

# Chapter 15

## The Return

(540 – 340 BCE)

**To one who is gifted with spiritual strength, truthfulness and purity,  
the Spirit of Love and Faith shall grant firmness and stability of body.  
Such a person shall be successful in life's ordeal  
and shall be regarded, my Lord, as thy good servant**

Yasna 30:7 from Zoroastrian Scripture<sup>1</sup>

From around the time that Cyrus issued his decree of release, Judeans in Babylonia could have been members of the royal court, civil servants, merchants, traders, bankers and subsistence farmers. There is evidence of wealth in the form of the records of Marashu banking house. Tablets exist showing that they did business with members of the Jewish community and others in the period that followed Cyrus decree. Recently the 'Al Jahudu' tablets, provide evidence of transactions associated with the everyday lives of people in a cluster of Judean Villages between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Animals were exchanged, houses let, slaves bought and sold, inheritances arranged and records kept of names and addresses.<sup>2</sup> Al Jahudu is the Babylonian name for Jerusalem, so these tablets establish the existence of a Babylonian village named after homeland's capital city.

There was an understandable reluctance to return. Many successful families must have reflected that Judah was so far away, and so poor and the journey so expensive. Better surely just to support the return financially than actually to take part in it.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless a caravan was eventually formed and a 'new Judah' was launched under the leadership of the Persian appointed 'governor', Sheshbazzar, and a prince of the house of David called Zerubbabel.<sup>4</sup> The caravan set out some time shortly after 538, a little over 60 years after the first exile. It travelled from the cities of the Chaldean Kings to the hills of Judah planning, no doubt, to make a new beginning there. The place to which the caravan went was known in Persian administrative circles as Jehud. Jehud was one of the provinces of the 5<sup>th</sup> Persian Satrapy which also included Babylonia, Syria-Palestine and Cyprus. It may initially have been administered from Samaria. It was geographically smaller than pre-exilic Judah; its post-conquest borders left it with only about 770 square miles, the size of a modest English county. Its northern boundary included Bethel; the eastern boundary was the Jordan as far south as Engedi, whilst the southern border ran north of Hebron, which had become a town in Edom.

Population estimates for late pre-exilic Judah give a number of around 32,250. This was the land that the returnees left. But the population to which they returned has been estimated at just 10,850 – the size of a small town today, not enough to qualify as a state, but not completely empty. Did the returnees expect to re-occupy their grand-parent's landholdings? Was this resisted by the current

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<sup>1</sup> Zoroastrianism was the religion of the Persian emperors. The Avesta is extremely difficult to read, let alone translate, since some of it is written in a 14-letter alphabet. This quotation was taken from a framed extract on the wall of the fire temple in Kerman in August 2000. Other translations used here are by L. H. Mills and James Darmesteter (from *Sacred Books of the East*, American Edition, 1898) and by D.J. Irani from the web-site [www.zarathushtra.com](http://www.zarathushtra.com)

<sup>2</sup> Stökl (2015) and Horowitz, Greenberg and Zilberg; "By the Rivers of Babylon"; The Bible Lands Museum and the Israel Exploration Society.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus, the Alexandrian Jewish historian writing 600 years later. was of the opinion that many were reluctant to leave their property in Babylon. Josephus, *The antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, Chapter 1: 3(8).

<sup>4</sup> Some commentators hold that Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were different names for the same person since both are given the title 'governor' and both are said to have laid the foundations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple. Some hold that the term 'governor' should not be interpreted literally as Jehud was probably administered from Samaria at this time.

occupiers? Or were they welcomed back with joy and festival?

Those that had been left behind by the exile, and had not fled to Egypt, had struggled to scratch an existence from the desecrated land. They may have been joined by others from Edom and elsewhere who had chosen to fill the gaps left by the departed people. Even so Archaeologists estimate that less than 500 people lived amongst the ruins of Jerusalem before the returnees arrived<sup>5</sup>. Writing long after the event, the compiler of Ezra-Nehemiah states the number of returnees at 42,360, quite an impressive gain in 2 to 3 generations over the 4,000 to 10,000 that went into exile! It is almost certainly an exaggeration. Modern archaeological methods suggest that even by the late Persian period, the number of people in Jerusalem was still less than 2000; whilst in Jehud as a whole it was no more than 17,000. The number of returnees to Jerusalem must therefore in reality have been no more than a few thousand at most.

They returned bringing the experience of exile with them. This would have included both the way they had learnt to carry out their faith in a foreign land and also what they had learnt of the faith of their rulers. The most recent of these rulers, and the ones that promoted their return were the Persians, whose leaders practised Zoroastrianism.

### **Zoroastrianism**

Zoroaster (or in Avestan, Zarathustra) was a prophet who probably lived in north-eastern Iran at some time between 6000 BCE and 600 BCE. He preached the worship of Ahura Mazda, the 'Wise Lord'. In the Behistun inscriptions Darius affirmed no less than 34 times that he was under the protection of Ahura Mazda. In the Yashts (prayers) there are a number of hymns in honour of the 'Yazatas', beings who deserve reverence, but who are not gods. Perhaps they are analogous to the angels, cherubim and other heavenly beings that populate parts of the bible. These 'Yazatas' included the sun, the moon, a spirit of water and fertility (very similar to the Babylonian 'Ishtar'), and Mithra (who would become a roman cult). Ahura Mazda is depicted as venerating the 'Yazatas' and asking for their help. Darius may have recognised the gods of other nations as 'Yazatas', not gods like Ahura Mazda but nevertheless beings deserving veneration and respect. His regard for the gods of other nations is illustrated in a letter he wrote to his governor in Ionia:

*"I hear that you not obeying my orders in all matters. I commend your policy of introducing food-crops from beyond the Euphrates into lower Asia and cultivating my land. ... But in that you are causing my intention with regard to the gods to be forgotten, then, unless you change your course, I shall give you cause to know that I am angered. For you, not knowing the god Apollo, who spoke all truth to the Persians, have levied tribute from his sacred gardeners, and ordered them to dig unhallowed soil,"*<sup>6</sup>

In the beginning, the Zoroastrians believed that there were two spirits and one chose 'Truth' and the other chose 'The Lie'. In the Avesta we read:

*I shall tell you now of the Two Spirits at the beginning of Creation.  
The Holier of the two thus speaks to the Evil One:  
"Neither our thoughts nor our teachings,  
Neither intentions nor choices,  
Neither our words nor our deeds,  
Neither our consciences nor our souls ever agree"*<sup>7</sup>

The good spirit is sometimes personified, sometimes seen as an abstract principle. In a later creed the two spirits were conceived as separated by a void, one in lightness above and the other in darkness below. The good spirit, realising that the evil one would attack, 'because his nature is to destroy', brings into being the spiritual and material worlds as countermeasures. In this way Zoroastrianism deals with two of the great issues of theology – the origin of evil and the reason for creation. Ahura Mazda, who is sometimes identified as the good spirit, sometimes as the father of the good spirit, did not create evil; it came into existence as a result of the free choice of a spirit, and the world came into being as a trap to contain it. Although evil brought sin, disease and death into the

<sup>5</sup> Leith (1998) in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*; p.384.

<sup>6</sup> Darius I (lived 550-486). Correspondence quoted in Yamauchi (1990); 'Persia and the Bible'; p 162 and cited by Burn (1984) in 'Persia and the Greeks' p 114.

<sup>7</sup> Yasna 45:2

world, he was trapped there and opposed by the six faculties of Ahura Mazda – the Good Mind, Righteousness, the Kingdom, Right-mindedness, Wholeness and Immortality.

Just as the eternal spirits were free to choose, so it is believed that man is free to choose between ‘Truth’ and ‘the Lie’. Each must achieve his or her own salvation and the only way to do so is through good thoughts (*humat*), good words (*huhkt*) and good deeds (*huvarsth*). When at death the spirit attempts the journey to paradise it will be the accumulated balance of good thoughts, good words and good deeds over evil thoughts, words and deeds that will determine whether the journey will be successful. At the time of judgement, the spirit stands on the bridge which joins the mortal world to paradise and is tested there over molten metal and fire:

*With what understanding shall you, O Mazda, give judgment to the two contending sides,  
Through your fire, a token of the final molten test?  
Let there be a sign of the separation:  
The destruction of the evil, from the blessedness of the righteous.*

*The Wrong of the wicked shall perish before the Right of the truthful.  
Standing at the Bridge of Judgment, the evil soul beholds the path of the righteous,  
But the evil of his actions, the words of his evil tongue, prove to be his fetters,  
In fear, he finds that he fails.<sup>8</sup>*

There is no possibility that a late repentance will cancel out earlier sins. Man is free to choose, but must accept the consequences of his choice. Mankind takes part in the struggle against evil: for only if sufficient people choose rightly will evil be overcome.

Zoroaster’s perception of Ahura Mazda is given in a remarkable passage, which has similarities with 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah. The date of the composition of this prayer is debatable, but some scholars consider it to have been 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE <sup>9</sup>

*This I ask you, tell me truly O Ahura;  
In the beginning, who was the father and creator of the Truth?  
Who determined the paths of the sun and the stars?  
Who, but you, so arranged the moon to wax and wane?  
This, O Mazda, and much more, I would like to know.*

*This I ask you, tell me truly, O Ahura;  
Who so balanced the earth and heavens to keep them apart?  
Who created the waters and the plants?  
Who yoked swiftness to the winds and motion to the clouds?  
Who is the Creator of the Good-Mind, O Mazda?*

*This I ask you, tell me truly, O Ahura;  
What great craftsman created light and darkness?  
What craftsman produced the phenomena of sleep and wakeful activity?  
Who made the dawn, noon, and night  
Which call the enlightened to their duties?*

*This I ask you, tell me truly, O Ahura;  
Whether what I now announce is really true,  
Does Right-mindedness, through the benevolence of our actions, further the cause of Truth?  
Does the Kingdom of Heaven rest on the foundation of the Good Mind?  
For whom have you created this richly endowed world?*

*This I ask you, tell me truly, O Ahura;  
Who established blessed Right-mindedness, the spirit of Benevolence, in the exalted  
dominion?  
Who, with foresight, made the son reverential to the father?  
Thus I seek to comprehend you, O Mazda,*

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<sup>8</sup> Yasna 51: 9 & 13

<sup>9</sup> Persia and the Bible p 405

*Through the Benevolent Spirit, the Giver of all!* <sup>10</sup>

Just as there are the personified divine attributes such as Right-mindedness, so also the texts speak of demons (daevas) as personified abstractions of evils such as Greed, Lust, Envy and Shame which must not be permitted to enter the body. The worst of these is 'Aeshma Deava', Wrath.

The prophet believed in the resurrection of both body and soul and regarded immortality as the greatest gift of Ahura Mazda to humankind. Although the spirit who chose evil may be able to corrupt this world, there would be a second existence in which evil would have no power, for

*Never shall the False Teacher destroy existence a second time,  
For his tongue stands mute, his creed stands exposed.*<sup>11</sup>

and

*"To them who give heed to me with dedication,  
I shall come with the blessings of Perfection and Immortality"*<sup>12</sup>

There is a belief that the world will receive three saviours, the third of which will conquer disease and death and in a final apocalyptic battle enable goodness to overcome the 'Lie', ushering a new paradise:

*When the victorious Saviour and his helpers,  
... shall restore the world, which will never grow old and never die  
never decaying and never rotting,  
ever living and ever increasing, and master of its wish,*

*When the dead will rise,  
when life and immortality will come,  
and the world will be restored at its wish;*

*When the creation will grow deathless, - the prosperous creation of the Good Spirit, -  
then the Lie shall perish ...  
as it is the will of the Lord.* <sup>13</sup>



A common Zoroastrian symbol is a figure inside a winged wheel. It appears to be similar to the images associated with Horus in Egypt and Ashur in Assyria, and when used in conjunction with the monuments of the Persian kings was said to represent their kingly spirit. The image above comes from the front of the fire temple in modern Kerman – and despite protestations that Zoroastrians do not make statues of Ahura Mazda, it is probably intended as an icon symbolic of the Good Spirit.

