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Ezra and Nehemiah: A Review of the Return and Reform

By MARTIN W. LEESEBERG

EDITORIAL NOTE: This article is an abstract of a dissertation by Prof. Martin W. Leesberg of Luther Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, which he prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Theology degree, conferred upon him by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., on May 31, 1961.

THE books of Ezra and Nehemiah present an account of the history of the Judean people from the time of the Exile until the transition to Judaism was well on its way. Cyrus, king of Persia, in his first regnal year issued a decree permitting the Judean exiles to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4). Sheshbazzar, a Judean prince (Ezra 1:8), led the first group of returnees and rebuilt the altar. The temple was begun in the following year (Ezra 5:16), but opposition by the people of the land delayed the project for about fifteen years.

Later Zerubbabel, the governor, and Jeshua, the priest, led another caravan to Jerusalem. Together with Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets, they began to build the temple in the second year of Darius, king of Persia (Ezra 5:1-12). In spite of local opposition the temple was completed in the sixth year of Darius (Ezra 6:15). The record then breaks off until the seventh year of Artaxerxes, when Ezra led a group of Jews to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:1-5). Through his efforts the people were brought to repentance, and the evil of marriages with foreigners was attacked. (Ezra 7:14, 25)

In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah, the king's cupbearer, was sent as

governor to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-10). The wall was built and the earlier work of Ezra was brought to conclusion (Neh. 13). Thus the reform ended in success.

At first glance this straightforward account appears to present no problem in establishing the course of events during this period. A closer study of the material, however, raises questions which call for an answer. There are problems and apparent inconsistencies in the narrative which the careful reader cannot fail to notice:

- a. The edicts of the Persian kings preserved in the Book of Ezra are written in such definitely Jewish style that their authenticity has been questioned. (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-12; 7:12-26)
- b. The relationship of Sheshbazzar to Zerubbabel is unclear since both are credited with laying the foundations of the temple. (Ezra 1—5, especially 1:8; 3:2-8; 5:14, 16)
- c. From the story of the building of the temple in Ezra it appears that the primary problem was the opposition of the people of the land, while the Book of Haggai implies only internal difficulties caused by spiritual lassitude. (Ezra 4:1-5; Hag. 1:2, 9; 2:16-19)
- d. Essentially the same list of those who returned from Babylon is presented in both Ezra and Nehemiah. (Ezra 2; Neh. 7)
- e. A story of an attempt to build the walls of Jerusalem is inserted in the midst of the account of the building of the temple. (Ezra 4:6-24)

- f. The record states that Ezra and Nehemiah were in Jerusalem at the same time with apparently overlapping authority and commissions. In spite of this the two men seem to have had very little connection with each other. (Ezra 7:12-26; Neh. 2:1-10, and his governmental acts, passim; cf. Neh. 8:9; 12:26, 36)
- g. Ezra apparently thanked God for a wall in Jerusalem thirteen years before Nehemiah built it. (Ezra 9:9; cf. whole story of Neh. 1-7)
- h. The Ezra narrative presupposes a settled city with comparative safety for the inhabitants. Thirteen years later Nehemiah tells of a semideserted place with danger surrounding the people.
- i. The lack of correlation between the list of those who returned with Ezra and the list of those who helped Nehemiah build the wall is odd if the group which Ezra led came only thirteen years before the arrival of Nehemiah. (Ezra 8:1-20; Neh. 3:1-32)
- j. The attitude of Ezra toward foreign wives was one which insisted upon divorce, while that of Nehemiah was milder, except in the case of Sanballat's son-in-law, demanding only the promise not to allow children to marry foreigners. At the same time Ezra apparently had no enemies, but Nehemiah was surrounded by them. (Ezra 10:1-5; Neh. 13:23-28)
- k. Eliashib, the high priest, is presented as a contemporary of Nehemiah. On the other hand, Johanan, a son or grandson of Eliashib, is portrayed as one who had a room in the temple precincts during Ezra's first year in Jerusalem. (Ezra 10:6; cf. Neh. 12:10, 22; also Neh. 3:1; 13:4-6)
- l. The contents of the Law which Ezra brought are not made clear.

Other ancient writings, 1 Esdras,¹ the pertinent sections of Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*,² and the Elephantine Papyri,³ merit consideration for background but help little in solving these problems; rather they raise new ones. The Elephantine Papyri, however, are important as an aid in dating certain Old Testament personages.

The question of the literary relationship between Ezra-Nehemiah and the books of Chronicles is quite involved.⁴ William F. Albright's defense of the Jewish tradition that Ezra was the Chronicler⁵ may be accepted as essentially correct. The accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah thus are considered to be documents closely contemporary with the events of the reform.

The historical background for this period in Judah is practically the history of the Persian Empire. The following is a short chronological table of the Persian kings indicating the main events of each reign (all dates B. C.):

¹ Any references will be to Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta, id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, editio quarta (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1950).

² Flavius Josephus, "Antiquities of the Jews," *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, translated by W. Whiston (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, n. d.); hereafter cited as *Ant.*

³ A. E. Cowley, editor, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B. C.* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923), also Emil G. Kraeling, ed., *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).

⁴ See the standard Introductions for a thorough discussion of the problems of authorship, relationship, and date.

⁵ William F. Albright, "The Biblical Period," *The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Religion*, ed. L. Finkelstein (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), pp. 54 ff.; hereafter cited as *Period*.

