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THE CHRONOLOGY OF EZRA & NEHEMIAH (II)

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The Priestly Genealogy

Jeshua the high priest, who returned with Zerubbabel, was not a young man at the time. We know this because his father, Jehozadak, was taken into captivity (1 Chron. 6:15). Thus was 50 years before the decree of Cyrus (2 Kings 25:18-22, by implication). Jehozadak's father Seraiah, slain by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:18-22), was high priest at the time, so his father Azariah (1 Chron. 6:14) was already dead. Thus, Seraiah was probably in his 50s or 60s, which would put his eldest son Jehozadak in his 30s or 40s. Accordingly, it is likely that Jeshua was born before the captivity. It is possible that Jeshua was born in captivity, but he would still be fairly old by the 6th year of Darius, 21 years after the return, 71 years after the captivity. To be on the safe side, we shall put his age at 80 in the 6th year of Darius, 21 years after the return.

Jeshua's son was Joiakim (Neh. 12:10). He was high priest in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh. 12:26). According to the long chronology, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem 70 years later than the sixth year of Darius, which would mean that Joiakim was born when his father was very old indeed, or else that there is gap (aha, blessed gaps!) in the genealogy. Gaps do appear in genealogies (though not in chronologies) in the Old Testament, but given the tremendous importance placed on the genealogical records of the priests and Levites in Ezra and Nehemiah, it is very unlikely that there is any gap here (Ezra 2:62; Neh. 12:22).

Of course, a gap is barely possible, but it is much easier to account for this genealogy on the basis of the short chronology. Old Jeshua died immediately after the Temple was dedicated, which means that his son Joiakim took over at the time Ezra arrived a year later. (The death of the high priest is significant in establishing the nation; see Num. 35:28; Num. 20:22-21:3; Josh. 24:33. The apparent fact that Jeshua's life spanned the entire captivity-punishment of Israel adds an additional dimension to Zechariah 3.)

Joiakim's son was Eliashib (Neh. 12:10). Evidently, at the time of Nehemiah (13 years after Ezra arrived) Joiakim was already an old man, so his son Eliashib was helping him as high priest (Neh. 3:1).

We are told of two sons of Eliashib: Joiada (Neh. 12:10), who sewed first as high priest, and Johanan (Neh. 12:23; Ezra 10:6), who sewed with and after him.

One of Joiada's sons, unnamed, was already married when Nehemiah returned for his last visit about 13 years later (Neh. 13:28). We know that Joiada had a son named Jonathan, who is not listed in Nehemiah 12:22 as serving

high priest. (Note, though Johanan and Jonathan are similar in English, they are definitely not the same name in Hebrew.)

It is helpful to realize that Johanan was Joiada's younger brother, because tatters from the Jewish colony at Elephantine mention Johanan as a high priest in the 14th and 17th years of Darius's reign. If Johanan had been a son of Joiada, this would be impossible. According to Ezra 10:6, Johanan already had a room in the Temple precincts in the 7th year of Darius, so he must have been at least a late teenager at this time.

There is plenty of time for all this in the short chronology. Here is a possible chronology:

Darius yr. 6	Jeshua age 80, dies; Joiakim 60; Eliashib 40; Joiada 20; Johanan 18
Darius yr. 7	Johanan 19, has room in Temple (Ezra 10:6)
Darius yr. 14	Johanan, age 26, has title of high priest, according to Elephantine letters. Johanan could have been apprenticing at this age (Num. 8:24, assuming that this rule for the Levites applied to the priests as well).
Darius yr. 17	Johanan, age 29, has title of high priest, according to Elephantine letters.
Darius yr. 20	Nehemiah arrives; Joiakim 74; Eliashib 54; Joiada 34; Johanan 32; Joiada's unnamed son (Jonathan?) 14.
Darius yr. 33	Nehemiah's second visit; Eliashib 67; Joiada 47; Johanan 45; Joiada's son (Jonathan?), married, 27; Jaddua 2.

According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 11:7-8), Jaddua was still high priest when Alexander the Great arrived at Jerusalem, which if we take Daniel's 70 weeks of years literally, was about 85 years after this. Jaddua would be close to 90 years old. According to Josephus, he died shortly after this event. Josephus is not a completely reliable historian, so we have to take his statements *cum grano salis*. He also tells us of an aged Sanballat who was operating at the time Alexander arrived on the scene. Since the Sanballat of Nehemiah was in office in Darius yr. 20 (short chronology), he would have to be at least 30 at that time, and thus about 130 when Alexander arrived. There are other confusions in Josephus's account of this period as well. Perhaps, though, among all his confusions Josephus has it right about Jaddua's living to see Alexander.

