

EZRA

INTRODUCTION

[Following is the introduction to both Ezra and Nehemiah, for they are parts of one whole.]

1. Title. In Hebrew Bible manuscripts Ezra and Nehemiah appeared as one volume, like the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, until A.D. 1448, when the Vulgate division into two volumes was introduced into a Hebrew manuscript for the first time. Originally, the united book was called “Ezra.” But in the LXX this was divided in two parts called 2 and 3 Esdras, prefaced by the Apocryphal 1 Esdras, which contains excerpts from the two canonical books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Jerome was the first to give the two canonical books the names “Ezra” and “Nehemiah,” names which they retain to the present day. He designated 1 Esdras of the LXX as 3 Esdras and classed it as an Apocryphal book.

2. Authorship. Ezra and Nehemiah form the historical and literary continuation of the books of Chronicles, and a study of the style and language reveals that they probably had the same author. Jewish tradition (the Talmud) names Ezra as the chief author (*Baba Bathra* 15a) and Nehemiah as the one who completed the work.

Although the double book Ezra-Nehemiah does not claim to have been written in its entirety by Ezra, there is nothing in it which could not have been written by him. The author used official material of Zerubbabel’s time and his own, and also reports probably written by Nehemiah. The change in pronouns from the 1st person to the 3d person singular is no proof of a multiple authorship within the sections dealing with Ezra’s (3d person: chs. 7:1–26; 8:35, 36; 10:1–44; 1st person: chs. 7:27 to 8:34; 9:1–15) and Nehemiah’s work (1st person: chs. 1:1 to 7:73; 12:27 to 13:31; 3d person: chs. 8:1 to 12:26. Such changes appear also in ancient non-Biblical literature (see on Ezra 7:28).

Since the various lists of priests and Levites presented in Nehemiah 12 terminate about 400 B.C. (see on Neh. 12:10, 11, 22), the book seems to have been written at about that time, the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra was a scribe (Ezra 7:6), and was anxious to acquaint his people with the sacred writings (see Neh. 8:1–8). It would have been strange indeed for such a man not to make provision for preserving for the guidance and edification of posterity an accurate account of the wonderful events of his time. It is therefore entirely appropriate to consider Ezra the inspired author of the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. In writing, he was guided in making selections from available public records, such as decrees (see Ezra 1:2–4; Ezra 6:6–12; etc.), letters (see Ezra 4:11–16; 5:7–17; etc.), lists (see Ezra 2:1–67; etc.), and other source materials.

The fact that two sections of Ezra are written in Aramaic (chs. 4:8 to 6:18; 7:12–26) has been used in the past as evidence for a much later authorship than the time of Ezra. This argument was proposed at a time when there was only fragmentary knowledge of the spread and use of Aramaic in the Persian Empire. Since the discovery of numerous Aramaic documents from different parts of the Persian kingdom and of many Aramaic Jewish documents from Egypt, from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, this argument is no longer valid. There is remarkably great similarity between the Aramaic of these documents and the Aramaic parts of Ezra. Aramaic had become the official language of the Persian Empire, and was used for the publication of decrees and directives, as well as for correspondence and for economic and legal documents. Hence, lettered men like Ezra

were bilingual and could use both their mother tongue and Aramaic in speaking and writing. In fact, the use of Aramaic spread so widely that any man who could read was expected to know Aramaic; thus the author of Ezra could expect his readers to be able to understand his Aramaic sections. This accounts for the fact that he did not deem it necessary to translate into Hebrew the Aramaic source materials he used. Concerning contemporary Aramaic documents, see pp. 79–83.

3. *Historical Setting.* Aside from Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah are the only historical books of the postexilic period, and are of great importance for a reconstruction of the history of postexilic Jewry. However, they do not record the history of the people of God in unbroken sequence for the period covered by the two books, but only certain parts of it. There are large gaps for which little information is available.

Ezra records, first of all, the return of the Jews from exile under the guidance of Zerubbabel, the reorganization of the sacrificial service, and the beginning of the rebuilding of the Temple. All these events took place within about two years, early in the reign of Cyrus. During the next 13 years the work progressed slowly against opposition. Then appears an account of the resumption of the building of the Temple and its completion and dedication under Darius I. Of the next nearly 60 years Ezra leaves no record. Then, in 457 B.C., Ezra was sent back to Judea by King Artaxerxes, with far-reaching authority to reorganize the nation's administration according to Mosaic law. He tells of his return and some of his reforms, but again breaks the thread of continuity for more than ten years, when Nehemiah appears on the scene of action as governor, and reports his activities in the book which bears his name.

All the events described in Ezra and Nehemiah took place during the first half of the period of the Persian Empire, which lasted from 539 B.C., when Babylon fell to the victorious forces of Cyrus, until, with the death of Darius III in 331 B.C., the empire ceased to exist and was succeeded by that of Alexander the Great. The history of postexilic Jewry begins "in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia" (Ezra 1:1). The Persian Empire stretched from the desert wastes of Iran in the east to the coast of Asia Minor in the west, and from the Armenian highlands in the north to the border of Egypt in the south. Cyrus, its founder, was a prudent and humane monarch. In harmony with his policy of appeasing nations subjugated by Babylon, he resettled them in their old homes and restored their places of worship. In accord with this generous policy, the Jews were allowed to return to their old homeland and rebuild their Temple. For the most part, the kings of Persia attempted to rule their empire with equity and consideration. Their officials were admonished to practice honesty and to work in the interests of the peoples whom they governed. The monotheistic religion of Zoroaster, the state religion at least from Darius I on, stood on a much higher level than that of the polytheistic and idolatrous predecessors of the Persians, the people of Babylonia.

When Cyrus took Babylon he became acquainted with the aged Daniel, trusted counselor of the great Nebuchadnezzar of a former era, and learned to appreciate his advice. Through Daniel, Cyrus must have become acquainted with Isaiah's prophecies concerning him and his appointed role in behalf of God's people (Isa. 44:21 to 45:13), and granted their restoration (PK 557). The great work of pacifying his far-flung empire in its years of infancy required the king's full attention. He lost his life in a campaign against unruly eastern tribes after a reign of about nine years, counted from the fall of Babylon.

Returning to Judea, the Jews found hostile neighbors, and were continually harassed by the Samaritans, a people of mixed racial and religious origins. Because Cyrus was busy unifying his far-flung empire, these enemies succeeded in hindering the Jews and causing them untold trouble that slowed the work of rebuilding the Temple.

Cyrus' eldest son, Cambyses, reigned for less than eight years. His greatest achievement was the conquest of Egypt. That he was favorably disposed toward the Jews is known from a Jewish document found in Egypt, but we have no evidence that he actively assisted the Jews in rebuilding their Temple.

The short reign of the false Smerdis proved a great setback for the Jews. Under this king, described by Darius as a destroyer of temples, the work at Jerusalem was stopped. The stoppage may have been partly due to Samaritan enemies, for new foundations had to be laid as soon as stable conditions under the strong government of Darius I permitted resumption of the work. The era of Darius the Great was marked by prosperity and order. The Jews, like other nations, benefited from his wise and strong rule. Under the spiritual leadership of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they finished the Temple and dedicated it in the sixth regnal year of Darius, 515 B.C.

An era of unrest began, however, when late in his reign Darius decided to invade Greece. From that time on the empire experienced repeated reverses in Greece, Egypt, and elsewhere that disturbed the internal peace and stability of the empire. The next two kings, Xerxes and Artaxerxes I, were weaklings, opportunists, and unstable in character, and owed their throne to the strong hand of powerful counselors. Disastrous campaigns in Greece and rebellions in Egypt and other parts of the empire caused great unrest and led to vacillating domestic and foreign policies.

It was during a serious rebellion in Egypt (463–454 B.C.) that Ezra received major concessions for the Jews, whose good will Artaxerxes needed in this crucial period, since Judea lay athwart the highway to Egypt. Later, when the satrapy to which Judea belonged rebelled (after 450 B.C.), Artaxerxes apparently supported the supposedly loyal Samaritans under the erroneous assumption and fear that the Jews might join the rebellion. Accordingly Artaxerxes authorized the Samaritans to halt the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, which had been in progress for some time. When order in the satrapy was restored, Nehemiah, a trusted Jewish court official, succeeded in obtaining a royal appointment as governor of Judea, and completed the rebuilding of the city wall. This he did under continuing threats of violence.

He served as governor for two terms, and proved to be an able organizer and religious leader. He laid a comparatively solid political, social, and moral foundation that proved of great value in the turbulent times that followed.

4. Theme. Ezra and Nehemiah are historical source books which record the outworking of the divine plan in the restoration of the Jews, whereby they were afforded another opportunity to cooperate with the eternal purposes and prove their right to exist as a nation. This record shows, furthermore, how the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah were fulfilled, and provides invaluable source material by which other prophecies, those of Dan. 8 and 9, can securely be anchored to the facts of history.

Ezra and Nehemiah illustrate, by a series of instructive examples, how a few people can do great things for God when led by God-fearing, sincere, unselfish, but fearless and determined leaders. These books contain much that edifies and that strengthens faith in the unfailing leadership of God.

5. Outline.

- I. The Decree of Cyrus and the Return Under Zerubbabel, Ezra 1:1 to 4:5, 24.
 - A. The decree of Cyrus, 1:1–11.
 1. A copy of the decree, 1:1–4.
 2. The Jews respond to the call, 1:5, 6.
 3. Cyrus restores the sacred Temple vessels, 1:7–11.
 - B. The list of returning exiles, 2:1–67.
 1. The leaders, 2:1, 2.
 2. The laity, 2:3–35.
 3. The Temple personnel, 2:36–63.
 4. The total number of the congregation, 2:64.
 5. The servants, entertainers, and beasts of burden, 2:65–67.
 - C. Resumption of the daily offering; laying the foundation of the Temple, 2:68 to 3:13.
 1. Gifts for the new Temple, 2:68, 69.
 2. Settlement of the returned exiles, 2:70.
 3. Rebuilding of the altar and resumption of the daily sacrifices, 3:1–6.
 4. Contracts made for materials, and with workmen, 3:7.
 5. Laying of the foundation of the new Temple, 3:8–13.
 - D. Building carried on under difficulties until it is stopped, 4:1–5, 24.
 1. The Samaritans offer assistance and are rejected, 4:1–3.
 2. Efforts of enemies to hinder the work, 4:4, 5.
- II. Attempts to Harm the Jews During the Early Years of Ahasuerus, Ezra 4:6.
- III. Artaxerxes Stops the Building of the Wall of Jerusalem, Ezra 4:7–23.
 - A. Letter of Bishlam of Samaria to Artaxerxes, 4:7–16.
 - B. Reply of Artaxerxes, permitting the Samaritans to stop the work, 4:17–22.
 - C. Samaritans stop the work by force, 4:23.
- IV. Resumption and Completion of the Building of the Temple in the Time of Darius I, Ezra 5:1 to 6:22.
 - A. Haggai and Zechariah bring about a resumption of the work on the Temple, 5:1, 2.
 - B. Tatnai's visit to Jerusalem, 5:3–17.
 1. Tatnai's visit and talk with the elders, 5:3–5.
 2. Tatnai's letter to Darius, 5:6–17.
 - C. The decree of Darius, 6:1–12.
 1. The decree of Cyrus found at Achmetha, 6:1, 2.
 2. A copy of the decree of Cyrus, 6:3–5.
 3. Darius' instructions to Tatnai, 6:6–12.
 - D. The Temple finished and dedicated, 6:13–22.
 1. Tatnai aids the Jews, 6:13.
 2. The new Temple completed, 6:14, 15.
 3. The dedication of the new Temple, 6:16–18.
 4. Celebration of the Passover, 6:19–22.
- V. The Decree of Artaxerxes I and the Return Under Ezra, Ezra 7:1 to 10:44.
 - A. The decree of Artaxerxes, 7:1–28.
 1. Ezra's genealogy, 7:1–5.
 2. A brief account of the return, 7:6–10.
 3. A copy of the decree, 7:11–26.

4. Ezra's expression of gratitude, 7:27, 28.
- B. The return from Babylon, 8:1–36.
 1. A list of the returning exiles, 8:1–14.
 2. The assembling at Ahava and the solicitation of Levites, 8:15–20.
 3. Preparations for the journey at Ahava, 8:21–30.
 4. Arrival at Jerusalem and delivery of gifts, 8:31–36.
- C. Ezra's reforms, 9:1 to 10:44.
 1. Ezra's distress over foreign marriages in Judea, and his prayer, 9:1–15.
 2. Leaders and people willingly divorce the foreign wives, 10:1–17.
 3. List of the transgressors, 10:18–44.
- VI. Nehemiah's First Term as Governor of Judea, Neh. 1:1 to 12:47.
 - A. Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem, 1:1 to 2:11.
 1. Nehemiah receives word of conditions at Jerusalem, 1:1–4.
 2. Nehemiah's prayer, 1:5–11.
 3. Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah's request to return to Jerusalem and rebuild its walls, 2:1–8.
 4. Nehemiah's arrival; first indications of difficulties, 2:9–11.
 - B. The rebuilding of the walls, 2:12 to 6:19.
 1. Nehemiah's inspection of the wall at night, 2:12–16.
 2. An appeal for action encounters approval and objection, 2:17–20.
 3. The distribution of 42 building groups, 3:1–32.
 4. Various unsuccessful attempts to halt Nehemiah's work, 4:1–23.
 5. Social reforms carried out during Nehemiah's first period of governorship, 5:1–19.
 6. Further attempts to stop the building; completion of the wall, 6:1–19.
 - C. Nehemiah plans to repopulate Jerusalem, 7:1–73.
 1. Organization of the city police, 7:1–3.
 2. Nehemiah plans a census preparatory to repopulating Jerusalem, 7:4, 5.
 3. List of returned exiles of Zerubbabel's time serves as basis for the new census, 7:6–73.
 - D. Religious reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, 8:1 to 10:39.
 1. Reading of the law at a great national gathering, 8:1–13.
 2. Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, 8:14–18.
 3. A day of solemn repentance and confession, 9:1–38.
 4. A list of those who signed the covenant, 10:1–28.
 5. The contents of the covenant of reform, 10:29–39.
 - E. The repopulation of Jerusalem carried out, 11:1–36.
 1. List of those who dwelt at Jerusalem, 11:1–19.
 2. List of cities of the province of Judea, 11:20–36.
 - F. A list of the Temple personnel, 12:1–26.
 1. Priests and Levites of the time of Zerubbabel, 12:1–9.
 2. Genealogy of the high priests, 12:10, 11.
 3. Priests of the time of Joiakim, 12:12–21.
 4. Levites of the time of Eliashib, 12:22–26.
 - G. The dedication of the wall, 12:27–43.
 - H. The appointment of treasurers, 12:44–47.
- VII. Nehemiah's Second Term as Governor of Judea, Neh. 13:1–31.
 - A. Separation of Jews from foreigners, 13:1–3.
 - B. The removal of Tobiah from the Temple, 13:4–9.

- C. Regathering of the Levites and reform in tithing and in the keeping of the Sabbath, 13:10–22.
- D. Reform regarding foreign wives, 13:23–29.
- E. Concluding statement, 13:30, 31.

CHAPTER 1

1 *The proclamation of Cyrus for the building of the temple. 5 The people provide for the return. 7 Cyrus restoreth the vessels of the temple to Sheshbazzar.*

1. The first year. The city of Babylon fell to Persian arms on Tishri 16 (Oct. 12), 539 B.C. (see p. 55), and Cyrus himself entered the city on Marcheshvan 3 (Oct. 29) of the same year. However, it was not until the next New Year's Day, Nisan 1 (March 24), 538 B.C., that the first Babylonian regnal year began. All documents previous to this day were dated in his "accession year" (see Vol. II, p. 138). The Jews, on the other hand, counted the regnal years of Persian rulers according to their own calendar. By the Jewish civil calendar the first full year from the fall of Babylon extended from the autumn of 538 to the autumn of 537 B.C. For further information on the problem, see pp. 96, 97. On the rulership of "Darius the Mede," see p. 95, also Additional Note on Daniel 6.

The edict of Cyrus for the return of the Jews seems to have been issued in the former capital city of the Medes, Ecbatana (Achmetha), which became one of the summer residences of the Persian kings. A copy of the decree found in the archives of Ecbatana some years later (Ezra 6:2) implies that Cyrus was there sometime during his first year. Evidence from the contemporary archives of the banking firm of "Egibi & Sons" in the city of Babylon indicates that Cyrus was in Ecbatana in or preceding the month of September, 537 B.C., which fell toward the close of the first full Jewish calendar year after the fall of Babylon.

Cyrus. This is the Latinized Greek form of the Hebrew *Koresh*, which is closer to its Persian (*Kurush*) and Babylonian (*Kurash*) equivalents.

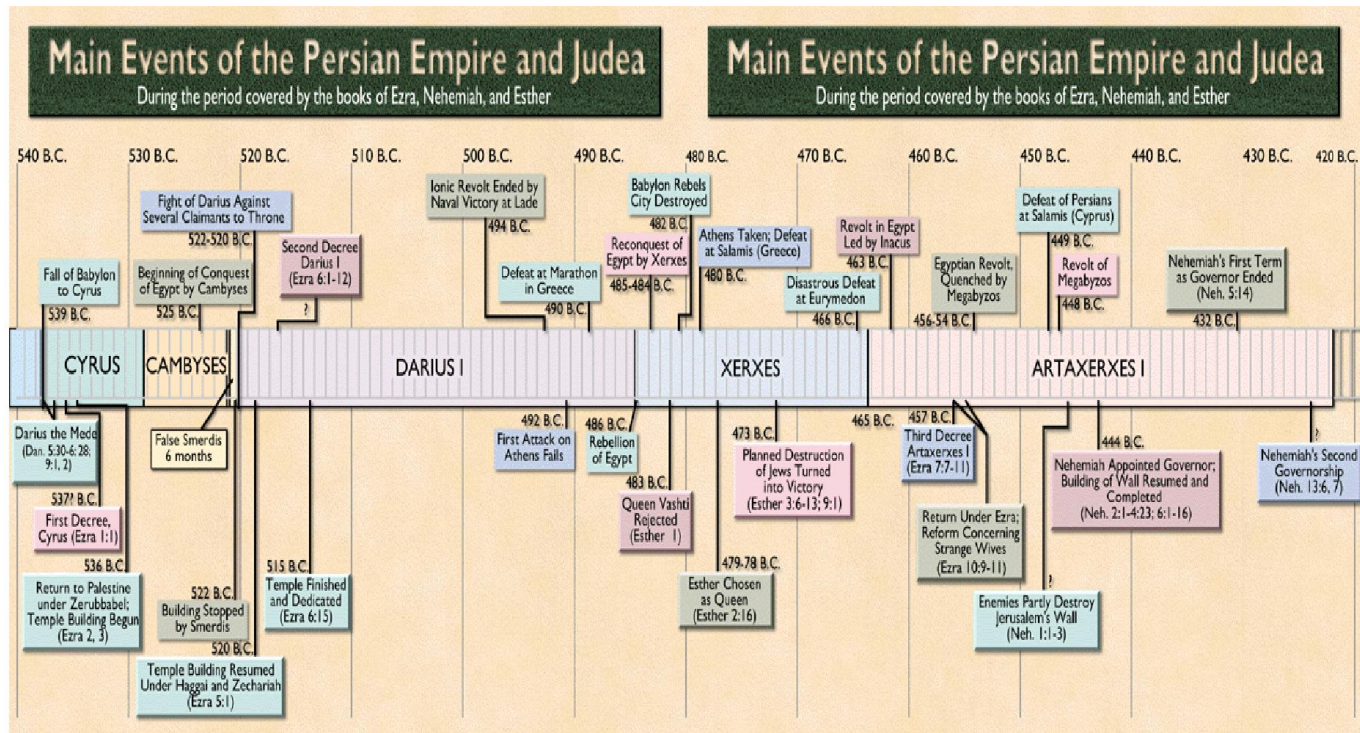
Jeremiah. Reference is made here to the two prophecies of Jeremiah found in chs. 25:11, 12; 29:10, prophecies which had convinced Daniel that the time of return and restoration had come (Dan. 9:2). Since the Babylonian captivity had begun in 605 B.C. (see on Dan. 1:1), the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies were due to expire in 536, according to inclusive reckoning (see Vol. II, p. 136). Therefore if the decree of Cyrus was issued in the summer or autumn of 537, and the Jews probably returned to their homeland in the spring of the following year, 536, this would fulfill the prophecies of Jeremiah (see pp. 96, 97).

Stirred up the spirit. As in years past God had influenced heathen rulers (Gen. 20:3; Dan. 2:28; etc.) to carry out His purposes, He now worked on the heart of Cyrus to fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah concerning this monarch, prophecies that had been made more than 150 years earlier (Isa. 44:28; 45:1–4, 13).

A proclamation. The decree was publicly proclaimed throughout the various satrapies of the empire, from the borders of India in the east to the Aegean Sea in the west, and from the Caucasus in the north to the Persian Gulf and the border of Egypt in the south.

In writing. The decree was sent out in written form and deposited for permanent reference in an archive (see ch. 6:1, 2). Writing had probably been introduced into Persia but recently, for archeological evidence shows that Persian records were kept beginning with the reign of Cyrus. The proclamation was presumably issued in the official Persian

language, perhaps also in Babylonian, and probably in Aramaic, which was understood throughout the empire. The Behistun inscription of Darius I (see Vol. I, pp. 98, 110, 111; Vol. III, p. 57) consists of similar inscriptions in Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian. A copy has also been found in Aramaic.



2. **Thus saith Cyrus.** An official formula for introducing a royal proclamation, similar to those used in other royal decrees. For example, the Behistun inscription (Aramaic version, col. iii, l. 37) reads, “Thus says king Darius.”

King of Persia. Compare the ordinary formula in Persian inscriptions, “I am ..., the great king, the king of kings, the king of Persia.”

The Lord God of heaven. Exactly the same title is found in an Aramaic petition made by Jews of the Nile island of Elephantine to a Persian governor (Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, No. 30, lines 27, 28), while in the reply of the Persian official to the petitioners, only the words “God of heaven” are used (*ibid.*, No. 32, lines 3, 4). Jewish monotheism may have appealed to Cyrus if he was a Zoroastrian; he may have equated Yahweh with his own god Ahura-Mazda.

Hath given me. Cyrus felt that he was an appointee of heaven, and that as such he had a divine commission to fulfill. In the famous inscription on the clay barrel of Cyrus, now in the British Museum, the king says, “He [the Babylonian god Marduk] scanned and looked [through] all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead him [in the annual procession]. He pronounced the name of Cyrus, king of Anshan, declaring

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ezr 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

him to be the ruler of all the world.” These words, written for the Babylonians, are so similar to those used in the proclamation on behalf of the Jews that they, in combination with the other typical official terms used, constitute strong proof of the authenticity of the decree. The only difference consists in the names of the gods. In Babylonian proclamations the name of the Babylonian god Marduk was naturally used, while in one written for the Jews the name of their God was employed.

He hath charged me. The word “he” is emphatic. This emphasis is also found in the ancient Greek and Latin translations of the text. Obviously, Cyrus makes reference to Isa. 44:28. Josephus (*Antiquities* xi. 1) claims that this passage was shown to Cyrus soon after Babylon’s fall, and it is only natural to consider Daniel as the one who informed the king concerning the predictions of Cyrus’ conquest of Babylonia and his part in the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s Temple (see PK 557). In the aforementioned clay barrel inscription Cyrus claims to have repatriated many foreign gods the Babylonians had transported to their capital, and rebuilt many sanctuaries that had been in ruins. In view of the fact that the authorization for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem came in the first year of his reign, it is probable that the wisdom of such a policy (see PK 571, 572) led Cyrus to do the same for other subject peoples and their gods. Thus the king’s action with respect to the Jews and their Temple was completely in agreement with what eventually became a general policy of pleasing the nations that had suffered at the cruel hands of the Babylonians, in order to gain their good will and loyal support as citizens of the new Persian Empire.

House. Heb. *bayith*, “house,” used of either a human dwelling or of one devoted to God. *Bayith* may therefore appropriately be translated “temple” here.

In Judah. That this phrase is added here, and again in the following verse, reflects the official character of the document, which would be expected to indicate the precise geographical location of the Temple to be rebuilt.

3. Of all his people. The permit to return was not limited to the exiles of Judah and Benjamin, the descendants of the subjects of the former kingdom of Judah taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. It included all people who counted “the Lord God of heaven” (v. 2) as their God, particularly descendants of the ten tribes of the former northern kingdom of Israel, transplanted to various provinces of the Assyrian Empire in the 8th century B.C. According to 1 Chron. 9:3 members of at least some of the northern tribes were then living in Jerusalem.