- 539—530 *Cyrus I*, conquered Babylon; permitted all deported peoples to return home; policy of conciliation with subject nations.
- 530—522 *Cambyses*, conquered Egypt; called back by a revolt in Babylon; died before return.
- 522—486 *Darius I*, won throne after two years of civil war; re-conquered Egypt; political reforms; conquered Ionian coast; conflict with Greece; conquered European Scythia; revolt in Egypt.
- 486—465 *Xerxes*, revolt in Babylon; re-conquered both Babylon and Egypt; failed in Europe; series of harem intrigues; murdered.
- 465—424 *Artaxerxes I*, revolt in Egypt; recovered Egypt; defeated by Greece, then victories; Peace of Callias; Peloponnesian War with Persia aiding now one, now the other side to prevent victory.
- 424— *Xerxes II*, reigned forty-five days; murdered.
- 423—404 *Darius II*, Persia supported Sparta and crushed Athens; end of Peloponnesian War; many local revolts, all put down.
- 404—358 *Artaxerxes II*, revolt by Cyrus and Egypt; battle of Cunaxa and death of Cyrus; war with Sparta and loss of Egypt; long struggle against internal decay.
- 358—338 *Artaxerxes III*, conquered Egypt once more; reestablished a strong government; murdered.
- 338—336 *Arses*.

336—332 *Darius III*, Alexander the Great and Arbella.⁶

The opinion of Adam C. Welch that Judaism developed among the remanent population of North and South Israel can not be accepted. It is based upon the assumption that the poorer classes of the nations preserved the traditions of God, and then covenanted to worship Yahweh and to remain separate from their neighbors. Ezra was simply a caravan leader who could not keep his followers in order, while Nehemiah had no connection with the reform at all.⁷ This basic assumption is at variance with the purpose and methods of exile in ancient empires. The aim was to eliminate the possibility of revolt and was achieved by exiling all the officials, nobles, and religious leaders. These were the people transported to Babylon, among whom the movement for the reform began and who forced their will upon the Jerusalem community.

The work of Charles C. Torrey in the area of post-exilic research is in many ways very useful. However, his insistence that the whole story of the Exile and the return was a piece of religious polemic by the Jews against the Samaritans forced him to deny the historicity of Ezra and the authenticity of the record.⁸ Recent archae-

⁶ A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c. 1948), passim.

⁷ Adam C. Welch, *Post-Exilic Judaism* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons Ltd., 1935), passim.

⁸ Charles C. Torrey, "The Aramaic Portions of Ezra," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, XXIV (April 1908); "The Chronicler as Editor and Independent Narrator," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, XXV (January 1909; April 1909), hereafter cited as *Editor; The Chronicler's His-*

ological finds have demonstrated quite clearly that urban life in Palestine had practically ceased to exist from the time of the Chaldean invasions until well into the Persian period.⁹ Thus there is no reason to regard the account of the return as a fiction, and scholars are justified in rejecting Torrey's conclusions.

Julius Morgenstern has recently posited a theory of an additional destruction of Jerusalem in about 485 B.C., as the immediate background for the Ezra-Nehemiah history.¹⁰ The arguments for this position rest upon an exegesis of many passages of the Old Testament which is highly subjective and in some cases is simply the piling of one assumption upon a previous one. Dates for books and events seem to be settled on the basis of his theory rather than upon the evidence of the text. Consequently this solution must be rejected.

The problems of the narrative will now

story of Judah (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), hereafter cited as *History*; "The Nature and Origin of 'I Esdras,'" *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, XXIII (January 1907); "Sanballat The Horonite," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XLVII (1928), hereafter cited as *Sanballat*; and many others.

⁹ Albright, *Period*, p. 49, n. 122. In his latest work Torrey has tried to turn this argument by assuming that the destruction was so vast that there were no cities nor villages to which the exiles might return. He has ignored the possibility that "their cities" of the period of the Exile may not be the same places as "their cities" after the return; cf. Torrey, *History*, p. xxvi.

¹⁰ Julius Morgenstern, "Jerusalem — 485 B.C.," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XXVII (1956), XXVIII (1957), and XXXI (1960); "The Message of Deutero-Isaiah in its Sequential Unfolding," *Ibid.*, XXIX (1958), and XXX (1959); and "A Chapter in the History of the High Priesthood," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, LV (1938).

come under scrutiny in the order in which they have been listed above.¹¹

a. The edicts of the Persians are preserved in three places in Ezra (1:2-4; 6:3-12; 7:12-26). The first two of these, relating to the return of the exiles and the building of the temple, appear to be variant forms of the same decree. The former is written in Hebrew and the latter in Aramaic. The third one, also written in Aramaic, is concerned with the mission and authority of Ezra.

Reasons often adduced to deny the authenticity of the decrees are: the naming of Yahweh instead of Ahuramazda as the god of heaven; the mention of Jerusalem in connection with the temple of Yahweh; the orders for the neighbors to assist the Jews with gifts of money and goods; and the grant of extensive secular power to Ezra.¹²

The studies of Elias J. Bickermann¹³ of the methods used by the Persians to issue decrees demonstrate the probability of the authenticity of the decrees. He brings evidence to show that the use of the term "God of Heaven" in an ambiguous manner was usual. He also shows that a copy of the decree was placed in the court archives, but the decree itself was published orally by a herald in the language of the people addressed. This form of publication partly explains the difference between the Hebrew and Aramaic versions of the decree. In addition, when Darius reissued the decree there was more interest in the temple than in the return.

¹¹ *Supra*, pp. 79, 80.

¹² See the standard Introductions and Commentaries *in loco*.

¹³ Elias J. Bickermann, "The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra I," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXV (1946), 249—275.

Since most of the above arguments apply also to the decree authorizing Ezra to regulate the Jerusalem community and since the Elephantine Papyri indicate that the Persians were interested in the religious welfare of their subjects,¹⁴ there is no reason to deny the authenticity of the three decrees.

b. Most older scholars identified Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel as the same man. In more recent years, however, this has been considered an unsatisfactory solution. Albright has pointed out that both of the names are Babylonian and thus could hardly have been given to the same man.¹⁵

A distinction between the two men is supported by 1 Esdras, since 2:8 refers to Sheshbazzar as governor of Judah under Cyrus, while 4:13 portrays Zerubbabel as one of Darius' guardsmen. Thus it is probable that Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were not the same man. The latter is easy to identify as the governor of Judah when the temple was built under Darius I, 520—516 B. C. (Ezra 5; Haggai; Zechariah 1-8). Sheshbazzar was probably the Shenazar mentioned in 1 Chronicles 3:18, thus a son of Jehoiachin and uncle of Zerubbabel.

c. The establishment of the relationship of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel does not explain all the difficulties in the record of the early return and the slow building of the temple. Ezra 4:1-5 blames the opposition of the people of the land for the long delay, while Haggai 1:2-4, 9 and 2:16-18 mentioned only the spiritual lassitude of the Jews themselves.

