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EZRA—NEHEMIAH OR NEHEMIAH— EZRA ?

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THE purpose of this article is to discuss whether the Chronicler's view that Ezra preceded Nehemiah can reasonably be maintained to-day. A considerable body of modern scholars hold that the Chronicler in the books of "Ezra" and "Nehemiah" is in error, and that his history of the period must be largely rewritten.

Apart from somewhat extravagant theories, such as that Ezra is entirely the product of the Chronicler's imagination, the usual view is that the Chronicler has confused the two kings of the name of Artaxerxes. In the documents that he used he found it stated that Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, and Ezra in the seventh year. Assuming that this king was Artaxerxes I (464-424 B.C.) in both cases, he wrote his history so as to make Ezra precede and overlap Nehemiah. Actually, however, a closer investigation of the sources which underlie "Ezra—Nehemiah" shows that Nehemiah must have come to Jerusalem in the reign of Artaxerxes I, and Ezra in the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-359 B.C.).

This investigation of the sources is made possible by the fact that the Chronicler in "Ezra—Nehemiah" appears more as a collector of documents than as a general historian. Decrees, letters, registers and memoirs are strung together on a background of history. How far the Chronicler himself has supplied or edited these documents is a matter for dispute. But that they are mainly original is suggested by the variety of their forms. For example, the letter in Ezra vii. 12-26 is given in Aramaic, and the memoirs are retained in the first person.

At first sight this fact would incline us to accept the books "Ezra—Nehemiah" as a very valuable authority, as being a scrap-book of original cuttings. But before this position can be accepted we must be convinced (1) that the Chronicler has not, as it were, arranged the cuttings in his scrap-book in the wrong order and thus given a wrong sequence of events, and (2) that he has not touched up and expanded some of the individual "cuttings" in the light of his own outlook and later point of view. The only way of answering these two questions is to examine the sources for ourselves and see if they are consistent with each other and with what we know of the period from other sources.

The main alleged rearrangement of history is this matter of the coming of Ezra and Nehemiah to Jerusalem. The Chronicler's version is that Ezra arrived in 457 B.C. and Nehemiah in 444 B.C., both in the reign of Artaxerxes I. The modern investigation of the documents incorporated in "Ezra—Nehemiah" is supposed to show that while Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem in 444 B.C. Ezra did not come till 397 B.C. in the reign of Artaxerxes II.

This modern version must meet a very serious objection straight away, and this objection does not seem to have been recognised by those who hold the theory. As long as the Chronicler is dealing with ancient history it might not be difficult for him to be trapped into a mistake of this sort. But the Chronicler wrote about 300 B.C. and some would place him earlier than that. The late Professor Dick Wilson of America placed him as early as 405 B.C. But taking the usual modern dating of 300 B.C., we find that the Chronicler is writing about someone who, according to the modern view, came to Jerusalem ninety-seven years before. There is nothing to show how long Ezra lived after coming to Jerusalem, but since he had time to attain to a high position in Jewish estimation, it is hardly likely that he lived in Jerusalem for less than ten years. We should not be unfair, then, if we said that the Chronicler is writing about someone who, it is alleged, died not more than eighty-seven years earlier. This person was no ordinary man but one of the chief men of his day. There would almost certainly be one or two people still living in Jerusalem in 300 B.C. who, as children, had seen Ezra. A very large number would have heard of him from their parents who had seen him. Is it, then, credible that the Chronicler could have made such an extraordinary mistake as to place Ezra sixty years too early, in a period quite outside living memory, and contemporary with another great leader who was also outside living memory? But supposing that he had made this strange mistake, it must have been detected instantly by the majority of his readers.

This objection is so strong that only absolutely incontrovertible evidence from the documents themselves could warrant our accepting the modern rearrangement. Is this evidence forthcoming?

For a clear investigation of the sources, we cannot do better than turn to Dr. W. O. E. Oesterley's *History of Israel* (Vol. 2) and *Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*. These books were written in collaboration with Dr. Theodore Robinson, but Dr. Oesterley is responsible for the post-exilic period.

Oesterley holds that three points at least show that Nehemiah must have preceded Ezra.

