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The Life and Work of Ezra

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THE LIFE AND WORK OF EZRA

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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**TO MY MOTHER
AND FATHER**

CHAPTER I

JUDEA IN POST-EXILIC TIMES

Ezra was one of the great men of Jewish history. It has been said, and rightly so, that with Ezra, one stands at the cradle of Judaism. In Jewish tradition he figures as a second Moses. He wielded a tremendous influence upon the Jewish nation, the effects of which are felt to this very day. He set an indelible mark upon succeeding ages. He was largely responsible for the course Judaism took after the exilic period. Through his untiring efforts the law which was originally given by Moses, but which since that time had been neglected, was restored to the Jewish nation with renewed vigor. Ezra marks the springtime in the national history of Judaism. His hand gave a new and lasting shape to the least plastic of all materials that any reformer ever had to work upon, the character of the Jewish people.¹

For the source of our information concerning the life and work of Ezra we are dependent first of all upon the Biblical books of this period, namely, the Book of Ezra and the Book of Nehemiah, his contemporary. However, the information in these two Biblical books is meagre. Ezra is revealed to us in such brief and hurried flashes that it is difficult to form a distinct conception of his personality and of his work. It is true that in his own Book and in the few chapters of the Book of Nehemiah which treat of him and his work, he appears before us as a man of sincere piety, of unselfish patriotism, and of unbending firmness of will; but little is

¹James Hastings, The Greater Men and Women of the Bible (New York: Scribner's and Sons, 1915), IV, 21.

said of the actual outcome of his reforming energy, and this little does not seem remarkable even where he succeeded.

If, therefore, we were dependent entirely on the Canonical Books for our information concerning Ezra, we would have a most inadequate conception of what Ezra the man was like, and of what he did for the people of his race. These bits of information, these biographic and autobiographic fragments which, unfortunately, are all that the Biblical chroniclers saw fit to preserve, must be supplemented by the verdict pronounced by posterity upon the man and his labours. Even though these few references to Ezra in Scripture give a certain insight into his methods and motives, they also leave much untold. Therefore, we must rely to a great extent upon another source, namely Jewish tradition and Jewish opinion which supplement the Biblical record and which are unanimous in ascribing to Ezra the development of Judaism as it appears in the post exilic period.

Ezra came upon the scene at a very crucial point in the history of the Jewish nation. The total ruin of the nation seemed imminent. The Children of Israel were fighting for their very existence and survival. Their future seemed as uncertain as it had seemed many centuries before when they slaved under the cruel yoke of Pharaoh in Egypt.

The time in which Ezra lived and laboured followed that period which is known in Jewish history as the Babylonian Captivity. Because of her apostasy and rebellious attitude, God gave Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian Empire, even as the Northern Kingdom, the Ten Tribes were carried off into exile by the Assyrians many years before. Even Jerusalem, the Judean capital, was completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B. C. This is the 70-year period in Jewish history known as the

"Captivity" or "Exile" and which lasted until the year 536 B. C. when Cyrus, the Persian king, overthrew the Babylonian Empire and granted the Jews permission to return to their homeland.

The leader of the first band of exiles who availed themselves of the king's decree was a descendant of David named Sheshbazaar, 'prince of Judah', known also as Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel. According to Ezra 2:64, 65, the total number of those who returned on this first expedition was 42,360 together with 7,337 servants. This group probably included representatives of the different tribes which had been carried away by the Assyrians, so that in a real sense, the return might be described as a national movement. Under the direction of twelve leaders, headed by Zerubbabel and the priest Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, the journey of approximately 1,000 miles around the desert was safely accomplished in about five months and the restored exiles found themselves established once again in their homeland.²

The territory which these returned Jews occupied was very small. They did not inhabit all of Palestine, not even all of Judah. The area in which they settled and over which Zerubbabel ruled as governor consisted of about 20 miles square in and about Jerusalem.

The lot of this settlement was not very fortunate. Both external and internal difficulties had to be grappled with. Palestine, and especially Jerusalem, had not been entirely depopulated. Those who had been left behind had intermarried with the heathen who had settled there during the years of the Captivity. The returning Jews, looking upon themselves as the only true Children of Israel and descendants of Abraham, were hesitant in

² R. L. Ottley, A Short History of the Hebrews (Boston: The Macmillan Company, 1923), p. 229 f.

dealing with their former countrymen who had associations with the heathen element. The Jews who had remained behind were also in danger of being ejected from their possessions which they occupied in order to allow the old owners, returning from Babylon, to regain them. The prophet Haggai who was active in this period also reveals to us that the general stress of the times was increased still more by droughts and famines.³

Even though Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the other Jewish leaders were confronted by these many difficulties, they immediately set to work to rebuild the Temple of the Lord. To the accompaniment of song and instruments, the foundation of the Temple was laid. When the Samaritans who occupied the territory to the north of Judah heard that the Jews were actively engaged in the rebuilding of the Temple, they requested permission to assist in this endeavour. However, the Samaritan help was refused and from that day forward, as was inevitable, there began a division in the Jewish Church; the old were cut off from the new, and the Samaritans, feeling themselves not wanted, broke off all dealings with the Jews. Due to these disturbances, the rebuilding of the Temple was temporarily halted.

The Temple was finally completed in the year 516 B. C. after Tatnai, a Persian governor, visited Jerusalem and learned that the enemies of the Jews who had returned from the Captivity had hindered them in the rebuilding of the Temple. A search was made and the decree of King Cyrus was found in which royal permission was granted to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. After labouring for seven years, the Temple was brought to completion in 516 B. C.⁴

³A. W. F. Blunt, Israel Before Christ (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 105 f.

⁴A. M. Rehwinkel, New Testament World (St. Louis: Concordia Mimeo Co.), II, 96.

Active in this period were Haggai and Zechariah, two of the last prophets of the Old Testament period. These two men were also instrumental in the building of the Temple. When they saw that their countrymen were becoming indifferent in religious matters, they lifted the drooping spirits of the Jews by reminding them that their crop failures and other hard times were due to a large extent to their religious indifference. Encouraged by these prophets, the Jews set themselves to work once again.⁵

The events discussed to this point are related in the first six chapters of the Book of Ezra. Although the seventh chapter of Ezra's work begins with no other indication of time than the vague phrase "Now after these things", nearly sixty years elapsed between the events recorded in the sixth chapter and the mission of Ezra related in chapter seven. We have little knowledge of the history of this long period. The last event of major importance is the dedication of the Temple upon its completion in 516 B. C. Following this there appears to be a period of bitter disappointment for the Jews who resided in the Judean State.

Certain portions of the Book of Malachi belong to this period between Zerubbabel and Ezra. This prophet suggests that conditions grew steadily worse. Zerubbabel seems to have died and the Jews had no native governor to intercede for them. Even though the Temple was rebuilt, still the community did not flourish. Religious zeal and interest in the Temple worship decreased perceptibly; foreign religious practices gained favour. The burdens of these Jews were heavy ones. Crop failures, grasshopper plagues and heavy indebtedness made living conditions unfavourable and in many instances unbearable. Many Jews married heathen women. The unsatisfactory

⁵Ibid., p. 97.

relations with their neighboring nations, especially the Samaritans, continued. In general, all that we know is that up until the year 460 B. C. the conditions grew steadily worse; disintegration set in, which suggests that the return of the captives from Babylon and the attempt to refound a Jewish community seems to have been to the Jews a great mistake, and that every trace of it would soon be blotted out.⁶

It was at this critical point in the history of the Jewish nation that Ezra appeared on the scene as the man of hour. Arriving in Jerusalem from Babylon in the year 458 B. C., Ezra, a man who has been compared with Calvin, came resolved to exclude utterly from the church the "Sons of the Land" and to reintroduce and enforce the Law of God upon the Jewish people.⁷

⁶Rudolph Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 411.

⁷E. E. Kellett, A Short History of the Jews (New York: The Dial Press, 1929), p. 216.