It seems most probable that there were two attempts to build the temple, as portrayed in the record. The first of these

projects, under Sheshbazzar, failed for some obscure reason. Perhaps the simple combination of Sheshbazzar's death, together with the laxity of neighboring Persian governors and opposition by local people checked the work. Frustration then led to the condition of spiritual carelessness mentioned by Haggai and Zechariah.

Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai, and Zechariah were all in Jerusalem when the death of Cambyses precipitated a crisis in the Persian Empire.¹⁶ It may be true that some of their hearers ascribed political intentions to the words of the two prophets. But it is hardly possible that a revolt occurred since the temple was finished by the express orders of Darius I in 520 to 516 B. C.

d. It is almost certain that the lists of returnees in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 are variants of the same roll.¹⁷ With the exception of Torrey,¹⁸ most scholars accept the lists as containing genuine information about a part of the Jerusalem community. The great problem is that the list is undated. Galling's suggestion¹⁹ that the list is an official census of the community in answer to the investigation of Tattenai, is probably correct. Nehemiah disclaims any responsibility for compiling the list, stating only that he found it when he considered making a census of the people (Neh. 7:5). The roll itself states that Zerubbabel

¹⁶ *Supra*, p. 81.

¹⁷ H. L. Allrick, "The Lists of Zerubbabel (Nehemiah 7 and Ezra 2) and the Hebrew Numeral Notation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, CXXXVI (December 1954), 27.

¹⁸ Torrey, *Editor*, pp. 214 ff.

¹⁹ Kurt Galling, "The Göli-list According to Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7," translated from the German by C. R. Simon, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXX (June 1951), 151—157.

¹⁴ A. E. Cowley, *op. cit.*, papyrus 38, line 7.

¹⁵ Albright, *History*, pp. 7 ff.

and Jeshua were the leaders of the returnees at the time it was compiled. The objection that the Jerusalem group could not have comprised fifty thousand people by 520 B. C. is invalid. It would have required only about three thousand immigrants a year to the community to have attained that number. The list then, in its dual recension, is an authentic census of the Jerusalem community late in 520 or early in 519 B. C.

e. The short account of an unsuccessful attempt to build the walls of Jerusalem seems out of place in the story of the building of the temple (Ezra 4:6-23). Some scholars²⁰ think that the Chronicler simply wanted to tell of all of the incidents of opposition of the people of the land before proceeding to report Zerubbabel's success in building the temple.

Ezra 4:6-23 certainly is a résumé of several deeds of harassment by the enemies of the Jews. The date of the major incident of this section was probably just before the coming of Nehemiah. There is no doubt that he expected opposition and was ready when it developed. At the same time it should be noted that the opposition mentioned here was not to the temple but to the walls. The underlying motive in this

case was probably political and not religious.

f. The Biblical narrative explicitly connects the work of Ezra and Nehemiah in only three verses, Nehemiah 8:9; 12:26 and 12:36, indicating that the two men were active in Jerusalem at the same time. A careful reading of the Ezra and Nehemiah stories shows that except in these three verses there occurs no other account of contact between the two men. Moreover, their commissions and authority seem to overlap since both apparently supervised both secular and religious phases of life in the Jerusalem community.

A close study of the three texts indicates that there is no textual evidence for a clear-cut decision as to the authenticity of the passages. The ancient versions are of no help, and Josephus merely complicates the question of the relationship of the two men to each other.

There are four possibilities of explaining why Ezra and Nehemiah are not mentioned together except in the three passages mentioned. (1) Ezra preceded Nehemiah and was dead before the latter's arrival, as Josephus tells the story.²¹ (2) Nehemiah preceded Ezra and had completed his work before Ezra arrived in Jerusalem. (3) The two men were personally antagonistic and avoided any mention of one another unless absolutely necessary. (4) The two men were in Jerusalem together for only a relatively short time, doing different work so that they did not cross each other's path in an official manner except for the three incidents which are mentioned.

In assessing these possibilities the first and the third seem to be improbable.

²⁰ Carl F. Keil, *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, translated from the German by Sophia Taylor, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament in Clark's Foreign Theological Library, fourth series (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1888), VIII, 74; Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1958), pp. 372 ff.; Kurt Galling, "Kronzeugen des Artaxerxes?" *Zeitschrift fuer die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des nachbiblischen Judentums*, LXIII (1951), 73 f.; J. Stafford Wright, *The Date of Ezra's Coming to Jerusalem* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1947), p. 25; hereafter cited as *Ezra*.

²¹ Josephus, *Ant.*, XI, 5, 5.

There is no evidence in the Biblical text for the explanation given by Josephus, nor for the assumption of personal antagonism between the two men. The second suggestion ultimately amounts to a denial of the authenticity of the three passages linking the work of Ezra and Nehemiah. There is much to commend the fourth possibility: the paths of the two men crossed infrequently because they were together in Jerusalem for only a short time and had differing missions.

A close examination of the rescript of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:12-26), authorizing the return of Ezra, discloses that it is essentially a grant of authority to control the religious life of the Jews. Except for the last two verses (25, 26), it is quite a moderate order. Even these two verses can be understood as placing the Jews in the western provinces under the rule of Ezra in spiritual matters alone. Since Ezra, in fact, never used secular powers, this is the most likely intention of the decree.

Nehemiah, on the other hand, was sent to build the wall of Jerusalem. He very likely was appointed to the governorship of Judah with the documents and military force required to accomplish the task (Neh. 2:6-9). Whenever he acted in the religious field it was as an administrator enforcing laws known to the people. Thus there was no essential conflict between the missions of the two men.