The main ideas of Zoroastrianism would have become familiar to the exiles in Babylon and Persia. Returnees drifted back to Jehud fairly slowly over the twenty years that followed Cyrus' decree, but those who did would have been aware of the main ideas of Zoroastrianism. Scholars debate just how influential these ideas have been, but it is striking that following this contact, Judaism (and thus Islam and Christianity) acquired ideas concerning the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the

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<sup>10</sup> Yasna 44:3-7

<sup>11</sup> Yasna 45: 1

<sup>12</sup> Yasna 45: 5

<sup>13</sup> Yasht 19: 89-90

body, a Devil who works in opposition to God, a final Apocalyptic battle and of a Saviour who will come in the last days.

### **Astronomy and the Calendar**

The Persians were amongst the first people to use a solar, as opposed to a lunar calendar. It had 12 months of 30 days with a thirteenth month used to keep the calendar synchronised with the seasons. This idea may have been brought back by the returnees, although it does not appear in a biblical context until it was incorporated into the book of Enoch. There, alongside some primitive astronomical science, is a solar calendar of 364 days, comprising four seasons of ninety days plus one of 4 days. (This is similar to the present-day Ethiopian calendar, which comprises 12 months of 30 days plus a thirteenth month of, normally, 6 days.)

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, sectors of the Judean community would be engaged in a debate as to whether this solar calendar or the alternative lunar calendar – the one now used in most countries - was divinely ordained. This debate would be crucial to the Essenes of Qumran.

### **Psalms of the return**

It is possible that those who returned reflected on the experience of exile in psalms such as the melancholy but savage ‘By the waters of Babylon’.

*By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept  
when we remembered Zion.  
There by the poplars we hung up our harps  
For those who had captured us required a song  
– those that mocked us wanted laughter.  
‘Sing us a song of Zion’*

*How could we sing a song of Yahweh in a foreign land?  
If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither;  
If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth  
– if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.*

*Yahweh, remember the sons of Edom  
on the day in Jerusalem,  
when they said, “Strip her! Strip her! Down to her bottom!”.  
Daughter Babylon you destroyer;  
Happy the man who repays you for all that you did to us  
Happy the man who seizes and dashes your children against the rock! <sup>14</sup>*

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah and the early poems**

It is doubtful that worship ceased on the temple site during the exile. Yahwism continued in Samaria, and probably in Galilee and Ammon as well as in Jehud itself.<sup>15</sup> Jeremiah’s historian reported that, after the destruction of the 1<sup>st</sup> temple, a group of 80 pilgrims came from Samaria, to worship at the site<sup>16</sup>.

It is also doubtful if much, or any, progress was made in the rebuilding of the temple by the first group of returnees. Other matters, such as the restoration of the land so that it could be farmed, probably pre-occupied the early arrivals. It required a significant campaign by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to get rebuilding started in earnest. It may have been that any work that might have been done in the early years had to be repeated, for both Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel are credited with

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<sup>14</sup> Psalm 137; The line beginning “when they said, “strip her” differs from the AV since the translation of the repeated hebrew ‘*aru*’ as ‘raze it, raze it’ is not supported by usage elsewhere. The hebrew ‘*y’sod*’ had the double meaning of ‘foundation’ and ‘buttocks’. The English ‘bottom’ perhaps also permits such double understanding. The image intended here is of Jerusalem as a woman being abused. The reference is to the day of Jerusalem’s fall to the Babylonians when it is alleged that the Edomites exploited the opportunity to pillage the city. See Dahood (1970) p. 273

<sup>15</sup> Oxford p. 386-7.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremiah 41: 4-5.

laying the foundations of the temple<sup>17</sup>. Ezra claims that the temple was rededicated in 515 or 516 – a date that fits in with Jeremiah’s prophesy. If true, the rebuilding was not accomplished until more than 20 years after Cyrus had granted the exiles permission to return. Haggai and Zechariah indicate that, once started, serious work on the project lasted little more than a couple of years.

When the last editor of Isaiah finally put the book together, he included in chapters 56 to 66 some poems that were almost certainly composed between 537 and 445 – after the first return but before the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. Some scholars would suggest a narrower time-span – between 530 and 500 BCE, around the time of the building of the second temple. There are references to a temple in some of the poems, whilst others refer to a desolate Zion. Scholars dispute whether all the poems have the same author, but they do have a certain unity of message. They have an interest in cultic matters that is absent from Second Isaiah; they welcome foreigners to the worship of Yahweh in sharp contrast to the narrow nationalism that will come later with Ezra and Nehemiah. The theme of salvation continued from Second Isaiah, but it was salvation delayed. Third Isaiah recognised that salvation will only come to the faithful and not to the insincere rich. He introduced the idea of apocalyptic judgement separating out the pious from the wicked. The poems as a whole appear to be addressed to people who were living in and around Jerusalem after the return.

These poems are not in chronological order, but rather seem to be organised in a chiasmic structure by theme. The core material in chapters 60 to 62 has similarities with the Zion poems of Second Isaiah and includes the prophet’s calling in the very centre of these texts. There he said he was an ‘*anointed of Yahweh*’, that is a ‘*messiah*’, the Hebrew for ‘anointed one’. Previously kings were anointed, but in post-exilic times this practice also applied to the chief priest as the leader of the community.

The prophet recognised as Third Isaiah was anointed not by men, but by Yahweh. He was not of the leadership; rather he condemned it. The core is surrounded by two lamentations, dealing with the theme of salvation delayed – delayed because of the sins of the people. Included with these in today’s bible is a brief poem which imagines Yahweh coming to Zion after having visited a terrible judgement on Edom whose people had dared to loot defenceless Judah in the days following the Babylonian siege. It could be a later insertion as it seems somewhat out of place. The lamentations are enclosed by a group of poems each of which contrasts the promises of Yahweh to his servants, often described as the poor and the oppressed, with the behaviour of the rich citizens and the established priests that were misleading the community. Poems denouncing pagan practices and the priests that execute them enclose that material. Finally, in the two poems that book-end Third Isaiah, the priesthood was extended not just to the faithful Judeans but also to those foreigners who believe in Yahweh and obey his covenant – for people from remote lands who have never seen Yahweh’s glory would be brought to his Holy Mountain, where some of them would become priests.

#### A structure for Third Isaiah

56:1-8	Foreigners welcomed to the ministry of Yahweh
56:9-57:13	Priests and pagan practices condemned
57:14-21	‘I dwell with the oppressed and lowly; there is no peace for the wicked’
58:1-14	Condemnation of false fasting, but rewards for the righteous
59:1-21	Lamentation: Salvation is delayed by sin
60:1-22	Of Zion: ‘Arise, Shine, for your light has come.’
61:1-11	‘The spirit of Yahweh is upon me’
62:1-12	Of Zion: Nations shall see your deliverance
(63:1-6)	( <i>The judgment of Edom; perhaps inserted by an editor</i> )
63:7-64:11	Lamentation: I will recount the gracious deeds
65:1-25	Condemnation of pagan worship, but rewards for Yahweh’s servants
66:1-4	‘I will look upon the lowly and oppressed; but condemn false worship’
66:5-17	Pagan practices and priests condemned
66:18-24	Foreigners welcomed to the ministry of Yahweh

If the dating is correct, the poems offer an insight into Jehud in the years of the return. The leadership was condemned for drunken selfishness; they were ‘*greedy dogs who will never be satisfied*;

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<sup>17</sup> Alternatively, it may have been that one started the planning and the other started the building, or one founded the altar and the other the temple building.

*shepherds who understand nothing – all after their own gain*<sup>18</sup>. The prophet attacked those who practiced pagan rites, calling them ‘*sons of sorcerers, the spawn of adulterers and whores*’ and accusing them of ritual prostitution ‘*burning with lust under the terebinths – under every leafy tree*’ and of child sacrifice ‘*slaughtering children in the beds of streams and the clefts of rocks*’, of pouring libations onto ‘*smooth stones*’ and of necromancy - ‘*sitting in tombs and spending the night in graves*’<sup>19</sup>. In contrast to the faithless rich, there was a faithful remnant – the poor and broken hearted who would be given crowns instead of dust and would be called ‘*oaks of righteousness*’<sup>20</sup>. The fate of Yahweh’s true servants was contrasted with that of those who have abandoned Yahweh: ‘*My servants will eat but you will hunger; my servants will drink; but you will thirst*’<sup>21</sup>. There are suggestions in Isaiah 66 that the prophet was associated with a pious sect who saw themselves as those who would inherit the New Jerusalem, but who were spurned, perhaps expelled, by their laxer brethren.<sup>22</sup>

The author of one of the earliest of these poems (Isaiah 61) may also have been the person who wrote the responses to the Servant Songs. The first Song, it will be recalled, said of the Servant, “I have put my spirit upon him”. Now this poem in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah collection began with the phrase: -

*The spirit of Yahweh Elohim is upon me  
because Yahweh has anointed me.*

The response to the Servant Song, written in Yahweh’s voice, said to the servant: ‘*I have called you in Righteousness, I have taken you by the hand*’ – a phrase that recalled the Babylonian New Year festival when the king ‘takes the hand’ of his god. The response continued: -

*“I will form you and give you as a people’s covenant  
to be a light to all nations –  
to open the eyes of the blind,  
to free the captives from prison  
and those who lie in darkness from their dungeons”*<sup>23</sup>

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah poem, this theme was developed further. The one who has been anointed by the spirit of Yahweh said: -

*He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to those in prison.*

According to Luke’s Gospel, the opening of this poem was the text given to Jesus of Nazareth to read in the synagogue in his home town over 500 years later. Luke asserts that Jesus identified himself with the Servant, saying “This day, in your hearing, this text has been fulfilled”.<sup>24</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah poem declared itself to be a poem of the return by saying of ‘*those who mourn in Zion*’ that: -

*They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
restore places long left desolate,  
and repair the ruined cities –  
the desolations of many generations.*

The poet saw the new Israel as being the priests of Yahweh, who will minister to the rest of the world and be served by it: -

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<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 56:11

<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 57:3-6 and 65:4. The complaints are familiar from Jeremiah and Ezekiel. With the ‘good figs’ exiled it is not improbable that these pagan practices continued unabated.

<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 61:1 & 66:2

<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 65:13

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 66:5 “Your brothers who hate you and reject you for my name’s sake have said ‘May Yahweh be glorified...’. But they shall be confounded”. Isaiah 66:22 “For just as the new heavens and new earth will endure in my presence, so will your race and your name”

<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 42: 6b-7. The full response is verses 5 – 9.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 4:17-22

*Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,  
foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines  
You shall be called 'Priests of Yahweh',  
you shall be named 'Ministers of our God'.<sup>25</sup>*

Another 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah poem made a distinction between the new community of the faithful servants and the old Judah had who abandoned Yahweh. The new Israel would be the good grapes selected from the cluster. His vision for the faithful was not just of a rebuilt Jerusalem but of a new heaven and a new earth. Halfway through the poem he used Yahweh's voice to declare: -

*For Look!  
I am creating a new heaven and a new earth.  
The past will not be remembered; it will not come to mind.  
Be glad and be joyful forever in what I am creating;*

*For Look!  
I am creating Jerusalem as 'Joy' and its people as 'Delight'.  
I will be joyful in Jerusalem, and will delight in my people there;  
No more shall the sound of weeping be heard, nor the cry of distress.  
No more shall there be an infant there that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime*

*For they are the children of those blessed by Yahweh,  
and their descendants too.  
Before they call, I will answer,  
while they are still speaking, I will hear.  
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
But the serpent—its food shall be dust!  
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.<sup>26</sup>*

The new universe is characterised by joy and gladness (mentioned three times in just three verses), and 'Joy' becomes the name of the new Jerusalem.

