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THE CHRONOLOGY OF EZRA & NEHEMIAH (1)

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In our survey of Biblical chronology we have arrived at the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which provide chronological information for the period after the return from exile, the Restoration Period of Old Testament history. The question we begin to address in this essay is whether the Artaxerxes of these books is the same person as Darius, a question we shall answer, contrary to modern opinion, in the affirmative.

Before getting into this question, however, it will be of some help to consider the actual content of these two books – or are they one book that has been divided in half? Some evidence from the ancient world, such as the Talmud, indicates that Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book simply called Ezra.

In fact, each book can stand alone, but they both have the same overall structure and outline, so that they are like twins. Ezra is concerned with holiness in the sanctuary, while Nehemiah is concerned with holiness in society. Ezra focuses on the Temple and its ethical boundaries; Nehemiah focuses on the city and its physical boundary (the wall).

Both books have the same outline. In each we begin with the decree of God's appointed sovereign, a decree that authorizes the reestablishment of God's kingdom (Ezr. 1-3; Neh. 1:1 - 2:16). In each book this is followed by a time of opposition, as enemies try to prevent the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra) and wall (Nehemiah), but in each book God's people emerge victorious and the project is completed (Ezr. 4:1 - 6:15; Neh. 2:17-6:19).

After the completion of the project, there is a formal covenant renewal, and associated with this are other events. In Ezra, the covenant renewal is followed by Ezra's visit to Jerusalem bringing spoils from the gentiles to adorn the Temple (Ezr. 6:16 - 8:36). In Nehemiah, the covenant renewal is accompanied by a reorganization of the people and of their leaders (Neh. 7:1 - 13:3).

Virtually every time the covenant is renewed formally in the Old Testament, there is immediately a fall into sin. The first instance of this pattern is seen in Genesis 2-3, the next in Genesis 9, another in Genesis 15-16, again in Exodus 24 + 32, again in Leviticus 9-10, again in 2 Samuel 7 + 11, and again in both Ezra and Nehemiah. The "Fall and Renewal" in both books concerns the sin of intermarriage, the same sin committed by the Sethites before the Flood (Gen. 6; Ezr. 9-10; Neh. 13:4-31).

The Chronological Problem

The chronological problem in Ezra-Nehemiah boils down to this: On the one hand, the name lists in these two

hemiah lived by the name "Artaxerxes," and Artaxerxes I (Artaxerxes Longimanus) reigned many years after Darius. We can resolve this problem one of two ways. The first is to strain the information given in the name lists in order to make it fit, this approach being the common one today. This gives us a long chronology for Ezra. The other way of resolving the problem is to hold that "Artaxerxes" in Ezra-Nehemiah is simply another name for Darius, giving us a short chronology. The long chronology is the establishment view today among both unbelieving and evangelical commentators. The short chronology has always been favored by Biblical chronologists.

Because this is a complicated matter to discuss, let alone resolve, we shall take more than one article to deal with it. In this essay we shall begin to examine the internal evidence in Ezra-Nehemiah, evidence that points clearly to a short chronology. Later we shall take up the arguments against the short chronology, by looking at the names of the Persian monarchs as given in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Nehemiah and Mordecai

In Ezra 1-2, we read that immediately after Cyrus's decree (536 B.C.), a group of exiles returned from Babylon to begin work on the Lord's Temple. Among these were "Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai" (Ezr. 2:2). Nehemiah 7:7 gives virtually the same list: "Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamiah, Mordecai." Who is this Nehemiah who returned with the first group of exiles? Most expositors hold that he cannot be the same as the Nehemiah who wrote Nehemiah, because the latter Nehemiah was still alive over 100 years later. We must ask, however, if this interpretation makes sense. Was Ezra trying to confuse his reader by mentioning some other Nehemiah in Ezra 2:2? More, was Nehemiah himself trying to confuse us by mentioning some other Nehemiah in Nehemiah 7:7?

