300,000 and on the coast of Cilicia built a support fleet of 300 ships.²⁸ Megabyzus (some sources spell it Megabyxos) commanded the land force and Artabazus (or Artabazos) commanded the fleet.²⁹ The attack came either in 456³⁰ or early 455³¹ and Megabyzus succeeded in defeating the combined forces of the Egyptians and Greeks. The latter were now confined to the island of Prosopitis, “situated between a canal and two branches of the Nile.”³²

Here the Greeks were in a dangerous situation. For the Egyptians, apart from Inaros himself, made a separate peace, and all the supplies of the Greeks had to be brought by ship up the Nile. By strenuous efforts the expeditionary force held its ground a period of eighteen months until midsummer 454, when the Persians diverted the waters of the canal and marched in to the assault. Only a few of the Greeks escaped across the desert to the colony at Cyrene; 6,000 surrendered and the rest were killed.³³

Discussion

The above account raises a fascinating series of questions. Two different versions of the Greek defeat in Egypt can be supported from classical sources and there has been some confusion as a result. On the one hand the Greeks are confined to Prosopitis, hold out, are defeated, and some escape to Cyrene-west across the desert. This account, accepted by Hammond in the above quotation, is the one given by both Diodorus and Thucydides.³⁴ Ctesias, on the other hand, reports that Inaros and the last of the Greeks took their last stand not on an island but in a city, that they were not defeated but offered terms, that this happened not at Prosopitis but at Byblos in Egypt, and that instead of making their way west across North Africa they were brought before Artaxerxes, who questioned them at length about the death of Achaemenes. Inaros was subsequently impaled and some of the Greeks were beheaded, while a small number were released and made their way home-but not via Cyrene. Clearly two different sets of events are being related here.

A first reconstruction. J.B. Bury makes one account out of the two. The defenders of Prosopitis who escaped made their way to Byblos, gave themselves over to Megabyzus after doing so, and then went home via Cyrene on the coast of North Africa.³⁵ This solution attempts to make two sets of events into one.

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The reason why I mention Bury is that Margalith seizes on the retreat to Byblos as evidence that the entire coast of Palestine was under Greek control by the end of the war, i.e., that retreating to a given place implies retreating through friendly territory. It is friendly to Greeks because it is under Greek control. But to draw this conclusion from these events Margalith must make the crucially flawed assumption that the Byblos in question is the well known Phoenician city by that name located on the Mediterranean coast north of Tyre. Ctesias specifically states that the Byblos he has in mind is in Egypt: *pheugei de pros t-n Bublōn Inaros (polis ischura en Aiguptu haut)*³⁶ but Inaroslees to Byblos (a strong city in Egypt).

And in any event when Artabazus and Megabyzus bring their combined fleet and army from Cilicia for the attack, the army marches through the entire Levant from north to south, from Anatolia to Egypt, with no record of Greek opposition. Diodorus states that the Persian forces “advanced overland through Syria and Phoenicia; and with the fleet accompanying the army along the coast, they arrived at Memphis in Egypt.”³⁷ Margalith’s reconstruction is therefore radically impossible.

A second reconstruction. What I suggest actually happened is as follows. The Greeks alone, without Inaros, held out on the island of Prosopitis, at the end of eighteen months the water surrounding it was diverted, and they were unable to hold the Persians off any longer. Megabyzus, however, did not attempt to massacre those who remained but very generously allowed them to return home across more than 600 miles of desert via friendly Cyrene in North Africa.³⁸

When Megabyzus next came to Byblos in Egypt, whatever city that might be, he found the rebels in so strong a position that besieging them seemed pointless.³⁹ So he offered them terms if they would surrender. In my view one reason why this offer was taken seriously by Inaros himself and by the remaining Egyptians and Greeks who were with him is that Megabyzus had established his credibility by allowing the defenders of Prosopitis to escape. It was a precedent they could believe and so they agreed to his terms and surrendered.

Megabyxos went home with his prisoners. He “found the King much embittered against Inaros for the death of his brother

Akhaimenes”, and had to plead hard, saying that he had obtained the surrender of Byblos [“Papyrus”; otherwise unknown as a place-name in Egypt], their last strong position, only by pledging his word that their lives should be spared. At last Artaxerxes promised this, and Megabyxos handed them over. But the Queen-mother Amestris, one of those tigress-mothers whose uninhibited instincts repeatedly bedevilled the attempts of kings to act wisely, wore down her surviving son at last. Five years later, it is said, she got him to hand over Inaros and had him impaled; “and she beheaded fifty Greeks, which was all she managed to get”. Megabyxos, his honour outraged, got the other Greeks away to Syria, and there defied the King.⁴⁰

The contribution of Margalith. It cannot be maintained, as Margalith claims, that the Greek forces of the Delian League controlled the eastern Mediterranean coast from Egypt all the way up to Phoenicia at any time between 460 and 454. Those Greeks who escaped in a direction they could choose fled west rather than north-away from the coast of Phoenicia as it were. But after discounting the details of what he says we still owe Margalith an immense debt of gratitude for raising the subject of Greek influence at all. The fact is that events outside Judea had a dramatic impact on events narrated in biblical sources during the years immediately before and after 457. Artaxerxes’ Jewish policy was not influenced by his dealings with Jews alone. Thus, a date within the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424) for Ezra’s return is believable not because Margalith has correctly interpreted every historical clue-he has not-but because the narrative makes such good sense against the backdrop of events that we know were occurring elsewhere at the same time.

The coastal city of Dor, near Megiddo, was indeed under Athenian tribute in 454 at the end of the war and later there were Syrioi “Syrians” on a similar list.⁴¹ Whether Greeks controlled the entire coastline as Margalith implies or a single city, their position in Egypt and the approaches to it by sea was something that Persia could not ignore. With hindsight we can see that Persia was in no great danger from Inaros and his Greeks. But Artaxerxes could not be so sure of that as the events unfolded, and he was the one responsible for formulating policy at the time.

As exegetes we must take into account each of the events that Artaxerxes had to deal with that might have any bearing on Jerusalem

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and Judea, and we must take those events just as seriously as he did. Otherwise we will never understand Artaxerxes' point of view. If we make no attempt to understand how he thought, we cannot hope to understand how he acted under given circumstances in relation to Ezra. Here then, outside Judea, is one part of the context for the events of Ezra 7 and Margalith has done us a major service by calling attention to it.

Why Did Artaxerxes Choose Ezra?

The thought of sending a delegation to Judea to gain the good will of his Jewish subjects there would not be the first one to occur after Artaxerxes lost Memphis in the autumn of 459. The king's first thought would be something more along the line of recapturing Memphis. Since the problem was that Greeks were holding the city, the solution would be to find some way of getting them out. A diplomatic method for accomplishing this objective was explored first and then, when it failed, military preparations were set in motion. All of this took time.

Again, when the additional idea occurred to the king or one of his advisors that it would be well to conciliate the people living immediately adjacent to Egypt, that is not the same thing as setting a finished solution in place. The objective in this case was more subtle. The Persian military was already heavily committed. Establishing a garrison would do nothing but anger the population, transforming itself from a precaution into a real necessity and compounding Artaxerxes' problems. The object in this case was not to keep Judea out of Egypt's rebellion by force, but to cause the Jews living there to want to remain loyal. He wanted to eliminate the need for arms in Judea rather than stationing troops there. Artaxerxes needed to find some way to put the Jews in his debt. A period of one and a half years from the fall of Memphis (late 459) to the departure of Ezra at Passover time 457 ("first month," Ezra 7:9a) fits the time requirements of the situation perfectly. He then arrived in Jerusalem sometime during the fifth month, i.e., less than sixty days before Day of Atonement 457 (Ezra 7:9b).

Ezra's qualifications

Artaxerxes needed to find a man who could ably and effectively administer his proposed largess to the Jews—someone respected by Jews everywhere. Ezra was the man he chose.

Born of the sons of Aaron, Ezra had been given a priestly training; and in addition to this he had acquired a familiarity with the writings of the magicians, the astrologers, and the wise men of the Medo-Persian realm. But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God; he longed for wisdom to carry out the divine will. And so he 'prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it.' Ezra 7:10. This led him to apply himself diligently to a study of the history of God's people, as recorded in the writings of prophets and kings. He searched the historical and poetical books of the Bible to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed and His people carried captive into a heathen land... God chose Ezra to be an instrument of good to Israel, that He might put honor upon the priesthood, the glory of which had been greatly eclipsed during the captivity. Ezra developed into a man of extraordinary learning and became 'a ready scribe in the law of Moses.' Verse 6. These qualifications made him an eminent man in the Medo-Persian kingdom.⁴²

Ezra's political attitudes

There has been much discussion of Ezra's attitudes toward the existing Persian government. Sarah Japhet in particular has emphasized the positive and accepting aspects of his thinking.⁴³ With greater insight J. G. McConville points out that Jewish attitudes toward Persia in the time of Ezra were at best mixed.

The real political aspiration is freedom from Persia. Indeed, the real reason for the portrayal of intermarriage as a chronic ill is to explain why the community continues to be in bondage.⁴⁴

Thus, while it is true that Persia had granted privileges to the Jews which must now evoke gratitude, why was it still in a position to do so? The fact that Persia does grant privileges and concessions is good; the fact that it has to before the same results can be achieved is bad. According to McConville, Persia is seen in a dual role through out Ezra-Nehemiah as being at once the solution and the problem requiring a solution.

The reference to Darius as 'the king of Assyria' (vi 22) marks him, even in an act of benevolence, as the true descendant of Sennacherib and Shalmaneser... The attitude to Persia in Ezra-

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Nehemiah, far from being clearly favourable, is in my view at best equivocal. There is a *prima facie* case for actual antagonism to the Empire in the parallel which the book of Ezra undoubtedly evokes with the exodus from Egypt.⁴⁵

It is in Persia's courting of Jewish favor so as to maintain political control over Judea that we see the basis for any ambivalence Ezra might have had, and surely did have, toward Persia. Persia wanted to placate its Jewish population; Ezra wanted to seize any and every opportunity to advance his people's interests, and yet there would surely be a question in his mind whether advancing them at the cost of allowing Judea in turn to advance Persia's interests represented progress. He cannot have been ignorant of Artaxerxes' motives, but, without necessarily sharing or having any sympathy for them as such, Ezra discerned God's advancing providence in the turn of events and set himself resolutely to do what he could under the circumstances.

More on Ezra's Public Life

The present model helps to clarify both why Ezra should be so prominent as to attract the king's attention while still living in Babylon and yet why he should be given so little attention in Jerusalem toward the end of his life.

Ezra's initial prominence in Babylon

If Klaus Koch is right, as I believe he is, in suggesting that Ezra thought of his return as a second exodus,⁴⁶ then a request to the Persian pharaoh for permission to leave his country with a number of his subjects would seem indicated. But Ezra did not ask to return. The most natural way to interpret Ezra 7:6 ("The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.") is that, having received the commission to go, there were certain things he would need and that all such requests were granted. And in any event, whether Ezra thought of his mission as a counterpart to that of Moses or not, to make Ezra's self-concept a starting point for the discussion may prejudge any questions that arise during its course. The king himself wanted Ezra's mission to succeed. The point emphasized here is that we must understand Artaxerxes' concept of Ezra's mission as well as Ezra's concept of it. Ezra was not the only one involved.

Consider the fact that Ezra “went up from Babylon” (Ezra 7:6, 9). That is where he lived. But the king who sent him lived at Susa in Persia (see Neh 1:1; 2:1). Now the ruins of Susa lie roughly 220 miles (350 kilometers) due east from the ruins of Babylon by air and no one traveled by air. While I was a graduate student in Albuquerque, New Mexico, studying linguistics, I lived about 220 miles by car from my home in Las Cruces. It was a long drive. I would not want to walk that distance. If Ezra lived the same distance from the king that I lived from my home, Ezra did not have ready access to the king. It would be almost impossible for him to have asked for the privilege of mounting his second exodus without going to such lengths in the process that the facts surrounding his request would become part of the narrative. But no such information is there. These circumstances must remain puzzling so long as we assume that the idea for Ezra’s return to Jerusalem was entirely his own.⁴⁷

If we think, on the other hand, in terms of Artaxerxes trying to find a suitable authority figure among the Jews to convey the state’s official regards to Judea, then the things that made the story puzzling before are now precisely what make it understandable and clear. One can easily imagine the king requesting names from his advisors of Jewish religious leaders in major cities. Here was a man from a city that was prominent in its own right and also boasted the empire’s largest and most influential Jewish sector, renowned far and wide for both his religious and his secular learning, who already occupied something of a senior statesman role among Jews within the realm.⁴⁸ It was a natural choice.

One would not normally expect the learning or the reputation of an Ezra to be acquired in a short time. These are things that develop and mature gradually. So a corollary of the above model is that we would not expect Ezra to be a young man when selected by the king for his important mission. He was the Abraham Joshua Heschel of his day—a symbol of his people.

Ezra’s relationship with Nehemiah

It appeals to our sense of logic to say that Ezra and Nehemiah either were contemporaries or were not. If they were, why do we have no indication that there was any conflict of authority between them? If they were not, how do we account for the fact that Ezra is

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mentioned eleven times in the book of Nehemiah? (He is mentioned only thirteen times in the book of Ezra.)⁴⁹ But this is not the only way to state the problem and it is not the most insightful way. There is middle ground between saying that Ezra and Nehemiah were or were not contemporaries. They could very well have lived in the same place at the same time and yet not have been contemporaries in the sense of exercising similar kinds of authority at the same time or of having comparable roles in the public life of Jerusalem. They could be coresident without being coresponsible. If this is the case, however, and something more than an unlikely possibility, why is it the case?

If Ezra had responsibilities similar to those of Nehemiah when he arrived in Jerusalem in 457, the question is why he would not still be bearing them in 444 when Nehemiah arrived. The answer has two parts: (1) The king had issued a stop work order removing a crucial base of support (Ezra 4:21); and (2) whereas a younger man might have rebounded immediately and started looking for alternatives, Ezra was not young. He was approaching extreme old age. Neither factor in isolation accounts for the data, but a combination of the two does. In fact it may be that one of the reasons why Nehemiah was so urgent in his desire to follow Ezra to Jerusalem was that a younger man's efforts were now needed. The fact that the gates which Rehum and Shimshai had burned were still in ruins was evidence of this.⁵⁰ Things were progressing too slowly. If Nehemiah came for the express purpose of replacing Ezra, in the sense of bearing burdens the older man could no longer bear comfortably alone, then the facts that both men had similar grants of authority, and that their use of that authority did not conflict, are precisely what we would expect.

Ezra's two public appearances in the book of Nehemiah

If Ezra were already sixty-five when he left Babylon in 457 he would be almost eighty when Nehemiah arrived in 444. An eighty year old man could hardly be expected to take an active part in the work of rebuilding the wall (Neh 3). But he could well serve as a representative of his people on ceremonial occasions involving special honor, and this is precisely the way Ezra is mentioned in the book of Nehemiah.

Celebrating the Day of Atonement. In chap. 8 the people gather in Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Day of Atonement. All the

people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel (Neh 8:1).

This is a most intriguing passage. Why should Ezra be “told” to bring out the Book of the Law? And why should such a request be made on this particular occasion? Public readings of the law were not normally a part of the Day of Atonement ritual. Ezra read by popular demand. It is true that the arrangements for his part in the program were planned in advance, because a high wooden platform was built for the occasion (vs. 4). But this act of planning does not diminish the fact that “the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate” told Ezra to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses (vs. 1).⁵¹

There might be other explanations, but the one that seems most reasonable is that Ezra at this time was very old, beloved by the people, and known as one who had notably tried to benefit his nation. Not all of his efforts had been successful. Younger men had to come in and finish the wall. He nearly succeeded in this endeavor but was prevented by circumstances outside his control.⁵² But one thing Ezra did do with resounding success was to revive the study of Jewish national history through sacred texts that he himself had had a part in preserving.⁵³ By now he is considered a benefactor emeritus of his people and those he has worked with and for call him forward one last time to bask in the results of his great learning.

Dedicating the wall. The only other occasion on which Ezra is mentioned in the book of Nehemiah is at the dedication of the wall, where Ezra led one group and Nehemiah led another around different parts of the wall.

I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate... (36) Ezra the scribe led the procession. (Neh 12:31, 36). The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people-past the Tower of the Ovens to the Brought Wall, (Neh 12:38).

It is significant that, although Nehemiah is the one stating how things shall proceed, Ezra leads the first choir, i.e., he is given the

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position of greatest honor. This fact is entirely consistent with the present model.

Otto Eissfeldt presents a line of reasoning that is similar to the one I have developed above, but does so by way of arguing for the opposite position—that Ezra came to Jerusalem during the reign of Artaxerxes II.⁵⁴ It all sounds very plausible.

Thus we may grant that the assumption that Ezra, commissioned by Artaxerxes II, appeared in Jerusalem in 398, has greater probability than his dating under Artaxerxes I. This probability is still further strengthened by the information gained from the Brooklyn papyri to the effect that the Persian rule over Egypt did not break up by 404, as was formerly assumed, but only in 400 or 399, and by the natural inference from this, which Cazelles has put forward, that the Persians, with the loss of their Egyptian bulwark, would have to lay very great stress upon the procuring of ordered conditions in Palestine, and so just at that time, 398 BC, entrusted Ezra with a task directed towards that end.⁵⁵

It would sound more plausible if this attempt to place Ezra's return in context and thus be fair to all evidence from every quarter could be applied to the entire biblical narrative. Eissfeldt's proposals cannot be. If Ezra came to Jerusalem in 398, how could he help Nehemiah dedicate the wall shortly after the latter's arrival (Neh 12)? And how could he help Nehemiah celebrate the Day of Atonement (Neh 8)? If we solve these artificial problems by translocating Neh 8 and 9 to a point between Ezra 8 and 9,⁵⁶ the question is no longer how Ezra could be present in the narrative (Neh 8:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13) but how Nehemiah could be present there (Neh 8:9).⁵⁷ Thus, each new part of the above solution brings with it an additional problem.

If the model I propose generated problems in this way, my readers would immediately notice the fact and would discount what I say. This same judgment should be applied equally to all writers. It is unnecessary to put Neh 8 and 9 between Ezra 8 and 9, and to discard the references to Ezra in Neh 12, or to make any other substantive adjustment to the text.⁵⁸ It is unnecessary to change what the text says in order to discover what it means. The book makes perfectly good sense just as it reads—but not if we fail to understand it. There is

a historical synergy that must be allowed to take place among the various details of Ezra-Nehemiah which cannot operate until we accept all of them.

End Notes

- ¹ By contrast the earlier return of Zerubbabel under Cyrus had been entirely financed by private donations (Ezra 1:4).
- ² There is no indication whatsoever as to any motives which caused Ezra's decision, nor indeed is there any indication that the decision was Ezra's. Nehemiah describes at length the stages which lead to his appointment and the steps taken by him to influence the king and to obtain his permission for a short visit (Neh 1; 2,1-8). The king's reluctance in this case is evident in Nehemiah's request for letters of safe-conduct and a grant for building materials. In marked contrast to this we read about Ezra that although he never requested anything, the king by his own initiative and that of his privy council (7,13-14,26) sent Ezra to investigate the situation in Jerusalem" (Othniel Margalith, "The Political Role of Ezra as Persian Governor," *Zeitschrift der alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98 [1986]: 110). Margalith has overstated his case somewhat. Ezra did ask for something, although we do not know what it was: "The king had granted him [Ezra] everything he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him" (Ezra 7:6). But we may assume that he refers to concessions made under the prior assumption that the trip would take place. We return to this passage below.
- ³ In fact 220 miles is closer to 354 kilometers, but my purpose is to convey an idea of the distances involved rather than to make a scientific claim about Iraqi topography.
- ⁴ For an authoritative discussion of the date for Ezra's return see Siegfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1970), pp. 117-27.
- ⁵ The idea that Ezra returned to Jerusalem in 398 under Artaxerxes II was proposed in 1889 by Maurice Vernes and was subsequently developed and championed in a number of different publications from 1890 to 1924 by Albin van Hoonacker. See Carl G. Tuland, "Ezra-Nehemiah or Nehemiah-Ezra?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 12 (1974): 47-62. Tuland's review of van Hoonacker's theory is sharply critical. Despite all arguments against it, however, the theory in question has found a wide base of support. It is assumed without discussion to be correct for example in the introduction to 1 Esdras in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Apocrypha of the Old Testament, The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 1. Others have suggested that Ezra might have returned in 428 spring-to-spring (427 fall-to-fall) under Artaxerxes I (Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah, The Anchor Bible* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1965], p. 59). This conjecture requires adding "thirty-" to the text before the word "seventh" (Ezra 7:7).

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- ⁶ See n. 2 above.
- ⁷ Sara Japhet has argued in a number of papers that Ezra-Nehemiah and the Chronicler “cannot be seen as the work of the same author, and that they are separated by difference in time, world view, historical understanding and literary method” (“Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel - Against the Background of the Historical and religious Tendencies of Ezra-Nehemiah” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 [1982]: 67). An important feature of her argument is that Ezra and his contemporaries were wholly well disposed toward Persian. Whatever we eventually conclude in regard to the authorship of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles, Japhet is demonstrably wrong about Ezra’s attitudes toward Persia, as J. G. McConville has shown (“Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfilment of Prophecy” *Vetus Testamentum* 36 [1986]: 205-24). I return to this point below.
- ⁸ What brought the whole issue of Ezra’s age to my attention initially was a remark by Tuland, with which I disagree, that Ezra might have died before Nehemiah’s arrival (“Ezra-Nehemiah,” p. 49). Dead men do not celebrate the Day of Atonement with live men. The text of Neh 8 claims that both Ezra and Nehemiah were present and I accept that claim.
- ⁹ Klaus Koch discusses Ezra’s return in terms of Ezra’s own reasons for wanting to return (“Ezra and the Origins of Judaism,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 [1974]: 173-97). What I propose here is that the same events be discussed from Artaxerxes’ point of view.
- ¹⁰ Elephantine papyrus AP 6 is double dated to year 21 of Xerxes and the accession year of Artaxerxes. See Julia Neuffer, “The Accession of Artaxerxes I,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 6 (1968): 60-87.
- ¹¹ Russell Meiggs, “The Growth of Athenian Imperialism,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 63 (1943): 22.
- ¹² N. G. L. Hammond, *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 297.
- ¹³ Ilya Gershevitch, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), vol. 2: *The Median and Achaemenian Periods*, p. 335.
- ¹⁴ Diodorus of Sicily, ed. C. H. Oldfather, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 11.74.1, p. 315. Ctesias, on the other hand, twice states that Achaemenes was Artaxerxes’ brother (Achaemenid-n ton adelphon, ton adelphon Achaemenid-n; *Persica* 29.32, 35) and after his death in Egypt refers to Achaemenes as a child (paidos), i.e., just a young man (29.36). See G. F. Hill, *Sources for Greek History between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp. 114-19.
- ¹⁵ *Cambridge History of Iran*, 2:335.
- ¹⁶ See Meiggs, “Athenian Imperialism,” p. 22, n. 8.
- ¹⁷ For the names of the generals see Diodorus, 11.74.6, p. 319. For the date 456 see Meiggs, “Athenian Imperialism,” p. 23.
- ¹⁸ Hammond, *History*, p. 293.
- ¹⁹ “Political Role,” p. 111.
- ²⁰ The evidence from the Greek tribute lists can be invaluable. Meiggs, for example, has shown that the numbers of cities listed for 454/53 (135), 453/52 (158), 452/51 (145), and 451/50 (155) were substantially lower after the war than during it. From this he draws that Athens’ disastrous adventure in Egypt resulted in a

lowering of political prestige and a reduction in its scope of influence. Recall also that 454/53 was the year when Athens transferred the League treasury from Delos to Athens, effectively completing the transition from Delian League to Athenian Empire. So consolidating its empire did not immediately bring about any increase in Athens' ability to generate revenue. It appears that for a time consolidating the empire had the opposite effect. "In 449 roughly 175 cities paid tribute to Athens. During the first assessment period from 454 to 450 the numbers are considerably lower" (ibid., p. 29).

- ²¹ Cambridge History of Iran, 2:334.
- ²² It was not an empty precaution. Judea would later join a whole series of later revolts-not in concert with Egypt (Egypt was independent of Persia from 400-341), but, what the Persians feared perhaps more, with Phoenicia. The first of these revolts occurred some time between 370 and 362, the second in 346, and then of course Alexander invaded in 332/31 (John Wilson Betlyon, "The Provincial Government of Persian Period Judea and the Yehud Coins," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 [1986]: 638-40).
- ²³ Hammond, *History*, pp. 212, 231.
- ²⁴ The story is pathetic in some ways. Sparta acted from the noblest of motives in solidarity with fellow Greeks, whom they well knew to be their enemies. Shortly after making this decision, between 459 and 455, Athens systematically attacked and destroyed the Spartan fleet, along with those of Corinth and Sicyon (Hammond, *History*, p. 297). As one author observes, the Greek city-states were "suicidally quarrelsome" (Ramsay MacMullen, "Foreign Policy for the Polis," *Greek and Rome*, 2nd series, 10 [1963]: 118). A few years earlier Xerxes had tried to obtain water and earth, the customary symbols of submission, from Sparta by means of a similar embassy and had met with predictably similar results. The record of his failure is preserved by Polybius: "All Greeks, therefore, should foresee the approaching storm [with Rome] and especially the Lacedaemonians. For why do you think it was, men of Sparta, that your ancestors, at the time when Xerxes sent you an envoy demanding water and earth, thrust the stranger into the well and heaped earth upon him, and bade him announce to Xerxes that he had received what was demanded, water and earth? Or why did Leonidas and his men march forth of their own will to meet certain death [at Thermopylae]? Surely it was to show that they were risking their lives not for their own freedom alone, but for that of the other Greeks" (W. R. Paton, trans., *The Histories*, Loeb Classical Library, no. 159 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925] 9.38.1-4).
- ²⁵ Rehum and Shimshai appeal precisely to this sort of economic motive when stating their case against the Jews at a later time: "Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is built and its walls are restored, no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and the royal revenues will suffer... We inform the king that if this city is built and its walls are restored, you will be left with nothing in Trans-Euphrates" (Ezra 4:13, 16). On the chronological relationship between Ezra 7 and Ezra 4 see Hardy, "The Chronology of Ezra 4," *Historicism* No. 10/Apr 87, pp. 18-41.
- ²⁶ *History of Greece*, p. 296.
- ²⁷ See Hardy, "The Context for Ezra's Use of a Fall-to-Fall Calendar," *Historicism* No. 8/Oct 86, pp. 2-65.
- ²⁸ Diodorus, 11.77.1, p. 323.

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- ²⁹ Cambridge History of Iran, 2:335.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Hammond, *History of Greece*, p. 296.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Diodorus, 11.77.1-5; Thucydides, C. F. Smith, trans., *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 1.109.4-110.1, p. 183.
- ³⁵ “The Greeks having burned their ships [at Prosopitis] retreated to Byblos, where the capitulated to Megabyzus and were allowed to depart. A tedious march brought them to friendly Cyrene, where they found means of returning to their homes. Inaros who kindled the revolt was crucified, though his life had been spared by the terms of the capitulation. Soon afterwards a relief squadron of fifty triremes arrived from Athens. It was attacked by the powerful Phoenician fleet in the Mendesian mouth of the Nile, and only a few ships escaped. The Persian authority was restored throughout the land; they day for Greek control of Egypt had not yet come” (J. B. Bury, *A History of Greece to the Death of Alexander the Great*, 2 vols. [London: MacMillan, 1902], 1:387). “In that year [454] the Greeks were forced to abandon Egypt and retreated overland towards Byblos, an indication that at that time Dor and the whole coast was in their hands” X(Margalith, “Political Role of Ezra,” p. 111). See also B. M. Mitchell, “Cyrene and Persia,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 86 (1966): 99-113.
- ³⁶ Ctesias, *Persica*, 29.33. See Hill, *Sources*, p. 115.
- ³⁷ Diodorus, 11.77.1, p. 323.
- ³⁸ Cyrene was located near the northernmost point of land on the east side of the Gulf of Sidra, in what today is Libya. It was founded by Greek colonists, perhaps in 631 (Mitchell, “Cyrene,” p. 111). The first of these had come from Thera but later colonists came “from all parts of Greece” (ibid., p. 99). Cyrene was made part of the Persian empire in 525 during Cam-byses’ Egyptian campaign (ibid.), but managed to break away afterward. There is a question whether it was still under Persian control by the time the survivors of Prosopitis reached there in 454 (ibid., p. 112).
- ³⁹ Ctesias writes: *ekein· analutos edokei* “he considered that [place] impregnable” (Hill, *Sources*, p. 115).
- ⁴⁰ Cambridge History of Iran, 2:336. As this same source goes on to say, “There are difficulties about this story, which we have only on the authority of Ktesias; that historian nowhere shows better that he was concerned only to be “popular”; for example, no battle takes place without a “Homeric” duel between the generals. For (a) “five years” takes us to 449, when the war with Athens ended (and the prisoners were released?); and (b) Megabyxos was then still in favour (below, p. 337). His prolonged revolt must be after 449. But possibly Ktesias is wrong only in putting together the execution of the fifty Greeks (at once, 454/453?) and that of Inaros, later, at which he revolted” (ibid.)
- ⁴¹ Benjamin Dean Meritt, *Documents on Athenian Tribute* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), p. 79
- ⁴² Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophets and Kings as Illustrated in the Captivity and Restoration of Israel* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1943; originally published 1917), pp. 608-9.

- ⁴³ See Japhet, "Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel Against the Background of the Historical and Religious Tendencies of Ezra-Nehemiah," *Zeitschrift der alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982): 66-98, especially pp. 71-80. "The answer to this question [of Ezra's silence concerning Zerubbabel's Davidic origins] is to be found imbedded in one of the foundations of Ezra-Nehemiah's world view-its stand concerning the political reality and its possibilities. The core of this stand is a complete acceptance of the political present and a complete absence of any perspective of change" (ibid., p. 72). "In the narrative method of *Ezr* 1-6 then, two elements are interwoven. The first is the description of political fact, according to which the kings of Persia determine even the smallest details of the destiny of those peoples under their rule, making the lives of these people dependant on the good will and favour of the Persian kings. The second element is the full acceptance of this situation, and the understanding of it not only as an expression of God's will and sovereign guidance of the world, but as a divine grace and as God's way of redeeming His people. In the framework of this sort of political thought there is no room for change, and even less room for hopes of redemption. The House of David, as the vehicle of aspirations to national unity and as the symbol 'par excellence' of salvific hopes, has no place in this world view and therefore is conspicuously absent from the book" (ibid., pp. 75-76). This is Japhet's position. See also idem, "The Supposed Common Authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah Investigated Anew," *Vetus Testamentum* 18 (1968): 330-372. See also Mark A. Throntveit, "Linguistic Analysis and the Question of Authorship in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah," *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1982): 201-16.
- ⁴⁴ "Fulfillment of Prophecy," p. 213.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 208. Earlier McConville writes, "If Koch's views about a cultic procession and about the inclusion of the Samaritans are somewhat tenuous, his idea that Ezra depicts only a partial fulfilment, an interim situation which by its nature postulates a greater fulfilment yet to come is, I believe, important. My study arises from a belief that a great deal more evidence for this view of Ezra can be brought to bear on the problem than Koch actually indicated" (ibid., p. 207). Koch's suggestion that Ezra tried to include the Samaritans in a renewed Jewish nation is one thing, but I do not think his suggestion that Ezra saw his return as a cultic procession is at all tenuous. Each part of his model must be evaluated on its own merits. Ezra left Babylon on "the twelfth day of the first month" (*Ezra* 8:31). Just before that, perhaps on the eleventh day, he proclaimed a fast in preparation for the journey (vs. 21). We are not told what he did the day before that, but can know without a shadow of doubt that he proclaimed a feast. My source of information is Exodus: "Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month [the first month] each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household... This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover" (*Exod* 12:3, 11). It passes belief that anyone could celebrate the return of Israel from Egyptian captivity on the tenth day of the first month and then start leading a large company of people back to Judea from Babylonian captivity two days later, on the twelfth day of the first month, and not see any connection between the two events. Of course Ezra thought of his mission as a cultic procession. How could he possibly think of it in any other way? For this moment at least he was one with the sacred history that he had spent his life studying.