But salvation was delayed. The returnees were having a difficult time; they may have expected the power of Yahweh to be with them, smoothing their way, but this did not seem to be happening. Had Yahweh let them down? The poet addressed this issue: -

*Yahweh's hand is not too short to save,  
nor his ear too dull to hear.  
It is your iniquities that separate you from your god,  
and your sins that have hidden his face from you  
so that he does not hear.  
...  
Justice is turned back,  
and righteousness stands off,  
Truth stumbles in the street,  
and uprightness has no power to come in.  
Yahweh saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.  
...  
And he will come to Zion as a Redeemer for those in Jacob who turn from sin.<sup>27</sup>*

Salvation was delayed because of the iniquity of the people. The theme continued in the poem that began "Who is this that comes from Edom"<sup>28</sup> and in the following poem "I will recount the gracious

<sup>25</sup> These two quotations (Isaiah 61:1b & 5-6) come from the poem whose full extent is 61:1-11.

<sup>26</sup> This poem is found in Isaiah 65:8-25. The quoted verses are 17-20 and 23b-25

<sup>27</sup> This come from the poem in Isaiah 59:1-21. The quoted verses are 1-2,13,15b & 20

<sup>28</sup> Isaiah 63:1-6

deeds”<sup>29</sup>. The opportunist settlement of parts of Judah by Edomites following the exile was felt by the returnees to have been a betrayal. But in “*I will recount the gracious deeds*” the poet asked Yahweh to intercede and set the hearts of his people right: -

*Why, Yahweh, do you let us stray from your ways  
and harden our hearts, so that we do not fear you?  
Turn back for the sake of your servants,  
for the sake of the tribes, your heritage.  
Why have the wicked trodden on your holy place,  
our enemies on your sanctuary.  
We have long been like those whom you do not rule,  
like those not called by your name.  
Rend open the heavens and come down,  
Let the mountains quake at your presence.* <sup>30</sup>

Another poem, beginning with a reference to 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah’s ‘Holy Way’, recalled the people to justice and declared that Yahweh resided with the poor and the oppressed: -

*“Build it up, build it up!  
Prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people’s way.”  
For thus says the High, the Exalted, who lives in eternity, whose name is Holy:  
“I dwell in the high and holy place,  
but also with the oppressed and lowly,  
to revive the spirit of the lowly,  
and the heart of the oppressed.”*  
...  
*But the wicked are like the troubled sea that cannot rest;  
Its waters stir up mud and mire.  
“There is no peace”, says my Eloah, “for the wicked.”* <sup>31</sup>

These poems seem to reflect a time after the return, but before the restoration of the temple, a time when the returnees were struggling with challenges from the population who had not gone into exile, with the economic difficulties of rebuilding the land and, it would seem, with poor leadership. There are other poems in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah collection, but these seem to have been written after the second temple had been built, and for that to happen, more support would be required.

It might have been expected that the Judean Communities in Egypt to which Jeremiah and Baruch were taken would have joined the returnees. However, this expatriate community was, for most of its members, a voluntary one. They could have chosen to remain with Gedaliah and make what they could of the situation. In 586 they had chosen not to do so, and in the intervening years had seen no reason to change their minds and leave the communities that they had joined in Alexandria and elsewhere. Judeans had been well established in Elephantine Island near Aswan for some time, where they were largely employed as mercenaries by an Egyptian administration to whom they may have felt a greater loyalty than to a Persian state that threatened invasion of Egypt. Archaeological evidence suggests that they were an independently minded group who had had not adopted the Deuteronomic reforms of their fatherland. The idea of ‘returning’ to a fragile Judean entity, just because some exiles had been released from Babylon may have even have occurred to them.

### **The fall of Egypt**

At the age of 70, Cyrus was still actively campaigning and extending the empire he had

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<sup>29</sup> Isaiah 63:7- 64:11

<sup>30</sup> Isaiah 63:17 – 64:1 The restoration of the disturbed central verse is due to McKenzie (1968) p 189

<sup>31</sup> This poem is Isaiah 57:14 – 21; verses 14,15,20 & 21 are quoted. The reference is to Isaiah 35:8-10 “A pure highway will be there; it will be called the Holy Way...”. The repeated ‘build it up, build it up’ may also be a deliberate counterpoint to the broadly contemporary psalm 137 which gives the despised Edomites the line “Strip her! Strip her!”

The ending “There is no peace for the wicked” also occurs in Second Isaiah (48:22), but there it is so out of context that it seems to have crept in as a result of a scribal error. It is more contextually sound here.

created. In 530 BCE he established an outpost by the Aral Sea called Cyropolis – modern Kurkath. But in July of that year he died in battle and his body was transported back to the site of his first triumph at Pasargardae where it was interred in a tomb with the simple inscription: -

*Mortal!*

*I am Cyrus, son of Cambyses, who founded the Persian empire and was Lord of Asia  
Grudge me not, then, my monument*

He was succeeded by his son, another Cambyses, named no doubt after his grandfather. This Cambyses has an ambivalent reputation. Some say he was a vicious tyrant; others that he combined ruthlessness with shrewd politics – using both rewards and punishments to achieve his purpose. He retained all of Cyrus' empire and expanded it yet further. Egypt was a country of substantial wealth that, at the start of Cambyses reign, was outside the Persian Empire. Cambyses made careful preparations to change that.

In Egypt, in 526, the experienced Pharaoh Amasis died. Just six months later Cambyses launched his attack. He chose the logistically difficult route across the Sinai desert with the support of water-bearing camel trains supplied by a Kedarite king. At the same time, a fleet of Phoenician ships under Persian direction entered the Nile. This complex attack finished the Saite Dynasty. Cyrus' son, in accordance with his father's usual practice, presented himself to the Egyptian people as a liberator come to end the misrule of the usurper Amasis. He may have married a daughter of Apries, or put about a story that he himself was the son of a daughter of Apries – political moves designed to give him legitimacy as a true Egyptian ruler. He supported some of the established religious order and reportedly re-appointed compliant officials to their previous roles. But he also reduced the royal gifts to certain temples, possibly in response to an insufficiently enthusiastic welcome. It was rumoured that he burnt the mummified body of Amasis and that he stabbed the royal Apis bull, sacrilegious acts in Egyptian eyes. But the former act may have been part of his strategy of establishing the connection between his reign and that of the legitimate Apries and the latter may have been no more than the rumour-mongering of disenchanted priests. Whatever the truth of those stories, it is probable that, once established, he followed his victory over Egypt with expeditions into the western desert and south towards Ethiopia. All this took time.

In 522, he received information that a rebel was attempting to secure the Persian throne. He set out to return home but whilst passing through Syria, he accidentally stabbed himself in the thigh with his own sword. The wound became gangrenous and he died whilst still en route. His grave near Persepolis, prepared some years before, was probably never occupied.

### **Darius (522-486)**

It would seem at first sight that the accidental death of the emperor was fortunate for the rebels. Their leader, Gaumata, had the additional advantage of being a look alike for Cambyses brother. Unfortunately, a group of nobles, perfectly aware of the attempted deception, organised a counter-coup; and thus Darius came to the Persian throne. With such a beginning, it was not surprising that his first task was to put down a series of attempted rebellions by subject kings who fancied trying their luck whilst there was confusion at the core of the empire. In Behistun, Darius has provided an inscription which lists a number of rebels including the king of Babylon, the king of Media, an Armenian who claimed to be the son of Nabonidus, a Persian who sought to be king of Elam and four others.<sup>32</sup>

Darius was a great administrator and builder. He built a canal between the Red sea and the Nile, fifty miles long and 45 metres wide, in order to facilitate trade with Persia and India. He built the great city of Persepolis. To create this magnificent city, Darius brought craftsmen from all over the Persian Empire. At one point, no less than 6,000 artisans were working on the project; yet it is a triumph of coherent vision and witty design. The central building was 120 meters on each side and could probably hold 10,000 people.

To run his great empire, he built a royal road from Susa to Sardis – a distance of 1,700 miles. He established a mail system which used horses and men stationed along this road a day's distance apart. The couriers were 'stayed neither by snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor darkness from accomplishing their appointed course with all speed'<sup>33</sup>. It took no more than a week to get a royal message from one end of the road to the other. Darius was responsible for the organisation of the empire into around twenty regions under the rule of Satraps appointed by the emperor. Although in complete charge of

<sup>32</sup> See Yamauchi (1990), *Persia and the Bible*, p 132 for more details.

<sup>33</sup> Herodotus 8.98

administration and taxation, they did not control the army garrisoned in their area and were subject to periodic inspections by civil servants from the emperor's personal office. By these means 120 nations were governed.

Around this time Zerubbabel ("Seed of Babylon") was appointed to the governorship of Jehud. Zerubbabel was the grandson of the ex-king Jehoiachin, and thus of the Davidic line. During his governorship, the chief priest in Jerusalem was Joshua, who claimed descent from the last chief priest before the exile. Zechariah, writing around this time, called Zerubbabel 'The Branch'<sup>34</sup>. A similar concept underlies a poem found in Isaiah: -

*A shoot will come out from the stock of Jesse,  
and a Branch will grow out of his roots.  
Yahweh's spirit will rest upon him,  
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
a spirit of counsel and might,  
a spirit of the Knowledge and Fear of Yahweh.*

The poem continued by developing the idea of the perfect ruler, for whom justice and truth will be like the belt around his waist. He will not judge by appearances, but the strong and the weak will be treated equally in this prayed-for new world – a concept that the poet expanded metaphorically to the whole of nature, for: -

*The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie with the kid,  
the calf and the lion will feed together,  
and even a small child will lead them.  
The cow and the bear will graze -  
their young lying side by side;  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
...  
They will not hurt nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be filled with the Knowledge of Yahweh  
as the waters cover the sea.<sup>35</sup>*

This poem resonates with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah poem concerning the new heaven and the new earth quoted earlier.<sup>36</sup>

Attempts to build a second Temple had not advanced very far by 520, perhaps because there were relatively few returnees before then; perhaps because of incompetent leadership; perhaps because of the poor economic circumstances that prevailed in Jehud at the time. The exiles considered themselves a group apart from the population who had remained. They may have been wealthier, more able and more ideologically committed to restoring the culture and the nation than the non-exiles. They were probably in conflict with the non-exiles over questions of land ownership, the latter no doubt considering that they owned what had been left vacant at the time of the exile and which they had subsequently cultivated and maintained over two or three generations.

Haggai dates his first oracle to the second year of the reign of Darius (ca. 520). His work and the material that is now found in the first eight chapters of Zechariah were edited into a single text, perhaps by the author of the first part of Zechariah. The last oracle in chapter 8 of Zechariah is dated two and a half years after the first oracle of Haggai. Between these two dates the authors moved from urging the rebuilding of the temple to recognising that it was near completion.