His God be with him. The kindness of Cyrus, praised by many classical authors (Aeschylus, Herodotus, Xenophon, Plutarch, Diodorus, Cicero, and others), is reflected in these words. Cyrus’ greatness lay in his tolerance of, and greatheartedness toward, subject peoples. The influence of Daniel and the Isaiah prediction concerning him no doubt had much to do with the formation of his imperial policies (see PK 557).

He is the God. Commentators and Bible translators are divided in regard to the meaning of this clause and the one following it. Some have taken it to be an admission by Cyrus that Jehovah is the only true God, and have compared it to a similar confession by Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 6:26). Others connect it with the following clause and read, “He is the God who is in Jerusalem.” This would make Cyrus consider Jehovah as merely a local deity.

By treating “he is the God” as a parenthetical expression and translating *’asher* as “which,” the thought is conveyed that the clause, “which is in Jerusalem” refers back to the word “temple.” The Hebrew, however, clearly reads, “he is the God which is in Jerusalem,” as do also the LXX, the Vulgate, and other ancient versions. If parentheses are to be used at all, they must enclose the entire statement as a unit. Furthermore, the word *’asher* may be translated either “which” or “who,” as required by the context.

It may be that, like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:47; 3:28; 4:37) and Darius (Dan. 6:26), Cyrus had come to recognize the true God (see PK 557); but the Hebrew text, at least as we have it today, does not permit the words of Ezra 1:3 to be construed as proof of this. A document has been found in which Cyrus, in addressing himself to the Babylonians, speaks of their god Marduk in precisely the same terms he here uses of the God of the Jews. However, see PK 557.

4. *Whosoever remaineth.* That is, Jews who chose to remain in exile (see PK 559). Those who were successfully established in business enterprises of one kind or another would be most likely to remain. It was only right that they should assist their returning brethren with large contributions.

The freewill offering. Permission was granted the Jews to collect financial contributions from their heathen friends for the Temple to be built in Jerusalem. It is noteworthy that the public pronouncement of Cyrus’ decree contains this appeal to the citizens of the empire without mentioning the fact that Cyrus had made provision for the rebuilding of the Temple from public funds, as is stated in the copy of the decree deposited in the government archives at Ecbatana (see on ch. 6:2). The reason is obvious. Had the proclamation mentioned the royal subsidy, few people would have felt impressed to give to the enterprise themselves. Without knowing that the government was paying part of the cost, many heathen who were friendly disposed toward the Jews may have been more willing to make private contributions.

5. *Chief of the fathers.* These were the hereditary heads of families, whose authority was recognized (see on Ex. 3:16). Although the permit to return had been so worded as to include all believers in Jehovah, only the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, are specifically mentioned. Members of other tribes, if any, must have been in the minority.

Whose spirit God had raised. Only a comparative minority of the exiles returned. Even many of the clans of Judah and Benjamin chose to remain in the land of their adoption. Many had come to honor and wealth in Babylonia, as cuneiform records reveal, and were unwilling to forsake all they had acquired by hard labor through the years in exchange for an uncertain future in desolate Judea. It is for this reason that later on efforts were again made to lead back to Judea others who had remained behind in the initial return movement (see Ezra 7:7; Zech. 6:10). The first company willing to risk all for their country and for their God was composed of patriots and zealots; perhaps also of some who had nothing to lose by the move and who could only improve their lot by returning to their former homeland. Those who remained behind may have justified their decision by quoting Jeremiah’s admonition of more than half a century earlier, to build houses, plant fields, found families, and take an active interest in the welfare of their land of exile (Jer. 29:4–7). Those who declined to return to Palestine formed the nucleus of the strong and influential Jewish communities that existed in Babylonia throughout its successive history until very recent times.

7. The vessels. All vessels listed are of gold and silver. Since many Temple objects taken by Nebuchadnezzar were of bronze (2 Kings 25:14; see on Ex. 25:3), Cyrus evidently restored only those that had been dedicated to Babylonian deities and thus preserved since their arrival from Jerusalem more than half a century earlier. It seems that objects not made of precious metals had not been preserved.

This generous act on the part of Cyrus was not an isolated case. The king relates in the inscription of the afore-mentioned clay barrel in the British Museum (see on v. 2), that he returned to their rightful places many cult objects previously plundered by the Babylonians.

8. Mithredath. A Persian name that also appears as *Mitradati* in a cuneiform document of the time of Artaxerxes I.

Treasurer. Heb. *gizbar*, “treasurer,” found only here and in ch. 7:21. *Gizbar* is a Persian loan word found also in Babylonia in the form, *ganzabaru*. The use of this and other words of Persian origin in the book of Ezra indicates that the original document was written in the time of the Persian Empire, probably by a contemporary of the events described.

Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. Sheshbazzar, called “governor” in ch. 5:14, is identified by many scholars with Zerubbabel (see chs. 3:8; 5:16; EGW, RH, March 28, 1907). He is called a “prince of Judah,” a dignity that Zerubbabel, as a grandson of King Jehoiachin, also possessed (1 Chron. 3:17–19). It was not unusual for Jewish nobles in exile to bear two names (see Dan. 1:7). The name Sheshbazzar is thought to be from the Babylonian *Shamash–abal–usur*.

9. Thirty. It will be noted that the itemized list of Temple utensils given in vs. 9, 10 adds up to 2,499 rather than 5,400, the figure given in v. 11. It is possible that the itemized list is only partial, and that it was not intended by Ezra to add up to the total given. However, the last item on the list appears to include all other utensils not already listed, and should, presumably, make up the difference between the total of the preceding items and the grand total of all of them. All the ancient Hebrew MSS and versions agree with the figures as given in the KJV. It is worthy of note, however, that a parallel passage in the Apocryphal book of 1 Esdras (ch. 2:13, 14) avoids this seeming discrepancy by listing 1,000 “golden cups” instead of the 30 given here, and 2,410 “vials ... of silver” instead of only 410, as in v. 10. Otherwise the figures are the same. The grand total as given in 1 Esdras 2:14 is 5,469, the sum of the figures for the various items as given there. Some have suggested that the figures in 1 Esdras were deliberately altered to avoid the seeming discrepancy in Ezra 1:9–11. All that can be said is that evidence is insufficient to provide a definite solution to the problem.

Charges. Heb. *'agartelim*, “baskets,” a word of uncertain meaning. The LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac offer the translation “basin,” which has been adopted by various modern versions.

Knives. Heb. *machalaph*, a word found only here in the OT and of uncertain meaning. The context suggests that some sort of vessel is meant.

10. Basons. Heb. *kaphor*, “bowl,” or “bason,” as also in Ezra 8:27 and 1 Chron. 28:17. The related Akkadian word *kaparu* also means “bowl.”

11. All the vessels. See on v. 7. Probably many of these “vessels” were among those that Belshazzar profaned at the feast the night Babylon fell (Dan. 5:3). The irreverent use of these sacred utensils and the defiant spirit that prompted such an act gave visible evidence of the fact that Babylon would no longer respond to divine messages of guidance and that it would refuse to release the Jewish captives in order that they might return to their homeland as God planned that they should (Dan. 5:1–4, 21–23). Accordingly, the kingdom passed to a nation that would cooperate with the divine plan (vs. 25–31).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–4PK 558

2, 3 TM 203

5 PK 599

5–11PK 559

CHAPTER 2

1 *The number that return, of the people, 36 of the priest, 40 of the Levites, 43 of the Nethinims, 55 of Solomon’s servants, 62 of the priests which could not shew their pedigree. 64 The whole number of them, with their substance. 68 Their oblations.*

1. Children of the province. While the city of Babylon was one of the capitals of the Persian Empire, and its land a satrapy under the administration of a satrap, Judah was a province. The use of this expression is evidence of the familiarity of the writer with the political situation of that time.

Every one unto his city. Upon their return the exiles not only settled in Jerusalem but also in neighboring towns and villages, such as Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, Mizpah, and a number of others (see Neh. 3:2–19; 11:20–35).

2. Zerubbabel. The political leader of the returning exiles. In ch. 3:2 and elsewhere he is called the son of Shealtiel. In 1 Chron. 3:19, however, he is listed among the sons of Pedaiah, a brother of Shealtiel. This seeming discrepancy can be explained by assuming a levirate marriage (see on Deut. 25:5–10) between Shealtiel’s childless widow and his brother Pedaiah, whose first male child by such a marriage would be considered the heir of Shealtiel (see on Matt. 1:12). Zerubbabel, though actually the son of Pedaiah, is called the son of Shealtiel in a majority of the passages that refer to him. The fact that in the only place where Zerubbabel is called Pedaiah’s son, Shealtiel appears without children, though older than his brother Pedaiah, supports the theory of a levirate marriage.

Haggai (ch. 1:1) speaks of Zerubbabel, a grandson of King Jehoiachin, as governor of Judah. Cyrus thus appointed the descendant of a former king of Judah to rule in the name of the Persian king, a choice with which Cyrus could expect the Jews to be pleased. They would naturally accord more willing service to one of their own princes than to a foreigner.

Jeshua. *Yeshua*‘ is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew name usually translated “Joshua.” This Jeshua was the spiritual leader of the returning exiles, the “high priest” of Haggai 1:1 and Zech. 3:1, and is referred to also in Ezra 3:2; Neh. 12:1; etc. He was a direct descendant of Aaron, through his father Jozadak, high priest at the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s captivity (1 Chron. 6:3–15; Ezra 3:2). Jeshua was probably born in exile, since he lived to see the completion of the Temple 20 years after the return to Jerusalem.

Thus, two men of the old Jewish nobility led out in the restoration of Judah, one a descendant of the former reigning house as the appointed political leader, and the other a son of the last precaptivity high priest as spiritual head. Their names may have been suggested to Cyrus by a trusted counselor, such as Daniel, and both were no doubt chosen because of sterling character and because they enjoyed the confidence of their people.

Nehemiah. The function of the other ten leaders here enumerated is unknown, inasmuch as their names do not appear again except in the duplicate list of Neh. 7. They may have been the elders mentioned frequently in later passages (see ch. 5:5, 9; etc.).

The number of the men. The following list of exiles shows the importance attached by the Jews to ancestral lists. Though transported to Babylonia under the most miserable conditions imaginable, many had apparently succeeded in preserving their genealogical documents. Some, however, had not been so successful, and could not prove their pedigree. (v. 59).

The numbers of persons in the various family groups here given differ slightly from those of a duplicate list Nehemiah used almost a century later to guide him in the resettlement of Jerusalem. Of the 42 numbers given by Ezra (vs. 3–60), 18 differ from the corresponding numbers in Neh. 7. The differences are small, and can be explained by assuming that the lists were drawn up at different times, and that during the interval the population figures varied, owing to deaths and births, or for other reasons.

3. Children of Parosh. Or, “sons of Parosh.” The large family unit of Parosh, with 2,172 men, stands first, as it does again in the corresponding list of Neh. 7. The name Parosh means “flea.” It is unknown how the family came to adopt this name, but it is a fact that Arab tribal heads frequently bear animal names such as lizard, gazelle, shrewmouse, etc. Similarly, a Jewish tribal head may have taken the name “flea,” a name David figuratively assumed after having spared Saul’s life at the cave of Engedi, expressing his own humility in Saul’s presence (1 Sam. 24:14; 26:20).

4. Shephatiah. An old family, whose name means “Jehovah has judged.” This name appears frequently from the time of David onward.

5. Arah. This name, meaning “He has wandered,” is attested but once elsewhere, as that of a man of the tribe of Asher (1 Chron. 7:39). However, the name is found in Babylonian documents, and may have been adopted during the Exile.

6. Pahath-moab. The largest family unit, with 2,812 men. The name means “governor of Moab,” implying that a former family head had governed Moab when that country was subject to Judah.

7. Elam. This name is attested in 1 Chron. 8:24; 26:3.

8. Zattu. Nothing is known of this or the following name, Zaccai (v. 9).

10. Bani. This name appears in Hebrew records since the time of David (2 Sam. 23:36).

11. Bebai. A Babylonian name. This family was either newly founded or had exchanged its former name for a Babylonian one during the Exile.

12. Azgad. The name is found nowhere else. The greatest numerical difference in the lists of Ezra and Nehemiah occurs here, Ezra giving the number as 1,222, and Nehemiah (ch. 7:17) 2,322. A later copyist may be responsible for this seeming discrepancy.

13. Adonikam. The name attested only here means “My Lord is risen.”

14. Bigvai. A Persian name; the Bagoas in Greek records. A Persian governor by that name ruled over Judah toward the end of the 5th century B.C. This large family of 2,056

men returning with Zerubbabel may have taken the name Bigvai in honor of the Persians. This family may have come from an area bordering on Persia, and may have favored Persian policy. The Jews have always been very adaptable.

15. Adin. The names in vs. 15–19 are all Hebrew, but the persons are otherwise unknown.

20. Gibbar. After the 17 tribal units enumerated in vs. 3–19, 15 groups follow, classified according to cities or villages. The location of Gibbar is unknown. Nehemiah's list has Gibeon here (Neh. 7:25).

21. Beth-lehem. In Judah, south of Jerusalem, now called *Beit Lahm*.

22. Netophah. A town near Bethlehem whose exact location is unknown. It is also not clear why the people of Netophah, Anathoth, Michmas, Bethel, and Ai (vs. 23, 27, 28) are called “men,” and all others “children,” or “sons.”

23. Anathoth. A Levitical city in Benjamin, now *Râs el-Kharrûbeh* near 'Anāta, 3 mi. (4.8 km.) northeast of Jerusalem. It was formerly the home town of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1). On the term “men,” see on v. 22.

24. Azmaveth. A town north of Anathoth, now called *Ḥizmeḥ*.

25. Kirjath-arim. Usually called Kirjath-jearim, now *Tell el-Azhar*, about 7 1/2 mi. (12 km.) west-northwest from Jerusalem.

Chephirah. Now *Tell Kefireh*, north of Kirjath-jearim.

Beeroth. On the road leading from Jerusalem to the north. Beeroth has been tentatively identified with *Râs eṭ-Tahûneh*, near Bethel.

26. Ramah. Probably *er-Râm*, 5 1/2 mi. (8.8 km.) north of Jerusalem.

Gaba. Or, Geba, known today as *Jeba'*, east of Ramah (see on 1 Sam. 13:3).

27. Michmas. Now *Mukhmâs*, northeast of Gaba. On the term “men,” see on v. 22.

28. Beth-el. Now *Beitîn*. On the term “men,” see on v. 22.

Ai. Ai has been identified with *et-Tell* east of Bethel, where excavations were carried on from 1933 to 1935. The identification is probably correct as regards postexilic Ai, although its correctness in regard to Joshua's Ai is doubted (see on Joshua 7:2).

29. Nebo. Now *Nûba*, near Aijalon, which lies about 12 mi. west-northwest of Jerusalem.

30. Magbish. An unknown locality in central Palestine.

31. The other Elam. In view of the fact that an Elam is mentioned among the families (v. 7), it is uncertain whether a locality or a family is here designated.

32. Harim. This name has also been generally considered that of a tribal unit rather than of a locality. A personal name, *Harimma'*, appears in Babylonian records of the 5th century, indicating that this family was one of those that adopted foreign names during the Exile.

33. Lod, Hadid, and Ono. These three places lay 25 mi. (40 km.) northwest of Jerusalem. Lod is called Lydda in the NT, and now bears the name of *Ludd*. Hadid, now

el-Hadîtheh, lay about 3 1/2 mi. (5.6 km.) east-northeast of Lod, while Ono, now *Kefr 'Ana*, lay about 5 mi. (8 km.) north of Lod.

34. Jericho. This city lay in the Jordan valley and has generally been identified with *Tell es-Sultân*, adjoining modern Jericho (see Vol. I p. 124; Vol. II, p. 42).

35. Senaah. It is interesting to find at the close of all nonecclesiastical families and city groups the largest unit of all—3,630 men—with the strange name “children of Senaah.” That this group is mentioned last may indicate that it was considered less important than the others. Because of its feminine ending the name has been thought to represent a town but that so large a town should have existed without ever being mentioned elsewhere would be most unusual. How could such a place have disappeared without leaving any trace of its former existence? For this reason some commentators consider it to be the name of a family unit. But if so, why should it be mentioned alone, at the end of a number of city groups, in spite of its great number? It therefore seems reasonable to consider that the 3,630 “children of Senaah” were a class of low-caste people, as Meyer and Kittel have suggested. The name Senaah appears also in variant forms in Neh. 11:9 and 1 Chron. 9:7.

Settlements of the Persian Province of Judah According to Ezra and Nehemiah

²

²Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ezr 1:2). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



The exact extent of the restored province of Judah is unknown. However, the cities and towns listed in Ezra and Nehemiah, plotted on a map, provide an approximate idea of the boundaries. Compare this territory with the area fortified by Rehoboam (see Invasion of Sennacherib) and with the kingdom of Hezekiah's time (see The Province of Judah in Nehemiah's Time). The bold lines represents the main highways through this area.

Some think it possible that this name was given to people who could not prove their ancestry, and did not belong to a professional guild, such as the apothecaries or goldsmiths (Neh. 3:8, 31). They seem to have been men without an established place in society, with neither pedigree nor inherited rights. A common lot united them. They may not have fared well in Babylonia, and perhaps returned in great numbers with the hope of better opportunities in Palestine.

36. The priests. Of the priests, four families with a total of 4,289 men returned to Jerusalem, and three additional families that could not prove their eligibility (vs. 61–63). Three of the legitimate priestly families traced their descent back to persons who had been heads of priestly courses during the reign of David, namely Jedaiah, Immer, and Harim (1 Chron. 24:7, 8, 14). The other family originated from a certain Pashur, of whom

³Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

nothing further is known. No Biblical person who bore this name can have been the ancestor of this family.

The four priestly families mentioned in this list of exiles were still the main representatives of the priesthood in Ezra's time, 80 years later, when all four are mentioned in the list of those who had taken strange wives (Ezra 10:18–22).

40. *The Levites.* It is surprising to find the lower ecclesiastical workers returning in such small numbers—only 74 Levites, 128 singers, 139 gatekeepers, and 392 other Temple servants—a total of 733 men as compared with more than 4,000 priests who returned.

From the history of the kingdom of Judah we know that the Temple service had, at times, fallen into decay, and that many of the Temple personnel had been connected with the pagan high places (see on Judges 5:18) that had been established throughout the country. All of these were destroyed by Josiah as a part of his work of reform (2 Kings 23:5, 8, 13), and their priests taken to Jerusalem. But a place in the sanctuary and at the altar of the Temple was denied them, and they were apparently allowed to perform only the most menial tasks (see on 2 Kings 23:9).

Ezekiel refers to the misconduct of the Temple personnel prior to the Exile, but the Zadok priests seem to have remained at least comparatively free from idolatry, and, in the service of the Temple shown him in vision, were to have served as priests. Their Levitical brethren were to be allowed to perform only menial duties in the new Temple. The Levites could thus not expect positions of honor, and most of them may therefore have preferred to remain in exile.

Another possible reason for the small number of returning Levites may have been that relatively few of them had been taken into exile. Nebuchadnezzar at first deported only the higher officers, the nobility, and the armed forces. The Levites did not belong to any of these classes—at least not since the time of Josiah—and may therefore not have been deported in so great numbers as the priests. If but few Levites were in exile, the number of those returning would also be small.

41. *The singers.* A special class of Levites. Only one family is represented, that of Asaph, one of the leading musicians in the time of David (1 Chron. 6:39, 43; 16:5, 6). What had become of the descendants of the other musical directors mentioned in the titles of the Psalms and other Bible passages is not known.

42. *Porters.* Another profession known since the time of David. The Temple, with its many halls, gates, and courts, particularly upon the occasions of annual feasts, required a special police force to maintain order and security.

43. *The Nethinims.* The word thus translated is from the root *nathan*, “to give,” and means “given ones,” probably in the sense of being devoted, or dedicated to the sanctuary. Since the time of Joshua (Joshua 9:27), foreigners had been used for the most menial type of work in the Temple service. To this group of Temple servants prisoners of war may have been added from time to time (see Ezra 8:20). The returning Nethinims belonged to 35 families.

55. *Solomon's servants.* King Solomon had apparently increased the service personnel of the Temple, inasmuch as the new buildings required much more attention (1 Kings 9:20, 21; 2 Chron. 8:7, 8). As the lowest rank of ecclesiastical workers, they are here mentioned last. They lived in separate towns, or in their own quarters in Jerusalem, and, though not Israelites, had agreed to keep the whole law (see Neh. 10:29–31). The

Deuteronomic law required that they be considered a part of the congregation of Israel (Deut. 29:10–13; Ex. 20:10) and be treated as such. Ten families of “Solomon’s servants” returned with Zerubbabel.

58. *All the Nethinims.* The Nethinims (vs. 43–54) and “Solomon’s servants” (vs. 55–57) were apparently so closely related in origin and work that their number is given as if they were one group. A total of 45 families is represented, averaging eight men each. It is thus apparent that their family units were, for some unknown reason, much smaller than those of the full-blooded Jews. Later, at the time of Ezra, 220 more Nethinims returned (ch. 8:20). Reports must have reached Babylonia that those who returned under Zerubbabel had found good positions in the Temple service, and many more became willing to sever their connections with Mesopotamia and return to Palestine.

59. *Tel-melah.* The locations of all four Mesopotamian places mentioned in this text are unknown. From these four places came 652 men (v. 60) belonging to three family groups which could not give proof that they were descendants of former Jews. If their forebears had been legitimate inhabitants of Judah at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, they may perhaps have received especially rough treatment, either during the journey to Babylonia or as slaves after their arrival, and had consequently lost all identifying documents (see on v. 2).

61. *Priests.* Three returning families claimed to belong to the priesthood but were unable to present valid credentials. Admission to priestly office was denied them by the governor until a high priest would be able to procure a divine decision by means of the Urim and Thummim. It is strange that the number of these priests is not given either in this list or in that of Neh. 7.

Koz. It is possible that this family was later able to establish its priestly rights, because we find a certain “Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz” taking part in the building of the city wall in Nehemiah’s time (Neh. 3:4, 21). Ezra (ch. 8:33) simply calls him “Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest.” The members of this family seem either to have found their credentials or to have secured other evidence that their ancestors were priests, or, the Urim and Thummim had revealed God’s will with respect to them.

63. *The Tirshatha.* From the Persian *tarshata*, an honorific title for the governor of a province, equivalent to “His Excellency.” Its literal meaning is, “the feared one.”

Urim and ... Thummim. See on Ex. 28:15, 30. Zerubbabel evidently anticipated that the power of obtaining direct answers from God by means of the Urim and Thummim, which had existed in pre-exilic times, would be restored as soon as the new congregation was re-established and the services of the Temple reinstated. Whether his expectations were fulfilled is not known.

64. *The whole congregation.* The sum total of all the figures given in the preceding verses is 29,818, while the total number of returning exiles is given as 42,360. It is thus evident that besides the men enumerated in detail another 12,542 must have followed. Since the number 12,542 is too large for the three families of priests whose numbers were not given (see on v. 61), the suggestion that they were women must be considered a possible solution to the problem. Their relatively small number—in comparison with the number of returning men—can be explained by assuming that many men left their families with relatives in Babylonia until homes could be provided for them in Palestine. Presumably, the women were then to follow their husbands in a later caravan as soon as the situation in Palestine should make the trip advisable. Since, in the following verses,

maidservants as well as menservants are counted, and female singers as well as their male colleagues, it seems certain that the wives of free citizens were not omitted from the count. Hence, we are to understand the 42,360 individuals listed as the total number of all returning citizens, men, women, and ecclesiastical personnel.

65. *Beside their servants.* After the enumeration of all Jews and also of those who claimed to belong to the congregation, 7,337 male and female slaves are mentioned. That they were not Jews is evident not only from their social position but also from the place they receive in this list—after the total of the “whole congregation” has been presented. It is surprising to find that in the 50 years of their captivity some of the Jews had improved their social standing to the extent that they had acquired slaves—one to every sixth Jew.

Singing men and singing women. Some have thought that these non-Jewish artists were to swell the comparatively small number of Levitical singers (see on v. 41). This is, however, unlikely. Some commentators consider them secular entertainers. When the Israelites left Egypt about 1,000 years earlier a “mixed multitude” of non-Israelites also went up with them (Ex. 12:38), and in the wilderness became a cause of much trouble (Num. 11:4). It would not be surprising to find that in leaving Babylonia the Jews were accompanied by a similar group.

66. *Their horses.* A total number of 8,136 riding animals and beasts of burden is listed as accompanying the expedition. Since the group desired to travel rapidly, the returning group took no sheep, goats, or cattle. Those who possessed such animals in Babylonia probably sold them and took the money with them.