The story of the dedication of the wall (Neh. 12:27—13:3) together with the mention of Nehemiah's previous journey to Babylon and return to Jerusalem is the key to the problem. A careful reading of this section of the book, ignoring the chapter division, shows that Nehemiah did not dedicate the wall when he built it, but

some seventeen or eighteen years later. What was the reason for the long delay? Rawlinson's suggestion that Nehemiah simply did not dare to dedicate the wall without the express permission of the king, seems adequate.²² At the same time he did not dare to ask permission by letter for fear of being misunderstood, nor could he leave Jerusalem until he was sure that the city was safe from both external and internal enemies.

If Ezra and Nehemiah were in Jerusalem together only in the latter part of Nehemiah's governorship, the question arises whether it is possible to fix Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem as occurring between Nehemiah's return to the king and his second visit to Jerusalem. Such a hypothesis would explain why there is no further mention of their joint activity in the record. The sequence of events would be as follows: Nehemiah arrived first, built the wall, governed for twelve years, and returned to the king. During this time it is quite likely that he enforced no great changes in the religious life of the people. All the notices of religious reform in the text occur after he came to Jerusalem the second time. Ezra arrived in the period of Nehemiah's absence and was faced immediately with the necessity of reforming the spiritual life of the people, particularly in the area of marriages with foreign women. His first efforts were partially successful, but the problem could not be settled completely because of opposition within the high priest's family. Joiada's son had married Sanballat's daughter (Neh.

²² George Rawlinson and G. Wood, *The Book of Nehemiah*, *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n. d., reprint, 1950), VII, section 2, 132.

13:28), but there is no mention that this case was investigated.

During the absence of Nehemiah there was no authority sufficient to keep the high-priestly family in line. With his return to Jerusalem, however, the circumstances changed. The governor dedicated the walls, giving Ezra a prominent place in the ritual, but seemingly excluding the high priest (Neh. 12:27-43). As a part of the ceremony, the Law against marriage to foreigners was read (13:1-3). Then, with the prestige gained by this successful political accomplishment, Nehemiah enforced the measures against spiritual evils. He drove out the son-in-law of Sanballat and demanded obedience to other provisions of the Law.

This hypothesis may be charged with overlooking the fact that the text records Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7,8). To obviate this objection only a slight emendation of the text is necessary. It is proposed that the reading of "the seventh year" be changed to either the "twenty-seventh year" or "thirty-seventh year," involving the accidental dropping-out of only one word in the original. Since in the assumed text there were three successive words beginning with the same letter, *ש*, such an omission on the part of the copyist is quite likely.²³ The probability of such an haplography is much greater than the conjecture of an interpolation of the names at three different places, which is necessary if Ezra and Nehemiah are not regarded as contemporary. The question whether the original read twenty-seventh or thirty-seventh year is decided in favor of the latter

²³ There is at least one such loss of a part of a number known in the Bible (1 Sam. 13:1).

by the fact that Ezra and Nehemiah are placed together after Nehemiah's return to the king in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes. Ezra then arrived five years later.

This sequence of events raises one more difficulty. An explanation must be given to the question how Ezra 7—10 became separated from Nehemiah 8—10. In accepting the authorship of Ezra for the whole Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah history, it is not necessary to assume that the text has been preserved in the exact order in which he left it. A later scribe, who did not realize that the word "thirty" had dropped out of the "thirty-seventh year," could have decided to correct the order of the text. If Ezra came in the seventh year of Artaxerxes and Nehemiah in the twentieth, he could have concluded that obviously Ezra should precede Nehemiah in the record. Yet the text named the two men together in the incident now recorded in Nehemiah 8. So the scribe simply moved that part of the story of Ezra which contained no reference to Nehemiah to a position preceding the history of Nehemiah.

g. The word *קיר*, which Ezra uses for "wall" (Ezra 9:9) in his prayer of thanksgiving, normally means a stone wall to keep small animals out of the vineyards. It sometimes means a city wall, however, and is used both literally and in a figurative manner. On the basis of the evidence available it is not possible to demonstrate whether Ezra used the word in reference to an actual wall or symbolically for God's protection.

But the usage of *קיר* in either sense does not affect the suggested dates for Ezra and Nehemiah. Since Nehemiah ar-

rived in 444 B.C., he had already built the wall before Ezra came in 427 B.C. The wall had been built when Ezra prayed; therefore, the precise meaning of the word does not determine the understanding of the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah.

h. The Ezra narrative reflects a settled city with comparative safety for the inhabitants (Ezra 10:1). The story of Nehemiah and his work tells of a city which did not have enough inhabitants to fill its own space (Neh. 7:4). Moreover, the builders were in danger from the surrounding people. The situation should be the reverse if Ezra preceded Nehemiah.

The explanation of Scott that the crowd at prayer was large in relation to the space occupied seems to be the simplest answer to the problem.²⁴ The number could also have been augmented by worshipers from all Israel, not only from Jerusalem. Thus it is impossible to draw any solid conclusions about the chronological relationship of Ezra and Nehemiah from a study of this incident.

i. The problem of correlating the list of Nehemiah's builders (Neh. 3:1-32) with that of Ezra's caravan (Ezra 8:1-33) is complicated by the fact that both rolls deal only with leaders. Actually only one name in each list can be fairly reliably assigned to the same man, Meremoth, son of Uriah (Ezra 8:33; Neh. 3:4 and 31). He appears in the Nehemiah narrative as a leader in the rebuilding of two sections of the wall and in the Ezra story as a priest in charge of the temple treasury. The question is simply which incident occurred first.

²⁴ W. M. F. Scott, "Nehemiah-Ezra?" *The Expository Times*, LVIII (1946-47), 263 f.