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- ⁴⁶ “When Ezra has arrived he takes action in the home country in a way analogous to the occupation of the promised land after the first Exodus; so for example the separation of the people of the countries (Ezra ix.1), or the new way of celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, “Since the days of Joshua to that day the Israelites had not done so” (Neh. viii.17). All these details of the Ezra record are understandable only if the historical Ezra intended to fulfil the promises or, better, to be the instrument of fulfilment of the promises of the exilic prophets about a marvellous return of the exiles, which will be the foundation of a second Israel and the opening of a new Heilsgeschichte. . . . The followers of Wellhausen look on Ezra as the man who established theocracy and who in fact buried prophetic hopes and eschatological expectations. I do not think that the Ezra texts confirm such a theory. On the contrary, it seems possible that no other man of post-exilic times attempted so eagerly to realize certain prophetic promises. He showed that the prophetic outlook into the future of Israel is not only pious theory, not only utopia in the sense of that which will never to come to pass, but that it is also an instruction for practice, a power to change the conditions of contemporary society, even under the evil circumstances of an overwhelmingly strong foreign empire, if such a change is necessary” (“Origins of Judaism,” pp. 188, 189).
- ⁴⁷ Ezra did ask for something, although we are not told what it was. “The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him” (Ezra 7:6). This passage is consistent with the present model. If the king searched Ezra out and presented to him his intentions of sending a delegation back to Judea, it is entirely reasonable that Ezra, after thinking the matter through, would say in effect, “If I go there I will need this and this.” The king then granted him everything he asked.
- ⁴⁸ When Ezra needed Levites for the return trip he approached “Iddo, the leader in Casiphia” (Ezra 8:17). There was no doubt in anyone’s mind who the leader was in Casiphia. Similarly, there was no doubt who the leader was in Babylon.
- ⁴⁹ See Ezra 7:1, 6, 10, 11, 12, 21, 25; 10:1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 16; Neh 8:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13; 12:13, 26, 33, 36. In both books the name is confined to two chapters only-Ezra 7 and 10, Neh 8 and 12.
- ⁵⁰ On the burning of the gates see Hardy, “The Chronology of Ezra 4,” *Historicism* No. 10/Apr 87, pp. 30-31.
- ⁵¹ Ezra read all morning from the scroll and he stood while he did so (Neh 8:5, 7). He was not in feeble health. When then? Does the old age hypothesis really work? There is one other thing to consider. Ezra’s early work on the wall in Ezra 4 had been done under royal protection (Ezra 7:12-26, especially vs. 18). Just before Nehemiah’s arrival, however, everything he had worked to accomplish lay in ruins (Ezra 4:23; Neh 1:) and his authority had been revoked (4:21). A younger man might have started looking for alternatives but at this point I speculate that Ezra accepted the situation confronting him and turned his attention to things that were equally necessary but of a more spiritual nature, such as the work on manuscripts that he is associated with in the present narrative.
- ⁵² See Hardy, “Chronology,” pp. 30-36.
- ⁵³ The law of Moses was not called into existence by the fact that Ezra studied it, and yet there is a sense in which the scroll Ezra read before the assembled people was indeed a result of his own learning. “The efforts of Ezra to revive an interest in the study of the Scriptures were given permanency by his painstaking, lifelong work of preserving and multiplying the Sacred Writings. He gathered all the

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copies of the law that he could find and had these transcribed and distributed. The pure word, thus multiplied and placed in the hands of many people, gave knowledge that was of inestimable value” (Ellen White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 609). Ezra was the father of textual criticism in the best sense of the term. He had compared and evaluated readings from earlier copies of the “Book of the Law” in order to establish the veracity of the text and his name was now widely associated with it.

⁵⁴ I learned this after the present paper was written.

⁵⁵ Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 554-55.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 548-52.

⁵⁷ Eissfeldt places Nehemiah in the years between 445 and 432 (*ibid.*, p. 553). He has not considered the chronological implications of Neh 1:1 and 2:1, which require a fall-to-fall calendar. The dates should be 444 and 431. Be this as it may, if Ezra came in 398 there can be no contact between Ezra and Nehemiah, whereas the text requires it

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 548-52.

Chapter 2

Introduction to the Books of Ezra-Nehemiah

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah (one book-in the Hebrew Bible) trace the story of the return of the people of God to the land of Israel after the 70-year captivity in Babylon. Scholars differ as to the chronological order of the books, some maintaining that the events of Nehemiah occur before those of Ezra. Other historians place the return under Zerubbahel (recounted in the first six chapters of Ezra) as the earliest return, dated approximately 537 BC, with Ezra and Nehemiah leading later returns in that order. Be that as it may, we shall follow the biblical order so that we might learn the meaning of these events in the spiritual parallel of our individual lives.

The book of Ezra begins with the same words which close the book of 2 Chronicles. They recount the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, to reestablish and restore the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. This gives us our clue to the meaning of Ezra, for it is a book which

recounts the method of God in restoring a heart which has fallen into sin.

The Main Characters

The book divides naturally into the ministries of two men: Zerubbabel, chapters 1-6 and Ezra, chapters 7-10. Both of these men led expeditions of Jewish captives back to Jerusalem from Babylon. Zerubbabel was a descendant of David and thus of the kingly line. Ezra descended from Aaron and is therefore a priest. This suggests immediately that in the work of restoration both a king and a priest are needed. The work of the king is to build, or in this case, to rebuild. The work of the priest is to cleanse. Restoration in an individual life always requires these two ministries. There is need to rebuild the character through a recognition of the kingship and lordship of Jesus Christ in the human spirit. Such building involves the recognition of God's right to own and direct us and to change us according to His will. But restoration also involves cleansing. The spirit and the soul are to be cleansed by our great High Priest, who is able to wash away our guilt, tidy up our past and restore us to a place of fellowship and blessedness before God.

Zerubbabel

Under Zerubbabel an early return takes place. This kingly descendant led about 50,000 people from Babylon back to Jerusalem. This is far fewer in number than those who have returned to the land in our own day, but the biblical record attaches great importance to this first return. Cyrus, the king of Persia, may have known of Isaiah's predictions concerning his instrumentality in the hands of God, for he gave willing aid to the Jews who returned, putting in their hands again the vessels of the Temple and giving them goods and animals (Ezra 1:7).

When they came to Jerusalem it was the seventh month of the year and they arrived in time to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast (also called the feast of ingathering) was the time when Israel dwelt in booths to remind them of their pilgrim character. This feast also looks forward to the eventual regathering of Israel from their vast worldwide dispersion to celebrate the personal reign of Messiah upon the earth in great power and glory.

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The careful list of those who returned, given in chapter 2, indicates that not only did various families and clans go back but also a company of priests, a smaller number of Levites, certain servants who were to assist the Levites in their service, and a number of people whose genealogy was somewhat uncertain.

Their first act upon return was to build an altar on the original Temple site, in the midst of the ruins. Under the open sky they erected an altar to God and began to worship and offer sacrifice as the Law of Moses had bid them. This is most significant, for the first act of a heart that really desires to return from wandering in darkness and the ways of the world to real fellowship with God is to erect an altar. The altar is the symbol of divine ownership and involves sacrifice, worship and praise. The sacrifice is that of our right to run our own lives; worship is the enjoyment of the restored relationship where the heart is ministered to by the only One who can fully meet its needs; praise is that of a rejoicing heart.

The second thing they did was to lay the foundation of the Temple (3:10). This work when finished was met with mixed feeling, for some of the people shouted with a great shout of joy and others, including those who had seen the first Temple built by Solomon, wept with a loud voice, so that it was impossible to distinguish the shouts of joy from the sounds of weeping (3:13). Perhaps you too may have felt this way. Have you ever returned to God after a time of coldness and withdrawal, with a great sense of joy as the foundations of fellowship were re-laid by the Spirit, yet with regret for the loss of wasted years? This is what is portrayed here. Tears of joy mingled with tears of sorrow as the people saw the Temple being rebuilt.

The third factor in the return of Zerubbabel was the immediate opposition which developed to the restoration of the Temple. Here we see portrayed the force at work in every human heart which immediately rises up to oppose everything God attempts to do. There is a great lesson here in how this force reveals itself. The opposition first appears as friendly solicitude. The people of the land approached Zerubbabel and said, "Let us build with you, for we like you seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here" (4:2). This apparently friendly and openhearted desire to participate in the work

marked a very subtle attack upon the returning exiles. It is not difficult to say no to an enemy who breathes fiery threats of slaughter, but when he comes dripping with solicitude and offers to help with your project it is difficult to say no.

But this Zerubbabel did, for he declined their offer of help and stated the Jews would do the work alone. It may have seemed a bit churlish, but it was not mere caprice, for God had commanded Israel not to fellowship with other nations or engage with them in joint enterprises concerning faith. It meant simply that God rejects utterly the philosophy of the world in carrying out His work in the world. There is a worldly religion, and a worldly philosophy which tries to interject the concepts and methods of the world into the lives of God's people. God has made it clear that these are to be rejected. The thinking of the world reflects the spirit of the devil, who is the god of this age. His philosophy is, "Advance yourself; do this for your own glory. Use religious ways to advance your own purposes and thus win admiration, power and fame." But God rejects this principle in its totality.

When the offer of friendship was rejected, it quickly turned to hatred. The people of the land began to mock and taunt the Jews, thus discouraging Israel from doing the work that God had commanded. These so-called "friends" even used legal means to undermine Israel's authority and right to build, for they obtained from Artaxerxes, the king, a decree to stop the rebuilding of the Temple in view of the rebellious history of the Jews. The work was stopped for a period of six years and the Temple lay with only its foundations completed, overrun with weeds and grass (4:24). It was during this period that, according to the prophet Haggai, the people turned instead to building their own homes with many luxuries and comforts. Those who attempt a return to fellowship with God may often find that the record of their past rises again to haunt them and impede their progress, but a determination to go on with God would overcome even this handicap.

To aid the people, God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who proved to be God's instruments to turn the people back to their work (5:1). God also moved the heart of Darius the king to search for the original edict of Cyrus which allowed the restoration of the

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Temple. When it was found a decree was sent to Israel to permit the rebuilding to continue.

At last the work was finished, and in chapter 6 we read of the celebration of the Passover, marking the beginning of their new life under God. Since the Passover pictures the conversion of a Christian, it is clear from this that our new birth will never be a source of delight to us until we are restored in the temple of our spirit to fellowship with the living God. Unless we are enjoying the glory and the light of heaven upon our hearts we have nothing for which to give thanks, nothing to celebrate.

Ezra

Chapters 7-10 concern the ministry of Ezra the priest. He too led a band of captives back to Jerusalem, though the exact dates are difficult to determine. It is said of him that “he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him” (7:6). What kind of a man is this whom a Gentile king regards so highly that he will give Ezra anything he asks? The secret is given in 7:10, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” He was not only a Bible reader; he was also a Bible doer. As a result, Ezra could ask anything of the king and it would be granted.

Ezra’s specific assignment by Artaxerxes the king was “to adorn the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem” (7:27). To achieve this Ezra gathered a great company about him, taking special care to include among them a company of Levites. After prayer and fasting they set out on their journey, committing themselves to the overruling providence of God to keep them safe on their way. In due time they arrived in Jerusalem and there Ezra found an incredible condition. The Jews and the Levites had again begun to marry with their ancient enemies, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites.

Centuries before, God had given specific orders that the Israelites were not to intermingle with these tribes. Now they were starting the whole wretched mess over again. It was this intermarrying which

had broken the strength of the nation before. It had undermined the power of God among them and finally divided the people, broken up the tribes and separated them into two nations. At last, as they succumbed to the idolatrous practices of those whom they had married, God delivered them into the hands of their captives. Now it appears that after 70 years of captivity they had not learned a thing. This is a vivid reminder that the flesh within us never changes. No matter how long we may walk in the Spirit, we will never arrive at a place where we cannot revert to the worst we have ever been, if we depart from dependence upon the Spirit of God.

When Ezra heard that the people had disobeyed God in intermarrying he tore his garments, pulled the hair from his head and beard, and sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. It was unbelievable to him. But as the book nears its close Ezra prayed to God and confessed this great sin of the people. In graciousness God moved the hearts of the people and the leaders came in brokenhearted contrition to Ezra and acknowledged their wrong. A great proclamation was issued and the people assembled together. It happened to be a day when it was raining, but despite the rain the people stood, thousands of them, in front of the Temple and confessed their guilt and agreed to put away the wives and children they had acquired outside the will of God (10:9-17).

This was not an easy thing to do, but it is surely what Jesus meant when He said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children... he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). It does not mean that a man must put away his wife today, for this is symbolic teaching. It means that we are to put away whatever comes from the flesh (which is always pictured by the Canaanite tribes).

The book closes with a listing of the men in Israel who were faithful to the Word of God, and obeyed Him in this painful matter. Thus the work of Ezra was completed and the task to which he had been assigned, that of beautifying the Temple, went forward. So it is also in the parable of our lives.

Nehemiah

As the book of Ezra recounts the building of the Temple, so the book of Nehemiah gives us the story of the rebuilding of the walls of

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Jerusalem. This is a significant order, for always the way back to God after a period of declension and captivity to evil must begin within the human spirit-the temple of man. But the next step is to begin a reconstruction of the walls, since walls are universally the symbol of strength and protection. This is a clear picture of the process of rebuilding the defenses of the spiritual life to protect against the attacks of any enemy. Many human derelicts drift up and down the streets of our cities, hopeless and helpless, because their defenses have crumbled away; but frequently God in grace reaches them, against all the expectations of those who have known them, and their walls of defense are rebuilt again. This is the story of the book of Nehemiah.

Chapter 3

Rebuilding the Defenses

The first step in this process is given in chapter I where a report is brought to Nehemiah in the city of Susa concerning the ruin and decay of Jerusalem. When Nehemiah heard these words he wept and mourned for several days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven (1:4). Thus the first step in rebuilding the defenses of any life is to become greatly concerned about the ruins. Have you ever taken a good look at the ruins of your life? Have you ever stopped long enough to assess what you could be to God, compared to what you are? Have you looked at the possibilities that God gave you and seen how far you have deviated from that potential? If you have, then like Nehemiah, you have received word in some form or other of the desolation and ruin that is present. If you will begin to be concerned and weep over those ruins, you will have begun the process of rebuilding.

This mourning is immediately followed by confession (1:5-9). Nehemiah prays a great prayer in

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which he acknowledges the sin of his people and the justice of God in having fourfold the words of Moses, given in warning centuries before. Also in Moses' words, recorded in Deuteronomy, was the promise that when anyone, even in a distant country, would begin to pray to God, a recovery and restitution to the place of blessing would begin.

The prayer of confession is followed by a great commitment (1:10, 11). Nehemiah asked for divine success to be given him, for a plan is already forming in his mind even while he has been in prayer. He has something definite which he wants to ask and he prays that God will grant him mercy in the sight of the king.

Here is a man who, out of his concern and after the confession of his heart, commits himself to a project. Invariably in an enterprise like this there are factors over which man has no control and God must arrange them. So Nehemiah prays about his appearance before the king.

When, in his work as cupbearer, he comes before the king (2:4-8), his face shows concern over the city of his fathers. At the king's request he makes known to him what is troubling him. The account especially notes that the queen was sitting beside the king. Our Bible scholar has identified the king as Ahasuerus who appears also in the book of Esther. If this is the case the queen here is Esther herself. The names Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus are not proper names but are really titles meaning the great king (Artaxerxes) and the venerable father (Ahasuerus). If Esther is the queen then it would explain why the king in Nehemiah is willing to restore Jerusalem; for Queen Esther is also a Jewess.

The next need in rebuilding the defenses of a city, or of a life, is that of courage to face the opposition that immediately arises. Encouraged by the king, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem (2:8) where he found certain Canaanite leaders who were greatly displeased that someone had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. Whenever a man like Nehemiah says "I will arise and build," Satan always says, "Then I will arise and oppose."

Such opposition requires not only courage but caution. Nehemiah rode out around the city of Jerusalem by night (2:15), surveying the ruin that was there and taking careful note of what needed to be done. He made an honest survey of the facts and then began to lay

his plans. There was no public announcement of what he intended to do, for that would have stirred up even further opposition. But without conceit or ostentation he began his work.

Principles of Reconstruction

If the walls of your life are broken down or your defenses have crumbled so that the enemy is getting at you on every hand, and you easily fall prey to temptation, it would be well to pay special heed to the principles of reconstruction set forth in chapter 3 of this book. We learn, first of all, that the people were willing to work. Second, that they became personally involved and began right where they were. Each began to work on the part of the wall that was nearest to his own house, and so called forth the deepest of personal involvement on his part.

It is noteworthy that the reconstruction of the walls centered about the 10 gates of the city. Again, in one of the marvelous hidden revelations of truth which is frequently found in Scripture, the names of these 10 gates, in the order in which they appear, is most instructive.

First, there is the Sheep Gate (3:1). Through this gate the sacrificial animals were brought into the city to be offered on the altar. This clearly pictures the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed on the cross for us, and therefore stands for the principle of the cross. That is always the starting place to regain strength in your life. You must recognize anew that the work of the cross is to cancel out your selfish ego and put to death that which is for your own glory and advancement.

The account then moves to the Fish Gate (3:3). When we remember that Jesus said to His disciples, "Follow Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1 :17), this gate suggests the witness of a Christian. Every Christian is called to be a witness. If you can never give an account of what the Lord has done for you, then this wall is broken and the Fish Gate needs to be rebuilt.

In verse 6 the Old Gate (3:6) represents the unchangeable truth of God upon which everything new must rest. As someone has well said, "Whatever is true is not new and whatever is new is not true". In many places today the old truth is being forsaken, but if you allow this old truth to go you will find that the wall crumbles and enemies outside gain access to your soul.

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The next gate is the Valley Gate (3:13). This suggests the place of humility, the place of lowliness of mind and humbleness of heart. On almost every page of Scripture God speaks against the pride of man. He looks always for the lowly, the humble, the contrite and those who have learned that they are not indispensable. This gate seems to be frequently in need of repair with many of us. But we need to be reminded that “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James. 4:6).

Next in order is the Dung Gate (3:14). This is not a very beautiful name but it represents an essential process in life: you need to eliminate that which is corrupt and defiling. No life can be strong or healthy that does not have an often used elimination gate within it.

The Fountain Gate is mentioned next (3:15). This name reminds us instantly of the words of Jesus to the woman at the well: “The water that I shall give [you] shall become in [you] a well of water [a fountain] springing up to eternal life” (John 4:14). This speaks of the Holy Spirit who is to be like a river of life in you, enabling you to obey God’s will and His Word. To drink from that flowing fountain is to be refreshed in spirit, and to find power to do what God requires.

The Fountain Gate is followed by the Water Gate (3:25,26). Water is always, in Scripture, the symbol of the Word of God. The interesting thing about this Water Gate is that it did not need to be repaired. Evidently it was the only part of the wall that was still standing. The people who lived near it are mentioned, but nothing is said about its repair. Thus the Word of God never breaks down nor does it need repair, it simply needs to be reinhabited.

The eighth gate is the East Gate facing the rising sun (3:29). This is, therefore, the gate of hope, anticipating that which is yet to come when the trials of life and the struggles of earth end, and the glorious new sun rises on the day of God. This gate needs to be rebuilt in many of us who fall under the pessimistic spirit of this age and are crushed by the hopelessness of our times.

The ninth gate is the Horse Gate (3:28). The horse in Scripture is the symbol of warfare, that is, the need to do battle against the forces of darkness. It too is often in need of repair. As the apostle Paul says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness” (Ephesians. 6:12).

The final gate is the Muster Gate (Nehemiah. 3:31). The Hebrew word means literally “the examination” gate. This is evidently the place where judgment was conducted, and speaks of our need to take a good look at ourselves now and then and evaluate what we are doing. That brings us around again to the Sheep Gate (3:32), the gate of the cross. The cross must be at the beginning and end of every life.

Pray and Watch

The derision and scorn of their Canaanite neighbors continued to mount, and threats were made against the lives of Nehemiah and other leaders. In response, Nehemiah did two important things: He went to prayer, and set up a guard. From then on, the workers labored with their weapons beside them, keeping watch and building at the same time (4:16). It was a practical demonstration of, “Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.”

Seeing his persistence, his enemies tried various approaches to stop the work. Nehemiah retained a single eye to the work to which God had called him. The end result was the finishing of the wall and the gaining of the respect of surrounding nations when they saw the hand of God at work.

When the walls were completed the people were encouraged to move back from the suburbs to homes within the city walls (chap. 7). The register of peoples is almost identical to the list in Ezra, which lends confirmation to the theory that it was Nehemiah who first returned from Babylon and Ezra who came later. This also is strengthened by the fact that it is only at this point in Nehemiah that Ezra appears in the book.

When the walls were completed, the time came to reaffirm the spiritual strength of the nation. In a great gathering of the people, the Law was read to them anew, accompanied by exposition given by Ezra the priest (chap. 8). It is especially significant that when the people were convicted by the reading of the Law to the point of weeping, Ezra and Nehemiah comforted them with reassurances that the Lord Himself had made provision for their forgiveness, and that “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (8:10).

Chapters 11 through 13 conclude the book, with first a recognition of certain gifts among the people. Levites, gatekeepers, singers and

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various other ministries were recognized. This is similar to the New Testament which sets the church to discover the gifts of the Spirit that are given among them, and put them all to work. In chapter 12 is the story of the dedication of the wall. The people gathered and marched around the wall with instruments, singing and shouting, playing and rejoicing.

During the reading of the Law, it was learned again that the people of God should give no official place to either an Ammonite or a Moabite. Nehemiah, who had gone back to Persia and apparently had returned for the dedication of the walls, reminded the high priest that Tobiah was an Ammonite and had been given a place to live within the very Temple itself. This is the Tobiah who had done so much to hinder the work of building the wall. To correct this, Nehemiah went in and threw Tobiah's furniture out into the street. Further, he found that the priests and Levites had been cheated, so he restored the money that belonged to them. Then discovering that the people were violating the Sabbath, he commanded that the doors of the city should be shut when the Sabbath began and kept shut until it was ended. Finally, he dealt with some violence with the problem of intermarrying with forbidden races again. When he learned that one of the priests was the son-in-law of Sanballat, who had done so much to oppose Nehemiah's work, he chased the young man from his presence.

To us it may appear that Nehemiah was overly severe with these violations, but here is a man who has learned that there can be no compromise with evil. He manifests one of the greatest lessons the Spirit of God can ever teach us: to say no when it needs to be said and to say it with firmness and determination. Those who have made a mark for God throughout the history of the church have been those who have learned to say no at the right times.

Thus the book of Nehemiah has given itself to a clear demonstration of how to rebuild the walls of strength in our individual lives, and to maintain those walls in strength by unceasing resistance to allurements and attacks which attempt to force us to compromise. How important it is to be ruthless against the forces that undermine and sap the vitality of our lives in Christ.

Chapter 4

Text and Canonicity of Ezra-Nehemiah

In the Hebrew Bible (MT) Ezra-Nehemiah is a single work. But in the Septuagint (LXX), Latin Vulgate (ca. AD 400) and our English Bible it has been divided into two separate works (The same is true of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles). In the LXX, the title Ezra is Esdras Beta (the name Esdras is a translation equivalent for Ezra), and Nehemiah is Esdras Gamma. In the Latin Vulgate, Ezra is known as 1 Esdras and Nehemiah is known as 2 Esdras. This can be confusing since in the OT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha there are two other, similarly named works. See the chart below.

Septuagint (LXX):	Esdras Beta	Esdras Gamma	Esdras Alpha	
Latin Vulgate:	1 Esdras	2 Esdras	3 Esdras	4 Esdras
NRSV:	Ezra	Nehemiah	1 Esdras	2 Esdras

[1Esdras is part of the OT Apocrypha and dates from about the second century BC (ca. 150). 2 Esdras

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is an apocalyptic work for the most part and forms part of the OT Pseudepigrapha. It dates from the end of the first century BC and is probably written in response to the Jewish sufferings in light of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Neither 1 nor 2 Esdras is part of the Protestant canon, but since the Council of Trent 1 Esdras has been recognized by the Catholic church as deuterocanonical, though Jerome relegated it to an appendix in his Latin Vulgate. For further information on these books, including their provenance, themes and problems, see J. E. Wright, "Esdras, Books of," in *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 337-40; Z. Talshir, "1 Esdras," in *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 341-42.]

Ezra and Nehemiah: Contemporaries?

There have been three primary views with regard to the date of Ezra's return to Jerusalem. It is clear that the text joins his coming to Jerusalem with the reign of Artaxerxes, but which Artaxerxes is in view? [In Ezra 7:1, 8 the text joins the return of Ezra to the reign of king Artaxerxes, either Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464-423) or Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404-359 BC). See Gleason Archer, Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 419]. If Artaxerxes I, Ezra returned in 458 BC, the seventh year of the king's reign (Ezra 7:8). After completing certain reforms, it is conceivable that Ezra returned to Susa. Some thirteen years later in 445, Nehemiah came to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the walls. He stayed for twelve years. During this twelve years Ezra returned again, and the two worked together reforming the exiles. This means that both Ezra and Nehemiah were for a time contemporaries, as is suggested by Nehemiah 8:2. This is the traditional view, but it is not without its problems. Why is Nehemiah the governor not mentioned in Ezra? Further, why is Ezra only mentioned once in Nehemiah's memoirs and nothing is said of his reforms earlier in 458 BC?

For these and other reasons, some scholars have developed other scenarios. It has been suggested that Ezra did not return under Artaxerxes I, but Artaxerxes II, in 398 BC. This places Ezra after the time of Nehemiah. This seems to cohere better with the problem of marriage to foreign wives. If, under the traditional view, Ezra had dealt with that problem, why was it still an issue when Nehemiah arrived

some thirteen or so years later? To some scholars it seems that Ezra came after Nehemiah, in the reign of Artaxerxes II, in 398. But that is not the only problem. More central to this view is the mention of Ezra going to the private room of Johanan (Ezra 10:6). But in Nehemiah 12:22 Johanan is referred to as the grandson of Eliashib, who himself was a contemporary of Nehemiah. If the people have been correctly identified, this means that Ezra must have been in Jerusalem much later than Nehemiah.

There are three important reasons, however, that make a 398 return highly unlikely. First, as we indicated above, Nehemiah 8:2 suggests that both Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries. Second, Fensham speaks to the issue of marriages to foreign women:

When Nehemiah returned from Jerusalem a few years later, he was shocked by the increase in foreign marriages. As Nehemiah 13 shows, even the cultic services at the temple had come to a standstill. This was one of the bleak moments in the history of Judaism, when the people were prone to forget the reforms of their leaders. If such regression could have happened in only a few years since Nehemiah had left Jerusalem (433-430), quite conceivably the same could have occurred after a thirteen-year interval from the start of Ezra's reforms (458-445). [For details see, F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 7.]

Third, there is no evidence at all that the Johanan mentioned in Ezra 10:6 is really the same person as the grandson of Eliashib mentioned in Nehemiah 12:22. The fact that Johanan was a common name at the time makes this association highly unlikely.⁵ Thus the traditional view is to be preferred over a view which endorses a late return for Ezra (i.e., around 398).

Another view argues that Ezra returned in the thirty-seventh year of Artaxerxes I, during Nehemiah's second term (428 BC). This argument is based largely on the unfounded supposition that there is a textual corruption in Ezra 7:8 where it is alleged that the "seventh" year should be amended to the "thirty-seventh" year. As ingenious as this solution appears, it unfortunately lacks even a shred of textual evidence to commend it.

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In short, though it is not without its problems, the traditional view is still the most likely and therefore the one to be preferred. Thus a plausible outline of events would include: (1) Ezra returns in 458 and initiates certain reforms. After this, he returns to Susa; (2) appointed by Artaxerxes I, Nehemiah takes up the governorship of Judah in 445. He remains twelve years, during which Ezra returns to Jerusalem; (3) Ezra helps Nehemiah as governor and is thus mentioned in Nehemiah 12 (e.g., vv. 26, 36). This scenario also explains why Nehemiah the governor is not mentioned in Ezra's reforms (Ezra 8-10). In the end, through their combined efforts, the temple and the city walls were rebuilt.

Authorship and Date

Several suggestions have been made as to the author (s) of the combined work of Ezra-Nehemiah. It seems likely that whoever edited the Chronicles, since 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 leads naturally into the first few verses of Ezra, probably edited the production of Ezra-Nehemiah. Strands of Jewish tradition regard Ezra as the compiler of the Chronicles and therefore the author/editor of Ezra-Nehemiah (e.g., Baba Bathra 15a). Most modern interpreters, however, do not regard Ezra as the final editor, but rather see a process of editing that may have continued down to 400 BC. [Cf. Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 229-30, who argue that, while there are no historical errors in the text, a Chronicler (not Ezra) later wove together the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah (with other reliable sources) into a theological history of the restoration of the people of Israel. This, they argue, does not impinge on the inspiration of scripture for God inspired the Chronicler much like he did Luke in the collecting, editing, and employing of sources in the writing of his gospel (cf. Luke 1:1-4)]

Historical Background

In 722 BC Israel in the north (i.e., Samaria) had finally given way to Assyrian aggression. But Assyria herself was eventually overrun by the Babylonians in 612 BC when they plundered Ninevah, Assyria's capital. The Babylonians repeatedly attacked Judah's capital, Jerusalem, finally laying siege to it and exiling many of her important people (artisans, craftsmen) in 586 BC. Judah had been punished by God just as Jeremiah and the prophets had predicted. But punishment was not to last forever.

The Persian empire was growing in strength until 539 BC, when Cyrus II, the Persian king, overran Babylon with relative ease, establishing Persia as the new super-power of the Near East. The Persians, however, maintained a different policy toward conquered peoples, permitting them to return to their homelands. The first return of the Jews, then, came in 538/537 BC when Zerubbabel and several thousand Jews went up to the city of God to establish the altar and resume sacrifices (Ezra 1-6). Later, under the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-423), both Ezra (Ezra 7-10) and Nehemiah returned, in 458 and 445 respectively. Nehemiah remained in Jerusalem for at least twelve years though it only took him 52 days to complete the building of the walls (Neh 6:15).

Theological Themes

The book of Ezra, in conjunction with Nehemiah, records the fulfillment of God's promise to restore his people to their land after seventy years of Babylonian captivity. In keeping with this, there is stress laid on God's sovereignty over both his own people, but also foreign kings and peoples as well. It was he who "stirred up the spirit" of Cyrus II (1:1) to permit any willing Israelite to return to his land. And it was he who later prompted Darius I (6:14, 22) and Artaxerxes I (7:11-13ff) to decree similarly (9:9).

Ezra also lays stress on the theme of God's covenant with his people, reflected especially in the Lord's special presence in the temple and Israel's special access to him through God-appointed sacrifice. Thus the rebuilding of the altar and the temple (Ezra 3-6), and the offering of sacrifices, receives considerable attention in Ezra. So also the joy and exuberance of the people (3:10-13; 6:22).

But religious reform is essentially meaningless in Israelite theology without spiritual and ethical reform. Marriages to foreign women, though forbidden in the law of Moses (cf. Ezra 9:11-12), were rampant during Ezra's time and posed an enormous threat to Israel's future commitment to remain true to YHWH. The solution was drastic, yet necessary: after Ezra's lengthy confession to God and plea for his mercy (9:5-15), the people decide to put their foreign wives away (10:19). Thus, the religious purity of the people was restored, if ever so briefly, through the work of Ezra. The overall focus in Ezra, then, is on the return of the Lord's people to (1) the worship of the God who keeps

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his covenant; (2) to the land He promised to give his people; and (3) to religious and ethical purity.

