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**WAS NEHEMIAH CONTEMPORARY WITH EZRA IN 458 BC?**

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The dominant factor affecting any study of the theology or literary arrangement of Ezra-Nehemiah is the question of the dates given to the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>1</sup> In this article it will be suggested that Nehemiah's first visit commenced in 465 and his second in 445 (all dates are BC). These new dates will have implications for the literary arrangement of his book and set his missions in a new relationship to Ezra's work.

Scholarly opinion since the turn of the century has accepted the immovability of Nehemiah. He has become the fixed point in the discussion.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, throughout the past century of research the

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Emerton observed that, "Unless fresh evidence is discovered, we shall never be certain when he [Ezra] went to Jerusalem" ("Did Ezra go to Jerusalem in 428 B. C.?" *JTS* 17 [1966] 1-19, cf. p. 1).

<sup>2</sup> E. W. Hamrick noted that "all critics are agreed that his [Nehemiah's] journey to Jerusalem in the 20th year of Artaxerxes is an authentic historical event" in "A New Study of the Ezra Problem" [Ph.D. Diss.: Duke University, 1951] 223). Cf. also H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987) 55, (hereafter *OTG*), and his *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX.: Word Books, 1985) xxxix, (hereafter *Word*). However, Hugo Winckler, dated Nehemiah in the 20th year of Darius (501) and Ezra's visit in 515 (*Altorientalische Forschungen* [3 vols., 2. Reihe; Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1899] 2.480, 485). The 20th year of Artaxerxes II (384) was preferred by F. de Saulcy, *Étude chronologique des livres d'Esdras et de Néhémie* (Paris: A. Levy, 1868); J. Imbert, "Le temple reconstruit par Zorobabel," *Le Muséon* 8 (1889) 51-66, who placed Ezra in 398; M.- J. Lagrange, "Néhémie et Esdras," *RB* 3 (1894) 561-85; and id., "La question Néhémie et Esdras," *RB* 4 (1895) 193-202. After the discovery of the Elephantine Papyri, Lagrange accepted the 7th of Artaxerxes I in "Les nouveaux papyrus d'Éléphantine," *RB* 17 (1908) 325-49. Note also *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (ed. I. Singer; 12 vols; New York & London, 1904-06), art. "Chronology"; H. H. Howorth, "Some Unconventional Views on the Text of the Bible," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 23 (1901) 305-25 (esp. pp. 312-14, 322-24); 24 (1902) 332-40; 25 (1903) 15-22. C. C. Torrey, *The Second Isaiah* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928) 456-60; *ibid.*, "Sanballat 'the Horonite'," *JBL* 47 (1928) 380-89 (in his *Ezra Studies* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1910] 333-35, Torrey had tentatively put Ezra in the reign of Artaxerxes I); H. P. Smith (*Old Testament History* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903]) regarded Ezra as a fiction; R. J. Saley, "Date of Nehemiah Reconsidered," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies* (ed. G. A. Tuttle; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 151-65; N. H. Snaith raised the possibility that Nehemiah returned in the 22d (not the 32d) year of Artaxerxes I ("The date of Ezra's Arrival in Jerusalem," *ZAW* 22 [1951] 53-66, esp. p. 60 n. 45). L. W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913); W. F. Albright, "The Date and Personality of the Chronicler," *JBL* 40 (1921) 104-24, but in "A brief History of Judah from the days of Josiah to Alexander the Great," *BA* 9 (1946) 1-16, esp. p. 13, he settled for 428. Another suggestion is the 7th year of Artaxerxes I (458); S. Jellicoe, "Nehemiah—Ezra: A Reconstruction," *ExpTim* 59 (1947/8) 54 switched the two reformers around; D. F. Robinson thought Ezra was Nehemiah in "Was Ezra Nehemiah?" *ATR* 37 (1955) 177-89; cf. also D. H. Haigh, "Coincidence of the History of Ezra with the First Part of the History of Nehemiah," *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 2 (1873) 110-13.

moveable man has been Ezra.<sup>3</sup> He has been placed in the 7th of Darius I (515 BC);<sup>4</sup> the 7th of Xerxes (479 BC);<sup>5</sup> the 7th of Artaxerxes I (458 BC);<sup>6</sup> the 7th of Artaxerxes II (398 BC);<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive review of the discussion see Hamrick, "A New Study." Albright remarked that the problems of Ezra-Nehemiah "have received every conceivable solution . . . except the right one" ("Date," 104).

<sup>4</sup> Winckler, *Altorientalische Forschungen*.

<sup>5</sup> J. D. Michaelis, *Deutsche Übersetzung des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen und Gotha, 1785) 42, 62, who placed Nehemiah in 445. J. Jahn, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: G. & C. Carvill, 1827) 273-82.

<sup>6</sup> This has been the traditional view and has the support of the following writers: F. M. Cross, "A Reconstruction of the Judean Restoration," *JBL* 94 (1975) 4-18; B. D. Eerdmans, *The Religion of Israel* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1947) 210-16; O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934); F. C. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); J. de Fraine, *Esdras en Nehemias* (Roermond en Maaseik: J. J. Roman & Zonen, 1961); A. Jepsen, "Nehemia 10," *ZAW* 66 (1954) 97-106, esp. p. 84; U. Kellermann, "Erwägungen zum Problem der Esradatierung," *ZAW* 80 (1968) 55-87; D. F. Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979) answers four major objections to 458 (p. 147). R. Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Gotha: Leopold Klotz, 1923); K. Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," *JSS* 19 (1974) 173-97; F. X. Kugler, *Von Moses bis Paulus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1922) 215-33 had the novel idea of trying to shew that Ezra would have violated the sabbath laws if he had begun his return to Jerusalem at any time other than 458 (see A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament* [Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads, 1949] 2.207 for Kugler's view); E. Meyer, *Die Entstehung des Judenthums* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1896) 89-92; J. Morgenstern, "The Dates of Ezra and Nehemiah," *JSS* 7 (1962) 1-11; A. F. Rainey, *Australian Journal Biblical Archaeology* 1 (1969) 51-78, esp. p. 62; M. Rehm, "Nehemias 9," *BZ* 1 (1957) 59-69; W. Th. in der Smitten, *Esra: Quellen, Überlieferung und Geschichte* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973) 91-105; H. H. Schäfer, *Esra der Schreiber* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1930); W. M. F. Scott, "Nehemiah—Ezra?" *ExpTim* 58 (1946-47) 263-67; S. Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," *IDBSup*, 317-28; C. G. Tuland, "Ezra-Nehemiah or Nehemiah-Ezra?" *AUSS* 12 (1974) 47-62; R. de Vaux, *DBSupp* 4.764-69; Williamson, *Word xxxix-xliv*; J. S. Wright, *The Date of Ezra's Coming to Jerusalem* (repr. London: Tyndale Press, 1958).

<sup>7</sup> This was suggested as long ago as 1699 by Aegidius Strauch[ius] in *Breviarium chronologicum: being a Treatise describing...the periods, and epocha's us'd in chronology...Now done into English...by R. Sault* (London, 1699) 360. He mentions Joseph Scaliger as a supporter for this date. It was also advocated by S. Patrick, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament* (London, 1727) 1.674 (cf. 2.687 in 1822 ed.), and by W. H. Mill, *The Evangelical Account of the Descent and Parentage of the Saviour Vindicated* (Cambridge: University Press, 1842) 153, but given a new lease of life by Maurice Vernes in 1889 in his *Précis d'histoire juive depuis les origines jusqu'à l'époque persane* (Paris: Hachette, 1889) and A. van Hoonacker, "Néhémie et Esdras. Une nouvelle hypothèse sur la chronologie de l'époque de la Restauration," *Le Muséon* 9 (1890) 151-84, 317-51, 389-401. Others who championed this view were W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (repr. New York: Doubleday, 1957), who later abandoned this date in favour of 428 in *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963) 93, 111, and in "Brief History," 13; cf. also Batten, *Ezra*, 28, 47; R. A. Bowman in *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York & Nashville, 1954), 3.551-68; L. H. Brockington, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* (Century Bible; London: Nelson, 1969) 21; H. Cazelles, "La mission d'Esdras," *VT* IV (1954) 113-40; J. Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1949) 200; Saley, "Date of Nehemiah," 151-65; de Saulcy, *Chronologique*, 46; N. H. Smith, "Ezra's Arrival," 53-66; Torrey, *Ezra Studies* 38 n. 1, 170, 239, 260 n. 11; G. Widengren, "The Persian Period," in *Israelite and Judaeen History* (ed. J. H. Hayes & J. M. Miller; London: SCM, 1977) 503-09.

the 7th of Artaxerxes III (351);<sup>8</sup> the 27th of Artaxerxes I (438);<sup>9</sup> the 32d of Artaxerxes I (433);<sup>10</sup> the 37th of Artaxerxes I (428);<sup>11</sup> the 37th of Artaxerxes II (367);<sup>12</sup> while some have even regarded him as the invention of the Chronicler—a fiction of his imagination.<sup>13</sup> The caustic remark of C. C. Torrey is typical of this viewpoint:

No fact of Old Testament criticism is more firmly established than this; that the Chronicler, as a historian, is thoroughly untrustworthy. He

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<sup>8</sup> Lagrange, “Néhémie et Esdras,” *RB* 3 (1894) 561-85. He placed Nehemiah in 384 and Ezra in 351 on the basis of Josephus’ chronology. Hoonacker replied in “La question Néhémie et Esdras,” *RB* 4 (1895) 186-192 to the effect that Josephus’ chronology could not be trusted because he knows of only one Artaxerxes. Lagrange abandoned this view in “Les nouveaux papyrus,” and accepted 438 for Ezra and either 432 or 445 for Nehemiah.

<sup>9</sup> *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (ed. T. K. Cheyne & J. S. Black; 4 vols.; London: A. & C. Black, 1899-1903) 3.3385.

<sup>10</sup> W. H. Kusters, *Het herstel van Israel in het perzische tijdvak* (Leiden: Brill, 1894; German transl. by A. Basedow, *Die Wiederherstellung Israels in der persischen Periode* [Heidelberg: Hörning, 1895] 103-17). He was followed by H. Guthe, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Freiberg: Mohr, 1899); A. Bertholet, *Die Bücher Esra und Nehemia* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1902) 30; R. H. Kenneth, “History of the Jewish Church from Nebuchadnezzar to Alexander the Great,” in *Essays on some Biblical Questions of the Day* (ed. H. B. Swete; London: Macmillan, 1909) 91-135, and in his *The Church of Israel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1933) 63; J. Bewer, *The Literature of the Old Testament* (rev. ed.; New York: Columbia University, 1933) 280-82. (cf. Albright, “Brief History” 13-14). Kusters held that there was no return of Babylonian exiles until Ezra’s time. The Chronicler invented the returns under Cyrus and Darius I and also the contemporary notices of Ezra and Nehemiah.