Meremoth is mentioned as a member of the Haqqos family which had claimed but had been denied priestly status at the time of Zerubbabel. (Ezra 2:61; Neh. 7:63)

The problem is solved best if we assume that Meremoth served Nehemiah as a builder in 444 B.C. Because of his zeal he may have been promoted a bit more rapidly than usual, and by 427 B.C. when Ezra arrived he was one of the temple treasurers. This would place his birth at about 480 B.C., fifty years after his family had been denied priestly status, sufficient time for the family to prove its claim even before his birth.

j. The Biblical accounts show that Ezra took a severe attitude toward the foreign wives, demanding that they be divorced (Ezra 10:1-5). Nehemiah had a milder approach. Except for the case of Sanballat's son-in-law, he insisted only upon the promise not to allow children to marry foreigners (Neh. 13:23-28). At the same time the records disclose strong opposition to the work of Nehemiah, while Ezra apparently had no enemies.

The explanation of these facts probably lies in the nature of the work done by the two men. Nehemiah, as governor, was responsible for the peace and safety of the community. He found it necessary to oppose Sanballat, governor of Samaria (Neh. 2:1, 19; 4:1; 6:1), who very likely wanted to add Jerusalem to his domain. Moreover, he found it necessary to oppose the policies of Eliashib and Joiada, the high priests, who were interested in building up political influence in neighboring countries. At the same time Nehemiah could have been rather easy-going in his relations to the peasants who were not dangerous politically.

Ezra was of a different temperament. He prayed and fasted (Ezra 10:1,2) while others acted. Yet he refused to compromise on principles. He wanted all Jews to worship Yahweh with his own single-minded sincerity. The historical and religious situation made these men allies in ensuring the political safety and the spiritual integrity of the Jerusalem community. The active work of Nehemiah exposed him to immediate enmity, while the passive policy of Ezra protected him. Yet the Samaritan traditions are probably right in ascribing their excommunication from the Jerusalem community to the work of Ezra.²⁵

k. While Eliashib, the high priest, is presented as a contemporary of Nehemiah (Neh. 3:1; 13:4-6), Johanan, his son or grandson, is portrayed as having had a room in the temple precincts during Ezra's first year in Jerusalem (Ezra 10:6; cf. Neh. 12:10, 22). Such a synchronization does not seem congruent with Ezra's preceding Nehemiah by thirteen years.

In the Elephantine Papyri a certain Johanan is named as high priest at Jerusalem in 408 B. C.²⁶ The only Johanan mentioned in the Bible during this period is the grandson of Eliashib (Neh. 12:22). This information definitely places Eliashib and his contemporary, Nehemiah, in the reign of Artaxerxes I, whose twentieth year was 444 B. C. Then the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes was 432 B. C., the year in which Nehemiah returned to Babylon. Some time after that, but before Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem, Eliashib

died and Joiada, father of Johanan, succeeded as high priest. (Neh. 13:28)

Ezra 10:6 simply states that Ezra spent the night in the temple room of one named Johanan. The lack of identification of this man points to a well-known official, probably the high priest.²⁷ Some scholars avoid the chronological difficulty by stating that the man named in Ezra 10:6 was not the future high priest.²⁸ Snaith²⁹ and Rowley³⁰ both solve the difficulty by dating Ezra in the seventh year of Artaxerxes II. This involves the textual emendations mentioned above and is not entirely satisfactory.

The Biblical data and the information from Elephantine fit into the chronology which places Nehemiah in 444 B. C. and Ezra in 427 B. C. In fact, this solution removes the necessity of postulating exceedingly long lives for both Johanan and his son, Jaddua, who was still high priest in 332 B. C.,³¹ and does not require the textual emendations suggested by Snaith and Rowley.

l. Any attempt to define what Law Ezra taught must take cognizance of the following points. The similarity between the

²⁷ Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Question of Authorship in the Ezra-narrative* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1944), p. 74.

²⁸ Keil, *Ezra*, p. 127; Young, op. cit., pp. 374 ff.; Wright, *Ezra*, p. 20; and Scott, op. cit., p. 264.

²⁹ Norman H. Snaith, "The Date of Ezra's Arrival in Jerusalem," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des nachbiblischen Judentums*, LXIII (1951), 62.

³⁰ Harold H. Rowley, "The Chronological Order of Ezra and Nehemiah," *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), pp. 145 to 150.

³¹ Josephus, *Ant.*, XI, 8, 4.

²⁵ Moses Gaster, *The Samaritans, Their History, Doctrines, and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp. 28 ff.

²⁶ Cowley, op. cit., Papyrus 30, lines 4, 17, and 18.

Jewish and the Samaritan laws certainly points to their origin and completion in a period preceding Ezra. The application of regulations (Neh. 8:15) from the Priestly Code, assumed by many to be the last document to be added to the Pentateuch, points in the same direction. The matter-of-fact acceptance of the people of the binding force of the Law (Neh. 8:1,6,9), also adds strength to this position. Thus it is safe to say that the Law which Ezra had was substantially the Pentateuch as it now exists. The work of Ezra was not that of introducing the Law; rather his task was to teach a Law which was already known, but neglected.

In order to save space the reconstruction of the history of this period will be presented in tabular form.