Hermeneutical Difficulties in the Study of Ezra-Nehemiah

Some of the most complicated problems in Hebrew history as well as in the literary criticism of the Old Testament gather about the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Apart from these books, all that we know of the origin and early history of Judaism is inferential. They are our only historical sources for that period; and if in them we have, as we seem to have, authentic memoirs, fragmentary though they be, written by the two men who, more than any other, gave permanent shape and direction to Judaism, then the importance and interest of these books is without parallel in the Old Testament, for nowhere else have we history written by a contemporary who shaped it.

It is just and practically necessary to treat the books of Ezra and Nehemiah together. Their contents overlap, much that was done by Ezra being recorded in the book of Nehemiah (viii.-x.). The books are regarded as one in the Jewish canon; the customary notes appended to each book, stating the number of verses, etc., are appended only to Nehemiah and cover both books; the Septuagint also regards them as one. There are serious gaps in the narrative, but the period they cover is at least a century (538-432 BC). A brief sketch of the books as they stand will suggest their great historical interest and also the historical problems they involve.

In accordance with a decree of Cyrus in 538 BC the exiled Jews return to Jerusalem to build the temple (Ezra i.). Then follows a list of those who returned, numbering 42,360 (ii.). An altar was erected, the feast of booths was celebrated, and the regular sacrificial system was resumed. Next year, amid joy and tears, the foundation of the temple was laid (iii.). The request of the Samaritans for permission to assist in the building of the temple was refused, with the result that they hampered the activity of the Jews continuously till 520 BC (iv, 1-5, 24). Similar opposition was also offered during the reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes, when the governor of Samaria formally accused the Jews before the Persian government of aiming at independence in their efforts to rebuild the city walls, and in consequence the king ordered the suspension of the building until further notice, iv.6-23. Under the stimulus of the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the real work of building the temple was begun in 520 BC. The enterprise roused the suspicion of the Persian governor,

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who promptly communicated with Darius. The Jews had appealed to the decree of Cyrus granting them permission to build, and this decree was found, after a search, at Ecbatana. Whereupon Darius gave the Jews substantial support, the buildings were finished and dedicated in 516 BC, and a great passover feast was held (v., vi.).

The scene now shifts to a period at any rate fifty-eight years later (458 BC) Armed with a commission from Artaxerxes, Ezra the scribe, of priestly lineage, arrived, with a company of laity and clergy, at Jerusalem from Babylon, with the object of investigating the religious condition of Judah and of teaching the law (vii.). Before leaving Babylon he had proclaimed a fast with public humiliation and prayer, and taken scrupulous precautions to have the offerings for the temple safely delivered at Jerusalem. When they reached the city, they offered a sumptuous burnt-offering and sin-offering (viii.). Soon complaints are lodged with Ezra that leading men have been guilty of intermarriage with heathen women, and he pours out his soul in a passionate prayer of confession (ix.). A penitent mood seizes the people; Ezra summons a general assembly, and establishes a commission of investigation, which, in about three months, convicted 113 men of intermarriage with foreign women (x.).

The history now moves forward about fourteen years (444 BC). Nehemiah, a royal cup-bearer in the Persian palace, hears with sorrow of the distress of his countrymen in Judea, and of the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. i.). With the king's permission, and armed with his support, he visited Jerusalem, and kindled in the whole community there the desire to rebuild the walls (ii.). The work was prosecuted with vigour, and, with one exception, participated in by all (iii.). The foreign neighbours of Jerusalem, provoked by their success, meditated an attack - a plan which was, however, frustrated by the preparations of Nehemiah (iv.). Nehemiah, being interested in the social as well as the political condition of the community, unflinchingly rebuked the unbrotherly treatment of the poor by the rich, appealing to his own very different conduct, and finally induced the nobles to restore to the poor their mortgaged property (v.). By cunning plots, the enemy repeatedly but unsuccessfully sought to secure the person of Nehemiah; and in fifty-two days the walls were finished (vi.). He then placed the city in charge of two officials, taking precautions to have it strongly guarded and more thickly peopled (vii.).

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At a national assembly, Ezra read to the people from the book of the law, and they were moved to tears. They celebrated the feast of booths, and throughout the festival week the law was read daily (viii.). The people, led by the Levites (under Ezra, ix.6, lxx.), made a humble confession of sin (ix.), and the prayer issued in a covenant to abstain from intermarriage with the heathen and trade on the Sabbath day, and to support the temple service (x.).

The population of the city was increased by a special draft, selected by lot from those resident outside, and also by a body of volunteers (xi.). After a series of lists of priestly and Levitical houses, one of which is carried down to the time of Alexander the Great, xii.1-26, the walls were formally dedicated, and steps were taken to secure the maintenance of the temple service and officers, xii.27-47. [According to Josephus, Jaddua (Neh. xii.22) was high priest in the time of Alexander (about 330 BC?).] On his return to Jerusalem in 432 BC Nehemiah enforced the sanctity of the temple, and instituted various reforms, affecting especially the Levitical dues, the sanctity of the Sabbath, and intermarriage with foreigners, xiii.

The difficulties involved in this presentation of the history are of two kinds- inconsistencies with assured historical facts, and improbabilities. Perhaps the most important illustration of the former is to be found in Ezra iii. There not only is an altar immediately built by the returned exiles - a statement not in itself improbable - but the foundation of the temple is laid soon after, iii.10, and the ceremony is elaborately described (536 BC). The foundation is also presupposed for this period elsewhere in the book (cf. v.16, in an Aramaic document). Now this statement is at least formally contradicted by v.2, where it is expressly said that, under the stimulus of the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, who did not prophesy till 520 BC, Zerubbabel and Joshua began to build the house of God. This is confirmed by the very explicit statements of these two prophets themselves, whose evidence, being contemporary, is unchallengeable. Haggai gives the very day of the foundation, ii.18, and Zechariah iv.9 says, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house." It is not impossible to surmount the difficulty by assuming that the laying of the foundation in 536 BC was a purely formal ceremony while the real work was not begun till 520; still, it is awkward for this view that the language of two contemporary prophets is so explicit. And in any case, the statement in

Ezra v.16 that “since that time (i.e.536) even until now (520) hath the temple been in building” is not easy to reconcile with what we know from contemporary sources; the whole brunt of Haggai’s indictment is that the people have been attending to their own houses and neglecting Jehovah’s house, which is in consequence desolate (Hag. i.4, 9).

The most signal illustration of the improbabilities that arise from the traditional order of the book lies in the priority of Ezra to Nehemiah. On the common view, Ezra arrives in Jerusalem in 458 BC (Ezra vii.7, 8), Nehemiah in 444 (Neh. ii.1). But the situation which Ezra finds on his arrival appears to presuppose a settled and orderly life, which was hardly possible until the city was fortified and the walls built by Nehemiah; indeed, Ezra, in his prayer, mentions the erection of the walls as a special exhibition of the divine love (Ezra ix.9). Further, Nehemiah’s memoirs make no allusion to the alleged measures of Ezra; and, if Ezra really preceded Nehemiah, it is difficult to see why none of the reformers who came with him from Babylon should be mentioned as supporting Nehemiah. Again, the measures of Nehemiah are mild in comparison with the radical measures of Ezra. Ezra, e.g. demands the divorce of the wives (Ezra x.11ff.), whereas Nehemiah only forbids intermarriage between the children (Neh. xiii.25). In short, the work of Nehemiah has all the appearance of being tentative and preliminary to the drastic reforms of Ezra. The history certainly gains in intelligibility if we assume the priority of Nehemiah, and the text does not absolutely bind us. Ezra’s departure took place “in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king” (Ezra vii.7). Even if we allow that the number is correct, it is just possible that the king referred to is not Artaxerxes I (465-424), but Artaxerxes II (404-359). In that case, the date of Ezra’s arrival would be 397 BC; in any case, the number of the year may be incorrect.

Any doubt which might arise as to the possibility of so serious a transformation is at once met by an indubitable case of misplacement in Ezra iv.6-23. The writer is dealing with the alleged attempts of the Samaritans to frustrate the building of the temple between 536 and 520 BC (Ezra iv.1-5), and he diverges without warning into an account of a similar opposition during the reigns of Xerxes (485-465) and Artaxerxes (465-424) (Ezra iv.6-23), resuming his interrupted story of the building of the temple in ch. v. The account in iv.6-23 is altogether irrelevant, as it has to do, not with the temple, but with the building of the city walls, iv.12.

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Such peculiarities and dislocations are strange in a historical writing, and they are to be explained by the fact that the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is not so much a connected history as a compilation. The sources and spirit of this compilation we shall now consider. First and of surpassing importance are (a, b) what are known as the I-sections - verbal extracts in the first person, from the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah: -

- ❖ Ezra vii.27-ix., except viii.35, 36.
- ❖ Neh. i.-vii.5, xii.27-43, xiii.4-31.
- ❖ Other sections, though they are not actually extracts from the memoirs, appear to rest directly on them: cf. Ezra vii.1-10, x., Neh. viii.-x. In these sections Ezra is spoken of in the third person.
- ❖ Of great interest and importance are the Aramaic sections, Ezra iv. 7b-vi.18 and vii.12-26, involving correspondence with the Persian court or royal rescripts.
- ❖ Finally, there are occasional lists, such as Neh. xii.1-26a, or Neh. vii.6-69, a list of the returning exiles, incorporated in the memoirs of Nehemiah from some earlier list and borrowed in Ezra ii.

These are the chief sources, but there can be no doubt that they were compiled - that is put together and in certain cases worked over - by the Chronicler. That suspicion is at once raised by the fact that Ezra-Nehemiah is a strict continuation of the book of Chronicles,[1] though in the Hebrew Bible Chronicles appears last, because, having to compete with Samuel and Kings, it won its canonical position later than Ezra-Nehemiah. But apart from this, the phraseology, style and point of view of the Chronicler are very conspicuous. There is the same love of the law, the same interest in Leviticalism, the same joy in worship, the same fondness for lists and numbers. He must have lived a century or more after Ezra and Nehemiah; he looks back in Neh. xii.47 to "the days of Nehemiah," and he must himself have belonged to the Greek period. One of his lists mentions a Jaddua, a high priest in the time of Alexander the Great. He speaks of the king of Persia (Ezra i.1), and of Darius the Persian[2] (Neh. xii.22), as one to whom the Persian empire was a thing of the past; contemporaries simply spoke of "the king," Ezra iv.8.

[Footnote 1: Note that the opening verses of Ezra are repeated at the end of Chronicles to secure a favourable ending to the book- the more so as that was the last book of the Hebrew Bible.] [Footnote 2: In Ezra vi.22 Darius is even called the king of Assyria.]

Many of the peculiarities of the book are explained the moment it is seen to be a late compilation. The compiler selected from his available material whatever suited his purpose; he makes no attempt to give a continuous account of the period. He leaves without scruple a gap of sixty years or more between Ezra vi. and vii. He interpolates a comment of his own in the middle of the original memoirs of Nehemiah. He transcribes the same list twice (Ezra ii., Neh. vii.), which looks as if he had found it in two different documents. He gives passages irrelevant settings (cf. Ezra iv.6-23). He passes without warning from the first person in Ezra ix. to the third person in Ezra x., showing that he does not regard himself as the slave, but as the master, of his material. Whatever may be thought of the view that he has reversed the chronological order of Ezra and Nehemiah, the book undoubtedly contains misplaced passages. Ezra x. is a very unsatisfactory conclusion to the account of Ezra, whereas Neh. viii.-x., which deal with the work of Ezra and its issue in a covenant, form an admirable sequel to Ezra x., and have almost certainly been misplaced.

We cannot be too grateful to him for giving intact the vivid and extremely important account of the activity of Nehemiah the layman in Nehemiah's own words (i.-vii.5); at the same time, his own interests are almost entirely ecclesiastical. Unlike Ezra (viii.15ff.), he says little of the homeward journey of the exiles in 537, but much of the temple vessels (Ezra i.) and of the arrangements for the sacrificial system, iii.4-6. He dwells at length on the laying of the foundation stone of the temple, iii.8-13, on the Samaritan opposition to the building, iv.1-5, on the passover festival at the dedication of the temple when it was finished, vi.19-22. He amplifies the Nehemiah narratives at the point where the services and officers of the temple are concerned.

The influence of the Chronicler is unmistakable even in the Aramaic documents, whose authenticity one would on first thoughts expect to be guaranteed by their language. Aramaic would be the natural language of correspondence between the Persian court and the western provinces of the empire, and these official documents in Aramaic one might assume to be originals; but an examination reveals some of the editorial terms that characterize the Hebrew. A decree of Darius is represented as ending with the prayer that "the God that hath caused His name to dwell there (i.e. at Jerusalem) may overthrow all kings and peoples that shall put forth their hand to destroy this

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house of God which is at Jerusalem” (Ezra vi.13). To say nothing of the first clause, which has a suspicious resemblance to the language of Deuteronomy, such a wish addressed to the God of the Jews is anything but natural on the lips of a Persian. Again, there are several distinctively Jewish terms of expression in the rescript given by Artaxerxes to Ezra, e.g. the detailed allusion to sacrifices in Ezra vii.17. This, however, might easily be explained by assuming that Ezra himself had had a hand in drafting the rescript, which is not impossible.

The question, however, is for the historian a very serious one: how great were the liberties which the Chronicler allowed himself in the manipulation of his material? It is interesting in this connexion to compare his account of the decree of Cyrus on behalf of the Jewish exiles in Ezra i.2-4 with the Aramaic version in vi.3-5, which has all the appearance of being original. The difference is striking. Cyrus speaks in ch. i. as an ardent Jehovah worshipper; but the substance of the edict is approximately correct, though its form is altogether unhistorical and indeed impossible. The Chronicler’s idealizing tendency is here very apparent; and it is not impossible that this has elsewhere affected his presentation of the facts as well as the form of his narrative. In the light of the very plain statements of the contemporary prophets Haggai and Zechariah, we are justified in doubting whether, in Ezra iii., the Chronicler has not antedated the foundation of the temple. To him it may well have seemed inconceivable that the returned exiles should - whatever their excuse - have waited for sixteen years before beginning the work which to him was of transcendent importance.

It is possible, too, that prophecy may have influenced his presentation of the history. He throws into the very forefront a prophecy of Jeremiah (xxv.12), and regards the decree of Cyrus as its fulfilment (Ezra i.1). He may also have had in mind the words of the great exilic prophet who had represented Cyrus as issuing the command to lay the foundation of the temple (Isa. xlv.28); and he may in this way have thrown into the period immediately after the return activities which properly belong to the period sixteen years later. But it is perfectly gratuitous, on the strength of this, to doubt, as has recently been done, the whole story of the return in 537 B.C. Those who do so point out that the audience addressed by Haggai, i.12, 14, ii.2, and Zechariah viii.6, is described as the remnant of the people of the land - that is, it is alleged, of those who

had been left behind at the time of the captivity. No doubt the better-minded among these would lend their support to the efforts of Haggai and Zechariah to re-establish the worship, but this community as a whole must have been too dispirited and indifferent to have taken such a step without the impulse supplied by the returned exiles. The devotion of the native population to Jehovah, not great to begin with - for it was the worst of the people who were left behind - must have deteriorated through intermarriage with heathen neighbours (Neh. xiii., Ezra ix. x.); and without a return in 537 on the strength of the edict of Cyrus, the whole situation and sequel are unintelligible. The Chronicler's version of the decree of Cyrus throws a flood of light upon his method. It cannot be fairly said that he invents facts; he may modify, amplify and transpose, but always on the basis of fact. His fidelity in transcribing the memoirs of Nehemiah is proof that he was not unscrupulous in the treatment of his sources.

It remains to consider briefly the value of these sources. The authenticity of the memoirs of Nehemiah is universally admitted. Similar phrases are continually recurring, e.g. "the good hand of my God upon me," ii.8, 18, and the whole narrative is stamped with the impress of a brave, devout, patriotic and resourceful personality. The authenticity of the memoirs of Ezra has been disputed with perhaps a shadow of plausibility. The language of the memoirs distinctly approximates to the language of the Chronicler himself, though this can be fairly accounted for, either by supposing that the spirit and interests of Ezra the priest were largely identical with those of the Chronicler, or that the Chronicler, recognizing his general affinity with Ezra, hesitated less than in the case of Nehemiah to conform the language of the memoirs to his own. But more serious charges have been made. It has been alleged that the account of the career of Ezra has been largely modelled on that of Nehemiah, as that of Elisha on Elijah, and that legendary elements are traceable, e.g. in the immense wealth brought by Ezra's company from Babylon (Ezra viii.24-27). These reasons do not seem altogether convincing. The Chronicler stood relatively near to Ezra. Records and lists were kept in that period, and he was no doubt in possession of more first-hand documentary information than appears in his book. There is no obvious motive for the writer who so faithfully transcribed the memoirs of Nehemiah, inventing so vivid, coherent and circumstantial a narrative for Ezra in the first person singular (Ezra vii.27-ix.).

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The question of the Ezra memoirs raises the further question of the Aramaic documents. The memoirs are immediately preceded by the Aramaic rescript of Artaxerxes permitting Ezra to visit Jerusalem for the purpose of reorganizing the Jewish community (Ezra vii.12-26). Doubt has been cast upon the authenticity of this document on the strength of its undeniably Jewish colouring; but this, as we have seen, is probably to be explained by the not unnatural assumption that Ezra himself had a hand in its preparation. Its substantial authenticity seems fully guaranteed by the spontaneous and warm-hearted outburst of gratitude to God with which Ezra immediately follows it (Ezra vii.27ff): "Blessed be Jehovah, the God of our fathers, who hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart," etc. A similar criticism may be made in general on the Aramaic document, Ezra iv. 7b-vi.18. It is certain, as we have seen, that the document has been retouched by the Chronicler; but the whole passage and especially the royal decrees are substantially authentic. Attention has been called to the Persian words which they contain, though this alone is not decisive, as they might conceivably be due to a later author; but the authenticity of the decree of Cyrus is practically guaranteed by the story that it was discovered at Ecbatana (Ezra vi.2). Had it been a fiction, the scene of the discovery would no doubt have been Babylon or Susa.

After making allowance, then, for the Chronicler's occasionally cavalier treatment of his sources, we have to admit that the sources themselves are of the highest historical value, though in order to secure a coherent view of the period, they have, in all probability, to be rearranged. No rearrangement can be considered as absolutely certain, but the following, which is adopted by several scholars, has internal probability: -

Ezra i.-iv.5, iv.24-vi., followed by about seventy years of silence (516-444 B.C.). Neh. i.-vi., Ezra iv.6-23, Neh. vii.1-69 (= Ezra ii.), Neh. xi., xii., xiii.4-31, Ezra vii., viii., Neh. vii.70-viii., Ezra ix.-x.9, Neh. xiii.1-3, Ezra x.10-44, Neh. ix., x.

Despite their enormous difficulties, Ezra-Nehemiah are a source of the highest importance for the political and religious history of early Judaism. The human interest of the story is also great - the problems for religion created by intermarriage (Neh. xiii.23ff., Ezra ix., x.), and the growth of the commercial spirit (Neh. xiii.15-22). The figure of

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Ezra, though not without a certain devout energy, is somewhat stiff and formal; but the personality revealed by the memoirs of Nehemiah is gracious almost to the point of romance. Seldom did the Hebrew people produce so attractive and versatile a figure - at once a man of prayer and of action, of clear swift purpose, daring initiative, and resistless energy, and endowed with a singular power of inspiring others with his own enthusiasm. He forms an admirable foil to Ezra the ecclesiastic; and it is a matter of supreme satisfaction that we have the epoch-making events in his career told in his own direct and vigorous word.

John Edgar McFadyen

Chapter 5

Outline of the Books

The following outline could be suggested to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The structure is based on the major events occurring within the narrative.

1:1- 6:22 - The return under Zerubbabel

- 1:1-11 The decree of Cyrus - 538BC
- 1:1- 4 The Order to return to rebuild the house of God Anyone who wished to return could do so
- 1:5 -11 Vessels of the temple that had been taken to Babylon were returned for the temple, given to Sheshbazzar

2:1-70 A (selective) list of the people who returned

- 2:1-2 Legitimization of people of Israel - continuity with God Zerubbabel and Jeshua were the leaders
- 2:3-58 Laity, priests, Levites, temple servants were included

- 2:59-63 People who wanted to go but could not prove ancestry
Determination was made later
- 2:64-67 Total is given as 42,360 plus servants, singers, and animals
- 2:68-70 The people brought items for the temple, idealistic
representation of the birth of the new community

3:1-13 The new beginning

- 3:1-6 Jeshua and Zerubbabel built an altar Fearful of the people
of the land Sacrificed burnt offerings in accordance with
Feast of Tabernacles Foundations of temple were not yet
laid
- 3:7-13 Laying foundation of temple Work was begun second
month of second year after return to Jerusalem Celebrations
were held after foundations were laid Priests and Levites
played major role Response of people was mixed Older
Israelites who remembered Solomon's temple wept in
sorrow Younger Israelites shouted for joy

4:1-23 Suspension of Work on Temple

- 4:1-5 Samaritans tried to get in on the action, were rebuffed
Israelites claimed Cyrus' decree applied only to them
Samaritans continued to harass Israelites People of Israel
were "disheartened" and stopped working on temple
- 4:6-23 A glimpse of future Samaritan tactics Samaritans wrote
several letters to the king complaining about inhabitants
Accused them of being rebellious and evil Said they would
not pay tax, tribute once Jerusalem was restored Wanted
to forewarn the king King's response: he checked into it
and agreed with them Ordered the Samaritans to stop
the building process Apparently they did
- 4:24-6:22 Rebuilding of Temple
- 4:24-5:2 Work on the temple ceased until the second year of
Darius (ca 519BC) Prophets Haggai and Zechariah
prophesied Work was restarted
- 5:3-17 Governor of Trans-Euphrates questioned their actions
Work continued pending response from Darius Governor
sent letter to Darius Reviewed exile, permission to return
Included names of builders Asked Darius to check

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whether temple vessels were given back Asked him to research whole permission issue Wanted report sent back to Governor

6:1-5 Discovery of Cyrus' edict Not only did Cyrus command the temple be rebuilt, but also funds were to come from royal treasury Included comment that golden vessels "must" be returned to temple

6:6-12 Darius' reply to Governor Told Governor to withdraw He must not interfere in any way In addition he was to provide the funds from his own treasury He was also to give them adequate supplies for sacrifice Included consequences for anyone interfering with edict

6:13-15 Work on temple was completed Governor carried out Darius' order Temple was completed in the sixth year of Darius' reign(ca 516 BC)

6:16-18 Dedication of Temple Priests, Levites carried out sacrifices in accordance with Law of Moses

6:19-22 First Passover Celebrated with all fanfare Also celebrated Feast of Unleavened Bread

7:1-10:44 - The Return under Ezra

7:1-8:36 Return of Ezra

7:1-10 Ezra's mission Sent from Babylon, arrived in Jerusalem seventh year of the king Mission: to study the law of the Lord, to practice it and to teach it

7:11-25 Artaxerxes' Letter (Probably written by Ezra and sanctioned by king) Anyone was given leave to accompany Ezra Ezra was to go to Jerusalem to see if people were living in accordance with the Law of God He was to collect silver and gold from a variety of sources Money was for animals for sacrifice If they needed any other things, they could get money from the royal treasury "Everything demanded by the God of heaven must be provided" No tax should ever be imposed on priests, Levites, temple servants Anyone who did not comply with these orders could face death or imprisonment

7:27-28 Ezra offered thanksgiving

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- 8:1-14 List of Heads of families who accompanied him Twelve families are mentioned; perhaps reference to twelve tribes Symbolic “resettling” of Jerusalem
- 8:15-20 Temple personnel Roughly 220 personnel went along to assist Levites, priests
- 8:21-23 Prayers to God for a safe journey Dangerous to travel with “gold and silver” Ezra resisted asking king for military escort Fasted, trusted in God
- 8:24-30 Description of treasure 650 Talents = 24+ tons of gold and silver Priests and Levites accepted responsibility for safe transport
- 8:31-36 Return to Jerusalem God kept them safe on their journey Weighed the talents shortly upon arrival - nothing was missing Gave them to the priest Shared the king’s edict with surrounding governors

9:1-10:44 The reforms of Ezra

- 9:1-5 Marriage involving foreigners Leaders informed Ezra of practice of intermarrying Ezra tore his clothes, sat down until evening sacrifice. People stood around in silence, trembling At evening sacrifice, Ezra prostrated himself before God
- 9:6-15 Ezra’s prayer Confessed guilt of the people (included himself). Realized God had graciously allowed them to return. Feared they had learned nothing in the process. Acknowledged “remnant” - purified group of Israel - had been given opportunity to return as a token of His grace and mercy Feared that if remnant continued to sin, God would wipe them out, too
- 10:1-6 Divorce of Foreign Women Ezra prayed publicly as people gathered around him People were fearful, wept bitterly One of the leaders agreed with Ezra Confessed sin of the people If they removed the iniquity, God would forgive them Women were to be sent away; the exiles were to be protected against further sins Even children had to be sent away Renewal of the covenant Leaders took an oath to fulfill covenant to end marriages

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- 10:7-17 People called to Assembly They had three days to gather, or lose property and standing in community All the people gathered Ezra addressed them: By marrying foreigners, they had committed treason and added to the guilt of Israel Leaders said they could reform by separating themselves from the women (proposal had to come from leaders - Ezra was still outsider) Entire congregation agreed to do so Each case was to be investigated, decision would be final Whole purpose was to avoid the anger of God Two men objected - not sure if they objected to proposal or to delay of its execution Eventually people did accept; Ezra stayed in background
- 10:18-44 List of all those guilty Even priests had married foreign wives, had to send them away Sacrifices were offered-unintentional sins Sin was serious; law of God must be kept

Nehemiah 1:1- 7:72 - The Return under Nehemiah

- 1:1-4 Nehemiah inquired about Jews in Jerusalem Was told they were "in trouble and shame," wall was in disrepair Nehemiah wept for days, prayed to the God of heaven
- 1:5-11 Nehemiah's prayer Lament prayer - solidarity with people Confessed sins of people and of himself Reminded the Lord he had redeemed these people, prayed for mercy Asked for success Nehemiah was cupbearer for the king
- 2:1-10 Nehemiah and the king King held a festival; Nehemiah served him with a gloomy countenance King inquired as to what was wrong Nehemiah asked for permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild wall Requested letters of safe passage for governors of Trans-Euphrates Governors (Sanballat and Tobiah) were very upset that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites
- 2:11-20 Nehemiah's inspection; officials' reactions Nehemiah checked the area under cover of darkness Needed to see if plans could be executed. After deciding that it was possible, he summoned all the leaders. Said the city was in danger, wanted to rebuild the wall. The favor of God was upon him

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Also had the authority of king Artaxerxes Adversaries found out, tried to dishearten the Jews Nehemiah: “in the name of God, we will rebuild this wall.”

- 3:1-32 Working on the wall List of people and the section they restored List included artisans, craftsmen, priests
- 4:1-23 Opposition of the Samaritans
- 4:1-3 Sanballat and Tobiah heaped insults on the Jews
- 4:4-6 Nehemiah’s prayer Asked for vindication because enemies heaped scorn on work of God
- 4:7-8 Sanballat and company decided to fight against Jerusalem
- 4:9-23 Nehemiah’s response Organized Jewish people into army Half of the people worked; half of them guarded the work Quick action saved the day; the Samaritans did not want a full-scale war Would have adverse reaction from Persians People from rural areas were to spend the night in erusalem Basically worked around the clock
- 5:1-5 Economic woes Work on the wall had impact on agriculture Perhaps neighbors were less likely to trade because of hostilities over wall Farmers were starving, mortgaging land to buy grain, selling children into slavery Jews were taking advantage of poorer Jews
- 5:6-13 Nehemiah’s response Called the leaders and called for drastic measures Sticky situation - involved many prosperous leaders Told them it was abominable Jews were taking advantage of people God had redeemed Leaders were ashamed, agreed to refund all land, monies, cancel whole debt Took oaths, decision was ratified by priests
- 5:14-19 Nehemiah as governor of Judah (445-433BC) Refused to levy taxes, worked for his food
- 6:1-19 Plots against Nehemiah to prevent him from completing the wall
- 6:1-4 Sanballat and Tobiah tried to entice Nehemiah into meeting with them He refused because of his workload Four invitations were sent; four invitations were refused

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- 6:5-9 Fifth invitation accused Nehemiah of attempting to rebel against king Nehemiah saw right through that one, totally rejected it
- 6:10-14 Enemies enlisted a prophet to entice Nehemiah to meet at the temple Nehemiah saw through that one as well Prayed that God would see what Sanballat and Tobiah were doing
- 6:15-16 Despite attempts to delay, Nehemiah and Jews finished wall in 52 days. Neighbors were frightened, acknowledged work was of God
- 6:17-19 Important people tried to act as mediator between Nehemiah and Tobiah - telling him Tobiah wasn't all that bad after all Nehemiah didn't fall for that either
- 7:1-3 Appointment of officers in Jerusalem Gates of Jerusalem were officially in place
- 7:4-72 List of people who returned Similar, but not identical, to list in Ezra Purpose was to organize families, encourage some of them to move to city

Nehemiah 8-12:43 - Renewal and Reform

- 8:1-12 Reading of the law in the time of Ezra-Nehemiah Ezra read the law before all the people Nehemiah was also present (v.9) - many scholars question historicity Law was interpreted so all could understand what was being read As people became aware of their sins, they wept Ezra told people to be filled with joy; Lord would be their strength People left, celebrated
- 8:13-18 Feast of Tabernacles Reinstitution of Festival
- 9:1-5 Day of Fasting Possibly Day of Atonement Fasting ended with celebration of praise
- 9:6-38 Prayers of Penance Survey of life as chosen people, complete with history dating back to Abraham Recounted time in Egypt, wilderness, land of promise, exile, restoration Ended with confession of sins, slavery, and poverty in the land of promise Then, covenant was renewed
- 10:1-27 Names of people who signed seal of the covenant

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- 10:28-29 All the people took an oath to keep the law of God Included all priests, Levites, temple servants, wives, husbands, children Oath was to *keep* and *practice* the law of God
- 10:30-39 Stipulations of the Covenant Promised not to intermarry Promised not to do business on the Sabbath Promised to hold sabbatical year - debts were forgiven Tithes would support and maintain the temple Provided food for the workers as well
- 11:1-24 People who settled in Jerusalem
- 11:1-2 Leaders lived in Jerusalem 1 out of 10 families were picked by lots to move to the city It was a privilege to be so close to the temple Seen as an example of God's will - not Nehemiah's doing
- 11:3-9 Names of the people who lived in the cities
- 11:10-18 List of priests and Levites
- 11:19-24 Remaining groups Gatekeepers and temple servants (Scholars do not agree whether these lists are historical)
- 11:25-36 Cities of Judah and Benjamin List of Judahites and Benjamites who lived in cities
- 12:1-26 More lists
- 12:1-9 List of priests who returned with Zerubbabel
- 12:10-11 Genealogy of high priest
- 12:12-26 Lists of Priests and Levites in time of Joiakim (ca 460-445BC)
- 12:27-30 Priests and Levites prepared to assume their duties Gathered from the country side, purified themselves, people, and the wall
- 12:31-43 Procession around the wall Much singing, some went to the right, others to the left Groups came together at the temple, singing and sacrificing
- 12:44-47 People willingly contributed to the temple
- 13:1-3 Foreigners were excluded from congregation Based on segments of what was written in the law

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- 13:4-9 Remaining business involving Tobiah, Priest (Nehemiah had returned to Persian court for some time) Priest had brought Tobiah into temple, given him large chamber When Nehemiah returned and discovered it, he threw all Tobiah's belongings into the street Ordered that the chamber be purified Purity of religion had to be maintained, regardless of the cost
- 13:10-14 Reaffirmation of Levites, duties and privileges
- 13:15-22 Restoration of Sabbath - must *rest* and acknowledge God
- 13:23-29 Recurring problem of intermarriage Despite previous resolution of the issue (Ezra 9-10; Neh. 6, 10), people were still engaged in practice Nehemiah cursed them, pulled their hair, made them take an oath Cited problems arising with this practice dating back to Solomon
- 13:30-31 Final summary of reforms Nehemiah claimed his work was successful Asked the Lord to remember all he had done

This brings to a close the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The remnant has been returned to Jerusalem. The temple and the wall of the city have been restored. The people are poised to begin life anew as children of God, but we have already seen how difficult it will prove to be. Nor does it take into account that many Jews lived outside the land of promise. Thus it is that the Book of Esther chronologically follows Ezra-Nehemiah. Whereas they focused on the return to Judah, Esther describes life in the Diaspora.