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<sup>34</sup> Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12

<sup>35</sup> Isaiah 11:1-9. Verses 1-2 & 6-9 are quoted. The dating of the poem is uncertain. The vocabulary is associated with post-exilic literature and the idea and indeed some phrases also occur in Third Isaiah – especially the concept of the 'holy mountain', five times in Third Isaiah, but otherwise only in Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Obadiah, Zephaniah, & Zechariah and then just ten times in total. Some split the poem into two, but note the repetition of the Knowledge of Yahweh

<sup>36</sup> Isaiah 65:8-25 and 11:1-9 both included the phrase 'They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.'

There are literary and editorial associations between the two chapters of Haggai and chapters 7 and 8 of Zechariah that make these two sections act like ‘bookends’ to the texts between. The whole phrase ‘the house of Yahweh of Armies’ is just one of some 18 literary usages that have been identified as common to the two passages. Another is the date formulae, which measures time against the dates of the Persian monarch – not Zerubbabel, nor the return.

Haggai began by campaigning for the rebuilding of the temple, and he specifically looked to Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua to do it. He was concerned that the people were too involved with their own businesses to be willing to put money and effort into renewing the temple, and suggests that the poor harvests of recent years are due to their lack of concern for their god.

*Is it time for you yourselves to live in panelled houses while this house lies in ruins?*

...

*You look for much, and, it comes to little; and when you bring [the harvest] home, I blow it away. “Why?” asks Yahweh of Armies. “Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses.” Therefore, the heavens above have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce.*

*Then Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the rest of the people; and they came and began work in the house of Yahweh of Armies, their God<sup>37</sup>*

Haggai encouraged the people to act not only by appealing to their sense of what was right and proper, but also by promising prosperity. Yahweh would shake the nations, and treasure would pour out.

*“The silver is mine, and the gold is mine”, says Yahweh of Armies. “The splendour of this later house shall be greater than that of the earlier. In this place I will give prosperity.”<sup>38</sup>*

Zechariah, who had probably been brought to Jerusalem from Babylon by his grandfather<sup>39</sup>, joined with Haggai in urging work on the temple; he called for more returnees:

*“Up, up! Flee from the land of the north”, says Yahweh,  
“I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven”, says Yahweh,  
“Up! Escape to Zion, you that live with daughter Babylon.”<sup>40</sup>*

The main content of the book of Zechariah is a report of a set of dream-visions he claimed to have had in the night of February 15<sup>th</sup> 519. The report of the vision took the form a chiasmic structure centred around the two leaders – Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the ‘Branch’. It comprised eight episodes.

- The 4 horsemen of Heaven (Zechariah 1: 7-17)
  - The 4 horns that broke Judah; the 4 smiths that repaired her (Zechariah 1:18-21)
  - The measurement of Jerusalem (Zechariah 2:1-5)
  - Joshua and the accuser (Zechariah 3)
  - The lampstand and the olive trees: Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4)
  - The flying scroll of Justice (Zechariah 5:1-4)
  - The basket of Iniquity (Zechariah 5:5-11)
- The 4 charioteers of Heaven (Zechariah 6:1-8)

The two leaders were the topic of the fourth and fifth visions. On either side of these were two visions concerning Jerusalem; these in turn were surrounded by two visions concerning Judah, which were finally enveloped by two visions of heavenly spirits. In his dream Zechariah was accompanied by an angel-messenger who provided him with some explanations of what he saw in his vision – in a similar manner to the angel-messenger who accompanied Ezekiel in his visions of Jerusalem.

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<sup>37</sup> Haggai 1:4 & 9 & 14

<sup>38</sup> Haggai 2:8-9

<sup>39</sup> Merrill (2004)

<sup>40</sup> Zechariah 2:6

In the first vision, Zechariah saw a man riding a red horse accompanied by three other colourful horses. These had been patrolling the world and report that the whole earth is quiet and at rest. The accompanying messenger asks Yahweh “*How long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah with whom you have been displeased these seventy years?*” (It appears that it may have felt to Zechariah that the punishment was still continuing, even though the return had been accomplished. Or is the reference to Jeremiah’s seventy years more important in the mind of the author than the physical reality?) Yahweh’s response is “*I am very angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they enhanced the misery... Therefore I will return to Jerusalem with compassion, and my house shall be built there.*”<sup>41</sup> In the matching eighth vision, four strong chariots, drawn by four colourful horses, have sought and received permission from Yahweh to go to the four corners of the earth. The accompanying angel notes that the one going to the North has set his spirit at peace.

The second and seventh visions dealt with Judah. The second involved four horns and four smiths; the horns had driven the people of Judah to the four corners of the world; four smiths had come to cut off the horns of the nations that had done this. The seventh vision described the placing of the guilt of the land, represented by a woman called ‘wickedness’, in a basket and sealing it away with a lead seal. It is taken away by two other women to Shinar, an ancient name for Mesopotamia – the seat of power of the oppressors of Israel and Judah - Assyria and Babylon.

The third and sixth visions dealt with the preparations to rebuild Jerusalem. In the sixth vision a flying scroll removes everyone who steals or swears falsely whilst in the third vision a man with a measuring line was called back from determining the boundaries of Jerusalem for the city was to be inhabited as villages without walls because of the multitude of people who would come there. Yahweh would protect the city with a ring of fire.

The central two visions dealt with the leadership of Judah. The first of these began with a passage reminiscent of the prose part of Job. Joshua in filthy rags was envisioned standing before the Angel of Yahweh with the Accuser at his right hand ready to deal with him. But in this case Yahweh rebuked the Accuser. Joshua’s rags were removed with the words “*See, I have removed your guilt from you, and will clothe you in fine garments.*”<sup>42</sup> Joshua was reassured that if he kept to Yahweh’s ways, then he would rule in Yahweh’s house. But he was also told that Yahweh would bring the ‘Branch’, Zerubbabel, to Judah and he would lay the seven-sided foundation stone of the house. The last vision was of a seven-branched candlestick, a menorah, flanked on either side by olive trees. He was told “*These seven are the eyes of Yahweh that penetrate the whole world*” and the two olive trees represent “*the two anointed ones who stand by Yahweh*” presumably the priest Joshua and the governor Zerubbabel<sup>43</sup>

Twenty-two months later, in December 518, a delegation came to ‘*the priests of the house of Yahweh of Armies*’ to enquire as to whether they should still fast in the fifth month of the year in commemoration of the destruction of the former temple – as had been their practice for many years. This suggests that the rebuilding of the temple had at least been begun and that some temple priests had been appointed. The answer the delegation received began with a question; -

*“When you fasted and lamented in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted?”*<sup>44</sup>

It continued with the consistent prophetic appeal for sincerity and the explanation that a failure to listen to the voice of Yahweh was the cause of their exile ‘*these seventy years*’. They were urged to ‘*render true justice; to show mercy and compassion to one another, and to care for the widow, the orphan, the immigrant and the poor*’ – words that could have been taken from Micah or Isaiah.

Soon however, Zechariah felt able to speak in the voice of Yahweh saying: -

*“I will bring my people to live in Jerusalem.  
They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”*

And he continued:

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<sup>41</sup> Zechariah 1:12-16

<sup>42</sup> Zechariah 3:4

<sup>43</sup> Zechariah 10b-14

<sup>44</sup> Zechariah 7:5

*“Let your hands be strong!”*

*“You have recently been hearing these words from the mouths of the prophets who were present when the foundation was laid for the rebuilding of the temple, the house of the Yahweh of Armies.*

*Up to now, there have been no wages for people or hire for the animals”<sup>45</sup>*

But that was about to change.

Early in Darius’ reign, the governor in charge of the Province across the river (i.e. Babylon and Trans-Euphrates), had made a visit to Judah and discovered that temple building was in progress. He enquired as to their authority for doing this and was assured that the project had been authorised by Cyrus. The governor wrote to Darius and asked for confirmation. A search was made in the archives in Babylon and Ecbatana and an official minute confirming Cyrus decision was uncovered. Darius accordingly instructed that the work should continue and further that *“the cost is to be paid to these people, in full and without delay, from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province Beyond the River.”* The full exchange of correspondence was copied by the compiler of Ezra.<sup>46</sup>

With a grant from the regional administration assured, it may be presumed that building proceeded with all speed. The author of Ezra 6 recorded that the temple was completed in February 516.<sup>47</sup> It was dedicated the following year. The dates may have been chosen for their significance. Jeremiah had prophesied that Judah would ‘serve Babylon’ for seventy years<sup>48</sup>. The temple was destroyed in 586; thus the restoration of the temple around 516 fulfilled a reasonable interpretation of Jeremiah’s prophesy.

Whilst the building of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple had been engaging the committed in Jehud/Judah, there were significant developments in the Persian Empire. Darius had dealt with the main rebels and was able to leave the capital. He moved east and added the area along the Indus river, south of the Punjab, to his empire. This area subsequently provided his treasury with 360 talents of gold annually (about 10,800 kgs). He commissioned a successful expedition to explore the Indus to its mouth and from there to navigate to the Red sea. In 516, he attempted to push north against the Scythians, but this venture failed.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah in the time of the second temple**

The first and last poems of 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah collection have an awareness of the second temple and were therefore written after 515. These poems contain a strikingly open approach to foreigners, made clear in the opening poem “Preserve justice”<sup>49</sup>:

*Do not let the foreigner joined to Yahweh say,*

*“Yahweh will separate, separate me from his people”.*

*Do not let the eunuch say,*

*“I am just a dry tree.”*

*For thus says Yahweh:*

*To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall never be cut off.*

*To the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh, to minister to him, to love the name of Yahweh, and to be his servants – all who keep the Sabbath, honour it and hold fast to my covenant; these I will bring to my holy mountain, and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their offerings and sacrifices shall be acceptable on my altar.*

Deuteronomy had banned eunuchs and certain foreigners from membership of the Israelite

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<sup>45</sup> Zechariah 8: 8-10

<sup>46</sup> Ezra 5.1-6:15

<sup>47</sup> Ezra 6:15

<sup>48</sup> The prophesy is in Jeremiah 25: vv 11-12. It may have been an addendum to a passage dated to the 605 BCE - the date of the battle of Carchemish (See previous chapter). Specifically it stated that Judah and all the neighbouring lands ‘will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years’ and that at the end of that time Yahweh will punish Babylon. The Persian conquest of Babylon was in 539 BCE. It happens that the Babylonians took Haran – the last stronghold of the Assyrians - in 609 BCE a few years before Jeremiah’s prophesy.

<sup>49</sup> Isaiah 56:1-8

community. This author promised full membership, and even more to both. Foreigners could become Yahweh's priests! The poet has Yahweh describe the rebuilt temple in a manner that echoed the prayer placed by the Deuteronomists into the mouth of Solomon, for this time "*my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*"

The poem "*Arise, shine for your light is come*"<sup>50</sup> continued the international theme for "*nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn*". The nations will bring their wealth to glorify the temple. "*All those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of Yahweh*". Some suggest that this poem was the inspiration behind Mathew's account of the wise men following a star and carrying gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (a Sheban export) to the new born Jesus.<sup>51</sup> It has become an important Christmas reading in Christian churches.

Perhaps the experience of practicing his faith in exile had convinced this prophet that faithfulness to Yahweh, not descent from the right ancestor, was what was precious in Yahweh's sight; perhaps too it was his disgust at the pagan practices indulged in by some members of the established priesthood that led him to look elsewhere for the faithful: certainly, this author showed little respect for the local leadership: -

*The watchmen are blind, they are all without knowledge;  
they are all silent dogs that cannot bark;  
dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber.  
The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough.*

*The shepherds also have no understanding;  
they have all turned to their own way,  
to their own gain, one and all.  
They say,  
"Come let us get wine;  
let us fill ourselves with beer.  
Tomorrow will be like today.  
More, much more!"*<sup>52</sup>

There is a real feel of a drinking song being quoted in the last couplet. It looks as if, in the poet's view, Zerubbabel, Joshua and their cronies, the watchmen and the shepherds, were leading Jehud astray.