| <i>B. C.</i> | | <i>Reference</i> |
|--------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 539/538 | Capture of Babylon and the Cyrus Edict. Since the Persian throne year began with Tishri, this Edict was probably issued in the first year of Cyrus | Ezra 1:1 |
| 537 | Building of the altar, first offerings, Tabernacles, all during Tishri of second year of Cyrus | Ezra 3:1, 6 |
| 536 | Temple foundations laid by Sheshbazzar, second month of year after return, late spring | Ezra 3:8 cf. 5:16 |
| 536—520 | Interruption of temple-building, probably from internal causes | Ezra 4:5, 24 |
| 520 | Second attempt to build temple, dated from Hag., first day of sixth month, second year of Darius. Offer of help, refusal, and accusation to Tattenai | Hag. 1:1 cf. Ezra 4:1-4 |
| 516 | Temple completed, third Adar, sixth year of Darius | Ezra 6:15 |
| 516 | Dedication of temple; celebration of Passover; fourteenth Nisan, no year stated, but from form of narrative, presumably sixth year of Darius | Ezra 6:19 |
| 485 | Letter of general accusation to Xerxes | Ezra 4:6 |
| 446/445 | Abortive attempt to build the walls of Jerusalem under Artaxerxes I | Ezra 4:7-23 |
| 445 | Hanani brought news to Nehemiah; Chislew, twentieth year of Artaxerxes I | Neh. 1:1 |
| 444 | Nehemiah received permission to build wall of Jerusalem; Nisan, twentieth year of Artaxerxes | Neh. 2:1-6 |
| 444 | Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem, presumably the same year, to take full advantage of king's favor | Neh. 2:11 |
| 444 | Wall finished, 25 Elul, no year stated but done in fifty-two days, so probably the same year | Neh. 6:15 |
| 444 | Appointment of Hanani as commandant, also of singers, gatekeepers, and Levites | Neh. 7:1, 2 |
| 444 | Census begun, old list found | Neh. 7:5 ff. |

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|--------------|
| 443—432 | Slow completion of all the towers and ramparts of the wall, strengthening first rapid work, repopulation of the city, approximate places of residence of the Jewish community established | Neh. 11 |
| 443—432 | Slow establishment of social justice in community | Neh. 5 |
| 432 | Nehemiah went to Babylon | Neh. 13:6 |
| 432—428 | Eliashib admitted Tobiah to temple | Neh. 13:4, 5 |
| 432—428 | Joiada became high priest; Joiada's son married Sanballat's daughter | Neh. 13:28 |
| 427 | Twelfth of first month, no year stated, Ezra departed from Ahava. From following data, this was same year as arrival in Jerusalem, hence thirty-seventh year of Artaxerxes, accepting the slight textual emendation | Ezra 8:31 |
| 427 | Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, fifth month, thirty-seventh year of Artaxerxes I | Ezra 7:8 |
| 427 | Public complaint concerning mixed marriages | Ezra 9:1 |
| 427 | Assembly in regard to mixed marriages, twentieth day of ninth month, no year stated, but likely the year of Ezra's arrival | Ezra 10:9 |
| 426 | Divorce actions completed, first day of first month, no year stated, immediate action likely | Ezra 10:17 |
| 426 | Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, no date stated | Neh. 13:7 |
| 426 | First reading of the Law, first of seventh month, no year stated, presumably soon after Nehemiah and Ezra had joined forces | Neh. 8:2 |
| 426 | Followed by another session the next day | Neh. 8:13 |
| 426 | Feast of Tabernacles, no year stated | Neh. 8:18 |
| 426 | Fast and confession, twenty-fourth of this month | Neh. 9:1 |
| 426 | The sealing of the covenant | Neh. 10 |
| 426 | Dedication of the walls; no date is given, but likely after the journey to Babylon | Neh. 12:27 |
| 426 and shortly after | Final reforms: Tobiah cast out, tithes and Levites, Sabbath observance, final settlement of mixed marriages | Neh. 13:8-31 |

The reform of Ezra and Nehemiah is then an episode in the story of God's dealing with man. It is an integral part of the *Heilsgeschichte*. These two men gathered the strands of previous development and laid the foundations for that which followed. Hence their work cannot be considered simply an episode in world history.

The attempt to date their work by the use of all possible information is legitimate, but their significance is bound up in God's own plans. They came in the fullness of time and helped to prepare a people for the Christ. This is their accolade, and this alone.

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

BRIEF STUDIES

I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION

This brief study reproduces the substance of a paper delivered to the St. Louis City Pastoral Conference on Nov. 10, 1958.

The final, formal act of committing a dead body to a grave or to an urn is one of the frequent and difficult tasks ministers have to perform in the course of their pastoral duties.¹

In itself and its surroundings there is little or nothing to relieve the gloom and sorrow of the occasion. One neither cares nor needs to describe this, because the language one would use, however choice or classic it might be, would still be morbid, biting, and very sad. The Christian minister, however, works here against a magnificent backdrop of historical fact and eschatological hope — Christ's resurrection and His return in glory to raise the dead. At burial services he speaks Biblical words that form a framework around the inexorable fact of death and the solemn act of burial. These words, whether they be those of his sermon text, the lections, or the passages from the Word of God read at the graveside, all allow him to say: "In the hope of the resurrection to eternal life."² Unless the resurrection of our Lord and of the dead who die in the Lord and are raised to life eternal is at the very heart of the service of burial in sermon and rite, as it must have been at the heart of the ministrations to the dying and the bereaved, this ministry is not truly Christian and Biblical.

tions to the dying and the bereaved, this ministry is not truly Christian and Biblical.

It is not necessary here to describe the acts of commendation or committal. Nor will we criticize the frequently distressing and degrading customs and ornaments that have been accumulating around the service of so-called Christian burial. These are in many respects the result of enterprise and of worldly, though no doubt well-meant, considerations on the part of the pastor's partner when he buries the dead — the funeral director. Nor is the intention here to give a historical summary of the use of the Christian committal passages in general or of Lutheran choices in particular.³ It is much more profitable to examine the passages from the Bible which we do use in the home, the church, and at the graveside.⁴ Of these many passages we wish to examine with some degree of thoroughness only one portion — 1 Cor. 15:42-44, 53-57.

Translation

- 42 Thus is the resurrection of the dead. The sowing is done in corruption, the raising is done in incorruptibility.
- 43 The sowing is done in shame, the raising is done in glory.
- 44 The sowing is done in weakness, the raising is done in strength. Sown is a psychic [i. e., mortal] body, raised is a pneumatic [i. e., of the Spirit of God] body, for there is a psychic body, and there is a pneumatic body.

¹ In 1960 the pastors of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod officiated at burial rites of 25,139 persons. Of these 2,000 were of preconfirmation age. The increase in burials (1,571) was 7 percent over the previous year. Baptized membership increased 3 percent. *Statistical Yearbook* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 175.