68. *When they came.* The writer passes over the journey in silence (see on Gen. 24:7, 62), though it must have taken several weeks. The route is not mentioned, although the topography of the Near East leaves few uncertainties in this respect (see on Gen. 12:5). The caravan probably followed the banks of the Euphrates up to the 36th parallel, or went through the former homeland of Assyria to Arbela, and then followed the approximate course of the present Syro-Turkish border till they reached the Euphrates. From there, the desert between the Euphrates and the Orontes River was crossed, with the Aleppo oasis as a stopping place, midway across the desert. Reaching the Orontes, they probably followed this river up to its source, and then marched through the *Beqa'*, the valley between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges, until they reached the upper course of the Jordan, and so entered Palestine. This was the route that most military forces of the Assyrians and Babylonians had taken in the past and that the captive parents and grandparents of this group apparently traversed in the opposite direction half a century earlier (see Jer. 39:5–7; 52:9, 10, 27).

The time of departure was probably the spring of 536 B.C. (see on ch. 1:1), and perhaps Jerusalem was reached in the summer of the same year. Eighty years later it took Ezra and his caravan almost four months to reach Jerusalem (chs. 7:8, 9; 8:31), and it is reasonable to think that Zerubbabel's journey lasted as long as that of Ezra.

Offered freely. Arriving at the site of the former Temple, the members of the expedition conducted a thanksgiving service in which the heads of families and the people offered gifts for the planned reconstruction of the Temple building to the sum of 61,000 drams of gold and 5,000 silver minas.

This was a most remarkable sum for a group of people who had but recently regained liberty. A spirit of liberality must have taken hold of them like that which gripped the people at the building of the tabernacle at Sinai (see Ex. 36:5–7). They knew how God

had fulfilled His promises through the prophets, and were willing to make a sacrifice to re-establish the Temple and its service.

God has ever provided His people with opportunities to give of the means entrusted to them. There is no better cure for the spirit of selfishness that naturally infects the human heart than to respond “freely” to calls to advance the cause of God in the earth and to help their fellow men. Those who truly love God will cultivate the spirit of liberality (see 2 Cor. 9:6, 7).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

64, 65 PK 598
64–70PK 560

CHAPTER 3

1 *The altar is set up.* 4 *Offerings frequented.* 7 *Workmen prepared.* 8 *The foundations of the temple are laid in great joy and mourning.*

1. *The seventh month.* Shortly after their arrival in Palestine, probably in the summer of 536 B.C., the newly returned exiles assembled at Jerusalem to inaugurate the new Temple service. This gathering took place at the end of the 6th month, as a comparison of v. 1 with v. 6 shows. The 7th month (Tishri) was one of the most sacred months of the entire Jewish religious year. The 1st day of that month was New Year’s Day of the civil calendar (see Vol. II, p. 110). The month began with a blowing of trumpets and a holy convocation (Lev. 23:24; see Vol. II, p. 106). Ten days later came the solemn Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27), followed almost immediately by the Feast of Tabernacles, from the 15th to the 22d day of the same month (Lev. 23:34–36).

The people gathered. The people were prepared to stay long enough to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (v. 4), one of the three great feasts every Jew was required to observe in Jerusalem (Ex. 23:14; Lev. 23:2; Deut. 16:16).

2. *Jeshua.* Concerning Jeshua and Zerubbabel, see on ch. 2:2.

Built the altar. The old Temple area must have been surveyed, and the place ascertained where the altar of burnt offering had originally been located. On that sacred spot a new altar was built. The altar was the center of Jewish worship, and services could not be carried on without it. The altar must have been completed by the last day of the 6th month (see v. 6).

As it is written. Under the leadership of men like Daniel and Ezekiel the exiles had determined to start from the beginning to worship God according to His expressed will, and not again fall into the sins of indifference and idolatry, on account of which they and their fathers had had to suffer so much. Reference is probably here made to Lev. 17:2–6 and Deut. 12:5–7, where God explicitly commands the Israelites to offer their sacrifices only at the place He would select for that purpose. That place was Jerusalem (1 Kings 9:3).

3. *His bases.* Rather, “its place” (RSV), meaning that the altar was erected on the exact spot where Solomon’s altar of burnt offering had stood.

Fear was upon them. Although the people had but recently returned from Babylonia, they were already aware of the hostility of their neighbors, who were not a little displeased that the Jews had now returned to their homeland. The surrounding people may have occupied some parts of Judea during the Exile, and were now asked to return these to their rightful owners. Naturally, they looked with suspicion upon the Jews, who made it plain that henceforth no other worship than that of Jehovah would be tolerated.

This hostility may already have been revealed in threats. Hence, the returning exiles assembled in Jerusalem in a state of fear. Though they had permission from Cyrus to raise up both their altar and their Temple, it was not at all certain that this could be accomplished without encountering serious opposition from the neighboring peoples. Cyrus had only recently come into possession of these areas, which had belonged to the Babylonian Empire, and he may have exercised only nominal control over them.

Burnt offerings. As the law required (Ex. 29:38, 39; Num. 28:3, 4).

4. Feast of tabernacles. The festival requirements of Lev. 23:33–42 were carefully observed. To live in tents or booths had a real and appropriate meaning this time. The feast was originally established as a memorial of the 40 years of desert wandering. Once more the people of God had been led back to their homeland from a foreign country, where they had been in exile; once more they were living in tents, until more permanent places of abode could be built.

Daily burnt offerings. These offerings are not those mentioned in vs. 3 and 5, but pertained to the Feast of Tabernacles. The regulations concerning them are found in Num. 29:12–40. All particulars there enjoined were now carefully observed, as may be concluded from the record here given of the celebration.

5. Continual burnt offering. This was doubtless the daily morning and evening sacrifice (Ex. 29:38–42; Num. 28:3–6).

Both of the new moons. Literally, “and those of the new moons.” The reading in the KJV gives the impression that the continual burnt offerings pertained to the newmoon festival and the other set feasts, but this is not the meaning of the Hebrew text. The regulations for the feast of the new moon are found in Num. 28:11–15.

The set feasts. See on Lev. 23:2. These were the other feasts such as the Passover, Feast of Weeks, and the Day of Atonement.

Freewill offering. The custom of bringing freewill offerings was also reinstated (see Lev. 1–3). Thus provision was made for all that was most essential in the practice of the Jewish religious ritual, although the Temple itself remained unbuilt for the time being.

6. Seventh month. See on v. 1.

7. Gave money. During the festive assembly discussions were held concerning the rebuilding of the Temple, and contracts were closed with artisans able to carry out the plans there laid. Many of the exiles had doubtless been employed by the Babylonians in building their palaces, temples, and fortifications. During the time of the Exile, particularly under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon had witnessed tremendous activity, as the texts excavated there have shown. The professional skill acquired in Babylon now proved to be a great asset, and Zerubbabel set the masons and carpenters to work at their respective tasks, paying them regular wages in money.

Meat. Literally, “food.”

Zidon. The purchase of cedars from the Lebanon Mountains was made by contract with the Sidonians and Tyrians, with compensation in kind. Phoenicia was a narrow strip of coastland and had to import foodstuffs (see Acts 12:20; see also Vol. II, p. 68). Solomon had paid for the materials received from Hiram of Tyre with wheat, barley, wine, and oil (2 Chron. 2:15), and similar arrangement was now made by Zerubbabel. From the most ancient times the Lebanon region had furnished cedarwood for building palaces, temples, and other public buildings throughout the civilized countries of the Near East.

That the Sidonians are mentioned before the Tyrians accords with the actual political situation under the Persian rule. Herodotus (vii. 96, 98; viii. 67) claims that in the time of Xerxes the king of Sidon possessed a higher rank than the king of Tyre. This condition probably existed before Xerxes' time, and was due to the long siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar. The result was a marked weakening of the economic strength and prestige of Tyre. Sidon profited by this situation and thereafter took the lead among the Phoenician city states (see Vol. II, p. 69).

According to the grant. A special grant of Phoenician timber made by Cyrus seems to be intended. Although outside of this remark we have no written evidence of such a grant, the provision made in the official decree, as later found in Ecbatana, to have the cost of the Temple paid from royal funds, apparently included the purchase of building material with public money. The food, drink, and oil must have been provided by the Persian administration, because the newly arrived Jews could hardly have found enough foodstuffs even for their own needs in the half-deserted country to which they had come.

8. The second year. If the year of the Jews' return was 536 B.C. (see on ch. 1:1), the second month of the second year would have fallen in the spring of 535 B.C. The months were numbered beginning with Nisan, the 1st month of the ecclesiastical year, even though the months so designated referred to the civil calendar, which began in the fall with Tishri, the 7th month (see Vol. II, p. 108). The phrase, "of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem," shows clearly that the second year of their return is meant, and not the second year of Cyrus' reign, as some commentators have thought.

The second month. Called Iyyar in the postexilic calendar. Some commentators think that this month was chosen for the beginning of building activities in order to coincide with the date chosen by Solomon for beginning the erection of the first Temple (1 Kings 6:1).

Zerubbabel. In v. 2 Jeshua, the high priest, is mentioned before Zerubbabel, the governor, because reference is made to a purely ecclesiastical affair, the beginning of the sacrificial service, in which the high priest naturally had primary authority. In connection with the rebuilding of the Temple, Zerubbabel, representing the authority of the state, is mentioned first. He was the official representative of the Persian king, who had issued the decree to rebuild the Temple; therefore it was his privilege and duty to lead out in the measures to be taken in carrying out the decree.

Appointed the Levites. The few Levites who had returned (see on ch. 2:40) were appointed by the governor to supervise the workmen employed in rebuilding the Temple.

From twenty years. In conformity with a custom that had existed at least since the time of David, that the Levites could serve only after reaching the age of 20 (1 Chron. 23:24, 27; 2 Chron. 31:17). In Moses' time they were not permitted to serve until the age of 25 (Num. 8:24).

Set forward. That is, "supervised" or "had the oversight."

9. Jeshua. The supervision of the work was under three groups, probably arranged according to the population of the new province of Judea. Jeshua was the head of the priesthood, Kadmiel was spokesman for the tribe of Judah, and Henadad was apparently the leader of the lower rank of Temple personnel.

10. Priests in their apparel. The priestly garments which the people had recently provided (ch. 2:69) were designed "for glory and for beauty" according to the Mosaic law (Ex. 28:40).

With trumpets. The blowing of trumpets was a priestly prerogative (Num. 10:8; 31:6; Joshua 6:4; 1 Chron. 15:24; 16:6; 2 Chron. 5:12), while cymbals were the musical instruments played by Levites (1 Chron. 15:16, 19; 16:5; 2 Chron. 5:12, 13; 29:25).

After the ordinance of David. This ordinance is given in 1 Chron. 15:16–24. However, Zerubbabel’s musical service fell short of the “ordinance of David,” since it failed to provide for several instruments that were an essential part of David’s system. Apparently, the musical training of the Levites had been neglected during the Exile (see Ps. 137:2–4).

11. They sang together by course. Or, “they sang responsively” (RSV), literally, “they replied [to each other].” The choir was divided into two groups that sang alternately, or antiphonally.

Shouted. Shouting has always characterized occasions of joy and triumph, but is seldom mentioned in connection with religious affairs. One such exceptional occasion occurred when the ark of the covenant was taken to the Israelite camp near Aphek (1 Sam. 4:5), another when David brought it up from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:15). Pious shouting is also mentioned in Ps. 47:5 and Zech. 4:7.

12. Ancient men. It was only 50 years since the Temple of Solomon had been destroyed (586 B.C.) and 70 since the first captivity, and there were “many” older men in the congregation who had seen it in their youth, or childhood, and vividly remembered its grandeur and glory. They could not help crying when they thought of the modest plans for rebuilding the Temple. It was a “day of small things” (Zech. 4:10), and the new house, in comparison with the old one, appeared to be “nothing” (Haggai 2:3). Solomon had been able to employ the best workmen of his own country, which reached from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates, and the skill of neighboring lands, like that of the Tyrians. Zerubbabel had to depend on his own subjects, the few citizens of the small province of Judea.

13. Noise of the weeping. Weeping in the Orient is not done silently, but with the utterance of shrill cries.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–6PK 560

11, 12 PK 563

12 GC 23

12, 13 PK 564

CHAPTER 4

1 *The adversaries, being not accepted in the building of the temple with the Jews, endeavour to hinder it.* 7 *Their letter to Artaxerxes.* 17 *The decree of Artaxerxes.* 23 *The building is hindered.*

1. The adversaries. Concerning their identity, see v. 2. Although they apparently came in a friendly guise, the historian saw them for what they really were, “adversaries,” literally, “enemies,” like Haman (Esther 7:6) or Sanballat (Neh. 4:11).

2. We seek your God. It was true, in a sense, that they sought God, though not like the returned exiles. The Samaritans, inhabitants of the area formerly occupied by the kingdom of Israel, were mainly Aramaeans from Syria and Mesopotamia. They had a mixed religion of paganism and Jehovah worship (see 2 Kings 17:24–33).

Since the days of Esar-haddon. Of a transplantation of people into the region of Samaria by Esarhaddon, who reigned over Assyria from 681–699 B.C., no information is

available aside from this statement. However, the prophecy of Isa. 7:8—a prediction made about a decade before Samaria’s fall—to the effect that Ephraim would be broken within 65 years so “that it be not a people,” may refer to this transplantation. The fulfillment should therefore have taken place before 665 B.C., during Esarhaddon’s reign. It seems that a new uprising against Assyrian power among the remnants of the former Israelite kingdom must have occurred at that time, with the result that the Assyrians moved them out of the country and replaced them by contingents of foreigners, as Sargon II had done after the destruction of Samaria in 723/2 B.C. (2 Kings 17:24). Another, and even later, transplantation of people under “Asnapper” (Ashurbanipal) is mentioned in Ezra 4:10.

3. *Ye have nothing to do.* From the sad experience of Babylonian exile, the Jews had learned one thing well—to resist the temptation to join idolaters in any kind of enterprise. Unfaithfulness to God had resulted from the unholy connections the pre—exilic Jews had made with other nations, and the end of this course of action had been disgrace and disaster. The Jews had therefore determined not to fall into that error again, a vow that, with few exceptions, postexilic Jewry rigorously kept. If anything, they went to the opposite extreme.

The break with the Samaritans at this time proved final. The result was hatred and mutual aversion and contempt, which continued through the centuries (see Luke 9:52–54; John 4:9).

4. *Weakened the hands.* Or, “discouraged” (RSV). Encouragement is spoken of as “strengthening the hands” (Ezra 6:22; Isa. 35:3; Jer. 23:14; etc.). The expression “weakening the hands” (see Jer. 38:4) occurs also in the so-called Lachish Letters, inscribed potsherds from Jeremiah’s time (see Vol. I, p. 125; Vol. II, p. 97).

Troubled them. Since the “trouble” resulted in a cessation of work, it must have been fully effective. The hindering seems not to have been limited to threats, but was probably of a more serious nature. All the returned exiles lived in unfortified settlements, presumably in temporary houses or tents. The threats made against them, and occasional attacks on their property, may have been of such a nature that workmen not resident in Jerusalem found it necessary to remain at home to protect their families and property. Whatever course was followed by the enemies of the Jews, the later records make it clear that their actions were highly successful and that the work on the Temple ceased for many years.

5. *Hired counsellors.* Although v. 5 leaves a number of questions unanswered, it is clear that certain royal advisers were bribed by the Samaritans to influence the king against the Jews. Daniel had presumably died—his last vision is dated in the 3d year of Cyrus (Dan. 10:1)—and his enemies (see Dan. 6:4) may have had more success influencing Cyrus against the Jews following his death. However, Cyrus seems to have neither revoked his decree nor issued one prohibiting the building of the Temple, because if such a counterdecree had been issued, the enemies of the Jews would have used it in the time of Darius. Moreover, Persian kings had a strong aversion to revoking a decree (see Dan. 6:8; 12; 15; Esther 8:8).

6. *Ahasuerus.* Some commentators have identified the Ahasuerus of this verse with Cambyses, since his name appears in this chapter following events that took place in the time of Cyrus. Others have pointed out that the name “Ahasuerus” appears in ancient records only as that of the king known by the Greek name “Xerxes,” and have therefore

placed the incompletely recorded event of this verse in the beginning of Xerxes' reign. See Additional Note at the close of this chapter.

An accusation. The enemies of the Jews, the Samaritans, made of the accession of a new king to the throne an opportunity to harm the Jews. Unfortunately, nothing is said as to the nature of these accusations or of their results (see above, on v. 5). That nothing is reported concerning an adverse decision of the king against the Jews may perhaps be interpreted to mean that the petition elicited an unfavorable reply, and that the Jews remained unmolested.

7. Artaxerxes. Commentators who have identified the Ahasuerus of v. 6 with Cambyses, have seen in this Artaxerxes the false Smerdis, who ruled for about half a year in 522 B.C. and was killed by Darius I, who then took the throne. Others have identified the Artaxerxes of vs. 7–23 as the king known in history as Artaxerxes I. See Additional Note at close of this chapter.

Bishlam. This name is not attested elsewhere; it is uncertain whether it is Persian or Semitic. Mithredath is a Persian name (see on ch. 1:8). Tabeel might be Semitic (cf. the Assyrian name *Tâb-îlu*; see also Isa. 7:6). The three men here named were probably Samaritan leaders. One at least, Mithredath, was a Persian, perhaps the governor, or possibly a Persian commissioner assisting a native governor by the name of Bishlam.

In the Syrian tongue. Literally, “in Aramaic.” The words translated “interpreted in the Syrian tongue” can be rendered either as “set forth [in] Aramaic,” or “translated [from] Aramaic.” The meaning would be that the letter was written in the Aramaic square script, used for official correspondence throughout the Persian Empire, and either composed in the Aramaic language, or translated from Aramaic into another language, perhaps Persian.

8. Rehum the chancellor. With v. 8 the first Aramaic section of Ezra begins. The document which the compiler of the book—perhaps Ezra himself—used, was apparently written in Aramaic from this point on and taken over without change. Rehum is a Semitic name borne also by several Jews in the days of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2) and Nehemiah (Neh. 3:17; 10:25; etc.). This name occurs also in the Aramaic papyri of Elephantine. It is not strange to find this name borne by a Samaritan, since many Samaritans were of Aramaean (Semitic) stock. The Aramaic word translated “chancellor” is also found in Jewish documents from Elephantine, and seems to mean “private secretary,” or “accountant,” being perhaps the title of the assistant governor.

Shimshai. This name appears also in the Aramaic texts from Elephantine, as well as in Babylonian texts, in the form *Shamshai*, meaning “my sun.” His title, “scribe,” shows that the letter was actually written by him and that the previously mentioned Rehum had composed or dictated it.

9. The Dinaites. The word thus translated, taken by the older translators as one representing a people, appears also in the Elephantine papyri, where its primary meaning is “judge” or “magistrate.” It is so translated in the RSV.

The Apharsathchites. This word, found again in ch. 6:6, is taken by most modern commentators as the Aramaic or Persian term designating a certain class of officers, although an exact equivalent aside from these two instances is unknown. The same is true of the “Tarpelites.”

The Apharsites. This word either designates an unknown class of officers or should be vocalized (see Vol. I, pp. 25, 26) in Hebrew so as to read “Persians” (RSV).

Archevites. People from the city of Erech (see on Gen. 10:10), now *Warka*, in southern Mesopotamia.

Dehavites. The word thus translated, formerly thought to designate a people, should be vocalized so as to mean “that is” (see Vol. I, pp. 25, 26). The latter part of v. 9 then reads, “the men of Susa, that is, the Elamites” (RSV).

10. Asnapper. A corrupt form of the name Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, 669–627? B.C. Of his deportation of inhabitants from Erech, Babylon, and Susa nothing is known from any other source. However, the bloody wars of Ashurbanipal against Babylon (652–648 B.C.) and Elam (date uncertain) are well attested from Assyrian records. As a result of these wars people from the cities mentioned were apparently deported to Samaria.

This side the river. This is the first occurrence in the book of Ezra of the official name of the Persian satrapy inclusive of Syria and Palestine. Its Aramaic name *'Abar nahara'*, “Beyond the River” (RSV), is found as *Ebirnâri* in the cuneiform inscriptions of that time. The name indicates its geographical location as comprising lands lying beyond the Euphrates, as thought of from the capitals of the Persian Empire.

And at such a time. See on v. 17.

12. Came up from thee. That is, from the land of Babylonia.

Building the rebellious. The basis of this accusation lay in the various plots and revolts of the Jews against their Babylonian overlords, as described in 2 Kings 24 and 25. There had been other revolts against Assyria previously (2 Kings 18:7; 2 Chron. 33:11), but it is doubtful that the Samaritans knew of them. They would, however, be well informed concerning the repeated rebellions under the last three kings of Judah—Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—which had ended in shame and disgrace, and resulted in the destruction of Judah and the slavery of its inhabitants. Thus they had a plausible reason for charging that Jerusalem was a rebellious and wicked city.

Set up the walls. From these words it appears that the accusation was directed against the building of the city wall, as again, later, in the time of Nehemiah. The Aramaic word translated “set up” literally means “completed.” This accusation was certainly exaggerated, as the next phrase refers to the foundations, and even more so the following verse. Hence, the work cannot have been nearly as complete as the Samaritans claimed.

13. Then will they not pay. The conclusions drawn from the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s fortifications were plausible. History knows of many examples of a city refusing to pay tribute to its overlords, if it felt safe in doing so. Many times the mere repair of city walls aroused suspicion and was interpreted as a preparation for rebellion. That the accusation was entirely unfounded, however, is quite clear. The Jews had been grateful to Cyrus for allowing them to return to their former homeland. They had received royal favors, and were certainly far from revolting against the benevolent rulers of Persia, who had favored them in many ways. The history of Jewry under Persian rule reveals no real, organized revolt.

Toll, tribute, and custom. The three expressions chosen by the translators of the KJV do not clearly convey the meaning of the three Aramaic words involved. The first, a loan word from the Akkadian, means revenues to be paid in money; the second, an old Persian word, means tribute to be paid in kind or produce; the third, also taken from Akkadian, represents feudal fees to be paid for certain grants.

14. *We have maintenance from the king's palace.* Literally, “Now because we eat the salt of the palace,” an idiomatic expression. Their interests were thus linked with those of the king, and the continued well-being of the throne and the financial health of the royal treasury were matters of personal concern to them.

15. *Book of the records.* The great nations of antiquity, such as the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians, kept political, economic, and historical records. Many such archives have come to light in recent years. Since the city of Babylon was not destroyed when it fell to Cyrus, the archives of Nebuchadnezzar probably fell into the hands of the Persians intact, and could thus be consulted by later Persian kings. Such a search, now proposed, would prove the correctness of the accusation made.

For which cause. Here was an undeniable fact on which the Samaritans relied. It was a historical fact, easily proved, that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem only after repeated rebellions. This line of argument, however, was no proof that the Jews would revolt against their Persian overlords, who had shown themselves true friends of the Jews and treated them so generously.

16. *Have no portion.* The danger of a possible rebellion was so exaggerated that the accusation appears almost ridiculous. The Samaritans claimed that a revolt of the Jews would result in the loss to Persia of the entire satrapy “Beyond the River” (see on v. 10) which compromised all the lands lying between Babylonia and Egypt, and of which Judea was one of the smallest.

17. *An answer.* The fact that the king corresponded directly with provincial officials, by-passing the satrap, points to a most unusual political situation. Under ordinary circumstances the king would never have written directly to lower state officials in a distant province. Such a message would have been transmitted through regular diplomatic channels, in this instance the office of the satrap.

Rehum. On Rehum and Shimshai and their titles, see on v. 8.

Peace, and at such a time. The Aramaic word *shelam*, translated “peace,” is the universal greeting used in most parts of the Near East to the present day, whether it be pronounced “*salam*,” “*shalam*,” or some other way. The Aramaic word translated “and at such a time” has been found in short Aramaic letters written on potsherds (ostraca) from the 5th century B.C., and apparently was part of a common formula of greeting. It should be translated “And now” (RSV), and introduces the message of the letter.

18. *Plainly.* Some commentators have suggested translating the Aramaic word *meparash* as “in Persian,” which would make good sense here. Since the same word, however, occurs in another Aramaic document where only the meaning “plainly” fits the context, the translation of the KJV must be accepted as correct.

19. *Search hath been made.* The Samaritans’ suggestion of checking on the history of the Jews in the archives of the Babylonians was carried out. The records of Nebuchadnezzar were still available for official investigation.

20. *Mighty kings.* If the king’s words mean what they seem to say, they can refer only to David and Solomon, to whom alone such a description applies. Israel then ruled from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates (1 Kings. 4:21, 24), and expected tribute from various princes and rulers (2 Sam. 8:6–12; 1 Kings 10:14, 25). If indeed David and Solomon are meant, the records of Babylon must have been exceptionally complete and accurate. The only other ruler that might have been considered a “mighty king” of

Jerusalem was Josiah, who felt himself strong enough to risk battle with the armies of Egypt (2 Kings 23:29).

Toll, tribute, and custom. See on v. 13.