CHAPTER II

BIRTH AND EDUCATION OF EZRA

Ezra was of the tribe of Levi, and of the priestly branch of it, which was directly descended from Aaron. He came of the line of High Priests, but not of that branch which had enjoyed the High Priesthood since the return from the Captivity. The last high priestly ancestor whom he could boast was Seraiah who held office during the time of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:18). In the first verse of the seventh chapter of his own work Ezra refers to himself as being "the son of Seraiah". However, this ancestor of his met his end when he was ordered put to death by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah after he had been taken captive by this Babylonian ruler. This incident occurred many years before Ezra's time. Approximately 130 years elapsed between the death of Seraiah and Ezra's departure to Jerusalem. It is probable, therefore, that Ezra was a grandson or still more remote descendant of the Seraiah mentioned in Ezra 7:1.¹

No statement has come down to us with reference to the exact year of Ezra's birth. We may gather, however, from the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus in Ezra 7 that in 458 B. C. - that monarch's seventh year - Ezra was at least forty years of age. It is generally believed that a scribe was able to enter upon his office only after he had attained thirty years of age. Ezra must have been a Scribe for a considerable number of years before he could have gained so great a reputation which convinced Artaxerxes that

¹George Rawlinson, Ezra and Nehemiah: Their Lives and Times (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1923), p. 2.

he was capable of leading such an important delegation back to Jerusalem. If we are correct in our assumption, then Ezra must have been born during the reign of Darius Hystapes the great Persian ruler who reigned from 521 to 485 B. C. and during whose reign the second Temple was built. It may be safely said, then, that Ezra was born approximately in the year 500 B. C.²

Ezra held a dignified position among the exiles as he grew to manhood among them. There is reason to believe that the priestly houses were held in high respect among the Jewish exiles. The members of these priestly families who chose to remain behind when Cyrus granted permission for the Return continued to form the directing and governing element among the Jews living in Babylonia, Media and Persia. Since Ezra's position would be higher than most, for no other priest could boast of so illustrious an ancestry as could Ezra, this future scribe certainly had a great many opportunities to cultivate his mind and to lay up stores of knowledge for his work. Ezra certainly had access to the various forms of culture, to the "schools" of that day, and to any of the literature, whether foreign or native.³

The circumstances of the times were in Ezra's favour. From history we know that the Babylonians had, from an ancient date, the learning that covered a very wide field. Such subjects as arithmetic, astronomy, history, chronology, geography, comparative philology and grammar were accessible to the people of Ezra's day. We can be sure that Ezra took advantage of these various opportunities and applied himself diligently to these studies so that he might broaden his knowledge in these various fields. His chief

²Ibid., p. 13.

³Ibid., p. 2.

interest, however, would lie in quite a different direction. His heart was wholly set on the moral and religious improvement of his countrymen. Even though Ezra was not a member of "the goodly fellowship of the prophets", still he had all the religious fervour of a prophet and he too possessed much of the disregard of mere profane and secular learning which characterized the prophets generally. Since his heart was set on becoming a "ready scribe in the Law of the Lord" the bulk of the Babylonian learning would possess little attraction for him as he prepared himself for his future work.⁴

Ezra had access to a literary culture that was far from contemptible which the Hebrews had inherited from their forefathers and had brought with them from Palestine to Babylonia. Among their cherished possessions were the sacred writings which they regarded as possessing the highest value. "Schools" had early been formed, which students attended under the direction of a master and in which writing, composition, religious doctrine and music were taught. The chief study no doubt was the Law and its interpretation, but subsidiary subjects of instruction entered also into the curriculum; among these were included musical science, sacred poetry, exegesis and textual study. In the course of time the number of these books increased, as did also the number of sacred books, not considered as sacred, but nevertheless regarded to be of the highest value. By the time of the Exile and the days of Ezra there existed almost all of the canonical books: the historical works of the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, the Hagiographa which included the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentation, Ecclesiastes, Esther and Daniel. Also completed were the major

⁴Ibid., p. 2 ff.

and minor prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. Only a few additional books were still to be added to the Old Testament Canon at Ezra's time; these were the works of Ezra, Nehemiah his contemporary, and Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets.⁵

Besides the canonical books Ezra also had access to a great many books which since then have been wholly lost, and which are mentioned by the author of Chronicles. Among them were such works as: the Chronicles of King David; the Acts of Samuel the Seer; the Acts of Nathan the Prophet; the Acts of Gad the Seer; the Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilomite; the Vision of Iddo the Seer; the Acts of Shemdiah the Prophet; the Commentary of the Book of the Kings; Isaiah's Acts of Uzziah; the Thousand Sayings of Solomon and his works on natural history and many others. Thus Ezra and the other exiles were in possession of a copious literature, varied in its character and of high educational value to those who studied it. Ezra certainly took advantage of these opportunities by diligently applying himself to the study of this literary culture which the exiles had brought with themselves to Babylon.⁶

We may be safe in assuming that Ezra devoted himself especially to the pursuit and cultivation of that science and literature which had been handed down in the Judean schools, and which since the exile had no doubt derived considerable advantage and improvement from contact with the "Chaldean learning" and with the famous "scientific caste" which had one of its chief seats at Babylon, and another at Borsippa in the immediate

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁶A. M. Rehwinkel, New Testament World (St. Louis: Concordia Mineo Co.), II, 103.

neighborhood. His main study would be a study of the sacred books, and especially of the Torah, or "Law of Moses", the most sacred of all the Old Testament documents and for which Ezra had a deep regard. Since this would involve much linguistic and textual research, for the old Hebrew was no longer intelligible to the exiles whose language had come to be the Aramaic, or the so-called "Chaldee", Ezra would have to make himself thoroughly acquainted with two forms of speech, so that he might be able to translate the one into the other without hesitation. He would have to decide between various readings in the different copies of the law which were in the hands of the exiles. It was either from the first, or it soon came to be, his object to make himself as perfect "a scribe of the Law of God" as possible; and this would involve not only acquaintance with the letter, but familiarity with the spirit of Scripture, the power of expounding aright all the many passages of the law where the meaning was obscure or ambiguous, and so making the hearer to understand it. Essential elements in his education would thus be: (1) knowledge of two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic; (2) facility in speaking and writing them; (3) deep acquaintance with the full spiritual meaning of the Law, so as to correctly expound it; (4) a thorough acquaintance with the extant texts.⁷

But this was not all that was needed. To be a successful teacher of a nation, which was what Ezra set himself and "prepared his heart" to be, it was necessary to know them; and to know them it was necessary to study their history. If Ezra was, as many critics insist, the author of Chronicles, he must have made a very thorough study of the history of his nation from its earliest beginning. We cannot doubt that Ezra, in the course of his

⁷George Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 6 f.

early training at Babylon, devoted a large share of his attention to the current historical literature which we have already mentioned. This literature had been brought by some of the wealthier and better-educated of the exiles from Palestine to Babylonia, and had been treasured by them as among the most valuable of their possessions. It is deeply to be regretted that so little has come down to us with respect to the Judean schools in the period of the Exile, the division of the subjects of study, the methods of teaching, or the order in which the subjects were taken. But there is no doubt that Ezra applied himself diligently to his studies in his early years when the acquisition of knowledge was the main duty of the day and so reached the perfection to which he ultimately attained in later life.⁸

As a general rule the scribe was able to enter upon his office only after he had attained thirty years of age. His studies began, probably, at thirteen; this being the case, he would be actively engaged in his studies for a period of seventeen years. Ezra therefore had ample time to prepare himself for his profession; he was well equipped when the time came for entering upon the active office of the Scribe.⁹

Darius ruled the Persian Empire during the early years of Ezra's life. However, upon this monarch's death in the year 486 B. C., Xerxes mounted the Persian throne. It was under this most fickle and capricious of all Oriental rulers, the worst of all the Archaemonian kings, that Ezra grew to manhood. Ezra was probably twenty-four or twenty-five years of age when the news came to Babylon from Susa that, to gratify a favourite, the fantastic Xerxes had issued a decree for the extermination of the whole Jewish

⁸ Ibid., p. 7 f.

⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

nation, the account of which we have in the Book of Esther. Thus Ezra, by the time he was twenty-five years old, had probably passed through some severe trials and had some remarkable experiences. He was not a mere recluse student. The circumstances of his life had made him acquainted with danger, trouble, doubt, suspense, conflict and triumph. When he was formally inducted into the scribe's office at the age of thirty he was no neophyte, trembling, nervous, and diffident, but a man of ripened judgment and tried powers, well prepared to fill an important position and to exercise a powerful influence over the fortunes of his countrymen. During Xerxes' reign he cannot have been a very loyal subject. No doubt he long remembered the danger to which his nation had been exposed by the weakness and folly of this king. While Xerxes ruled, the Jews probably felt insecure, hoping that they would not be exposed again to the same danger, the fear of being exterminated. In 465 B. C. Xerxes died, murdered by the captain of his guards. At this time, Ezra must have been between thirty and thirty-five years of age.¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid., p. 15 ff.

CHAPTER III

EZRA'S RELATIONS WITH ARTAXERXES, HIS COMMISSION

AND JOURNEY

After the death of Xerxes, the Persian crown passed to the youngest of his sons, Artaxerxes, also called Longimanus. In the seventh year of his reign he issued a decree similar to the decree issued by Cyrus eighty years before in which permission was granted to any and all Jews to return to their homeland. This was the Second Return made under Ezra the Scribe in the year 458 B. C.¹

The question naturally arises at this time, How came the king to issue such a decree? No definite reason or explanation of the king's actions can be found in the historical records of that time. And yet when we examine the prevailing conditions in the Judean community during this period, we can readily see that both Ezra and Artaxerxes considered a re-colonization of Jerusalem and its surrounding territory to be of the greatest importance.