Chapter 6

Contents of the Books

Ezra-Nehemiah deals with the period of the restoration of the Jewish community in Judah, then the Persian province of Yehud, in the sixth-fifth centuries B.C.E. during the approximately 100 years between the time of the edict of Cyrus (538) permitting the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and the 32nd year of the reign of Artaxerxes I (433). Three different periods are represented in the books, each with different leaders and different royal missions. The first period (Ezra, chaps. 1-6) goes from the time of the edict of Cyrus (538) until the rebuilding of the temple (516), when the leaders of the Jews were Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. The second period (Ezra, chaps. 7-10 and Neh., chap. 8) commences in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes (458), when Ezra is given a royal mandate to lead a group of exiles back to Jerusalem. The third period (Neh., chaps. 1-7 and 9-13) encompasses a 12-year period from the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes (445) until his 32nd year (433), and deals with the work of Nehemiah.

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The First Period (Ezra, Chaps. 1-6)

The first period, embracing 22 years from 538 to 516, includes an account of (1) the edict of Cyrus; (2) a list of the first returnees; (3) restoration of worship and laying foundations of the Temple; (4) opposition to the Temple building; (5) the appeal to Darius and his favorable response; and (6) the completion of the Temple. In this period the leaders were Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. Sheshbazzar is thought to be identical with Senanazzar (the fourth son of Jeconiah (Jehoiachin), I Chron. 3:18), and is termed both prince and governor. Zerubbabel is one of the leaders of the first émigrés (2:2), and probably succeeded Sheshbazzar (4:2), though both are said to have laid foundations of the Temple (Sheshbazzar in Ezra 5:16 and Zerubbabel in Zech. 4:9).

The Edict of Cyrus (1:1-11)

There are two accounts given in the Book of Ezra of the edict of Cyrus: a Jewish version in Hebrew, and a Persian version in Aramaic. The Jewish/Hebrew version has Cyrus declare that God has given him “all the kingdoms of the earth,” that He has ordered the reconstruction of the Temple, and that any of God’s people who so wish may return to assist in the carrying out of the order (1:1-3). The Persian/Aramaic version gives extra details detailing the specifications of the Temple to be built (e.g., its height and width should be 60 cubits, emulating the Temple destroyed by the Babylonians), that expenses for the Temple will be paid by the state, and that precious utensils captured by Nebuchadnezzar and brought to Babylon will be returned (6:3-5). This last fact is actually mentioned in the first chapter of Ezra (v. 7). Cyrus released the cult objects and delivered them to Sheshbazzar, the governor of Judah, via Mithredath, the state treasurer. The Cyrus cylinder records similar acts of amnesty and favor shown to the peoples and deities of other countries following his conquest of Babylon in 539 (Cogan).

A List of the First Returnees (2:1-3:1)

The list of the returning exiles with Zerubbabel is itemized by family, place of origin, occupation (e.g., priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, etc.). Because this list is repeated in its entirety in Nehemiah (Neh. 7:6-8:1a) there has been much discussion of the list’s purpose, and where the list originally belonged. Most likely, the writer in the Book of Ezra was using a later list compiled for other uses, and its purpose at

the beginning of Ezra is to magnify the first response of the exiles to Cyrus' edict. However, in the Book of Nehemiah, the list is used for a different purpose, as a starting point of a campaign to induce those who had settled elsewhere in Judah to move to Jerusalem, which needed repopulation.

Restoration of Worship and Laying Foundations of the Temple (3:2-13)

Among the first activities of the returning exiles in 538 were to erect an altar on the site of the Temple, renew sacrificial worship, and celebrate the festival of Tabernacles. Preparations were then made for the rebuilding of the Temple, parallel to the preparations made for Solomon's Temple. The laying of the foundations was performed with a special service: prayer and song. The people's response was enthusiastic and they wept out of joy. However, there were a number of the returned exiles who had seen the first Temple, and these people wept in memory of this destroyed Temple to such an extent that the weeping for joy could not be distinguished from those weeping in memory of the destroyed Temple.

Opposition to the Temple Building (4:1-24)

Work on the Temple did not proceed smoothly and, although it was started in the second year after the return (537), work was not continued on it until the second year of Darius I (521). The long delay of some 21 years between the laying of the Temple's foundations in 537 and its completion in 516 is explained as due to opposition by the local population. The opposition arose primarily as a result of the exclusionary policy of the returnees about permitting the indigenous population to participate in the rebuilding effort. The returnees believed that they were the true representatives of the people of God who had gone into exile, and that those who had not gone into exile but remained in the land, or were descendants of displaced peoples who had subsequently adopted Israel's religion, were not entitled to join in this project. The opponents are called "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" and "people of the land," and they attempted to thwart the rebuilding effort by various means including writing accusatory letters to the Persian kings. These accusatory letters contained in 4:6-23 are problematic on two counts: first, because they do not deal with the rebuilding of the Temple but with the rebuilding of the city, and second because these letters are addressed to Persian

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kings who reigned long after the Temple was actually completed (516). These letters are sent to Xerxes I (486-465) and Artaxerxes I (465-424). That the section containing these letters is misplaced is clear from the fact that it is put in a different place in I Esdras, where these letters occur in chapter 2, and not in chapter 4 as in the Masoretic text.

Appeal to Darius and Favorable Response (5:1–6:14)

The end of chapter 4 reverts back to the proper chronology, that of the second year of Darius (521), at which time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the Jews to persist in the building of the Temple. The renewed activity led to an investigation by local Persian authorities, and a letter of inquiry (not a complaint like the preceding communications) was sent to Darius. The Persian authorities reported that they had gone to Jerusalem, observed the state of building operations, and had requested information on the authorization of the project. They were informed by the Jewish leaders of the edict of Cyrus granting the Jews permission to rebuild the Temple, and the letter asked the king to verify whether or not Cyrus did issue this edict. Darius then ordered a search in the royal archives, and the edict was found and is reproduced in his reply to the local authorities (see above). Darius issues instruction that the Cyrus decree be honored, and that expenses for the project be defrayed from the tax income accruing to the royal treasury from the province. Moreover, provisions were to be made for daily religious observances so that prayers could be made for the welfare of the king and his family. The aforementioned Cyrus Cylinder is often pointed to as an example of a Persian monarch who requested prayer from other peoples for his own and his son's welfare.

Completion of the Temple (6:15-22)

The reconstruction on the Temple was completed in the sixth year of the reign of Darius I (516); the work had taken 21 years since the foundation was laid in the second year of Cyrus (537). A joyful dedication ceremony took place with enormous amounts of sacrifices, "one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and twelve goats." Shortly afterwards the returned exiles celebrated the Passover, together with those of the indigenous population who had "separated themselves from the uncleanness of the nations of the lands," a hint that the returnees were open to permitting others into their fold (see also Neh. 10:29).

The Second Period (Ezra, Chaps. 7-10 And Neh., Chaps. 8-9)

The second period dated in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes I (458) deals with the work of Ezra, after whom the book was named, and includes (1) the edict of Artaxerxes to Ezra; (2) Ezra's return to Jerusalem; (3) his reaction to news of intermarriage; (4) his reading of the Torah; and (5) a day of penance and a prayer of the Levites. In this period, the leader is Ezra, a priest whose ancestry is traced back to Aaron (7:1-5), and a scribe "well versed in the law of Moses" (7:6, 11). The date of Ezra is problematic as is his relationship with Nehemiah, because apart from Nehemiah 8:9, and two other minor references (Neh. 12:26, 36), the two are never mentioned together. According to their respective books, Ezra assumed his mission in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (458) and Nehemiah came in the 20th year of the same king (445). This would mean that Ezra, who came at the express command of Artaxerxes to implement and teach the law, did not conduct his first public reading of the Law until 13 years later. Another problem for the biblical chronology is that Ezra found many people in Jerusalem but, according to Nehemiah, in his time, Jerusalem was unpopulated. For these reasons and others, some scholars believe Ezra came to Jerusalem much later, either in the 37th year of Artaxerxes I (428) or in the seventh year of Artaxerxes II (397) (see discussion in Klein).

The Edict of Artaxerxes to Ezra (7:1-28)

In the seventh year of his reign (458), Artaxerxes I (465-424) issued a royal edict granting permission for Jews to go to Jerusalem with Ezra. Ezra was permitted to bring with him gold and silver donations from other Jews. Regular maintenance expenses of the Temple were to be provided from the royal treasury and there was to be release of taxes for Temple personnel. Ezra's mission was "to expound the law of the Lord" and "to teach laws and rules to Israel" (v. 10). For this purpose he was granted, not only a royal subsidy, but he was also empowered to appoint judges, enforce religious law, and even to apply the death penalty. In response to critics who argue that such a concern by a Persian king for a foreign cult would be unlikely, the Passover papyrus issued by Darius II in 419/18 to the Jews at Elephantine in Egypt regarding the date and method for celebrating the Passover

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(Porten) has often been cited. Nevertheless, the question of imperial authorization of Jewish law by the Persian Empire continues to be a subject of debate (Watts).

Ezra's Return to Jerusalem (8:1-36)

Ezra's four-month journey to Jerusalem is described by Ezra in a first-person memoir. After listing the names of the leaders returning with him, Ezra discovers there were no Levites in his party so he had to muster up 38 Levites from some Levitical families. Another problem was security. Because Ezra had originally made a declaration of trust in God before the king, he felt it inappropriate to request from him the customary escort. Thus he accounted the party's safe arrival in Jerusalem with all its treasure intact as a mark of divine benevolence.

Ezra's Reaction to News of Intermarriage (9:1-10:44)

When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem he was informed that some people, including members of the clergy and aristocracy, had contracted foreign marriages. Immediately upon hearing this news Ezra engaged in mourning rites, tore his garments and fasted, and, on behalf of the people, confessed their sins and uttered a prayer of contrition. He is joined by a group of supporters who are also disturbed by this news. At the initiative of a certain Shecaniah son of Jehiel, Ezra was urged to take immediate action. An emergency national assembly was convened, and Ezra addressed the crowd in a winter rainstorm calling upon the people to divorce their foreign wives. The assembled crowd agreed to Ezra's plea, but because of the heavy rains and the complexity of the matter (Ezra's extension of legal prohibitions of marriages that had previously been permitted), they requested that a commission of investigation be set up. After three months the commission reported back with a list of priests, Levites, and Israelites who had intermarried.

Ezra's Reading of the Torah (Neh 8:1-12)

Seemingly out of order, Ezra reappears in chapter 8 of the Book of Nehemiah where it is recounted that he publicly read the Torah on the first day of the seventh month (Rosh Ha-Shanah). He stood upon a platform with dignitaries standing on his right and left. The ceremony began with an invocation by Ezra and a response by the people saying "Amen, Amen." During the reading the people stood while the text was made clear to them (or translated for them (into Aramaic) by the

Levites (van der Kooij). The people were emotionally overcome by the occasion and wept. However, they were enjoined not to be sad, rather to celebrate the day joyously with eating, drinking, and gift giving. The day after the public reading a group of priests and Levites continued to study the Torah with Ezra and came across the regulations for observing the feast of Tabernacles on that very month. A proclamation was issued to celebrate the festival which was done with great joy, and the Torah was again read publicly during the entire eight days of the festival. It has often been pointed out that the feast of Tabernacles which is described as being discovered anew from the Torah reading and had not been observed since the days of Joshua, had already been observed not too much earlier by the first return-ees (Ezra 3:4). Furthermore, the materials said to be collected for the festival (branches of olive, pine, myrtle, palm, and leafy trees) differ from those mandated for the festival in Leviticus 23:40 (where the materials are the fruit of trees (later interpreted as the citron), willows of the brook, palms, and bough of leafy trees (later interpreted as the myrtle). Most strikingly, these materials are said to be used to construct “tabernacles,” and not to be used for making of the in accordance with the later rabbinic interpretation.

Day of Penance and Prayer of the Levites (Neh. 9:1-37)

On the 24th day of the month, immediately after the celebration of the feast of Tabernacles, a fast day was announced. The identification and purpose of this fast day is unknown. Most commentators believe that this fast and following prayer of the Levites should come after the events described in Ezra 10, which was concerned with problems of intermarriage. The long prayer of the Levites (v. 5-37) is akin to one of the historical hymns in the Psalter (cf., Ps. 105, 106, 135, 136) (Fensham). The hymn contains stereotypical Psalm language, and contains references to the creation, the covenant with Abraham, the acts of God in Egypt, the wanderings in the desert, Sinai, the conquest, the Judges, and to later periods .

Many of the sections are divided by the independent pronoun (v. 6, 7, 19, 27, 33). The hymn is noteworthy in not mentioning David and Solomon, two of Judah’s glorious rulers, nor is there any mention of the exile and the current restoration, events central to Ezra and Nehemiah. Verses 6-11 of this hymn are included in the Jewish morning prayer service.

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The Third Period (Neh., Chaps. 1-7 And 9-13)

The third period encompasses 12 years from the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes I (445) until his 32nd year (433), and deals with the work of Nehemiah, who had held an important office (termed a “cupbearer”) in the royal household of the Persian king Artaxerxes I (465–424). The work of Nehemiah described in the form of a first-person memoir includes his rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and his economic and religious reforms. One of the characteristics of Nehemiah’s memoirs is that he intersperses short direct prayers within his narrative usually starting with slight variations (5:19, 6:14, 13:14, 22, 29, 31). In particular, this period deals with (1) Nehemiah’s response to the news from Jerusalem; (2) Nehemiah’s efforts at reconstructing and fortifying Jerusalem; (3) intrigues against Nehemiah; (4) the dedication of the wall; (5) Nehemiah’s resolution of economic problems; (6) Nehemiah’s religious reforms.

Nehemiah’s Response to News from Jerusalem (1:1-2:9)

In the 20th year of the Persian king Artaxerxes I (445), a delegation of Jews arrived from Jerusalem at Susa, the king’s winter residence, and informed Nehemiah of the deteriorating conditions back in Judah. The walls of Jerusalem were in a precarious state and repairs could not be undertaken (since they were specifically forbidden by an earlier decree of the same Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:21)). The news about Jerusalem upset Nehemiah, and he sought and was granted permission from the king to go to Jerusalem as governor and rebuild the city. This change in Persian policy is thought to have come after the Egyptian revolt of 448 when it was believed that a relatively strong and friendly Judah could better serve Persia’s strategic interests (Myers). Nehemiah was also granted much material assistance including supplies of wood for the rebuilding effort. However, unlike Ezra, Nehemiah requested a military escort for safe conduct throughout the provinces of the western satrapies.

Nehemiah’s Efforts at Reconstructing and Fortifying Jerusalem (2:10-4:17, 7:1-4)

A short time after his arrival in Jerusalem Nehemiah made a nocturnal inspection tour of the city walls riding on a donkey. He relates

that he could not continue riding, but had to dismount, because of the massive stones left by the overthrow of the city by the Babylonians. After his tour of inspection, Nehemiah disclosed to the local Jewish officials his mission to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah set to the task of rebuilding the wall by dividing the work into some 40 sections. Nearly all social classes (priests, Levites, Temple functionaries, and laypeople) participated in the building effort. Throughout the time of the building, Nehemiah encountered opposition and harassment from the leaders of the Persian provinces, who had previously administered the affairs of Judah, especially from one Sanballat, a Horonite (from Beth Horon), also termed the Samaritan/Samaritan. Sanballat resorted to mockery and ridicule, stating: “that stone wall they are building - if a fox climbed it he would breach it” (3:33-35). To counter the opposition, Nehemiah provided a guard for the workmen, and the masons and their helpers also carried swords. Because of the magnitude of the project, the workmen were separated from each other by large distances, so a trumpeter was provided ready to sound the alarm, the idea being that should one group be attacked the others would come to their aid. Nehemiah ordered the workers to remain in Jerusalem partly for self-protection and partly to assist in guarding the city. After the wall was rebuilt, Nehemiah appointed Hanani his brother and a similar-named individual, Hananiah, to be in charge of security. He also gave an order that the gates to the city should be closed before the guards went off duty and that they should be opened only when the sun was high (at midmorning). In addition to the security police, there was a citizen patrol whose duty it was to keep watch around their own houses. The central problem was the small population of Jerusalem: the city was extensive and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not yet built. Nehemiah decided to bring one of ten people from the surrounding population into Jerusalem (11:1-2).

Intrigues against Nehemiah (6:1-19)

One of Nehemiah’s enemies, Tobiah, an Ammonite, had intermarried with a prominent family in Judah. He had tried unsuccessfully to subvert Nehemiah’s work by enlisting their aid, but without success. Since Nehemiah’s enemies could not prevent the rebuilding and fortification of the city they made desperate attempts to capture him. One plan was to lure him away from Jerusalem to some unspecified place. Four times they attempted to invite him to “meetings,” and each time

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Nehemiah, knowing their harmful intentions, refused their invitation. When these attempts failed, a fifth attempt was made to hurt Nehemiah by framing him before the Persian authorities with a false report that he planned to have himself proclaimed king in Judah. A sixth attempt to damage Nehemiah was to pay a false prophet, Shemaiah, to lure Nehemiah into the Temple, but Nehemiah, realizing that this was a plot, refused to go. Despite these threats, Nehemiah reports that the wall was completed in just 52 days, which seems to be an incredibly short time for such a monumental task. According to Josephus, the project took two years and four months.

Dedication of the Wall (12:27-43)

A large gathering of priests, Levites, musicians, and notables assembled from all over Judah for the dedication of the wall in Jerusalem. Nehemiah divided the participants into two processions each commencing from the same point; one procession marched south towards the Dung Gate and then around the right side of the wall, the other marched north along the top of the left side, and both groups joined up together at the Temple square. Each procession was led by a choir, and musicians with trumpets, cymbals, harps, and lyres brought up the rear. Ezra is said to have marched in one procession (though his presence in the text is probably an editorial addition), and Nehemiah in the other. The two joyful processions met up in the Temple square where the dedication was concluded with many sacrifices.

Nehemiah's Resolution of Economic Problems (5:1-19)

During the period of the rebuilding, the people complained about the scarcity of food and the burden of high taxes. To meet their basic needs, the poor were required to pledge their possessions, even to sell sons and daughters into slavery. Nehemiah reacted angrily against the creditors accusing them of violating the covenant of brotherhood. When his appeal to the creditors voluntarily to take remedial action failed, Nehemiah forced them to take an oath, reinforced by a symbolic act of shaking out his garment, to restore property taken in pledge, as well as to forgive claims for loans. Nehemiah himself alleviated the people's tax burden by refusing to accept the very liberal household allowance for his official retinue which amounted to some 40 shekels of silver a day.

Nehemiah's Religious Reforms (10:1-40, 12:44-47, 13:1-29)

Nehemiah's religious reforms are found (a) in the so-called Code of Nehemiah; and (b) in the regulations he enacted upon embarking on his second term as governor in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes I (433).

Code of Nehemiah (10:1-40)

The Code of Nehemiah represents pledges made by the community to observe the Torah, its commandments and regulations. It is preceded by a list of signers including Nehemiah, his officials, the priests, Levites, and prominent family members (1-28). In the Code, the community promised to do seven things:

(1) to avoid mixed marriages with the peoples of the land; (2) not to buy from foreigners on Sabbaths and holy days; (3) to observe the sabbatical year; (4) to pay a new annual third shekel temple tax; (5) to supply offerings for the services and wood for the Temple altar; (6) to supply the first fruits, firstlings, tithes, and other contributions to the Temple; (7) to bring the tithes due to the priests and Levites to local storehouses.

Regulations Enacted by Nehemiah during his Second Term as Governor (13:1-31)

Expulsion of Foreigners (13:1-9). In their continued reading of the Torah the community came across a law (possibly referring to Deut 23:4-6) that Ammonites and Moabites were prohibited from becoming Israelites, and so they resolved to separate from foreigners. When Nehemiah returned from an official visit to the Persian court in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes (433) he discovered that the high priest Eliashib had given living quarters in a former storage room of the Temple to one of his old enemies Tobiah, the Ammonite (see above). When Nehemiah returned he evicted Tobiah, discarded all his belongings, and had the chambers purified and restored to their original use.

Renewal of Levitical Support (13:10-14)

Another consequence of Nehemiah's absence at the Persian court was that the people had stopped giving tithes to the Levites forcing them to return to their villages. Nehemiah took steps to bring back the Levites to Jerusalem by ensuring that outstanding payments, which had not been collected during his absence, would be paid and that future tithes would be regularly given.

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Enforcing Sabbath Regulations (13:15-22)

Nehemiah reports that in his day the Sabbath had been utterly commercialized. People were working in vineyards and on the farms, and Phoenician traders set up shops in Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Nehemiah attempted to put a stop to this Sabbath activity by ordering the gates of the city closed during the Sabbath. Despite his orders, the Phoenician traders camped outside the walls hoping to entice customers to come outside.

Problem of Mixed Marriages (13:23-29)

As in Ezra's day, Nehemiah had to deal with problems arising from marriages with foreign women. A major concern of his was the fact that the children of these marriages could no longer speak the language of Judah. Nehemiah ordered an end to further intermarriage, but he did not go as far as Ezra who demanded divorce from foreign wives.

Chapter 7

Significance of the Books for Later Judaism

Ezra and Nehemiah's actions and decrees may be seen as the beginning of an ongoing reinterpretation of tradition in its application to changing circumstances (Talmon). Ezra's reading of the Torah inaugurated a new element in Jewish life whereby the Torah was read and explicated on regular occasions in public. This public reading also led to the democratization of knowledge of the Torah among Jews, since prior to this event most parts of the Torah were under the exclusive provenance and control of the priests (Knohl). The differences between the formulation of regulations in the Book of Nehemiah and their counterparts in the Torah illustrate the process of legal elaboration necessary to meet contemporary exigencies (Clines, 1981). These differences can be seen in at least three areas: contributions to the Temple, regulations regarding Sabbath observance, and new intermarriage prohibitions.

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Temple Contributions

Some examples of modifications to Pentateuchal laws introduced in the Code of Nehemiah involve upkeep of the Temple. In Exodus 30:11-16, mention is made of a one-time half-shekel tax. The Code of Nehemiah, however, establishes an annual Temple tax, that of one-third of a shekel. In Leviticus 6:1-6, it is stated that fire should burn continuously on the altar but it does not prescribe the mechanism by which this ought to be done. The Code of Nehemiah does this by stipulating how the wood for the altar is to be obtained. In Deuteronomy 14:23-26, it is enjoined that tithes for the Levites are to be brought to the Temple. The Code of Nehemiah modifies this regulation by permitting an alternate collection system in provincial depots. All these stipulations for the Temple maintenance represent an innovation in ancient Israel, since now the upkeep of the Temple is made the responsibility of the entire community, not just of the king or the governor (Eskenazi).

Sabbath Observance

In the Pentateuch, the Sabbath law enjoins rest from work (e.g., Ex. 20:8-11; 23:12; and *passim*), but nowhere defines buying food as work, yet buying food from foreigners on the Sabbath is prohibited in the Code of Nehemiah. According to Amos 8:5, pre-exilic Israelites did not trade on the Sabbath, but the new conditions in Nehemiah's time of foreign merchants coming into Jerusalem on the Sabbath led to this new interpretation of the law.

New Intermarriage Prohibitions

The stipulations against intermarriage in Exodus 34:11-16 and Deuteronomy 7:1-4 prohibit intermarriage with Canaanites (Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites). Both Ezra and Nehemiah redefine these old Canaanites (who had long disappeared) as the new Canaanites, the current Ashdodites, Ammonites, and Moabites. It is often thought that Ezra's action insisting on the divorce of foreign wives and their children, together with Nehemiah's concern that the children of these foreign women could not speak the language of Judah, represented a shift in Israelite matrimonial law. Previously offspring of intermarriage was judged patrilineally; now it was to be on the matrilineal principle.

Restoration of the Temple

The Book of Ezra begins with a decree from King Cyrus of Persia, allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC (Ezra 1:2-4). The introduction to this decree specifies when it was proclaimed:- In the first year of King Cyrus (539-538 BC, shortly after the Persian defeat of Babylon). It also introduces us to one of the principal themes of Ezra-Nehemiah: the relationship between God's work and human work. Cyrus made his proclamation-that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, and because-the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus (Ezra 1:1). Cyrus was doing his work as king, seeking his personal and institutional ends.

Yet this was a result of God's work within him, advancing God's own purposes.

We sense in the first verse of Ezra that God is in control, yet choosing to work through human beings, even Gentile kings, to accomplish his will.

Workplace Christians today also live in trust that God is active through the decisions and actions of non-Christian people and institutions. Cyrus was God's chosen instrument, whether or not Cyrus himself recognized that. Similarly, the actions of our boss, co-workers, customers and suppliers, rivals, regulators or a myriad of other actors may be furthering the work of God's kingdom unrecognized by either us or them. That should prevent us from both despair and arrogance. If Christian people and values seem absent from your workplace, don't despair - God is still at work. On the other hand, if you are tempted to see yourself or your organization as a paragon of Christian virtue, beware! God may be accomplishing more through those with less visible connection to him than you realize. Certainly, God's work through Cyrus - who remained wealthy, powerful, and unbelieving, even while many of God's people were only slowly recovering from the poverty of exile - should warn us not to expect wealth and power as a necessary reward for our faithful work. God is using all things to work towards his kingdom, not necessarily towards our personal success.

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God's work continued as many Jews took advantage of Cyrus decree. Every one whose spirit God had stirred prepared to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5). When they arrived in Jerusalem, their first job was to build the altar and offer sacrifices on it (Ezra 3:1-3). This epitomizes the chief sort of work chronicled in Ezra and Nehemiah. It is closely associated with the sacrificial practices of Old Testament Judaism, which took place in the temple. The work described in these books reflects and supports the centrality of the temple and its offerings in the life of God's people. Worship and work stride hand and hand through the pages of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Given the focus in Ezra upon the rebuilding of the temple, people's jobs are mentioned when they are relevant to this effort. Thus the list of people returning to Jerusalem specifically itemizes-the priests, the Levites... and the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants(Ezra 2:70). The text identifies masons and carpenters because they were necessary for the building project (Ezra 3:7). People whose skills did not equip them for working directly on the temple contributed to the task through the fruit of their work in the form of freewill offerings (Ezra 2:68). Thus, in a sense, the rebuilding of the temple was the work of all the people as they contributed in one way or another.

Ezra identifies political leaders in addition to Cyrus because of their impact, positive or negative, on the construction effort. For example, Zerubbabel is mentioned as a leader of the people. He was the governor of the territory who oversaw the rebuilding of the temple (Haggai 1:1). Ezra mentions-Rehum the royal deputy and Shimshai the scribe, officials who wrote a letter opposing the temple's reconstruction (Ezra 4:8-10). Other kings and officials show up according to their relevance to the rebuilding project.

The temple is what the project was about, but it would be a mistake to think that God blesses craftsmanship and material work only when it is devoted to a religious purpose. Ezra's vision was to restore the whole city of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:13), not just the temple. We will discuss this point further when we come to Nehemiah, who actually undertook the work beyond the temple. Ezra describes several efforts to squelch the construction (Ezra 4:1-23). These were successful for a while, stopping the temple project for about two decades (Ezra 4:24). Finally, God

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encouraged the Jews through the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah to resume and complete the job (Ezra 5:1). Moreover, Darius, king of Persia, underwrote the building effort financially in the hope that the Lord might bless him and his sons (Ezra 6:8-10). Thus the temple was finally completed, thanks to the fact that God had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them so that he aided [the Jews] in the work on the house of God (Ezra 6:22).

As this verse makes clear, the Jews actually did the work of rebuilding the temple. Yet their labors were successful because of help from two pagan kings, one who inaugurated the project and the other who paid for its completion. Behind these human efforts loomed the overarching work of God, who moved in the hearts of the kings and encouraged his people through the prophets. As we have seen, God is at work far beyond what meets the eye of his people.

Chapter 8

Restoration of Temple, City Wall and Covenant

Careful attention to the reading of God's Word in order to perform His will is a constant theme. The spiritual revival came in response to Ezra's reading of the Book of the Law of Moses (8:1). After the reading, Ezra and some of the priests carefully explained its meaning to the people in attendance (8:8). The next day, Ezra met with some of the fathers of the households, the priests, and Levites, in order to understand the words of the Law (8:13). The sacrificial system was carried on with careful attention to perform it as it is written in the Law (10:34, 36). So deep was their concern to abide by God's revealed will that they took a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law... (10:29). When the marriage reforms were carried out, they acted in accordance with that which they read from the Book of Moses (13:1).

A second major theme, the obedience of Nehemiah, is explicitly referred to throughout the book due to the fact that the book is based on the memoirs or first person

accounts of Nehemiah. God worked through the obedience of Nehemiah; however, He also worked through the wrongly-motivated, wicked hearts of His enemies. Nehemiah's enemies failed, not so much as a result of the success of Nehemiah's strategies, but because God had brought their plot to nothing (4:15). God used the opposition of Judah's enemies to drive His people to their knees in the same way that He used the favor of Cyrus to return His people to the Land, to fund their building project, and to even protect the reconstruction of Jerusalem's walls. Not surprisingly, Nehemiah acknowledged the true motive of his strategy to repopulate Jerusalem:- my God put it into my heart (7:5). It was He who accomplished it.

Another theme in Nehemiah, as in Ezra, is opposition. Judah's enemies started rumors that God's people had revolted against Persia. The goal was to intimidate Judah into forestalling reconstruction of the walls. In spite of opposition from without and heartbreaking corruption and dissension from within, Judah completed the walls of Jerusalem in only 52 days (6:15), experienced revival after the reading of the law by Ezra (8:1ff.), and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (8:14ff.; ca. 445 BC).

The book's detailed insight into the personal thoughts, motives, and disappointments of Nehemiah makes it easy for the reader to primarily identify with him, rather than the sovereign hand of God theme and the primary message of His control and intervention into the affairs of His people and their enemies. But the exemplary behavior of the famous cupbearer is eclipsed by God who orchestrated the reconstruction of the walls in spite of much opposition and many setbacks; the good hand of God theme carries through the book of Nehemiah (1:10; 2:8, 18).

Interpretive Challenges

First, since much of Nehemiah is explained in relationship to Jerusalem's gates (cf. Neh. 2, 3, 8, 12), one needs to see the map Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Day for an orientation. Second, the reader must recognize that the time line of chapters 1-12 encompassed about one year (445 BC), followed by a long gap of time (over 20 years) after Neh. 12 and before Neh. 13. Finally, it must be recognized that Nehemiah actually served two governorships in Jerusalem, the first from 445-433

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BC (cf. Neh. 5:14; 13:6) and the second beginning possibly in 424 BC and extending to no longer than 410 BC.

Restoration of the Covenant (Ezra 7:1-10:44)

Ironically, Ezra himself does not appear in the book bearing his name until chapter 7. This learned man, a priest and teacher of the law, came to Jerusalem with the blessing of the Persian king Artaxerxes over fifty years after the rebuilding of the temple. His assignment was to present offerings in the temple on behalf of the king and to establish the law of God in Judah, both by teaching and by appointing law-abiding leaders (Ezra 7:25-26).