² *The Lutheran Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), pp. 67—102. *The Pastor's Companion* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), pp. 67—98, esp. 94, 95.

³ John Schmidt, "Preaching at Funerals," *The Lutheran Quarterly*, XIII (Aug. 1961), 249—254. Cf. John Schaller, *Pastorale Praxis* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1913), pp. 89 ff.

⁴ *The Pastor's Companion*, pp. 67, 70—79, 94, 95.

- 53 For the perishable [that which is capable of decaying] must clothe itself in [or must put on] indestructibility and the mortal must put on immortality.
- 54 Then when this perishable puts on imperishability and this mortal puts on immortality, then will occur the word written: "Swallowed up was death in victory."
- 55 Death, where is your victory? Where, Death, your stinger?
- 56 The stinger of death is the sin, the power of the sin, the Law.
- 57 Thanks to the God, who gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ.

As we approach the text we allow the words to speak to us as pastors, curates of our people, to whom we are ministers.

Οὕτως — Paul here refers to the analogies from the world of nature: the nature of sown grain, differing, as seed and harvest, in itself, with itself, sown and grown; the nature of the animal world, differing, on earth, in all its variety, but all animal; the world of heavenly bodies, stars, sun, moon, earth, differing in the heavens among themselves, but all celestial.⁵ The analogies are just that. They do not want pressing, e.g., it would go too far to say that seed is little, that it rots and produces a plant larger than itself, full of many grains, and draw conclusions about the resurrection from that. Surely, in the case of the seed, the comparison is in the dying and living, not elsewhere. The variation is in the types of flesh: all animal, animated, but different — men, beasts, flies, fish — but all show inherent and continuing identity. The heavenly bodies are generally similar, but embrace vast differences in size, location, and purpose. This is his theme — sameness with change, variety with constant identity in nature and purpose. So, says

⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 14:35-41.

Paul, is the resurrection of the dead, for great or small, for sun or satellite, for man or beast. So, in all its infinite mystery but empiric fact, in all its variety but substantive continuity with what goes before, is the resurrection of the dead.

Ἀνάστασις — almost uniquely Biblical and peculiarly Judaic, this word is also pretty well exclusively New Testamental. Parallels in the myths of whatever culture we might examine are not convincing; they are basically and terribly different. Ἀνάστασις, resurrection, is totally linked with that of Jesus, the only Source from which the possibility and fact of *our* resurrection, i. e., the resurrection of the dead, can proceed. Without His resurrection there will be no resurrection for anyone else.

Τῶν νεκρῶν — the dead. Are these male? female? neuter? Since we are now not going into the restoration or transformation of the νεκρῶν in the parousia of the ἔσχατον, it will be enough to say that the dead are people.

The heading, so to speak, of what we say at committal services, therefore is: Listen, you mourners and heavyhearted survivors! What we do here today is not done, as it appears to be done, with finality and hopelessness. Remember what happens in this ground, or any like it, on which we stand sowing, dying, growing, living. Remember the world of animal life, as it walks and flies about. This earth and this world end, and the flesh must be put off. Remember the skies above us and the earth, which is part of the solar, stellar, lunar system — skies that are ordered, glorious, variable, but unified in the creation.

The analogy is: Life in its widely diversified variety in unity is everywhere. So the resurrection is for all. It is the work of One who made all who will be in the resurrection. The resurrection is the work of One who remakes all.

Ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν — the resurrection

of the dead. This is one of the class of great, single, summarizing, incomprehensible statements of real historical truth with which God's Word assaults our credulity and our limitedness. Others are the creation of the world, the incarnation of the Logos, the redemption of the world, the election unto life everlasting, the oneness or wholeness of the church, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

The Bible is full of these sentences or expressions. By human standards they are grandiloquent, impossible. Yet all of them together are a chain which carries the revelation of God, a chain that ties us to Him and ties us together in the company of His children. So in this grand, universal fashion God remains consistent within Himself in the resurrection.

Σπείρεται — sown. The word is used four times in this period sentence. Of course, it means "sown," "it is sown," passive, 3d person singular. What is the subject? To borrow a German expression, it could be *man*, i. e., sowing goes on all the time. Or it could be "the body is sown." But when should this be understood to happen? Perhaps at burial, more likely throughout life, for "we die daily."

Ἐγείρεται — is raised. Again, the dead, the body. The word is clearly intended to express the parallel to "sown," namely, the harvest. Only that which is sown, i. e., dies, can be harvested, i. e., be raised.

In harmony with this opening note of promise by Paul that he is going to demonstrate the ἀνάστασις, there now begins a grand series of contrasts, which it will suffice briefly to place opposite each other with their meaning and under the proper heading.

SOWN

| | |
|----------|------------------|
| φθορά | corruptibility |
| ἀτιμία | shame |
| ἀσθενεία | weakness |
| ψυχικόν | psychic (mortal) |

RAISED

| | |
|-------------|---|
| ἀφθαρσία | purity and incorruptibility |
| δόξη | glory |
| δύναμις | power: not <i>σχῆμα</i> which means strength, but really power, which is from God. ⁶ |
| πνευματικόν | pneumatic, i. e., of the Spirit of God |

Thus Paul heaps up his expressions in the most glaringly contrasting fashion available to him in the language he is using — and Greek is known to be rich in synonyms. The parallels are resumed in vv. 53—57.

| | |
|-----------|--|
| φθαρτόν | a shame beyond computation that men should literally decay, rot. |
| θνητόν | capable of dying; not only <i>mortal</i> , but <i>mortible</i> |
| ἀφθαρσίαν | (see above) a gift beyond computation, that men shall rise and never again be subject to decay |
| ἀθανασίαν | incapable of ever dying again; not only <i>immortal</i> , but <i>immortible</i> |

These verses are invariably read during the Lutheran service of committal. Here we have, then, a portrayal of men, before death, compared with believing men after death. He who is corruptible, shameful, weak, psychic (mortal) is moving in the direction of being no longer subject to decay, glorious, powerful, spiritual, deathless. Man's condition before death is almost indescribably

⁶ Cf. the article on δύναμις in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, II, 286 to 318.

shameful — witness the variety of degradation to which he is subject or to which he subjects himself and into which he plunges. How much more indescribable is what awaits him, us, in the resurrection! The words sound through to us, as we read them aloud at the graveside, as pastors read them to us, or as we reread them in the Scripture. The full grasp and significance of what these words say must await eternity. Yet we can say some things now.