21. Give ye now commandment. The commission is indeed a strange one. The emperor writes to a distant province and orders its officials to issue a decree. Why did not the king act in his own name and effect his will through agents who were responsible to him, and who customarily acted on his behalf? It seems that this royal letter fits only into the time when the king's authority in the satrapy "Beyond the River" was tenuous at best, and was dependent on any officials who might choose to be loyal to him. It should be noted, furthermore, that the royal concession to the Samaritans was limited in scope and time. The letter permitted them to order the work of rebuilding Jerusalem to halt, but did not give them permission to destroy what had already been built. The king also reserved the right to countermand his present decision by another to be made later.

Until another commandment. Apparently the king intended to invite the Jews to present their case, to affirm their loyalty to him, as the Samaritans had apparently done, and thereupon to be in a position to receive new royal favors. The letter thus constituted a temporary royal injunction, or restraining order.

23. Rehum. On Rehum and Shimshai and their titles, see on v. 8.

By force and power. Upon receipt of the king's letter the enemies of the Jews lost no time in acting on its authority. They proceeded immediately to Jerusalem, and, by a display of force, compelled the Jews to comply with its provisions.

24. Then ceased the work. That very little progress had been made at the time when work ceased can be seen from the fact that it was necessary to lay a new foundation stone in the second year of Darius, when the work of rebuilding the Temple was resumed (Haggai 2:18).

It was not God's will that the work of reconstruction should cease. Active faith on the part of the people would have been met by divine power exercised to hold the enemies of His people in check.

Darius. Darius is the Greek form of the name, which in the Hebrew is written *Dareyawesh*. The Old Persian form is *Darayavaush*, while the name is spelled *Darijâwush* in Babylonian texts. In Egyptian hieroglyphs, where the vowels are not expressed, the king's name is written *Drjwsh*, and in the Aramaic vowelless inscriptions *Dryhwsh*, *Drywhsh* or *Drywsh*. There can be no question that Darius I, who reigned from 522–486 B.C., is meant. According to Persian reckoning, the second regnal year of Darius began on Nisan 1 (April 3), 520 B.C., and ended on the last day of the month Adar (March 22), 519 B.C. (see pp. 98, 99).

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON CHAPTER 4

Ezra 4:6–23 speaks of the opposition of the enemies of the Jews "in the reign of Ahasuerus," and of a letter of complaint "in the days of Artaxerxes" that brought a royal order to force the Jews to stop building. Verse 24 closes the chapter with this statement: "Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia."

On the face of it this reference to Darius in v. 24 seems to be a continuation of the preceding passage (vs. 5–23), and if so, "Ahasuerus" and "Artaxerxes" were kings reigning between Cyrus and Darius I. Accordingly, v. 24, which speaks of the "second

year of the reign of Darius,” would mark the end of a consecutive narrative, with the reference to Darius in v. 5 merely stating in advance the duration of the hindrances to be narrated in vs. 6–23. Hence the sequence of kings in ch. 4 would be: Cyrus (v. 5), Ahasuerus (v. 6), Artaxerxes (v. 7), Darius (vs. 5, 24). Those who thus understand ch. 4 point to the fact that ancient history reveals that two kings bridge the gap between Cyrus and Darius I, namely, Cambyses and the false Smerdis (see pp. 56, 57). They also point out that Smerdis apparently was known under various names, the Babylonians calling him *Bardiya*, while Greek authors seem to have known him not only under the name *Smerdis* but also as *Merdis*, *Mardois*, and *Tanuoxarkes* or *Tanaoxares*. They therefore conclude that the Ahasuerus of v. 6 is Cambyses, and the Artaxerxes of v. 7 is the false Smerdis.

However, it is generally held today that the incidents described in ch. 4 are not given in their chronological order; specifically, that the events of vs. 6–23 took place at a later time than those of vs. 1–5, 24. Accordingly, v. 24 and the narrative in ch. 5 about the work of Haggai and Zechariah, who were active in the 2d year of Darius I, are held to be a continuation of the order of events that was interrupted at ch. 4:5. Those who take this position insist that it does not cast a shadow on inspiration; Biblical writers often depart from strict time order in their narratives.

Those who hold that the events of ch. 4 are not set forth in chronological order stress the fact that the actual sequence of names in vs. 5–7 is Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus, Artaxerxes. They also stress the corollary fact of history that the two kings that followed Darius I were Xerxes (authoritatively identified with the Ahasuerus of Esther) and Artaxerxes I. Therefore they affirm that the “accusation” of v. 6 was made in the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, probably when he passed through Palestine on his way to Egypt; and that the “letter” of v. 7 produced an unfavorable edict from Artaxerxes I, the same king who had sent Ezra to Jerusalem under a most generous decree.

It is the letter to Artaxerxes (v. 7) that creates a problem on both sides of this question of the identification of the kings named in vs. 6 and 7. Those who hold that Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes are, respectively, Cambyses and Smerdis find themselves confronted with the problem of accounting for the names of the kings, and for the fact that the complaining letter deals only with the building of the city and walls, and makes no reference to the rearing of the Temple. In the days of Smerdis the Temple was being built, but there is no Biblical evidence that the walls were being built, unless it is found in Ezra. 4:7–23. On the other hand, those who regard this incident of the complaining letter as occurring during the reign of Artaxerxes I are required to account for a complete reversal of the king’s attitude toward the Jews—from that of favor in his 7th year to disfavor in an unknown year, and back to favor in his 20th year.

Inasmuch as many Biblical scholars today hold that Ahasuerus (v. 6) is Xerxes, and Artaxerxes (v. 7) is Artaxerxes I, the reasons they offer for this view are here summarized for the benefit of those readers who may wish to examine this problem more exhaustively.

1. *The identification of Ahasuerus.* The name Ahasuerus is found in three OT books—Daniel, Esther, and Ezra. Daniel’s reference to Ahasuerus as the father of Darius the Mede (ch. 9:1) can be left undiscussed here, since the identity of Daniel’s Darius has not yet been established by contemporary records. Hence, the identification of his father is also obscure. The Ahasuerus of Esther (ch. 1:1; etc.) is generally identified with the

king whom the Greeks called Xerxes. The Hebrew *Achashwerosh* is a much closer transliteration of the Persian *Khshayârshâ* or the Babylonian from *Achshiyarshu* than is the Greek *Xerxes*. It should not be forgotten that the vowels did not come into the Hebrew Bible manuscripts until about the 7th century A.D. Hence, the Hebrew author of Esther reproduced only the consonants of *Khshayârshâ* and wrote 'Chshwrwsh. The Jews of Elephantine in Egypt spelled the name *Chshy'rsh* or *Chshyrsh* in their vowelless Aramaic script.

The spelling of the name Ahasuerus in Ezra 4:6 is the same as in Esther, and linguistically fits, of all known Persian kings, only the name of Xerxes. There is no linguistic basis whatsoever for identifying the name Ahasuerus with Cambyses. Cambyses' name appears as *Kambujiya* or *Kabujiya* in Old Persian, *Kambusiya* in Elamite *Kambuziya* in Akkadian, *Kmbyr* in hieroglyphic Egyptian, and *Kambyses* in Greek. The Jews of Elephantine spelled the name in their vowelless Aramaic script *Knbwzy*. It is therefore impossible to equate the Hebrew form 'Chshwrwsh with any of the known transliterations of Cambyses. It is also unwarranted to assume that he was known under another name among the Palestinian Jews. His name appears on numerous Babylonian cuneiform tablets, on Persian stone inscriptions, Egyptian hieroglyphic monuments, in Aramaic papyri, and in the historical works of the Greeks, but always as Cambyses.

2. *The identification of Artaxerxes.* The name "Artaxerxes" occurs in the Bible only in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. History knows three Persian kings of this name, called Artaxerxes I, II, and III. That the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7 (vs. 1, 7, 11, 21), Ezra 8:1, and Nehemiah (chs. 2:1; 5:14; 13:6) must be identified with Artaxerxes I is shown in the Additional Notes on Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 2. Thus this present discussion deals only with the identity of the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7, 8, 11, 23, and 6:14.

The Hebrew spells the name Artaxerxes as 'Artachshast', 'Artachshašt', and 'Artachshašta'; the Old Persian, *Ardakhcashaca* or *Artakhshatrâ*; the Babylonian, *Artakhshatsu* and *Artahshassu*; the Elamite, *Irtakshasha*; the Egyptian hieroglyphs, 'Rtchshssh; and frequently in the Jewish Aramaic papyri of Elephantine the spelling is 'Rtchshssh. These transliterations in different languages refer only to the three kings known as Artaxerxes I, II, and III. The reader should note that the consonants in the various transliterations are basically the same, and that only the vowels change, a change of secondary importance in most languages.

It has been claimed by those who identify the false Smerdis with Artaxerxes that Smerdis was known under widely different names. But a close study of his known names in the light of linguistic rules shows that this is not the case. His original name, according to Darius I, was Gaumata, but he claimed to be *Bardiya*, the brother of Cambyses, and is called only by this name in known contemporary records. This name appears as *Birtiya* in Elamite, *Barziya* in Akkadian, and in the Jewish Elephantine papyri, *Brzy* (without vowels).

The Greeks called this false Bardiya “Smerdis.” Now “Bardiya” looks altogether different from “Smerdis,” but the difference is more apparent than real. The initial *S* of *Smerdis* remains unaccounted for. The *B* of *Bardiya* expressed by an *m* in *Smerdis* follows a common linguistic phenomenon, according to which *b*, *v* and *m* frequently interchange in different languages. The *r* and *d* of *Bardiya* are retained unchanged in the Greek form *Smerdis*, which contains the Greek ending *is* instead of the Persian *iya*. It is clear, then, that the name *Smerdis*, and its variants *Merdis* and *Mardois*, are only variant transliterations of *Bardiya*, not different names. It is furthermore pointed out that the *Tanuoxarkes* of Ctesias and the *Tanaoxares* of Xenophon are not to be identified with the false Smerdis, but with the real son of Cyrus whom Cambyses killed, and who according to Darius was the true Bardiya. The two apparently various names, *Tanuoxarkes* and *Tanaxares*, have the same meaning, “The one with the giant’s body,” and are Greek designations, which were given to Bardiya, since their legends ascribed to him the body of a giant. It is therefore maintained by those who oppose an identification of the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4 with Smerdis that there is no evidence for the assumption that the false Bardiya, or Smerdis, was known as Artaxerxes during his short reign, or thereafter.

3. *Reason for apparently strange sequences in narrative.* The author of Ezra would undoubtedly have had a good reason for presenting the narrative of ch. 4 in the sequence in which it is found. The chapter in this form deals with the work of opposition to the returned Jews that was carried on by their “adversaries.” The writer, living in the time of Artaxerxes I, did not limit his record of antagonistic actions to the time of Zerubbabel, but added similar experiences of much more recent dates to show to his readers that the Samaritans, the principal enemies of the Jews, had worked against them intermittently ever since the end of the Exile. First, they had “weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building” the Temple during the reign of Cyrus and his successors “until the reign of Darius” I (Ezra 4:1–5) Later, “in the reign of Ahasuerus,” Darius I’s son and successor, a further undisclosed attempt was made to harass the Jews (v. 6). Finally, a letter of accusation was sent to Artaxerxes, the king under whom Ezra lived, with the result that the work of restoring Jerusalem’s wall was halted temporarily by a royal decree (vs. 7–23).

Only after Ezra had related these different hostile acts carried out by the enemies of his people during a period of about 90 years, did he continue his narrative of the Temple building under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Hence, v. 24 resumes the story where it was left in v. 5 and repeats some of the thoughts already previously expressed, in order to lead the reader back to the story which had been interrupted by vs. 6–23.

It may be worth while to notice, in passing, that Ezra presents documentary evidence for only one of the three hostile incidents related in ch. 4. The nature of the hostile acts carried out from the time of Cyrus until Darius is indicated only in general terms, of which the hiring of “counsellors against them” is the only specific indictment mentioned. About the nature and result of the “accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem” under Ahasuerus (v. 6) the reader is left entirely in the dark. These incidents had occurred before Ezra’s time, and documents concerning them were probably no longer available. However, the fact that detailed and documentary evidence is presented

concerning the events which had taken place in Artaxerxes' time lends weight to the view that Ezra had been involved in it.

4. *Explanation of Artaxerxes' changed policies toward the Jews.* One of the reasons offered for identifying the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7–23 with Smerdis, is this: Artaxerxes I of history is known from Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 2 as a king who twice showed favors to the Jews, which makes his conduct toward them compare favorably with that of previous Persian kings. Therefore it seems difficult to understand that he should have acted in an *unfavorable* way toward the Jews, which he must have done if he is the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4. On the other hand, it is a fact of history that Smerdis destroyed temples that had been supported by his predecessors on the Persian throne. Although Darius' statement that Smerdis, the former Magian, had destroyed temples, probably refers primarily to Zoroastrian sanctuaries, it may include others. Hence, it is held that it is not unreasonable to conclude that Smerdis issued a decree adversely affecting the building program of the Jews in the days of Zerubbabel, although no Biblical or contemporary secular proof exists for this plausible view.

However, the reasons just given for identifying the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4 with Smerdis are not as weighty as might appear. The historical Artaxerxes I is known as a moody and unreliable character, from whom one could always expect a change in attitude. A study of his life history makes it easy to understand how he reversed his favors to disfavours. Of the various stories that reveal his unreliable and unpredictable character the following are typical:

The Egyptian rebel Inarus had been given a solemn assurance that his life would be spared if he would surrender. Receiving this pledge, Inarus gave himself up, but was nevertheless murdered by Artaxerxes I some time later on. This act of royal perfidy, unworthy of a Persian ruler, made Megabyzos, his brother-in-law, so angry that he rebelled against the crown, with the result that the empire was nearly wrecked.

On one occasion, when the king was unexpectedly attacked by a lion, Megabyzos came between them and saved the king's life by killing the lion. Yet, Artaxerxes, who apparently did not like the idea that he had needed the help of another when in a precarious situation, lost his temper and demanded that Megabyzos should be killed. He finally reversed his order and banished him instead.

Although Artaxerxes was not a bad man by the standards of his day, he was untrustworthy, since he acted on moody impulses and momentary feelings and impressions. Hence, Artaxerxes would simply be running true to form, if after showing favors to the Jews, he reversed himself completely on another occasion.

The events related in Ezra 4:7–23 fit the political conditions that existed during the revolt of Megabyzos, governor of the province of "Beyond the River," to which Samaria and Judea both belonged. This rebellion probably began about 488 B.C. and lasted some years. Those who hold that the narrative related in this Scripture passage took place in the time of Artaxerxes I point out that it seems likely that only during this time would the Persian king have dealt directly with local officials, accepted letters from them, and sent them his decisions without passing them through the regular channels of the satrap's office, as appears to be the case in these letters. The Samaritans would have used the opportunity of Megabyzos' rebellion to assure the king of their continued loyalty and at the same time accuse the Jews of treacherously rebuilding their fortifications with the definite purpose of revolting against the king. In that case Artaxerxes, who grasped at

every means that offered itself to help him in his dilemma, especially if he could at the same time create unrest and difficulties in Megabyzos' territory, would have granted the request of the Samaritans to stop the work of the Jews in rebuilding Jerusalem.

Accordingly, these enemies of the Jews, not satisfied with this permission, would go to Jerusalem and use "force and power" against their hated neighbors. If the foregoing is an accurate reconstruction of history, then this was probably the time when portions of the partly rebuilt wall were broken down and some of the completed gates burned with fire (Neh. 1:3).

5. *Hostile acts of chapter 4 deal with different subjects.* The nature of the "accusation" in Ahasuerus' reign is unknown. In the days of Cyrus (vs. 1–5) the opposition to the building activity of the Jews evidently sprang from the fact that they were rebuilding the Temple (see vs. 1 and 3). The reason mentioned for the enmity of the Samaritans in Artaxerxes' time was that the Jews were rebuilding the city and the wall (see vs. 12, 13, 16, 21).

Some commentators who have identified the Artaxerxes of ch. 4 with Smerdis hold that the "wall" of vs. 12, 13, and 16 refers simply to the protective outside walls of the Temple area. However, this is an interpretation based, not on facts, but on conjecture.

6. *The Artaxerxes of chapter 6:14.* In ch. 6:14 an Artaxerxes is mentioned as one of three Persian kings whose "commandment" enabled the Jews to build and finish the Temple. To identify this Artaxerxes also with Smerdis seems out of the question, since Smerdis ruled less than seven months. If in reply to a letter of complaint, he issued a decree that halted the Temple building, he must also have issued another "commandment," favorable to the Jews, all within his seven months' reign—something highly improbable. For this reason many of the commentators who have declared that the Artaxerxes of ch. 4 is Smerdis, have nevertheless declared that the Artaxerxes of ch. 6:14 is Artaxerxes I. But if the Artaxerxes of ch. 6 is the same as the Artaxerxes ch. 7—and there is general agreement that he is—there is no valid Biblical or historical reason to identify the Artaxerxes of ch. 4 as any other than Artaxerxes I.

These six points summarize the reasons offered by those who hold that the Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6 is Xerxes and that the Artaxerxes of vs. 7–23 is Artaxerxes I.

The facts of history and the sacred record are always in harmony, each with the other. Any seeming discrepancy between the two is due to our limited knowledge and understanding of one or both.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–24PK 567–573

1, 2 PK 567

3 PK 568

1–5IT 281

4 PK 594

4, 5 PK 571

7 PK 572

21–24PK 573

23 PK 594

CHAPTER 5

1 *Zerubbabel and Jeshua, incited by Haggai and Zechariah, set forward the building of the temple.* 3 *Tatnai and Shethar-boznai could not hinder the Jews.* 6 *Their letter to Darius against the Jews.*

1. Then the prophets. This is the first mention of the work of prophets among the Jews after their return from exile. Prophecy seems to have been silent for about 16 years, ever since the “third year of Cyrus,” Daniel uttered his last message (Dan. 10:1). Now it was revived. Since we have the actual writings of the two prophets here mentioned, Haggai and Zechariah, we are well informed as to what they contributed by way of encouragement and guidance in the resumption of work on the Temple. It is evident from their words that the long delay in realizing the ardent hopes in regard to the rebuilding of the Temple had had an adverse effect on the spirit of the people. Experiencing opposition to their pious efforts to please God and to re-establish the Temple and its services, they allowed their enthusiasm to fade away. A selfish desire for comfort had taken the place of zeal for the honor of God.

Instead of watching for an opportunity to begin the work anew, and taking advantage of it, the people acquiesced in the indefinite postponement and said among themselves, “The time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built” (Haggai 1:2). Laying aside the idea of pressing forward with the work, they had turned their energies to the practical object of establishing themselves in comfortable homes (Haggai 1:4, 9). The result of this complacency had been divine judgments, consisting of poor harvests, economic distress (Haggai 1:6, 1:9–11), and great political insecurity (Zech. 1:12 to 2:9). These conditions had not been recognized by the people as signs of God’s displeasure. Human agents were therefore raised up by God to interpret to the people the meaning of the circumstances in which they found themselves and to inspire them with new zeal.

Haggai the prophet. Nothing is known of him except his name and his work during a very few months at this most critical time. The name, which occurs occasionally in early Israelite history, appears far more often in the postexilic period. Eleven different Jews mentioned in Aramaic documents of 5th-century Elephantine bore this name, which has also been found in excavated documents in Palestine. The name may have come into favor because of the fame the prophet Haggai attained as a result of his successful ministry.

Zechariah the son of Iddo. Since, in Hebrew usage, the word “son” is also used in the sense of grandson, it is no mistake to call Zechariah the son of Iddo, although he was actually Iddo’s grandson (Zech. 1:1; see on 1 Chron. 6:13, 14). Zechariah’s father had either been less important than his grandfather, or had died early, with the result that Zechariah was probably brought up in his grandfather’s house.

Prophesied. Prophecy does not consist primarily in making predictions—as the word is commonly but inaccurately understood. Most prophetic messages were exhortation and instruction. Those who gave these messages were called prophets because they spoke in response to divine direction, and whatever they uttered as a result of this divine illumination was called prophesying.

2. Zerubbabel. The political and spiritual leaders of the people were still the same as in the time of Cyrus (see ch. 2:2). Haggai’s first message was especially directed to these leaders, and other messages of Haggai and Zechariah, given upon various occasions, aided and encouraged them in their work (Haggai 1:1; 2:21–23; Zech. 3:1–10; 4:6–10).

Began to build. The data given by Haggai reveal the successive stages that marked the resumption of building activity. The first call for action was sounded Aug. 29, 520 B.C. (Haggai 1:1). This appeal proved successful, for the leaders apparently began laying plans immediately, and actually set to work about three weeks later, Sept. 21, 520 B.C. (Haggai 1:15). When the site was cleared and the trenches were being dug for the new foundation, it again became apparent that the new Temple would not compare well in size and beauty with that of Solomon's, and some expressions of disappointment were heard (Haggai 2:3, 9; cf. Ezra 3:12, 13). For this reason Haggai addressed another message of encouragement, this time to the people, on October 17 (Haggai 2:1). Two months later everything was ready for the laying of the foundation, and that great occasion, Dec. 18, 520 B.C. (Haggai 2:10, 18), was celebrated, in keeping with Oriental custom. On that day Haggai delivered two speeches, the last of which we have any record. In the meantime, two months after Haggai delivered his first recorded message, Zechariah joined him (Zech. 1:1). A study of the books of Haggai and Zechariah emphasizes the accuracy of the statement of Ezra 5:2, that "the prophets of God" were "helping them" in rebuilding the Temple. Their stirring messages of exhortation, instruction, and encouragement contributed much to the task; in fact, except for their inspired ministry, the Temple might have continued to lie desolate.

3. Tatnai. The satrap of "Beyond the River" was Ushtani, in Greek, Hystanes. He had been appointed in the spring of 520 by Darius, and resided in Babylon, inasmuch as he was concurrently satrap of Babylonia. Until recently it was thought that Ushtani was only another name for Tatnai, but a recently published cuneiform document mentions "Tattanni, governor of Ebir-nâri." We know now that Tatnai was the deputy of Ushtani for the satrapy "Beyond the River." Being in charge of two satrapies, Ushtani could not devote sufficient time to both; the satrapy of Babylonia required most of his attention. It is noteworthy that the Biblical report calls Tatnai a *pachath*, "governor," exactly the same word (*pahat*) the cuneiform inscription uses to designate Tatnai.

Shethar-boznai. According to Herodotus (iii. 128), every satrap had a royal secretary, and this was probably the office held by Shethar-boznai. The name is attested in Old Iranian as *Shêthrabûzana*, and in cuneiform documents in the form of *Shatabarzana*, *Ushtabuzana*.

Their companions. The complement of assistants and servants that formed the regular retinue of a satrap.

Who hath commanded you? The reason for this visit seems to have been another complaint made by the enemies of the Jews. Tatnai, apparently a conscientious Persian official, had decided to make a personal investigation before passing on the complaint. It is also possible, however, that Tatnai came to Jerusalem, not as the result of a complaint concerning the renewed building activities at the site of the Temple, but on a routine tour of inspection, perhaps his first, following appointment to the office of deputy satrap of "Beyond the River." Arriving in Jerusalem and observing the building program in progress, he demanded to know the authority for it. It may seem strange today that he asked for the "command" for rebuilding the Temple rather than the "permit," but in the official language of the times a "permit" was a "command."

This house. See on ch. 1:2.

This wall. The Aramaic word translated here and in v. 9 as “wall” is also used repeatedly in Aramaic documents from Elephantine (see pp. 79–83), but its meaning is nevertheless obscure. In those documents it can have the meaning “outfit,” “decoration,” “detail,” in three instances, but in another document seems to mean “specification.” It is certain, however, that it does not mean “wall,” a translation derived from the LXX and the Vulgate. In the light of the Elephantine texts the question of Tatnai should probably be translated, “Who has commanded you to build this temple, and to design these details [or, decorations]?”

4. Then said we unto them. The LXX reads, “Then said they [Tatnai and Shetharboznai] to them [the Jews].” The Aramaic clearly reads “we” rather than “they,” but such a reading cannot be harmonized with the context. It seems preferable to read “they,” thus making the first part of v. 4 a statement introducing the question of the latter part of the verse as one asked by Tatnai and Shethar-boznai (see vs. 6, 10).

5. The eye of their God. “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous” (Ps. 34:15). “He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous” (Job 36:7). The elders had acted in response to a direct command of God through His prophets (see on Ezra 5:1, 2), and God saw to it that they remained unmolested while carrying out His will.

While the author of Ezra gave all glory to God for the outcome of Tatnai’s visit, one cannot help admiring the impartiality of this important official, who acted according to the highest traditions of integrity of a Persian officer.

6. Tatnai. Concerning Tatnai and Shethar-boznai, see on v. 3.

The Apharsachites. Some of the older commentators took the word thus translated to mean “Persians,” but it was discovered to be an Old Iranian word designating an inferior class of officials.