Ezra did not explain the king's favor in terms of good luck. Rather, he credited God with putting such a thing as this into the heart of the king to send Ezra to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:27). Ezra took courage and acted on the king's order because, as he said, the hand of the Lord my God was upon me (Ezra 7:28). This language of God's hand being upon someone is a favorite of Ezra, where it appears six times out of eight times in the whole Bible (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). God was at work in and through Ezra, and that explains his success in his endeavors.

Ezra's confidence in God's help was tested when it came time for his entourage to journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. I was ashamed, Ezra explained, to ask the king for a band of soldiers and cavalry to protect us against the enemy on our way; since we had told the king, The hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all who forsake him' (Ezra 8:22). For Ezra, to depend on a royal escort implied a failure to trust in God's protection. So he and his retinue fasted and prayed rather than seek practical assistance from the king (Ezra 8:23). Note: Ezra was not following any particular Old Testament law in choosing not to receive royal protection. Rather, this decision reflected his personal convictions about what it meant to trust God in the real challenges of leadership. One might say that Ezra was an idealistic believer in this situation, because he was willing to stake his life on the idea of God's protection, rather than to ensure protection with human help. As we'll see later, Ezra's position was not the only one deemed reasonable by godly leaders in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ezra's strategy proved to be successful. The hand of our God was upon us, he observed, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes along the way (Ezra 8:31). We do not know, however, if members of Ezra's party carried weapons or used them for protection. The text seems to suggest that Ezra and company completed their journey without a threatening incident. Once again, the book of Ezra shows that human efforts are successful when God is at work in them.

The last two chapters of Ezra focus on the problem of Jews intermarrying with Gentiles. The issue of work does not emerge here, except in the example of Ezra, who exercises his leadership in faithfulness to the Law and with prayerful decisiveness.

Restoration of the Wall (Neh 1:1-7:73)

The first chapter of the Book of Nehemiah introduces the book bearing his name as a resident of Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire. When Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down more than a half-century after the completion of the rebuilding of the temple, he sat down and wept, fasting and praying before God (Neh. 1:4). Implicitly, he was formulating a plan to remedy the situation in Jerusalem.

The connection between the temple and the wall is significant for the theology of work. The temple might seem to be a religious institution, while the walls are a secular one. But God led Nehemiah to work on the walls, no less than he led Ezra to work on the temple. Both the sacred and the secular were necessary to fulfill God's plan to restore the nation of Israel. If the walls were unfinished, the temple was unfinished too. The work was of a single piece. The reason for this is easy to understand. Without a wall, no city in the ancient Near East was safe from bandits, gangs and wild animals, even though the empire might be at peace. The more economically and culturally developed a city was, the greater the value of things in the city, and the greater the need for the wall. The temple, with its rich decorations, would have been particularly at risk. Practically speaking, no wall means no city, and no city means no temple.

Conversely, the city and its wall depend on the temple as the source of God's provision for law, government, security and prosperity. Even on strictly military terms, the temple and the wall are mutually dependent.

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The wall is an integral part of the city's protection, yet so is the temple wherein dwells the Lord (Ezra 1:3) who brings to nothing the violent plans of the city's enemies (Neh. 4:15). Likewise with government and justice. The gates of the wall are where lawsuits are tried (Deuteronomy 21:19, Isaiah 29:21), while at the same time the Lord from his temple executes justice for the orphan and the widow (Deut. 10:18). No temple means no presence of God, and no presence of God means no military strength, no justice, no civilization and no need for walls. The temple and the walls are united in a society founded on God's covenant and steadfast love (Neh. 1:5). This at least is the ideal towards which Nehemiah is fasting, praying and working.

The last line of Nehemiah 1 identifies him as cupbearer to the king (Neh. 1:11). This means not only that he had immediate access to the king as the one who tested and served his beverages, but also that Nehemiah was a trusted advisor and high-ranking Persian official. He would use his professional experience and position to great advantage as he embarked upon the work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

When the king granted him permission to oversee the rebuilding project, Nehemiah asked for letters to the governors through whose territory he would pass on his trip to Jerusalem (Neh. 2:7). In Nehemiah's view, the king granted this request for the gracious hand of my God was upon me (Neh. 2:8). Apparently, Nehemiah did not believe that trusting God meant he should not seek the king's protection for his journey. Moreover, he was pleased to have officers of the army and cavalry escort him safely to Jerusalem (Neh. 2:9).

The text of Nehemiah does not suggest there was anything wrong with Nehemiah's decision to seek and accept the king's protection. In fact, it claims that God's blessing accounted for this bit of royal assistance. It is striking to note how different Nehemiah's approach to this issue was from Ezra's. Whereas Ezra believed that trusting God meant he should not ask for royal protection, Nehemiah saw the offer of such protection as evidence of God's gracious hand of blessing.

This disagreement demonstrates how easy it is for godly people to come to different conclusions about what it means to trust God in their work. Perhaps each was simply doing what he was most familiar with. Ezra was a priest, familiar with the habitation of the Lord's presence. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king, familiar with the exercise of

royal power. Both Ezra and Nehemiah were seeking to be faithful in their labors. Both were godly, prayerful leaders. But they understood trusting God for protection differently. For Ezra, it meant journeying without the king's guard. For Nehemiah, it meant accepting the offer of royal help as evidence of God's own blessing.

We find signs in several places that Nehemiah was what we could call a pragmatic believer. In Nehemiah 2, for example, Nehemiah secretly surveyed the rubble of the former wall before even announcing his plans to the residents of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:11-17). Apparently he wanted to know the size and scope of the work he was taking on before he publicly committed to doing it. Yet, after explaining the purpose of his coming to Jerusalem and pointing to God's gracious hand upon him, when some local officials mocked and accused him, Nehemiah answered, The God of heaven is the one who will give us success (Neh. 2:20). God would give this success, in part, through Nehemiah's clever and well-informed leadership. The fact that success came from the Lord did not mean Nehemiah could sit back and relax. Quite to the contrary, Nehemiah was about to commence an arduous and demanding task.

His leadership involved delegation of parts of the wall-building project to a wide variety of people, including Eliashib, the high priest, [and] his fellow-priests (Neh. 3:1), the Tekoites, minus their nobles who didn't want to submit to the supervisors (Neh. 3:5), Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths and Hananiah, one of the perfumers (Neh. 3:8), Shallum,... ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, [and] his daughters (Neh. 3:12), and many others. Nehemiah was able to inspire collegiality and to organize the project effectively.

But then, just as in the story of the rebuilding of the temple in Ezra, opposition arose. Leaders of local peoples attempted to hinder the Jewish effort through ridicule, but the people had a mind to work (Neh. 4:6). When their words did not stop the wall from being rebuilt, the local leaders all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it (Neh. 4:8).

So what did Nehemiah lead his people to do? Pray and trust God? Or arm themselves for battle? Predictably, the pragmatic believer led them to do both:- We prayed to our God, and set a guard as a protection against them day and night (Neh. 4:9). In fact, when threats against

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the wall-builders mounted, Nehemiah also stationed guards at key positions. He encouraged his people not to lose heart because of their opponents:- Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes (Neh. 4:14). Because of their faith, the people were to fight.

Then, not long thereafter, Nehemiah added a further word of encouragement, Our God will fight for us! (Neh. 4:20). Yet this was not an invitation to the Jews to put down their weapons and focus on building, trusting in supernatural protection alone. Rather, God would fight for his people by assisting them in battle. He would be at work in and through his people as they worked.

We Christians sometimes seem to act as if there were a rigid wall between actively pursuing our own agenda and passively waiting for God to act. We are aware that this is a false duality, which is why, for example, orthodox/historic Christian theology rejects the Christian Science premise that medical treatments are acts of unfaithfulness to God. Yet, at moments, we are tempted to become passive while waiting for God to act. If you are unemployed, yes, God wants you to have a job. To get the job God wants you to have, you have to write a resume, conduct a search, apply for positions, interview, and get rejected dozens of times before finding that job, just as everyone else has to do. If you are a parent, yes, God wants you to have enjoyment in raising your children. But you will still have to set and enforce limits, be available at times when it's inconvenient, discuss difficult topics with them, cry and suffer with them through bumps, broken bones, and broken hearts, do homework with them, ask their forgiveness when you are wrong, and offer them forgiveness when they fail. You don't get time off as a reward for good behavior such as taking your kids to church. Nehemiah and company's arduous work warns us that trusting God does not equate with sitting on our hands waiting for magical solutions for our difficulties.

Nehemiah's wall-building project was threatened, not just from the outside, but also from the inside. Certain wealthy Jewish nobles and officials were taking advantage of economically difficult times to line their own pockets (Nehemiah 5). They were loaning money to fellow Jews, expecting interest to be paid on the loans, even though this was prohibited in the Jewish Law (for example, Exodus 22:25). When the

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debtors couldn't repay the loans, they lost their land and were even forced to sell their children into slavery (Neh. 5:5). Nehemiah responded by demanding that the wealthy stop charging interest on loans and give back whatever they had taken from their debtors.

In contrast to the selfishness of those who had been taking advantage of their fellow Jews, Nehemiah did not use his leadership position to enhance his personal fortune. Because of the fear of God, he even refused to tax the people to pay for his personal expenses, unlike his predecessors (Neh. 5:14-16). Instead, he generously invited many to eat at his table, paying from this expense from his personal savings without taxing the people (Neh. 5:17-18).

In a sense, the nobles and officials were guilty of the same kind of dualism we have just discussed. In their case, they were not waiting passively for God to solve their problems. Instead, they economic life had nothing to do with God. But Nehemiah tells them that their economic lives are of utmost importance to God, because God cares about all of society, not just its religious aspects:- Should you not walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies [to whom the nobles had forced the sale of Jewish debtors as slaves]? (Neh. 5:9). Nehemiah connects an economic issue (usury) with the fear of God.

The issues of Nehemiah 5, though emerging from a legal and cultural setting distant from our own, challenge us to consider how much we should profit personally from our position and privilege, even from our work. Should we put our money in banks that make loans with interest? Should we take advantage of perks made available to us in our workplace, even if these come at considerable cost to others? Nehemiah's specific commands (don't charge interest, don't foreclose on collateral, don't force the sale of people into slavery) may apply differently in our time, but underlying his commands is a prayer that still applies:- Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people (Neh. 5:19). As it was to Nehemiah, God's call to today's workers is to do everything we can for our people.

In practice, that means we each owe God the duty of caring for the cloud of persons who depend on our work: employers, co-workers, customers, family, the public and many others. Nehemiah may not tell us exactly how to handle today's workplace situations, but he tells us how to orient our minds as we decide. Put people first.

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The external and internal problems facing Nehemiah did not halt work on the wall, which was completed in only fifty-two days (Neh. 6:15). The enemies of Judah were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem; for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God (Neh. 6:16). Even though Nehemiah had exercised his considerable leadership to inspire and organize the builders, and even though they had worked tirelessly, and even though Nehemiah's wisdom enabled him to fend off attacks and distractions, nevertheless he saw all of this as work done with God's help. God worked through him and his people, using their gifts and labor to accomplish God's own purposes.

Restoration of the Covenant - Phase II (Neh 8:1-13:31)

After the wall surrounding Jerusalem was completed, the Israelites gathered in Jerusalem in order to renew their covenant with God. Ezra reappeared at this point in order to read the Law to the people (Neh. 8:2-5). As they heard the Law, they wept (Neh. 8:9). Yet Nehemiah rebuked them for their sorrow, adding, Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord (Neh. 8:10). However central work might be to serving God, so is celebration. On holy days, people are to enjoy the fruits of their labors as well as sharing them with those who lack such delights.

Yet, as Nehemiah chapter 9 demonstrates, there was also a time for godly sorrow as the people confessed their sins to God (Neh. 9:2). Their confession came in the context of an extensive recital of all the things God had done, beginning with creation itself (Neh. 9:6) and continuing through the crucial events of the Old Testament. The failure of Israel to be faithful to the Lord explained, among other things, why God's chosen people were slaves to foreign kings and why those kings enjoyed the fruits of Israelite labors (Neh. 9:36-37).

Among the promises made by the people as they renewed their covenant with the Lord was a commitment to honor the Sabbath (Neh. 10:31). In particular, they promised not to do business on the Sabbath with the peoples of the land who worked on this day. The Israelites also promised to fulfill their responsibility to support the temple and its workers (Neh. 10:31-39). They would do so by giving to the temple and its staff a percentage of the fruit of their own work. Now, as then,

the commitment to give a percentage of our income to support the service of the house of our God (Ezra 10:32) is both a necessary means of financing the work of worship and a reminder that everything we have comes from God's hand.

After completing his task of building the wall in Jerusalem and overseeing the restoration of society there, Nehemiah returned to serve King Artaxerxes (Neh. 13:6). Later, he came back to Jerusalem, where he discovered that some of the reforms he had initiated were thriving, while others had been neglected. For example, he observed some people working on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15). Jewish officials had been letting Gentile traders bring their goods into Jerusalem for sale on the day of rest (Neh. 13:16). So Nehemiah rebuked those who had failed to honor the Sabbath (Neh. 13:7-18). Moreover, in his typically pragmatic approach, he closed the city gates before the Sabbath began, keeping them shut until the day of rest had passed. He also stationed some of his servants at the gates so that they might tell potential sellers to leave (Neh. 13:19).

The question of whether and or how Christians ought to keep the Sabbath cannot be answered from Nehemiah. A much broader theological conversation is necessary. Nevertheless, this book reminds us of the centrality of Sabbath-keeping to God's first covenant people and the threat posed by economic interaction with those who do not honor the Sabbath. In our own context, it was certainly easier for Christians to keep the Sabbath when the malls were closed on the Lord's Day.

However, our contemporary culture of round-the-clock commerce puts us in Nehemiah's situation, in which a conscious - and potentially costly - decision about Sabbath-keeping is required.

Chapter 9

Spirituality of Restoration in Ezra-Nehemiah

Ezra the priest was a faithful servant of God who helped fulfill God's promises to the remnant of Judah in Babylon in the 400s BC. His calling was not self-appointed, nor could anyone on his own fulfill the kind of responsibilities to which he was called. God recognized Ezra as a man of judgment (Ezra 7:25). He was conscientious (Ezra 9:3). His principles led him to resolutely oppose sin. He had a profound love of God's Word and devoted himself to studying it and faithfully teaching God's truth (Ezra 7:10). Ezra found the spiritual strength he needed through prayer and fasting. He was willing to sacrifice his own needs and encourage others to do the same to extol and honor God. Understanding Ezra's background can help us see how God could use him to bring His people back to wholehearted obedience.

Judah Restored

God forgets neither His people nor His promises to them. In love, He warned the people of Judah that, if

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they didn't repent of their sinful, rebellious ways, He would remove them from their homeland. When they refused to heed His repeated warnings through His prophets, He allowed the Babylonians to conquer and remove them through three major deportations (ca. 606, 597 and 587 BC). Their punishment was 70 years of captivity in a foreign land (Jeremiah 25:1-13).

True to His word, God fulfilled His promise to restore the descendants of Judah after the 70 years. Zerubbabel headed the first return, which was to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1-6; ca. 536-516). Ezra led a later group in 457. Nehemiah, Ezra's contemporary, returned to rebuild the shattered walls of Jerusalem in 444. The Bible tells us that Zerubbabel was a prince of Judah in Babylon. He led nearly 50,000 of his countrymen to rebuild the temple. They faced considerable opposition to this monumental project. Zerubbabel and others got sidetracked. Their focus shifted to building houses for themselves. But the correctional exhortations from prophets Haggai and Zechariah corrected the problem. Zerubbabel and his workmen got back on track and completed the temple around 516. Although the people rebuilt the physical temple, they were still in poor spiritual condition. Then Ezra entered the picture.

When God needed a man of sterling character and strong conviction, He chose Ezra. Ezra means "help," as in helping to restore and reform Judah. His example can be encouraging to any who desire to be faithful to God. Ezra was a direct descendant of the priestly family that included Eleazar, Phineas, Zadok and Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5). He was "a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses" (verse 6) and an "expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel" (verse 11). In a testimony to his convictions, we read that "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (verse 10). While in Babylon, Ezra gained the favor of King Artaxerxes, who granted him a commission to return to Jerusalem (this was the second return, ca. 457 BC). The king invited all who wanted to go Jews, Israelites, priests and Levites to accompany Ezra to Jerusalem. However, only 1,754 chose to make the journey, compared with 49,897 who had returned with Zerubbabel 79 years earlier.

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Restoration of the people

Although the second return numbered fewer than 2,000 people, we must consider that five decades had passed since the completion of the temple in Jerusalem (in 516). Much can happen in two generations. The temple was complete and in use, but something was missing: a right attitude toward Almighty God. The people still lacked understanding. They were not wholeheartedly obedient to God. God works in a systematic and orderly way. Through the great Persian king, Cyrus, He fulfilled His promise that the Jews could return to their homeland after 70 years in captivity. Next God provided Zerubbabel to rebuild the literal temple. Finally God set His hand to begin to restore the spiritual temple, a remnant of Judah. He used Ezra to accomplish this. Ezra took a census of those who volunteered to return to Judah and Jerusalem with him. An important and practical reason for the census was to determine the needs for the temple services. Ezra was surprised as he considered who could serve in what capacity that no Levites were present. “And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there” (Ezra 8:15). So he directed leaders of his countrymen to “bring us servants for the house of our God” (verse 17). The leaders then made sure some Levites would return with Ezra for the service of the temple.

Next Ezra needed protection for “us and our little ones and all our possessions” on the long journey back to Jerusalem (verse 21). He was ashamed to ask the king to supply an escort of soldiers for defense against any enemies they might encounter. So he proclaimed a fast, and he and the people humbled themselves before God, asking Him to safeguard them on this dangerous trek. “So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer” (verse 23). The journey was safe and uneventful. “So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days” (verse 32). Then they gave offerings to God.

Removing sin

After their offerings, the leaders came to Ezra worried about a significant problem: Men of the remnant of Judah and a few from Israel had taken wives from neighboring gentile nations. This God had expressly forbidden them to do, since such marriages would weaken their resolve to honor God, who had specifically chosen and

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selected Judah and Israel to represent Him. Note Ezra's words in this regard: "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites" (Ezra 9:1). These heathen nations worshiped false gods. Were the Israelite men to remain married to their foreign wives, the prospect of false religion again enticing and seducing God's people was a real and dangerous problem. This, God had earlier warned, was precisely one of the reasons His people would be taken into national captivity unless they repented.

Israel reformed. God had sent Ezra to teach His people His way of life, to reveal to them their sins and exhort them to heartfelt repentance. "Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, 'We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this' (Ezra 10:1-2).

Shechaniah encouraged Ezra to take the responsibility and make a decree that Jewish men separate themselves from their gentile wives. "Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath" (verse 5). Ezra issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to the descendants of the captivity, directing them to gather in Jerusalem (verse 7). The men of Judah and Benjamin came as directed and sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of importance of the business at hand and because of heavy rain. (This took place in the time of year we would call December.)

Ezra led a confession to God, admonishing the gathered Benjaminites and Judahites and some Israelites to put away their pagan wives. The majority of them agreed to do so and obeyed God's command through Ezra. After several months "they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives" (Ezra 10:17). God, through His

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faithful priest Ezra, had removed a major source of sin from the people. God recognized that His people need to be united spiritually in their worship of Him (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). Although faithful Ezra had helped the remnant of Judah to return to God, they did not remain faithful. Neither had Israel repented and turned to God after Assyria removed its people from their northern kingdom almost three centuries earlier (721-718).

Another priest to gather Israel

Many of the descendants of the kingdom of Judah are still identifiable as we near the year 2000. The so-called lost 10 tribes of Israel, which disappeared from history after their captivity in Assyria, are also still extant, although not as easily identified, as we near the beginning of the third millennium.

Ezra the priest is a forerunner of Jesus Christ, the High Priest of God the Father (Hebrews 7). Near the end of the present age of man promised Christ, our High Priest a remnant of believers, spiritual Jews (Romans 2:28-29), would not only escape great tribulation (Revelation 12:12-17) but carry on the work God began through Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:14; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

God promised the people of Judah He would return them to Jerusalem, after their 70-year Babylonian captivity, to rebuild the temple and restore proper worship. God similarly promises to return Judah and Israel to their ancestral homeland. Many prophecies show that at Jesus Christ's second coming He will gather the descendants of Israel and Judah from the ends of the earth (Isaiah 11:10-12; Jeremiah 23:3-8; Ezekiel 36; 39:25-29). "Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 39:28-29). These astounding events are part of the good news of the Kingdom of God Jesus Christ proclaimed (Mark 1:14-15).

Chapter 10

The History from Ezra to Maccabean Period

Let us now take a look at Judaism in the last century of Persian rule, after Nehemiah (432) and before Alexander's conquest of Asia (332). During this period, Jerusalem and a strip of land around it formed a small district of Judea (Ilehud) lost in the enormous satrapy "Across the River," that is, west of the Euphrates. The district of Judea was approximately a quadrilateral, about thirty-five miles long, from Beth-el to Beth-zur, and from twenty-five to thirty miles broad, the plateau between the Dead Sea and the lowland in the west. Its area was about a thousand square miles, of which a good part was desert. Of the political history of Judea during our period there is virtually no record. An accidental notice informs us that Artaxerxes III of Persia had deported many Jews to the Caspian Sea during his campaign against Egypt. In all probability, Jerusalem, like Sidon, sided with Egypt in this conflict. A cuneiform tablet records the transport of prisoners from Sidon to Babylonia in the autumn of 345. Thirteen years later

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Jerusalem as well as Sidon opened the gates to Alexander the Macedonian.

The Judaism of Ezra and the Chronicler

There was a Persian governor in Jerusalem; there was a provincial fiscus; jar handles bearing stamps of “Judea” and “Jerusalem” in Hebrew and later Aramaic characters show that tribute was paid in kind. The governors received “bread and wine” from the people (Neh. 5:15) and since the governor had to provide a free table for his officers and the nobles of the land, each day he had to slay one ox and six choice sheep, exclusive of fowl. No wonder, then, that the governor expected a sheep as a present in behalf of suppliants (Mai. 1:8). Monetary economy, nevertheless, began to grow in Palestine. In the time of Nehemiah there are people borrowing money to pay the royal taxes. It is worth noting that Persian royal coins have not been found until now in the numerous and rich coin hoards of the fourth century in this region. Likewise, the Book Ezra-Nehemiah does not mention any coin; when it mentions precious metals and objects made of the metals, it reports their weight. There is no certain record of troops from Judea in Persian service.

The contingent from “the Solymian hills” in Xerxes expedition against Greece, mentioned in the epic poem of Choerilus, a friend of Herodotus, refers probably to the “eastern Ethiopians.” But the Jews had arms and had to appear with their swords, their spears and their bows by order of the governor. The latter had his personal guard, and the castle in which he lived commanded the Temple Hill. Like every city and nation in the Persian Empire the Jews enjoyed a more or less large autonomy, amplified by bribes and diminished from time to time by arbitrary interference of the Persian authorities. For instance, when once a murder had been committed in the Temple, the governor inflicted on the Jewish nation the fine of fifty shekels for every lamb used in the daily offering; this payment was enforced for seven years, that is, probably, until a new governor came to Jerusalem.

The Jews were represented by “the nobles of the Jews,” the heads of the clans. On the other hand, there was the High Priest, “and his colleagues the priests who are in Jerusalem,” as a document of 409 says. All the sacred personnel, the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, slaves and servants of the Temple were free of tolls,

tributes and customs. Here as elsewhere the Persian government favored the priesthood among its subjects as against the military aristocracy. The introduction of the Torah as "the law of the Jews" by a royal decree in 445 served the same purpose. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to regard the district of Yehud in the fourth century as an ecclesiastical state. While in Egypt, at the same date, a very large part of the soil belonged to the temples, and even a tithe of custom duties was assigned to them, the sanctuary of Jerusalem does not appear to have possessed any real estate outside its own site, and the emoluments of the priests were offerings of the believers. Even the voluntary contribution of a third of a shekel by every male Israelite, established under Nehemiah to defray the expenses of public worship, fell into disuse.

But the influence of the priests continued to rise. In Nehemiah's time lay rulers of Judah led in public affairs, e.g., in the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem, while the priests and the Levites purified the people; likewise plots against Nehemiah were devised among "the nobles of Judah." A century after him, a Greek traveler learned from his Jewish informant that public affairs of the Jews were administered by priests. It is a widely spread error that Judaism after Ezra was under the yoke of the Law, that the Jews were a community governed by an extreme strictness, that they were immune to foreign contagion and, until the Macedonian conquest, separated from the Greek world.

As a matter of fact, excavations have shown that in the fifth and fourth centuries BC Palestine belonged to the belt of an eclectic, Greco-Egyptian-Asiatic culture, which extended from the Nile Delta to Cilicia." The kitchen pots, as well as heavy bronze anklets worn by girls, or weapons of men, were now the same in the whole Levant, united under Persian sway. Greek painted pottery, Phoenician amulets and Egyptian idols are equally typical of Palestine in the fourth century. A Jerusalemite who went down to the coastal cities, let us say to Ascalon, could not help seeing a Greek cup showing Oedipus in conversation with the Sphinx or small bronzes of Egyptian deities. And when he returned with earthenware for his household, it might happen that he introduced into the Holy City reminiscence of a Greek mythos. An Attic black-figured cup with a sphinx has been found at Tell-En-Nashbeh, some six miles north of Jerusalem. The story, related by a pupil of Aristotle, that the master had met in Asia Minor (c. 345

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BC) a Hellenized Greek-speaking Jew is probably a fiction, but not one which is improbable. The commercial influence of Greece in Palestine was so great that the Athenian coins became the principal currency for trade transactions in the fifth century. This currency was gradually replaced in the fourth century by local imitations of the Athenian “owls.”

The authorities in Palestine also struck such imitations. As their small denominations show, these coins were destined for local use and for business transactions on market days. Nevertheless, used by pious Jews and even bearing the stamp of a Jewish agent of the Persian government (Hezekiah), these first Jewish coins show not only the owl of the Athenian model but also human figures, and even the image of a divinity seated on a winged wheel. Whether the die cutter simply imitated here the Baal of the Tarsian coins or intended to represent in this way the “Lord of Hosts,” these coins are hardly in accord with the biblical interdiction of “graven images.” In fact, being real men and not puppets like the characters portrayed in conventional textbooks, the Jews of the Restoration, like those of every generation, were entangled in contradictions and in conflicting patterns of real life.

They were convinced that God set them apart from the nations (Lev. 20:24), but they called Him the God of Heaven, which was the title of Ahuramazda, the deity of their Persian rulers. They regarded as Israel’s heritage the whole land from Dan to Beer-sheba, even from Egypt to the Orontes (I Chron. 13:5), but did not establish friendly relations with the remnants of Ephraim who worshiped the same God and consecrated His priests according to the prescriptions of the Torah (II Chron. 13:9). In Jerusalem in the fourth century the priesthood was considered firmly organized by David himself, but among these ancient priestly families were some like the clan Hakoz, which had been regarded as of doubtful lineage only a hundred years before. The Jews imagined that they were living according to the Law of Moses, while the synagogue, unknown to the Torah, became a fundamental part of their devotional life. So “the congregation of the Lord” became the basic element of the nation and a Jerusalemite could not imagine the national kings of the past acting otherwise than in agreement with the Holy Community (I Chron. 13:1; 16:1; 28:8; 29:1; II Chron. 30:4).

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Of still greater significance was another innovation: how the Torah came to be taught “throughout all the cities of Judah” (U Chron. 17:9). Before this the priests had kept to themselves the decision on matters of ritual and of morals. The knowledge comes from the priest’s lips, says an author of the age of Ezra and Nehemiah, and law from the priest’s mouth, because he is the messenger of the Lord (Mai. 2:7). But the democratization of the instruction in the Law in the fourth century opened the way to the coming of the scribe, and imperceptibly compromised the supremacy of the priest. From now on, the superiority of learned argument over authoritative decree prevailed. The First Psalm presents as the model of happiness not the officiating priests in the Temple, but rather the Sage who meditates on the Torah day and night. Scribes and Sages, clergy and laymen, the Jews were expected to be “saints,” holy unto the Lord (Lev. 20:26). But the Law of God which gave the standard of holiness was imposed upon the saints by the decree of their pagan sovereign. Another widespread and mistaken conception is that of postexilic exclusiveness.

As a matter of fact, in the Persian period, the Jews were first of all peoples we know to open wide the gates to proselytes. Every ancient cult was exclusive; none but the members of a family participated in the worship of its tutelary gods; no foreigner was able to sacrifice to the deities of a city. When Orestes, unmasked as a stranger, returns to his ancestral home, he asks permission to take part in religious ceremonies “if strangers may sacrifice with citizens.” In the fifth century B.C. the Athenians equally that it is a “calamity” to have an alien father. They were proud of being autochthonous, and not immigrants of mixed blood. In 333 B.C., when Alexander the Great was already making war in Asia, a special law was necessary in Athens to authorize the shrine of a foreign deity on the sacred soil of Pallas. But the Jewish law allowed a stranger sojourning among the Jews to keep the Passover with the congregation of Israel (Ezra 6:21). “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger who sojourns among you” (Ex. 12:49). And again: “The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the homeborn among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself” (Lev. 19:34).

An Athenian contemporary of Ezra would be astonished to hear that he has to love the Metoeci. Equally startling for the ancient world

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was the idea of proselytism, the appeal to the nations to join themselves to the Lord, which began with Second Isaiah and was repeated by later prophets again and again. “Thus says the Lord of hosts : In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying: We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:23). So, the postexilic community establishes the new and really revolutionary principle: “Thus says the Lord: My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Is. 56:7). Again we meet with the fact that every historical situation is many-sided and full of contradictions. The heathens were tolerant and their gods lived amicably side by side because each nation had its own gods who did not care for other people. An Argive refugee in Athens is told not to be afraid of the Argive gods: We have gods who fight on our side and who are not weaker than those on the side of the Argives. Thus, the pagans made no efforts to convert a stranger but, for the same reason, excluded him from their own religion. Everybody was a true believer, in the opinion of the heathen, if he worshiped his ancestral gods. Thus, each city was exclusive and intolerant within its walls, but recognized the other gods outside. On the other hand, knowing that the Lord is the One True God, the Jews naturally proselytized among the heathen and admitted the converted to the universal religion. And for that same reason they were intolerant of those outside the congregation and rejected the folly of idolatry. Only a Jew was a true believer, but everybody could enter the congregation of the Chosen People.

The thought of this period is illustrated in an anonymous historical composition which now appears in the Bible as Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. The arrangement reveals that the latter part of the original work (Ezra-Nehemiah) found its way into the scriptural canon before the portion (Chronicles) which related the pre-exilic history already covered by the Books of Samuel and Kings. But the work originally formed a single, continuous narrative from Adam to Nehemiah; it was still read in this edition by the compiler of a Greek version (the so-called First Esdras) in the second century BC. For the pre-exilic period the Chronicler draws for the most part on the Books of Samuel and Kings, but adds a great deal of information from other sources. Historians usually discount this additional material and blame the

Chronicler for his little regard for facts. He can, for instance, state coolly that David had 1,570,000 warriors, exclusive of the troops of Levi and Benjamin (I Chron. 21:5). But the same exuberance in numbers is displayed by Assyrian records, and the source of the Chronicler (II Sam. 24) gives a number no less fantastic for David's army: 1,300,000. Fact-hunting critics overlook a very important feature of the work: its emancipation from the authority of tradition.