In an apocalyptic poem, placed by the editor at the end of Isaiah, these faithless Judeans will be purged so that a New Israel can emerge, with foreigners amongst the priests in Yahweh's temple. But first the enemies of Yahweh must perish, they will be judged in fire – a metaphor possibly influenced by Zoroastrian theology:

*For Look! Yahweh will come in fire with his chariots like the whirlwind;  
To strike with his anger in fury;  
his indignation in flaming fire  
For Yahweh judges by fire,  
with fire he will test all mankind.*

Then

*I will assemble all nations and tongues; they will come and will see my glory...and I will take  
some of them for priests and for Levites*

*For just as the new heaven and new earth I am making will endure in my sight  
So your race and your name shall endure.  
And it will be from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath  
All mankind shall come to worship before me.*<sup>53</sup>

The openness to foreigners apparent in 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah suggests that the new world order created by the

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<sup>50</sup> Isaiah 60:1-22

<sup>51</sup> See Spong (2016) chapter 8; and Mathew 2:1-12

<sup>52</sup> Isaiah 56:10-12

<sup>53</sup> Isaiah 66:15-16 then 21-23

unified Persian empire was to some extent bringing together the dispersed expatriate communities. Interwoven throughout the empire was a developing appreciation of Greek culture, especially literature. Greece seems to have been an early adopter of the Canaanite concept of phonetic writing as witnessed by the similarity of the Greek letter shapes and names - alpha beta – with the Canaanite originals – aleph bet<sup>54</sup>. Persian and Greek culture began to influence from around 500 BCE

### The Song of Songs

Both the date and the authorship of the Song of Songs are uncertain. The language used some borrowed words from Persian, and some from Greek. For example, ‘*pardes*’ meaning an orchard or walled garden in 4:13 is a Persian word<sup>55</sup>, whereas the Greek word ‘*phoreion*’ probably underlies the Hebrew translated in NRSV as palanquin in 3:9. This suggests a date towards the end of the Persian era, when Greek culture had started to penetrate society. Scholars have noted the similarity of the song with Egyptian love poetry. In these poems, as in the Song, the beloved is often called ‘sister’, and they have a similarly intimate sensuality as indicated by the Egyptian example and the extract from the Song that follows:

From Egypt: -

“When I behold sweet cakes,  
[they now seem like] salt.  
And pomegranate wine, [is no longer] sweet in my mouth—  
The scent of your nose alone  
is what revives my heart.”<sup>56</sup>

And from the Song-

*How much better is your love than wine,  
and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!  
Your lips distil nectar, my bride;  
honey and milk are under your tongue.  
The fragrance of your garments is the fragrance of Lebanon.*<sup>57</sup>

A likely time for the writing of this poem could thus have been the period after the Persian conquest of Egypt, when the influence of Greek culture was already strong and growing, knowledge of Persian well established, and economic well-being restored in Jerusalem. The author had a wide knowledge of plants and animals not found in Jehud; he or she may have been well-travelled, or may have lived in the Diaspora, or was simply intrigued by the exotic traditions and literature of the wider Persian Empire. The Song makes use of the Judean traditions that surround the Solomon legend. At times it seems to be about a love affair between Solomon and the Shulamite – perhaps inspired by the tale of the beautiful girl who was brought into David’s harem to warm the ageing king in his last months. Whilst it may have entered the cannon mainly as a result of the ‘Solomon’ references and its allegorical potential, we can be grateful that this superb erotic poem, a celebration of physical sexual love, is retained in the bible. Although it is sometimes argued that, like some Persian poetry of the early Islamic era, sexual love is a metaphor for the love of god, the level of intense physical intimacy present in the Song makes this a difficult line to follow.

Some see the book as a collection of poems, although they dispute how many. It seems to work best when viewed as a script for a dramatic performance. It has a number of voices – the groom (Solomon), the bride (the Shulamite), and the bride’s friends (who act like a Greek Chorus). The reader is left to make his own interpretation as to who is speaking and to whom (although the New International Version of the Bible makes some suggestions)

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<sup>54</sup> The names of the letters have meanings in Semitic which describe the symbols; not in Greek. The Greek names and symbols thus derive from their Semitic equivalents. The early use of alphabetic writing in these cultures led to the written versions of the works of Homer and the Hebrew Epics emerging at about the same time.

<sup>55</sup> To the desert-dweller a walled garden with running water was paradise; this is the origin of our word.

<sup>56</sup> Based on an example quoted in Michael Fox (*Egyptian Literature (Egyptian Love Songs)*) in ABD (1992). The guesses for the words missing from the original, shown here in brackets, are my own.

<sup>57</sup> Song of Songs 4:10-11

*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!*

*For your love is better than wine,  
your anointing oils are fragrant,  
Your name is perfume poured out;  
therefore the maidens love you.*

*Draw me after you, let us make haste.  
Let the king bring me into his chamber*

*We will exult and rejoice in you;  
we will extol your love more than wine.  
Rightly do they love you.*

*Daughters of Jerusalem,  
I am black and I am beautiful  
like the tents of Kedar,  
like the curtains of Solomon.  
Do not gaze at me because I am dark,  
because the sun has gazed on me.  
My mother's sons were angry with me;  
they made me keeper of the vineyards,  
but my own vineyard I have not kept!*

*Tell me, you whom my soul loves,  
where you pasture your flock,  
where you make it lie down at noon;  
for why should I be like one who is veiled  
beside the flocks of your companions?*

*If you do not know,  
O fairest among women,  
follow the tracks of the flock,  
and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents.<sup>58</sup>*

The work is given a unity by the repeated passionate plea:

*"I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,  
do not arouse or awaken love until it is ready!"<sup>59</sup>*

The work is full of references to flowers and animals, many exotic and not native to Israel. Here the Persian word for an orchard is used, and a comparison made with the Persian idea of Paradise as a walled garden. There may be double meanings throughout the Song.

*A walled garden is my sister, my bride,  
a walled spring, a source seal  
Your channel is an orchard- paradise of pomegranates  
with all choicest fruits -  
henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,  
with all trees  
of frankincense, myrrh and aloes,  
and with all the chief spices -  
A garden source, a well of living water,  
A flowing stream from Lebanon.<sup>60</sup>*

<sup>58</sup> Song of Songs 1:2-8. The Kedarite king Geshem was one of the people Nehemiah had to deal with. The reference to the beauty of the dark tents of Kedar in this passage may thus be a pointer to its date.

<sup>59</sup> Song of Songs 2:7, 3:5,5:8 & 8:4

The climax of the poem comes with the remarkable lines;

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm;  
for love is as strong as death,  
passion as fierce as the grave.  
Its flashes are flashes of fire  
a flame of Yah.<sup>61</sup>*

Although the Hebrew of the last line can be literally translated as ‘a flame of Yah’, the more usual translation is ‘a raging flame’<sup>62</sup>. The usual translation thus misses what could be one of the very few religious allusions in this poem.

The whole poem is consummated in the final verse: -

*Make haste, my beloved,  
and be like a gazelle,  
like a young stag  
upon the mountains of spices!*

### **Darius and Problems with Greeks**

Zerubbabel disappears from the bible. There are various traditions concerning his fate, ranging from execution, through imprisonment to recall. It is probable that his rule was ended by the Persian administration when Darius was able to review his minor vassals and remove from them any leadership that might be considered a potential political embarrassment. It appears that the Persians chose one Elnathan, who was probably not even a Judean, as the next governor. The fading of the Davidic line is unremarked in the contemporary Judean writings, and little further information has been culled from Persian sources. In the time after the re-building of the temple, this tiny province does not seem to have interested the Persian administration much. What did concern them was Greece.

In 507, the Athenians sent a delegation to Sardis (HQ of the most westerly Persian province), where they offered to form a treaty with the Persians – probably as insurance against any future problems they might have with rival Sparta. In 499, when the governor of Miletus decided it would be a shrewd career move to lead a revolt of the Ionian cities against the Persians, Athens somewhat inconsistently sent twenty ships to help the revolt. The rebels succeeded in burning Sardis in 498, and continued to disrupt the western front of the Persian Empire until put down in a sea battle in 494. In view of the Athenian double-dealing in the matter of the 507 treaty, Darius decided to send a punitive force against them. Storms in the northern Aegean damaged the Persian fleet, and so it was not until 490 that a Persian force landed in mainland Greece prepared to sort out the Athenians. The ensuing battle of Marathon is regarded by many as a turning point in history, for the Persians lost.

It may not have seemed so bad to the Persians at the time; they had only sent a small force and their total losses were only 6400 men, and they could always try again. And they did, but that would be under Darius’ son Xerxes and the next battle would be at Thermopylae.

Darius caused the laws of Egypt to be codified and written down, a project that lasted 20 years. His grandson Artaxerxes was thus continuing an established Persian practice when in his turn he asked Ezra, then a Judean civil servant working in the Persian administration, to undertake a similar task with respect to the laws of the people of the province of Jehud.

### **Xerxes – in the shadow of his father (486-464)**

Darius was succeeded by his son Xerxes in 486 BCE. Early in his reign he decided to avenge the battle of Marathon. He assembled a substantial army – around 150,000 men – and a navy, it is said, of a thousand triremes supplemented by numerous smaller vessels<sup>63</sup>. He appointed his brothers and half brothers to leading positions and left from Susa in 481. After crossing into Thessalonica, the Persian

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<sup>60</sup> Song of Songs 4:12-15

<sup>61</sup> Song of Songs 8:6

<sup>62</sup> Roland Murphy, *Song of Songs* in ABD (1992)

<sup>63</sup> Yamauchi, 1990: *Persia and the Bible*, p 196-197

army, accompanied offshore by the navy, proceeded southward towards Athens. The Greeks chose to make a stand 4-days march north of Athens where the pass of Thermopylae, just 50 metres wide, minimised the value of the Persians numerical advantage. The Greeks posted their fleet near the northern entrance of the Gulf of Mali – in which Thermopylae lies - thus separating the Persian fleet from the army. The battle for the pass lasted several days with no breakthrough achieved. Then the Persians learnt of a mountain route that would outflank the pass. A corps of crack troops marched ten miles through the night over the 5,000-foot secondary pass. Now there were Persians on both sides of the pass. The Greek commander fought a desperate rear-guard action in order to allow half of his force to escape to safety. Of those involved in this last stand, none survived. The Persians won Thermopylae, but at tremendous cost. Herodotus estimated that 20,000 men died there, but he tended to exaggerate. Xerxes lost two half brothers and in his rage had the dead body of the Greek commander beheaded.

The way was now open to Athens, and on September 5<sup>th</sup>, the Acropolis fell and the old Parthenon was destroyed. The Persian fleet closed in for the kill. The Persians, following another tip-off rowed through the night to trap the Greek fleet in the bay of Salamis. But the bay was small and the vast number of Persian ships proved to be a handicap, not an advantage. Now the Persians were caught in a narrow bay at the mercy of the more manoeuvrable Greek vessels – lured there by the tip-off which had been a deliberate leak by the Greek commander.

One third of the Persian fleet was lost and another half brother to Xerxes killed. Xerxes now feared that his fleet was so damaged and his supply line so extended that further operations in Greece were too risky. He personally retreated back to Sardis, leaving a substantial part of his army with Mardonius on the Greek mainland. In 479, two more battles – one at Plataea on the Greek mainland and the other on the other side of the Ionian Sea at Mycale ended Persian attempts to subjugate the mainland Greeks.