8. The house of the great God. This is a remarkable expression in the mouth of a heathen. The Persians were Zoroastrians, and the monotheism of the Jews no doubt appealed to them as a religion similar to their own. This may partially explain why Persian kings and officials were, for the most part, sympathetically disposed toward the Jews in general and toward their desires and aspirations.

Great stones. Literally, “stones of rolling,” indicating stones of such a size as to require rollers in order to be moved. In ancient times stones of tremendous size were used for temples and public buildings. Some of these stones can be seen in Egyptian temples, such as the one in Karnak, or in a later buildings, such as the Roman temple at Baalbek or the superstructure of Abraham’s tomb in Hebron.

Timber is laid in the walls. A reference to the ancient architectural method of laying a row of timber in the walls for each three rows of stones. The decree of Cyrus expressly made mention of this procedure (ch. 6:4), and the Jews were meticulously following the order. The method of building walls by alternating one row of timber and three rows of stone is first mentioned in connection with Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 7:12). During the excavation of Megiddo a public building of the time of Solomon was uncovered which showed this architectural feature, the timber used being cedar. Other places where this practice has been observed are Carchemish, a Hittite city, and ancient Alalakh in northern Syria. The older Jews, who had seen Solomon’s Temple with the rows of timber in the walls, may have desired to see the new Temple built in the same fashion, and made request to Cyrus accordingly. This seems to be the only plausible explanation for this

provision in the official decree, because it was not the custom of the Persians to build walls in this way, or of any other nation of that time, so far as our knowledge goes.

9. Then asked we those elders. Zerubbabel, as governor of Judea, was the appointed representative of the Persian Government and probably received Tatnai and his staff in his own official mansion. Zerubbabel seems not to have revealed to Tatnai his own part in the rebuilding of the Temple, and to have referred Tatnai with all his questions to the “elders” of the people (see ch. 2:2, 68). That Zerubbabel is not the spokesman of the elders in the investigation is evident from their references to him as governor (vs. 14–16) by the name under which he was known to the Persian administration in Cyrus’ time (see on ch. 1:8). When Tatnai came none of the Jews knew what his attitude might prove to be, and the elders may have felt it the part of wisdom that Zerubbabel should remain in the background if an investigation were to be conducted. They may have reasoned that if Tatnai should stop the work, and perhaps send the responsible leaders to Persia to give an account of their doings, the state would thus not be deprived of Zerubbabel, whose leadership apparently meant much to them at this time.

10. Their names. See on v. 4. Tatnai deemed it important to send with his letter a list of the names of the leading men in charge of the new building program. Officials in the Persian capital could ascertain whether any of the men named had engaged in subversive activities, and whether they were the recognized leaders of the Jews. The list of names is unfortunately not included in the book of Ezra, and we do not know whose names Tatnai included. The name of the high priest, Jeshua, probably headed the list, but Zerubbabel’s name may not have been included (see on v. 9).

11. Servants. Humbly, the elders claimed to be no more than servants of God and to be following His directions. Thus they were bound to obey when God should speak.

God of heaven. This name of God was the one Jews customarily used in speaking about Him to their Persian overlords, as we know from the Elephantine papyri (see pp. 79–83).

Great king of Israel. That is, Solomon, greatest of all Jewish monarchs, so far as the extent and prosperity of his kingdom are concerned and the position it occupied among other kingdoms of his time.

12. Our fathers had provoked. Chiefly, by their flagrant idolatry and the moral abominations it involved—the sacrifice of children, and licentious rites belonging to the worship of Baal. For centuries, with only short and rare intervals, “the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen,” and even “polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem” (2 Chron. 36:14).

Nebuchadnezzar. For the final siege of Jerusalem see 2 Kings 24 and 25.

13. Cyrus the king of Babylon. On the date of the decree referred to, see on ch. 1:1. To call Cyrus “king of Babylon” is as correct as to give him the title “king of Persia” (ch. 1:1), Cyrus took Babylon in October, 539 B.C. The next spring, in his absence, his son Cambyses attended the New Year festival, at which each king of Babylon received his kingship by taking the hands of Bel Marduk, the chief god. Later that year, and thereafter, we find Babylonian documents prefixing “King of Babylon” to Cyrus’ title “King of Lands.”

King Cyrus. The repetition of the name Cyrus in this verse is significant, and was apparently used to emphasize the fact that the building activities did not represent a rebellious spirit, but were in accordance with a royal decree.

14. The vessels. See on ch. 1:7–11.

Nebuchadnezzar took. See on 2 Kings 24:13.

Sheshbazzar. See on chs. 1:8; 5:9. From the additional information here given we learn that Sheshbazzar, or Zerubbabel, as he was more commonly called, had been made governor of Judea, a fact not mentioned in the earlier account of Cyrus' commission.

15. Let the house. The Temple place was an ancient, holy site, chosen by God Himself. It was the place to which God directed Abraham when he went forth to sacrifice his son (Gen. 22:2), where the angel stood and stayed the pestilence in David's time (2 Sam. 24:16, 17), and where "the glory of the Lord filled the house" in Solomon's day (2 Chron. 7:1).

16. Since that time. It is not clear whether the latter half of v. 16 is part of the answer given by the elders to Tatnai, which he reports to Darius (see v. 11), or Tatnai's own opinion relative to the facts. Perhaps the latter is the more probable. Tatnai was possibly not aware that for a number of years previous to the second year of Darius the work had been suspended. It would seem that the work must have progressed rapidly, or Tatnai would not have concluded that the present state of progress might conceivably represent more than 15 years of work. It is also possible that a considerable time had elapsed since the renewal of building activity in the second year of Darius.

17. The king's treasure house. Excavations have shown that documents of religious or literary nature were preserved in temple archives or in palaces, and economic and political documents in palace libraries. Numerous large archives consisting of many thousands of cuneiform tablets have been found in the ruined sites of the ancient world. The most famous of these archives is the so-called library of Ashurbanipal, found in one of his palaces at Nineveh. Other state libraries or archives have been found in the royal palaces at Mari on the central Euphrates, in the Hittite capital city of Khattushash (Boghazköy), in the palace of Ugarit (Ras Shamrah), the palace of Ikhnaton at Amarna, and elsewhere. Whether royal treasures were kept in the same places is not yet certain, but this may easily have been the case. Hence, it was probably on the basis of good information that Tatnai proposed a search of the royal treasury for the decree of Cyrus, to determine whether the claim of the Jews was true.

At Babylon. Thinking that the decree had been issued at Babylon, Tatnai suggested an investigation of the files kept there. It is probable that neither the Jews, who suggested the search, nor Tatnai himself knew that the decree actually had been made at Ecbatana, the former capital of Media. It seems strange that the Jews were not able to produce a copy of the document to establish the truth of their claims. It is possible that their enemies, in a surprise attack, had stolen and destroyed their official files. This would have left the Jews without any legal evidence by which they could prove their right to rebuild the Temple.

It should be noted in this connection that Tatnai must have gained a favorable impression of the sincerity and good faith of the Jews. He did not stop the work, but allowed them to continue to build until a thorough investigation would determine the validity of their claims and the present king had had an opportunity to render a decision.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

- 1 PK 573
2 PK 577, 579
5, 6 PK 578

CHAPTER 6

1 *Darius, finding the decree of Cyrus, maketh a new decree for the advancement of the building. 13 By the help of the enemies, and the directions of the prophets, the temple is finished. 16 The feast of the dedication is kept, 19 and the passover.*

1. Then Darius. The request of Tatnai, deputy satrap of “Beyond the River,” received the immediate attention of Darius (ch. 5:17).

Made a decree. Preferably, “gave an order,” since a “decree” was not necessary in order to have a search made in the royal archives for the document.

House of the rolls. Literally, “in the house of the books,” that is, the royal library or archives. On the observation that the “treasures” were kept there, see on ch. 5:17.

In Babylon. Tatnai seems to have received the impression from the Jews during his visit in Jerusalem that the original document would probably be found in the royal archives at Babylon. He had suggested, therefore, that Babylon was the place where the search should be made (ch. 5:17). Darius followed this suggestion and had a search made at Babylon, which, however, proved to be fruitless.

2. Found at Achmetha. When the document referred to in Tatnai’s letter was not found, a further order was apparently given to extend the search to the royal archives of the other Persian capital cities, Ecbatana and Susa. This indicates a sincere effort on the part of the king and his officials to be fair, and to make a thorough investigation before reaching a decision. This places the Persians in a most favorable light. They could easily have discontinued the search upon finding, at Babylon, no decree of Cyrus regarding the Jews. In extending the search to other places where it was apparently known that official documents of Cyrus’ first year were deposited, these officials did everything possible to arrive at a fair and unbiased conclusion.

Achmetha was the old Median capital. In Old Persian it was called *Hagmatâna*, and in Greek, Ecbatana. Today the city is called *Hamadân*. Lying in the western Iranian mountains, 6,000 ft. (1,829 m.) above sea level, the Persian kings made it one of their summer capitals. Babylon, situated in the river valley, became uncomfortably hot in summer. The present population of *Hamadân* is more than 100,000.

The fact that the document was found in Ecbatana and not in Babylon indicates that Cyrus resided there when the decree was issued. The relation of this fact to the date of issuance of the decree has already been noted in comments on ch. 1:1.

A roll. All documents of the Persian Empire period which have been recovered from the region of Mesopotamia and Persia are cuneiform tablets. Owing to the climatic conditions prevailing in these lands, Persian records written on perishable material such as papyrus or leather have not survived. However, Persian documents on papyrus and leather from that period have been preserved in Egypt, proving the accuracy of the statement here made that the official decree of Cyrus was written on a scroll, not on a clay tablet. Since the official, universal language of the Persian Empire was Aramaic, as the documents found in Egypt testify, it can be taken for granted that Cyrus’ decree was written in Aramaic.

3. A decree. See on ch. 1:1–4. The superficial differences between this copy of the decree and that recorded in ch. 1:1–4 are due to the fact that this copy was for official use only, whereas the other was published. The decree made public contained a permit to return to Palestine, to rebuild the Temple there, and to collect money for that purpose, but it made no mention of the decision of Cyrus to support the erection of the Temple with public funds (see on ch. 1:4). However, the copy of the decree that served as a directive for the officers of the realm clearly stated that the cost was to be met by the royal treasury (ch. 6:4). Exact specifications as to methods of construction were given in this copy.

The height thereof. The figure here given for the height of the new Temple is twice that of the Temple of Solomon, and its width three times as great (see 1 Kings 6:2). The length of the new structure is not given; that of Solomon's Temple was 60 cu. Yet the new edifice is said to be "as nothing" in comparison with that of Solomon's (Haggai 2:3), and those who had seen the Temple of Solomon wept they saw the foundation of the new building, because of the obvious inferiority of the latter (Ezra 3:12; cf. PK 564). It is not impossible that the length of the cubit measure of Cyrus' decree differs somewhat from that of the Jews, though it is hardly possible that the difference should have been so great as to reconcile the apparent discrepancy between the facts noted. It is more reasonable to think that Cyrus gave permission for a much larger edifice than the Jews actually built. But with a royal subsidy (see on ch. 1:4) it is difficult to think that they would have been content with a structure so much inferior to that of Solomon. It may be that the dimensions given in Cyrus' decree are for the front of the Temple only, which was of more magnificent proportions than the rest of the building.

4. A row of new timber. See on ch. 5:8.

The expenses. See on chs. 1:4 and 6:3.

5. The golden and silver vessels. See on ch. 1:7–11.

6. Tatnai. Concerning Tatnai and the other men here mentioned, see on ch. 5:3, 6.

Be ye far from thence. It may be that the author of the official report incorporated in Ezra 6 has abbreviated or condensed the letter of Darius, and given only the essential parts of it—a résumé of the decree of Cyrus, and the confirming decree of Darius. The first important point of Darius' letter is a warning to the officers of the satrapy "Beyond the River" against interfering with the work at Jerusalem. The language of the whole letter shows that a strong and determined king ruled the state. Some of the decrees of other Persian rulers, as recorded in Ezra and Esther, clearly reveal vacillation on the part of the issuing monarchs.

8. I make a decree. Darius was not content to send a copy of Cyrus' decree to Tatnai, to inform him of the right of the Jews to continue working on the Temple. He confirmed the former decree by a new one of his own, one that surpassed even the generous provisions of the former one (see on ch. 1:7).

Expenses. Cyrus had decreed that the reconstruction of the Temple at Jerusalem be subsidized with public funds (v. 4). This part of the decree had probably never been carried out (see ch. 4:4, 5), because the Samaritans seem to have successfully frustrated the good intentions of Cyrus. When Darius learned from the copy of Cyrus' decree found at Ecbatana that financial support had been promised the Jews, he probably inquired of the royal treasurer as to how much money had been spent on the Temple since the first decree was issued. His annoyance upon receiving the information that either little or nothing had been paid so far is implied by the strong language of his letter to Tatnai—"be

ye far from thence” (v. 6), “let the work ... alone” (v. 7), “that they be not hindered” (v. 8), “without fail” (v. 9), and especially the threats in v. 11 in case this decree should be ignored.

Cyrus had only vaguely defined the source of financial help as “the king’s house” (v. 4), which could mean that the funds were to come from the royal purse, though all public money was disbursed at the discretion of the king. Darius, however, ordered that the expenses of the men employed on the Temple be paid by the satrap of “Beyond the River” from the royal tribute of the province. Thus, presumably, no additional burden was laid upon the taxpayers.

Many modern commentators have doubted the genuineness of this part of the decree, declaring it unthinkable that a Persian king could be so much interested in the Temple of a distant and insignificant nation. However, secular history presents us with parallel cases. This was Cyrus’ policy not only in regard to the Temple at Jerusalem but also in regard to many other sanctuaries (see on ch. 1:2). It is reported that after conquering Egypt, Cambyses, Cyrus’ son, had the temple of Neith at Saïs cleaned, assured its priesthood of their customary income, and favored it with royal gifts—as the Egyptian kings had done before. Even Antiochus the Great gave the Jews large gifts of wine, oil, incense, wheat, and salt for sacrifices, and money for the completion of the Temple (*Antiquities* xii. 3. 3), in appreciation of their loyalty early in his reign.

9. *Bullocks, and rams, and lambs.* These were the chief sacrificial animals of the Jews—a lamb being required every morning and evening, 2 more on the Sabbath, 7 at each of the great feasts and at the beginning of each month, and 14 on every day during the Feast of Tabernacles. This would be altogether more than a thousand in the course of a year. Rams and bullocks were added to the lambs on the more solemn occasions. The only other ordinary sacrificial animal was “a kid of the goats.”

Wheat, salt, wine, and oil. These commodities were needed for the “meat offerings” by which every burnt offering was accompanied (Ex. 29:40, 41; see on Lev. 2:13).

According to the appointment. It was a most extraordinary concession to the Jews to allow their priests to fix the amount of support they should receive from the satrap. Darius must have had confidence that the Jews would not abuse his generosity. The integrity of men such as Daniel, Mordecai, Ezra, Nehemiah, and perhaps others, doubtless had made a deep impression on the monarchs under whom they served. It seems probable that some influential Jews were employed in the state department of the Persian Empire. The hand of one of these men probably had part in the preparation of this decree of Darius.

10. *Pray.* The requirement that the good will and generosity of the king be repaid by sacrifices and prayers on his behalf is closely paralleled in the clay barrel inscription of Cyrus already mentioned (see on ch. 1:2). There the king states that he had restored the cult of the Babylonian gods that the Babylonians might daily ask Bel and Nabu to bless him and his son Cambyses with long life. That the Jews were not opposed to carrying out such a request can be concluded from the practice in the time of the Maccabees to offer sacrifices on behalf of the Seleucid kings (1 Macc 7:33).

11. *Hanged.* Not hanging as we know it, but impaling, a cruel form of execution practiced extensively by the Assyrians. Many of their reliefs depict impaled men, mostly captured enemies. Two ways of impaling were known. In each, a stake with a sharp point

was set up in the ground. The victim, nude, was then impaled by piercing him through his body, either from his buttocks upward or through his chest.

Threats such as those Darius attached to this decree are common in ancient documents. In the light of the practice of absolute rulers in ancient times the threats in this decree do not seem extraordinary. People reading royal decrees in the ancient Orient were used to them, and often witnessed their execution. For example, the famous code of Hammurabi contains some 250 lines of imprecations against any who should alter its provisions. Darius felt that his decree was in need of strong language. The Samaritans had shown themselves clever in the art of defying royal commands. The decree was intended to frighten them, and thereby restrain them from doing further harm.

13. Tatnai. Concerning the men here mentioned, see on ch. 5:3, 6.

So they did speedily. Having no enmity toward the Jews, as is evident from their former actions and their letter to Darius, Tatnai and his fellow officers revealed no reluctance in carrying out the royal command. The king's will had been made known to them in unmistakable words, and they proceeded to carry it out with zeal. In part, the rapid completion of the Temple must be attributed to their good will. This must have required Tatnai and his retinue to visit Jerusalem again and make a survey of the financial needs of the Jews and the number of sacrificial animals considered necessary for the Temple service (see on v. 9).

14. They prospered. The Jews, who had experienced so many troubles and disappointments during recent years, could have expected no greater or more joyful surprise than the message of Darius' new decree. Suddenly were fulfilled the prophecies of Haggai, who had reminded them that their God was the owner of silver and gold, and that it would be easy for Him to supply the necessary means to complete the task they had begun in faith (Haggai 2:8). On the day when the new foundation had been laid, the Lord had promised, "From this day will I bless you" (Haggai 2:19). Marvelous was the fulfillment. In fact, the blessings in view must have exceeded their most daring hopes.

The other prophet of those days had asked, "Who hath despised the day of small things" (Zech. 4:10)? How miserable and poor their efforts seemed to be when they began a second time to build the house of their God. Although they had obeyed the prophets, and had started to build, there was fear in their hearts. They were surrounded by enemies. However, they had trusted in the word of the prophet, who emphatically stated that "the hands of Zerubbabel," which had "laid the foundation of this house," should "also finish it," and that in this way they would know that the Lord of hosts had sent him to them (Zech. 4:9).

Artaxerxes. Some older commentators who identified the Artaxerxes of ch. 4:7 as the false Smerdis, naturally identified Artaxerxes of ch. 6:14 also as the false Smerdis. But the king here mentioned is Artaxerxes I, and for two reasons: 1. It is hardly conceivable that Smerdis would have issued a favorable decree, after having been hostile—all within the 7 months of his reign. 2. Because the Artaxerxes here mentioned is listed in order after Darius. By the time of Ezra, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes had all issued decrees regarding the Temple and its services. There appears to be a contradiction between the statement that Artaxerxes' decree was required for the completion of the Temple and the statement in v. 15 that the Temple "was finished" during the reign of Darius. This apparent contradiction may be resolved on the reasonable assumption that Artaxerxes' beautifying of the house of the Lord (ch. 7:27) was in a very real sense of the word a final

finishing of the building of the Temple. Hence Ezra felt justified in including Artaxerxes as the third of three kings whose decrees made possible the restoration of the Temple and of Jerusalem (see chs. 7:27; 9:9).

Mention of the king Artaxerxes in this verse is evidence that the book of Ezra was written, not in the time of Zerubbabel, but in that of Ezra, probably during the reign of Artaxerxes.

15. Finished. The exact day of the completion of the Temple is given, probably also the day of dedication described in vs. 16–18. Adar 3 in the 6th regnal year of Darius I was about March 12, 515 B.C., six weeks before the Passover.

The rebuilding of the Temple from the time the foundation stone had been laid a second time (Kislev 24, 2d year of Darius) to its completion, had therefore occupied about 4 years and 3 months, some 2 years and 3 months shorter than it had taken Solomon to build his Temple. The reason for this difference probably lies in the fact that Solomon had first to prepare a flat surface on which to erect the various buildings belonging to the Temple complex, a task of no small size. Although the present substructures of the Temple area at Jerusalem date from Herodian times or later, as far as they are visible, they reveal the tremendous efforts that must have been made by the early builders to construct a foundation platform on which the Temple and its many auxiliary buildings could be erected. When the exiles returned they probably found that great parts of this substructure were still good enough to use without expensive, time-consuming repair work. Furthermore, the buildings seem to have been less elaborate and numerous than in Solomon's time, and probably much less lavishly decorated (see ch. 3:12). Also, a certain amount of building had been carried on since the time that the first decree was issued. Some or all of these reasons may have been responsible for the comparatively short period required to build the second Temple.

Concerning the size of the new Temple, the number of subsidiary buildings, their arrangement and outer form, we are completely without information. The Temple of Solomon, or perhaps the ideal temple of Ezekiel (Eze. 40–42), may have served as a pattern for some parts. That this Temple, like Solomon's, possessed auxiliary buildings, is evident from such texts as Ezra 8:29; Neh. 12:44; 13:4, 5, where certain rooms are mentioned in connection with the Temple. In some of these chambers Temple treasures were kept; others served as offices for certain priests. According to 1 Macc. 4:38 the Temple was surrounded by several courts.

16. Kept the dedication. The report of this feast of dedication is brief, containing only the information that (1) it was a feast of joy, (2) a great number of sacrifices were offered, and (3) the Temple servants, priests, and Levites carried out the services prescribed by the law of Moses from that day forth. Music no doubt played a major role in the activities of the day of dedication, inasmuch as there had been much singing connected with similar occasions in earlier times (see 1 Chron. 16:4–36; 2 Chron. 29:25–29).

17. An hundred bullocks. The number of sacrifices offered during this dedication service is small in comparison with similar services celebrated during the reigns of Solomon (1 Kings 8:63), Hezekiah (2 Chron. 30:24), and Josiah (2 Chron. 35:7). Hundreds now take the place of the thousands previously offered.

All Israel. In v. 16 the congregation is referred to as “the children of *Israel*.” The writer is careful to present the returned exiles as “Israel,” not merely as “Judah” (see chs.

2:70; 3:1; 4:3; 5:1). The number of he-goats offered was 12 (ch. 6:17), the number of tribes in the undivided kingdom. We may assume that representatives of every tribe had returned with Zerubbabel, and that consequently it was possible to regard the re-established people as “Israel” (see Neh. 11:20; Jer. 50:4; Eze. 37:15–19; Zech. 8:13; Mal. 1:1). However, the great majority of the repatriated exiles were of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and were accordingly more commonly spoken of as “Judah” (Ezra 4:1, 6; 5:1; Zech. 8:15). Desirous of emphasizing the nobler and grander view, of seeing in the congregation the remnants of the whole people of God, Zerubbabel ordered this solemn sin offering of 12 he-goats, one for each of the tribes. Ezra followed the same procedure when he arrived in Jerusalem with the second group of exiles some 60 years later (Ezra 8:35).

18. Priests in their divisions. The completion of the new Temple was naturally followed by an arrangement of the ministers of the Temple, corresponding to that originally made by David (see 1 Chron. 23:6–23; 24:1–9). This arrangement was based upon the ordinances of the law concerning the respective offices of the two orders—priests and Levites—as given in the book of Numbers (chs. 3:6–10; 8:6–26), but the “courses” themselves were not established till David’s time.

19. Kept the passover. It should be noted that in this verse the author returns to the use of Hebrew, and continues in Hebrew till ch. 7:11. That Ezra wrote parts of his book in Hebrew and parts in Aramaic may probably be most simply explained by the fact that both languages were well known to the Jews. Aramaic was the language common to the Persian Empire. Official decrees were written in it.

A number of particularly solemn Passovers were celebrated in Jewish history, and these were accorded special attention by the writers of the Bible. Such are the Passover celebrated by Hezekiah after his cleansing of the Temple (2 Chron. 30), and that celebrated by Josiah after the completion of his reform (2 Chron. 35). Both of these Passovers accompanied a revival of Temple worship after a period of apostasy. Ezra places in the same category the Passover following the dedication of the new Temple. This does not mean that the exiles had not celebrated the Passover prior to the year 515 B.C., since Ezra 3:5 contains the information that they observed “all the set feasts of the Lord” as soon as they arrived in their homeland. However, this first Passover after the completion of the building of the new Temple marked the full re-establishment of the regular ordinances of religion, more or less interrupted from the time of the destruction of the first Temple.

Fourteenth day. The day fixed by the law of Moses (see Ex. 12:6). This was about April 21, 515 B.C.

20. Purified together. The translation of v. 20 as given in the KJV and RSV is probably correct, though the following has been defended by a number of commentators: “For the priests had purified themselves, while the Levites were all pure, as one man.” Those who follow the latter translation believe that the Levites are the ones referred to in the second half of v. 20 as killing the Passover for both priests and laymen, being more completely sanctified than the priests. Such a situation is described in 2 Chron. 29:34, where the Levites in the time of Hezekiah are described as being more upright in heart than the priests. However, most translators follow the KJV reading. This reading makes no difference between the priests and Levites, holding that both classes of Temple

attendants were equally prepared for this solemn occasion, and presents priests and Levites as working together in the slaying of the Passover lambs.