During these sixty years in which little has been handed down to us with respect to the state of affairs in the Judean State, the Jews in Babylonia were in constant touch with their countrymen in Judea. Regular reports of the conditions in Jerusalem reached Ezra and the other Jewish leaders in Babylon. Ezra was informed that the many difficulties which had confronted the Jews had chilled their religious impulse upon which they had made their return, and that their experience was one of bitter disappointment. He

¹George Rawlinson, Ezra and Nehemiah: Their Lives and Times (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1923), p. 18.

heard of the widespread unfaithfulness to the religious ideals which the prophetic teachers had set up before them. He was disheartened when he heard that the worship of God was being performed in a slovenly manner and that even the priests were acting in such a manner so as to degrade their office.²

This Scribe no doubt looked with great concern upon the growing neglect of the Jews in their homeland and their decline of national pride before the eyes of the other nations. His dearest wish was that these conditions be changed. The respect which many nations showed them rested to a great extent upon the esteem in which other nations held the God of heaven whom they proudly served. Since political means had failed in the re-establishment of the Judean community, religious ones would now have to be attempted. The gifts of money which had been sent regularly to help in the re-establishment of the community had proven useless. Ezra knew that the older prophets would have insisted at this point on an inner change, a conversion of heart, on a circumcision not of the flesh but of the spirit. The congregation at Jerusalem had to be given definite standards for life and ritual. Ezra knew that only the Law of God could now point the way. The same Law that had succeeded in keeping their nation strong and united in times past was now needed to strengthen that part of the nation that was slowly disintegrating in far off Jerusalem. These thoughts may have moved Ezra to seek permission of the king to lead a band of exiles to Judea that he might avert the terrible fate that awaited the congregation in Jerusalem.³

²A. W. F. Blunt, Israel Before Christ (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 107.

³Rudolph Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 417 f.

On the other hand, it may well be that Artaxerxes himself was directly responsible for this Second Return. In the fifth year of his reign an insurrection broke out in Egypt and this rebellion threatened the Persian Empire with the gravest danger. It may be that in connection with this insurrection, which was not suppressed till six years later, that special consideration was given by Artaxerxes to Palestine which lay on the Egyptian border. This monarch fully realized that the Jews were among his most loyal subjects and so he resolved to attach them as closely as possible to his own interests by favours which should recall the old kindness of Cyrus. He knew the colonists who went with Zerubbabel were too few and feeble to occupy the entire territory which had once solely belonged to the Jewish nation. Jerusalem still was only sparsely populated. Under these circumstances Artaxerxes determined on a re-colonization. Renewing the permission granted by Cyrus eighty years before he decreed that "all they of the people of Israel in all his realm, and of their priests and Levites, which were minded to go up to Jerusalem", should be at liberty to do so (Ezra 7:13). He may have hoped for a greater response than actually followed. But his one interest was to keep Palestine closely connected to his own crown so that this Jewish homeland might serve as a strong and solid barrier against any advance into Asia which might be attempted by the Egyptians.⁴

It is believed that Artaxerxes himself selected Ezra to lead this expedition. He may have been personally acquainted with this Scribe, even as he was familiar with Nehemiah a number of years later. From history we know that the Persian rulers held their court during different portions of the year at the three great capitals of Babylon, Susa and Ecbatana.

⁴George Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 18 f.

According to Xenophon, our best authority, the Babylonian residence was the longest, extending to seven months of the year. Artaxerxes may have been acquainted with a number of the Judean leaders in the Babylonian community. If he was not personally acquainted with Ezra, then at any rate he must have known something of him by reputation. The terms of the decree seem to imply that there was a close personal knowledge. Ezra is described as "the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven," (Ezra 7:12). "The law of his God is in his hand" (Ezra 7:14), and the "wisdom of his God" (Ezra 7:25). He is trusted to an almost unlimited extent. He is addressed in the second person (Ezra 7:14-25). It would seem that Ezra had in some way or another gained the deep respect and high approval of the Persian king who had formed an extraordinary estimate of his personality and his abilities.⁵

Be it as it may, the following decree was issued by Artaxerxes and placed into the hands of Ezra:

Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thy hand; and to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, and all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem; that thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your

⁵Ibid., p. 20.

God. The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house.

And I, even I Artaxerxes, the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily. Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom upon them. And thou Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people, that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. And whosoever shall not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment (Ezra 7:11-26).

Ezra's mission is now to be considered. He was, first of all, to gather a group of colonists. No compulsion was to be used; this was to be a voluntary emigration. No doubt Ezra was commanded to recruit as many as he could. But he had many difficulties to contend with. The Judean settlers in Babylonia had become closely attached to the homes which they had made for themselves. They had trades, businesses and employments which they could not carry away with themselves. Many were hesitant in breaking their family-ties, in losing their position, or in turning their backs on the life to which they had become accustomed in Babylonia. They hesitated to begin a new life under the trying conditions and difficulties which they knew prevailed in Judea since the first return under Zerubbabel. The Babylonian Israelites were hesitant in exchanging

the comparatively comfortable quarters where they and their families had settled more than a hundred and thirty years before, for residence in a distant land, which was exposed to many dangers, and in a community that was weak and depressed.⁶

The perils and the dangers of the way had also to be considered. A thousand mile stretch of desert lay between themselves and their brethren in Judea. The wastes of the desert, the robbers and predatory desert tribes no doubt deterred many and persuaded them to turn a deaf ear to the words which Ezra addressed to them.⁷

The result was that only about 6000 souls, men, women and children, obeyed Ezra's call and set out from Babylon. All twelve families were represented, many of them, no doubt, related to those who had returned with Zerubbabel and who soon hoped to be reunited with their families. One descendant of David, Hattush, accompanied the emigrants (Ezra 8:2). Besides Ezra there were two priests, Gershom and Daniel. The other returning exiles were of families possessing little distinction.

A huge amount of wealth which was to be used in aiding the poverty stricken community was also entrusted into the care of Ezra. A great treasure of silver and gold was given to the exiles to be used in the adornment of the Temple. The non-Jewish inhabitants of the nation were asked to contribute of their wealth for the benefit of the Jews at Jerusalem. One hundred twenty-two vessels of silver, gold and brass were presented to Ezra to be placed in the Temple. Artaxerxes also conferred

⁶George Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 20 f.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 22.

upon Ezra a most important and unusual power, namely, to draw upon the provincial treasuries in Palestine and Syria for money or for food, whichever may be needed, within the limit, however, of 100 talents of silver and 100 measures of wheat, oil and wine. At the same time all the priests, Levites, Nethinim and others who laboured in and around the Temple were granted exemption from taxes of every sort.

The king conferred extraordinary powers upon Ezra. Primarily, Ezra was to inquire into the general condition of the province and report on it (Ezra 7:14). Though he was not expressly given the title of governor, yet it is quite clear that he exercised full governmental authority and was, during this his first visit to Jerusalem, entirely uncontrolled by any superior authority. He was given the authority to set up magistrates and judges over his own countrymen in Judea; and it is very evident that he himself was the chief judge (Ezra 10:5). He had the power of life and death, along with the right to inflict punishment of a secondary nature, as fine, imprisonment; entire confiscation of goods and banishment (Ezra 7:26). He was to enforce the Law of God upon those who knew it and to teach it to those who were ignorant of it (Ezra 7:25). He was to give special consideration to the re-establishment of the Temple service in full dignity and honour (Ezra 7:15-20). Artaxerxes seems to have had high regard for the intercession which the Jews would make to their God on behalf of their civil governor, and the king was fearful lest, through any default in the regular series of offerings, there "should be wrath against the realm of the king, and of his sons" (Ezra 7:23). The king also supplied Ezra with a number of shorter documents which he was to deliver to the various satraps and governors along the way (Ezra 7:25).

Finally, on the 1st of Nisan, which would be about April, in the year 458, Ezra and his band of 6000 exiles, equipped with a royal edict, provided with rich contributions, inspired with a great religious purpose, and confident that the hand of their God was upon them, began their long and dangerous journey to Jerusalem.⁸

There was little choice as to the route which this expedition could take. They no doubt followed the same course as that taken by Zerubbabel many years before. This would take them up the Euphrates River on the left or eastern bank, since travelling on this side would be easier and safer. The first lap of their journey brought them from Babylon to Is or Hit, known today as Ahava, a distance of about 140 miles from the capital city. Here the expedition pitched camp for three days and Ezra took this opportunity to record the names of those returning to Jerusalem. Much to Ezra's dismay, no Levites were present in the company. Messengers were sent to the village of Casiphia, a Jewish settlement nearby, and the Jews there readily responded. Thirty-eight Levites and 220 Nethinim joined the party of returning exiles. After fasting and humbling themselves before God, and making confession of their sins and throwing themselves entirely upon His mercy, the party continued the journey to Jerusalem.⁹

The next part of their journey brought them to Khabour, and from there they travelled to Belik and finally to Balis where they crossed the Euphrates River on the Syrian side of this town. After journeying into the Valley of the Orontes they travelled southward into the Land of Palestine.¹⁰

⁸Walter F. Adeney, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther (New York: George H. Doran Co.), p. 122.