The picture is quite comprehensive when man is viewed in his fallen though redeemed state. We should look at our hands, our bodies, we should feel them, and realize, each one, "I die daily!" We could be dead in the very next instant. We look at the range of disease in this body, which is intended to be the vehicle of divine life, and we perceive that it is but a horribly weak, fragile shell. But — how will this body be later?

It will be forever enlivened and no longer available as prey to disease, age, mortality. It will be glorious with a glory suitable to it, but similar to that which permeated Jesus' body at His transfiguration; so will the body be at the resurrection. It will be powerful, in a divine sense. The δύναμις is never ascribed in the New Testament to man. In God it is an inherent, not a derivative power, more than strength or brute force. This power will pervade and animate the resurrection body. The body will be deathless. It will not be able to die again. Indeed, there will be no death.

Rising on the Last Day will be like changing clothes (v. 53) from rags to spangles, like changing our condition from filth within and without to immaculateness. All this, because we have not yet experienced it, at present presages and prefigures putting on or being put on with an unspoilable body in the resurrection (middle voice with passive connotation). Even as death is the most devastating witness in evidence of our fallen state,

so resurrection will be our most potent witness to our permanent state of ultimate redemption.

And this, of course, is the truth. Subtly free quotes from Is. 25:8 and Hos. 13:14 now follow in v. 54. Even in the sense of these ancient words the quotes indicate a great transformation as an expression of the New Testament hope. This hope is based on the New Testament events described in the closing chapters of each of the Gospels, namely, the resurrection narratives with their sequels.

"Ὄταν-τότε, "when" — "then." The extreme tension of these words is almost unbearable: Then, when — when, then. The future is thought of as already present, the present is thought of as already future. Death is "gulped down" — into victory. Death is not changed, it is removed.

The epical, lyrical address to death in v. 55 leads us to ask: How could anyone speak more strongly or dramatically than by apostrophizing death? It is as if Paul is looking, and as if we can look, directly into the terrifying face of death without quailing. He did — we can.

Κέντρον — stinger. Like a buzzing, inescapable, poisonous insect, death here almost receives a personality, although death is basically a negation, and it is difficult to personify a negative. But death strikes and strikes. Yet, even as the insect, having struck, leaves his stinger behind and is finished as a stinging insect, so death, not by striking, but by the resurrection of Christ, is left powerless to harm. Here and now a man can really die in hope. The victory, of course, is Christ's. What happened once — resurrection — will happen again — resurrection. Who will deny the death-dealing character of this stinger? It could, it did kill even Jesus Christ. But it is done with once and for all in the resurrection. Because in the death of Christ all died and therefore all sins were taken away, so in His

resurrection also all do and shall rise. This is the victory. For this victory we now give thanks as though it were already completely ours. It is ours even now, in a sense, namely, in the sense that Christ is risen. But our thanks will be eternally spoken by us and be accepted by God when we are with Him and with His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such is the Word of God, in perfect harmony with everything else the Scriptures tell us about the resurrection. This Word of God we read and speak at the graveside. On those inevitable occasions in the ministry of the parish when the shepherd has to console the weeping, mourning, sometimes almost inconsolable members of his flock, these and similar things are what he should be saying. If he wants to speak of other things, in the obedience of faith they must all be brought under examination in the light of such passages as 1 Cor. 15.

We are all aware that a very frequent question asked is "Where are our dead?" The import of this question is usually "Where are they now?" No doubt it means "Where are they, what are they, how are they, during the time in which we are still on earth and during which they are dead, buried?" Now, the Scriptures tell us "they are with God." Paul says, "I have a longing to be with Christ." Jesus said to the man on the cross, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." This can only mean that when he died his everlasting destiny, fate, future was settled at the time of his dying. Together with this, it can mean, that in God's eternal NOW, which is ever present, in which there is no yesterday nor tomorrow, but only a permanent TODAY, it is already as if the resurrection has taken or had taken place. Paul, or the thief, or anyone who dies in

Christ is with God. The blessedness of one who dies in the Lord, i. e., in the faith of Christ and in the hope of the resurrection of the dead, is "from henceforth." That can surely only mean that as far as they or God are concerned only one thing awaits them after death, only one thing awaits us after our death — life eternal, light eternal, victory eternal, to be with God and Christ. The comforts which we sometimes attach to the so-called "lesser hope" of a being with God in a provisional condition apart from, or prior to, resurrection must not in any way be allowed to shorten the resurrection promises. Pastors should not try to paint pretty word pictures or other types of pictures about the time the dead may be spending prior to resurrection which in any way reduce the force of the resurrection promises. The *status medius* or the intermediate state is brought in rather hesitantly by the church's teachers who try to stay with the Biblical emphasis of the resurrection fact and the resurrection hope as these, the fact and the hope, are given us in the Scriptures.⁷ If it is enough for Christ Himself and His blessed apostles, if it is enough for the church's teachers over the years to point to the living Christ as the Source and Guaranty of our salvation, our resurrection, and of our eternal bliss, it should be enough for us. As it is, it is far more than we deserve. For really we deserve nothing. It is all God's gracious gift to mortal man in whom, by His gift, there lives the life of the redeemed in Christ.

St. Louis, Mo. GILBERT A. THIELE

⁷ F. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1920), III, 574—578. A. Hoenecke, *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House), IV, 225—239.