Athens and her allies formed the Delian league, a group of Greek states dedicated to harassing the remaining pro-Persian Greek states and to directly opposing the Persians. Any idea that this was a voluntary arrangement was dispelled when Naxos attempted to leave the league in 465 and was harshly repressed by Athens. By then, the league had evolved into the Athenian empire.

On his return from the Grecian expedition, Xerxes busied himself with continuing his father's work at Persepolis. Later a novella would be written about this period in which a Judean girl, Esther, married Xerxes. With her father Mordecai, she discovers a wicked plot by the high official, Haman, to have the Judeans in the empire killed. She discredits Haman and frustrates his plot. Some scholars, attracted by the accuracy of the portrayal of the background to this story, would like to believe in the historical veracity of the plot<sup>64</sup> although there is little to support this. Mordecai's name derives from Marduk, the god of Babylon and Esther from Ishtar, also a Babylonian god, so perhaps this delightful fantasy was originally a Babylonian story. There is no evidence that anyone, let alone a Judean girl, ever took over from the formidable Amestris as Xerxes' queen. The story is set in the southern Persian capital of Susa. Nevertheless, in 2005, Jews were still venerating the supposed tomb of Esther in the old Median capital of Ecbatana - modern Hamadan.

Xerxes was assassinated by a captain in his bodyguard, Artabanus, who then persuaded Xerxes son, Artaxerxes, that his father had been killed by his elder brother. This was sufficient for Artaxerxes to seek out and kill the brother. The final stage in the plan was for Artabanus to kill Artaxerxes, but this failed when Artaxerxes proved too strong for him and the would-be assassin died in the struggle. That, at least, is Artaxerxes account of how he came to be king in 465 BCE. It was to be a long reign lasting 40 years.

In his first year he had to deal with a letter, allegedly sent (according to the compiler of Ezra chapter 4) by a group of immigrants living in Samaria, which complained that the Judeans in Jehud were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. As Jehud had a reputation as a rebellious state, Artaxerxes wrote back that these works were to be stopped; the responsible officials in Samaria then proceeded urgently to Jerusalem and '*by force and power made them cease*'<sup>65</sup>.

From Jerusalem itself, voices were heard which suggest that the new state of Jehud was struggling with locust plagues, drought, opposition from neighbouring states and indifferent priests. The population was still very small, around 17,000<sup>66</sup> It is possible that a poem composed at this time about a plague of locusts will later be used, perhaps slightly modified, by Joel as a metaphor for his warning about the imminence of the Day of Yahweh. Joel's version read: -

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<sup>64</sup> See Persia in the Bible pp 226 - 238

<sup>65</sup> Ezra 4:23

<sup>66</sup> Leith (1998)

*A nation has invaded my land,  
powerful and innumerable.  
It has the teeth of a lion -  
the incisors of a lioness.  
It has destroyed my vines,  
and splintered my fig trees.  
It has stripped their bark and thrown it away,  
turning their branches white.<sup>67</sup>*

### **Malachi (probably 5<sup>th</sup> century)**

An anonymous messenger speaks from sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. His words are recorded in the book entitled ‘Malachi’, the Hebrew for ‘my messenger’. The title may come from the opening of the third chapter – “*I am sending my messenger who will clear a path for me.*” Malachi could also be a short form of the hypothetical name “Malachiah” (messenger of Yah), although this is generally regarded as a less likely speculation.

Malachi was originally created as a separate work, but at some stage it became one of three short pieces of prophecy to be appended to ‘1<sup>st</sup> Zechariah’. Later it was separated again to become a book on its own and it was then that it was probably given its present title.

The original text can be dated by its content to the period between the completion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple and the reforms of Ezra, and by vocabulary and grammar to the earlier part of that period since the Hebrew used is similar to that of Haggai and 1<sup>st</sup> Zechariah<sup>68</sup>. It was a period of disappointment. Zechariah’s vision of a renewed state ruled by the house of David had not materialised. Neither the prosperity foreseen by Haggai, nor the endless stream of returnees predicted by Zechariah had happened. The priests were lackadaisical in their service of Yahweh:

*“What a weariness this is,” you say.  
“You sniff at me,” says Yahweh of Armies.*

The people felt let down. They said:

*“It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by keeping his commandments and going about like mourners before Yahweh of Armies? Now we count the arrogant happy. Evildoers not only prosper, but they get away even when they challenge God.”<sup>69</sup>*

The Messenger deals in question and answer form with the concerns of the time: -

- *“I have loved you”, says Yahweh, but you say, “How have you loved us?”<sup>70</sup>*  
Answer: by preferring you to Edom. (Edom appears to have faded away during the late Babylonian period; it may have been absorbed by the Kedarite Arabs<sup>71</sup> and later by the Nabateans.)
- *“Where is the respect due me?” says Yahweh of Armies to the priests whose behaviour mocked his name.<sup>72</sup>*  
Answer. ‘*not in the sacrifice of polluted offerings*’. (Malachi was a strong critic of the established priesthood. Here he criticised the practise of offering otherwise useless animals as sacrifices: “*...and if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not wrong? And if you offer the lame and sick, is it not wrong? Try offering them to your governor; will he be pleased?*”)

<sup>67</sup> Joel 1:6-7

<sup>68</sup> Hill, 1992; Malachi; ABD. This article contains a summary of scholarly views.

<sup>69</sup> Malachi 3:14

<sup>70</sup> Malachi 1:2

<sup>71</sup> There are Assyrian references to Kedar from the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, and from Babylonian sources in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. It was a Kedarite king, called Geshem in the Bible, that contested for influence over Jerusalem with Ammonite and Samaritan rulers in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Edom seems to have disappeared by then. The Nabateans may have become a significant desert power in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE; certainly they had established themselves in Petra by 312 BCE when they successfully fought off an attack by the Greek general Antigonos.

<sup>72</sup> Malachi 1:6

- *You cover Yahweh's altar with tears...because he no longer regards your offerings. "Why does he not?"*<sup>73</sup>

Answer: 'because Yahweh was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have been faithless, though she was your wife by covenant.'

- *"Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say 'How are we robbing you?'"*<sup>74</sup>.

Answer: by not giving the full tithe.

- *You have wearied Yahweh with your words. Yet you say "How have we wearied him?"*<sup>75</sup>

Answer: by saying, "All who do evil are good in the sight of Yahweh" and by asking "Where is the God of Justice?"

Answering the question "Where is the God of Justice?", the text continued with the famous apocalyptic passage concerning the Day of Yahweh – the day when he will come to his temple to purify the nation:

*But who can endure the day of his coming,  
and who can stand when he appears?  
For he is like a refiner's fire.*<sup>76</sup>

The priests and Levites will be purified in the fire – following Zoroastrian theology – and then Yahweh will have men able to make acceptable offerings.

Malachi's prophecies show a strong interest in the priesthood and the sacrificial system, yet he was not a priest. He was a man of personal piety. In the great prophetic tradition, he believed that internal attitude was more important than external form, and that idolatry and social injustice were not tolerable. He was courageous enough to attack the influential priestly class and the social elite.

Meanwhile, back in the diaspora, the preparation of what was to become a definitive edition of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible had been begun.

### **The work of the Redactors**

The final editor of the Torah of Moses, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, is usually called the Redactor in scholarly circles and given the letter R. This is not to suggest that scholars are agreed that all the editorial work was accomplished by the same person. It is quite possible that the editing of the Torah evolved over time and that a number of hands were involved. In the previous chapter it was suggested that these were merged at some time during the exile or early second temple period.

There is a strong rabbinical tradition that links Ezra to the Torah. The Apocryphal Esdras II (also known as the fourth book of Ezra), written at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, claims that Ezra 'reconstructed' the text of the Torah, which it claims had been lost when the first temple was burnt down by the Babylonians<sup>77</sup>. Chapter 7 of the Biblical Book of Ezra states that Ezra was authorised by the Persians to make enquiries of Jehud with regard to the law (Aramaic 'dat'), 'which is in your hand'. The same chapter also states that Ezra has set his heart on 'studying the law (Hebrew 'torah') of Yahweh, producing and teaching statutes and ordinances in Israel'.<sup>78</sup> Antaxerxes' commission to Ezra may have had as its object the enforcement of civil law (the probable meaning of the Aramaic 'dat') as much as religious law, but Ezra could have widened his brief. If it was Ezra that prepared the Torah for use amongst the believers, then he probably did this whilst working in the Persian civil service towards the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century – around, say, 460 BCE. He was handling texts that had been preserved and copied for between 100 and 250 years, texts that had already acquired considerable authority – and

<sup>73</sup> Malachi 1:13

<sup>74</sup> Malachi 3:8

<sup>75</sup> Malachi 2:17

<sup>76</sup> Malachi 3:2

<sup>77</sup> 2 Esdras 14:22b. The author has Ezra say "I will write everything that has happened in the world from the beginning, the things that were written in your Torah"

<sup>78</sup> Ezra 7:11

perhaps some copyist's errors.

When Ezra read aloud the document he brought with him to Jerusalem, the people heard things that were new to them. In Leviticus, for example, the list of holidays originally ended with the terminating phrase *'these are the appointed festivals of Yahweh'*<sup>79</sup>; but then, just two verses later, some instructions have been added concerning the festival of booths. These instructions told the people to make their booths from *'palm trees, leafy trees and willows of the brook'* – and in Nehemiah<sup>80</sup> we find the people, on Ezra's instruction, making booths of *'palms and other leafy trees'* and living in them for eight days. The text then says that this was a novelty, for they had never previously celebrated in this way – not from the beginning of their history (the time of Joshua) until that day. The *palm trees* and *willows of the brook* were more typical of the waters of Babylon than of Jerusalem. The festival of booths may thus have been shaped in Mesopotamia.

Early Christian thinkers such as Jerome also thought that Ezra had a great deal to do with the production of the Torah in its final form; Richard Friedman of the University of California agreed with this proposition in his book *"Who wrote the Bible?"*<sup>81</sup> But there are good reasons for believing that the person who did this was a priest rather than a scribe. A priest would have had access to the documents that were involved in the editing process and would have had the time and motivation to produce a definitive Torah. This editor used 'Elohim' as the name of God, as did the Priestly text. He was prepared to revise laws – even to write new ones. The result of his work was an arrangement of texts in which each of the books of the Torah except Deuteronomy began with a piece of Priestly writing. One of his insertions was a revision to the law concerning purification offerings following inadvertent sin<sup>82</sup> In Leviticus (a Priestly text) it says that when the transgression becomes known, the congregation should offer a "bull of the herd as a purification offering and bring it before the Tent of the Meeting, where the elders shall lean their hands upon it and it shall be slaughtered before Yahweh". In Numbers<sup>83</sup>, however, the revised version of the Levitical laws of sacrifice state that in the same circumstances the community shall offer *"a young bull as a burnt offering, a soothing odour to Yahweh, together with its appropriate grain and drink offerings, according to the regulations; and they shall add a male goat as a sin offering; and the priest shall make expiation for the whole community"*. The revision omitted the previous reference to Tent of the Meeting. This Tent was lost when the first temple was destroyed and never replaced. Is this omission an accident? Or does it indicate that the revision was made in second temple times, reflecting the absence of the Tent of Meeting but yet in a context in which sacrificial practices had been resumed?