21. Separated themselves. Having mentioned the returned exiles, Ezra here refers to a second group of Israelites as taking part in the celebration of the Passover. These must have been some of “the poor of the land,” left behind by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. “to be vinedressers and husbandmen” (2 Kings 25:12). During the long years of exile, when the priests and religious leaders were in Babylon, these ignorant, poor people seem to have accepted many pagan practices. The exiles had gained a new religious experience in the school of tribulation under the wholesome influence of men like Daniel and Ezekiel. Accordingly they required those who had not been to Babylon to reform their lives in order to belong to the new state. Some of those here referred to may have been foreigners who wholeheartedly accepted the religion of the Jews, and were received into the congregation of the Jews as equals. As at the time of the Exodus, provision was made for all of those who desired to join God’s people, to do so.

22. Feast of unleavened bread. This was observed for one week, as required by the law (Ex. 12:15; 13:7; Lev. 23:6). On the spiritual meaning of the feast see 1 Cor. 5:8.

King of Assyria. It is generally understood that Darius is meant here, and it is surprising to find him called “king of Assyria.” It is true that the Persian kings never called themselves “King of Assyria,” although from Cyrus until Xerxes they bore the title “King of Babylon” in addition to their other titles. Since Babylon had been part of Assyria for centuries, but had finally replaced that empire, occupying all its former possessions, it is possible that the name Assyria is here used as a synonym for Babylonia (see on 2 Kings 23:29).

According to another interpretation, Assyria here is simply a designation for the great power of Western Asia, whether at the time the statement was made this power might be Babylonia, Persia, or some other power. Support for this view is found in recently discovered documents of the intertestament period, in which the Seleucid kings are called Assyrians.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1, 2 PK 579

3–5PK 558

7–10, 12PK 579

8–12PK 598; TM 203

14 DA 233; GC 326; PK 607, 698

14–17, 19PK 596

CHAPTER 7

1 *Ezra goeth up to Jerusalem.* 11 *The gracious commission of Artaxerxes to Ezra.* 27 *Ezra blesseth God for his favour.*

1. Now after these things. The author makes a marked division between the first and second sections of the book by means of an expression used nowhere else in the book of Ezra. The actual time interval between events described in ch. 6 and in ch. 7 seems to have been almost 58 years—from the spring of 515 B.C. (see ch. 6:15) to the early months of 457 B.C. (see ch. 7:7).

Artaxerxes. For the spelling of the king’s name see Additional Note on Chapter 4. With the majority of conservative scholars, this commentary holds that the Artaxerxes here mentioned is Artaxerxes Longimanus, who reigned from 465–423 B.C. For a

summary of the evidence in favor of this view, see Additional Note at the close of this chapter.

Ezra the son of Seraiah. Ezra was probably the great-great-grandson of Seraiah. In the language of the Bible writers, every descendant is a “son,” and every ancestor a “father.” Christ is “the son of David,” and David “the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). Joram “begat Ozias [Uzziah]” (Matt. 1:8), his great-great-grandson (see 1 Chron. 3:11, 12, where Uzziah’s other name, Azariah, is used). Ezra probably omits the names of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, who were undistinguished, and claims descent from Seraiah, the last high priest to minister in Solomon’s Temple (2 Kings 25:18).

Azariah, the father of Seraiah, is mentioned only in the genealogical list of 1 Chron. 6:13, 14 and in Ezra 7:1, but Azariah’s father Hilkiyah is no doubt the high priest of Josiah’s time (2 Kings 22:4–14; 2 Chron. 34:14–22).

5. The son of Aaron. In vs. 1–5 Ezra traces his genealogy back to Aaron, the first high priest. A comparison with the genealogical list provided in 1 Chron. 6:3–15 shows that Ezra omitted six names between the Azariah and Maraioth of v. 3, which are found in 1 Chron. 6:7–10, and another name (Meraioth) between Zadok and Ahitub of v. 2 (see 1 Chron. 9:11). The abbreviation of genealogies by the omission of unimportant names was a common practice among the Jews. A notable instance is the omission of several names in Matthew’s genealogy of Christ (see on Matt. 1:5, 11, 15, 17).

Although Ezra was a descendant of Aaron, and thus belonged to the high-priestly family, he was not a high priest himself, but only a “priest” (Ezra 7:11, 12; Neh. 8:2).

6. Ezra went up. See ch. 2:1, where the same expression, “went up,” is used in regard to the first group of returning exiles.

Ready. Heb. *mahir*, a word used also in Aramaic and Egyptian to designate a skilled, fast-writing scribe. In the Elephantine papyri Ahikar refers to himself as “a wise and ready scribe,” and uses the same word *mahir*. He thus wished to indicate that he was not only a scribe but a learned man. In Egypt, where *mahir* had become a professional title for skilled scribes, such a man was highly trained in every phase of secular learning. Ezra, however, used his talents in the realm of religion, being a scholar “in the law of Moses.” See on v. 11.

Which the Lord God. It is characteristic of Ezra’s piety never to forget that the law was not a mere human code given by an earthly lawgiver, but a direct, divine gift—“the law of the Lord” (v. 10), “the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel” (v. 11), and “the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses” (Neh. 8:14).

All his request. Ezra had made a favorable impression on the king and had won his confidence. How this was accomplished is unknown.

7. The children of Israel. The same six classes of colonists are here mentioned as returning under Ezra that, according to the earlier narrative (ch. 2:70), had accompanied Zerubbabel. The order of mention is nearly, but not quite, the same.

Seventh year of Artaxerxes. Ezra probably counted the 7th year of Artaxerxes according to the Jewish custom, that is, in terms of the Jewish civil calendar year, which began in the fall (see Vol. II, pp. 110, 112, 138, 140). The 7th regnal year of Artaxerxes I began in the fall of 458 B.C. and ended in the fall of 457, according to the table on page 108 of this volume. For an explanation of these dates and those of vs. 8, 9, see pp. 100–103 of this volume.

8. He came to Jerusalem. From v. 9 it appears that the first day of the first month (Nisan) of the religious year had been selected for the beginning of the journey. This is not surprising, since the dry season was usually used for such a journey, one that a caravan required several months to complete. Similarly, all military campaigns were begun in the spring. The day of departure, according to the Jewish calendar on p. 108, was most probably March 27, 457 B.C. The time occupied on the way was nearly four months. The exiles arrived at Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month (Ab), or approximately July 23, 457 B.C. That it took Ezra's group four months to reach Jerusalem seems at first thought a long time, but it should not be forgotten that a caravan like his must have taken a number of prolonged rests, one of which is recorded as occurring at Ahava (ch. 8:15). The log of the march of the army of the younger Cyrus from Ephesus to Cunaxa near Babylon provides an actual record of such a journey. Although Cunaxa was reached in 91 marching days, the entire journey, including resting days, occupied about half a year (Xenophon *Anabasis* ii. 1. 6). We need not be surprised, therefore, that Ezra's journey occupied four months. Some delay must almost certainly have been occasioned by the perils of the trek (see ch. 8:31). As to the probable route, see on ch. 2:68.

9. The good hand. The special divine favor here referred to probably includes the royal response to Ezra's request (see v. 6), and deliverance from enemies who had intended to attack the caravan on the way (see ch. 8:21–23, 31).

10. Prepared his heart. Ezra was a consecrated man. The aim and ambition of his life was to know the will of God, to cooperate with God, and to teach others to do likewise. This was the man God now called to do a special work.

11. The priest. The genealogy of vs. 1–5 implies that Ezra was priest, but v. 11 provides the only specific statement of this fact. Nehemiah also so designates Ezra (ch. 8:2, 9).

The scribe. Here for the first time *sopher* is used in the NT sense of *grammateus*, "scribe," meaning a man trained in the exposition of the Scriptures. Ezra stands at the head of a line of famous Hebrew scholars, which in the time of Christ included men like Hillel and Gamaliel, whom the Jews considered worthy successors of Ezra.

12. King of kings. The decree itself is quoted in vs. 12–26, written in Aramaic exactly as it issued from the Persian chancellery. It is closely related in form and content to the documents found in chs. 4 to 6, and is now, following the discovery of similar documents in Elephantine, recognized as genuine by even the most critical scholar. "Kings of kings" was a recognized title of the Persian monarchs, and is found in every Persian inscription of any considerable length. The title was first used by Assyrian kings, who thereby expressed the fact that they ruled over many vassal kings whom they retained on their respective thrones in conquered lands. The title was later taken over by the kings of Babylon (see Dan. 2:37), and then by the Persian kings when they became masters of the world.

Ezra the priest. It is interesting to note that the decree does not make use of the ordinary Aramaic word *kumra'*, "priest," but the loan word *kahen*, taken from the Heb. *kohen*. In Aramaic documents from Elephantine, writers also make a clear distinction between pagan priests, for whom they used the ordinary Aramaic word *kumra'*, and the

true priests of God, whom they designated by the word, *kahana'*. The use of this word in the document of Ezra 7 therefore indicates that the decree, although approved and issued by the king and in his name, was composed by a Jew in the imperial chancellery. Other evidence found in this decree points in the same direction.

A scribe of the law of the God of heaven. Aramaic, *saphar datha' di-'elah shemayya'*. A correct explanation of this title was made in the 1930's by H. H. Schaeder. On the basis of analogous titles he shows that it designates a high officer in the Persian chancellery in charge of affairs pertaining to "the law of the God of heaven." Accordingly, Ezra was a reporter of Jewish religious affairs in the Persian government. Similarly we find in the later Parthian and Sassanide government the head of the Jewish population (*resh galutha'*, "head of the exiles") occasionally ranking with the highest government officials. Neh. 11:24 also testifies to the existence of such an office in the time of Artaxerxes I. We are unable to say how Ezra received this appointment, but it is evident that appointment to this office would make him the most influential Jew in Babylon. That he used his influence in the interest of his people is proved by the contents of the decree.

Perfect. The Aramaic has only the word *gemir*, meaning "completed," and is considered by most scholars to be either an abbreviated formula indicating the end of a document or a word meaning "issued." In the first case the word "peace" must be supplied, as the KJV has done, but the second interpretation considers the text complete as it stands.

And at such a time. See on ch. 4:17.

13. *All they of the people.* The decree of Artaxerxes is as broad in scope as the proclamation of Cyrus (ch. 1:3), and gives permission not only to the Jews but to all Israelites of every tribe to accompany Ezra to Jerusalem. That Israelites of all the tribes actually went up to Jerusalem on the occasion is implied by the reference to "twelve bullocks for all Israel," which those who returned with Ezra offered, on their arrival, to the "God of Israel" (see on ch. 8:35).

14. *Seven counselors.* In Esther 1:14 the seven counselors appear as seven princes, who "saw the king's face" and "sat the first in the kingdom." No inscriptions have thus far been found to explain further the functions of this group. The conjecture has been made that it refers to the heads of the seven great Persian families, which, according to Herodotus (iii. 84), had privileges that went beyond those enjoyed by other families, including the right of unrestricted access to the royal presence.

The law of thy God. Ezra's commission included the duty of carrying out an investigation into the religious conditions in the province of Judea. For this, the law of God would, of course, be made the standard. The words concerning the law have frequently been understood by critical scholars as implying that Ezra was the author, or at least an editor, of the law referred to. That this view is incorrect can be seen from v. 25, which indicates that this law was already well known to the Palestinian Jews before Ezra's arrival. It is therefore obvious that "the law of thy God" was a book, or books, already in the possession of Ezra, and of the Jews in Palestine as well. The nature of this law, already known to the Jews of Babylon and Palestine, is revealed in Neh. 8.

15. *The silver and gold.* Financial affairs assume a most important role in this decree. Gifts which Ezra was commissioned to take to Jerusalem came from three sources—the king and his counselors, a collection taken among non-Jewish friends in the satrapy of Babylonia, and freewill offerings made by Jews resident outside of Palestine (v. 16). In ancient times the transmission of great sums of money was made by well-protected caravans. The highways of travel were never safe from robbers, and the larger the remittance the greater the danger of its being intercepted. Josephus relates (*Antiquities* xviii. 9. 1) that the gifts annually remitted to Jerusalem from Babylon in Roman times were escorted by a great number of armed men.

Whose habitation. This phrase is similar, but not identical, to that used by Cyrus in ch. 1:2, 3. It does not necessarily mean that Artaxerxes considered the God of the Jews a local deity, but simply that the location of His Temple was at Jerusalem. If a Jew such as Ezra was the actual author of this decree, which was then approved by Artaxerxes (see v. 12), he would naturally use phraseology such as this.

17. *Buy speedily.* Rather, “buy judiciously” or “with all diligence” (RSV). Artaxerxes was not concerned with how *soon* the money was to be spent, but how *well*. The primary purpose of the money sent by Ezra was to maintain the Jewish ritual (see ch. 6:9, 10).

18. *Whatsoever shall seem good.* The remainder of the money was to be spent in any way that Ezra, acting under divine guidance, might direct. Ezra was thus free to use as much of the money as he deemed wise for purposes he might consider necessary, without asking specific permission each time. The decree thus gave him the right to use money for such things as repair work on the Temple or for rebuilding the wall. At the time the decree was written Ezra may have considered this freedom of action desirable. Later, when the Samaritans showed their enmity, he may have regretted not having specific objectives mentioned in the decree that were to be financed with the royal appropriation.

19. *The vessels also.* It does not appear that these were sacred vessels originally belonging to the first Temple, like those Cyrus had entrusted to Zerubbabel. Rather, it would seem, they were part of the voluntary offering (v. 15), in which they are distinctly included (see ch. 8:26–28). Perhaps the vessels sent with Zerubbabel had proved too few for the great festivals. There are parallels in ancient history, of kings sending expensive vessels as gifts to other kings, or to the temples of allied nations. Artaxerxes’ gift was thus by no means unusual.

20. *Whatsoever more.* Here the flexibility of the decree becomes apparent. Ezra is granted unlimited access to the royal revenue of the province of Judea, to be used for any purpose connected with the Temple. Within the limitations stated in v. 22, Ezra’s own discretion was to determine what should be done.

King’s treasure house. Not the royal treasury at Susa or Persepolis, where tribute from the various provinces was stored, but the local treasury of Judea, to which the Jews made their remittances and from which Ezra was now authorized to draw.

21. *All the treasurers.* The “decree” included in Ezra’s authorization was probably sent out separately to the royal treasurer resident in Judea, and to those in the satrap’s office who dealt with the financial matters of that province. It was hardly the intent of Artaxerxes that Ezra should demand the revenue of such provinces as Samaria or Ammon, whose inhabitants were Judea’s enemies. The Aramaic title translated “treasurer” appears also on objects from Persepolis.

Ezra ... the scribe. On Ezra’s official title, see on v. 12.

22. *Unto an hundred talents of silver.* According to the weight of the light Babylonian talent, this would be 3,013 kgs., or 3.32 tons. In addition, Ezra could require 100 cor of wheat (22,000 liters, or 624 bu.), and 100 baths (2,200 liters, or 581 gals.) each of wine and oil.

In the Babylonian contract tablets oil and wine are usually dealt with in “jars” whose capacity is not known. Prices for wine varied from one to eight shekels a jar, according to the quality of the wine and the season of the year. Compare Vol. I, p. 169.

A requisition to the treasurer for wheat, wine, oil, and salt seems strange today, but was natural enough in the Persian system, where taxation was partly in kind and every province was required to remit to the royal court the choicest portion of its produce. Wine, corn, oil, and salt were all produced abundantly in Palestine, which was “a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey” (2 Kings 18:32), and, in the region about the Dead Sea, abounded with salt.

23. *Wrath against the realm.* In the seventh year of Artaxerxes I there was “wrath against the realm” of Persia of a most serious nature. Egypt had revolted from the Persians c. 463 B.C., and in the following year, with the assistance of the Athenians, had driven the last Persian out of the country. Toward the close of 459 a vain attempt was made to force Athens to recall her troops. In 458 Artaxerxes resolved to attempt the recovery of the revolted country. Soon thereafter he issued this decree authorizing Ezra’s expedition to Jerusalem. History records that from the year 457 B.C. on things went well for the Persians in Egypt. Memphis was recovered in that year, and in 456 the Athenian troops were finally defeated and the province of Egypt recovered.

And his sons. When Artaxerxes came to the throne he was still quite young, and it is not known how many sons he had in his seventh year. Ultimately, the number reached 18 (Ctesias *Excursus Persika* 44).

24. *We certify.* The older commentators have seen in the pronoun “we” either a plural of majesty, still in common use by royalty and perhaps comparable to the editorial “we,” or an indication that Artaxerxes here includes his sons. Both views, however, are incorrect. A better understanding of Aramaic shows that the subject of the active participle “certify,” or “notify,” is indefinite, and that the phrase should be translated in the passive sense “you are notified.”

It shall not be lawful. On the three taxes mentioned here see on ch. 4:13. Documentary evidence reveals that the Egyptian priesthood was exempt from taxes during most of its history (see on Gen. 47:22). Although there is no documentary evidence confirming the same custom in Persia, the fact that this privilege was granted to the Jewish Temple personnel implies that the Persian priesthood also was tax exempt. Ezra would hardly have secured such a grant for the priests of his people if the Persian priesthood had not enjoyed similar privileges.

That the policy of exempting priests from taxation is not without parallel even in the time of the Persians can be seen from a Greek inscription in which Darius I censures a certain Gadatas for ignoring the royal policy by exacting “tribute from the sacred cultivators of Apollo.” Antiochus the Great also granted similar privileges to the Jewish priesthood (Josephus *Antiquities* xii. 3. 3).

25. *Magistrates and judges.* The closing part of the decree (vs. 25 and 26) authorizes Ezra to reorganize the judicial system of Judea and to be responsible for all future appointments of judicial officers in that province. The word *shaphetin*, “magistrates,” is

simply the Aramaicized Hebrew equivalent of the word translated “judges.” The word has not been found in non-Jewish documents written in Aramaic, but its root verb appears in Jewish records found at Elephantine. Its use in the decree of Ezra 7 is one more proof that a Hebrew-speaking Jew, probably Ezra, was responsible for the wording of this document.

Beyond the river. See on Ezra 4:10. That Ezra’s jurisdiction was not intended to cover the entire area of “Beyond the River” is evident from the additional explanatory clause, “all such as know the laws of thy God.” It assigns to Ezra’s jurisdiction only the Jewish portion of the population, including Jewish proselytes.

Teach ye them. Ezra, who was probably responsible for the wording of the decree, must have known something about the spiritual conditions prevailing in Judea, which had convinced him of the need for instructing the returned exiles in the law of God. Knowing that his personal conviction on the matter might not carry much weight with the leadership in Judea, he secured royal authorization for this work in order that the Jews might not be tempted to slight this aspect of his program of reform. That the initiative for these provisions in the decree came from Ezra is implied in vs. 6, 28.

26. Let judgment be executed. Finally, Ezra was authorized to enforce the law, with the power to fine, imprison, banish, or execute offenders, as he should deem right. These powers were always entrusted by the Persians to the civil administrators of provinces, who ruled as autocrats within their respective territories, responsible to the king alone. The grant of such far-reaching responsibilities to Ezra shows that Artaxerxes did not consider him merely a religious leader. He was invested with secular authority over every branch of the administration of the Judean province, except, perhaps, that of finance.

27. Blessed. Having quoted the important document in Aramaic, the language in which it was originally issued, Ezra now proceeds in Hebrew, which continues without interruption to the close of the book. A true man of God, he expresses gratitude for answered prayer.

Beautify the house. Ezra’s word of gratitude indicates that Artaxerxes had given authorization for further building activities in connection with the Temple. It is not known whether this work consisted of decorations only or whether it included also buildings. This text doubtless explains why Ezra included Artaxerxes among the kings whose “commandment” caused the Temple to be built (see ch. 9:9, and on ch. 6:14).

28. Unto me. Many modern commentators have thought that only those parts of the book of Ezra which are written in the first person singular can be attributed to Ezra, and that those parts which refer to Ezra in the third person singular were written by someone else (see chs. 7:1–11; 10:1). However, a careful study of ancient documents shows that a change of pronouns is no proof of a change in authorship. Examples can be given from Egyptian (the Sinuhe story, see on Ex. 2:15), Assyrian (Annals of Sargon II), Aramaic (Ahikar story), Hebrew (Dan. 4), and Greek (Thucydides) documents, in which the same peculiarity appears. Even in some modern literary works writers change suddenly from the first to the third person or vice versa, as Kittel has shown.

Before the king. See on v. 15. Here is further evidence that Ezra had appeared before Artaxerxes and his cabinet as a petitioner (see also v. 6). Although it must be assumed that Ezra’s tact and wisdom were responsible for much of the success that crowned his efforts, especially in obtaining the decree, the hand of Providence led him on step by step.

He freely acknowledged that his success was due to God's goodness and that God had worked on the hearts of the king and the rulers before whom he had appeared.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON CHAPTER 7

Until the closing years of the 19th century Jews and Christians alike considered the Artaxerxes of the book of Ezra to be the first Persian king who bore this name. He was called by the Greeks Artaxerxes Longimanus (meaning "long hand"), and reigned from 465 to 423 B.C. Since 1890, however, the situation has changed markedly. In that year a Belgian scholar, A. van Hoonacker, published his first study on the chronological order of Ezra and Nehemiah, arguing for a reversal of the traditional order and essaying to make Ezra one of the successors of Nehemiah. This view of the successors of Nehemiah. This view has won many followers in the scholarly world. Those who reverse the traditional order are now about equal in number to those who still adhere to it. In view of the importance of this question, particularly with respect to the prophecy of Dan. 9:24–27 and its exact dating, a more detailed analysis of the problem is here given.

Scholars who believe that Ezra followed Nehemiah can be grouped as follows: (1) those dating the events of Ezra 7 in the last years of the reign of Artaxerxes I, usually in his 37th regnal year (427 B.C.) instead of in the 7th, as in the Bible text, and (2) those who assign Ezra's expedition to the 7th year of the reign of Artaxerxes II (405/04–359/58 B.C.).

The views of the first group need no discussion in this commentary, for they involve nothing more than a conjectural emendation of the text, which rejects the date as given in Ezra 7 and substitutes another in its place. The majority of scholars who believe the Ezra's activity in Jerusalem followed that of Nehemiah belong to this first group.

More impressive are the arguments of scholars belonging to the second group. They point out that the Bible does not indicate which of the three Artaxerxes of history is meant in Ezra 7, and that they do no violence to the Biblical record by placing the events of Ezra 7 and 8 in the 7th year of Artaxerxes II instead of the 7th year of Artaxerxes I. Since every student of the Bible will admit that the events recorded are not always presented in chronological order, one is not entitled, a priori, to reject a view that assigns Ezra 7–10 to a time after the events described in Nehemiah. A careful study of all the evidence is essential to a valid decision with respect to the matter.

To begin with, it is appropriate to inquire as to the reasons why scholars forsook the long-held position that Ezra came to Jerusalem in the 7th year of Artaxerxes I, and Nehemiah in the 20th year of the same king. Of numerous arguments brought forth in favor of reversing the traditional order only five are of any particular significance. These assert:

1. That Nehemiah knows little of Erza. If Ezra had come to Jerusalem armed with extensive administrative, religious, and judicial powers, as Ezra 7 implies, why does he not play a more important role in Nehemiah's time? It is true that Ezra is mentioned as reader of the law (Neh. 8:1–6, 9), and as one of the leaders of the two processional choirs at the dedication of the wall (Neh. 12:36), but his activities are completely overshadowed by those of Nehemiah. If, on the other hand, he was a comparatively young priest of Aaronic descent in the time of Nehemiah, it was only natural that he should be a reader of the law, but without an important place in the civil administration. Later, presumably, he gained the ear of the Persian king and was dispatched to Judah with the extensive powers listed in Ezra 7.

2. *That Nehemiah is silent about the exiles who returned with Ezra.* In his endeavor to repopulate the capital of the country, Nehemiah reviews the census of the various groups that returned with Zerubbabel almost a century previously (Neh. 7), but seems to ignore completely those who, according to Ezra 7 and 8, returned only 13 years earlier, if Ezra's return took place in 457 B.C. If, however, Ezra came with about 5,000 or 6,000 people in the time of Artaxerxes II, Nehemiah could base his repopulation measures on the only census available, that of Zerubbabel.

3. *That Ezra finds a commission instituted by Nehemiah.* When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem he handed over the treasures entrusted to him by Artaxerxes to four Levites, who were apparently in charge of the Temple funds (Ezra 8:33). Nehemiah reports that during his second term of office he appointed a commission of four over the treasuries (Neh. 13:13), implying that such an institution did not exist before his time. Hence it is concluded that Ezra must have arrived at Jerusalem after the commission had been set up, that is, after Nehemiah's first governorship.