<sup>11</sup> Albright, “Brief History,” 1-16; id., *The Biblical Period*, 93, 111; J. A. Bewer, “The Gap between Ezra, chapters 1 and 2,” *AJSL* 36 (1919) 18-26; id., “Josephus’ Account of Nehemiah,” *JBL* 43 (1924) 224-26; J. Bright, “The Date of Ezra’s Mission to Jerusalem,” in *Yehezkiel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume* (ed. M. Haran; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1960) 70-87; id., *A History of Israel* (3d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 391-402; M. W. Leeseberg, “Ezra and Nehemiah: A Review of the Return and Reform,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 33 (1962) 79-90; A. Lefèvre in *Dictionnaire de la Bible* (ed., H. Cazelles; Paris, 1960) 416-21; and *DBSup* 6.414-21; M. Noth, *History of Israel* (London: A. & C. Black, 1958) 318, 329; V. Pavlovsky places Ezra in 430 in “Die Chronologie der Tätigkeit Esdras. Versuch einer neuen Lösung,” *Biblica* 38 (1957) 275-305, 428-56; W. Rudolph placed Ezra between 445 and Nehemiah’s second visit in *Esra und Nehemia samt 3. Esra* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949) 65; Emerton (“Ezra”) has produced the most incisive critique against this date. For the main arguments in support of this date see Williamson, *OTG*, 56-58 and *Word*, xli-xliv.

<sup>12</sup> De Saulcy, *Etude chronologique*; G. Maspero, *The Passing of the Empires* (London: S.P.C.K., 1900).

<sup>13</sup> Among those who regarded Ezra as a fictitious person, or the creation of the Chronicler, are A. E. Bailey & C. F. Kent, *History of the Hebrew Commonwealth* (rev. ed.; New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1935) 282-83; S. A. Cooke, “The Age of Zerubbabel,” in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (ed. H. H. Rowley; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950) 19-36; J. Halevy, “Esdras et le Code Sacerdotal,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 4 (1881) 22-45; G. Hölscher, *Geschichte der israelitischen und jüdischen Religion* (Giessen: S. Töpelmann, 1922) 140 n. 1; E. Renan, *Histoire du peuple d’Israel* (5 vols.; Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1893), 4.96-106; H. P. Smith, *Old Testament*, 381-400; Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, 241, 243, 247; id., *The Composition and Historical Value of Chronicles—Ezra—Nehemiah* (Giessen: J. Richer’sche, 1896) 15, 29, 57; Hoonacker, “Néhémie et Esdras” (see n. 7).

distorts facts deliberately and habitually; invents chapter after chapter with the greatest freedom; and, what is most dangerous of all, his history is not written for its own sake, but in the interest of an extremely one-sided theory.<sup>14</sup>

Of these dates the only serious contenders—to judge by modern treatments of the subject—are the 7th of Artaxerxes I (458)<sup>15</sup> and the 7th of Artaxerxes II (398).

## I. *The Date of Ezra's Mission, 458 or 398*

### 1. *Ezra's Mission in 458*

The first problem with 458 is that Ezra is assumed to have carried on his mission for thirteen years before the people responded whole-heartedly to the public reading of the Torah. This delayed response is regarded by many scholars as being incompatible with the people's bitter weeping as soon as the leaders make public the extent of mixed marriages among the "leaders and officials" of the community. This response suggests that there was a pure remnant, and probably a zealous one at that, in Judah, who deplored what had been happening and saw in Ezra their opportunity to bring the community "back to the Bible." Did it really take thirteen years before Ezra reestablished the Feast of Booths (Neh 8:14-17)? Did the same zealous remnant wait thirteen years before they resolved "to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our God" (Neh 10:29) or promise not to give their daughters in marriage to the peoples around them, or take their daughters for their sons (Neh 10:30)? In view of the oath Ezra made the "leading priests and Levites and all Israel" take (Ezra 10:5), and the covenant entered into to end all intermarriages when he arrived in 458 (Ezra 10:3; Neh 9:38), is it not incredible that after this magnificent start Ezra achieved nothing more until Nehemiah arrived thirteen years later when he implemented the laws relating to mixed marriages, Sabbath trading, temple worship, the maintenance of temple personnel, and especially the reinstatement of the Feast of Booths? Apparently Ezra also had permission to punish "by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment" (Ezra 7:26). Yet despite all this responsibility and ability, he waited thirteen

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<sup>14</sup>Torrey, *Composition*, 252, 274 (and cf. pp. 1, 43, 51-3, 55, 59, 64). He makes similar disparaging remarks regarding the Chronicler's "slovenly style" (pp. 27-28), and "his capacity to invent" events, such as the Return (pp. 52, 60, 62) and persons, such as Ezra (pp. 29, 61). These allegations were rebutted by W. O. E. Oesterley & T. H. Robinson, *History of Israel* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1932) 2.139.

<sup>15</sup>The main arguments in support of this date are set out by Williamson in *OTG*, 59-68 and *Word*, xli-xliv.

years before he lifted a finger to reinstitute such a noncontroversial reform as the Feast of Booths. Why wait so long?<sup>16</sup>

Given the royal and spiritual powers and responsibilities that Ezra had, if the reforms of Nehemiah 8—10 do not record his first year's work, but rather what happened thirteen years later, his critics can rightly accuse him of being an inept if not a cowardly leader. ( See VIII. 2-3 below for other difficulties.) *Deduction:* If Ezra arrived in 458 and Nehemiah 8—10 records the reforms of that year, then (according to the present state of the Hebrew text) Nehemiah was present in Jerusalem in 458 (cf. Neh 8:9 and 10:1).<sup>17</sup>

A second problem is a theological one. If Ezra spent thirteen years reading the Torah to the people, why is it that Yahweh rewarded Ezra's long—yet successful—mission by bringing disaster upon Jerusalem in the last year of his mission? Nehemiah would have found this disaster difficult to reconcile with Yahweh's past dealings with the nation which was to reward the obedient and bring disaster on the disobedient. Why else does Nehemiah *immediately* link the destruction of the walls with disobedience? Are we to assume that the national repentance of 445 was brought about by the destruction of the walls, rather than as a result of Ezra's long mission? If so, then we are still left with the problem of an ineffectual, national, spiritual leader.

## 2. *Ezra's Mission in 398*

The main problem with 398 is that it rules out the possibility that Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries as Neh 8:9, 10:1, and 12:36 expressly state them to be (according to the present state of the Hebrew text). We have already noted that the main problem with a date in 458 is that Nehemiah 8—10 is separated from Ezra 9—10 by thirteen years. On the other hand, a date in 398 for Ezra comes up against the growing scholarly consensus that Ezra 9—10 and Nehemiah 8—10 belong to Ezra's first year and relate the same connected series of events.

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|----------|------|----|-----|
| Nehemiah | 9—10 | is | now |
|----------|------|----|-----|

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<sup>16</sup> No satisfactory explanation has ever been given for this 12-year gap in Ezra's career (cf. Williamson, *OTG*, 20). The explanation of Wright (*Date of Ezra's Coming*, 25) that Ezra was left out in the cold after his initial reforms and did not get another opportunity until Nehemiah arrived does not reflect well on either Ezra or the people. In this case both are at fault.

<sup>17</sup> As early as 1785 Michaelis (*Übersetzung*) had concluded that Ezra's mission was reported in Nehemiah 8—10 and was completed before Nehemiah arrived in 445 (see Hamrick, "A New Study," 7). Williamson notes that "since Torrey's time all but the most conservative, such as Kidner and Fensham, have agreed that Neh 8 (and perhaps 9—10) was once an integral part of the Ezra material in Ezra 7—10" (*OTG*, 22, cf. *Word*, xxx). Similarly, Hayes & Miller (*Israelite and Judaeon History*, 492): "Neh 7:73b + chapters 8-10 obviously continue the story of Ezra 7-10 . . . This is a widely recognized scholarly assumption." Brockington accepted Nehemiah 8—10 as belonging to Ezra's first year (i.e. 398) (*Ezra*, 21), and J. M. Myers conceded that chap. 8 belongs to Ezra's first year (*Ezra-Nehemiah* [New York: Doubleday, 1965] xliii, li).

generally classed by critical scholars as part of the Ezra Memoir material and consequently it is out of place in its present context in the book of Nehemiah.<sup>18</sup>

As early as 1896 C. C. Torrey had proposed the literary sequence: Ezra 8, Nehemiah 8, Ezra 9—10, Nehemiah 9—10; this has been the basis for subsequent modifications ever since. The growing consensus among critical and conservative scholars is that Nehemiah 8—9 (and possibly 10) and Ezra 8—10 belong together, and that consequently the events they record took place in Ezra's first year in Jerusalem. Whether Ezra's first year is to be dated in 458 or in 398, one thing is certain according to conservative and critical scholars—Nehemiah was not in Jerusalem on either of those dates.<sup>19</sup>

## II. *The Theological Issue that Divides Conservative Scholarship: The Dating of Nehemiah 8—10*

On the question of the date to be given to Nehemiah 8—10 conservative scholars are now firmly and, it would appear, irreconcilably split. Those who hold that these chapters relate events that occurred in Nehemiah's first year (i.e., 445) follow the traditional understanding.<sup>20</sup> Those who hold that they relate events in Ezra's first year (either 458 or 398) follow the critical position popularized by C. C. Torrey in 1896.<sup>21</sup>

### 1. *The Conservative-Traditional Dilemma*

If Nehemiah 8—10 relates events in Ezra's first year—which is 458 on the conservative reckoning—then the contemporaneity notices of Neh 8:9 and 10:1 must be false because the earliest date that Nehemiah was in Jerusalem was 445.

If doctrine and exegesis should harmonize then it was not possible, given the traditional doctrine regarding the inspiration of Scripture, that Scripture could contradict itself so blatantly and remain credible. It was

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<sup>18</sup> Torrey noted, "The material contained in these seven chapters [Ezra 7—10 & Nehemiah 8—10] is thoroughly homogeneous, and bears the mark of a single author" (*Composition*, 15). Schäder suggested the order: Ezra 8, Nehemiah 8—9, Ezra 9—10 (*Esra der Schreiber*, 12); as did Eissfeldt (*Einleitung*, 589-91). I Esdras has the order, Ezra 8—9, Nehemiah 8—9. The connecting link is at I Esdr 9:36-37. This was also the view of Hamrick ("A New Study," 218) who suggested that Neh 10 and 13:4-31 belong to Nehemiah's second visit (p. 245).

<sup>19</sup> This is particularly the case among those scholars who opt for 398 for Ezra's coming. Among those who explicitly deny that Ezra and Nehemiah were ever contemporaries are: Batten, *Ezra*, 28, 357; Eissfeldt, *Einleitung*, 596; Hamrick, "A New Study," 186 and *I Samuel-Nehemiah*, 424; Hölscher, *Geschichte*; Howorth, "Some Unconventional Views on the Text of the Bible," *PSBA* 24 (1902) 337-40; id., 25 (1903) 15-17; C. F. Kent, *A History of the Jewish People* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1899); Kittel, *Geschichte*; Lods, *Prophets*, 296, 304; Schäder, *Esra der Schreiber*; J. Touzard, "Les Juifs au temps de la période persane," *RB* 12 (1915) 59-133; and Vernes, *Précis*, 585-86.

<sup>20</sup> See the commentaries of Kidner (*Ezra*) and F. C. Fensham (*The books of Ezra and Nehemiah* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982]) as examples.

<sup>21</sup> See the commentary of Williamson (*Word*) as an example.

natural, therefore, for the older exegetes to place the events of Nehemiah 8—10 in the only known date when Ezra and Nehemiah were known to be contemporaries, namely, in Nehemiah's first year. This view was supported by the observation that Ezra was present at the dedication ceremony in this same year (Neh 12:36). Thus doctrine and exegesis were happily married and enabled the traditional commentators to maintain their high view of Scripture. The question naturally arises: Did their doctrine of Scripture dictate the exegesis before the text had been studied independently of any *a priori* doctrine of Scripture? A high doctrine of Scripture married to a low level of exegesis is often difficult to put asunder once it has acquired an aura of antiquity and the imprimatur of modern conservative scholarship.