⁹George Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 29 ff.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 32 ff.

The party of exiles arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month of July. They had been four months upon their journey. The direct distance between Babylon and Jerusalem is approximately 520 miles, but the circuitous route which they followed easily doubled the distance. Various stops had to be made along the way so that Ezra might deliver the "king's commissions" to the various rulers. It can be safely estimated that the exiles averaged approximately eight miles a day as they journeyed homeward to Jerusalem.¹¹

¹¹Ibid., p. 35 f.

CHAPTER IV

EZRA AND THE MARRIAGE REFORMS

It seems strange that Ezra delayed so great a length of time before he set into operation his work of reform. As mentioned before, he had been informed while yet in Babylon of the conditions that prevailed in Jerusalem, of the mixed marriages, of the religious indifference of his countrymen and of their general laxity in all matters both moral and religious. A period of four months passed before any action was taken by Ezra. He may have spent this time studying conditions and receiving reports of the situation. Finally, however, the time had come to seize this evil by the roots and destroy this cancerous growth.¹

God's commandments forbidding marriage with the Canaanites and which had been given to the people through Moses was being openly transgressed. Concerning these heathen God had said to His people, "Thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (Deut. 7:3). Even though this commandment had been broken on a number of occasions before this time, it seems that now it was forgotten in its entirety. Foreign marriages had become matters of everyday occurrence. Wives had been taken from the Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Canaanites, Amonites and Amorites. The Levites and priests were as guilty in this matter as were the common people and the upper classes had especially transgressed this commandment. And the consequences were such as would be expected. Idolatry was now being tolerated in the Holy Land; superstitious

¹Rudolph Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 422.

practices had crept into religious affairs and the purity of worship was seriously endangered. The mixed marriages were gravely endangering both the moral and religious life of his countrymen.²

The manner in which Ezra proceeded seems to suggest to us that he wished to utilize public opinion rather than force and violence to achieve his goal. He created a carefully considered scene which really expressed his feelings and was also calculated to make an impression upon the masses. In the dramatic style which is quite natural to an Oriental, he rent both his tunic and mantle and tore the hair from his head and his long priestly beard. It was a sign of his horrified and startled emotions. Through the long hours of the summer afternoon he sat amazed and silent on the Temple pavement.³

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Ezra poured forth his heart to God in prayer. In this outburst which he addressed to the Almighty we see the true character of this great Scribe. The prayer contains not a single petition. He identified himself with his people, innocent though he was in this particular transgression of God's law, and pleaded with God to look mercifully upon His people because of "our iniquities" and "our trespasses". Prostrate with self-humiliation he cried, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to Thee, my God." In this manner Ezra was hopeful of moving the people to share in his feelings of shame and abhorrence for the practices which he was now deploring. He was well aware that the national life of these people hung on God's good pleasure—that if they

²George Rawlinson, Ezra and Nehemiah: Their Lives and Times (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1923), p. 38.

³Walter F. Adeney, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther (New York: George H. Doran Co.), p. 133 f.

should again fall away by openly transgressing God's commandments after just having been miraculously returned from the Captivity, God's anger would be so great that there should be no remnant or escaping.⁴

Ezra's prayer and confession, his grievous weeping and prostrate humiliation before God had its desired effect upon the people. As the news spread throughout the city, a great congregation of men, women and children assembled before the Temple to gaze upon this strange sight. Perhaps some already realized the only course which was open to them, the violent rupture of home ties, the severance of husband and wife, of parent and child, the complete sacrifice of human love on what appeared to be the altar of duty to God.⁵

To Ezra's delight, Shechaniah, the son of Jehiel, one of the leaders in the community stepped forward and, as spokesman for the people, confessed his own and the nation's sins and promised Ezra that he would have their full cooperation in rooting this evil out of Israel. He besought Ezra to arise, to be of good courage, and to proceed with the work of tearing asunder the marriages which were threatening the life of the Judean community.

Ezra immediately extracted an oath from the people assembled before the Temple, from the clergy and the laity, that they would execute this covenant. Messengers were quickly sent throughout the area surrounding Jerusalem summoning all the people of Judea to gather in the courtyard of the Temple within three days, under severe penalty should any refuse to come. After the congregation had been assembled Ezra once again

⁴George Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁵Walter F. Adeney, *op. cit.*, p. 142 f.

repeated his demands and the people again approved them. However, since the rainy season was upon them, it being about the month of December, and since the task would require many days, this work was handed over to a committee over which the leaders of the congregation presided together with Ezra. The courts convened and the divorces were granted. No one escaped this domestic reformation; even though some opposition arose, within three months the alien branches were cut off from the vine of Israel.

Ezra's record of governorship concludes rather abruptly at this point. After giving the names of those who had taken strange wives, Ezra brings his own Book to a close. He disappears from the scene for fourteen years, returning in the year 444 B. C. during Nehemiah's governorship. A period of about eight months had passed between Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem and the completion of this reform movement. It seems that at this time Ezra was either recalled by Artaxerxes to Babylon or he may have returned of his own accord to report on the general conditions of the Palestinian province.

...the law was made to be observed. The people's hearts were turned towards the law and the house of God was again being used as a place of prayer for their own private use. Once again they had entered into mixed marriages. In those places, it seems that he probably had spent those fourteen years between 452 B. C. to 444 B. C. in Babylon or elsewhere in the Persian Empire.

CHAPTER V

THE INSTITUTION OF THE LAW AND EZRA'S RELATIONS

WITH NEHEMIAH

It was not until fourteen years later that Ezra reappeared on the scene. Some historians are inclined to believe that Ezra spent these years in Jerusalem where he laboured unwearingly in training and educating a number of judges and scribes who would be capable of governing and ruling over the Judean community. Others again are of the opinion that Ezra returned to Babylon either by order of Artaxerxes or of his own accord, where he spent these fourteen years among his countrymen. The latter view seems to be the most probable. This view would account for the abrupt termination of Ezra's narrative and for the relapse of the Jews into their former irregularities which was so apparent at the time of Ezra's second return described in the Book of Nehemiah. Had Ezra been on the scene in Jerusalem we can scarcely believe that he would have permitted the conditions in Judea to fall to such a low ebb. Socially, religiously and morally the people again were in a bad way. The study of the Law was again being neglected. The Temple worship was being performed in a slovenly manner and the House of God was even being used by unscrupulous persons for their own private use. Once again many had entered into mixed marriages. On these grounds, it seems best to conclude that Ezra spent these fourteen years between 458-444 B. C. at Babylon or elsewhere in the Persian Empire.¹

¹George Rawlinson, Ezra and Nehemiah: Their Lives and Times (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1923), p. 44 f.

Meanwhile, the Judean community was being ruled by one, Nehemiah, a governor, whom Artaxerxes had sent from Babylon to rejuvenate the Jews in Jerusalem. Nehemiah may have been directly responsible for summoning Ezra from Babylon, or wherever he may have been at the time, to assist him in carrying out the reform work that was needed so badly. It is strange that neither of these men make any direct reference in their respective works as having worked together in any reformatory work in Judea. But it is generally admitted and believed that these two men lived and laboured together at this point in Jewish history. Nehemiah and Ezra were excellently fitted to assist and supplement each other. On the one hand, Nehemiah was a born political leader, a statesman, a warrior who was well suited to grapple with and overcome any dangers that might arise. Ezra, on the other hand, was a teacher, one who was able to convince, persuade, instruct, educate and to guide the people in the true knowledge and pure religion. Nehemiah was well prepared to cope with the external difficulties; Ezra was well equipped to deal with any internal matters, especially with the moral and religious problems of the people.²

Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem seems to have preceded the time for the observance of the Feast of the Tabernacles, usually celebrated in the season of fall after the crops had been gathered from the fields. Even though this festival had been restored by Zerubbabel upon his arrival at Jerusalem (Ezra 3:14), it had since then been neglected. Upon his arrival Ezra intended to re-introduce this festival. His object was to revive the Judean community from the state of depression into which it had fallen since his first visit to the city. Since it was the seventh

²Ibid., p. 45 f.

month of the year, the Jubilee month, and a time for joy and rejoicing, Ezra read from God's Word those passages which required the celebration of the harvest festival with gladness and thanksgiving and insisted that the people heed his words. The inhabitants poured from the city and into the countryside where they gathered the branches, the houses were built and the people gave themselves up to rejoicing and festivity. Day after day Ezra read to the congregation from the Book of the Law of the Lord; for seven days the feast was kept; on the eighth day the "solemn assembly" was held.