The same editorial insertion also states that the foreigners may offer sacrifices to Yahweh for it said that *'you and the foreigner shall be alike before Yahweh'*<sup>84</sup>. This doctrine of openness to foreigners is like third Isaiah, but very unlike Ezra, who, when he came to Jerusalem, urged the Israelites there to separate themselves from the non-Israelites amongst whom they were living, even to the extent of divorcing their wives and sending away their children. The redactor who wrote in favour of integration with foreigners in Numbers 15 certainly had very different views from those expressed in Ezra's memoir. Perhaps Ezra wrote a theoretical text in the liberal atmosphere of the Persian foreign office, but changed his views when confronted with the state of Israelite culture on the ground in Jerusalem. More probably, they were different people.

The Samaritan Yahwist movement broke away from the Judean movement as a result of disputes that arose following the arrival of the returnees; but this break had been a long time in coming. Samaritan theology suggests that the schism started as far back as the shift of the Israel's principle Sanctuary from Sechem to Shiloh. The Samaritan Chronicle of Abu'l Fath states that Sanballat and Zerubbabel were already disputing the place for the building of the second temple whilst Zerubbabel was still in Babylon.<sup>85</sup> A letter from the Yahwists at Elephantine seeking permission to rebuild their temple suggests that the schism was well established by 410 BCE and that the Samaritan branch was regarded as a substantial authority rivalling Jerusalem. The version of the Torah which certain Samaritans use to this day, and which is regarded by them as the only scripture, is very close to that found in certain Dead Sea scrolls and to that quoted by the Chronicler and therefore probably very close to the version used in Jerusalem in Ezra's time. It only differs from the Masoretic text in various

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<sup>79</sup> Leviticus 23:37

<sup>80</sup> Nehemiah 8:16

<sup>81</sup> Friedman (1987); *Who wrote the Bible*; pp 223-225.

<sup>82</sup> Leviticus 4:14

<sup>83</sup> Numbers 15:24

<sup>84</sup> Numbers 15:15

<sup>85</sup> Robert T Anderson's article on the 'Samaritans' in ABD.

minor ways. It seems likely therefore that all the major editing of the Torah was completed before the final Samaritan split in the 5<sup>th</sup> century; if it was, then it is just possible that Ezra could have been the redactor. The Samaritans, however, were no admirers of Ezra. They were understandably opposed to the ‘purification’ of the priesthood initiated by Ezra. The dislike of Ezra suggests at least that, if it was Ezra’s text, then they ‘inherited’ it before the ‘purification’ got under way – or that it was so valuable that they accepted it despite their betrayal at hand of Ezra.

It was earlier suggested that, at the time of the exile, there would have existed a number of texts that would subsequently be combined to form the Torah. These probably included the original J and E texts, the Priestly writings and most of the work of the Deuteronomists. It was noted that there were other less extensive texts, such as the list of the Generations of Humans and Genesis 14. In order to create a unified single Torah of five scrolls, all these documents had to be edited together. It is possible that all these tasks were done at the same time and the resulting document divided into the five books we have today. It is perhaps more likely that these activities were part of a longer process that culminated in the production of the Torah in second temple times.<sup>86</sup> It is probable that four people, perhaps more, were involved in the process. It is plausible to distinguish: -

- the editor who merged the primary texts of J, E, and P with such skill – probably during the Babylonian exile.
- a less skilled scribe who added the stories set in Baal Peor, and perhaps incorporated some of the tribal traditional material.
- the internationalist, who may have been the person known as 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah or some-one writing with a similar theology – probably in exile.
- the person who structured the five books of the Torah and added the book of Genealogies, and who could have been the scribe Ezra.

#### Beresit

The Redactor(s) created *Beresit*, the book of Genesis, by taking the merged J, E and P material and dividing it into three linked sections by the use of the Book of Generations. The use of this device enabled R to make a division between the early myths in which Yahweh was shown to be closely involved his creation (walking and talking with Adam in the garden), the ancient pre-Israelite legends (Noah and the tower of Babel) and the stories of the Patriarchs in which Yahweh had little direct involvement.

The first section opened with the priestly account of creation. This was immediately followed by J’s creation story thereby creating the most commonly quoted example of the Bible’s internal inconsistencies. Yet the two accounts are clearly consciously linked. The form of their opening sentences mirror each other: -

Genesis 1:1

*“In the beginning of Elohim’s creating the heavens and earth – the world being then unformed and void...– Elohim said ‘let there be light’ ...”*

Genesis 2:4

*“In the day of Yahweh’s making of the earth and heavens – no plant of the field being yet in the earth...– Yahweh formed man...”*

Apologists seeking to repudiate the charge of inconsistency argue that the J account is an expansion of what happened on the sixth day; but this does not work convincingly since the creation of man follows the creation of plants in the P text, but precedes it in the J text. Perhaps R never considered that the J text would be taken literally. The P text is a logical, almost scientific, exposition of the process of creation, whilst the J text makes use of an entertaining story to explain how men, women, animals and plants relate to each other and to God. Perhaps R understood that the strength of the story that J used was to be found in the truths that it illuminated, and did not worry about surface inconsistencies. R was committed to ordering rather than changing the texts in his possession.

R may have assisted the blending of the two texts by changing J’s use of ‘Yahweh’ as the name of god to ‘Yahweh Elohim’ so as to provide continuity with the ‘Elohim’ of the P text. In Genesis

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<sup>86</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the activities and identity of the Redactor see chapter 13 of R E Friedman’s ‘Who wrote the Bible?’. Friedman accepts the conventional hypothesis that JE was created in the time of Hezekiah, but suggests that P was merged into that work by the Redactor, who may have been Ezra, who also split the text into the five books and brought in the Genealogies.

as edited, the ‘Yahweh Elohim’ form was only used in the Garden of Eden stories. The other place in the bible where the form ‘Yahweh Elohim’ was consistently used as the name of god is the book of Ezekiel. Does this suggest that this R was working in the same time and place as the great prophet of the Babylonian exile?

The J story of Cain and Abel completed the opening section. Then R introduced a part of the Book of Generations with the words “This is the Book of the Generations of Man (Hebrew ‘adam’).” He expounded the generations as far as Noah, thereby providing the link to the legends of the flood, Noah’s drunkenness and the tower of Babel; the second section. Then another extract from the Book of Generations moved the story on to the third section – the time of Abram and his family. The Redactor may have been the person who inserted the Genesis 14 story of Abram’s rescue of Lot and his meeting with Melchizedek; in doing so he could have added the reference to Yahweh into verse 22 to make it read “*I have sworn to Yahweh El-Elyon*” in order to harmonise this text with the J passages that surrounded it. If so, it was not retained in every copy since this change was absent from the source texts used for the Septuagint and Syriac translations. The apparent conflation of Yahweh with the Aramaic god El-Elyon only works because it is possible to construe El-Elyon as an adjectival qualifier of Yahweh meaning ‘most high god’ as well as a divine name.<sup>87</sup> The remaining Abram/Abraham stories, including the name change, led on to the stories of Joseph in Egypt – the stories that close the first book.

### Shemot

The next story cycle concerns Moses and the Exodus. R linked this with the ending of Genesis by writing an introduction that listed the names of those who entered Egypt with Jacob. This provided the Hebrew title of the book that the Greek translators called ‘Exodus’, for its opening words in Hebrew are ‘*v’oleh shemot*’, meaning ‘and these are the names’. R concluded his introduction by saying that the Israelites were fruitful and increased in numbers to such a degree that they threatened to over-run the country. An editor used the extended E account of the plague stories and the struggle between Pharaoh and Moses, the prophet of Yahweh, as his basic text and inserted the P plagues stories (blood, frogs, gnats and boils) at appropriate points. Friedman suggests he achieved stylistic unity by inserting the priestly refrain “*but the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the people go*” after each plague – not just the ones from the P text.

The crossing of the Red Sea used J, E and P material in their interwoven form. The journey through the wilderness to the Holy Mountain uses all versions of the commandments in combined form; but the five chapters giving the instructions for the tabernacle are from the priestly texts alone as are the five chapters describing the execution of those instructions with which the book ends.

### Vayyicra

The Hebrew title of the book we know by its Latin title as Leviticus is *v’ayyicra* from its opening words ‘And he summoned (Moses)’. It is almost entirely a Priestly work but it is thought that R incorporated new material in the instructions for the Festival of Booths. Near the end, some words were added based on the curses of Deuteronomy 28; it is a conditional redemption in the manner of late Baruch (Dtr2) and could have been added by him or the Redactor using Baruch’s approach ; -

*“Those of you who survive (the destruction of your land) will waste away in the lands of their enemies because of their sins... But if they confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors – their treachery against me ...I will remember my covenant...and I will remember the land... I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their god. I am Yahweh”<sup>88</sup>*

### Bemidbar

The Hebrew title for Numbers was *Bemidbar* meaning ‘In the wilderness’ from the opening line of the scroll. It contains mainly priestly texts, though there is some J and E material in the form of a different version of the story of the spies sent out to scout the promised land, the Dathan and Abiram episode, the defeat of Sihon and Og, the Balaam story, and Moses’ judgement of those who had gone over to Baal at Peor.

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<sup>87</sup> See the discussion of Genesis 14 in Chapter 1 p17-18.

<sup>88</sup> Leviticus 26:39-45

The merging of the spy stories had been skilfully done, but some of the other J and E stories were clumsily inserted into the P text – suggesting that at least two different editors were at work here. The Dathan and Abiram revolt is mixed up with the story of Korah’s revolt, whereas they are in reality two separate stories linked only by the theme of revolt. The result is a confusing text in which it is not clear where the action is taking place – in front of the Tent of Meeting or in front of Dathan and Abiram’s tents – or who is involved – sometimes Korah and sometimes not. The account of the heresy at Peor was likewise two different stories, in this case only connected by the place. In fact, neither story seems to be complete; all the editor seems to have done is to butt two half stories onto each other.

Friedman considers that R may have inserted into *Bemidbar* an elaboration of the Priestly text from Exodus which described the way the Tent of the Covenant was covered by a cloud every day as the Israelites moved with it through the wilderness.<sup>89</sup>

An editor was responsible for the revision of the sacrificial laws that are now to be found in chapters 15, 28 and 29. All these passages refrain from mentioning the tabernacle, and thus may have been written to authorise sacrifice in a temple with no tabernacle and may therefore be dated to the second temple period. These revisions also required that, in addition to the main meat sacrifice, defined quantities of grain, oil and wine were to be offered – thereby making the offering into a more pleasing meal. It may be that the more ancient laws with their emphasis on meat were appropriate for the nomadic community in which Yahwism evolved, whereas the addition of grain and wine became normal practice in a more sophisticated community – an example therefore of religious law catching up with cultural change. These late additions contain more precise instructions about the timing of the festivals than the earlier instructions that they superseded. A total of 30 days was prescribed as festivals in each year.

Numbers 33:1-49 looks like a separate secular document which has been inserted here as a kind of summary of the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites; it made little mention of Yahweh’s involvement, save to say that the Yahweh had struck down all the Egyptian firstborn as ‘*a judgement on their gods (elohim)*’. It also claimed that the Israelites escaped because the Egyptians were occupied in burying their dead. There was no drama concerning the crossing of the Sea of Reeds; it was just a location on their journey. Nothing was mentioned as having happened at Sinai either; the wilderness there was just a camp site. It was clearly not a priestly document, but R may have provided the introduction (verses 1 and 2) and a comment on the death of Aaron saying “*Aaron the priest went up Mount Hor at the command of Yahweh and there he died; on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 40<sup>th</sup> year after the Israelites left Egypt; he was 123 years old when he died.*”. Otherwise the first 49 verses of Numbers 33 are just an itinerary.