## 2. *The Conservative-Critical Dilemma*

Towards the end of the nineteenth century critical scholarship, with no particular doctrine of Scripture to defend, began to examine every facet of the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah and in particular the relationship between Ezra 9—10 and Nehemiah 8—10. The general consensus that emerged then and prevails to this day is that these two portions of text belong to Ezra's first year.<sup>22</sup>

One immediate consequence of this view was that the contemporary notices at Neh 8:9 and 10:1 were regarded as unhistorical and spurious.<sup>23</sup> It became fashionable to regard these notices or glosses as the work of later editors who lived sufficiently long after the death of Ezra and Nehemiah that they genuinely believed that the two men were

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<sup>22</sup> Needless to say the issue has become complex in recent studies. Williamson, for example, argues that Nehemiah 8—10 was the work of a later editor who brought together independent bits and pieces of Ezra and Nehemiah material to create a "pleasing overall theological unity." The editor's motive was "to form a united climax to their work" (*OTG*, 43, cf. p. 80). Nehemiah 8—10 is held to be "a carefully constructed compilation around the theme of covenant renewal" (*Word*, xxxiv). He also accepts the novel idea put forward by P.-P. Saydon in "Literary Criticism of the Old Testament: Old Problems and New Ways of Solution" (*Sacra Pagina* 1 [1959] 316-24) that Ezra-Neh was originally written on a number of small scrolls or panels. Saydon suggested that the panel or scroll containing Nehemiah 8—10 was accidentally transposed. Williamson, on the other hand suggested that the final juxtaposition of the sections was not left to chance. He sees a theological purpose behind the sequence of the panels, namely, that the work of reform was a unity, even though it was carried out by two men who worked independently of each other and at different times ("there is no historical evidence for an overlap between the work of Ezra and Nehemiah"; *Word*, xxxix). Nehemiah 8—10, he argues, forms the climax of the editor's work who intended that it should function as a pattern within his own later community (*ibid.*, xxxiv). This editor worked in the early fourth century BC (*ibid.*, xliii), and the two books received their present form around 300 BC (*ibid.*, xxxvi).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Williamson, "The reference to Nehemiah in v. 9 is a later addition" (*OTG*, 39). See Hamrick ("A New Study," 186, 253) for others who held this view. All of those listed under footnotes 7, 8 and 12 will also reject the contemporary references to Ezra and Nehemiah. Cross can confidently assert, "The appearance of the name Nehemiah in Neh 10:1, of Ezra in Neh 12:36, and the mention of them both in Neh 12:25 all stem from the hand of the editor of the final edition of the Chronicler's work" ("Reconstruction," 8 n. 28).

contemporaries. Judged by historical accuracy the editors were genuinely wrong. Some conservative scholars and commentators have adopted this critical consensus and the unhistorical nature of the contemporary notices. The implication of this view is that we have in these notices a clear example in canonical Scripture of an error of historical fact that has been meticulously preserved in the text. Logically it must follow that if one, why not more and many more?

The dilemma facing the conservative-traditional scholar is this: Can he continue to ignore the strong literary arguments that place Nehemiah 8–10 in Ezra’s first year? The acceptance of these literary arguments would avoid the inexplicable problems surrounding the thirteen-year delay in Ezra’s reformation. To do so, however, would mean that the references to Nehemiah in Neh 8:9 and 10:1 would have to be regarded as unhistorical. It is this unacceptable corollary that forces the conservative scholar to reject the literary arguments per se.

### III. *Proposed New Date for Nehemiah’s First Visit to Jerusalem*

The single fact that would heal the apparently irreconcilable split among conservative scholars and commentators is the presence of Nehemiah in Jerusalem in 458. Establishing the probability of his being in Jerusalem in 458 is one of the main objects of this paper. In the following discussion certain presuppositions are held without substantiation; none of them is new (except the hypothesis of a dynasty beginning with Xerxes) and they may be found in other more comprehensive treatments of the subject. Only the combination of them in this article is new.

First, the theory being put forward in this paper does not require any emendation of the Hebrew text to support it. Second, the Artaxerxes in Ezra-Nehemiah is that of Artaxerxes I (465-424). Ezra came in his 7th year and the second of Nehemiah’s visits is to be dated in the 20th year of this king’s reign. Third, the critical consensus that Ezra 9–10 and Nehemiah 8–10 relate events that occurred in Ezra’s first year will be accepted as established. Fourth, the conservative consensus that the contemporary notices of Neh 8:9, 10:1, and 12:36 are historically accurate will be assumed to be correct. The following is an outline of Nehemiah’s two visits to Jerusalem based on the conclusions reached in this paper.

(1) Nehemiah made two visits to Jerusalem. The first was as governor of Judah from 465 to 454 BC—“from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes . . . until his thirty-second year—twelve years” (Neh 5:14). This date is based on a dynastic reckoning (see the next section).

(2) Nehemiah’s second visit began in 445 and probably only lasted as long as it took to accomplish the repair of the walls of Jerusalem. This visit was probably a very brief one and most likely lasted less than a year, because he was still cupbearer to the king. He was granted his request “in



{Insert here the chart: A Chronological and Literary Harmony of Ezra—Nehemiah.}

the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes” (Neh 2:1). The date of 445 is based on Artaxerxes’ sole-reign reckoning.

(3) Ezra arrived in Jerusalem “in the seventh year of the King Artaxerxes” (Ezra 7:7). The date is based on Artaxerxes’ sole-reign reckoning. This means that Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries for approximately four and a half years (from 458 to 454) at most, but more probably only for one year, the year of Ezra’s visit to Jerusalem. In 454 Nehemiah’s twelve-year governorship came to an end and he returned to Susa.

(4) Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem for eight years—from 453 to 445. It was during this absence that a relation of Tobiah was given permission by Eliashib to occupy some of the temple store-rooms. It was in 446 or 445 that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, the news of which was brought by Hanani to Nehemiah in Susa (Neh 1:1). After this attack on Jerusalem the city was virtually deserted. Nehemiah was given short-term leave from his duty as cupbearer to return in 445 to repair the city walls.

#### IV. *Nehemiah’s First Term as Governor from 465 to 454*

The justification for including the year 458 in Nehemiah’s first term as governor is that the contemporary notices of Neh 8:9 and 10:1 place him there (or else in 398)<sup>24</sup> alongside Ezra, *if* we take the text as it stands, and *if* we take the critical consensus with respect to the thematic unity and *Sitz im Leben* of Ezra 7—10 and Nehemiah 8—10 as an assured conclusion. Should these two “ifs” be acceptable as a working hypothesis, then it follows that the traditional interpretation of the date formulas in Neh 5:14 and 13:6 can be categorized as an alternative hypothesis, and not as an assured fact of Scripture. The way is then opened up to see how these texts may be reconciled on some other hypothesis, such as the one outlined above.

The setting of Neh 5:14-18 occurs in connection with the repair of the walls, so that historically it is set in 445. One way of viewing these verses is to see them as an integral part of Nehemiah’s record *at that time* as he looked back on some period in the past when, as governor of the community, he showed the kind of mercy that he had hoped would have been followed by the people. He notes that as governor he had waived *his* rights that the community supply him and his prefects (150 men plus visiting diplomats) with their daily food. He tells us that rather than burden the already oppressed people of God he voluntarily supplied the daily requirements of his administrative staff out of his own pocket. The whole of vv. 14-18 can be taken to refer back to his first period as governor from the standpoint of those first fifty days or so in Jerusalem. If, as many scholars have noted, Nehemiah’s visit of 445 BC only lasted a

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<sup>24</sup>No one has ever suggested that Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries in 398 for the simple reason that it would require quite a number of arbitrary alterations to the present text to sustain such a theory.

few months or a year at most, and not twelve years, then the reference to a twelve-year period as governor must precede 445; otherwise what is the point of mentioning it in its present context?

What is of interest in 5:14 is the way Nehemiah dates this former period as governor. He says, “Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years.” Now compare this with 13:6-7, “But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later<sup>25</sup>I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem.”<sup>26</sup> If the leave Nehemiah requested in 13:6 is the same as that mentioned in 2:6, then Nehemiah’s second visit occurred in 445, which is the “twentieth year of King Artaxerxes” (2:1) on a sole-reign reckoning. Yet if his second visit began in the 20th year of Artaxerxes (445) his first visit must be the preceding period, which he describes as “from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes” (5:14). This means that his first visit ended in the 32d year of Artaxerxes (cf. 13:6), and yet his second visit began in the 20th year of Artaxerxes (cf. 2:1). This does not make sense. Clearly we have two systems of reckoning in these statements in which one period, namely, from the 20th to the 32d of Artaxerxes (5:14) *preceded* another period which commenced in the 20th year of Artaxerxes (2:1). The solution is quite simple—one is a dynastic reckoning and the other is a sole-reign reckoning.<sup>27</sup>

The dynastic reckoning is dated from the commencement of Xerxes’ reign. If the reigns of Xerxes and his son, Artaxerxes, are counted as one

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<sup>25</sup> This was eight years later on my theory.

<sup>26</sup> This was in 445 on my theory.

<sup>27</sup> Gyles (or Aegidius) Strauchius gives the view of Dionysius Petavius (*De doctrina temporum* [Lutetiae Parisiorum, 1627] bk. 12, chap. 32) that there were two systems of dating used with regard to Artaxerxes’ years. The first method reckoned the years from the 12th year of Xerxes when Artaxerxes became his consort in the empire. The second method was to reckon Artaxerxes’ years according to his sole-reign (*Breviarium chronologicum... done into English* [London, 1699] 364). Abp. James Usher had also reckoned the beginning of Artaxerxes’ reign nine years earlier than the date commonly accepted (see his *The Annals of the World* [London, 1658] in loco). He did this on the authority of Thucydides (lib. i, cxxxvii, 3) who declares that Themistocles’ flight into Persia took place after Artaxerxes had come to the throne, instead of during the reign of his father Xerxes, when the event actually occurred, which is dated to 474/3 according to Eusebius’ chronicon, i.e., Olympiad 76.4 = 473 BC. See the anonymous work, “Theories of Biblical Chronology,” *Journal of Sacred Literature* 10 (1860) 310-344, esp. 340. D. H. Haigh also suggested similar methods for computing the regnal years of Artaxerxes (“Coincidence of the History of Ezra With the First Part of the History of Nehemiah,” *TSBA* 2 [1873] 110-13). The first datum point was computed from the time he was made crown prince with his father Xerxes in 478; and the second was computed from the time he became sole ruler in 465. He postulated that Nehemiah, coming from Susa, used the coregency method; while Ezra, coming from Babylon, used his sole-reign reckoning. It follows from this that Nehemiah’s 20th year and Ezra’s 7th year was the same year, namely, 458. There is no evidence that Artaxerxes ever became crown prince in Xerxes’ lifetime, and in any case in 478 he was only about five years of age and he had two older brothers, Darius and Hystaspis, ahead of him in line of succession to the throne. Cf. A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1948) 289.

reign and the years numbered consecutively from the first year of Xerxes, it will be found that the period from the 20th to the 32d year falls mainly within Artaxerxes' reign (i.e., from 466/5 to 454). Thus in 5:14 and 13:6 Nehemiah's first visit has been dated according to the dynastic reckoning, whereas in 2:1 his second visit has been dated according to the sole-reign reckoning of Artaxerxes.