The festivities being over, the Jews who had assembled from all parts of Judea no doubt expected to be dismissed that they might return to their homes. But a further religious duty was imposed upon them. After a day of rest, the second day was set aside as a day of humiliation and abstinence; a confession of sin had to be made and the people were to renew their covenant with God. It was to this that all of the previous solemnities--the reading and expounding of the Law and the keeping of the Feast of the Tabernacles--had been intended to lead up. Ezra seized this occasion to introduce reforms of a sweeping nature. He was determined to strike while the iron was hot, while the people were penitent, conscious of their sin and determined to renew their lives. His aim was to induce the people to make a solemn profession of the complete acceptance of the Law and henceforth to live up to it.³

All went well for Ezra. The people were deeply moved. On the 24th day of the month they assembled with fasting, with sackcloth and earth upon them and readily confessed their sin. During the first fourth part

³Ibid., p. 47.

of the day, passages from the Law were read to the people; during the next three hours the people knelt and confessed their sins, then broke into a song of praise and blessing to God in a set form of words which Ezra probably composed and which we have recorded in the Book of Nehemiah (9:5-38). Finally the mercies of God were recounted and His further mercy was appealed to. The covenant was then renewed, not by word of mouth, but in a documentary form (Neh. 9:38), which had been drawn up and to which Nehemiah, Zadok the Scribe, the heads of the priestly families, the chief Levites and finally the princes appended their seals, (Neh. 10:1-27). The rest of the assembly, priests and laymen, male and female, were called upon to bind themselves to an oath and a curse, "to walk in God's law" and "to observe and do all the commandments of Jehovah, their Lord and His judgments and His statutes" (Neh. 10:28, 29).

There seem to have been appended certain protestations on particular points of religious observance to this general promise of obedience to the Law which the people swore that they would keep in every letter. Through the joint efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people were called upon to observe these points also. Among them was the old and vexed question of intermarriage with the heathen (Neh. 10:30), the proper observance of the Sabbath and of the sabbatical year (Neh. 10:31), the faithful payment of the first fruits (Neh. 10:35-37) and of the tithes, and the adequate support of the Temple service year after year by the voluntary offerings of the faithful (Neh. 10:32-34). These various reforms, even though they increased the burdens of the Judean community and restricted their liberties, still called out the patriotism of the people and woke up their religious zeal.

The time limits in which these two Hebrew leaders worked is uncertain; but it appears that their work was begun and completed in a matter of a few months. Nehemiah's book has few chronological notices. His governorship lasted for about twelve years; it cannot be definitely established during what period of his governorship these two men worked together. The evidence is against their having laboured together for very long and leads rather to the belief that, while Nehemiah resided permanently at Jerusalem, Ezra lived at Babylon from where he was summoned to assist the governor on this particular occasion.

Ezra's position under Nehemiah was a high one, second only to the governor. He was the chief religious leader. Upon Nehemiah's arrival at Jerusalem, Eliashib, the High Priest, appears as a person of great importance. He was soon, however, cast into the background after Ezra's arrival. Even though Eliashib was assigned the task of initiating the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem and their initial consecration was effected by him, he disappeared as soon as Ezra appeared on the scene. Eliashib took no part in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, nor in the renewal of the covenant. The explanation for this course of events suggests that Nehemiah was not satisfied with Eliashib's policy (Neh. 13:4-9, 28) and so substituted for his services those of Ezra. Nehemiah's action in this matter may be justified under the circumstances since Eliashib was unfaithful and imprudent in his official dealings.

CHAPTER VI

EZRA AS AUTHOR AND EDITOR

Not only did Ezra play an important part in the history of his countrymen as the reformer of the Jewish religious system, he has also been remembered by succeeding generations for his labours in the literary field. The Canonical Book which bears his hand provides abundant proof that this work was a direct result of his hand. Jewish tradition, on the other hand, ascribes to Ezra the huge task of having edited and compiled the entire Old Testament Canon as we have it today.

The majority of the Old Testament critics are generally agreed that the Book which bears the name of Ezra is his own composition since it is written in the first person (Ezra 7:28; 8:1, 15, etc.), and personation of one writer by another was unknown at the time to which the Book must be ascribed. Some critics, however, especially the German scholars, among them De Wette, Bertheau and Winer maintain that Ezra's work bears distinct traces of two, if not even three hands. The most marked traces to which they refer is the transition from the third to the first person in chapter seven, and again the transition from the first person to the third in the beginning of chapter ten. One English writer goes even further than these German critics in maintaining that this Book is the result of the work of four men, namely, Daniel, Nehemiah, Haggai and Ezra.¹

Jewish tradition, on the other hand, ascribes the sole authorship of this work to Ezra. The most credible theory is that Ezra collected the

¹George Rawlinson, Ezra and Nehemiah: Their Lives and Times (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1923), p. 53.

documents and traditions which constitute the first part (chapters 1-6), and was the original author of the second (chapters 7-10). There is a burden of internal proof favoring the sole authorship of this work. A marked uniformity of style runs through the Book; the same phrases frequently occur; there is the same accuracy, the same inclination to insert documents, the same constant mention of the Levites, the same knowledge of two languages—Hebrew and Chaldean—the same mode of designating the Almighty, the same exactness with respect to dates and the like. Or "Ezra" may have been compiled by another personage, for example Malachi; but its main parts had all previously passed through the hands of Ezra.²

The Book of Nehemiah embodies a document which in all probability was originally composed by Ezra. This is the prayer which Ezra chanted to the Almighty immediately preceding the sealing of the covenant by two companies of Levites (Neh. 9:5-38). These words resemble to a great degree in tone of thought and mode of expression the prayer of Ezra in his own Book (Ezra 9:6-15). It was, no doubt, written and composed for this special occasion and would naturally be the work of the chief ecclesiastical authority of the time. Since Eliashib was deposed soon after Ezra's arrival and this Scribe occupied the high priestly office, we may be safe in assuming that this prayer was also a product of Ezra's efforts.³

But Ezra's greatest achievement in the line of literary work, if we may allow this work to be his, was the composition of the important and extensive work known to the Jews as "Dibre-hay-yamin" and represented in our Authorized Version by the Two Books of Chronicles. Even though a

²Ibid., p. 53 f.

³Ibid., p. 54.

great many modern critics deny Ezra's authorship of this work, the entire array of Jewish authorities maintain that Ezra was the sole author of these books. A number of similarities between Ezra's Book and these two books of Chronicles have been pointed out in support of this view held by the Jewish historians. The resemblance between the style of Chronicles and the Book of Ezra is striking and extends to those portions of the latter Book which are almost universally allowed to be from the hand of Ezra. A number of these scholars are of the opinion that these two works were originally one, and that some uncertainty prevailed in the early Jewish schools as to where the severance should be made between them. In his biography of Ezra, Rawlinson sums up the similarities between these two works as follows:

The tone and spirit of the two Books is similar. What has been called the Levitical spirit is dominant in both. The externals of religion are held in high account. The Temple and Temple worship are all important. Emphasis is placed on the proper maintenance of the priests and Levites, the regular establishment of the "courses", and the rightful distribution of the several ministrations of the Temple among the Levitical families. There is the strong desire of putting on record the names of the priests and Levites employed in the ceremonies that come under notice, and no opportunity is neglected to doing honor to the order of the Levites. Then again those who refuse to look upon Ezra as being the author of Chronicles must therefore ascribe certain portions of the Book of Ezra to "the Chronicler", since the similarities between the two works are so evident and so striking.⁴

The circumstances of the times may have called for the writing of such a work. This external proof also points to Ezra as having been the author of these Books. All critics agree that the work was a product of the post-exilic era. After the return from Babylonia, one of the most pressing wants of the Judean community would be trusty genealogical records.

⁴Ibid., p. 54 f.

These records are found in the Books of the Chronicles and a great deal of interesting information has been extracted from them with respect to the fortunes of particular tribes. Ezra was also chiefly concerned in restoring the Temple and the public worship of God to the condition it had been under the previous kings of Judah. He wished to re-infuse something of national life and spirit into the hearts of the people and to make them feel that they were still the inheritors of God's covenanted mercies, and that the captivity had only temporarily interrupted, not dried up, the stream of God's love and favour to their nation. Now nothing could more effectually aid these pious and patriotic designs than setting before the people a compendious history of the kingdom of David, which should embrace a full account of its prosperity, should trace the sins which led to its overthrow, but should carry the thread through the period of the captivity, and continue it as it were unbroken on the other side; and those passages in their history would be especially important which exhibited their greatest and best kings as engaged in building or restoring the Temple, in reforming all corruptions in religion, and zealously regulating the services in the House of God. These considerations explain exactly the plan scope of that historical work which consists of the Two Books of Chronicles and the Book of Ezra. As far as the material and the sources of information which Ezra may have used, they are not difficult to discover. The genealogies are obviously transcribed from some register in which were preserved the genealogies of the tribes and families drawn up at various times.⁵ If this work can be ascribed to Ezra, it was

⁵William Smith, Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 153.

a far more ambitious effort than the brief "Memoirs" in which Ezra embodied his recollection of his own first visit to Jerusalem, together with a sketch of the previous history of the returned emigrants who came with Zerubbabel. Chronicles is a work of great research, of wide scope and of most careful execution.⁶

Ezra is also credited with having settled the Canon of the Old Testament as we have it today. According to Jewish tradition he was mainly responsible for having compiled and edited the Old Testament Books while at Jerusalem in the years after the Babylonian Captivity. Elias Levita, a distinguished rabbi of the time of the Reformation, is of the definite opinion that the editing of the Canon was the work of Ezra and the Great Synagogue, a body of 120 men assembled to assist him in the conduct of public and religious affairs.⁷

In connection with this task of re-editing and compiling the sacred books of the Old Testament, Ezra is said to have restored, corrected and re-edited the whole sacred volume, according to the threefold arrangement of the Law, the Prophets and the Hagiographa. He is also said to have been responsible for the divisions of the Pesukim, or verses, the writing of the vowel points handed down by tradition from Moses, and the whole series of emendations known as the Keri and ordinarily inserted in the margin of the Hebrew Bibles. Modern critics regard this traditional view as exaggerated, but admit that the idea of collecting the sacred Hebrew literature belongs to Ezra's time, and that this Scribe was instrumental in forming a nucleus

⁶George Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 57.