If we look at Nehemiah 3:16 we read about "Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, official of half the district of Beth-zur." This is clearly another Nehemiah, and that is why we are told who his father was. Nehemiah the governor carefully distinguishes this Nehemiah from himself. Surely he would have done the same in Nehemiah 7:7, if that Nehemiah had been someone other than himself.

We ought to assume that the Biblical writers were trying to communicate, not confuse. The reference to "Nehemiah" in Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7 should be taken as strong evidence that the short chronology is correct. Nehemiah returned with the exiles and was present for the

Nehemiah 7:7. In the absence of any other **qualifier**, we should assume that this is ~~the~~ **Mordecai**, the great and renowned **Mordecai** of Esther 10:3. This identification would shorten the chronology as far as the book of Esther is concerned, and indeed **would** tend to identify Esther's **Ahasuerus** as **Darius**. (For a possible side-light, **see** Nehemiah 2:6.)

Nehemiah 10 and 12

In Nehemiah 10 we are given a list of the **priests** and **Levites** who signed the covenant renewal document prepared by Nehemiah (Neh. 9:38). The names on this list are identical with those who returned to Jerusalem at the time of Cyrus's decree. if the long chronology were correct, there would be a 91-year gap between these two events. According to the short chronology, there are only about 34 years between the two events.

Those who returned with **Zerubbabel** in the first year of Cyrus (Nehemiah 12:1-21)

Those who signed with Nehemiah in the 20th year of **Artaxerxes** (Nehemiah 10:1-12)

Priests

1. Seraiah	Seraiah
2. Jeremiah	Jeremiah
3. Ezra	(Azariah)
4. Amariah	Amariah
5. Malluch	Malluch
6. Hattush	Hattush
7. Shechaniah (Shebaniah)	Shebaniah
8. Rehum (Harim)	Harim
9. Meremoth	Meremoth
10. Iddo	-
11. Ginnetho	Ginnethon
12. Abijah	Abijah
13. Miamin	Mijamin
14. Maadiah	(Maaziah)
15. Bilgai	Bilgai
16. Shemaiah	Shemaiah
17. Joiarib	-
18. Jedaiah	-
19. Sallu (Sallai)	-
20. Amok	-
21. Hilkiyah	-
22. Jedaiah	-

1. Jeshua
2. Binnui
3. Kadmiel
4. Sherebiah
5. Judah

Jeshua
Binnui
Kadmiel
Shebaniah
(Hodijah, cp.
Ezr. 2:40, 3:9)

6. Mattaniah
7. Bakbukiah
8. Unni

(and 12 others)

Of the 8 **Levites** who are **mentioned** as returning with **Zerubbabel**, 5 are mentioned as signing the covenant with Nehemiah. Of the 22 **priests** who returned with **Zerubbabel**, 15 signed the covenant with Nehemiah. It is quite natural that 20 out of "30 men who returned with **Zerubbabel** in the first year of Cyrus should still be alive 34 years later. It is not reasonable to suppose that they would be alive 91 years later.

Modern commentators get around this problem by saying that the names in Nehemiah 10 are **family** names, not personal names. That is, they are the names of the **priestly** courses **established** by the men living at the time of **Zerubbabel**, not the names of **individuals**. This is a **wholly** gratuitous **assertion** without any foundation in the text. First of all, a number of the names in Nehemiah 10:1-27 **correspond** to the personal names found in Nehemiah 3. Secondly, if family names or names of priestly courses are in view, then the **two** lists should be **identical**, which they are not. Of course, if it is a proven fact that the **Artaxerxes** of Nehemiah is **Artaxerxes Longimanus**, then **some** such explanation of Nehemiah 10 becomes **necessary**, but as we are seeking to show, there is good reason to suppose that the **Artaxerxes** in Nehemiah is in fact **Darius**. Therefore, Nehemiah 10 can stand without **procrustean** interpretations being forced upon it.

(To be continued)