4. *That the wall had been built before Ezra's arrival.* Ezra expressed his gratitude to God for having given "a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem" (Ezra 9:9), which apparently, had but recently been completed. Nehemiah, however, found only ruins, and had to rebuild the wall in the first year after his arrival at Jerusalem.

5. *That the high priest Johanan belonged to a later generation.* Johanan is usually quoted as the chief witness in favor of the view that Ezra followed Nehemiah. Johanan, the son of Eliashib, is one of the last dignitaries, probably high priests, mentioned in the book of Nehemiah (Neh. 12:22, 23). Since Eliashib was high priest during Nehemiah's governorship (Neh. 3:1, 20, 21; 13:4, 7), Johanan, who was either his son or grandson (Joiada is placed between Eliashib and Johanan in Neh. 12:22), belonged to a later generation. This conclusion agrees with the fact that Johanan is mentioned in a Jewish document as having been high priest in 410 B.C. Among the Elephantine papyri (see pp. 79–83) is a letter written Nov. 25, 407 B.C. (according to the Persian calendar) and addressed to Bigvai, the Persian governor of Judea. This letter states that the writers had written three years earlier to "Johanan, the high priest, and his colleagues, the priests who are in Jerusalem" (Cowley's edition, No. 30).

Moreover, Johanan, the son of Eliashib, had a chamber in the Temple at Jerusalem when Ezra arrived in that city (Ezra 10:6). If Ezra came to Jerusalem in 457 B.C., and found Johanan in possession of a Temple chamber, the latter must have been an officiating priest at least 20 years of age (see Ezra 3:8), presumably much older. If, according to the papyrus mentioned, Johanan was high priest in 410 B.C., he must at that time have been at least 67 years old, and since his successor Jaddua (Neh. 12:11, 22) was high priest when Alexander the Great was traversing Palestine (332 B.C.; see Josephus *Antiquities* xi. 8. 4, 5), 78 years later, Jaddua must have been about 100 years of age.

Those who hold that Nehemiah preceded Ezra declare that the apparent difficulty of conceiving that Jaddua functioned as a high priest at the age of 100 can be solved by assuming that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem under Artaxerxes II (405/04–359/58 B.C.). It can then be said that Johanan became high priest shortly before 410 B.C., as successor to Joiada, the son of Eliashib, Nehemiah's contemporary. Presuming that Johanan was about 30 years old in 410, he would have reached the age of 43 when Ezra arrived at Jerusalem in the 7th regnal year of Artaxerxes II, and thus had an office in the Temple, which Ezra could use (Ezra 10:6). If we presume further that Jaddua was born late in Johanan's life,

perhaps when Johanan was 40 years old, he would have reached the age of about 70 years at the time of Alexander's visit.

These are the five most important arguments that scholars set forth in favor of reversing the traditional sequence of the expeditions of Ezra and Nehemiah. These arguments will now be considered from the viewpoint of the traditional Ezra-Nehemiah sequence.

1. *The position of Ezra in Nehemiah's time was a normal one.* Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in 457 B.C. armed with great powers, but not as governor like Nehemiah, 13 years later. Ezra had gained the favor of the king, who authorized him to return to Judea and reorganize the judicial system according to Jewish laws (see Ezra 7:26). He also received far-reaching financial grants and apparently the right to fortify the city. During the rebellion of Megabyzos, satrap of "Beyond the River" (see p. 62), to which the province of Judea belonged, the Samaritans may have taken the opportunity of communicating directly with the king, assuring him of their own loyalty but at the same time accusing the Jews of sinister intent in rebuilding their city wall. Artaxerxes, vacillating by nature and an opportunist, may have gratefully accepted the declaration the Samaritans made, hoping that their loyalty would bring difficulties to the rebellious Megabyzos in his own satrapy, and allowed the Samaritans to call a halt to the rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall. Not satisfied with merely stopping the activity of the Jews, however, the Samaritans may have demolished parts of it and burned certain gates (see on Neh. 1:3).

After a reconciliation between Megabyzos and Artaxerxes had taken place, normal relations with the satrapy "Beyond the River" were restored, and Nehemiah heard from his brother (see on Neh. 1:2) of what had happened in Judea during the time connections with that province had been severed. Thereupon Nehemiah requested the king, whose favor he enjoyed, to be sent to Jerusalem with full authority to rebuild the wall (Neh. 1 and 2).

Although Nehemiah received full authority to rebuild the wall, he proceeded with utmost caution upon his arrival in Jerusalem, fully aware of the power and persistence of his enemies. His initial secrecy (Neh. 2:12-16), together with the determination with which he later faced opposition to his work, shows how well he was qualified to complete the task Ezra had been engaged in, but had been prevented from completing.

For this reason Ezra may have felt it wise to remain in the background until the work on the wall was finished. Ezra may also have been accused by his enemies among the Jews of causing unrest and friction between Judah and its neighbor nations because he expelled the heathen wives from Jewish homes when he returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 9 and 10). Prudence may therefore have dictated a course of action which at first made it appear that Nehemiah had little to do with Ezra.

However, with the wall completed and nothing serious to fear, Nehemiah would naturally accord Ezra his rightful place in the affairs of the nation. At the dedication of the wall, he called on Ezra to lead one of the two processional choirs of praise, while he directed the second one himself (Neh. 12:36, 38). It was only fitting that the two processions should be led by the two men who had been so prominent in the work of restoring the wall.

Later, when the festival season arrived, Ezra was the undisputed religious leader and directed the activities of the people (Neh. 8:1-6, 9, 13). This shows that Nehemiah did

not ignore Ezra, but accorded him his rightful place as soon as conditions permitted it. It is not true, as has been claimed, that Ezra's name can be dropped from Neh. 8 and 12 without the slightest consequence to the narrative. If this were done, one of the two processions at the time of the dedication of the wall would have no leader. The explanation that makes Ezra first the predecessor, and later the collaborer, of Nehemiah is fully consistent with known facts.

2. *Nehemiah used the oldest census list available.* That Nehemiah used the census list of Zerubbabel's time as a basis for his measures to repopulate Jerusalem (Neh. 7) does not imply that he ignored those exiles who had recently returned with Ezra, or that they had not yet returned. Our knowledge of the events of that time are only fragmentary. It is possible that the exiles accompanying Ezra had been more willing to live in Jerusalem than had those of Zerubbabel's time, a situation that would have led Nehemiah to review the earlier census list. Another reason for consulting the oldest available list may have been the fact that the 50,000 exiles of Zerubbabel's expedition were more equally distributed over the country than the comparatively smaller group that arrived in Jerusalem with Ezra. Since Zerubbabel's list mentions 45 groups, excluding servants and entertainers, and Ezra's list only 18 groups, it is evident that the first list provided a better representation of the population quotas than the latter. The fact that Ezra's list is not mentioned in Neh. 7 does not prove that it did not exist in Nehemiah's time.

3. *Nehemiah did not organize a new treasurer's office.* It is false to assume that Nehemiah, during his second governorship, instituted treasurers for the first time. The report of Neh. 13:10–14 clearly states that on his arrival at Jerusalem the second time Nehemiah found that for some time no payments of tithe had been made by the people and that the Temple personnel had therefore been forced to cultivate the fields in order to make a living. Nehemiah rectified this situation immediately upon his return. By persuading the Jews to resume tithe paying he succeeded in recalling the Levites and singers to the Temple. Treasurers would be needed to handle the funds, and four men were therefore appointed. The mention of four treasurers in Ezra 8:33 does not warrant the conclusion that it was necessarily customary to have all Temple funds handled by a commission of four. To assume that such a commission did not exist before Nehemiah's second term of service is without factual basis.

4. *Ezra thanked God for the permission to build a wall.* If the reconstruction of the history of Ezra's activity as reviewed briefly under No. 1 accords with the facts, Ezra was empowered to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem at the time of his return in 457 B.C. If so, it is not strange to find him thanking God (Ezra 9:9) for influencing the kings of Persia to give Israel a "reviving" (Cyrus and Artaxerxes I), to assist Israel in setting up the house of their God (Cyrus and Darius I), and to "give" them "a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem" (Artaxerxes I). It should be noted that Ezra does not state that the wall had *already* been finished. His words could be understood in this sense only if other evidence were forthcoming that proved that the building of the wall had been completed before his prayer was uttered. But taken alone, the statement may as well be interpreted to mean that by God's grace a permit had been granted to go forward with the rebuilding of the wall. The words do not imply that the wall was already finished, and this text cannot be taken as evidence that Ezra's reform, described in chs. 9 and 10, took place after the events recorded in the book of Nehemiah.

5. *The age of Johanan was not abnormal.* There is no reason to doubt that the Johanan mentioned in a Jewish document from Elephantine as high priest in 410 B.C. is the Johanan, son Eliashib, of Neh. 12:22, 23. Most probably he was also the man in whose office Ezra wept (Ezra 10:6). Even if at the time of Ezra's return to Jerusalem in 457 B.C. Johanan was already a respected priest of about 30 years of age, and had his own office adjacent to the Temple, he could still be high priest in 410 B.C., at the age of between 70 and 80 years, when the afore-mentioned letter of the Jews of Elephantine was written to him.

The only difficulty in this interpretation is in connection with Jaddua, if he was Johanan's successor as high priest and was still officiating in Alexander's time, 75 years after the Elephantine letter to Johanan, as Josephus seems to indicate (*Antiquities* xi. 8. 4, 5). However, this difficulty appears to be more serious than it actually is. Even if Josephus is correct in claiming that the high priest of Alexander's time was Jaddua, there is no proof that this was the same Jaddua as the one mentioned in Neh. 12:11, 22. The book of Nehemiah itself knows of another Jaddua, mentioned as a family head who signed the covenant of Nehemiah's time (Neh. 10:21). Hence, the Jaddua of Neh. 12:11, 22, who succeeded Johanan as high priest, could have been the grandfather of a high priest by the name of Jaddua who officiated in the Temple at the time of Alexander's visit.

It should be remembered that the historian Josephus made at least one serious mistake in his narration of the history of this time by making Sanballat a contemporary of Alexander (*Antiquities* xi. 8. 2, 3). We know from the Bible and from the contemporary records found at Elephantine that Sanballat lived in the time of Nehemiah (see on Neh. 2:10).

It is therefore altogether possible that he also confused the names of the Jewish high priests, though it would not therefore be necessary to assume that the story of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem must be considered legendary.

From the above discussion it is obvious that the evidence adduced in favor of considering Ezra as later than Nehemiah is at best very weak. In recognition of this fact, many scholars have declined to reverse the traditional sequence. Furthermore, such a proposed reversal involves the defenders of the reversal theory in some of the same difficulties they seek to avoid. This can be seen from the two following points.

1. *The age of Meremoth.* When Ezra arrived at Jerusalem in 457 B.C. he delivered the treasures, brought up from Babylon, to the priest Meremoth, the son of Uriah (Ezra 8:33). This same Meremoth is mentioned 13 years later as an active supporter of Nehemiah and an enthusiastic builder of two sections of the wall (Neh. 3:4, 21). No difficulties are involved in the same man's carrying out the various tasks attributed to him in the afore-mentioned texts, during the course of 13 years, from 457 to 444.

If, however, as claimed, Ezra arrived in 397 B.C., in the 7th year of Artaxerxes II, 47 years after Nehemiah's wall was built, it was a very old Meremoth who received the treasures from Ezra. Even if Meremoth was 25 years old at the time he was responsible for building two wall sections, he would have reached the age of 72 when he officiated as one of the treasurers at the time of Ezra's return. While this would certainly be possible, it should be noted that the new theory automatically assigns to Meremoth an age the proponents of that theory declare is incredible for Johanan.

Another point to remember is that in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah each high priest presumably served for life, and it is only to be expected that those holding the office would be advanced in years toward the close of their successive terms of service. Thus Aaron served as high priest to the age of 123, Eli to the age of 98, and Jehoiada to the age of 130 (Num. 33:39; 1 Sam. 4:15; 2 Chron. 24:15).

2. *The age of Ezra.* A much greater difficulty for the holders of the reversal theory is encountered in Ezra's age, if he arrived at Jerusalem 47 years after Nehemiah. Proponents of the new theory represent Ezra as the great religious leader in the activities described in Neh. 8, and as one of the two leaders at the dedication of the wall. But one chosen to lead out in these activities instead of the high priest must have been a man of distinction and a most influential person—hence, not a youth. It is difficult to imagine one selected for these roles as being less than 40 years of age, or that Nehemiah would have chosen him unless he was known for specific and important achievements accomplished prior to that time. Yet to allow Ezra a respectable age in Nehemiah's time leads inevitably to a ridiculously high age for him at the time of his supposed return from Babylon 47 years later, in the year 397 B.C.

Recognizing this serious difficulty, many scholars who reverse the Biblical order of Ezra and Nehemiah either delete Ezra's name from texts that associate him with Nehemiah, or arbitrarily assign his expedition to the 37th year of Artaxerxes I. For readers of this commentary it is sufficient to point out that both of these proposals are based on deliberate alterations of the Bible text. The conservative student of the Bible finds no reason for reversing the order of the arrival of Ezra and Nehemiah as given in the Bible. Such a transposition not only does not solve all the difficulties it proposes to dispose of, but creates new ones, and renders a reconstruction of the history of that time most difficult. We cannot ignore either the statements of Inspiration or the known facts of history.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–28PK 607–614

1 DA 233; PK 698

1–5PK 608

6 PK 609

9 DA 233; PK 611, 617, 698

10 PK 608, 623

11, 12 PK 610

12, 13 PK 607

12–26GC 326; LS 58; 1T 52

13 PK 611

14, 15, 20, 23 PK 610

24–26PK 611

27, 28 PK 612

28 PK 614

CHAPTER 8

1 *The combinations of Ezra, who returned from Babylon. 15 He sendeth to Iddo for ministers for the temple. 21 He keepeth a fast. 24 He committeth the treasures to the custody of the priests. 31 From Ahava they come to Jerusalem. 33 The treasure is weighed in the temple. 36 The commission is delivered.*

1. This is the genealogy. The list of exiles presented in vs. 1–14 parallels that of ch. 2:3–19, repeating for the most part the same family names, though not in exactly the same order. The numbers here are in each case much smaller, always less than one third and sometimes less than one twelfth. At the most, three new families of colonists are mentioned—those of Shechaniah (v. 5), Joab (v. 9), and Shelomith (v. 10), but in two of these cases the reading of the name is not certain. On the whole, Ezra was accompanied to Jerusalem by members of the same families as represented by those who were with Zerubbabel, though with Ezra there were fewer families, and fewer members in each family. Ezra’s list is thus much shorter than that of Zerubbabel, who had returned some 80 years before.

Altogether, 1,754 men are listed, but for a few groups no numbers are given. Estimating three to four women and children to every man, the total number of men, women, and children who returned with Ezra was approximately 8,000. That Ezra’s group should be smaller in comparison with that of Zerubbabel 80 years earlier can easily be explained. The same considerations that kept many back then were even more pressing now. In the Orient it is not easy to detach a family from the locality in which it has lived for a long period of time. By now, the Jews who remained in the land of exile had been there for almost a century and a half. Excavations of Nippur have brought to light numerous documents that show that many wealthy Jews lived in that region of Mesopotamia during the reign of Artaxerxes I. Hence, it may have been a difficult task for Ezra and his fellow leaders to convince as many to return as did accompany him. These returning colonists could expect only a hard pioneering life in the old homeland, with far fewer comforts than in Babylonia. In view of these considerations it is surprising to find that Ezra succeeded in persuading almost 2,000 families to cast in their lot with their brethren in the old homeland.

2. Of the sons. In v. 2 two priestly families, and one, of the house of David, are mentioned. The number of men belonging to each of the three families is not given, as is also true of the first family mentioned in v. 3. These numbers may have dropped out in an early copy of the list. Thus it is impossible to give the exact number of returning exiles.

Hattush. The punctuation of the KJV obscures the fact that Gershom was a son of Phinehas, Daniel of Ithamar, etc. At the time the KJV was translated the semicolon represented a greater break than a colon; the reverse is now true. Furthermore, though a remote descendant of David, Hattush was a grandson of Shechaniah (v. 3), as is evident from 1 Chron. 3:22, 23. Verse 2 should close with the name Shechaniah, not with Hattush.

3. Pharosh. For this name and those of the following verses also mentioned in the list of Zerubbabel’s time, see on ch. 2.

5. Shechaniah. A name has been lost in copying, either between the words “of the sons” and “of Shechaniah,” or between “Shechaniah” and “the son of Jahaziel.” The LXX supports the reading, “Of the sons of Zattu, Shechaniah, the son of Jahaziel.” Zattu is mentioned in ch. 2:8.

10. Shelomith. As in v. 5 there seems to be an omission of a name, which the LXX supplies by reading, “Of the sons of Bani, Shelomith, the son of Josephiah.” Bani appears as the head of a family in ch. 2:10.

13. The last sons. Probably the younger sons of Adonikam are meant. The families of the older sons seem to have returned already in Zerubbabel's time (ch. 2:13). The RSV reads, "those who came later."

15. The river. The river, or canal, called Ahava in vs. 21, 31, is otherwise unknown. The Ezra record leaves the impression that it was rather centrally located in Babylonia, for it was easy to make contact with the Levites, to whom an additional appeal was sent from that place (see vs. 15–20). Some have considered it equivalent to the Talmudic *'Thi*, which they identify with the modern *Hît*, northwest of Babylon.

Sons of Levi. The reason for the absence of Levites is probably the same as that discussed in connection with ch. 2:40, where the small number of returning Levites is apparent (see also on ch. 8:1).

16. Then I sent. The text seems to indicate that Ezra was not only surprised but perturbed that no Levites had responded to his appeal. Without them his caravan seemed incomplete, particularly in view of his desire to bring about a revival (see ch. 7:10, 14–28; cf. chs. 9, 10). That he sent "men of understanding" in addition to the nine family heads mentioned, to make a last and urgent appeal to the Levites for participation in the return journey, is significant. These two men, although they had no official title or function, were either especially eloquent or persuasive, or were considered otherwise exceptionally qualified for the task at hand.

17. Casiphia. The location of this place is unknown. Some have suggested that it was a religious center of the Babylonian Jewry, others that a school was located there where young Levites were trained as teachers for the schools of the synagogues. It is worthy of notice, in passing, that Iddo, the village head of this center of Levites, belonged to the technically inferior group of Temple servants called Nethinims (see on ch. 2:43).

18. By the good hand. This is Ezra's usual mode of acknowledging divine providence (see chs. 7:6, 9, 28; 8:31). Similar expressions also occur in Nehemiah (ch. 2:8, 18), but not elsewhere in Scripture.

A man of understanding. Heb. *'ish sékel*, considered by some commentators as a proper name, but without sufficient reason. No such name is known to have existed. If *'ish sékel* is taken as a proper name we are confronted with the further difficulty of having to assume that the name of his ancestors and the number of Levites in his family group have been lost from the list. The name of this man of discretion or prudence is given as Sherebiah, who is mentioned more than once in Nehemiah's time as a chief Levite (Neh. 8:7; 9:4, 5).

And Sherebiah. The Hebrew conjunction *we*, "and," should be rendered "namely" (RSV) or "even," so that the text reads, "they brought us a man of understanding, ... namely Sherebiah."

20. David and the princes. There is no record in either Kings or Chronicles of David's increasing the number of Temple servants, though such an arrangement accords well with other arrangements he is known to have made. The original Nethinims were probably the Gibeonites (see on Joshua 9:21; Ezra 2:43).

Expressed by name. The narrator evidently considered it necessary to state that a list of names of these Nethinims had been forwarded by Iddo to Ezra, probably by way of credentials, but he does not consider it necessary to insert the list in this account.

21. *I proclaimed a fast.* Fasting was usually symbolic of repentance, and often accompanied a disaster that had occurred or was expected. In this case, however, it was held in connection with prayer for a safe journey. The great responsibility of bringing these thousands of people safely to Judea rested heavily on Ezra, as vs. 21 and 22 indicate. The urgent need of the expedition for divine protection on the way was especially real to the members of the caravan, because Ezra, who desired to convince the king of the power of the true God, either had not asked for an armed escort or had declined to accept one (v. 22). Nehemiah, however, had no scruples about traveling with an escort (Neh. 2:9), which was no unnecessary luxury on so dangerous a journey through long stretches of sparsely populated territory. Ezra was fully aware of the existing dangers that confronted a group of unarmed exiles and their great quantity of treasure. Knowing that they needed divine protection more than anything else, but knowing also that God's presence would be assured only if no sin stood between the people and their God, he ordered them to fast and "afflict" (humble) themselves, meaning that they should search their lives and remove every known sin before setting forward on their way to Judea.

Our little ones. This shows that in Ezra's time all the men were accompanied by their families, while in Zerubbabel's time most families had remained behind for a time (see on Ezra 2:64).

22. *The enemy in the way.* See on v. 21. Verse 31 implies that no imaginary foe is referred to here. It may be Ezra knew that the Samaritans were waiting to intercept the caravan, or that some of the Arab tribes, who owed no allegiance to Persia, had learned of the caravan and were planning to attack it from ambush and plunder it.

24. *Sherebiah, Hashabiah.* These men and their ten associates were Levites, but not priests as the English translation implies (vs. 18, 19). Preceding "Sherebiah" is the preposition *le*. This is not translated in the KJV. The LXX here reads "and." Thus translated, the meaning of the passage would be that Ezra appointed 12 chief priests, and in addition to them 12 Levites, namely, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their colleagues—a total of 24 men—to be responsible for the safe transmission of the treasures.

25. *Weighed unto them.* The silver and gold were in bars or ingots, not in coined money. The Persians used coined money at this time, but the treasury kept the bulk of its stores in bars (*Herodotus* iii. 96).

26. *Silver.* Any attempt to express the value of the gold, silver, and bronze here listed, in terms of modern values, would fail to account for their true value at that time in purchasing power. A rough estimate of the total value, as determined by the weight of the three metals, would perhaps be more than 3 million dollars. Even critical scholars recognize that this detailed list of treasures and the list of family heads returning with Ezra bear the stamp of genuineness. If the book of Ezra were merely fiction, the author would hardly have devoted so much space to tedious lists of the returning exiles or have itemized the treasures.

Although a considerable portion of this treasure may have come from the royal purse, much of it was donated by the wealthy Jews of Persia and Babylonia, and some by their Gentile friends (see ch. 7:15, 16). While the amount of treasure carried back to Judea seems large, it should not be forgotten that the wealth of Persia at this time was immense (see Dan. 11:2). According to Herodotus (iii. 94, 95) India paid an annual tribute of 360

talents of gold dust (13.5 tons; 12.3 metric tons), Babylonia 1,000 talents of silver (37.7 tons; 34.3 metric tons), and large amounts were paid by other satrapies of the empire. The total revenues of the empire are given by Herodotus as 14,560 Euboeic talents. In comparison with this vast sum, the treasure carried to Judea by Ezra does not appear excessive, as some commentators have suggested.

27. *Vessels of fine copper.* The translation is correct, but it is not known what kind of vessels is meant or what it was that made these copper vessels “precious as gold.” Some have thought they were highly polished and glittered like gold, others, that it was the highly valued orichalcum, an amalgam of brass.

28. *Ye are holy.* Consecrated to God by their office, the priests and Levites were the proper custodians of consecrated things.

29. *The chambers.* These rooms were on either side of the main building in the Temple court (see 1 Kings 6:5), partly as chambers for the priests, partly as storerooms (see Neh. 13:5).

31. *The twelfth day.* On the first day of the month the company of travelers began to assemble (ch. 7:9), but during the three days’ encampment at the appointed place of meeting (ch. 8:15) Ezra discovered that no priests or Levites had responded to his appeal. Thereupon he took the measures described in ch. 8:16–20, to induce certain Levites and Nethinims to accompany them. Upon the arrival of these men Ezra ordained a fast to supplicate divine protection for the journey, and committed the sacred treasures to the care of the priests and Levites. Eight more days elapsed while these preparations for departure were being made, and the start from the river Ahava did not actually take place till the 12th day.

Such as lay in wait. Ezra’s fears were justified, and the dangers were real, but faith in divine protection was rewarded. We are not told how deliverance from their enemies was accomplished, but God in His own way took care of those who were consecrated to Him and who placed their trust in Him. The hand of God led Ezra and his fellow travelers safely through all the perils of the way, and brought them without loss or damage to their destination.

32. *We came to Jerusalem.* As in the earlier story of the return under Zerubbabel nothing is reported about the route taken or the experiences of the long journey of four months (PK 617). On the probable route from Babylonia to Judea, see on ch. 2:68.

Abode there three days. After the tiresome journey a brief period of complete rest was necessary. Like Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11), Ezra was content with a rest of three days.