⁷William Henry Green, General Introduction to the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), p. 93.

around which were eventually gathered the various Books at present constituting the Hebrew Scriptures. The gathering of this nucleus is sometimes ascribed to Nehemiah (2 Macc. 2:13), but we may properly look upon this tradition as signifying no more than that it was carried out by his authority. The actual collector of the sacred Books, their arranger and editor, could only be Ezra.⁸

Ezra's main task in connection with the compiling of these Books would not be merely to gather the Books together into a single volume, nor merely to arrange them in a particular way. The Books bore divine authority whether they were circulated separately or whether combined with others of like character. His chief concern would be to bring these books forward at a time when their claims could be properly scrutinized and thus certified to future ages as the duly attested writings of men inspired by God and prepared by the writers for the benefit of His people for all time to come. Such was the task that confronted Ezra and the members of the Great Synagogue.⁹

There was nothing to prevent the collection of these Books of the Old Testament by Ezra since all of these works were already in existence in the period immediately following the exile. The last addition to the Canon was made by Malachi, a contemporary of Ezra. Even though many critics are of the opinion that a great number of these Old Testament books were written in the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era, they base

⁸George Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁹William Henry Green, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

many of their assumptions on weak evidence. The weight of proof supports the view that the Old Testament Canon in its entirety was already in existence in the fourth century B. C.¹⁰

The center and "kernel" of the collection made by Ezra was the Law. On this Law he had for long years expended his most diligent labour, his most careful thought and all the resources of his learning. He had probably, while yet in Babylon, collected the various copies of the Law which the exiles had brought with themselves from Palestine, and when he took up his abode in Jerusalem, had further collated such other manuscripts as he found there, thus forming a text which we may well regard as the basis, at any rate, of that which our Hebrew Bible now gives us. The other books which may reasonably be ascribed to his collection, are the Five Books of Moses, the Book of Joshua, attached to the Pentateuch in the Samaritan Version, Judges, the Books of Kings and Samuel, the Hagiographa which included the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentation and Ecclesiastes. In existence were also the works of the "Major and Minor Prophets", namely, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. The books of Esther, Daniel and Ezekiel were also incorporated into the canon; these especially had to be reviewed by Ezra and the Men of the Great Synagogue since they had been written outside the confines of Palestine and their authority had to be investigated. The remaining seven books of the Old Testament canon were also included; these were Ezra, the Books of Chronicles, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and finally Malachi who lived and laboured among the Jews during Ezra's lifetime.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

¹¹ George Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 59 f.

With respect to the language and characters used by Ezra in his writings, it must be remembered that he was familiar with two languages, the Hebrew and the Aramaic or Chaldee. The Hebrew is used from the beginning of his book to chapter 4:7; from chapter 4:8 to chapter 6:18 the Aramaic is used; then he returns to the Hebrew until the end of his work, with the exception of the letter of Artaxerxes found in chapter 7:12-26. Hebrew tradition claims that Ezra used the square character, the one in which Hebrew books are now printed and which has been used for all Hebrew manuscripts from the date of the Christian era. Our church fathers, Origen and Jerome, support this view. The Jews call this character merubban, meaning "square" and ashshurith, meaning "Assyrian." The simplest explanation of this latter term is that it meant "Babylonian", Babylonia being considered a part of Assyria, and that this name was given to the writing because Ezra brought it from Babylon to Palestine. So it is altogether probable that Ezra was the first to introduce this square character of the Hebrew language in the Palestinian community. Some historians are of the opinion that this new method was adopted so that the Jews of Judea might have an additional mark of distinction from the Samaritans who still used the Phoenico-Hebraean letters. This explanation seems forced; Ezra's action was, more than likely, determined by the simple fact that, to the Hebrews of his day who could read, the square cursive character was far more familiar and intelligible from their long stay in Babylon than the archaic letters of the Phoenician type. Since he wished to facilitate the study of the Law it would seem that he would cause the copies of this Law to be made in the character best known to those who were likely to be its students.¹²

¹² Ibid., p. 60 f.

CHAPTER VII

EZRA AS LEADER OF THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE

According to Jewish tradition Ezra is credited with having organized and presided over a governing body formed along parliamentary lines and known as the Great Synagogue. The object of this organization was the general direction of religion in the Judean community. Biblical indications for the existence of this body in the time of Ezra are thought to be found in the Book of Nehemiah, particularly in chapter 8 and chapter 10:32-39. From Nehemiah chapter 8, Jewish historians conclude that Ezra was the president of this organization. There is every reason to believe that Ezra was assisted in his work by a body of counsellors who advised him in matters of religion. It is unfortunate that contemporary evidence is wanting as to their powers, duties and method of appointment. This body of counsellors which assisted Ezra may have been the germ out of which this Great Synagogue grew, and the Sanhedrin was probably a revival in Greco-Macedonian times of the earlier Great Synagogue, which after a while, ceased to function.¹

The members of this judicial body are believed to have been the leaders of Israel who returned from the exile and who were responsible for laying the foundation of the polity connected with the second Temple. It was assumed that the men who comprised this group were present at the memorable occasion on the 24th day of Tishri in the year 444 B. C. at which time the people swore "to walk in God's law" and hence they are referred to also as "Men of the Great Assembly."²

¹George Rawlinson, Ezra and Nehemiah: Their Lives and Times. (New York: Anson D. F. Rendolph and Company, 1923), p. 61.

²Wilhelm Bacher, "The Great Synagogue," The Jewish Encyclopedia, edited by Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1903), XI, 642.

The number of men comprising this body has not been definitely established. Some historians are of the opinion that there were 85 men in this assembly, the number of those mentioned in Nehemiah 10:2-29 as having signed and sealed the covenant which Ezra required of them. However, Nehemiah may not have found it necessary to enumerate all those who participated in this act; the number may, therefore, be greater. Other historians, on the other hand, are inclined to believe that there were but thirty men in this group some again that there were eighty. However, our best authority on this matter are the Talmudic references and there it is definitely established that the Great Synagogue was composed of 120 men, the leader of which was Ezra, and that Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were also members of this judicial body.³

These men were the religious leaders of their day. They established the code for Jewish life and ritual. Nehemiah tells us that they fixed the ritual observance for the first two quarters of each day (Neh. 9:3), and that the group was also engaged in legislative proceedings, the making of laws, etc. (Neh. 10:30 ff.). Tradition has ascribed to it the character of a chief magistracy, and its members, or rather its leaders, which included the prophets of that day, were regarded as the authors of other obligatory rules.⁴

This Assembly, originally under Ezra's leadership, has been remembered by Jewish tradition for a number of major accomplishments. They laboured on the final settling of the Old Testament Canon. They introduced the triple classification of the oral law by dividing the study of the Mishnah

³Ibid., p. 642.

⁴Ibid., p. 642.

(in the wider sense) into the three branches of midrash, halakot, and haggadot. They introduced the Feast of the Purim and also determined on what day it was to be celebrated. The benedictions and prayers which were to be used in Jewish worship were instituted by these men; in fact, they are credited with having shaped the entire Jewish ritual for worship. They saw to it that more copies of the Law were put into circulation.⁵ And finally, they did away with many of the theretofore evils usually accompanied by illiteracy and ignorance among the masses by introducing the square characters as the Hebrew alphabet, encouraged education, and so elevated the nation to a higher level of learning.⁶

Tradition also ascribes to these men a passage of three clauses which properly describes their aims and accomplishments and which reads: "Be heedful in pronouncing sentence; have many pupils; put a fence about the Torah". This aphorism, ascribed to an entire body of men, can only be interpreted as expressing their spirit and tendency. The phrase may have been formulated by one of its members, perhaps even by Ezra. At all events it may be regarded as a historical and authentic statement of the dominating thought of these early leaders of post-exilic Israelites who were designated in the tradition of the Palestinian schools as the men of the Great Synagogue. These words describe the goal to which these Jewish teachers, instructors and spritual leaders devoted their lives and efforts. We can see that the program of this assembly was quite similar to Ezra's chief goal in life in persuading the people "to walk in God's law" and

⁵Ibid., p. 642.