What has probably confused scholars in the past is that they have taken the time references in 2:1, 5:14, and 13:6 in their natural sense and *assumed* that "of Artaxerxes" meant what it said, namely, in the sole or personal reign of Artaxerxes I. To take the phrase "in the 32d year of Artaxerxes" to mean in year thirty-two which fell in Artaxerxes' period of rule (for such is the dynastic method of reckoning) seems unnatural if not contrived.

However, the Chronicler has left us a parallel case to the above in 2 Chr 16:1. There we read, "In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah." The natural understanding of this text is that Asa had been on the throne for 36 years when Baasha came up against him. Baasha, however, had been dead ten years by the time Asa had been on the throne 36 years! The solution to this problem was stated long ago in *Seder 'Olam Rabbah* and repeated by many commentators since then. James Anderson is typical in his comment on this text, "But that [the 36th year of Asa] is to be understood not of the very reign of Asa, but of the kingdom of Asa . . . or so long after the partition of the tribes."<sup>28</sup> In other words we have a dynastic reckoning here. If the reigns of Rehoboam, Abijam, and Asa are counted as one reign and the years numbered consecutively from the first year of Rehoboam it will be found that the 36th year coincides with the 14th year of Baasha's twenty-four year reign and the fifteenth year of Asa's sole-reign. Whether the Chronicler had written: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa," or "In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa" would not make any difference chronologically because both refer to the year 895. The former would have used the sole-reign reckoning while the latter has used the dynastic reckoning.<sup>29</sup> Neither Rehoboam nor Xerxes began a

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<sup>28</sup> J. Anderson, *Royal Genealogies* (London, 1736) 26. Cf. J. Thaddaeus & T. Man, *The Reconciler of the Bible Inlarged* (London, 1662) 68; Samuel Cradock, *The History of the Old Testament Methodiz'd* (London, 1683) 509; Wm. Carpenter, *An Examination of Scripture Difficulties... Old and New Testament* (London, 1828) 158 who gives this as Usher's solution.

<sup>29</sup> 2 Chr 24:15 might be another remnant of a dynastic reckoning. Jehoiada is said to have been a "son of a hundred and thirty years" when he died. He died towards the end of Amaziah's reign who reigned—on the dynastic reckoning—from the 96th to the 135th year of Judah's dynasty (dated from the division of the Kingdom). Maybe the text should be understood to refer to the 130th year after the division as the year of Jehoiada's death, and not that Jehoiada was 130 years old. 1 Sam 13:1 might likewise be a dynastic reckoning, "a son of a year is Saul in his reigning." Another puzzling date occurs at 2 Sam 15:7, "And it came to pass at the end of forty years that Absalom said to the king [David]." This event must have occurred at least three years before David's 40th year because of the famine mentioned in 2 Sam 21:1. In *Seder 'Olam Rabbah* the 40 years of this text are said to commence from the time that Israel asked for a king. It seems more probable that it commences from the time that Samuel anointed David as Saul's successor. An indirect way of arriving at this possibility is that Ezek 4:5 refers to 390 days (i.e., years) of iniquity committed by the house of Israel. Ezekiel's vision occurred in 592. Adding 390 years to this figure gives 982 BC. This date is eleven years before the end of David's life. It is probable that 982 is the date from which we are to trace the origin of the ten tribes' revolt against the "kingdom of Yahweh" possibly triggered off by the rebellion of Absalom but clearly led by Sheba (2 Sam 20). Now David was born in 1041 (cf. 2 Sam 5:4) consequently his secret anointing as king must have taken place between 1030 and 1020 BC. The Davidic dynasty began on the day that Samuel anointed David, the teenager, as Yahweh's lawful king. It was natural

new, distinct dynasty. Both men followed their fathers on their respective thrones.

There are many other examples where the biblical writers switch from one method of dating to another without any indication that they have done so. Thus in 1 Kgs 16:29 we read that “In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel.” And in 2 Chr 16:1 we read, “In the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s reign Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah.” The natural understanding is that only two years separate these two events. The truth is that 22 years separate Baasha’s incursion of Judah in 895 and Ahab’s accession to the throne in 873. The natural assumption would be wrong in both examples.

Another important observation is that the compiler of 1–2 Kings showed a distinct preference to date the synchronisms of the kings according to coregency years rather than the same king’s sole-reign years. But this preference is utterly useless to decide a single date. For example, in 1 Kgs 22:51 the prophet-historian prefers to use Jehoshaphat’s sole-reign reckoning but in 2 Kgs 15:13 he prefers to use Uzziah’s coregency reckoning. In neither case does the writer alert the reader to the fact that he has switched from one method of reckoning to another.<sup>30</sup> The lesson from this is that the natural interpretation of the text is not always going to be the correct one.

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that that date would never be lost sight of. On that day began a dynasty that would not end until it ushered in the messianic kingdom. Now if the 40th year of 2 Sam 15:7 is dated from the secret anointing of David (for it certainly cannot be dated from David’s public anointing for the reason given above) then the rebellion of Absalom and Sheba occurred between 990 and 980. Ezekiel’s figure of 390 years may fix the date at 982. The date when Ezekiel received his vision is also remarkable in that it marked the 430th year of the Davidic dynasty—a figure that was associated with bondage in Egypt. Ezekiel was to bind himself for 430 days and eat famine rations following this vision. The majority of commentators have taken the rebellion of Jeroboam as marking the commencement of Ezekiel’s 390 years. See Hugh Broughton, *A Seder Olam, that is: Order of the Worlde...* (Cambridge, 1594) 1, and James Anderson, *Royal Genealogies* (London, 1736) 77. Another puzzling date is that given in 1 Chr 26:31, “In the fortieth year of the reign of David.” It is unlikely that this is the 40th year of his reign which was his last and marked by some physical weakness. It is quite probable that the event is to be dated from Samuel’s secret anointing of David as king (ca. 1022). If so it coincides with the year that the ten tribes deserted David (cf. 2 Sam 15:7 with 20:1-2) and when he put trusted men from Hebron stock in charge of his transjordanian territory. Another dynasty reckoning is that of Omri’s rule for the age of Ahaziah (i.e., he was a “son” of 42 [non-accession] years in 2 Chr 22:2, but 22 actual years of age in 2 Kgs 8:26. Cf. 2 Kgs 8:16 where his father, Jehoram, was only 40 when he died).

<sup>30</sup> There are thirteen synchronisms with coregents and only four with kings who were coregents (cf. L. McFall, “A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles,” *BibSac* 148 [1991] 3-43, cp. p. 41). The exceptions should caution us not to rush into hasty assumptions and blame the resulting “confusion” on the biblical historian as was the case in the past. Unfortunately, remnants of this approach can still be encountered today in some modern commentaries. Exceptions in Scripture should alert us to look for a reason for them on the assumption that the change may not be purely fortuitous.

Perhaps no section of OT chronology is fraught with more problems than the period of the the Hebrew kings, for when the biblical writer comes to record the commencement and the total years that the Hebrew kings reigned, and who are known to have been coregents, he uses different starting points. Sometimes he will reckon the reign to have commenced with the first year of a king's sole-reign as in the case of Jehoram of Judah (2 Kgs 8:16-17) and ignore his coregency years, or he may quite arbitrarily (it would seem) reckon it from the first year of his coregency as in the case of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:1). To confuse matters still further he will sometimes include coregency years in the total or exclude them irrespective of when he judged his reign to have commenced. As a generalization it can be said that totals are calculated from the first year of a king's coregency (where he has one). But, as usual with generalizations, this information is useless when it comes to a particular case. What is certain is that the natural understanding is not always going to be the correct one. Below is a summary of the complex situation for recording the commencement and total years reigned by the Hebrew kings. Note the four patterns used by the writers to record this information. Pattern A-A, Jehoram [J] and Jehoiachin; pattern A-B, Jehoshaphat, Omri, Ahaziah [J], Jeroboam II, and Pekah; pattern B-B, Jotham, Azariah, and Manasseh; and lastly, pattern B-A, Jehoash [I], Ahaz, Hezekiah and Jehoiachin.<sup>31</sup>

Table showing all known Coregencies and Overlapping Reigns for the Kings of Judah and Israel

| Jehoram | Jehoiachin | Jotham | Azariah | Manasseh | Jehoash [I] | Ahaz | Hezekiah | Jehoiachin | Jehoshaphat | Omri | Jeroboam II | Pekah | Ahaziah [J] | Point from which each king's reign is calculated |
|---------|------------|--------|---------|----------|-------------|------|----------|------------|-------------|------|-------------|-------|-------------|--|
| A A     |            | B B B  |         |          | B B B B     |      |          |            | A A A A A   |      |             |       |             | Option A: From the first year of his sole reign  |
|         |            |        |         |          |             |      |          |            |             |      |             |       |             | Option B: From the first year of his coregency   |
| <hr/>   |            |        |         |          |             |      |          |            |             |      |             |       |             |  |
| A A     |            |        |         |          | A A A A     |      |          |            |             |      |             |       |             | Total years recorded for each king's reign       |
|         |            | B B B  |         |          |             |      |          |            | B B B B B   |      |             |       |             | Option A: The total excludes coregency years     |
|         |            |        |         |          |             |      |          |            |             |      |             |       |             | Option B: The total includes coregency years     |

As an illustration of just how complex and potentially confusing these patterns can be, if we take the pattern A-B for Jehoshaphat in 1 Kgs

<sup>31</sup> As long ago as 1662 Thaddaeus & Man (*The Reconciler*, 78) had reconciled 2 Chr 36:9 with 2 Kgs 24:8 as a sole-reign reckoning (i.e., the writer used the A-A Pattern). It is therefore surprising to find that on the strength of one Hebrew MS the NIV has unwittingly erased the B-A Pattern that the writer had employed at 2 Chr 36:9 and altered the text to bring it into line with the A-B Pattern used in 2 Kgs 24:8.

22:41-42, it reads, “Jehoshaphat son of Asa became king of Judah in the fourth year of Ahab<sup>32</sup>king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-five years.<sup>33</sup>” The base from which the 25-year reign is calculated is from the fourth year of Ahab, but this year is the point at which Jehoshaphat began his sole-reign. The writer has noted the year when Jehoshaphat began his sole-reign but in the total he gives he has included the four years that Jehoshaphat was coregent with his father Asa, namely, from Tishri 873 to 870/869. The natural or literal reading of those texts using the A-B and B-A patterns will always be wrong and lead to confusion, as it did for many centuries until Thiele’s contribution put Israel’s chronology on a more settled foundation.<sup>34</sup>

Although the biblical writers have used four distinct patterns there is nothing in the context to indicate which pattern they are currently using. Only with the help of nonbiblical chronological data was it possible for scholars to work out in each instance which pattern was being used. A thorough knowledge of the biblical data *alone* could never have removed the ambiguities inherent in the Hebrew text.

It is likewise in the case of Nehemiah’s dates. A thorough knowledge of the biblical data alone could never have removed the difficulties. The help of nonbiblical data has given us the reigns of the Persian kings for his life-time, [*WTJ* reads “for their lifetimes” by mistake] and this in turn has opened up the possibility that two systems of reckoning have been employed, one at Neh 2:1 (sole-reign reckoning) and another at 5:14 and 13:6 (dynastic reckoning).