Oriental historiography is strictly traditional. An Assyrian reviser of royal annals may transform a booty of 1,235 sheep into one of 100,225; or attribute to the king a successful campaign of his predecessor; but in the main he simply summarizes his source. The compiler of Kings closely follows his authorities, although he adds personal comments to the events. The Chronicler, like Hecataeus of Miletus or Herodotus, gives such information concerning the past as appears to him most probable, and corrects the sources in conformity with his own historical standards. For instance, when he asserts that the Levites carried the Ark in accordance with David's order (I Chron. 15:1), he interpolates something into his source (II Sam. 6:12) because he assumes as self-evident that the pious king could not but act according to the Law of Moses (Ex. 25:13). For the same reason he says "Levites" (II Chron. 5:4) when his source (I Kings 8:3) speaks of "priests" taking up the Ark under Solomon. Following his rule of historical probability, he cannot believe that Solomon turned over some cities to Hiram of Tyre (I Kings 9:12); so he changes the text: the cities were given by Hiram to Solomon (II Chron. 8:2). In the same manner, he attributes to ancient kings, David and Josiah, the organization of the priesthood and of the sacred services as they existed in his own time. Since Israel had ceased to be an independent state, the author treats with predilection all matters concerning the Temple, which now became the center of national life, and devotes a long description to religious measures of King Hezekiah which are hardly mentioned in Kings. Owing to the shift of historical interest, he passes over in silence the Northern Kingdom, which had rebelled against the house of David. He does not hesitate to use the term "Israel" when he speaks of Judah, which alone remained faithful to the covenant of the fathers.

The critics have often stressed the Chronicler's practice of viewing the past as the realization in Israel of the rules and principles of the

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Torah, his tendency to find the origins of the Judaism of his own day in remote antiquity. In fact, his purpose is not to give a mere chronicle but to provide a clue to the meaning and direction of Israel's history. The same attempt, with regard to Greek (and even world) history, was made by Herodotus, who wrote about a hundred years before the Chronicler. Herodotus seems to feel that the gods, envious of human greatness and happiness, use man's wrongdoings to punish him or his posterity. It is the doctrine of Nemesis, exemplified, for instance, in Polycrates's fate. The moral of history is, therefore, to remain an average man; its lesson is that of moderation and submission to destiny, the "nothing in excess" of the Seven Sages.

The Jewish author finds in divine pragmatism the principle for understanding the past; his clue is the idea of retribution. That is, of course, nothing new, Herodotus explains Croesus' fall by the sin of his ancestor in the fifth generation. In a cuneiform text Nabonidus's evil-doing explains his fall and the catastrophe of Babylon. But the Chronicler describes the whole of human history from this standpoint. According to his conception, the pious kings always enjoyed prosperity, while punishment necessarily befell the wicked and unfaithful ones. The idea is applied to the reinterpretation of the past with the same constancy and disregard of facts as when some modern books describe history in terms of class struggle or racial changes. From Saul to the last king, Zedekiah, the evil-doers die for their transgressions. But, since the Chronicler conceives of Divine Necessity in human history as the work of the personal God and not of a machinelike Fate of the Greeks, he seeks to justify the visitations sent upon Israel. In the first place, he stresses the idea of personal responsibility. He follows and repeats (II Chron. 25:4) the principle established in Deuteronomy (24:16) that "the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin" a conception which appears about the same time in Greece too.

But the principle of collective responsibility remained active in Greece, except for Athens, with regard to political crimes. In Judaism, the Book of Kings still presents the hand of God visiting the sins of the fathers upon their children and striking peoples for the transgressions of their kings. Jehoiachin is carried away and Judah is destroyed in 597 "for the sins of Manasseh" who had reigned almost

fifty years before (II Kings 24:3; Jer. 15:4). The Chronicler assumes that Manasseh had received a due punishment from the Assyrians, who led him about in fetters and held on to him by a hook thrust into his nostrils (II Chron. 33:11). On the other hand, the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 is explained in Kings (II Kings 24:20) as an expression of God's anger against the last king, Zedekiah. The Chronicler adds that "all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, transgressed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord which He had hallowed in Jerusalem" (II Chron. 36:14).

The Syrian invasion in the reign of Joash is a judgment on the people, "because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers" (II Chron. 24:24). The invasion of Shishak happened because all Israel had transgressed along with King Rehoboam (II Chron. 12:1). Consequently, the deliverance from Sennacherib is caused by the reconciliation of the people with God, and the author is fond of associating the people with the king in religious reformations (I Chron. 13:4; II Chron. 30:4f.).

This conception of personal responsibility for transgression explains the role of the prophets in Chronicles, Herodotus uses the Oriental theme of the wise counselor to show how man in his blindness neglects prudent advice and runs to his doom. The Chronicler knows that God sent His prophets "because He had compassion on His people" (II Chron. 36:15); but they mocked His messengers and despised His words. So the culprit was fully conscious of the culpability of his deed and duly warned, a proviso which later talmudic jurisprudence requires for legal conviction and punishment of a capital offender. Thus, warned by God, the wicked kings sinned with malice and God's wrath was fully justified. Accordingly, the Chronicler's standard in judging the ancient kings is their obedience to the Divine Message sent through the prophets. Jerusalem was destroyed because Israel scoffed at the warnings of the prophets. The Temple was rebuilt by Cyrus, in order that the Word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished (II Chron. 36:22).

This, "the Chronicle of the whole of sacred history," as Jerome calls it, leads to the Restoration under Persian rule. When the adversaries of Jerusalem frustrate the building of the Temple, King Darius intervenes, and the Jews dedicate the sanctuary and prosper

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“through the prophesying of Haggai... and Zechariah” (Ezra 6:14). In keeping with ancient historiography, the recital becomes fuller when the compiler approaches his own time. But some features of the latter part of his work are peculiar. In the first place, we note that while the author considers Nehemiah’s days as being in the past (Neh. 12:47), he does not continue the narrative until his own time but ends with the account of Nehemiah’s measures which concluded the Restoration in 432 BC. In the same way, Herodotus (and other Greek historians in the fifth century) did not deal with the events after the Persian wars. Again, while for the pre-exilic period the Chronicler refers to many sources, for the Persian epoch he gives hardly anything other than a reproduction of official records: lists, letters and memoranda of royal administration, memorials of Ezra and of Nehemiah.

He scarcely provides notes of his own for a chronological and logical framework. And, while he freely passes judgment on ancient persons and times, he refrains from expressing his personal views in the account of the Persian period. One is reminded of Greek *logograptoi* of the fifth century who, as an ancient critic says, repeated “the written records that they found preserved in temples or secular buildings in the form in which they found them, neither adding nor taking away anything.” This dependence on source material leads, quite naturally, to some confusion. As the Chronicler confuses, for instance, Darius I with Darius II, he places a dossier referring to Xerxes and Artaxerxes I before their predecessor Darius I.

The Chronicler quotes Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s accounts in their own words a feature which involved the change from the third person to the first person and vice versa. This device served to authenticate the narrative and came into historical writing from the diplomatic style, where exactness of quotation was absolutely necessary. In Egypt the story of the war of King Kamose in the sixteenth century BC, or the epic of the victory of Rameses II at Kadesh, c. 1300 BC, presents the same change from a subjective account to objective praise by the hero of his own deeds. The so-called “Letters to God Assur” in Assyrian historiography likewise show the use of the third person when the king is spoken of in the introduction composed by a scribe, while in the body of the text the king speaks in the first person. In a Persian tract composed after the conquest of Babylon in 538

BC. the so-called Cyrus cylinder, the author relates the evil-doings of Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, and the conquest of the city by Cyrus.

Then, without any transition, exactly as in Ezra-Nehemiah, the author introduces Cyrus's proclamation, beginning "I am Cyrus," which gives Cyrus's own account of the events. When the Chronicler quotes documents verbatim, he again follows the style of chancelleries. He introduces even in his narratives of pre-exilic history such compositions couched in official form, e.g., a circular communication of King Hezekiah (II Chron. 30) and even a letter of the prophet Elijah (nChron. 21:12).¹ Ezra's and Nehemiah's prayers, the national confession of sins, the covenants made with God under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah are presented as proof that there is a difference between the wicked Jerusalem of the kings and the new Israel which decided to follow the way of righteousness. That accounts for the blessing of the present state under the protection of the Persian kings. The Temple is restored "according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the decree of Cyrus, and Darius; and Artaxerxes king of Persia (Ezra 6:14),

The whole conception of the Chronicler shows that he wrote when Persian rule seemed destined for eternity and the union between the altar in Jerusalem and the throne of Susa seemed to be natural and indestructible. The Chronicler wrote before Alexander the Great, that is, in the first half of the fourth century. Accordingly, the tendency of his work is to recommend a kind of political quietism which should please the court of Susa as well as the High Priest's mansion in Jerusalem. The idea of the Messianic age which was destined to come after the overthrow of the Persian world power, finds no place in the work of the Chronicler. Armies are superfluous for Israel, the Jews need not fight when the Lord is with them; the Chronicler does not tire of stressing this conception. But "the Lord is with you while you are with Him" (H Chron. 15:2). Zedekiah was punished and Jerusalem destroyed not only because the king did evil HIM! did not give heed to Jeremiah's words, but also because "he rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God." That is taken from Eadde (17:13) but the lesson could hardly escape the attention of the Chronicler's readers, subjects of the Persian king.

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The Chronicler's historical work, Attic pottery unearthed in Palestine, Jewish coins bearing a Divine Image, universalism and exclusiveness, all these together create a picture of Jewish life after the Restoration rather different from what is conveyed by the conventional clichés. They indicate that life was more vivid, more diversified than the rules of conduct as formulated in Scripture might suggest.

The Jews of Elephantine

A postexilic oracle included in the Book of Isaiah (11:11) promises the return of the Diaspora from Elam, Assyria, Babylonia, Lower and Upper Egypt, from North Syria and "from the islands of the sea. This Jewish Diaspora encountered everywhere the Hellenic Diaspora. Greek trading stations existed in the fifth and fourth centuries, for example, at Ugarit (near modern Lattakie) and at the mouth of the Orontes in Syria. When in 586 Jewish refugees from Palestine, Jeremiah among them, went to "Tahpanhes" in the Egyptian Delta, they entered a settlement of Greek mercenaries, established here (Daphne) by Psammetichus. Payments of rations listed in a Babylonian account between 595 and 570 BC. were provided not only to King Joiachin [Jehoiachin] and numerous other men of Judah in exile, but also to Ionian carpenters and shipbuilders. As cuneiform business documents of the Persian period show, the Jews in the Babylonian Diaspora rubbed shoulders with men from India and Armenia and Turkestan and, of course, Lydians and Ionians. When later Greek authors supposed that Pythagoras, that ancient sage of Samoa, was indebted not only to Egypt and Chaldea, but to Jewish wisdom, too, when a later Jewish author thought that the Greek sages had learned loftier conceptions of God from Moses, they were probably wrong, but the surmise does not any longer appear absurd in the light of recent discoveries. One may fancy Ezekiel talking with Pythagoras in Babylon; they speak of Homer and of Moses. What a topic for an Imaginary Conversation in Landor's fashion! But our information concerning the Diaspora in the Persian period is scanty and accidental. To be sure, we still have numerous records from Babylonia, written between 464 and 404 BC., with many Jewish names. But since these tablets are business documents of one pagan firm in Nippur, in southern Babylonia, we do not really learn anything substantial of the life of the Jews from these contracts and receipts. Nevertheless, these

archives show that the golah of 597 and 587 still remained on the same place where the exiled had been settled by Nebuchadnezzar, namely, “by the river Chebar” (Ez. 1:1), which is the “large canal” of the cuneiform tablets, a watercourse on which Nippur was situated. The Jews in the documents often bear Babylonian and Persian names, some of them combined with the names of pagan deities.

For instance, the father of a Hanana is called Ardi Gula, that is, “servant of [the Goddess] Gula.” But about seventy per cent of the Jews had genuine Hebrew names. The Jews in the district of Nippur were for the most part farmers; but they were also tax collectors and royal officials; they held military tenures and transacted business with the Babylonians and the Persians. A Jewish claimant opposes a Babylonian merchant house “in the judicial assembly of Nippur.” There were many Jewish settlements in Egypt, too; for instance, in the Delta, near Pelusium, at Memphis, and in upper Egypt. The Egyptian Diaspora was pre-exilic. Even before the Exile an oracle signifies five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear to the Lord of Hosts (Is. 19:18), and the Second Isaiah (49:12) mentions the Jews in the land of Sinim, that is, Syene, at the first cataract of the Nile, at the southern border of Egypt. To this place Jewish mercenaries were sent by one of their kings in the beginning of the sixth century to help the Pharaoh. Guardian of the Ethiopian boundary, “the Jewish force” came into Persian service after Cambysee conquest of Egypt (525 BC), and obeyed the Pharaohs again after the defection of Egypt in 404. Numerous documents in Aramaic of the fifth century, belonging to this military settlement, have been unearthed at Elephantine.

The “Jewish force” (as the regiment is officially styled) was divided into companies, the captains of which bear Babylonian or Persian names; a Persian was “the chief of the force.” The settlers received pay and rations (barley, lentils, etc.) from the royal treasury. But the colony was civilian in its way of life. The Jews at Elephantine bought and sold their tenures, transacted business, defended their claims in civil courts, although everyone, even women, was styled as belonging to the regiment. The Jews dealt with military colonists of other nations settled in the neighborhood, as well as with Egyptians. There were mixed marriages. Independently of the military organization the Jews formed a religious community of the kind later, in the Hellenistic period,

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called politeujna. A president “with his colleagues” represented the community which was gathered in “assembly” whenever wanted. The president was also the treasurer of the local Temple of the national God, whom these Jews called “Yahu” and regarded as “the God of Heaven.” Likewise, their system of sacrifices and the terms referring to them were the same as in the Bible: holocaust, meal offering, incense; they offered libations and immolated sheep, oxen and goats. They observed the Passover. Their faith was rather homely and plain.

They suggested in a letter that their enemy was killed, “and the dogs tore off the anklets from his legs,” because they had prayed for it to the God of Heaven and fasted “with our wives and our children” in sack cloth. They did not doubt that merit before God may be obtained with expensive sacrifices, and would hardly appreciate the prophetic word that God desires mercy and not sacrifices (Hos. 6:6). But equally, they did not suspect that their place of worship was a violation of Divine Law proclaimed in Deuteronomy, which forbids altars and immolations outside of the one chosen place at Jerusalem. With the same “provincial” naivete, they uttered blessings in the name of “Yahu and Khnum.” While the religion of the Jews of Elephantine was primitive their business activity was highly modern. They wrote, and probably talked, not Hebrew but Aramaic, which had become the common and official language of the Persian Empire. Accordingly, while contemporary demotic documents reflect Egyptian law, and while Mesopotamian settlers near Aleppo (Syria) and at Gezer (Palestine) continued to draw cuneiform deeds in harmony with the Babylonian system, the Aramaic records from Elephantine manifest the formation and development of a new common law of the Levant.

The form of these instruments is that of a declaration made before witnesses and reproduced in direct speech; this is modeled on Egyptian formularies. The same form is used in an Aramaic lease agreement of 515 BC entered into in Egypt by two parties not of Jewish origin. Some stipulations in business documents from Elephantine reproduce Egyptian formulae also, e.g., the abandonment of the claims to a ceded property. But the term “hate for separation of spouses is Babylonian and biblical (Deut. 21:15), although it was also borrowed by the Egyptians. Babylonian too are the contracts of renunciation arising from a previous decision of the court, the legal term for “instituting a suit” and the standard of weight. This syncretistic

common law was built up partly by precedents set by the Persian king's judges, partly by way of customary agreements. The Persian court adopted, for instance, the Egyptian practice of imposing an oath (formulated by the judge) upon the party in support of the claim when there was no other evidence, even when the litigants were of different nationalities, e.g., a Jew and a Persian. Everybody was required, of course, to swear by his own deity; when a Jewess became the wife of an Egyptian, she was supposed to follow the status of her husband and she took oath by an Egyptian goddess. On the other hand, polygamy, allowed in Jewish law, was prohibited in marriage contracts of Elephantine by a stipulation agreed upon by the parties and guaranteed by a fine.

While Egyptian marriage was based on mere consensus, the Jews at Elephantine still regarded a union as valid only when the bride's father received from the groom a "marriage price" (mohar). But this conveyance of rights to the husband became here an antiquated formality. The new common law established an almost complete equality between spouses. Both had the right to divorce at his or her pleasure, provided the declaration of "hating" was made "in the congregation." The power to divorce was given to the bride in Egyptian marriage contracts, but it was limited to the husband alone in Jewish (and Babylonian) law. Egyptian too was the status of woman with regard to her legal capacity; married or not, she was able at Elephantine to conduct business, hold property in her own right and resort to law about it. No less surprising was the stipulation that either spouse would inherit from the other when there were no children. Thus, the Aramaic papyri from Elephantine of the fifth century BC are the earliest evidence we have for the transformation of the Jewish behavior in the Dispersion. Living on equal terms with the natives, transacting business with peoples of various races, intermarrying, the Diaspora began to diverge from the course followed at Jerusalem.

But living together with other people rarely continues untroubled. Although the priest of the Egyptian god Khnum was a neighbor of the Jewish sanctuary at Elephantine for many decades, in 411 the Egyptian clergy bribed the Persian governor to order the Jewish temple destroyed. One may doubt whether that was really "the first anti-Semitic outbreak," as the action is now considered by historians. When we read the endless complaints of a certain Peteesi, an Egyptian

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(513 BC), about vexations he was forced to suffer from Egyptian priests on account of some litigation,” we are rather prepared to believe that the conflict of 411 at Elephantine was a local incident, and not a symptom of general anti-Semitism. When the Persian governor refused to allow the reconstruction of the temple, the Jews of Elephantine sent an appeal to Jerusalem. But the existence of a temple outside Zion could hardly please the authorities at Jerusalem. Consequently, in 408, the Jews of Elephantine wrote to Bagoas, the Persian governor of Judea, and to the sons of Sanballat, governor of Samaria, hinting also at a forthcoming bribe.

The addressees prepared a memorandum recommending to the satrap of Egypt the reestablishment of the temple, without animal offerings, however: a compromise which would please both the Egyptians, who at this time worshiped almost every animal, and the Jerusalemites, who in this manner reduced the altar of Elephantine to a lower rank. But there were again intrigues and counterintrigues, bribes and favors at the court of the Persian satrap of Egypt; and since, toward the end of the fifth century, Egypt rebelled against Persia, the temple at Elephantine was never rebuilt, although the Jewish military settlement continued and was ultimately taken over by Alexander the Great.

The Policies of Alexander the Great

The Persian Empire fell in 333. When Alexander the Great proceeded down the coast of Syria toward Egypt, most peoples and cities on his route, Jerusalem among them, readily submitted to the Macedonian. The meeting of Jewish deputies, sent to offer the surrender of the Holy City, with the world conqueror later became a choice topic of Jewish legend. In fact, the Macedonian, who considered himself the legitimate heir of the Persian kings, here as elsewhere simply accepted and confirmed the statutes and privileges granted by his Iranian predecessors. But an accidental order of Alexander's deeply influenced the history of Palestine. The city of Samaria revolted in 332, and the king, having taken it, settled Macedonians there. This punishment, inflicted on Samaria, brought about the break between Judah and Ephraim. Captured by the Assyrians in 722, the city of Samaria had become a military colony. The men from Babylonia and northern Syria transplanted here, brought along their own gods, such as the god of pestilence, Nergal of Cutha,

who at the same time appeared in Sidon, a city also resettled by the Assyrians after the rebellion of 677.

Being polytheists, the settlers in due course adopted the deity of the land in which they dwelt and learned to worship the God of Israel with great zeal. Since Sargon in 722 deported only the higher classes of the district of Samaria, the countryside was not denuded of the original population. Sargon himself refers to the tribute imposed on this remnant of Israel. The newcomers intermingled and intermarried with the former inhabitants of the land of Samaria and accepted their religion. In 586, men of Shiloh and Samaria came and worshiped at the ruined site of the Temple of Jerusalem. In 520 the Samaritans claimed a share in the rebuilding of this Temple. As already noted, in 408 the Jews at Elephantine wrote to the leaders in both Jerusalem and Samaria as to coreligionists. Still later there were people of Ephraim who celebrated the Passover at Jerusalem (II Chron. 34:6). It seems that the conversion of the heathen immigrants to the service of the God of Israel was complete and that both Samaria and Jerusalem worshiped the same God with the same rites in the fourth century BC. There is no mention of any pagan cult among the Samaritans.

Accordingly, prophets in Jerusalem expected the redemption of both “prisoners of hope” (Zech. 9:13), Judah and Ephraim. The conflict between the two cities under Persian rule was primarily a political one, Samaria opposed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem because the resurrected capital in the south would be a natural rival of the northern fortress. In the same way, the Assyrian settlers in Sidon, who became completely assimilated with the natives, inherited their quarrel with Tyre, another Phoenician capital. But when Alexander planted Macedonian colonists in the city of Samaria, he destroyed the fusion between “the force at Samaria” and the countryside. The new masters of the stronghold did not know anything about the God of Israel. They did not care for Nergal either. They were at home rather in Athens, where in the third century BC a pagan association crowned a certain “Samaritan” as its benefactor. If the new inhabitants were inclined to adopt some elements of the religion of the former settlers, they could hardly succeed because the God of Israel did not tolerate any rival.

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It often happened that when a Greek colony was established, native villages under its control formed a union around an ancestral sanctuary. Following the same pattern, the countryside of (now Macedonian) Samaria constituted an organization, in Greek style, "Sidonians of Shechem," for the purpose of serving the God of Israel. Shechem, the most ancient capital and the most sacred site of Israel, became the natural center of the confederation. The name "Sidonians," that is, "Canaanites," was probably chosen in opposition to the new comers; it emphasized the fact that the members of the League were aboriginal inhabitants of Canaan. The geographical term "Samaritans" was appropriated by the Macedonian intruders, and the religious term "Israel" now belonged to Jerusalem. The descendants of the Assyrian settlers, men like Sanballat, Nehemiah's adversary, who had been the leaders in Palestine for four centuries and who were now dispossessed, could neither accept the predominance of the Macedonian colony nor become a dependency of Jerusalem. They repeated to the Jews, "we seek your God as you do" (Ezra 4:2), but were not prepared to recognize the demands of Jerusalem that the common Deity may not be rightfully worshiped away from the summit of Zion. As the Chronicler emphasized (II Chron.30:10), such claims were received with derision in the north.

The new union around Shechem, therefore, founded its own sanctuary. It was consecrated to the God of both Jerusalem and Shechem, and stood on the summit of Gerizim, overlooking Shechem, on the site where the Chosen People were commanded to "set the blessing," according to the precept of Deuteronomy (11:29). Deuteronomy was originally a Jerusalemite book, published in 621 B.C.E., but since 722 BC there had been no center of the religion of the fathers outside Jerusalem, and the worshipers of God, in Samaria or elsewhere, had to seek guidance at Jerusalem. The choice of Gerizim shows the dependence of the Shechemites on Jerusalem in spiritual matters and, at the same time, it proves that only the pride of the former Assyrian aristocrats, loath to acknowledge the supremacy of the southern rival, was responsible for the foundation of the Samaritan temple, and, consequently, for the break between Judah and Ephraim. The whole controversy between Jews and Samaritans was now subordinated to the question: Which place was chosen by God for His habitation, Zion or Gerizim? Later propagandist

inventions obscured the origin of the schism and confused its dating which, for this reason, remains controversial.

The Samaritans glorified their temple by attributing its founding to Alexander the Great. The Jews associated the separation with Nehemiah's expulsion of a scion of the high-priestly family for his marriage to a Samaritan girl (Neh. 13:28). This combination provided a "rational" account for the schism, and conveniently branded the priesthood at Gerizim as illegitimate. But the Jewish tradition itself, repeated by Josephus, states that the Samaritan temple was founded at the time of Alexander the Great. The fact that it did not receive any subvention from the Macedonian rulers, as well as the fact that it belonged not to Samaria but to "that foolish nation which dwells in Shechem" (as Ben Sira says), offers the definitive proof of its foundation after the Macedonian conquest. Jerusalem was situated far away from the main trade routes which crossed Palestine and ran along the coast. Thus, while the Greeks knew the Palestinian shore very well, no Greek writer before the time of Alexander the Great mentions the Jews, with the exception of Herodotus, who alludes to the circumcision practiced by "the Phoenicians and the Syrians of Palestine. But even after Alexander the Great, the first Greek authors who took cognizance of the Jews got their information from the Diaspora, from Jewish immigrants or Jewish soldiers in the service of Alexander and his successors. That is by no mean surprising.

Why should a Greek author, at a time when the whole fabulous Orient was open to his inquiry, concentrate on a Lilliputian place in the arid mountains? Let us note, by the way, that the first Greek book (by Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus) giving some exact information about Rome, appeared in 314-313 BC. Some years later another student of philosophy, Hecataeus of Abdera, who had accompanied Ptolemy I of Egypt in his Syrian campaign of 312 BC, published in a report of his journey the first Greek account of the Jews, based particularly on data given to the author by a Jewish priest who, in 312, accompanied the Ptolemaic army to Egypt." Hecataeus's narrative was used by Theophrastus, while another pupil of Aristotle, Clearchus, described what is probably a fictitious meeting between his master and a Jewish magician in Asia Minor. Let us consider the picture of the Jews as seen with Greek eyes at the end of the fourth century. For the reason just stated, a Greek writer must have had a

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particular motive to take an interest in the Jews. Now, the philosophers, and the school of Aristotle in particular, looked for empirical confirmation of their social theories in the newly opened Orient. Similarly, the discovery of America was utilized by European scholars of the sixteenth century to identify the Red Indians with the lost Ten Tribes.

Greek scholars of Alexander's time thought that the peoples untouched by the dissolving influence of modern (that is, Greek) civilization must have conserved the purity of religion and the perfection of social organization which the philosophers attributed to man in a state of nature. On the other hand, the Greeks knew that in the Orient knowledge was the monopoly of the priestly caste. Having discovered a people led by priests and obeying the Law coming directly from the Divinity, the Greeks ranged the Jews beside the Indian Brahmans and Persian Magi. The Jews are a "philosophical race," says Theophrastus; they descend from the Indian philosophers, says Clearchus. Just as a Greek author (Megasthenes) claimed that the doctrines of the ancient Greek philosophers concerning nature had been formulated by the Indians, other writers ascribed the origins of philosophy to the Jews. Clearchus presents a Jewish sage who furnishes Aristotle with the experimental proof of the Platonic doctrine of immortality. Some decades later, Hermippus, another follower of Aristotle, mentions the (supposed) Jewish belief in the soups immortality as a well-known fact, and adds that Pythagoras borrowed from the Jews and the Thracians his opinions about it. Since the Jews named their Deity "God of Heaven," they provided the philosophers with the desired proof that natural theology of mankind had identified God with the heavens. Likewise, monotheism, as well as the absence of divine images, agreed with the philosophical conceptions. Other data was interpreted accordingly. For instance, Theophrastus states that the Jews celebrate their festivals at night in contemplation of the stars (the order of heavenly bodies was for the philosophers the most important proof against atheism) and discourse about the Divine. In the same way, Hecataeus ascribes to the Egyptian priests philosophical conversations during the banquets where wine was not served.

The political organization of the Jews was viewed from the same standpoint, as the realization of an ideal state, governed by the Sages,

the philosophers according to Plato and the priests according to the Palestinians. The Torah is presented as a narrative of the settlement of the Jews in Palestine and as their constitution. Moses, as lawgiver, could establish his system only after the conquest; so, according to Hecataeus, he had conquered the Promised Land and founded Jerusalem. As in Sparta, his system is based on military virtues of bravery, endurance and discipline. As is fit for the perfect state, the legislator forbade the sale of the land distributed among the Jews of Palestine in order to prevent the concentration of wealth and its sinister consequence, the decrease of population. This Greek interpretation of Lev. 25:23 clearly shows that Hecataeus's inquiry was oriented by his philosophic aims; he elicited from his Jewish informants answers which could serve his theory. For this reason it is a very delicate task to appreciate the earliest Greek records as testimony regarding the state of Judaism in Alexander's time. When Hecataeus affirms that the priests receive a tithe of the income of the people, he idealizes the realities. When he adds that the priests administer public affairs, he surely gives a one-sided view of the subject. But when he emphatically states that the High Priest was regarded as the mouthpiece of God and messenger of divine oracles, we suspect that the Greek writer attributes to the Jews the behavior they should have in his opinion, in order to represent the ideal scheme of the philosophical commonwealth.

Hecataeus's High Priest, by the way, is chosen as the most able leader among the priests. Some features stressed in the Greek records are worth noting. The importance of the priesthood and the role of the High Priest in Jerusalem, the obstinacy of the Jews in defense of the Law and the slander of their neighbors and foreign visitors with regard to antialien sentiments of the Jews, already point in Hecataeus's narrative to characteristic features of Hellenistic Jewry. We learn that already before 300 BC the Jews in Palestine did not tolerate pagan shrines and altars on the holy soil and that at the same time, the Jews in the Diaspora freely scoffed at the superstitions of the Gentiles. This attitude was inevitable because the Jews were in possession of the Truth. They might have said to the pagans: We claim liberty for ourselves in accordance with your principles and refuse it to you in accordance with our principles. In the polytheist world of Hellenism, where all beliefs were admitted as different

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refractions of the same eternal light, the Jewish claim to the oneness of the Divine Revelation must have appeared as a provocation. Nevertheless, Alexander and his successors accepted the Jews among the citizens of the new settlements founded in the East. When the experiment of founding commonwealths of Greek type in the Orient succeeded, later descendants of the settlers became "Aristocrats" but the first settlers were no more respected by their contemporaries than the passengers of the Mayflower were by the Englishmen of 1620. The conquest of Alexander, welding East and West into a single economic whole, brought wealth to Greece and to many Oriental towns.

Why should a craftsman from Athens or a moneylender from Babylon enroll in the list of settlers of a new city far away, let us say Europos on the Euphrates? As the kings needed cities to safeguard the military communications and as strongholds against the indigenous population, settlers were at a premium. For instance, Alexander transferred some contingents from (still Assyrian) Samaria to Egypt, where they received allotments of land. There is no reason to suspect Josephus's statement that the early Hellenistic rulers gave the Jews equal status with the Macedonians and Greeks who settled in the new colonies. He fails to make it clear that these privileges were individual and did not bear on the position of Jewry as a community in the new colony. This was a point on which hinged the later struggle between the Greeks and the Jews in Hellenistic cities. We do not know how Alexander and his successors reconciled Jewish exclusiveness with the obligations of the Greek citizen. Probably, the antinomy was solved in each case empirically. There were Jews, like the magician spoken of by Clearchus, who "not only spoke Greek, but had the soul of a Greek," and thus were inclined to mutual tolerance. Sometimes the king exempted the Jews; thus Alexander pardoned the Jewish soldiers who had refused to build a heathen temple in Babylon, and Seleucus I ordered money to be given for oil to those Jews, citizens of Antiochia, who were unwilling to use pagan oil.

As oil was given by the "gymnasiarchs" for anointing during athletic games, the notice seems to imply that in Greek cities of the Diaspora, Jewish youth about 300 BC already took part in exercises of the "gymnasia," naked like their Hellenic comrades. Physical training was the foundation of Greek life and mentality in all Greek cities, and

the gymnasia became the centers of Greek intellectual activity and the principal instrument of Hellenization. Through the palaestra, by way of sports, the Jewish settlers became recognized members of the community. They learned to take pride in the city long before Paul proclaimed at Jerusalem his double title of honor, "I am a Jew, a Tarsian of Cilicia, citizen of no mean city." And conversely, the Jews of Alexandria could not but imagine that Alexander had become a worshiper of the true God at the time of his founding of their city and had brought the bones of the prophet Jeremiah to Alexandria as her palladium.

The Impact of Hellenism on Judaism: The Scribes

After Alexander's death (324 BC) wars between his generals ended in the dismemberment of his empire. After 301 there were three great powers governed by Macedonian dynasties: Asia (that is substantially Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia and a large portion of Asia Minor) under the sway of the Seleucids, Egypt of the Ptolemies, and the realm of Macedonia in Europe. Thus, the political unity of the world where the Jews lived was broken. Even the Roman Empire did not re-establish the lost oneness, since an important Jewry remained in the Parthian kingdom, outside the laws of the Caesars.