⁶Simon Glazer, History of Israel (New York: The Star Hebrew Book Company, 1930), II, 266.

"to observe and do all the commandments of Jehovah their Lord and His judgments and His statutes." (Neh. 10:28, 29). Their program was carried out many years later by the Pharisees who were cautious in pronouncing legal sentences, who were especially watchful over the schools and the training of the pupils and who assured the observance of the Law by the enforcement of protective measures and rulings.⁷

These men had a sacred duty to perform. They instructed the people to adhere to truth, to righteousness and to justice, and to spread learning throughout the nation. However, in the course of time, the decrees which this body of men issued came to be regarded more highly than even the precepts of the Law itself. Thus they came to be responsible to a great extent for the legalism which characterized the Jewish religion in the following centuries and which finally culminated in that form of religion known as Judaism.⁸

⁷Jewish Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 643.

⁸George Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 61.

CHAPTER VIII

EZRA THE FIRST GREAT SCRIBE

Another important development of this period following the Captivity was the rise of the professional interpreters of the Law called Sopherim or Scribes. Ezra was the first great scribe and he was solely responsible for having organized and developed the scribal office. In the post-exilic period the prestige of this class of learned men far exceeded its popularity and importance of the pre-Babylonian era. In the days of David and Solomon the keepers or the registrars of public and private statements bore the title of "scribes". These men were secretaries to the king, writing his letters, drawing up his decrees and managing his finances. Later during Hezekiah's reign the scribe's chief duty was to put into writing all that had been handed down orally. Jeremiah tells us that already in his lifetime these scribes were students and interpreters of the Law, and boasting of their wisdom (Jeremiah 8:8). But fresh glory was given to this class of teachers by Ezra in the period following the Babylonian Captivity. It was only natural development that after Ezra had so successfully instituted the Law upon the Jewish community, the copying and interpreting of this Law would become the highest and most coveted profession among the Hebrew exiles who had returned.¹

These Scribes organized themselves into a guild and maintained their authority by carefully observing uniformity in their teachings. Instructions

¹William Smith, Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 881.

were generally given free of charge, the Scribes usually earning their livelihood by some trade or occupation. They were honoured and respected by all. However, sincere as the Scribes may have been in the period immediately following the exile, they eventually came to produce a religion which called only for a mechanical and outward observance of the Law. They were mainly responsible for the gradual development of Judaism. They busied themselves not only with copying and interpreting the Law of God, but proceeded a step further in foisting upon the Jewish people a religion which consisted entirely in the mechanical and outward observance of the Law. Never in the history of the world was so great a work done so silently.²

In Ezra's day, the Scribes were concerned chiefly with the Mikra, that is, the simple recitation, studying and reading of the Law as in Nehemiah 8:8. They laid down rules for transcribing it with the most scrupulous precision. When the Law of God was made the rule of life for the entire Jewish nation and for each individual, their second step had been reached. The Jewish teacher could recognize no principles beyond the precepts of the Law. This second stage of the growth of their system can easily be traced when we become aware that the principle on which they acted was the same as that of the Men of the Great Synagogue. Their motto ordinarily ascribed to the Great Assembly, is said by some to have been phrased by one Simon the Just who lived in the year 300 B. C. and which read: "Our fathers have taught us three things; to be cautious in judging, to train many scholars and to set a fence about the Law."³

²A. M. Rehwinkel, New Testament World (St. Louis: Concordia Mimeo Co.), II, 114.

³William Smith, op. cit., p. 881.

The third step inevitably followed. The letter of the Law soon received the greater part of the Scribe's attention. They brought into existence a complex system of casuistry from the decisions on fresh questions. The new precepts came to take the place of the old ones. The right relation of moral and ceremonial laws was not only forgotten but absolutely inverted. The later Scribes came to conclusions which the earlier representatives of this order might have looked upon with horror. We need but to look at the Scribe and his office in the days of our Saviour to see how far they had gone to force the people to obey the letter of the Law. The decisions of previous rabbis were handed down and were looked upon as being sacred and even of more importance than the Law itself. These various decisions which the Scribes bound upon the consciences of the people were called the Halachoth. Out of these decisions there was formed a new code called the Mishnah. Added to this were the anecdotes of the schools and of the courts of law and many other sayings including some of the wildest fables; these formed the Gemara which filled up the measure of the institutes of rabbinic law. The Mishnah and the Gemara were finally joined together and the Talmud came into being. Jews throughout the world look upon the Talmud as the only norm of life and worship to this very day.⁴

The Scribes were responsible for a development in still another direction. They studied the Old Testament books and looked upon these sacred writings not only as a code of laws, but they imagined that these books suggested thoughts which could not be logically deduced from the writings. These efforts resulted in the Midrashim (searchings or investigation). The process by which this meaning, mystical or moral, was elicited became known as Hagada (sayings, opinion). Obviously there was no limit to

⁴ Ibid., p. 881.

such investigations. A higher stage than even the Hagada was soon reached. The mystical school of this interpretation finally culminated in the Kabbala (reception or received doctrine). Every letter of Old Testament Scripture, every number, became pregnant with mysteries.⁵

The Scribes were interested primarily in honoring the Mosaic Law and making its precepts the rule of daily life for every Israelite. They considered this the most worthy object, even though the means which they took to effect this were often far from worthy. They frequently succeeded in nullifying entirely the Law by burdening it with a mass of details utterly foreign to its fundamental principles. They placed the written law by the side of the unwritten which was made up of their own infinitesimal applications and explanations. Tradition soon took the place of Scripture. It came to have not only an equal but a superior influence in the conduct of the daily life. The Talmud directly affirms that it is more blameworthy to teach contrary to the instruction of the scribes than to those of the Law. In following such a course, it only naturally followed that the vital principle of obedience was weakened at its center. The letter was made more important than the spirit, and the commandments of God rendered of "no effect" by the traditions.⁶

From the New Testament we get a number of significant hints of what traditional Judaism was in its essential features. It required the "making clean the outside of the cup and platter". It so extended the law of tithes as to include mint, anise and cummin, while the weightier matters were neglected. It increased the number of fasts enjoined in the law from one in

⁵Ibid., p. 881.

⁶Edwin Cone Bissell, Biblical Antiquities (Philadelphia: The American Sunday School Union, 1886), p. 383.

a year to two each week and adopted the unseemly custom of praying at the corners of the streets "to be seen of men". The Sabbath was made a day of painful observances. Thirty-nine different forms of activity, illegal on the Sabbath, are enumerated in the Talmud. The day of rest was prolonged and made to begin even before the setting of Friday's sun. The pages of the New Testament reveal to us that all spontaneity of religious service along with sensitiveness of conscience, was effectually crushed out, and religion was made to consist in a machinelike observance of outward rules alone.⁷

The whole of this system of traditionalism was built up of innumerable rites and ceremonies, an elaborate formalistic code of falsified requirements, an intricate accumulation of dogmas demanding the painstaking observance of hypocritical non-essentials, which were so stressed as to lead the misguided followers of the Pharasaic teaching to believe that in their fulfillment lay the fulfillment of their religion. This constituted a rigmarole of rules and prohibitions, all arising from the dread of sacrilege or contamination, and dealing with the swearing of oaths, the washing of hands and utensils, the purification of clothing and houses, the eating of different kinds of meats, and the defilement resulting from contact with Gentiles.⁸

The Scribes were soon regarded to be the religious leaders of their day. The priests who were in the forefront in religious matters during the period of the monarchy, were all but forgotten. The Scribe arose to replace both the priest and the prophet. In the gifted Ezra the scribal and priestly offices were united. It was not until the Maccabean struggle that these two stood over against one another as avowed antagonists. This serves to explain better than almost anything else the origin of the two principal divisions in post-exilic Judaism. The party of the Pharisees

⁷Ibid., p. 383 f.

⁸A. M. Rehwinkel, op. cit., p. 112.

sprang out of that of the scribes; the party of the Saducees out of that of the priests. Neither was ever numerically identical with the body from which it arose; but the spirit and tendencies of the priesthood in the later times were always best represented by the Saducean party while the Pharisees answered as the flower of the seed to the principles and aims of the powerful class of scribes.⁹

It is difficult to say whether Ezra would have sanctioned the methods used and the courses taken by these Scribes who followed him in the office which he instituted. However, Ezra will be forever remembered as having successfully persuaded his countrymen "to walk in God's law". Mohammed, who lived almost a thousand years after Ezra's day, regarded Ezra the Scribe as having been solely responsible for having developed the Jews into the "People of the Book".¹⁰

⁹Edwin Cone Bissell, op. cit., p. 282 f.