#### V. *Nehemiah’s Second Term in Jerusalem: 445— ?*

On the traditional view the year 445 marked the commencement of Nehemiah’s twelve-year governorship and his *first* visit to Jerusalem. This year, however, could just as well mark Nehemiah’s *second* visit to Jerusalem. The justification for this suggestion arises from the wording of Neh 1:1, which reads, “Now it happened in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the capital.” Nehemiah does not say that this was the 20th year *of Artaxerxes*. Most scholars have assumed—because of the proximity of 2:1—that Nehemiah is referring to the 20th year of Artaxerxes I. However, because Persian years were calculated from Nisan to Nisan<sup>35</sup>the mention of the month Kislev, which is the ninth month in their calendar, rules out the 20th of Artaxerxes, otherwise

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<sup>32</sup> I.e., the year 869.

<sup>33</sup> From 872 to 848.

<sup>34</sup> E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

<sup>35</sup> See M. Sprengling, “Chronological Notes from the Aramaic Papyri. The Jewish Calendar. Dates of the Achaemenians (Cyrus—Darius II),” *AJSL* 27 (1910/11) 233-66, esp. p. 249. He notes that “the Jewish ‘civil’ year beginning with the first Tishri is almost certainly an institution of Greek (Seleucid?) times, later than Alexander” (p. 250).

Hanani would have arrived in Susa after Nehemiah had arrived in Jerusalem.

The solution adopted by most commentators (who have noted the difficulty) has been to emend “twentieth” and read instead “nineteenth.”<sup>36</sup> There is, however, the distinct possibility that a third system of reckoning has been employed in Nehemiah (apart from the sole and dynastic systems). If the text is allowed to stand as it is, then it follows that the 20th year of 1:1 cannot have the reign of Artaxerxes as its reference point. There must be some other point in history from which the 20th year of 1:1 has been reckoned. Now since Hanani arrived in Susa in the ninth month of 445, reckoning back 20 years gives us the year 465. Something happened in this year which had such an impact upon Nehemiah that he used it to date the arrival of his brother Hanani in Susa, rather than use the current Persian system of dating. The year 465 consequently marks the commencement of Nehemiah’s private system of reckoning. Can we discover what happened in 465 that had such an impact upon Nehemiah that he chose to date events from this year?

Is it a coincidence that 466/5 is the 20th year of the dynasty of Xerxes and Artaxerxes? Is it a coincidence that Nehemiah says he was governor from the 20th to the 32d of Artaxerxes? And if this is taken to be a dynastic reckoning then his first year as governor commenced in 465. It was easier for Nehemiah to date his twelve-year governorship by the dynastic system because his time as governor spanned the reigns of two Persian kings, than to give the fraction under each king separately. Consequently it is a fair inference that the 20th year of 1:1 is a private or journal reckoning made by Nehemiah himself and taking as its point of reference the year in which he, in the providence of God, was made governor of Judah. It was a year worth recording in any man’s memoir as a red-letter day.

If the above interpretation is correct, then it would appear that Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judah in the last months of Xerxes’ rule. Xerxes was murdered in the fifth month of his 21st year as king in 465.<sup>37</sup> The remaining seven months of this year constituted the accession-year of Artaxerxes. Since Nehemiah says he was governor from the 20th to the 32d, and adds that this was “twelve years,” this cannot be inclusive dating which would make 13 years as governor. He was governor either from the beginning of the 20th year to the end of the

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<sup>36</sup> Deliceto took the 20th year of 1:1 to refer to Hanani’s original departure from Susa to Jerusalem (*Laurentianum* 4 [1963] 431-68). Simon Patrick understood Nehemiah to be 20 years old at the time, on the analogy with Ezek 1:1 (*Critical Commentary*). S. H. Horn & L. H. Wood argued for a Tishri-Tishri regnal reckoning for the Persian kings (“The Fifth-Century Jewish Calendar at Elephantine,” *JNES* 13 (1954) 1-20; (cf. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 53 n. 13). This had already been suggested by J. Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (3d ed.; Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1897) 169 n. 1. Hamrick, following the majority of critical scholars, regards the 20th in 1:1 as an error (“A New Study,” 236).

<sup>37</sup> See R. A. Parker & W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology, 620 BC - AD 75* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1956) 17, who give Aug. 4?-8?, 465 for the exact date of his death (5th month, 14?-18? day, 21st year of his reign).



31st, or from the beginning of the 21st to the end of the 32d to complete twelve years as governor.<sup>38</sup> That it was the latter is clear from 13:6, where Nehemiah records, “for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I came unto the king.” The fact that Nehemiah says he was governor *from the 20th year* would suggest that he was appointed by Xerxes at the beginning of Nisan, 465 (five months before his assassination) rather than by Artaxerxes in the last seven months of that same year, which was his accession-year.

With this finding coincides the date of Hanani’s arrival in Susa in the ninth month of the 20th year *from the time that Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judah*. Thus there is no need to emend the Hebrew text as it stands.

When Nehemiah was granted his second visit to Jerusalem in 445 we are informed that “the queen” was present (Neh 2:6). If this was Esther she would have been the queen-mother and in her mid-fifties.<sup>39</sup> Artaxerxes was not her son.

## VI. *The Duration of Nehemiah’s Second Visit*

The duration of Nehemiah’s visit in 445 to repair the walls of Jerusalem has been a matter of debate among scholars.<sup>40</sup> Especially puzzling is Nehemiah’s reply to the king’s question, “How long will you be gone and when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time” (Neh 2:6). Commentators have noted the incongruity inherent in twelve years as the time set by Nehemiah to accomplish his request.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This assumes, of course, that all three systems in Nehemiah are using the Persian Nisan to Nisan calendar year (cf. E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World* [London: Thames & Hudson, 1968] 90). If we assume for a moment that Nehemiah used a Tishri to Tishri calendar year in his private journal then he would have had to wait sixteen months to present his petition to Artaxerxes. In Matt 1:17 “from David to the exile in Babylon” is fourteen generations without counting David.

<sup>39</sup> The term “queen” is flexible enough to include queen-mother (cf. Dan 5:10 and Williamson, *Word*, 180). Many commentators account for the presence of “the queen” on the supposition that Nehemiah was the favourite of the queen and that she was therefore supporting his request. If so this suggests that Nehemiah’s petition may have been a pre-arranged affair with the queen(-mother) who initiated a private banquet for the purpose (cf. Esth 5:4, 8).

<sup>40</sup> Torrey (*Composition*, 48, 49, 64; *Ezra Studies*, 248-49) dismisses Nehemiah’s second visit as unhistorical. He was followed by Kittel, (*Geschichte*, 3.648-49). R. H. Pfeiffer (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [New York: Harper Bros., 1948] 835) argued that Nehemiah returned from Susa to Jerusalem in 433 after a long absence from Jerusalem. Gustav Hölscher suggested that Nehemiah’s trip to Susa and back occurred within the 12-year period (445-433) (in *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments* [ed. E. Kautzsch & A. Bertoloth; Tübingen: Mohr, 1910] 452).

<sup>41</sup> Some have argued that this trip must have been a brief one and that he came back to Judah 12 years later in 433, so de Saulcy (*Etude chronologique*, 70). Williamson comments that, “This suggests that his original commission was specific (to build the wall) and comparatively short—certainly not twelve years” (*Word*, xxviii, 386). Keil, too, thought that Nehemiah requested leave to make a temporary sojourn in Judah without giving up his post as royal cupbearer (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950] 288). See Hamrick’s “A New Study,” 244, for further discussion of this point.

On the traditional view this was the occasion in which Nehemiah asked for, and received, a twelve-year commission to complete a task which took only 52 days.

However if we examine the context it appears to be a personal and private request by Nehemiah to repair the walls of the city where his fathers lay buried (2:3).<sup>42</sup> The king's question is directed solely at the length of time it will take to complete the repair work and resume his post as the king's cupbearer. The king is not offering Nehemiah a 12-year posting to one of his far-off poverty-stricken outposts. That would be a demotion not a promotion to one in Nehemiah's responsible position. Nehemiah neither requested nor was he offered such a post at this time. To conjecture that this was the occasion in which he was granted twelve years' leave of absence to repair the walls—a task which he completed in 52 days—is more than the context will bear.

The view being put forward here is that what has been traditionally assumed to be Nehemiah's first visit to Jerusalem in 445 and to have lasted twelve years was really his second visit and lasted only twelve months at the most. Hence the most probable reconstruction of events is that Nehemiah's 12-year term as governor was a thing of the past in 445; that he had returned to Susa in 454 (to become the king's cupbearer?), where he remained for the next eight years (454-445); that in 445 he was given temporary leave of absence to repair the walls—a leave of absence which lasted only as long as it took to complete the work. The eight-year break would allow sufficient time for children of mixed marriages (and speaking Ashdodite) to grow up (13:23).

## VII. *Did Nehemiah build Jerusalem's walls before Ezra arrived in 458?*

Given the new date proposed for Nehemiah's first visit and his deep sense of shame when he heard (in 445) that Jerusalem's walls were destroyed, it seems natural to assume that if he had been governor of the city for twelve years, his pride in the Holy City (as he calls it, 11:2) and its reputation and standing in the eyes of its enemies (witness his four months of grief over its ruined state) would ensure (or allow us to presume) that its walls were standing during his period as governor.

The following six points might suggest that Nehemiah did build the walls of Jerusalem: (1) Josephus' statements in *Ant.* 11.5.7-8 § 167-179; (2) the "acquired land" of Neh 5:16; (3) The letter sent to Artaxerxes; (4) "the city was large and spacious" (Neh 7:4); (5) Ezra's gives thanks for "a wall

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<sup>42</sup> Olmstead (*Persian Empire*, 314) notes that the king is not made aware that the city in question is Jerusalem whose building activity he had just ordered a few months earlier to be stopped!

in Judah and Jerusalem” (Ezra 9:9); (6) “in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the scribe” (Neh 12:26).

### 1. *Josephus’ Statements in his Antiquities*

Josephus, who is not regarded as being a thoroughly reliable historian when it comes to this period of Judah’s history,<sup>43</sup> states that Nehemiah “came to Jerusalem in the twenty-fifth year of the reign of Xerxes” (11. § 168). On the assumption that what Josephus has recounted is historically correct it should be noted that Xerxes did not reign for 25 years. He was murdered in the fifth month of his 21st year.<sup>44</sup> Could it be that Josephus is using a dynastic reckoning here? In that case, reckoned from the beginning of Xerxes’ reign the twenty-fifth year would fall in Artaxerxes’ reign, in his fourth year or 461/60. Ezra set out for Jerusalem at the beginning of the twenty-eighth year of Xerxes (using Josephus’ method of dating) or just under three years after Nehemiah arrived in Judah.

Next, Josephus tells us that Nehemiah took two years and four months, not 52 days, to build the walls which, by coincidence, means that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem with his large contingent of homeless exiles just as the walls were completed by Nehemiah in 458 (according to Josephus’ dates, if they are a dynastic reckoning).<sup>45</sup> Was Ezra’s coming at this time connected with the dedication of the newly completed walls? He surfaces again thirteen years later at the dedication of the repaired walls.

