

The Historical Context for Ezra's Return

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Introduction

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 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 B.C.? 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 Longimanus (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

Ezra and Nehemiah

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

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 B.C.?

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

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 B.C. 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 B.C. 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 engrafted 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 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 to 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.

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 tēn Bublon Inaros (polis ischura en Aiguptō hautē)³⁶
but Inaros flees 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 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 throughout 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-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 prejudice 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 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 Rehun 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.

[A]ll 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 position of greatest honor. This fact is entirely consistent with the present model.

Conclusion

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 B.C., 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.

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

¹By contrast the earlier return of Zerubbabel under Cyrus had been entirely financed by private donations (Ezra 1:4).

²There 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.

³In 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.

⁴For 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.

⁵The 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).

⁶See n. 2 above.

⁷Sara 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 fur 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.

⁸What 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.

⁹Klaus 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.

¹⁰Elephantine 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.

¹¹Russell Meiggs, "The Growth of Athenian Imperialism," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 63 (1943): 22.

¹²N. G. L. Hammond, *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 297.

¹³Ilya 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 (*Achaimenidēn ton adelphon, ton adelphon Achaimenidēn; 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.

¹⁶See Meiggs, "Athenian Imperialism," p. 22, n. 8.

¹⁷For the names of the generals see Diodorus, 11.74.6, p. 319. For the date 456 see Meiggs, "Athenian Imperialism," p. 23.

¹⁸Hammond, *History*, p. 293.

¹⁹"Political Role," p. 111.

²⁰The 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.

²²It 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).

²³Hammond, *History*, pp. 212, 231.

²⁴The 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).

²⁵Rehum 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.

²⁷See Hardy, "The Context for Ezra's Use of a Fall-to-Fall Calendar," *Historicism* No. 8/Oct 86, pp. 2-65.

²⁸Diodorus, 11.77.1, p. 323.

²⁹*Cambridge History of Iran*, 2:335.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Hammond, *History of Greece*, p. 296.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Diodorus, 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.

³⁶Ctesias, *Persica*, 29.33. See Hill, *Sources*, p. 115.

³⁷Diodorus, 11.77.1, p. 323.

³⁸Cyrene 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).

³⁹Ctesias writes: *ekeinē analōtos 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.)?

⁴¹Benjamin Dean Meritt, *Documents on Athenian Tribute* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), p. 79.

⁴²Ellen 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.

⁴³See 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.

⁴⁵Ibid., 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.

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).

⁴⁷Ezra 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.

⁴⁸When 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.

⁴⁹See 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.

⁵⁰On the burning of the gates see Hardy, "The Chronology of Ezra 4," *Historicism* No. 10/Apr 87, pp. 30-31.

⁵¹Ezra 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.

⁵²See Hardy, "Chronology," pp. 30-36.

⁵³The 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 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.

⁵⁴I learned this after the present paper was written.

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

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 548-52.

⁵⁷Eissfeldt 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.