Palestine became a dominion of Egypt but was reconquered by Antiochus III of Asia in 200 BC. Since the government of both the Ptolemies and the Seleucids rested on the same political principles, we may view as an entity the period of Ptolemaic and Seleucid domination over Jerusalem until the Maccabean struggle, that is, some 125 years between 301 and 175 BC. The district of Judea, called "the nation of Jews," under the Seleucids, was still a very small part of the province of Syria. When a traveler passed the Jordan or the town of Modein in the north, or went south beyond Bethzur, or toward the west descended into the coastal plain, he left the Jewish territory. Frontier guards, for instance, at Antipatris, customhouses, custom duties for export and import reminded the Jerusalemite of this fact. Thus, even in Palestine, the political term "Jew" did not include all the religious adherents of the Temple on Zion. With respect to religion there were many Jews and Jewries elsewhere, in Galilee or in Trans-Jordan or, for instance, where the powerful clan of the Tobiads was located. But politically these were not considered "Jews." The term

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“Jew” applied only to those “who lived around the Temple of Jerusalem,” and so a Greek historian calls them.

Jerusalem was the only “city” of the Jews; other settlements in Judea were politically “villages.” Judea continued to be a self-governing unit; there was no royal governor in Jerusalem, although the citadel of the Holy City was garrisoned by royal troops. The Jews, too, had to furnish contingents to the royal forces; Jewish soldiers are mentioned in Alexander’s army, a Jewish regiment of cavalry under Ptolemy. It may be that fortresses on the frontier, such as that at Bethzur, excavated recently, were occupied by native forces; about 200 BC the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt by the Jewish authorities. In 200 the Jewish militia helped Antiochus III to dislodge the Egyptian garrison from the citadel of Jerusalem. But more important for the central government was the collection of taxes, such as the poll tax, or taxes on houses or gate tolls, etc., to which was added the tribute, that is, the annual payment of a lump sum by the Jewish common wealth as such. In the third century Judea, as a province of the Egyptian Empire, was part of the highly complicated system of planned economy that was built up by the Ptolemies. Like all natives of the province, “Syria and Phoenicia,” the Jews had to declare their movable property and cattle for the purpose of taxation. Likewise, the Ptolemies introduced their subtle system of collecting the revenue by tax farmers.

The Ptolemies favored the local notables as farmers of revenue, since in this way the native aristocracy had a stake in the Ptolemaic domination. As regards self-government, Jerusalem was an “aristocratic” commonwealth. The “council of Elders” was the ruling body, composed of laymen and priests. But the aristocracy as a social class was priestly, just as in Hellenistic Egypt. When Antiochus III granted exemption from personal taxes to the upper class in Jerusalem, he named the council of Elders, the officers of the Temple with respect to their functions, and the sacerdotal caste as such. The intermediary between the royal government and the Jews was the High Priest, appointed by the king. Practically, the office was hereditary and was held for life. The High Priests, responsible primarily for the tribute, also became accustomed under Egyptian domination to farm the other taxes. In this way, the High Priest became the political head of the nation as well. About 190, Ben Sira spoke of the

High Priest Simeon in terms appropriate to a prince: he was the glory of his people, in his time the Temple was fortified, he protected his people. As to the common people, they were sometimes summoned to the Temple court to hear official reports on the situation and to acclaim the official speaker. Nevertheless, as Ben Sira shows, the “assembly of Elders and even the popular “assembly in the gate” continued to regulate social life and still had judicial and administrative functions.

While politically the situation of the “nation of the Jews” was essentially the same in 175 BC as had been that of the district Yehud two centuries earlier, there was a decisive change as to the state of civilization. There was a mixture of population and language and a diffusion of the foreign (Hellenic) culture unparalleled in the Persian period. To begin with, there were now many Hellenic cities in Palestine. The Jewish territory was practically in the midst of Hellenic cities: Ascalon, Akko (Ptolemais), Joppa (Jaffa), Apollonia and others on the coast; Samaria, Scythopolis and Gadara in the north; Pella, Gerasa, Philadelphia (Rabbath-Amnana) beyond the river Jordan; and Marisa in the south. Here the Jews came into contact with Greek men, institutions, arts, soldiers from Aetolia or Macedonia, Greek poets and sculptors like the creator of the fine statue of the nude Aphrodite found at Carmel recently. They could see in Marisa, for instance, the Greek system of paved streets forming quadrangular blocks with a large open place at the main street, enlarged by colonnades, a view quite different from the maze that constituted an Oriental town. In Trans-Jordan there was a mixed settlement of Jewish and Greek soldiers under the command of a Jewish sheikh. There, in 259 BC, a Greek from Cnidus in the service of the king sold a Babylonian girl to a Greek traveler from Egypt. Among the guarantors and witnesses were a son of one Ananias and a Macedonian “of the cavalymen of Tobias.”

The Jewish territory itself was crowded with Greek officers, civil agents and traders, as the papyri show. Greek residents loaned money, bought and sold slaves, oil, wine, honey, figs, dates, while wheat was exported from Galilee. Greek caravans came up to Jerusalem too. On the other hand, the kings had inherited from the Persian monarchs crown lands, and there were in Judea estates belonging to royal courtiers. It happened, of course, as a papyrus tells, that a Greek

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usurer was driven out of a Jewish village when he tried to collect money for a debt; but, as this instance shows, even the village could not avoid the Greek commercial penetration. Another important factor was that now a foreign language, Greek, became that of business and administration. Even in the villages there must have been persons able to draft a contract in Greek, or to write a request in the style required for a Greek petition. The influence of a new, foreign and technologically superior civilization acted, as usual, as a powerful dissolvent which destroyed the traditional discipline of life. The author of the Book of Jubilees gives us insight into the moral situation of Palestinian Jewry after one and a half centuries of intensive contact with the Greeks. He fulminates against the evil generation who forgot the commandments and sabbaths.

He repeatedly warns against associating with the pagans or eating with them. He lets Abraham implore his sons “not to take to themselves wives from the daughters of Canaan,” nor to make idols and worship them. He even speaks of children of Israel “who will not circumcise their sons,” and stresses the prohibition against appearing naked, that is, participating in Greek athletic games. It is particularly notable that he claims that the commandments were already observed by the Patriarchs and stresses again and again that ritual prescriptions are eternal ordinances. In fact, “every mouth speaking iniquity” already began to deny the perpetual force of the biblical regulations. As Esau says in the Book of Jubilees, “neither the children of men nor the beasts of the earth” have any oath valid forever: an echo of Greek philosophical criticism. Another contemporary writer, Ben Sira, speaks of the Jews who are ashamed of the Torah and its regulations, of ungodly men who have forsaken the Law of the Most High God. At the same time, probably unknown to Ben Sira, in Rome another adversary of Hellenism, Cato the Censor, applied himself to the reformation of the lax morals of Hellenized Rome where the newly coined word *pergricari*, “act as a Greek,” was used to signify the licentious way of life. But Cato surpassed the Jewish moralists in his antialien feelings. Ben Sira knows that wisdom has gained possession of every people and every nation, and he considers the physician ordained by God.

Cato insists that Greek physicians came to Rome with the purpose of killing Romans by treatment, and under his influence Greek

philosophers were expelled from Rome. Nevertheless, it is rather difficult to gauge the impact of Greek civilization on Jewish thought in the third century BC. Even if the Book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) was composed in this period, as the critics generally agree, it hardly shows any trace of Greek speculation. The outlook of the author is rather anti-intellectual: "he that increased knowledge, increaseth sorrow" (Eccl. 1:18). The whole philosophy of expediency which the author preaches, and even his lesson make the best of the present day belongs to the traditional teaching of wise men in the Orient. Significant only is his omission of traditional values. He does not attack these, but he emphatically denies their value: it is the same whether one sacrifices or not, "all things come alike to all" (Eccl. 9:2), "moment and chance" rule life (Eccl. 3:19). Ecclesiastes is prepared to accept anything because he doubts the value of everything. He mentions God thirty-eight times, but he also repeats thirty times that "all is vanity." It is in opposition to such a philosophy of relativity, dear to the "sons of Belial," that the author of Jubilees stresses the heavenly origin of the traditional precepts of belief and ritual. As it often happens, in order to uphold traditional values, their apologists themselves propose the most radical innovations.

The author of the Book of Jubilees outdoes the later talmudic teaching in his severity as to the observance of ritual prescriptions. But to assert the everlasting validity of the Torah, this traditionalist places his own composition beside and even above Scripture, claims for his book a divine origin, and gives precepts which differ widely from those set forth in the Torah. The Bible says that the sun and the moon shall regulate seasons and days. In his paraphrase the author of Jubilees attacks the lunisolar calendar and strongly urges the adoption of his own system of a year of 364 days in which each holiday always falls on the same day of the week as ordained by God. Since the Jewish ecclesiastic calendar was built on the observation of the physical reappearance of the new moon, the apologist of orthodoxy simply proposes to turn upside down the whole structure of the ritual. The reason for his revolutionary idea is significant: the irregularity of the moon confuses the times. Thus, without realizing it, this traditionalist succumbs to the seduction of the Greek penchant for rationalization.

In the face of innovators, Hellenistic or pseudoorthodox, the conservative forces, grouped around the Temple, stood fast and tried

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to uphold the established way of life. The literary representative of this conservative class was Jesus Ben Sir a, a warm admirer of the High Priest Simeon. He realized that with him a venerable line of pious maxim writers came to an end: "I, indeed, came last of all," he says, "as one that gleaned after the grape-gatherers." His social and religious ideas are conventional and the advice he addresses to his "son" (that is, pupil) aims at making him accept the present order. "The works of God are all good and He provides for every need in its time." Although he sharply denounces the oppressors who, by the multitude of their sacrifices, try to pacify God for sins he that deprives the hireling of his hire sheds blood he is convinced that poverty and wealth alike come from God. In these views, Ben Sira reproduces the traditional wisdom of the Orient. This traditional Oriental wisdom is further reflected in such general dicta as "he that runs after gold will not be guiltless." He also keeps the traditional tenets of religion, and implicitly rejects the new doctrine of the future life. He maintains that man can dominate his evil nature by strictly following the Law, he clings to the principle that the moral govern the world, that the wicked are punished, and that virtue leads to well-being while laziness and dissolution bring disaster. He strongly stresses man's own responsibility for his sins and his advice to his pupils is biblical: with all thy strength love Him that made Historians classify, but life's strands are inextricably interwoven.

The traditionalist Ben Sira is at the same time the first Jewish author to put his own name to his work and to emphasize his literary personality and individuality. He claims no prophetic inspiration, nor any apocalyptic revelation. He is bringing doctrine "for all those who seek instruction" and, like a Greek wandering philosopher of his time, proclaims: "Hear me, you great ones of the people and give ear to me, you, rulers of the congregation." He not only accepts the figure of personified wisdom (an originally Canaanite goddess), which appears in Proverbs, but puts this profane knowledge on a level with "the book of the Covenant of the Most High, the law which Moses commanded" a rather bold effort to reconcile. He synagogues with the Greek Academy, Jerusalem with Athens. Even the literary form of his book reflects the modernism which he combats. Ben Sira is fond of utilizing passages of Scripture as texts to comment upon in putting forth his own views on the subject. This practice was probably

influenced by synagogue preaching. The process of action and reaction produced in the third century BC by the suddenly intensified contact between Judaism and Hellenism led to curious changes in the usage of the Divine Name.

The proper name of the national God (YHWH) ceased to be pronounced by the Jews in the course of the fifth century except in the Temple service and in taking an oath. The latter usage is attested to by a source used by Philo, and it was preserved by the Samaritans as late as the fifth century of the Common Era. As the exceptions show, the motive for the disuse of the proper name was the idea that its utterance had magical power. The general belief in the magical efficacy of the proper name is well known, but in Canaan it became dominant about the beginning of the first millennium BC. Thus, the Phoenician gods are anonymous while the deities of the "Proto-Phoenicians" in the fourteenth century BC had proper names, as the texts of Ugarit show. The Jews accepted the idea of the unpronounceable Divine Name, only after the Exile. Their national God was now "the God in Jerusalem" or the "God of Heaven," a name which identified Him with the supreme deity of the Persians and the Syrian peoples. Accordingly, the pronunciation Elohim (God), and afterward Adonai (my Lord), was substituted for the tetragrammaton YHWH. When the Greeks came, the abstract term, "God," perfectly corresponded to their philosophical conception of the Supreme Being, ho Theos the God, or to Theion, the Divine. So they accepted this indefinite designation for the God of the Jews. By a kind of reversed attraction, the Greek speculative term then influenced Hebrew writers.

The Book of Kohelet speaks of God only as Elohim, One would expect, therefore, that when speaking Greek the Jews would designate their God as ho Theos or to Theion. As a matter of fact, they said Kyrios, a legal term meaning the legitimate master of someone or something, a word which as a substantive was not used in Greek religious language. It is simply a literal translation of the Hebrew appellative Adonai (the Lord), which became in the meantime the standard pronunciation of the awe-inspiring tetragrammaton. Since Kyrios was not intelligible to the Greeks and the term Theos had a rather general meaning, the Jews speaking or writing Greek in Palestine began in the third century BC to speak of their God as Hypsistos,

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“the Most High.” In the same way, in the fifth century BC the Hellenized Thracians identified their supreme deity, Sabazios, with Zeus. And again, the Greek term reacted upon the Hebrew style. Already in Ben Sira the designation, “Most High God,” is found forty-eight times, although the corresponding Hebrew term Elyon is very rare in the Bible. The same circumlocution is frequently used by the very anti-Greek author of the Book of Jubilees, and the same title was chosen by the Maccabean priest-kings to designate the God of Zion in their official Hebrew utterances. The Talmud quotes the formula: “In such a year of Johanan, priest of the Most High God.”

But the most important result of the Greek impact on Palestinian Judaism was the formation of a Jewish intelligentsia, different from the clergy and not dependent on the sanctuary. The new class was known as “scribes.” “Scribe,” if not simply penman, was the technical term for a public official who entered the civil service as a profession. Accordingly, there were in the ancient Orient preparatory schools for future office-holders. From these institutions came the works of the mundane “wisdom” literature (like the biblical Proverbs), advising, as a Babylonian text says, “to fear God and the Law.” But in the Hellenistic age Greek became the universal language of administration and business, and native writing and learning were rapidly becoming confined to the temples. The cuneiform documents of the Hellenistic age use the ideogram “priest” to denote the native notaries, and the latter act in Ptolemaic Egypt “in behalf” of a priest. Likewise, the native law in Ptolemaic Egypt was administered by a court of three priests. In both Egypt and Babylonia, so far as the native writing was still used, the priest was now the scribe, the judge and the sole teacher of the people, and the temples were only centers of native learning. The “Chaldeans,” astrologers and astronomers who preserved the ancient science in Babylonia, were part of the clergy. At the same time as in Egypt and Mesopotamia the polytheistic Orient shrinks into a priestly dependence, there begins a cleavage between the sacerdotal and the secular interpreters of the Divine Law in Judaism. About 190 BC.

Ben Sira urges his hearers to honor the priest and to give him his portion according to the Law. He acknowledges the authority of the High Priest “over statutes and judgment,” but it is the scribe who advises the rulers, and the assembly in the gate sits in the seat of the

judge and expounds righteousness and judgment. The scribe is not a lawyer acting in behalf of a client; but like the Roman *juris periti* of the same period, a person who has such knowledge of the laws and customs as to act as authority for the judge to follow in his decisions. In both Jerusalem and Rome, the administration of justice was no longer in the hands of the priests in the third century BC. Ecclesiastes mentions the “ten rulers” of the city who are not worth one Sage (Eccl. 7:19). Ben Sira mentions the jurisdiction of the popular assembly in the punishment of adultery. But for the most part he speaks of the “rulers.” He advises his reader: Gain instruction so that you may “serve the potentate.” Ben Sira has in mind the agents of the Macedonian kings, such as Zenon, well known on account of recently discovered papyri. As servant of his Greek master, the Jewish scribe becomes a legitimate interpreter of the Divine Law. In fact, still at the time of Malachi, that is, toward the end of the fifth century BC, knowledge comes from the priest’s lips and the people “seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 2:7). It is the priest who answers the questions concerning ritual cleanliness (Hag. 2:12).

The Chronicler still regards instruction in the Law as the privilege and duty of the Levites and considers the “scribes” as a class of the Levites (II Chron. 34:13). But in the royal charter given to Jerusalem in 200 BC the “scribes of the sanctuary” form a special and privileged body. The foreign rulers of the Orient needed, of course, expert advice as to the laws and customs of their subjects. Antiochus III’s proclamation concerning the ritual arrangements at Jerusalem could not be drafted without the collaboration of Jewish jurists. At the same time, the lay scribe, powerful in the council of the Greek potentates, became, owing to his influence with the foreign master, an authority in the Jewish assembly. The utterance of a prudent man,” says Ben Sira, “is sought for in the congregation,” and he mentions in opposition to the scribe, the craftsman, whose opinion is not asked in the council of the people. Since all Jewish law and legal customs were derived from the Torah, the scribe became the authority as to the Law of Moses. He meditated on the Law of the Most High. But still, in the time of Ben Sira the knowledge of the Torah was considered only part of the intellectual qualifications required of the scribe. He had also to find out the hidden sense of parables and to search out the wisdom of all the ancients. Daniel, who explains the secret and

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meaning of royal dreams at the Babylonian court, is the ideal scribe as visualized by Ben Sira.

On the other hand, the scribe is not only counselor of kings and assemblies, but also wise man and teacher. “Turn to me, you ignorant says Ben Sira, “and tarry in my school He promises as the fruit of his teaching the acquisition by the pupil of “much silver and gold.” But he gives to his pupils “wisdom,” “and all wisdom cometh from the Lord.” So his scribe and his school of wisdom prepare for the coming of the Pharisaic scholar in the next generation. This Pharisaic scholar regards learning as the highest of human values and teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but is prepared to serve his Master not for the sake of reward. However, between Ben Sira and the first Pharisees, there is the persecution of Antiochus and the revolution of the Maccabees.

The Greek Version of Torah

The process of dispersion continued and created new ramifications of third-century Jewry. We learn, for instance, that toward the end of this century two thousand Jewish families from Babylonia were settled by the Seleucid government as military colonists in Lydia and Phrygia, and that at the beginning of the same century Ptolemy I transferred Jews and Samaritans from Palestine to Egypt. The wars between Alexander’s successors brought many Jewish slaves, captured in Palestine, to the Alexandrian or Syrian markets. There was also a voluntary emigration; many went to Egypt, we are told, attracted by the humanity of the Ptolemies. The bulk of Jewry was still established between the Euphrates and the Nile. But the fate of Alexander’s empire divided the Levant into two parts. While the Jews of Egypt and, until 200 BC, of Palestine owed allegiance to the Ptolemies, the Jews in the East and, after 200 BC, in Palestine, were subjects of the Seleucids. The Hellenistic kingdoms were based on personal loyalty to the monarch rather than on national or territorial feeling. Since the Seleucids and the Ptolemies were perpetual rivals and antagonists who fought five wars in the third century, both dynasties tried to gain the favor of the Jews.

It is significant that the biblical passage (Deut. 26:5), “A wandering Aramean was my father and he went down into Egypt,” is changed to “My father forsook Syria and went down into Egypt” in the

Alexandrian Greek version. Likewise, the Midrash for Passover evening, established by the authorities of the Temple under the Egyptian rule, changes the same scriptural sentence, giving to it the meaning that the “Aramean,” that is, Laban, the personification of Syria, sought to destroy “my father,” Jacob, so that the latter came to Egypt according to the Word of God. On the other hand, after 200 BC, under the Seleucid domination, another composition in the Passover service put emphasis upon the anti-Egyptian implications of the Exodus and upon Israel’s Mesopotamian origins. The fact that Jerusalem, the spiritual center of the Diaspora, belonged to one of the rival powers cast suspicion on the loyalty of the Jews under the domination of the other. In a paraphrase of the biblical history, the Book of Jubilees explains the enslavement of the Jews by Pharaoh as follows: “because their hearts and faces are toward the land of Canaan,” ruled by the king of Syria. In the light of these texts we may understand the origins of the Alexandrine version of the Bible.

According to Jewish tradition, already known and standardized about 180 BC, the Greek translation of the Torah was made about 280-250 BC in Alexandria upon the suggestion of King Ptolemy II. Modern critics reject the tradition without the slightest reason, and regard the undertaking as one of the Alexandrine community, intended to convert the heathen and to enable the Greek-speaking Jews to read the Scriptures. Regardless of the auspices under which this translation was undertaken, the mere fact that the translation was made is of primary importance. Let us add that the Greek version of the Torah was soon followed by translations of other Jewish books. Throughout three centuries and more, the Jews did not cease from rendering their books into the world’s common language. Psalms of the Temple and the Psalms ascribed to Solomon, the prophets of old and the new fabricated revelations of Enoch and Moses, Job and Esther and the *dbixjuicles* of the Maccabean dynasty were published in Greek. Looking back at this activity of translators, a later Rabbi explained Genesis 9:27 as meaning: “Let them speak the language of Japhet in the tent of Shem.” This venture of translating was unique in antiquity. There were in Greek some popular tales or missionary tracts adapted from Egyptian; some authentic traditions were preserved in Greek books which circulated under the name of Zoroaster or Ostanés.

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Contemporary with the Greek version of the Torah, an Egyptian priest (Manetho) and the Chaldean Berossus, and later some Phoenician authors, issued in Greek summaries “from the sacred books” of the history of their respective peoples. These compilations were, like similar works of Jewish or Roman writers, Demetrius, Fabius Pictor and later Flavius Josephus, adaptations made to Greek taste. However, the esoteric character of priestly lore prevented a wholesale translation of the sacred books of the East. We know exactly hymns and rites of the Babylonian temples at Uruk (the biblical Erech) as used in the Hellenistic age, since we are able to decode the cuneiform signs. But the priests who copied these texts under the rule of the Seleucids abstained from translating their psalms and instructions into Greek. No wonder: in describing some rites, the author of the ancient text added: The Foreigner may not see it.” Likewise, there is an abundant literature in Greek attributed to the Egyptian god of wisdom, Thoth, called in Greek Hermes. But these books hardly exhibit any Egyptian element, and the ignorance of their writers is such that they make “That,” which is another spelling of “Thoth,” refer to an independent divinity. Although the daily liturgy of Hellenized gods, such as Isis, was celebrated in Greek, the authentic sacred books of Egypt, carried by the priests in sacral processions, remained inaccessible to the Hellenes.

An immense body of literature in Greek was ascribed to Zoroaster, but none of his votaries took the trouble to translate his authentic Hymns, and the Persian god Mithra always remained “unable to speak Greek.” In this way, while the Oriental religions remained unknown to a Western devotee, they lost ground in their native countries as well when the hieroglyphs and the cuneiforms began to be forgotten. In the second century BC the knowledge of sacred letters was already limited at Uruk in Babylonia to a small group of clerics. By translating liberally its literature, sacred and profane, new and old, into the world language, Judaism preserved its vitality. Moses and his law, or the revelations of Jewish seers, entered and filled in the mental world of the proselytes as if the latter had been born in Abraham’s posterity. The Jews became “people of the Book” when this Book was rendered into Greek. To return to the Greek version of the Torah, it was done with due regard for the Greek reader. The Rabbinic tradition recalls the fact that the translators at times changed their text out of deference

to pagan sensitivity. A classic instance is Lev. 11:6, where the Greek version renders the word “hare” among the unclean animals by “rough foot,” because the Greek word for hare (Lagos) was the epithet for the ancestor of the Ptolemaic Dynasty.

Even more important is the religious terminology of the translation. Although the ineffable Name was transliterated in the Greek Bible it was pronounced as Kyrios, the Lord. Likewise, the version omits other appellations of the God of Israel, such as Adonai, Shaddai, Sabaot, which continued to be used in Palestine. In their place, the version employs impressions such as “the God,” “the Almighty,” etc. In this way the particular God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob becomes in Greek the Supreme Being of mankind. This representation of the original meaning corresponds to the religious trend of the Greek world. In the Greek Diaspora the deities, let us say of Thebes or Crete, gave place to the universal Olympians, and the latter, losing their individuality, became simply different forms of the same universal deity of salvation and benefaction. Consider another example. The term, “Torah,” should be rendered in Greek by words expressing some kind of authority. But its regular rendering in the version is Nomos, “the Law,” or better, “the constitution.” Thus, the Pentateuch in Greek appeared as the legal corpus of Jewry. But while the translators tried to present Judaism as universalistic, they were no less intent on emphasizing the difference between the true religion and heathenism. For instance, they purposely used different

Greek terms when speaking of the Temple or the Altar or the service of the true God and, on the other hand, when mentioning idolatry. In a hymn of praise, written in 261 BC, a Greek contemporary of the translators glorified the Egyptian deity who had cured him. The technical terms of praise he uses, such as arete, dynamis, kratos do not occur, with regard to the Lord, in the Greek Pentateuch. With the same purpose of separating the Supreme Being from the anthropomorphic idols of the Greeks, the version avoids expressions attributing human forms and passions to the Lord. For instance, Ex. 24:10 tells that the Elders coming up toward Sinai with Moses “saw the God of Israel.” The Greek version reads: they saw the place “where the God of Israel had stood.” But neither the Greek version of the Bible nor the works of Berossus and Manetho, written for the Greek public, attained their object. The Greeks preferred their own

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quite fantastic versions of Oriental history. They repeated, for instance, despite Berossus' protest, that Babylon was founded by the dissolute Queen Semiramis, and said that Judah, the ancestor of the Jews, was a son of the same legendary queen. Neither Berossus nor Manetho is quoted by Greek historians, but both were read and used as sources of astrological and magical knowledge. Likewise, the Septuagint is quoted a few times by philosophers. Later pagan speculation might, like the author of Poimandres, employ the biblical history of creation to express a new religious feeling.

But Greek scholarship intentionally ignored the Bible as well as Berossus or Manetho because the Greeks regarded, quite naturally, their own tradition of the mythical past as trustworthy and consequently rejected as unreliable myths the contradictory Oriental accounts. Relations between the Jews and the pagans in the Dispersion continued to be friendly or indifferent. Philosophers considered the strict observance of the Sabbath as superstition. A writer could reproduce the malicious anecdote, invented by the Idumeans, about the foolishness of the people of Jerusalem, But there is no anti-Jewish passage in Greek literature before the Maccabean struggle nor any recorded anti-Jewish action. The details of daily life of the Jews in the Diaspora before the Maccabean age are almost unknown, except for Egypt. Here we find Jews transacting business with other colonists. They were legally regarded as "Hellenes," in opposition to the native "Egyptians." There is, for instance, a judgment of a Ptolemaic court of 226 BC concerning an alleged assault. Both parties were Jews, but the legal guardian of the defendant, a Jewess, was an Athenian, the witnesses of the summons were a Thracian and a Persian, and the case was decided according to Greek law. The juridical situation of the Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt, and in the Diaspora generally, is sufficiently clear. The difficulty begins when we try to appreciate the cultural relations between Jews and pagans. The number "6" was called "Eve of Sabbath" in the slang of gamblers in Alexandria. What did the Greeks know of the Jewish religion? Around 200 BC, a Jewish poetaster wrote a tragedy describing the Exodus.

The author (Ezekiel) follows Hellenistic dramatic techniques and imitates Euripides. But was his composition written for heathen readers or was it intended to take the place in Jewish education of Greek plays based on mythology? The most impressive witness and the

most important feature of Judaism coming into contact with Hellenism was the conversion of Greeks. There were, of course, always “strangers who joined themselves unto the Lord” (Jub. 55:10), but it was only in the Hellenistic age that proselytism became widespread. To understand the phenomenon, let us note at the outset that new adherents unto the Lord were all, or almost all, Greeks or Hellenized natives of Greek cities. The people of the countryside continued to speak their native languages and stubbornly worshiped their traditional gods. An Anatolian or Egyptian peasant did not care much for any deity in Greek garb, whether from Olympus or from Zion. The Greek translation of the Pentateuch represented the Most High God of the Dispersion as speaking Greek. The Alexandrine version of the Torah was made before 250 BC. No part of the Bible, however, was translated by the Jews into any tongue other than Greek not even Latin, although some Latin formulae were used by Latin-speaking Jews in Africa and Italy in the second and third centuries BC. All translations of the Bible, except those into Greek, were the results of Christian missionary activity. The Ethiopian eunuch, returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, was reading Isaiah (Acts 8:28) in Greek when met by the Apostle Philip on the road. Probably no Jew in Egypt ever tried to reach the natives who spoke only dialects of the Egyptian tongue. He was “Hellene” and as such he discriminated against the people who did not know Greek.

Nothing seemed to him more unfair than the idea of degrading himself to the condition of the natives. On the other hand, the people of the cities were in a propitious mood to receive foreign missionaries. The new cities of the Near East were new homes for settlers whether they came from Athens or from Caria. Of course, everybody took with him to his new home his ancestral idols and did not neglect the age-old shrines of the new country’s deities. But gods and men alike were upset on a new soil. There was room for unknown deities who might stir new hopes and quiet fears; and there was the fascinating appeal of the divine forces of the mysterious East, of gods who were old before the birth of Zeus. Accordingly, many Oriental cults started missionary efforts among the “Hellenes.” An Egyptian priest brought the worship of Serapis to Delos, the sacred island of the Greeks, at about the beginning of the third century BC. A shrine was erected to the Syrian Atargatis in an Egyptian village by a Macedonian soldier

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in 222 BC. Before the end of the third century BC the mysteries of the Persian Mithra spread among the Greeks in Egypt. Jewish propaganda followed the same road and the same pattern. The same term *proselytos* (*advena*), that is “one who has arrived at or to,” was used for both the converts to the Lord and the converts to the Egyptian Isis. Unfortunately, we do not have dated evidence of Jewish proselytism before the Maccabean period.

But when we are told that in 139 BC. Jews were expelled from Rome for attempting to infect Roman morals with their cult, we may postulate that proselytism in the Near East must have started before the beginning of the second century BC. It seems that in early Hellenism the people who completely accepted Judaism by circumcision and baptism, and refused to take part any longer in pagan ceremonies, were rather rare. But there were numerous Hellenes who revered the Most High without observing all the prescriptions of the Torah. Some early Hellenistic texts throw light on the state of mind of such “God-fearers.” About 180 BC a minister of Seleucus IV of Syria attempted to extort money from the Temple treasury, but failed ignominiously. His defeat, immortalized by Raphael’s *Storia di Eliodoro*, was, of course, explained in Jerusalem as a miracle. The story was told of Heliodorus who, scourged by angels, had been ordered to “declare unto all men the mighty power of God.” He then testified to all men the works of the Great God, whom he had seen with his eyes. Heliodorus did not become a Jew but the stripes received at the hands of the angels convinced him that the Lord of Zion is above all gods (II Mace. 2:4). In the same way, according to Jewish legend, Alexander the Great prostrated himself before the High Priest, and Nebuchadnezzar had to recognize that the Most High God does according to His will, in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth (Dan. 4:32). Since pagan cults were polytheistic, their propaganda tried to persuade men only of the relative superiority of a particular deity.

The Jewish mission adopted the same pattern. For example, there is a Jewish tale of Bel and Daniel. Deceived by a trick of Bel’s priests, the Persian king exclaims, “Great art thou, Bel, and there is not with him deceit-” But Daniel explodes the pretended miracle, and the king recognizes that great is the Lord, God of Daniel, and there is none other beside Him. The Book of Jonah describes a Jewish

missionary who calls for repentance and is sent to foreign lands, where the name of the Lord is already known and revered. The sailors on Jonah's ship are heathen, praying, every man, to his own idol, but they all fear the Lord exceedingly. These sailors, or Heliodorus of the Jewish tale, resemble the adherents of syncretistic cults who worshiped the Lord as the Supreme Master of the Universe, but placed under Him, or beside Him, other divine forces. Such were, for example, some religious societies in Asia Minor which fused the Phrygian Sabazios with Sabaot, observed the Sabbath, but refused to accept the exclusive attitude of Judaism toward pagan worship. The existence of such "God fearers" extended the influence of Judaism, of course, and the sons of semi proselytes often became full converts. But the recognition of such followers of Judaism sapped the foundations of the latter.