There was a Jewish colony in Egypt on an island in the Nile called in Greek Elephantine. Archaeologists have

hemiah's brother? Neh. 1:2); Sanballat (Neh. 3:1) (Papyri 21-22, 30-34). Because the present scholarly opinion is that Ezra and Nehemiah lived in the time of Artaxerxes Longimanus, it is assumed that the Darius of the Elephantine Papyri must be Darius II, who followed Longimanus. In terms of the short chronology, however, these letters should be understood as having been written in the time of Darius the Great.

It is interesting to notice that in Elephantine Papyrus No. 21 we have a letter to the head of the Elephantine colony, Yedoniah, from Hananiah, who might be Nehemiah's brother. The letter instructs them that King Darius had ordered in his 5th year that the Jews were to celebrate Passover. This squares very nicely with Ezra 5.

The Ezra Question

As we saw above, the high priest at the time Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem was Seraiah, and he was killed at that time. He was the father of Jeshua, who 71 years later presided over the Passover in the 6th year of Darius (Ezra 6). If we compare the genealogy of the high priests in 1 Chronicles 6:3-15 with the genealogy of Ezra in Ezra 7:1-5, we find that Ezra was a member of the high priestly family. His genealogy is identical with that of Seraiah, and he is said to be a son of Seraiah (Ezra 7:1). We have supposed that Jeshua was 30 in the 6th year of Darius. The youngest Ezra could possibly be at that time is 71, assuming he was born the year his father died.

Long chronologists argue that Ezra was in the time of Artaxerxes Longimanus, not in the time of Darius the Great. Thus, they suppose a gap between Seraiah and Ezra in the genealogy of Ezra 7:1. They defend this supposition by pointing to the fact that there is a definite gap between Azariah and Meraioth in Ezra 7:3 (cp. 1 Chron. 6:3-15). If there is one gap in Ezra's genealogy, they point out, they may well be another.

Let us see, however, whether the short chronology can successfully overcome the supposed gap between Seraiah and Ezra. Ezra was still alive in the 20th year of Darius, when Nehemiah arrived, making him at least 65 years old. Ezra was present at the dedication of the wall built under

that it only took 52 days for the wall to be rebuilt (Neh. 6:15), so that it was built in the very year Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem. Thus, Ezra was 85 years old at this time. This is possible, and so no gap is needed. Ezra was the son of Seraiah, and brother of Jeshua the high priest.

Is this a correct reconstruction of events? It would seem to take a lot longer than 52 days to put up a wall around a city. Nehemiah 5:14 says that Nehemiah was in Jerusalem for 12 years. His sole mission was to rebuild the wall, and there is no reason why he would have remained in the city for 12 years after rebuilding it. Before he left the King, Nehemiah told him how long it would take to rebuild the wall, and promised to return (Neh. 2:6). Since Nehemiah stayed in Jerusalem 12 years, it only makes sense that he told the king it would take 12 years to rebuild the wall. It is more reasonable to assume that it took 12 years for the wall to be rebuilt, amidst opposition. In Nehemiah 6:1 we read that "no breach remained in it [the wall] although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates." Then in 6:15 we read, "the wall was completed on the 25th of Elul, in 52 days." Thus, a simple consecutive reading of Nehemiah 5-6 indicates that it took "12 years for the wall to be put up, and another 52 days to get the doors in the gates erected. After this there was a dedicatory ceremony and the feast of tabernacles (Neh. 7-12), and then Nehemiah returned to Persia, his task completed.

If this interpretation is correct, then Ezra was alive in the 32d year of Darius. In terms of our suggested reconstruction of events, he would be 97 years old at this time. This is barely possible. Obviously, this is not a very strong argument for the short chronology. The long chronology says that there is a gap of one or more generations between Seraiah and Ezra, to bring us down to the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus. The short chronology can get around the need for a gap only by saying that Ezra lived to be at least 65, or more likely 97. The short-chronologist has to admit that there may well be a gap between Seraiah and Ezra, especially since there is a gap between Meraioth and Azariah in Ezra 7:3 (cp. 1 Chron. 6:3-15).

(70 be continued)