### 2. *The “acquired land” of Neh 5:16*

What is interesting about 5:16 is that Nehemiah focuses attention upon the one dominant concern he had when he was governor. He says he “devoted himself to the work of *this wall*. All my men were assembled there for the work; *we did not acquire any land*.” In its present context this must have something to do with the building project which the entire administration was engaged in. The acquisition of land in the context of building Jerusalem’s wall suggests some form of expansion, which in turn suggests new walls and foundations. A careful examination of the line that the repaired wall of 445 took would lead one to believe that no new walls or foundations were constructed in the 52 days it took to do that work. Consequently Nehemiah’s statement

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. especially the review of Josephus by Lagrange, “Les nouveaux papyrus d’Éléphantine,” *RB* 17 (1908) 325-49. Cf. also Bewer, “Josephus’ Account,” 224-26; H. H. Rowley, “Nehemiah’s Mission and its Background,” *BJRL* 37 (1955) 528-561, esp. p. 531; id., “Sanballat and the Samaritan Temple,” *ibid.*, 38 (1956) 166-98; C. G. Tuland, “Josephus, *Antiquities*. Book XI. Correction or Confirmation of Biblical Post-Exilic Records?” *AUSS* 4 (1966) 176-92; H. G. M. Williamson, “The Historical Value of Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* 9.297-301,” *JTS* 28 (1977) 49-66.

<sup>44</sup> See note 37 above.

<sup>45</sup> *Ant.* 11.5.8 §179 (Loeb ed.) Josephus notes that the walls were completed in the ninth month of the 28th year of Xerxes, which would mean that Ezra was present at the dedication service.

confirms what we have already deduced from Nehemiah 3, namely, that *he* did not acquire any land by which to enlarge the size and population of Jerusalem (but others may have done so, as we shall see).

### 3. *The Letter sent to Artaxerxes*

The letter sent by Judah's enemies to Artaxerxes led directly to the demolition of Jerusalem's walls towards the end of 446 or early in 445. In this letter two apparently contradictory statements are made about the building activities of the Jews. First, it is said that the Jews *have finished* building the walls (Ezra 4:12, Hishtaphel Perfect). And second, in the next verse the enemies warn the king not to let the Jews complete the building program they are presently engaged in (at the time of writing their letter). The king accedes to their request, granting them permission to make a decree ordering the Jews to cease building immediately.

One way to reconcile these statements—i.e., that the Jews *have finished* building and yet *are still building*—is to postulate two phases of building activity. The first phase was the work of Nehemiah, which was completed in 458; and the second phase was contemporary with the letter to Artaxerxes, around 446. What appears to have happened is that during Nehemiah's governorship he had the original city walls rebuilt on the 587 foundations (but note Kenyon's judgment below). This task probably took as long as Josephus said it did, namely, two years and four months. Nehemiah did not acquire any land under a governor's compulsory order on which to extend the city's walls. After Nehemiah left in 454 "the Jews," say their enemies in their letter to Artaxerxes, "who came up to us from you [referring to Ezra's sizeable reinforcements] have come in to Jerusalem, the rebellious and wicked city they are building, and the walls they have finished, and the foundations they join [or: are joining]" (Ezra 4:12).

It seems that what goaded the Samaritans to write to Artaxerxes was some major new wall-building activity by Ezra's homeless returnees. To judge by the speed with which the Samaritans demolished the walls of Jerusalem (i.e., as soon as they got permission to do so) and assuming that Hanani made no delay in getting word of this disaster to Nehemiah, the Samaritan letter must have been sent off sometime in 446. Therefore, in 446 (or thereabouts) a major building project was under way, which involved *foundations* as well as new walls, but these were not yet completed. We can only surmise that if Nehemiah completed the walls in two years and four months (13 years earlier) then the new building activity can only have been an *extension* to his walls. If so, then Ezra's Jews "acquired some land" (a thing which Nehemiah refused to do) adjacent to the wall of Jerusalem and began to build new foundations for the new walls (probably by re-siting that part of Nehemiah's wall which would have been behind the new line of the extended wall). It was this

*new* building activity which annoyed the Samaritans and alarmed Artaxerxes and which he decreed had to be stopped immediately.<sup>46</sup>

Naturally Judah's enemies took advantage of the king's ignorance of the situation and they demolished not only the newly founded extension walls, but also the main city walls which Nehemiah had built. If this scenario is plausible then it puts the horror that engulfed Nehemiah when he heard the news in a new context. Everything that he had done for Jerusalem as its governor had been undone: all his labor had been in vain. The community he had built up in Jerusalem had been scattered and the city virtually deserted. The depth of Nehemiah's reaction and its duration is commensurate with his personal involvement and achievement in building those walls.

When Nehemiah visited Jerusalem he was watched very closely by Judah's enemies. But for a man who was on his first visit to Jerusalem (according to the general consensus) his intimate knowledge of the topography of the walls in the *middle of the night* is remarkable.<sup>47</sup> He tells us that he measured certain sections of the wall carefully assessing the extent of the damage. This activity could be explained on the theory that he built these walls thirteen years previously, and knew the line they took round the city.

#### 4. "The city was large and spacious" (Neh 7:4)

Nehemiah makes the observation that "the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been built [not "rebuilt," as *NIV*; Neh 7:4].<sup>48</sup> This could mean that Nehemiah abandoned rebuilding part of his own wall and instead raised up the

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<sup>46</sup> Rudolph (*Ezra*, 44) argued that the destruction took place just before the time referred to by the report of Hanani to Nehemiah in 1:3 (cf. Myers, *I & II Esdras*, 40.)

<sup>47</sup> On the topography of the walls see M. Burrows, "Nehemiah's Tour of Inspection," *BASOR* 64 (1936) 11-21; id., "Neh 3:1-32 as a source for the Topography of Ancient Jerusalem," *AASOR* 14 (1934) 115-40; id., "The Topography of Neh 12:31-43," *JBL* 54 (1935) 29-39; G. St. Clair, "Nehemiah's Night-ride," *PEFQSt* for 1888, 46-48; T. F. Wright, "Nehemiah's Night-ride," *PEFQSt* for 1896, 172-74; R. Grafman, "Nehemiah's 'Broad Wall'," *IEJ* 24 (1974) 50-51; H. G. Mitchell, "The Wall of Jerusalem according to the Book of Nehemiah," *JBL* 22 (1903) 85-163. Kathleen Kenyon's excavations in Jerusalem appear to show that Nehemiah's inspection covered the walls surrounding the eastern hill. The southern part of the western hill was not included in the city during his lifetime. The remains of a west wall predating the Exile have not yet been found. The west wall in Nehemiah's day appears to have followed the western crest of the eastern hill. The eastern wall which Nebuchadnezzar destroyed had been built further down the slopes of the Kidron Valley. Nehemiah, apparently, rebuilt the eastern wall higher up the slope along the eastern crest of the hill (K. Kenyon, *Jerusalem: Excavating 3000 years of History* [London: Thames & Hudson, 1967] 107-111).

<sup>48</sup> If Kenyon is correct in stating that Nehemiah withdrew the line of the wall into the city on the east side then he reduced the size of the city. This might explain why Ezra's homeless men extended the boundaries of the city (most probably to the north) soon after their arrival. According to Neh 7:4 when Nehemiah returned in 445 the city was "broad on both sides . . . and there were no houses built."

walls belonging to the extension created by Ezra's returnees. This would account for Nehemiah's statement that "the houses had not yet been built." In other words, the extension walls had enclosed "acquired land," or fields, and it had been planned to build the walls first and *then*, when that was completed, to build the houses behind it. The plan never came to fruition and Nehemiah was left with a large and spacious city that had to be populated with sufficient men this time to prevent their enemies from storming it by surprise and undoing all their work once again.

#### 5. *Ezra's Gives Thanks for "a wall in Judah and Jerusalem" (Ezra 9:9)*

In his prayer Ezra gives thanks to God for giving them "a wall in Judah and Jerusalem" (Ezra 9:9). The word for wall here is *rdeG*;, which can refer to a literal wall (cf. Ezek 22:30 and Mic 7:11) but also to a protective wall such as those used around vineyards (cf. Num 22:24; Isa 5:5; and Ps 80:13). It is not found with the figurative meaning of "protective power" in the OT. The more usual word for city walls in the OT is *hm;ho*.

Ezra did not put his trust in a military escort, and being the spiritual man that he was he was not likely to put his trust in any man-made *hm;ho* either. If the Lord builds a *rdeG*; that is sufficient to keep the "foxes" from breaking down Nehemiah's *hm;ho*. Maybe Ezra discerned in the wall built by Nehemiah in 458 a token of that better and spiritual wall of God's protection of the remnant without which physical city walls were of no avail (cf. Ps 127:1). It was probably more appropriate for Ezra to use *rdeG*; if he was thinking of the whole territory of Judah as Yahweh's vineyard, and not just Jerusalem—precious though it was. No country was ever surrounded by a *hm;ho*, but a large tract of land might have a *rdeG*; or protective boundary wall around it.

Ezra appears to view the work of the temple and the wall in a holistic manner. One decree of God covers both: "They finished building the temple according to the decree of the God of Israel and by the decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia" (Ezra 6:14). The mention here of Artaxerxes has puzzled commentators. Yet Artaxerxes is aware that Israel's God is capable of making decrees, and he voluntarily permits Ezra to do according to God's decrees (Ezra 7:23). Ezra himself attributes Israel's prosperity to the fact that his God controls the successors to the Assyrian throne (6:22). Mighty though the kings of Persia might be, they were, in Ezra's eyes, like horses with bits in their mouths to do God's pleasure or displeasure. This being so, it can be argued that just as the destruction of the temple and the walls reflected God's displeasure in 586 so it was predictable that God's good pleasure would result in their restoration.<sup>49</sup> And, indeed, in Ezra's prayer he

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Jer 17:21-27 where the conduct of Jerusalem is determinative for the fate of the whole population of Judah (cf. also 19:11,15). Hence a *rdG* around Judah would find its natural counterpart in a *hm;ho* around Jerusalem.

mentions both temple and wall in the same breath, “He has granted us new life to rebuild the temple of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem” (9:9). The coupling of temple and wall as the physical manifestation of the various rubber-stampings by Persian kings of God’s decree (singular) of 7:23 is proof, if proof were needed, that God had executed his decree in its entirety. However, if no wall were present then Ezra’s proof of God’s good pleasure toward them becomes a little hollow, to say the least. Ezra’s prayer makes better sense if a wall actually existed at that time than if it did not.

It is clear that Nehemiah saw in the destruction of Jerusalem’s walls, not the cunning and superior power of Judah’s enemies, but the *displeasure of God*. He realized that Judah’s enemies could not put out a hand to throw down a single stone of Jerusalem’s walls unless God first withdrew his *rdcG*; from it. Hence his immediate connection of its destruction with some sin on Judah’s part. The presence or absence of the wall reflected the pleasure or displeasure of God in Nehemiah’s theology. The physical is, for Nehemiah, the outward and visible sign of God’s love or his anger toward his people. It is inconceivable that God could be pleased with His people and not give them back their temple and wall. The removal of either was directly related to the removal of his grace from them.

The work of 52 days cannot be connected with the rebuilding of the walls demolished by Nebuchadnezzar: it must have been repair work only. The question remains, When were the walls rebuilt? And the answer must be that it was some time before the repair work of 445.