(1) Nehemiah in his memoirs remarks that "the city was wide and large; but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded" (vii. 4). Nehemiah here "complains of the smallness of the population in Jerusalem; but Ezra (in x. 1) finds things rather different in this respect for he speaks of a 'very great congregation of men and women and children'; cp. also x. 13." (Oesterley, *Hist.*, 117.)

All weight is taken from this argument by noticing that Ezra's great congregation was gathered together "out of Israel" (x. 1). They were not dwelling in Jerusalem, but in the places round about (cp. also x. 7, 9, 14). This is entirely consistent with what Nehemiah says. In the record of the builders in Nehemiah iii. people from various districts are included, showing that there were numbers of people living round about Jerusalem. But they were evidently in no hurry to give up their new houses and lands and to come and

live in Jerusalem itself. This is Nehemiah's complaint (cp. Neh. xi. 1, 2). There is no evidence for saying, as Oesterley does in his *Introduction* . . . , p. 128, that "in Ezra's time there was clearly a large settled population in the City."

(2) According to Ezra ix. 9, Ezra finds the city walls built. He must then have come after Nehemiah.

It is tempting to take "wall" in this verse in a metaphorical sense, but Oesterley points out (*Hist.*, 117, footnote) that, apart from the parallelism of the verse, the Hebrew word "geder" is never used figuratively when referring to a wall.

That there was some sort of a wall in Ezra's time is fairly certain. Otherwise Nehemiah i. 3 is pointless. A message comes to Nehemiah in Babylon that "the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." If this refers to the original taking of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. it is difficult to see why Nehemiah should have been so moved by the report. But if it refers to a recent destruction of walls which were beginning to rise it is quite understandable. Further light is thrown on this wall and its destruction by the letter included in Ezra iv. 7-23. This letter is clearly out of chronological order, as is shown by the dating ("in the days of Artaxerxes," verse 7) and the subject-matter, which concerns the city and the walls, not the temple. It is probably inserted here, together with verse 6, to group together three different instances of opposition by the enemies of the Jews; and the original story is picked up again in verse 24. There is thus every indication that there was some sort of a wall to which Ezra could refer in his prayer.

(3) "From Nehemiah's memoirs it is seen that he was a contemporary of the High Priest Eliashib (Neh. iii. 1). From Ezra's memoirs (Ezra x. 6) we learn that Ezra was a contemporary of the High Priest Jehohanan, the son of Eliashib" (Oesterley, *Hist.*, 117). Oesterley goes on to show that "son" is sometimes used for "grandson" and that Nehemiah xii. 11 indicates that Johanan (Jonathan = Johanan. See xii. 22) was Eliashib's grandson. The Elephantine Papyri confirm the fact that Jehohanan was high priest in 408 B.C. This all fits in well with the theory that Ezra came to Jerusalem in 397 B.C.

The weak point in this theory is that Ezra does not say that Jehohanan was high priest in his day. He merely records that he went to his chamber, presumably in the temple precincts. If this Jehohanan was the later high priest, it is extremely likely that, as high priest elect, he would have a room of his own in the temple buildings. If he was the son of Eliashib, this would be a simple solution to the problem, but if he was the grandson, the question of age would make the solution rather unlikely, though not impossible. But actually it is not necessary to suppose that this was the later high priest. The name was a common one (cp. Neh. xii. 13, 18, 42) and it is quite likely that one of the sons of Eliashib bore the name as well as his grandson.

These three points, then, are far from conclusive. But Oesterley

raises the further objection that there is very little mention of Ezra and Nehemiah working together as contemporaries. The famous incident of the reading of the Law in Nehemiah viii. is not part of the Nehemiah memoirs, and though Nehemiah's name occurs in verse 9 the text here is open to suspicion, since the parallel verse in 1 Esdras ix. 49 omits the name. Similar textual doubt is present in Nehemiah x. 1 and xii. 26.

Nevertheless, the grounds for rejecting the Hebrew text in these cases are far from strong, especially in x. 1, where even the Greek MSS. have Nehemiah's name, though omitting his title "The Tirshatha."