A Jewish latitudinarian, such as a certain Artapanus, could endeavor to identify Moses with Thot Hermes, a central figure in Hellenistic syncretism, and ascribe to the apostle of monotheism the establishment of the Egyptian cult of animals. On the other hand, let us again open the Book of Jonah. The people of Nineveh who were and who remained pagans did not perish because they fasted and, covered with sackcloth, cried mightily unto God. Such is the lesson of this book: God is abundant in mercy and will have pity on the great city "wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle." The design of the book is not to teach the universality of Divine grace, as the critics say today. This point is already presumed by the author. But as the Rabbis explained and the Church Father, Chrysostom, saw, the question of Jonah is whether contrition per se, even that of unbelievers, is sufficient to turn away God's anger. The Jewish author of the biblical book affirms it. The universal church, as well as the mosque, answers in the negative *extra ecclesiam nulla solus*. This answer as well as Jonah's misgivings about God's compassion are easy to understand. If the repentance of the unbeliever avails him, if he may share the favor of Heaven without assuming the yoke of the Law, why the necessity to enter the fold? Why should a Jew by birth observe the numberless minute ritual precepts which involve social disapproval and, for instance, bar him from the royal table?

Chapter 11

Importance of the Second Temple Period

The period after Ezra-Nehemiah is called the second temple period. This period is remarkably significant in the Jewish history. The formation of the OT canon, the emergence of the OT pseudepigrapha, the division among the Jews on the basis of various sectarian beliefs etc. are the major features of this period.

The Second Temple period in Jewish history lasted between 530 BC and 70 AD, when the Second Temple of Jerusalem existed. The sects of Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots were formed during this period. The Second Temple period ended with the First Jewish-Roman War and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

After the death of the last Jewish Prophets of the antiquity and still under Persian rule, the leadership of the Jewish people was in the hands of five successive generations of zugot (“pairs of”) leaders. They flourished

first under the Persians (c. 539-c. 332 BC), then under the Greeks (c. 332-167 BC), then under an independent Hasmonean Kingdom (140-37 BC), and then under the Romans (63 BC-132 AD).

During this period, Second Temple Judaism can be seen as shaped by three major crises and their results, as various groups of Jews reacted to them differently. First came the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah in 587/6 BC, when the Judeans lost their independence, monarchy, holy city and First Temple and were mostly exiled to Babylon. They consequently faced a theological crisis involving the nature, power, and goodness of God and were also threatened culturally, racially, and ceremonially as they were thrown into proximity with other peoples and religious groups. The absence of recognized prophets later in the period left them without their version of divine guidance at a time when they felt most in need of support and direction. The second crisis was the growing influence of Hellenism in Judaism, which culminated in the Maccabean Revolt of 167 BC. The third crisis was the Roman occupation of the region, beginning with Pompey and his sack of Jerusalem in 63 BC. This included the appointment of Herod the Great as King of the Jews by the Roman Senate, the Herodian Kingdom of Judea comprising parts of what today are Israel, Palestinian Authority, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Following a decree by the Persian King Cyrus, conqueror of the Babylonian empire (538 BC), some 50,000 Jews set out on the first return to the Land of Israel, led by Zerubbabel, a descendant of the House of David. Less than a century later, the second return was led by Ezra the Scribe. Over the next four centuries, the Jews knew varying degrees of self-rule under Persian (538-333 BC) and later Hellenistic (Ptolemaic and Seleucid) overlordship (332-142 BC).

The repatriation of the Jews under Ezra's inspired leadership, construction of the Second Temple on the site of the First Temple, refortification of the walls of Jerusalem, and establishment of the *Knesset Hagedolah* (Great Assembly) as the supreme religious and judicial body of the Jewish people marked the beginning of the Second Temple period. Within the confines of the Persian Empire, Judah was a nation whose leadership was entrusted to the high priest and council of elders in Jerusalem. As part of the ancient world conquered by Alexander the Great of Greece (332 BC), the Land

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remained a Jewish theocracy under Syrian-based Seleucid rulers. When the Jews were prohibited to practice Judaism and their Temple was desecrated as part of an effort to impose Greek-oriented culture and customs on the entire population, the Jews rose in revolt (166 BC).

Hasmonean Dynasty (142-63 BC)

First led by Mattathias of the priestly Hasmonean family and then by his son Judah the Maccabee, the Jews subsequently entered Jerusalem and purified the Temple (164 BC), events commemorated each year by the festival of Hannuka.

Following further Hasmonean victories (147 BC), the Seleucids restored autonomy to Judea, as the Land of Israel was now called, and, with the collapse of the Seleucid kingdom (129 BC), Jewish independence was achieved. Under the Hasmonean dynasty, which lasted about 80 years, the kingdom regained boundaries not far short of Solomon's realm, political consolidation under Jewish rule was attained and Jewish life flourished.

Roman Rule (63 BC-313 BC)

When the Romans replaced the Seleucids as the great power in the region, they granted the Hasmonean king, Hyrcanus II, had limited authority under the Roman governor of Damascus. The Jews were hostile to the new regime, and the following years witnessed frequent insurrections. A last attempt to restore the former glory of the Hasmonean dynasty was made by Mattathias Antigonus, whose defeat and death brought Hasmonean rule to an end (40 BC), and the Land became a province of the Roman Empire.

In 37 BC Herod, a son-in-law of Hyrcanus II, was appointed King of Judea by the Romans. Granted almost unlimited autonomy in the country's internal affairs, he became one of the most powerful monarchs in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. A great admirer of Greco-Roman culture, Herod launched a massive construction program, which included the cities of Caesarea and Sebaste and the fortresses at Herodium and Masada. He also remodeled the Temple into one of the most magnificent buildings of its time. But despite his many achievements, Herod failed to win the trust and support of his Jewish subjects.

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Ten years after Herod's death (4 BC), Judea came under direct Roman administration. Growing anger against increased Roman suppression of Jewish life resulted in sporadic violence which escalated into a full-scale revolt in 66 BC. Superior Roman forces led by Titus were finally victorious, razing Jerusalem to the ground (70 BC) and defeating the last Jewish outpost at Masada (73 BC).

The total destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple was catastrophic for the Jewish people. According to the contemporary historian Josephus Flavius, hundreds of thousands of Jews perished in the siege of Jerusalem and elsewhere in the country, and many thousands more were sold into slavery.

A last brief period of Jewish sovereignty followed the revolt of Shimon Bar Kochba (132 BC), during which Jerusalem and Judea were regained. However, given the overwhelming power of the Romans, the outcome was inevitable. Three years later, in conformity with Roman custom, Jerusalem was "plowed up with a yoke of oxen," Judea was renamed Palaestina and Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina.

Although the Temple had been destroyed and Jerusalem burned to the ground, the Jews and Judaism survived the encounter with Rome. The supreme legislative and judicial body, the Sanhedrin (successor of the Knesset Hagedolah) was reconvened in Yavneh (70 BC), and later in Tiberias.

Without the unifying framework of a state and the Temple, the small remaining Jewish community gradually recovered, reinforced from time to time by returning exiles. Institutional and communal life was renewed, priests were replaced by rabbis and the synagogue became the focus of the Jewish communities, as evidenced by remnants of synagogues found at Capernaum, Korazin, Bar'am, Gamla, and elsewhere. Halakhah (Jewish religious law) served as the common bond among the Jews and was passed on from generation to generation.

Masada: Nearly 1,000 Jewish men, women and children, who had survived the destruction of Jerusalem, occupied and fortified King Herod's mountaintop palace complex of Masada near the Dead Sea, where they held out for three years against repeated Roman attempts to dislodge them. When the Romans finally scaled Masada and broke

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through its walls, they found that the defenders and their families had chosen to die by their own hands rather than be enslaved.

Halakhah is the body of law which has guided Jewish life all over the world since post-biblical times. It deals with the religious obligations of Jews, both in interpersonal relations and in ritual observances, and encompasses practically all aspects of human behavior - birth and marriage, joy and grief, agriculture and commerce, ethics and theology. Rooted in the Bible, halakhic authority is based on the Talmud, a body of Jewish law and lore (completed c. 400), which incorporates the Mishna, the first written compilation of the Oral Law (codified c.210),and the Gemara, an elaboration of the Mishna.

To provide practical guidance to the Halakhah, concise, systematic digests were authored by religious scholars beginning in the first and second centuries. Among the most authoritative of these codifications is the *Shulhan Arukh*, written by Joseph Caro in Safed (Tzfat) in the 16th century.

Political and Religious Leadership of the Second Temple Period

In 586 BC, the Chaldaean King Nebuchadnezzar II of the New Babylonian Empire destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and brought to an end the southern Kingdom of Judah, which had existed from 931 to 586 BC. This marked the end of the First Temple Period of Jewish history. Nebuchadnezzar took the families of the king, the high priest, and the leaders of Judah as captives to Babylon. There they were forced to live from 586 to 538 BC. This is known as the period of the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews (586 - 538 BC). After King Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered the New Babylonian Empire, he allowed some of the Exiles to return to Jerusalem. Under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra, Jerusalem was refortified, the Temple was rebuilt, and a semi-independent Jewish state was reestablished within the Persian Empire. This client state under the Persians was ruled by the High Priest and is therefore considered to have been a theocracy. The rebuilding of the Temple in 538 BC marks the beginning of the Second Temple Period of the history of the Jewish people.

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The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament of the Christians, ends its historical account with the glorious return of the Jews to Jerusalem and the reestablishment of the Temple. Later books detailing subsequent Jewish history are not considered canonical by either Jews or Christians.

Outline: Second Temple Period 538 BC-70 BC

Nehemiah and Ezra returned with some of the exiled Jews from Babylon and founded the second Temple.

1. Theocracy under Persian domination 538 - 323 BC
2. Theocracy under Hellenistic Kingdom of Ptolemaic Egypt 323 - 200 BC
3. Theocracy under Hellenistic Kingdom of Seleucid Syria 198 - 160 BC
 - Antiochus III the Great, ca. 241–187 BC, ruled 223-187 BC)
 - Seleucus IV Philopator, ruled 187 BC to 175 BC
 - Antiochus IV Epiphanes ca. 215 - 264, ruled 175 - 164 BC

Maccabean Revolt starts in 167

1. Jewish Independence first re-established 165
2. Celebration of Chanukkah when the Temple is cleansed and enough oil is found to light the candles.
3. Maccabean (167-135) and Hasmonaean (142-38 BC) Periods.
4. Struggle for Independence Under the Maccabees 167-135
5. The Independent Hasmonean Kingdom 142 - 63 BC
6. Hasmoneans Under Roman Tutelage 63 - 38 BC

Judea under Roman Domination 63 BC - 6 BC

- Pompey 63 BC conquered Jerusalem, Hasmoneans Under Roman Tutelage 63 - 38 BC
- King Herod the Great 38 - 4 BC
- Later Herodians
 - Archelaus ruled Judea and Samaria
 - Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Peraea

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- Philip ruled Batanaea
- Archelaus 4 BC - 6 BC

Roman Prefects, AD 6-41

1	Coponius, 6-9
2	Marcus Ambibulus, 9-12
3	Annius Rufus, 12-15
4	Valerius Gratus, 15-26
5	Pontius Pilate, 26-36
6	Marcellus, 36/37
7	Marullus, 37-41

Herod Agrippa I, 41-44

Roman Procurators, 44-66

7	Cuspius Fadus, 44-46?
8	Tiberius Iulius Alexander, 46?-48
9	Ventidius Cumanus, 48-52
10	Antonius Felix, 52-60?
11	Porcius Festus, 60-62?
12	Albinus, 62-64
13	Gessius Florus, 64-66

The first Jewish-Roman War (years 66–73 BC),
Destruction of the Second Temple 70 BC
Masada 73 BC

List of High Priests from 320 - 37 BC

1	Onias I, son of Jaddua, ca. 320-280 BC
2	Simon I, son of Onias, ca. 280-260 BC
3	Eleazar, son of Onias, ca. 260-245 BC
4	Manasseh, son of Jaddua, ca. 245-240 BC

5	Onias II, son of Simon, ca. 240-218 BC
6	Simon II, son of Onias, 218-185 BC
7	Onias III, son of Simon, 185-175 BC, murdered 170 BC
8	Jason, son of Simon 175-172 BC

The line of High Priests dating back to Aaron and Zadok comes to an end in 172 BC. The office becomes Politicized.

	Menelaus 172-162 BC
	Onias IV, son of Onias III, fled to Egypt and built a Jewish Temple at Leontopolis (closed in AD 66)
	Alcimus 162-159 BC

Inter-Sacerdotium [159-153]

It is unknown who held the position of High Priest of Jerusalem between Alcimus' death and the accession of Jonathan. Josephus, in *Jewish Antiquities* XX.10, relates that the office was vacant for six years, but this is indeed highly unlikely, if not impossible. In religious terms, the High Priest was a necessary part of the rites on the Day of Atonement - a day that could have not been allowed to pass uncelebrated for so long so soon after the restoration of the Temple service. Politically, Israel's overlords probably would not have allowed a power vacuum to last that length of time.

In another passage (XII.10 §6, XII.11 §2) Josephus suggests that Judas Maccabeus, the brother of Jonathan, held the office for three years, succeeding Alcimus. However, Judas actually predeceased Alcimus by one year. However, the nature of Jonathan's accession to the high priesthood makes it unlikely that Judas held that office during the inter-sacerdotium. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* tries to harmonise the contradictions found in Josephus by supposing that Judas held the office "immediately after the consecration of the Temple (165-162), that is, before the election of Alcimus".

It has been argued that the founder of the Qumran community, the Teacher of Righteousness (Moreh Zedek), was High Priest (but not necessarily the sole occupant) during the inter-sacerdotium and

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was driven off by Jonathan. This view is based on sources from the Qumran, that portray the teacher as a figure of authority usually associated with the high priest, however, without clearly spelling out names or events.

High Priests of the Hasmonean dynasty

1	Jonathan Apphus, 153-143 BC
2	Simeon Tassi, brother of Jonathan Apphus, 142-134 BC
3	John Hyrcanus I, son fo Simen Tassi 134-104 BC
4	Aristobulus I, son of John Hyrcanus, 104-103 BC
5	Alexander Jannaeus, son of John Hyrcanus, 103-76 BC
6	John Hyrcanus II, son of Alexander Jannaeus, 76-66 BC
7	Aristobulus II, son of Alexander Jannaeus, 66-63 BC
8	John Hyrcanus II (restored) 63-40 BC
9	Antigonus, Son of Aristobulos II, 40-37 BC

Religious Divisions During the Hasmonean Period

The Essenes were another early mystical-religious movement, who are believed to have rejected either the Seleucid appointed high priests, or the Hasmonean high priests, as illegitimate. Ultimately, they rejected the Second Temple, arguing that the Essene community was itself the new Temple, and that obedience to the law represented a new form of sacrifice.

Although their lack of concern for the Second Temple alienated the Essenes from the great mass of Jews, their notion that the sacred could exist outside of the Temple was shared by another group, the Pharisees (“separatists”), based within the community of scribes and sages. The meaning of the name is unclear; it may refer to their rejection of Hellenic culture or to their objection to the Hasmonean monopoly on power.

During the Hasmonean period, the Sadducees and Pharisees functioned primarily as political parties (the Essenes not being as politically oriented). The political rift between the Sadducees and Pharisees became evident when Pharisees demanded that the

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Hasmonean king Alexander Jannai choose between being king and being High Priest in the traditional manner. This demand led to a brief civil war that ended with a bloody repression of the Pharisees, although at his deathbed the king called for a reconciliation between the two parties. Alexander was succeeded by his widow, whose brother was a leading Pharisee. Upon her death her elder son, Hyrcanus, sought Pharisee support, and her younger son, Aristobulus, sought the support of the Sadducees. The resulting civil war ended with the Roman conquest of Jerusalem.

Jewish Movements of the Second Temple Era Comparative Chart

Sect:	Sadducees	Pharisees	Essenes (probably = the Qumran Sect that composed the “Dead Sea Scrolls”)
General			
Meaning of Name:	Descendants of Zadok, members of the old (pre-Hasmonean) High Priestly family	“Separatists” -probably because their special dietary restrictions and purity rules limited their social interactions with outsiders	Unknown. -Possibly “healers” because of their reputation for performing miraculous cures
Factors related to their political and social class			
Social Class:	Aristocratic priests	Common people	N/A
Figures of Authority:	Priests	Scholars and Scribes They challenged the importance of the priesthood, limiting it to the performance of Temple rituals.	The “Teacher of Righteousness” The apparent founder of the sect was probably a Zadokite priest who rejected the Jerusalem leadership

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Factors related to their reliance on the Bible or other sources of tradition			
Attitude to Bible:	Literalist: As a hereditary leadership they did not have to justify their authority, and did not have to develop special skills in interpreting it.	Sophisticated scholarly interpretations: This was proposed as an alternative to priestly authority: Leadership had to earned through knowledge and ability, not inherited.	“Inspired Exegesis” -distinctive interpretations of their own sect, especially those of the “Teacher of Righteousness”
Attitude to “Oral Torah”:	Accepted only what was explicitly written in the Torah	Believed in authority of “ancestral traditions” even if they had no basis in the Torah.	The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate their distinctive Biblical interpretations and rules, similar in purpose -but not in content- to the Pharisees’ “Oral Torah.”
Practices:	Based directly on the Torah	Accepted many additional laws and interpretations based on the “Oral Torah” and their own interpretations.	“Inspired Exegesis”
	Emphasis on priestly rituals and obligations (which enhanced the priests’ holiness and authority)	Extention of priestly laws (e.g., purity of food) to non-priests	Accepted many additional laws and interpretations based on their own interpretations.
		“Luni-solar” calendar	Solar calendar
Beliefs:	Rejection of ideas that have no clear basis in the Bible, such as life-after-death.	Acceptance of some non- Biblical beliefs that had been accepted by the people, e.g., Physical resurrection	Believed in spiritual survival after death. Dualistic determinism: Humanity has been divided into “Children

	Assertion of human freedom and accountability for their actions.	of the dead. Believed in limited free will: "Everything is in the power of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven."	of Light and Children of Darkness," who will soon clash in an apocalyptic war.
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General patterns:

- All the movements accepted the Torah and (with some possible exceptions) the same scriptures.
- Sadducees assumed hereditary leadership by virtue of priestly pedigree. Pharisees believed in scholarship as the main source of religious authority more democratic option.
- Biblical laws of purity and tithing defined the priests as a holier class. The Pharisees adopted some of these rules for themselves.

This might have given rise to the feeling that they were "separatists" who could not eat (or sometimes socialize) with those who did not observe their standards.

- According to latest research, Essenes were probably an extreme branch of the Sadducees who refused to compromise their traditions to serve in the Jerusalem Temple.
- Sadducees accepted only the practices and beliefs set down explicitly in the Torah (e.g., afterlife beliefs). The Pharisees respected ancestral customs that had taken root among the populace. This evolved into an elaborate tradition of "oral Torah."

The Formation of OT Canon and Pseudepigrapha

The second temple period is remarkable due to the formation of the OT canon. The following table gives the names of books included in the Old Testament of the Hebrew Bible, the Greek Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, and the King James Version (1611). Names of apocryphal books are italicized. The books enclosed in square brackets in the Septuagint column are books which appear in only some copies of that version. Summaries of the apocryphal books are given below.

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Hebrew Bible	Greek Septuagint	Latin Vulgate	King James Version
THELAW	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Genesis	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Exodus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Deuteronomy	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua
	Judges	Judges	Judges
THE	Ruth	Ruth	Ruth
PROPHETS	1 Samuel	1 Samuel	1 Samuel
Joshua	2 Samuel	2 Samuel	2 Samuel
Judges	1 Kings	1 Kings	1 Kings
1 Samuel	2 Kings	2 Kings	2 Kings
2 Samuel	1 Chronicles	1 Chronicles	1 Chronicles
1 Kings	2 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	2 Chronicles
2 Kings	(Prayer of Manasseh)	Prayer of Manasseh	Ezra
Isaiah	1 Esdras	1 Esdras	Nehemiah
Jeremiah		2 Esdras	Esther (Hebrew)
Ezekiel	Ezra	Ezra	Job
Hosea	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Psalms
Joel	Tobit	Tobit	Proverbs
Amos	Judith	Judith	Ecclesiastes
Obadiah	Esther	Esther	Song of Songs
Jonah	(with insertions)	(with insertions)	Isaiah
Micah	1 Maccabees	1 Maccabees	Jeremiah
Nahum	2 Maccabees	2 Maccabees	Lamentations
Habakkuk	(3 Maccabees)		Ezekiel
Zephaniah	(4 Maccabees)		Daniel (Hebrew)
Haggai	Job	Job	Hosea
Zechariah	Psalms	Psalms	Joel
Malachi	(Psalm no. 151)		Amos
	(Odes)		Obadiah
THE	Proverbs	Proverbs	Jonah
WRITINGS	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Micah
Psalms	Song of Songs	Song of Songs	Nahum
Proverbs	Wisdom of Solomon	Wisdom of Solomon	Habakkuk
Job	Ecclesiasticus	Ecclesiasticus	Zephaniah
Song of Songs	(Psalms of Solomon)		Haggai
Ruth	Isaiah	Isaiah	Zechariah

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Lamentations	Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Malachi
Ecclesiastes	Lamentations	Lamentations	APOCRYPHA
Esther	Baruch	Baruch	1 Esdras
Daniel	Epistle of Jeremiah	Epistle of Jeremiah	2 Esdras
Ezra	Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Tobit
Nehemiah	Daniel	Daniel	Judith
1 Chronicles	(with insertions)	(with insertions)	Additions to Esther
2 Chronicles	Hosea	Hosea	Wisdom of Solomon
	Joel	Joel	Ecclesiasticus
	Amos	Amos	Baruch
	Obadiah	Obadiah	Epistle of Jeremiah
	Jonah	Jonah	Song of the Three Children
	Micah	Micah	Story of Susanna
	Nahum	Nahum	Bel and the Dragon
	Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Prayer of Manasseh
	Zephaniah	Zephaniah	1 Maccabees
	Haggai	Haggai	2 Maccabees
	Zechariah	Zechariah	
	Malachi	Malachi	

Esther in the Septuagint has six extra paragraphs inserted at various places. In the Vulgate these are all removed to the end of the book. English versions omit them entirely, or remove them to an Apocrypha section.

Daniel in the Septuagint has The Story of Susanna inserted at the beginning, the Song of the Three Children inserted in chapter 3, and the story of Bel and the Dragon added to the end. In the Vulgate Susanna is moved to before Bel. English versions omit them entirely, or remove them to an Apocrypha section.

The extra books which were eventually received as Scripture in the Greek Orthodox Church and those received in the Roman Catholic church do not correspond exactly to the list of books commonly called “Apocrypha” by Protestants. The Protestant Apocrypha includes all of the books normally included in manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate. But three of these (1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh) were omitted from the list published by the Council of Trent when it fixed the Roman Catholic canon. (Apparently these omissions were unintentional. The “Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures”

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specified that the books were to be received “as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate.”) The Eastern Orthodox churches (including the Greek, the Russian, the Ukrainian, the Bulgarian, the Serbian, the Armenian, and others) do not receive 2 Esdras because it was not in the Septuagint, and they receive some books which were present in many manuscripts of the Septuagint but not in the Vulgate (Psalm 151, 3 and 4 Maccabees).

Greek Orthodox Canon	Protestant Apocrypha	Roman Catholic Canon
1Esdras	1Esdras	Tobit
Tobit	2Esdras	Judith
Judith	Tobit	Additions to Esther
Additions to Esther	Judith	Wisdom of Solomon
Wisdom of Solomon	Additions to Esther	Ecclesiasticus
Ecclesiasticus	Wisdom of Solomon	Baruch
Baruch	Ecclesiasticus	Epistle of Jeremiah
Epistle of Jeremiah	Baruch	Song of the Three Children
Song of the Three Children	Epistle of Jeremiah	Story of Susanna
Bel and the Dragon	Song of the Three Children	Bel and the Dragon
Prayer of Manasseh	Story of Susanna	
1 Maccabees	Bel and the Dragon	1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees	Prayer of Manasseh	2 Maccabees
3 Maccabees	1 Maccabees	
4 Maccabees	2 Maccabees	
Psalm 151		

The Apocryphal Books

Apocrypha is a Greek word meaning things hidden, and in ancient times this word was applied to religious writings esteemed almost as scripture by some, but which were not read to the unlearned in public. In modern Protestant usage the word “apocrypha” refers to all those writings which have wrongly been regarded as scripture by many in the church.

First Esdras. This book is someone’s attempt to revise the canonical Book of Ezra, supplementing it with material from the last two chapters of 2 Chronicles and the last two chapters of Nehemiah, and with an entertaining tale about three young courtiers who debate the question, “What is the strongest thing in the world?” The debate is held before the king of Persia, and the winner is to get a prize. The

first maintains that it is wine; the second that it is the king himself; the third argues with some irony and humor that women are stronger than either wine or kings, but that “truth” and “the God of truth” are by far strongest. This last young man turns out to be none other than Zerubbabel, who for his prize receives generous help from the king in rebuilding Jerusalem.

Second Esdras. Also called the Ezra Apocalypse. This is a typical Jewish apocalypse, probably first written in Greek about AD 100. Some hold that it was originally written in Hebrew. It appears to be a composite work, compiled of two or three sources. Around AD 120 it was edited by an unknown Christian, and then translated into Latin. The Christian editor added some introductory and closing chapters in which reference is made to Christ, but the original Jewish composition was not changed in any important respect. This book was not included in Septuagint manuscripts, and so the Greek text has been lost. The most important witness to the original text is the Latin version, which was included in medieval manuscripts of the Vulgate. The book consists mostly of dialogues between Ezra and angels sent to him to answer his urgent theological questions about the problem of evil, and in particular the failures and afflictions of Israel. All of this is presented as if written long before by Ezra and hidden away. The book was obviously written as an encouragement to the Jews, who had recently suffered the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). It also includes some symbolical prophecies concerning the Roman empire, in which Rome is figured as a three-headed eagle that oppresses the world and is finally destroyed by a roaring lion (a figure of the Messiah). There is a fantastic story of how the Hebrew Scriptures were all destroyed in the Babylonian exile and then perfectly restored by the miraculous inspiration of Ezra as he dictated all of the books to five scribes over a period of forty days. Along with the canonical books, Ezra dictates 70 secret books that are to be reserved for the wise. Second Esdras is presented as being one of these secret books. Martin Luther omitted First and Second Esdras from the Apocrypha of his German Bible in 1534, and both books were also rejected by the Roman Catholics at the Council of Trent in 1546. Nevertheless, they were included in the Apocrypha of the King James version.

Pseudepigrapha of Second Temple Period

Pseudepigrapha are falsely attributed works, texts whose claimed author is not the true author, or a work whose real author attributed it

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to a figure of the past. Some of these works may have originated among Jewish Hellenizers, others may have Christian authorship in character and origin.

1. Apocalyptic and related works:

- 1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch (Jewish, ca. 200 BC-50 BC)
- 2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch (Jewish, ca. 75-100 BC)
- 3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch (Jewish, in present form from ca. 5th to 6th cent. BC)
- Sibylline Oracles (both Jewish and Christian, ca. 2nd cent. BC-7th cent. BC)
- Treatise of Shem (ca. near end of first cent. BC)
- Apocryphon of Ezekiel (mostly lost, original form ca. late 1st cent. BC)
- Apocalypse of Zephaniah (mostly lost, original form ca. late 1st cent. BC)
- 4 Ezra (original Jewish form after 70 BC, final Christian additions later)
- Greek Apocalypse of Ezra (present form is Christian ca. 9th cent. BC with both Jewish and Christian sources)
- Vision of Ezra (a Christian document dating from 4th to 7th cent. BC)
- Questions of Ezra (Christian, but date is imprecise)
- Revelation of Ezra (Christian and sometime before 9th cent. BC)
- Apocalypse of Sedrach (present form is Christian from ca. 5th cent. with earlier sources)
- 2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch (Jewish, from ca. 100 BC)
- 3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch (Christian utilizing Jewish sources, ca. 1st-2nd cent. BC)
- Apocalypse of Abraham (Jewish primarily, ca. 70-150 BC)
- Apocalypse of Adam (Gnostic derived from Jewish sources from ca. the 1st cent. BC)
- Apocalypse of Elijah (both Jewish and Christian, ca. 150-275 BC)
- Apocalypse of Daniel (present form ca. 9th cent. BC, but contains Jewish sources from ca. 4th cent. BC).

2. Testaments:

- Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (current form is Christian, ca. 150-200 BC, but Levi, Judah, and Naphtali are Jewish and date before 70 BC and probably 2nd-1st cent. BC)
- Testament of Job (Jewish, ca. late 1st cent. BC)
- Testaments of the Three Patriarchs (Jewish Testaments of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from ca. 100 BC which are linked with the Christian Testament of Isaac and Jacob)
- Testament of Moses (Jewish, from ca. early 1st cent. BC)
- Testament of Solomon (Jewish, current form ca. 3rd cent. BC, but earliest form ca. 100 BC)
- Testament of Adam (Christian in current form ca. late 3rd cent. BC, but used Jewish sources from ca. 150-200 BC).

3. Expansions of Old Testament and other legends:

- The Letter of Aristeas (Jewish, ca. 200-150 BC)
- Jubilees (Jewish, ca. 130-100 BC)
- Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah (has three sections, the first Jewish from ca. 100 BC, and 2nd and 3rd sections are Christian. The second from ca. 2nd cent. BC, and the third- Testament of Hezekiah, ca. 90-100 BC)
- Joseph and Asenath (Jewish, ca. 100 BC)
- Life of Adam and Eve (Jewish, ca. early to middle 1st cent. BC)
- Pseudo-Philo (Jewish, ca. 66-135 BC)
- Lives of the Prophets (Jewish, ca. early 1st cent. BC with later Christian additions)
- Ladder of Jacob (earliest form is Jewish dating from late 1st cent. BC. One chapter is Christian)
- 4 Baruch (Jewish original but edited by a Christian, ca. 100-110 BC)
- Jannes and Jambres (Christian in present form, but dependent on earlier Jewish sources from ca. 1st cent. BC)
- History of the Rechabites (Christian in present form dating ca. 6th cent. BC, but contains some Jewish sources before 100 BC)

Ezra-Nehemiah

- Eldad and Modat (forged on basis of Numbers 11.26-29, before the 1st BC is now lost, but quoted in Shepherd of Hermas ca. 140 BC)
- History of Joseph (Jewish, but difficult to date).

4. Wisdom and Philosophical Literature:

- Ahiqar (Jewish dating from late 7th or 6th cent. BC and cited in Apocryphal Tobit)
- 3 Maccabees (Jewish, ca. 1st cent. BC)
- 4 Maccabees (Jewish, ca. before 70 BC)
- Pseudo-Phocylides (Jewish maxims attributed to 6th cent. Ionic poet, ca. 50 BC-100 BC)
- The Sentences of the Syriac Menander (Jewish, ca. 3rd cent. BC).

5. Prayers, Psalms, and Odes:

- More Psalms of David (Jewish psalms from ca. 3rd cent. BC to 100 BC)
 - Prayer of Manasseh (sometimes in Apocrypha, Jewish from ca. early 1st cent. BC)
 - Psalms of Solomon (Jewish, ca. 50-5 BC)
 - Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers (Jewish, ca. 2nd-3rd cent. BC)
 - Prayer of Joseph (Jewish, ca. 70-135)
 - Prayer of Jacob (mostly lost Jewish document from ca. 4th cent. BC)
- Odes of Solomon (Christian but influenced by Judaism and probably also Qumran, ca. 100 BC)