#### 6. “In the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the scribe” (Neh 12:26)

Nehemiah is called *Tirshatha* in Neh 8:9 and 10:1 and we have placed these chapters in Ezra’s first year. We have called attention to 5:14 where he is called *governor* (μjp) and we have argued that vv. 14-18 reminisce on a period in the past when Nehemiah was governor of Judah and Jerusalem. Apart from these references nowhere during Nehemiah’s 445 visit is he ever referred to as governor or Tirshatha of Judah and Jerusalem. At best he is a city mayor of Jerusalem, a fact that accords with the private errand he was sent on by the king. In Nehemiah’s own memoirs the period he is called governor is linked with a term which lasted twelve years, and the visit in 445 is too brief to qualify as his period of governorship.

We read in Neh 12:26, “They served in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest the scribe.”<sup>50</sup> Two things are significant in these

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<sup>50</sup> Albright argued that this verse is the “most conclusive” indication that Ezra followed Nehemiah, “Brief History,” 1-21. Hamrick: “The order in which Nehemiah and Ezra are mentioned would be difficult to explain on the assumption that the author knew that Ezra preceded Nehemiah by thirteen years” (“A New Study,” 273).

statements. First, Nehemiah is placed *before* Ezra, and second, Nehemiah is called “governor” which he was in his first visit but not in his 445 visit. Neh 12:26 ought, therefore, to be read as a correct chronological observation.

### VIII. *Nehemiah 13*

#### 1. *The Grammatical Argument: “and before this...”*

Chapter 13 of Nehemiah contains a number of related problems. First, in vv. 1-3 there is the report of a reading of the law “on that day.” The problem is, which day has the writer in view? Second, the incident of Tobiah’s relative in the temple chambers is linked to vv. 1-3 by the phrase “Before this.” If the phrase is intended to convey chronological sequence then this incident must pre-date the reading of the law. Third, v. 6 states, “But while all *this* was going on,” which is a direct reference to the Tobiah incident which Nehemiah could do nothing about because he had to return to Susa “in the 32d year of Artaxerxes.” Now if this 32d year is understood of Artaxerxes’ sole rule then Nehemiah went back in 433. If, however, it is understood as a dynastic reckoning, commencing with Xerxes’ reign, then he went back in 454. The problem is, in which year did he go back to Susa? The answer to that question will determine whether the events of vv. 7-31 belong to 445 or after 428.

The view of most commentators is that the renewed occurrence of mixed-marriages and the privileged treatment shown to a relative of Tobiah followed Nehemiah’s twelve-year period as governor and before Nehemiah made his second visit (which was some time after 433). The main reason for adopting this view rests (almost certainly) on a misunderstanding of the chronological notice of v. 6 which will be considered below.

If we leave aside for the moment the chronological notice of v. 6 the temporal notice of 13:1 “on that day” links the reading of the law to the appointment of temple overseers “on that day” (12:44), which in turn is linked with the offering of great sacrifices “on that day” (12:43); the day in question was the day Jerusalem’s walls were dedicated, the year being 445. The majority of commentators, however, take the view that “on that day” at 13:1 has no reference to the day of dedication which the other two occurrences undoubtedly have. The reference to “on that day” at 13:1 is said to refer to a reading of the law some fourteen or more years subsequent to the day of dedication.

The double antecedent postulated by conservative and critical exegesis for the same phrase is a difficulty, given that the phrase occurs three times within seven verses. The first two occurrences are generally agreed to refer to the day of dedication and, unless we have good reason to the contrary, the grammatical and logical assumption must be that the third occurrence will agree with the other two. Both Mowinckel and Kellermann were so convinced of this natural understanding of the



grammar that they were forced to deny that Nehemiah made a second visit and understood the events of chap. 13 to have taken place before Nehemiah's 445 visit.<sup>51</sup> Keil, too, acknowledged that he would have taken 12:44—13:3 to belong to Nehemiah's first visit but for v. 4.<sup>52</sup> Williamson, on the other hand, dismisses the troublesome phrase in 13:4 as "probably redactional."<sup>53</sup>

## 2. *The Theological Argument*

The reason for the moral, ethnic, and social deviations of the community must to a large extent be attributed to the lack of leadership of the quality that Nehemiah gave when he was in charge. The natural guardian of the nation's welfare (moral, ethnic, and social) was the high priest, but when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem after a few years absence he discovered that the high priest's grandson had married the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite. Yet in 458 Ezra had set up nation-wide commissions to oversee the dissolution of all mixed marriages. Eliashib appears to have been the high priest at that time.<sup>54</sup> If he was not high priest he was at least a prominent member of the community, for Ezra agreed to stay in the house of his son Jehohanan (Ezra 10:6).<sup>55</sup> The

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<sup>51</sup> Mowinckel, *Studien* II, 35-37; U. Kellermann, *Nehemia. Quellen Überlieferung und Geschichte* (BZAW 102; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann) 48-51.

<sup>52</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 283-4, but especially p. 286.

<sup>53</sup> *Word*, 383. S. J. De Vries likewise dismissed the phrase "this day" from 12:43 onwards as an artificial chronological notation (*Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* [London: SPCK, 1975] 61, 67, 115).

<sup>54</sup> H. Prideaux (*The Old and New Testaments connected* [New York: Harper & Bros., 1845] 1.297) puts the death of Joiakim in the 12th year of Artaxerxes (453) having been high priest for 29 years. Eliashib was high priest from 453-413 (p. 297); Joiada from 413-374; Johanan from 373-342; and Jaddua from 341-322. Anderson (*Royal Genealogies*, 116) gives the same information and gives as his source the *Chronicon Alexandrinum*. Albright worked out similar dates but without reference to any verifiable sources. He gives the birth of Joiada ca. 470, of Jehohanan ca. 450 and of Jaddua ca. 430 BC (cf. Albright, "Date" 122). For F. M. Cross' table of dates for the high priests see Hayes & Miller, *Israelite History*, 507. Eliashib was probably high priest from 453. His appointment would have been in the year following Nehemiah's return to Susa. Eliashib did not support Ezra's views on mixed marriages. Some time before 445 he permitted his own grandson to marry Sanballat's daughter. If he was a grandfather in 445 it is highly unlikely that he continued in office until 413 because the Elephantine Papyrus (No. 30) shows that his grandson, Jehohanan (if he is to be identified with Jonathan in Neh 12:11 which is virtually certain from 12:22), was high priest in 408. It would appear from Neh 12:26 that the high priest current at the time of Nehemiah and Ezra in 458 was Joiakim.

<sup>55</sup> It may or it may not be significant that Joiada, the next high priest, does not offer Ezra hospitality. It is left to his younger brother to be host to Ezra. Did Joiada, if fact, show hostility? He certainly showed his disdain for Ezra's reforms a few years later by deliberately flouting the ban on mixed marriages (Neh 13:28). It might well be that the high priest's family saw some theological illegitimacy in the spiritual powers given to Ezra by an earthly king whereas they had theirs from Yahweh through the legitimate succession from Aaron. If Ezra, as a priest, knew nothing of the mixed marriages for two months after his arrival it is not surprising that Nehemiah knew nothing of them until Ezra arrived. In any case only 113 men out of a population of over 50,000 were involved.

fact that Eliashib's grandson could enter into a mixed marriage when his father, Joiada, was high priest (on one reading of Neh 13:28) shows that there was some fundamental disagreement between him and Ezra on the matter of mixed marriages. If Eliashib was high priest (which is the other more probable reading of 13:28), then the disagreement is pushed right back to the very time that Ezra was carrying out his reforms in the country. Clearly Ezra and Nehemiah did not have the support of the high priest's family in what they were doing, and as soon as they left their policies were allowed to lapse.

Now it must be evident that neither Ezra nor Nehemiah could have been in Judah when the cultic, ethnic, and sabbath abuses reappeared. We have Nehemiah's explicit statement that he was not there, and we have to conclude from what happened during Nehemiah's absence that Ezra could not have been there either. It is as difficult to see Eliashib giving permission for a relative of Tobiah to take up residence in the temple precincts in the presence of Ezra, as it is to see Ezra permitting something that Nehemiah disallowed.

Now if Ezra was in Jerusalem carrying on his twelve-year mission which culminated in the reformation of 445, the abuses of Nehemiah 13 cannot fit into this period. Yet it was in the months leading up to the spiritual reformation that engulfed the entire nation (so we are informed) that God withdrew his *rdeG*; from Judah and Jerusalem and permitted Jerusalem's *hm;ho* to be destroyed. This runs counter to the theology that lay behind Nehemiah's repentance when he heard what had happened. It runs counter to the theology of the Chronicler.<sup>56</sup> As recently as Haggai's time Yahweh had brought about a succession of bad harvests to bring it home to the community that he was highly displeased with the lack of attention being given to his house, which they allowed to remain a ruin for fourteen years (cf. Hag 1:2-11).

If, as in the present hypothesis, Nehemiah 13 records the degenerate state of the community just prior to the destruction of the walls in 446/5, then this provides a better theological background against which to set the withdrawal of Yahweh's *rdeG*; from Judah and Jerusalem. Without this chapter we are left ignorant of the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem's walls. Israel's theology would lead us to look for the cause in the community's relationship to Yahweh, but if Nehemiah 13 records what took place after the destruction of the walls, then we have no information on Israel's relationship before that destruction, and consequently we have no explanation for that event. This is a further weakness (but not decisive) in the traditional hypothesis.

Theology and grammar would appear to be against the hypothesis of a twelve-year mission by Ezra culminating in a national day of repentance and reformation. It remains to see if history is also against it.

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. R. Dillard's study on the Chronicler's theology in "The Reign of Asa (2 Chronicles 14—16): An example of the Chronicler's Theological Method," *JETS* 23 (1980) 207-218.

### 3. *The Historical Argument: “in the 32d year of Artaxerxes”*

The determining factor that has forced commentators to place a gap of 14+ years between the “day” of 12:43-44 and the “day” of 13:1 has been 13:6,<sup>57</sup> “And during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the 32d year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon did I come unto the king, and at the end of days I have asked of the king, and I come in to Jerusalem.”

The literal or sole-reign interpretation of the 32d year has been the main cause why a gap of 14+ years has been assumed to lie between the “day” of 12:44 and the “day” of 13:1. Remove this gap and the “day” of 13:1 will refer to the same day mentioned four verses earlier, namely, the day of dedication. In turn this will settle the chronology of 13:4-14, “And *before* this Eliashib the priest appointed over the chambers of the house of our God a relation of Tobiah” (v. 4). That is, before what he has just recorded in vv. 1-3,<sup>58</sup> which takes the scene back before the day of dedication in 445. If this is correct then the historical context for the events of vv. 6-14 must also pre-date 445, because Nehemiah (in the verse recorded above) says that “during all *this* I was not in Jerusalem,” referring to the Tobiah incident. Now it was *after* this incident that Nehemiah came back in the “20th year of Artaxerxes,” but this 20th year was somehow *after* the 32d year of Artaxerxes according to 5:14 and 13:6-7.

This brings us to the meaning of the “32d year of Artaxerxes,” which is the crux of the whole matter. The dynastic hypothesis solves the problem very neatly and allows us to place the events of Neh 13 *before* the repair of the walls in 445 (or, better still, in the period between 454-445).