It is often asserted that neither Ezra nor Nehemiah mentions the other in his memoirs. Actually there is one passage where Nehemiah mentions Ezra, as will appear presently. But their general silence can be explained. We cannot tell how full the memoirs were originally: the Chronicler has apparently given selections from them. Ezra's memoirs in the first person do not extend beyond the end of the book that bears his name, when Nehemiah had not arrived at Jerusalem. Nehemiah's memoirs at first only deal with his coming to Jerusalem, and the events connected with the building of the wall. Even the high priest Eliashib is only mentioned here once (iii. 1). When it comes to the occasion of the reading of the Law, the Chronicler abandons the "secular" memoirs of Nehemiah, and turns to a more "priestly" account, possibly taken from an official record of Ezra to which Ezra x. also belongs. There is, of course, the possibility that these are memoirs of Ezra transposed from the first to the third person. In Nehemiah x. 28 there may be a return to the Nehemiah memoirs (*N.B.*—"we," verse 30, etc.), while in xii. 27-43 the Chronicler certainly professes to be giving the Nehemiah memoirs again. The passage deals with the dedication of the wall, and the first person singular occurs again. In verse 36 it is stated that "Ezra the scribe was before them." Here then is a clear mention of Ezra in Nehemiah's memoirs. Oesterley ignores this verse, though on page 113 of his *History* he refers to this whole passage as having "been worked over by the Chronicler in accordance with his special point of view." None the less we may be certain that the actual memoirs of Nehemiah underlie this passage, since otherwise there would be no point in the Chronicler using the first person singular. If this is so, there must have been some names given in the memoirs, as in chapter iii., and it would be entirely gratuitous to remove the name of Ezra here in the interests of a particular theory.

In closing, it is worth noticing that a certain amount of positive evidence in favour of the Chronicler's history is provided by one or two of the many names which occur in the books. The Chronicler has a fondness for giving names. It is extremely unlikely that he invented them. Had he done so, individual names would have been repeated in different lists far more than they actually are. As it is, the majority of the names occur only once. But a few names come more than once, and these support the traditional view

of the history. Thus in the Ezra memoirs in Ezra viii. 33 Ezra weighs the silver and the gold into the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest. In Nehemiah iii. 4, 21 Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz is given as one of the builders. In Ezra x. 31 Malchijah the son of Harim is one of those who had married foreign wives, and in Nehemiah iii. 11 he is one of the builders. The name Hattush also occurs in Ezra viii. 2 as one of those who came with Ezra, in Nehemiah iii. 10 as one of the Builders, and in x. 4 as one of those that were sealed. The occurrence of these names in passages belonging both to the time of Ezra and to that of Nehemiah is an indication that the two were contemporaries.

In the light of these facts it is justifiable to maintain that the modern view of the history of Ezra and Nehemiah has failed to prove its case. Much stronger evidence must be produced before we can safely conclude that the Chronicler has made this strange blunder in comparatively modern history. In the meantime we may assume that the Chronicler is correct in his contention that Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries, the former arriving at Jerusalem in 457 B.C. and the latter in 444 B.C.

The Yellow Spot (Gollancz, Ltd., 5s. and 8s. 6d. net) is an account of the extermination of the Jews in Germany, and contains a collection of facts and documents relating to three years' persecution of German Jews, derived chiefly from National Socialist sources and arranged by a group of investigators. The Bishop of Durham writes an introduction in which he indicates the horror which the revelations in the book produce upon the reader. It seems almost incredible that in the twentieth century any race of people could be guilty of the enormities related in this volume. The Bishop says: "I cannot believe that the hysterical nationalism which has swept over Germany, violating fundamental principles of civilised human intercourse, and openly menacing the peace of the world, will continue much longer." The stain upon their national character will, however, remain, and the atrocities recorded here will not soon be forgotten. Half a million human beings have been outlawed and many of them brought to a condition of destitution. History shows that every nation that has treated the Jewish race with cruelty has in the long run suffered for their doings, and we do not doubt that Germany will also suffer for its cruel treatment of the race. The volume is illustrated with pictures of the posters and other documents that have been used to raise prejudice against the Jews and to inspire hatred against them.

Simple Addresses, How to prepare and deliver them, by Helen M. Cobbold (S.P.C.K., 2s. net), contains a series of instructions intended for the use of those who have not had the advantage of a University education, and should be found useful for the large number of voluntary workers who desire to give simple addresses but do not know how to set about it.