¹⁰Henry Thatcher Fowler, Great Leaders of Hebrew History (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), p. 151.

CHAPTER IX

LATER LIFE, DEATH AND CHARACTER OF EZRA

The last distinct notice of Ezra contained in Holy Scripture is the account of the part which he took with Nehemiah in the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27-43). After this event he disappears from the scene of the Judean community never to be mentioned again in the Biblical narrative. This event probably occurred in the year 443 B. C. when Ezra would, according to our calculations, have attained the age of 57 years. It is impossible to determine whether Ezra returned to Babylon or whether he spent the remaining years in his adopted state of Judea. Very little history has been handed down to us with respect to these years in Jewish history. Hence once again we are forced to rely merely on Jewish traditions, which, in this particular matter, are contradictory and therefore unreliable.

One tradition handed down claims that Ezra returned to Babylon where he resided until his death at the age of 120 years, and that he was buried in a magnificent tomb at the point where the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers join. Another legend states that he was a courtier in the retinue of King Artaxerxes at the time of his death.¹ In this particular matter, Josephus is perhaps our best authority. According to this Jewish historian Ezra is said to have remained in Jerusalem the remaining years of his life where he laboured untiringly and that he lived to a ripe old age, died there, and was honoured with a magnificent funeral.²

¹Eril G. Hirsch, "Ezra," The Jewish Encyclopedia, edited by Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1903), V, 322.

²Ibid., p. 322.

Ezra's death is believed to have occurred between the years B. C. 420-410. This would mean that he would have attained the age of between 80 to 90 years. This would agree with the report of Josephus that he "died an old man".³

It is quite difficult to sum up the work and character of Ezra in a few words. He comes before our eyes in so many capacities, and he is revealed to us in such brief flashes, that it is difficult to form any distinct conception of the man and his work. He was a student, linguist, historian, teacher and preacher, judge, governor, reformer of a religious system and the second founder of a political community. We cannot say that he was a man of brilliant genius nor a man of great originality. Still we have to look upon him as one of the born leaders of men, one through whose efforts the whole Jewish world was influenced. Later Judaism, the Judaism of Maccabean times, derived all that was best in it from Ezra, its zeal, its burning desire to keep itself unpolluted from the impure idolatries and debasing superstitions of heathenism and its passionate attachment to the Law.⁴

The stubbornness and strength which characterized the later Judean nation and which enabled it to resist and overcome the persecuting Hellenism of Antiochus, and to battle for years on almost equal terms with the mighty legions of Rome can be traced back to Ezra. In exalting and so earnestly propagating the Law, in showing such fierce exclusiveness and stern rejection of the heathen element that was creeping into the nation, he was directly responsible for keeping alive that spirit of exclusive patriotism which carried the people through five centuries of

³George Rawlinson, Ezra and Nehemiah: Their Lives and Times (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Company, 1923), p. 69.

⁴Ibid., p. 71.

difficulty and struggle. The spirit of Ezra lived on in the hearts of the "Zealots" who fought so desperately against the forces of Rome in attempting to defend the very walls that Ezra himself had consecrated.⁵

If we would look at Ezra and his work purely from a political angle, we might be inclined to say that he was somewhat of a failure. But we would also be viewing the man from the wrong angle; for Ezra was not a statesman. He did not aim at political and national greatness. On the contrary, he was an idealist. And the success of an idealist is not to be found in material prosperity; but rather an idealist lives solely for his idea. If his idea triumphs, he is satisfied. And judged by this standard, the only fair standard, Ezra's work was certainly a success. He injected life into the spirits of his countrymen and filled them with a new enthusiasm. He turned a few weak bands of despondent exiles into a vigorous and energetic people. He established the separateness of the Jews. In saving and restoring the religion of his countrymen he was solely responsible for transmitting the Jewish religion to future ages as a precious casket which contained the seed of the great spiritual faith for which the world was waiting.⁶

In temperament, Ezra was extremely passionate and emotional. Shame paralyzed his tongue when he thought to what reproach he would lay himself open if, after boasting that God's protection was all sufficient, he should stoop to ask the Persian king for troops to defend him on his long and dangerous journey to Jerusalem. His heart was filled with

⁵ Ibid., p. 71 f.

⁶ Walter F. Adeney, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther (New York: George H. Doran Co.), p. 160 f.

consternation when he saw the extent to which his countrymen had gone in their mixed marriages. "When I heard this thing," he said, "I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard and sat down astonished," (Ezra 9:3). So passionate and emotional was the prayer which he offered to God on behalf of the sins of the people, that their emotions were stirred and they thrilled with sympathy when they heard him pray. So great was his grief that for three days he retired into the Temple chambers abstaining from food and drink. In all of his dealings with his countrymen there is a warmth in his devotions and a depth and fervour in his sympathy.⁷

Ezra's faith in God is admirable. No matter how great the discouragement, he remained clinging to the Most High. He traveled cheerfully to Jerusalem fully confident that the hand of the Lord was upon him. Upon his arrival in the Judean community he immediately paused to show his gratefulness to God for having brought him safely to the end of his journey. When confronted with the problems of the community he sought refuge in the Almighty pleading for support, strength and guidance.⁸

It may be true that Ezra's aims oftentimes were "narrow" and his methods "rigid". His religion was of a severe type and tinged with asceticism. He laid a great stress on fasting. After leaving Babylon he paused in his journeys and proclaimed a fast that he and his people might "afflict themselves before God, and seek of Him a right way for themselves and their substance, and their little ones". (Ezra 8:21). The tearing of his hair, his abstinence from food and his retirement into the chamber of the Temple gives traces of asceticism. When the

⁷George Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 72 f.

⁸Ibid., p. 73.

people assembled to renew their covenant, it may have been at Ezra's command that they "fasted, and put sackcloth and ashes upon their bodies" (Neh. 9:1). He had a deep sense of the awful majesty of God for he knew him as "the Great, the terrible and the Mighty" and he feared the chastisement and anger of his righteous God (Ezra 9:14).⁹

However, Ezra saw not only the severity of God. The religion which he inculcated was not one of mere gloom and austerity. He also set God forth as One who spared and who forgave (Neh. 9:8, 9), as One who punished His people far less than their iniquities deserved (Ezra 9:13), as One who was "ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness" (Neh. 9:17). When his countrymen were overcome by their grief, Ezra checked the people in their sorrow by saying, "Mourn not, nor weep. Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:9, 10). These various incidents tend to sweeten and brighten our idea of Ezra's religion and of subsequent Judaism. Strict and severe as Ezra may have been in his dealings with his countrymen, yet we see in this Great Scribe, in this Second Founder of the Jewish State, in this Great Reformer, a leader who held the balance even between a religion of gloom and light heartedness, and one who set forth God before the eyes of men in His true character, as at once good and severe, merciful and just, a God of love.¹⁰

⁹Fleming James, Personalities of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 477.

¹⁰Walter F. Adeney, op. cit., p. 308.

Ezra's personal character stands out in the narrative, both in Ezra and in Nehemiah, as that of a thoroughly earnest, God-pleasing, God-fearing, and man-loving man, without speck or flaw. Not of course that he was really perfect; but his defects are unnoticed. As a teacher he was indefatigable in his activity. In his reliance upon God he gives evidence of a deep sense of dependence upon the Almighty. With St. Paul we see him looking with horror at sin, but with pity on the sinner. As a servant of the Persian king, he so approves himself to his master as to be singled out for the high trust of an important commission. While exacting that commission he shows devotion, reliance upon God, honourable anxiety to discharge his duties faithfully and with exactitude, and a spirit of prayer and self-mortification that cannot be too highly commended. As governor of the Judean state he is prompt and decided in taking the measures necessary to purify the Jewish community, he persuades rather than commands, and he completes his tasks with the good-will and agreement of all concerned. He shows no jealousy or discontent while labouring under Nehemiah even though previously he himself was in charge of conducting all of the public affairs in the Judean state. Simple, candid, devout, sympathetic, full of energy, unselfish, patriotic, never weary of well doing, he occupied a most important position in the Judean community at a most important period in Jewish history. He was the second founder of the Jewish state. He left behind him a reputation among the Jews inferior only to that of Moses. And the traditions which cluster about his name, even if they had no other value, would at any rate mark the high esteem in which his abilities and character were held by his countrymen.

Two traditional sayings concerning Ezra handed down in Jewish tradition point to his accomplishment and to his greatness. "When the Law was forgotten of Israel, Ezra went up from Babel and found it." And again, "Ezra was worthy that the Law should have been given through him to Israel, if it had not been that Moses preceded him."¹¹

¹¹A. M. Rehwinkel, New Testament World (St. Louis: Concordia Mimeo Co.), II, 110.

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