A number of implications flow from this redating of chap. 13. Thus Nehemiah cleansed the temple of Tobiah’s relative during the time that he was repairing the walls in 445. His appointment of the four treasurers in Neh 13:13 is to be dated to 445. His expulsion of Eliashib’s married grandson (13:28) took place at this time also, and, incidentally, it reveals that Eliashib was a grandfather when he took part in the repair of the wall (3:1).<sup>59</sup> The appointment of Hanani and Hananiah to guard the gates of Jerusalem (7:2-3) may be referred to again at 13:19b. A difficulty with the traditional view is that it reflects badly on these two men who were personally appointed by Nehemiah to guard the gates of Jerusalem. Hananiah, in particular, is singled out for special praise as being a “man of integrity” and one who “feared God more than most men do” (Neh 7:2). Yet these men, on the traditional view, permitted the desecration of the sabbath by opening the gates to traders (13:15-22), for when

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<sup>57</sup> We have shown above that this verse is capable of yielding a dynastic date. Here we see its crucial chronological value.

<sup>58</sup> “This” can refer either to (a) the time “on that day” or (b) the sin of assimilation (implied); or (c) the act of separation (so Keil and Delitzsch, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 287). The phrase “and before this” occurs only here in the OT.

<sup>59</sup> See note 57.

Nehemiah returned about 428 (on the traditional view) he had to appoint some of his own men to guard the gates. Hanani and Hananiah can hardly have used the excuse that “while all this was going on we were not in Jerusalem,” unless, of course, both were dead by this time.

## IX. *Concluding Observations*

### 1. *The Missing Factor*

Even if we could accept the critical argument that the events of Nehemiah 8–10 occurred in 458 rather than in 445; and even if we accept that the contemporary notices embedded in those chapters are historical and consequently that Nehemiah was present with Ezra when he read the law in 458; and even if it be conceded that the events of Nehemiah 13 preceded the dedication of Nehemiah’s walls; and even if the present historical reconstruction offers an interpretation that might solve some of the interrelated problems of the two books; nevertheless, when all is said and done one element in the interpretation remains a hypothesis, namely, *that a dynasty existed whose first year commenced with the first year of Xerxes’ rule*. Unless fresh evidence is discovered, we shall never be certain that such a dynasty ever existed.<sup>60</sup>

### 2. *“Artaxerxes King of Babylon”*

Without detracting from what has been said above, it should be noted that Nehemiah uses an unusual title in Neh 13:6 when he says, “But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king.”

In a series of articles in the *Princeton Theological Review* for 1904 and 1905<sup>61</sup>R. D. Wilson drew attention to the fact that Neh 13:6 is the only recorded instance where Artaxerxes is given the title “King of Babylon.”<sup>62</sup> Why this exception? Wilson noted from his “approximately complete”<sup>63</sup> documentation of the “Royal Titles in Antiquity” that the Persian kings are never called “King of Babylon” as a standing title.<sup>64</sup> The

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<sup>60</sup> In Dan 11:2 Persian glory reaches its zenith in Xerxes who is distinguished as the richest king of the Persian Empire. Consequently his son, Artaxerxes, did not surpass him in this regard. He lived very much in the shadow of his illustrious father. Archaeology has uncovered the names of four previously unknown governors of Judah during the Persian period (see Hayes & Miller, *Israelite History*, 502). It may yet throw more light on the history of this period.

<sup>61</sup> See “Royal Titles in Antiquity: An Essay in criticism,” *Princeton Theological Review* 2 (1904) 257-82, 465-97, 618-64; id., 3 (1905) 55-80, 238-67, 422-40 558-72 (esp. relevant are pp. 430-40, and 558-71); id., “The Title ‘King of Persia’ in the Scriptures,” *ibid.*, 15 (1917) 90-145.

<sup>62</sup> “Title ‘King of Persia’,” 118.

<sup>63</sup> *PTR* 3 (1905) 558.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 565.

more usual designation was “King of Persia” as we would expect. In the table below it is quite noticeable that something has happened between the reign of Darius I and Xerxes’ reign which has caused any title with “King of Babylon” in it to be studiously avoided.

|              | “King of<br>Babylon”<br>(Omitted<br>in titles) | “King of<br>Babylon”<br>(Used on<br>its own) | “King of<br>Babylon<br>and of the<br>Lands” | “King of<br>Babylon.<br>King of the<br>Lands” |
|--------------|--|--|---|---|
| Cyrus        | 364  | 12   | 25  | 273   |
| Cambyses     | 415  | 30   | 53  | 306   |
| Smerdis      | 11   | 0  | 2   | 13  |
| Darius I     | 586  | 14   | 154   | 369   |
| Xerxes       | 13   | 1(?)   | 1   | 3   |
| Artaxerxes I | 126  | 0  | 0   | 0   |
| Darius II    | 87   | 1  |   |   |

The explanation for this surprising statistical phenomenon would appear to be connected with an event early in the reign of Xerxes. Under his father, Darius I, Xerxes had been made viceroy of Babylon, a post he held for twelve years until the death of Darius. Upon his accession to the throne the native scribes of Babylon employed the usual titular, “King of Babylon, King of Lands” for Xerxes as they had done for his father. However, some time early in his reign, Xerxes visited Babylon and forcibly (it would seem) entered the “tomb of Belitanes.” This act was strongly resented by the Babylonians. Xerxes was incensed by the Babylonians’ attitude and when he returned to Ecbatana he gave an order that removed the title “King of Babylon” from its customary initial position after his name, which was replaced or preceded by the title “King of Parsa and Media.”<sup>65</sup> This change incensed the Babylonians, who revolted and killed the king’s satrap. In revenge Xerxes completely demolished the city and from that day it lost its separate identity as a state and was incorporated into the satrapy of Assyria. From 482<sup>66</sup> onwards the very name of Babylon was officially banned.<sup>67</sup>

We can understand and explain the use of the title “King of Babylon” when it is applied by Ezra to Cyrus, who conquered the city (cf. Ezra 5:13), but its presence after Artaxerxes’ name in Neh 13:6 is anomalous and

<sup>65</sup> Wilson, however, records a first year inscription of Xerxes which reads, “Xerxes, king of Persia and of Media, king of Babylon, king of all lands” (*PTR* 2 [1904] 264, cf. also p. 270 nos. 5 and 6).

<sup>66</sup> Wilson (“Title ‘King of Persia’,” 96) places the disuse of the title after 480.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Olmstead, *Persian Empire*, 236.

baffling.<sup>68</sup> For the first eight years of his reign Xerxes was acknowledged as the “King of Babylon,”<sup>69</sup> and had ruled the city for twelve years before that, but given his attitude toward Babylon and its subsequent decline, it is surprising to find his son being given the title “King of Babylon.”

One possible explanation for its use in Neh 13:6 is that it is not so much a title here as a statement of local fact. The Jews were settled in Babylonia and had to come to terms with the fact that Babylon was to be their home for the next two or three generations. They experienced many rulers and lived through the conquest of their “homeland” (i.e., Babylon) by the Persians. From a parochial point of view, therefore, whoever was king would be known at the local level as the “King of Babylon.”

Among those who did not come back in 536 were Nehemiah’s family, whose ancestors lived under a succession of Babylonian kings. Nehemiah grew up in Babylon and it was only natural for him and the Jews in general to refer to every ruler of Babylon (be they native or “foreign”) as the king of Babylon. Consequently, for Nehemiah to call Artaxerxes “king of Babylon” may simply reflect and unconsciously betray a genuine contemporary manner of address. Presumably a contemporary native of Syria or Egypt would, from their local viewpoint, refer to Artaxerxes as “king of Syria” or “king of Egypt.”<sup>70</sup>

### 3. *Some Implications Stemming from the Present Theory*

So intimately tied up are the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah with the chronology of their books that any alteration in their dates produces a corresponding alteration in the value of their work and reputation.

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<sup>68</sup> There were 730 business tablets found in one room in Nippur. Of this total only 130 were published by A. T. Clay in *Business Documents of Murashû sons of Nippur. Dated in the reign of Artaxerxes I 464-424 BC* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1898). He published a similar work on documents from the time of Darius II (424-404) in *Legal and Commercial Transactions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1908). A complete transliteration and translation of all the tablets was promised for Series C but none appeared (see *Business Documents* [1898], 30).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Wilson, “Title ‘King of Persia’,” 93.

<sup>70</sup> Wilson records inscriptions such as: “Artaxerxes, Pharaoh the Great” (*PTR* 2 [1904] 272 no. 20; and esp. 15 [1917] 129); he notes that the Persian kings are called by the title “king of Upper and Lower Egypt” adding that, “It seems to have been a part of the policy of the Persian kings of Babylon and Egypt, the greatest of their subject states, to conciliate the native populations by the assumption of the official titles of the respective native kings, who preceded them. But the Persian kings are never called by the title “king of Babylon” in Egypt, nor by the title “king of Egypt” in Babylon, nor by either title outside of Babylon and Egypt, except twice in the Bible” (“Title ‘King of Persia’,” 96, 106). He notes in the same article that Greek writers never call any Persian king, “king of Babylon” (*ibid.*, 114 n. 41). It seems then, from the evidence so far, that it was mostly the native population of Babylonia who used the title “king of Babylon” *on its own* after the Persian king’s name. Wilson’s study was compiled more than seventy years ago and will therefore need to be updated.

By postulating two visits by both reformers in which they were contemporaries on both occasions there can be no question of “failure” being attached to the work of one which will not also apply to the other. The work accomplished by Ezra and Nehemiah on their first visits was undone. On their second visits they restored their work to its original state.

There is no difference of opinion between Ezra and Nehemiah over the issue of mixed marriages; they differ only in their methods of implementing it. Nehemiah’s hair-pulling corrective measure presupposes the covenant which the offenders were violating. On their second visit the city was large and deserted; on their first it was full. This circumstance is satisfied on the present interpretation.

Ezra did not stay in Jerusalem from 458 until the visit of Nehemiah in 445. His first visit lasted only as long as it took to put in place all the reforms mentioned in Neh 10:28-39, which were accomplished in his first year according to the record itself. His second visit was in 445 to put back in place all the reforms which had been displaced while he was away.

The order of names in Neh 12:26 is chronological.

All the contemporary references to Ezra and Nehemiah are historical.

There is no need to alter the Hebrew text in any particular to accommodate the present interpretation.

One hypothesis is proposed, namely, that the reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes constituted a dynasty. The present reconstruction of the history of Ezra-Nehemiah is not built entirely on this hypothesis. Rather it arose out of a logical deduction or inference based on a reinterpretation of a number of events in the text as it stands, and in particular the redating of Nehemiah 13 and 5:14-18 (to pre-445) and the acceptance of Nehemiah 8—10 as belonging to Ezra’s first year of reform in 458. In addition, many scholars were convinced that the wording of Neh 2:6 cannot refer to a twelve-year period. All these elements forced the present writer to place Nehemiah alongside Ezra in 458 and to reexamine the chronological data afresh in the light of this apparent fact.

Was Nehemiah contemporary with Ezra in 458? That depends on whether chaps. 8—10 of Nehemiah belong to Ezra’s first year or not. Most scholars seem to think that they do (and this article is built on that assumption). If so, and if Ezra came in 458, then Nehemiah was his contemporary according to Neh 8:9, 10 and 10:1. This article shows how a new understanding of the chronological data is in harmony with such a hypothesis. But a hypothesis it remains just the same as all others on the subject.

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