33. *Weighed.* On the fourth day Ezra discharged his commission to present to the Temple treasury the various gifts from Babylonia. In doing so he appeared in person before the priests and Levites, who were in charge of the Temple, and transferred to them the entire offering of gold, silver, and vessels listed in vs. 25–27.

Meremoth. He was one of the heads of the priestly order, under both Ezra and Nehemiah. He is mentioned as repairing two sections of the wall of Jerusalem when Nehemiah was governor (Neh. 3:4, 21), and as one of those who signed the covenant between God and Israel that was later concluded under the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah, in 444 B.C. (Neh. 10:5).

Eleazar. Being, like Meremoth, a priest, Eleazar is perhaps the individual of that name mentioned as taking part in the dedication of the wall in Nehemiah’s time (Neh. 12:42).

Jozabad. Jozabad and Noadiah were chief Levites. The former name occurs again in Ezra 10:23; Neh. 8:7; 11:16.

34. The weight was written. Not only were the ingots and vessels counted and weighed, but an inventory was made by the priests in charge of the Temple, and the weight of every vessel noted. Such was the care taken to prevent the embezzlement of Temple property by its custodians. It also relieved Ezra of further responsibility and protected him against possible later accusations. In Mesopotamia the smallest business transaction was documented, and Ezra was no doubt required to send back to the royal archives a signed receipt of delivery, as evidence that the provisions of the decree had been complied with.

35. Burnt offerings. Like their predecessors under Zerubbabel, who had made an offering for “all Israel” at the dedication of the Temple (ch. 6:17), the newly arrived exiles, also apparently representatives of all Israel, offered for the whole nation. The classes of animals offered are the same on both occasions. The number of he-goats is identical, but in every other case the number of animals is far less than upon the former occasion. This is consistent with the comparatively small number of those who returned under Ezra. In each category the number, except for the lambs, was divisible by 12. The number 77 is difficult to explain, unless emphasis was thereby given to the number 7, as some of the older commentators have suggested.

36. They delivered. The change in pronouns from the first to the third person plural is no evidence of difference in authorship (see on ch. 7:28). It is possible that this verse summarizes what Ezra had already done on his journey from the east to Jerusalem.

Lieutenants. Heb. *'achashdarpenim*, the equivalent of the Persian term translated “satrap” (see on Esther 3:12). The satrap of “Beyond the River” had his seat at either Aleppo or Damascus, and it seems more than probable that Ezra’s caravan had stopped at the residence of the satrap and presented to him the royal authorization for his mission. After his arrival at Jerusalem Ezra must also have informed the local governor of his commission and delivered to the revenue officers the financial decree of the king (ch. 7:21, 22). Ezra adds that he received the cooperation of all these officials. The Persians are seldom found in opposition to Jewish interests.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

15–36PK 612–619

15 PK 612

16 PK 614

17–22PK 615

21, 23 PK 616

21–23PK 619; 1T 282

24, 25, 28, 29 PK 616

31 PK 617

33–36PK 619

4

CHAPTER 9

⁴Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ezr 7:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

1 *Ezra mourneth for the affinity of the people with strangers. 5 He prayeth unto God with confession of sins.*

1. When these things were done. Some considerable time must have elapsed since Ezra's arrival at Jerusalem. He had reached the city on the first day of the 5th month (ch. 7:9), rested 3 days (ch. 8:32), and on the 4th day of the same month had transferred the treasure to the Temple authorities. It was not till the 17th day of the 9th month that the matter of the mixed marriages was taken in hand (ch. 10:8, 9). We cannot suppose that action was long delayed after the matter came to Ezra's attention.

The princes. It is remarkable that complaint on a matter of religious transgression came from the secular, not from the ecclesiastical, authorities of the city. The reason for this unusual situation is the fact that the religious dignitaries of the nation not only condoned the practice but were also guilty (v. 2). Since close relatives of Jeshua, the former high priest, had married foreign wives it is not strange to find that a movement for reform in this matter did not originate with the priests. When the religious leaders themselves were implicated it was understandable that the inferior orders should remain silent. By God's good providence, however, it often happens that when things have come to such a pass, and the ministers are corrupt, lay people are raised up to take the initiative to secure religious reform.

According to their abominations. The complaint does not claim that the Jews had already adopted the idolatrous practices of the pagans about them, but that they were associating with these heathen neighbors. The foreign wives of these backslidden Jews had undoubtedly introduced idolatrous rites into their homes.

The Canaanites. Mention of eight nations of antiquity with whom admixture had taken place does not necessarily mean that wives had actually been taken from each of the eight groups listed. It is possible that the Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Amorites no longer even existed as distinct ethnic groups. The princes had in mind the prohibitions of the Pentateuch such as that of Deut. 7:1–4, where these nations are enumerated, and drew Ezra's attention to the fact that these prohibitions had been violated.

2. The holy seed. Compare Isa. 6:13. However much the people of Israel polluted themselves by transgression, they were still His people, by prophetic announcement and by His grace, since the time of their rejection had not yet arrived. The Jews had been ordained "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6), "separated ... from all the people that are upon the face of the earth" (Ex. 33:16), a "peculiar people," that is, God's own (see on 1 Peter 2:9).

Chief in this trespass. The leaders were the chief offenders (ch. 10:18). A similar, or even more serious, defection of the leading classes took place in Nehemiah's time (Neh. 6:17, 18; 13:4, 28).

3. I rent my garment. Rending the clothes was a common Oriental mode of expressing grief (see Gen. 37:29, 34; 1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 1:2; 2 Kings 18:37; Job 1:20; 2:11, 12; Matt. 26:65). In Babylon, whence Ezra came, marriages with pagans had probably not yet become customary. Ezra was therefore shocked when he learned the extent to which this sin had made inroads among the returned exiles. He expressed his feelings in typical Oriental fashion, by first rending both his outer and his inner garments, then tearing his hair and beard, and finally by sitting down astonished, motionless and speechless, until the time of the evening sacrifice. Such a manifestation of horror and amazement was well calculated to impress those whose spiritual leader he had become.

Plucked off the hair. This practice is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, though it is found in the Apocrypha (Apocryphal Esther 14:2; etc.).

Astonied. Compare Dan. 4:19; 8:27, where the same word is used in the same sense.

4. Trembled. Not so much a reference to God-fearing persons as such (see Isa. 66:2), but to all who were alarmed at the transgression of the commands of God (Ezra 10:3) and the threats of the law against transgressors (Deut. 7:4).

The evening sacrifice. As morning is the time for business in the East, we may assume that the princes had visited Ezra early in the day, certainly before noon. The evening sacrifice was offered approximately at three o'clock in the afternoon (see Josephus *Antiquities* xiv. 4. 3; see also on Ex. 12:6).

5. I arose up. The time of sacrifice was also the appointed time for prayer, especially for a prayer in which a confession of sin was foremost or one of concern to the nation as a whole. Ezra probably felt that supplications for forgiveness would be most appropriate at the time when the sacrifice, which represented confession and forgiveness, was being offered.

Rent my garment. This second rending of his garments was not only a renewed indication of the depth of sorrow he felt, but also no doubt had the purpose of impressing the people who “were assembled” unto him (v. 4) with the seriousness of the situation, and to stir them up to repentance.

6. I am ashamed. Jeremiah had complained that in his days those who “committed abomination . . . were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush” (Jer. 6:15; 8:12). Ezra, possibly with these words in his thoughts, assures God in his prayer that he is deeply moved with shame for the sins of his people.

8. A nail. The nail, or peg, here mentioned has been taken by some commentators—Luther, Keil, and others—to be a nail in the wall (see Isa. 22:23, 25) on which utensils could be hung. The meaning would be that the people of God were sustained by this nail. Others have seen in it the tent peg, and thus symbolic of a sure abode.

9. The kings of Persia. While Ezra deplored the spiritual condition of the people, he is nevertheless grateful for the privileges granted by the Persian kings. Practically every monarch thus far had shown favor to the Jews. Cyrus had granted the first permit to return and build the Temple (Ezra 1), Cambyses had favored the Jews of Egypt, as we know from the Elephantine papyri, Darius I had renewed the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 6), Xerxes had granted unprecedented privileges to the Jews throughout the empire (Esther 8–10), and Artaxerxes I had now made new and far-reaching grants (Ezra 7). The only exception had been the false Smerdis, who actively hindered the Jews during the few months of his reign.

Set up the house. See on chs. 6:14; 7:27.

To give us a wall. It has already been pointed out in the Additional Note on ch. 7 that this statement does not necessarily mean that Ezra found a completed wall upon his arrival at Jerusalem. He refers to the several grants made by the Persian kings, particularly to permission to rebuild the wall. Ezra, who had been invested with authority to work on the wall, could therefore rightly say that God had extended mercy to them “in the sight of the kings of Persia, . . . to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.” Possibly, as some think, the “wall” is figurative and denotes protection (see Zech. 2:5).

11. The land. The quotation from “the prophets” does not appear elsewhere in the OT, and must therefore either be from a noncanonical, but inspired, writer, or a free

quotation giving the consensus of prophetic teaching on the subject. The first part of the quotation refers to the Mosaic age (see Deut. 7:1–3). The author of the book of Kings makes similar references to “the prophets” (2 Kings 17:23; 21:10; 24:2). The purpose of such references is to represent the truth in question as one frequently mentioned (see on Matt. 2:23).

It is true that elsewhere in Scripture (except for Deut. 7:1–3) there is no specific prohibition of marriages with Canaanites as such, though in the remarks made in Judges 3:6 (in the Hebrew Bible Judges is counted among the “Former Prophets,” see Vol. I, p. 37) such marriages are reproved as occasioning the seduction of Israelites to idolatry. Also, in the prophetic descriptions of the whoredoms of Israel with the various local Baals, and in the general condemnations of apostasy, the transgression of this prohibition is implicitly included. This certainly justifies the general statement that God had forbidden the Israelites to contract such marriages. It is therefore evident that these words of Ezra do not support the argument of critical scholars that Deuteronomy had a number of “prophet” authors.

Filthiness. Not literal, of the body, but figurative, of the moral and religious filthiness of the nations of Canaan. On the Canaanite religion see Vol. II, pp. 38–41.

12. Give not your daughters. This prohibition is worded after Deut. 7:3. The addition, “nor seek their peace,” etc., is taken almost verbally from Deut. 23:6, in reference to the Ammonites and Moabites. “That ye may be strong” recalls Deut. 11:8, and the promise, “eat the good of the land,” suggests Isa. 1:19. The words “and leave it for an inheritance” embody the idea found in several Biblical passages (Deut. 11:9; Prov. 10:27; Eze. 37:25).

14. Break thy commandments. Ezra views the sin in which he found his people to have fallen as having “grown up unto the heavens” (v. 6). Their sin was tantamount to a complete forsaking of God’s commandments, and in this condition they “cannot stand” before God (v. 15). Ezra’s public confession on behalf of his people (see Dan. 9:5–16) is based partly on the nature of the sin itself, and partly on the fact that they had revealed base ingratitude in turning from God so soon after He had forgiven their sins that sent them into captivity and had showered favor after favor upon them as they returned to Palestine. To fall again into the same transgression was, in Ezra’s estimation, unpardonable, and the punishment must certainly be nothing less than irretrievable destruction of the nation.

15. Thou art righteous. On behalf of his people, Ezra acknowledges the holiness of God in requiring them to comply with the provisions of His law. In contrast to His righteousness, their sinfulness stands forth in all its heinousness.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–15PK 619–621

1 1T 279

1, 2 PK 619

3–6PK 620

5 GW 178; PK 48

7–15PK 621

13–151T 279

CHAPTER 10

1 *Shechaniah encourageth Ezra to reform the strange marriages.* 6 *Ezra mourning assembleth the people.* 9 *The people, at the exhortation of Ezra, repent, and promise*

amendment. 15 The care to perform it. 18 The names of them which had married strange wives.

1. When Ezra. For the remainder of the narrative Ezra retires to the background, and speaks of himself in the third person. On the change of persons in pronouns, see on ch. 7:28.

A very great congregation. Many people had come to the Temple to attend the daily evening sacrifice. Seeing Ezra, the recently appointed leader, in the greatest imaginable distress, confessing the sins of the people, these men and women were naturally deeply affected. Ezra's sincerity made such a strong impression on them that they all wept. At first Ezra had knelt in prayer with his hands uplifted (ch. 9:5), but soon, sensing more and more the heinousness of the people's transgression, he threw himself upon the ground in an attitude of extreme humiliation. Emotional acts such as this could not fail to impress an Oriental congregation in the strongest way possible.

2. Shechaniah. Probably an influential man, for he appears here as spokesman for the people. Although his name does not appear among those who had foreign wives, and he must therefore be considered as having been free from this sin, he was deeply distressed by the fact that his father belonged to the transgressors, for it seems probable that his father, Jehiel, is the same person mentioned in v. 26 as among those who had married idolatrous wives. Both are of the family of Elam. Shechaniah may have long felt the evil influence of his father's foreign (second) wife, and hence could honestly agree with all the words of Ezra. He seems to have been glad that the problem had come to Ezra's attention, who was as much concerned about the situation as he had been.

There is hope. The penitence of the people, evidenced by their sore weeping, gave hope that they might be led to amend their ways and return to God.

3. To put away all the wives. Shechaniah came forward with concrete suggestions, which implies that this situation must have weighed heavily on his heart for some time. Ezra had not yet given advice in the matter. Shechaniah apparently considered marriages contracted contrary to the law not merely wrongful but actually invalid. The law of Moses permitted divorce for various reasons (see Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 19:3).

Such as are born of them. Young children especially require a mother's care, and it would have been extremely cruel to suggest a separation. Furthermore, hereditary tendencies were likely to perpetuate the spirit of apostasy. Older children might be already tainted with idolatry. It seemed best, at least to Shechaniah, to dismiss the children with the mothers.

According to the law. This suggestion may mean either: (1) let the law, which forbids these marriages, in this way be satisfied, or (2) let divorce take place as prescribed by the law (see Deut. 24:1).

4. This matter belongeth unto thee. Or, "it is your task" (RSV). Since Ezra's commission included the responsibility of executing judgment on those who would not obey the law of God (ch. 7:26), Ezra was morally obligated to take action. Shechaniah's assurance, "we are with you" (RSV), must have greatly encouraged Ezra, who realized that any action he might take in this matter would make him most unpopular with a considerable number of guilty men.

5. Then arose Ezra. Without hesitation he acted at once, binding the religious leaders by an oath to carry out the suggestion of Shechaniah, with which Ezra was in complete

agreement. To confirm such an important decision with an oath was in harmony with OT usage (see Joshua 2:12; Deut. 6:13; etc.).

6. *The chamber of Johanan.* As to the Temple chambers, see on ch. 8:29. On Johanan, see Additional Note on ch. 7. This Johanan seems to have been the grandson of Eliashib (Neh. 12:22, 23), high priest in Nehemiah's time (Neh. 13:4, 5). The Elephantine papyri attest that Johanan was high priest in 410 B.C. he already had a "chamber" in the Temple, and must therefore have been more than 20 years old at the time (see on Ezra 3:8). The objection of some commentators to identifying Johanan of this text with the one mentioned by Nehemiah and in the Elephantine papyri is not well founded.

He did eat no bread. Strict fasts of this kind were twice observed by Moses (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:18), and similarly by the inhabitants of Nineveh (Jonah 3:7), but they were not common. It was usually considered sufficient to abstain from eating (1 Sam. 1:7; 2 Sam. 3:35). Sometimes the person who fasted merely abstained from "pleasant bread," "flesh," and "wine" (Dan. 10:3). Ezra's great earnestness appears in the severity of his fast. Ezra's mourning in the office of Johanan, following the response of the people, clearly reveals that his previous emotional acts were the spontaneous expression of genuine horror, and not a well-planned theatrical performance, as some commentators have suggested.

7. *All the children of the captivity.* A favorite expression with Ezra (see chs. 2:1; 4:1; 6:16, 19; 8:35; etc.), including all, from both Judah and Israel, who had returned from the captivity.

8. *Within three days.* The limits of Judea at this time appear to have been Bethel in the north, Beth-Pelet and Beer-sheba in the south, Jericho in the east, and Ono in the west. As the frontier was nowhere much more than 50 mi. (80 km.) from Jerusalem, three days from the day that they heard the proclamation would allow sufficient time for all able-bodied men to reach the capital.

Forfeited. Literally, "devoted." This forfeiture of property does not mean its destruction, as prescribed in Deut. 13:13–17 in the case of a city fallen into idolatry, but its appropriation to the sacred use of the Temple (see Lev. 27:28; see on Joshua 6:17).

9. *The twentieth day.* In 457 B.C., Kislev 20 was probably Dec. 7 (see p. 108).

Street. Literally, "wide space." This was probably the outer court of the large Temple compound. Great numbers of people could easily be accommodated there. The present *Haram esh-Sherîf* in Jerusalem, which corresponds roughly to the ancient Temple site, with all its auxiliary buildings, covers approximately 170,000 sq. yds. (142,137 sq. m.), and in its spacious, open courts many thousands of people can be accommodated. The situation with the Temple was probably similar.

Trembling. The seriousness of the reason for which the people had been summoned must have been evident to all from the heavy penalties with which they were threatened in case they failed to attend.

The great rain. The ninth month, beginning in our November or December, brings heavy rains to Palestine. The winter rains start toward the end of October or the beginning of November, with light showers, but by early December heavy rain is falling. The incidental mention of "the great rain" is one of those seemingly unimportant touches that mark the writer as an eyewitness and the story as authentic.

10. *Ezra the priest stood up.* Thus far Ezra seemed to let the civil authorities take the leading part in the matter. Now he came forward boldly, denouncing the sin committed, and, as supreme leader, commanded the repudiation of the strange wives.

13. *We are many that have transgressed.* The marginal rendering of the KJV, followed also in the RSV, “we have greatly offended,” is a more exact rendering of the original text. Without doubt, however, the greatness of the offense consisted partly in the large number who had transgressed.

14. *Let now our rulers.* Since there were so many cases that would have to be investigated and settled, the suggestion was made that the administrative officers and judicial authorities should be authorized to deal with this matter, and that all those who had transgressed would be required to appear before them.

Until the fierce wrath. This clause and the remainder of the verse is grammatically somewhat obscure, but the rendering of the KJV and the RSV is probably correct.

15. *Employed about this matter.* Literally, “stood up against this matter,” meaning that they opposed it. The same words are used in this same sense in 1 Chron. 21:1; Dan. 8:25; 11:14.

The reason for the opposition of Jonathan, Jahaziah, and their supporters, is not stated. None of the four men is mentioned in the list of the transgressors, and no one could accuse them of seeking to protect themselves. The Levite Meshullam of v. 15 cannot be identified with the Meshullam of v. 29, who did not belong to the Levites, because the Levitic transgressors are mentioned in vs. 23, 24. These four men were either strongheaded fanatics, who opposed any delay and wanted the matter settled then and there, or they had been bribed to act on behalf of some transgressors who did not dare to voice their opposition publicly. Whatever their reasons, these men did not succeed. The narrative makes clear that the measures Ezra proposed were carried out.

16. *Ezra ... were separated.* The KJV faithfully renders the Hebrew text, which gives no indication as to who made the selection. Some commentators and translators alter the text so as to make it read that the commission was appointed by Ezra.

Sat down. The sittings of the commission appointed to decide individual cases began their work on Tebet 1, which was Dec. 18, 457 B.C., ten days after the mass meeting in Jerusalem had decided to refer the matter of the heathen wives to a panel of appointed leaders.

17. *Made an end.* The work of the commission closed the first day of the first month, Nisan 1 of 456 B.C., which was April 15. Thus the sessions of the special court continued almost four months, because in the spring of 456 B.C. a second Adar was probably inserted before Nisan (see p. 108; also Vol. II, pp. 103, 116).

18. *The sons of the priests.* Aware of the danger that the nation might relapse into the sin he was seeking to root out, Ezra punished the wrongdoers by placing their names on record, that others might take warning. First place in his catalogue of offenders he assigns to the priests, for their responsibility was greatest. As the special custodians of the law, they were obligated to adhere most strictly to its precepts. Next to the priests he lists the Levites, on the same principle. He then concludes with the laymen, arranged under their several families. The list of laymen suggests that only 9 of the 33 families mentioned in Zerubbabel's list were involved. There is one additional family that does not appear in Zerubbabel's list. Three of the four priestly families, on the other hand, and even near relatives of the high priest, were among the guilty.

The sons of Jeshua. First among the priests stand four names of sons and other relatives of the high priest Jeshua, who had returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. As in many other places in the Bible, “son” here stands for “grandson,” or even “greatgrandson” (see on ch. 7:1).

19. Gave their hands. Or, “pledged themselves” (RSV). The procedures followed with regard to the divorce of Jeshua’s relatives from their foreign wives are described here. First, they bound themselves by shaking hands—probably with the members of the commission—to put away their wives and to separate them from the congregation of Israel. Then they offered a ram as a trespass offering, according to the law (Lev. 5:14–16; cf. on Lev. 4:2). Throughout the remainder of the list only the names of the individuals and the families to which they belonged are given, without a repetition of the divorce procedure. It is evident from the context, however, that they were required to follow the same procedure.

20. The sons of Immer. On the priestly families, see ch. 2:36–39. Including those of the high-priestly family (v. 18), altogether 17 priests are mentioned as guilty. A comparison of these names with those given in ch. 2 reveals the fact that not one of the legitimate orders of priests who returned with Zerubbabel was free from guilt in this matter. Some of the names given in vs. 20–22 reappear in the lists of Neh. 8:4 and Neh. 10:2–9, and may indicate the same individuals.

23. The Levites. Of the Levites, only six names are given, and that without stating the houses to which they belonged. Kelaiah, better known as Kelita, appears under this latter name in Neh. 8:7 and Neh. 10:10. Jozabad appears again in Neh. 8:7.

24. The singers. The names of one singer and three porters are given.

25. Of Israel. That is, of the laity, of which 86 names in all are listed. Of the ten families represented, nine are mentioned in the list of Zerubbabel. Since two families of Bani are given (vs. 29 and 34), and but one in Zerubbabel’s list, the second family of the two must have returned at a later time.

26. Jehiel. Probably the father of the Shechaniah who counseled Ezra (see vs. 24).

44. All these. In Hebrew the entire verse is somewhat obscure. The most literal rendering would be the following, in which only two small grammatical adjustments are made in the Hebrew text: “All these had taken strange women, and there were some among the women who had given birth to sons.” Most modern scholars would alter the text and read the latter part of the verse thus: “and they sent away from them the women and their sons.” Whatever the original meaning, it seems clear that the author intended to convey the idea that it was more difficult to arrange a divorce where there were children than where there were not. All cases were dealt with in the same way.

The list given in vs. 18–43 shows that 113 men were guilty of marrying heathen wives. It would be interesting to know the size of the population of Judea in Ezra’s time, in order to secure a right picture of the extent of this evil in Judea. Since such figures are not available, a comparison can be made only with the people who had come to Judea with Zerubbabel about 80 years earlier.

<i>Number of men returning with Zerubbabel</i>	<i>Number of men with strange wives</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
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Priests	4,289	17	0.4
Levites	74	6	8.1
Singers	128	1	0.8
Porters	139	3	2.2
Laity	24,144	86	0.4
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total	28,774	113	0.3

Since so few Levites had returned in Zerubbabel's time, the percentage of transgressors in this group seems high in comparison with the other groups listed. It is apparent that in all groups an average of at least 3 men in every 1,000 had married foreign women. The small percentage may explain, in part, why Ezra experienced little or no opposition to the reform measures he proposed to carry out.

Although the number of transgressors was relatively small, the tendency was dangerous, and Ezra, like other serious-minded leaders, was determined to keep the nation free from pagan influence. Parallels to Ezra's reform occurred among other ancient nations, though usually with the purpose of keeping the race pure. In Rome patricians were prohibited from marrying plebeians before 445 B.C. (some say 437). In 451/50 B.C. Pericles enforced a law in Athens, according to which only those whose parents were full-blooded Athenians could remain Athenian citizens. Almost 5,000 persons were sold into slavery because they were so unfortunate as not to be of pure Athenian stock.

Ezra knew that the great disaster of 586 B.C., when Jerusalem was destroyed and the nation ceased to exist, had resulted from idolatry. A recurrence of those conditions must now be avoided by all means. The evil, still of small proportions when he reached Jerusalem, would, if unchecked, be out of hand in a short time. Therefore it had to be eradicated irrespective of individual hardships. The situation was especially dangerous because of the fact that leaders and members of the high-priestly family were among the transgressors. The measures of Ezra now, and of Nehemiah later, were instrumental in leading the Jews to look with abhorrence on mixed marriages, an attitude that has kept the Jewish nation comparatively free of intermarriage to the present day. In contrast, the ancient nations surrounding Judea have been lost through racial admixture and migration.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

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⁵Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ezr 9:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

⁶Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ezr 2:35). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.