### Debarim

Deuteronomy begins by saying ‘These are the words (Hebrew *debarim*) that Moses spoke.’ Hence the Hebrew name for the scroll. It is the only book of the Pentateuch that does not begin with a priestly text. The book that we have today includes material which may have had separate existences for a while – the texts described earlier as the ‘Treaty with God’ the Deuteronomic ‘Reflections’ and the ‘*torah*’ or Second Law, together with additions made in the early years of the Exile. Other additions include the ancient poems The Blessing of Moses and the Song of Moses.

But what of R? There is a passage which deals with the death of Aaron and the consecration of the tribe of Levi ‘*to minister to Yahweh*’.<sup>90</sup> This looks like a priestly insertion from the hand of an Aaronite priest – certainly not the work of a Deuteronomist. But the clearest indication of R’s work is the ending. In order to incorporate Deuteronomy as the last scroll in his five-scroll work, he adds an account of the death of Moses derived from the P account of Aaron’s death. P had written of Aaron, “At Mount Hor, near the border of Edom, Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, “Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah.” And now the redactor inserted the command of Yahweh to Moses:

*There on the mountain that you have climbed you will die and be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people. This is because both of you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah<sup>91</sup>.*

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<sup>89</sup> Numbers 9:15-23

<sup>90</sup> Deuteronomy 10:6-8

<sup>91</sup> The two passages are Numbers 20:23-23 and Deuteronomy 32:50-51

He seems not to have been concerned that the opening of the scroll claimed that the whole was the work of Moses and that therefore including an account of Moses' death was a little illogical. When he came to that final topic, he may have used material from all his sources and may have even have added some lines of his own:

From E and J:

“Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to mount Nebo,... and Yahweh showed him the whole land ... Yahweh said to him “This is the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants; I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross over.’ And Moses, Yahweh’s servant, died there in the land of Moab, at Yahweh’s command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-Peor, but no-one knows his burial place to this day.

From the Redactor (or possibly P and J):

*Moses was 120 years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour undiminished. The people wept for Moses for 30 days – till the period of mourning for Moses was over.*

From the Deuteronomists (possibly Baruch):

“Joshua, son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him, and the Israelites obeyed him – doing as Yahweh commanded. Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that Yahweh had him perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh, his servants and the entire land; and for all his mighty power and the awesome deeds that he performed before the eyes of all Israel.”

#### Editing The History – Joshua to Kings

It was not only the Torah that received editorial attention. The last few lines of Amos – “*I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and live in them*” – were probably added when the return from exile had become an imminent possibility after Cyrus’ decree of 538. The last few lines of the Deuteronomic History mention King Jehoiachin’s release from prison in Babylon in 561 BCE. This is taken by some to be the date and place of the final redaction of the Deuteronomic History (Joshua to II Kings). Other material may well have been incorporated at the same time. The table below lists some of those other texts that are now included in the six books of history, but for which there is no evidence that they were part of the original version.

Book & Chapter	Content	Possible Source
<b>Judges</b>		
1, 2:6-10	<i>Recapitulation</i>	
2:22-3:4	<i>Explanation of why some land still unconquered.</i>	
17-21	<i>The Levites concubine &amp; civil war</i>	J & ?
<b>I Sam</b>		
10:17-end	<i>Saul chosen by lot</i>	J
11	<i>Saul defeats the ammonites</i>	J
16:14-17:11	<i>David Introduced to Saul/Background to Goliath</i>	J
17:32-54	<i>David fights with Goliath</i>	J
18:6-16	<i>David’s Fame</i>	J
18:20-30	<i>David and Michal</i>	J
19:18-end	<i>Saul pursues David.</i>	J
26,27 & 29	<i>David spares Saul’s life, then lives in Philistia</i>	J & ?
<b>II Samuel</b>		
3	<i>Abner defects to David, is murdered and mourned</i>	J & AN
4	<i>Ishbaal assassinated</i>	J & AN
8	<i>‘David’s Wars and Officials</i>	?
11-20	<i>Bathsheba affair; rape of Tamar; two rebellions</i>	J
23	<i>Appendices</i>	Various

Much of this material was part of the extended J text discussed in an earlier chapter, but not included by DH because he preferred other versions. Thus it is supposed that he preferred the shepherd boy version of the David and Goliath story to the version in which David was already in Saul's camp as Saul's armour bearer; he omitted Saul's pursuit of David and, wanting to include only one incident in which David spares Saul's life, he chose to omit the less humiliating one. DH is also supposed to have omitted the murder of Abner, the assignation of Ishbaal, the Bathsheba affair, the rape of Tamar and the two rebellions against David's reign that J records. Whilst these matters were probably omitted by DH in pursuance of his wish to portray David as a boy chosen by Yahweh, the Redactor may have felt that this material, probably well-known orally and available in his other sources, should not be omitted from his 'definitive' version. Most of these were stand-alone episodes, and caused no problem. The exception is the Goliath story where the DH text already had the 'shepherd boy' version. The redactor simply added in the Yahwist version by dividing that story into four episodes – the introduction of David into Saul's court, the fight itself, the consequences for David in Saul's court and David's relationship with Michal. He inserted these episodes into the original DH text at appropriate points. This was not done as skilfully as the earlier merging of the primary document since the reader was left puzzling why Saul did not know who the victorious boy was when just a few verses earlier, Saul had personally tried to dress David, who the text said he knew and loved, in his own armour<sup>92</sup>.

The stories of the 'rebellions' of Hadad and Rezon against Solomon show linguistic evidence of being independent texts: they used the word '*satan*' meaning 'adversary' three times in reference to Solomon's human adversaries. The Chronicler offers no comparable passage and there is no identifiable historical substance to these stories. It is possible that these stories were added to the text preserved by the Masoretes at a time closer to the 4th than the 5th century.

Both the Chronicler and the original author of Deuteronomic History omitted J's 'domestic' material and the story of the rebellions against David. The Deuteronomist was keen to emphasise the excellence of David's kingship as the founder of the line of Kings enjoying a Covenant with Yahweh, whilst the Chronicler sought to establish his 'New Israel' led by a Priest which saw David as the exemplar of the leader-priest. The late exile or early return, when there was less concern to present David as a nearly flawless ruler, would have been a natural time for the incorporation of these stories. There was little desire amongst the returnees to have a king. Zerubbabel, who was of the Davidic line, was only described as a 'prince' of Israel. And although the governance role of the high priest was beginning to emerge, the concept of a nation led by its high priest had yet to be fully developed,

Thus it appears that the first five books of the Bible, now known collectively as the Torah, and the next six books from Joshua to 2 Kings had all been edited to more or less the form we now possess by around the middle of the 5th century plus or minus a few decades. The major prophets - Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel - were already mostly in their final form, whilst Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Haggai, Nahum and Zechariah had been written. Other writings included Job, Ruth, much of Proverbs, some scrolls of Psalms, Lamentations and possibly other material now lost to us. But it was the five scrolls of the Torah that were recognised as Scripture in the minds of the people.

#### **Artaxerxes and problems with Egypt (465-450)**

Artaxerxes was faced with a major Egyptian revolt in late 461. The rebels defeated the Persian Satrap, Xerxes brother, and gained control of the Delta. At the time the Athenian fleet was on a mission to liberate Cyprus, but hearing of events to the south, diverted to assist the Egyptian rebels. In 459, despite considerable losses, they helped the rebels capture Thebes, the capital of Lower Egypt. In 456, Artaxerxes sent his able Syrian Satrap south with a substantial army and the objective of restoring Egypt to Persian rule. After a nineteen-month campaign, and with help from the Phoenician navy, Satrap Magabysus was successful. The Greeks lost 200 ships and 6,000 men in that struggle and a further 50 ships two years later. The leader of the rebellion was impaled by Artaxerxes on the insistence of his mother Amestris, who (whatever the story of Esther will say) was still powerful enough to have her will in such matters. This was in breach of promises made by the Syrian Satrap who then renounced Persian sovereignty in disgust, and resisted two military attempts to bring him into line.

In 449 it is probable that a peace treaty was negotiated between Greece and Persia. Under its

<sup>92</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 16:19-22 and 17:31-40 where Saul knows David well with 17:55-58 where he has no idea who the boy is!

terms, the Greeks agreed to cease their attempts to 'liberate' Cyprus and Egypt, whilst the Persians agreed not to send their ships west of the Bosphorus into the Aegean and recognised Athens supremacy in the Dorian league.

The revolt in Egypt may have led the Persian leadership to be somewhat more concerned over Jehud, a thinly populated province close to the Egyptian border. The man they despatched to investigate matters may have been their foreign office's specialist in the area, the scribe Ezra.

### **Ezra: the memoir (ca 458)**

There is much controversy amongst scholars as to the date that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem. The date suggested by the biblical text for Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem is 458 BCE assuming that Artaxerxes I commissioned him 'in his 7<sup>th</sup> year'. The difficulty with this date is that one of Ezra's earliest acts was to read the law to the people at an assembly at which Nehemiah is said to have been present.<sup>93</sup> Unfortunately, Nehemiah did not arrive in Jerusalem until 445 BCE. One resolution of this is to suggest that Ezra continued to edit the law after his arrival and did not get around to reading it until 13 years after first coming to Jerusalem. Another scholarly suggestion is that Ezra was not sent in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Artaxerxes I, but rather in his 37<sup>th</sup> and that the 'thirty' has been lost from our present text as a result of a copyist's error.<sup>94</sup>

There are a number of reasons for accepting that Nehemiah was not present at Ezra's reading of the law. Firstly, apart from the almost incidental addition of his name in Nehemiah 8:9, there is no other text that refers to these men working together. Secondly, both men wrote memoirs and neither mentions the presence of the other. Thirdly, the similarity of their roles and their commissioning suggests that it would be unlikely that the Persians would have had them both in Jehud at the same time. And finally, the actions of Nehemiah when he did arrive in Jerusalem suggest that the law that Ezra taught them was well understood in Jerusalem; it was just that the people were not obedient to it.

Whatever the date, the biblical claim that Artaxerxes sent the scribe Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem with a mission to promulgate the laws of Judah is broadly accepted. A letter is quoted from Artaxerxes to Ezra. This letter states: -

*Artaxerxes, king of kings, to the priest Ezra, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven:*

*"Peace.*

*And now I decree that any of the people of Israel in my Kingdom, including priests and Levites, who freely offer to go to Jerusalem, may go with you - for you are sent by the king and his seven counsellors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand.*

*And also to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his counsellors have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem ... and the offerings of the people and the priests, given willingly for the house of their God in Jerusalem."*<sup>95</sup>

This commission from the Persian king is entirely plausible and has at least one precedent. Xerxes had earlier commissioned an Egyptian scribe to codify the laws of Egypt.

The text commonly regarded as his memoir contains material in the first person that describes how a group was gathered together of those interested in emigrating to the land of their forefathers, and how he led this caravan to Jerusalem. The material that is most plausibly by the hand of Ezra himself is his personal account of their journey<sup>96</sup>.

*I gathered them by the river that runs to Ahava, and we camped there for three days. When I*

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<sup>93</sup> Nehemiah 8.9 reads 'And Nehemiah, who was governor, and Ezra, the priest and scribe, and all the Levites who taught the people said to the people, "This day is holy to Yahweh your god; do not mourn or weep.'" There is no other mention of Nehemiah at this ceremony, or indeed of any other activity undertaken by the two men together, and thus many people feel that the reference to Nehemiah here could be an insertion by a later editor.

<sup>94</sup> Some scholars argue that the Artaxerxes referred to here was Artaxerxes II, whose seventh year would be 398 BCE, 47 years after Nehemiah began his first governorship and more than 26 years after the latest date for the start of his second. Whilst it is not entirely impossible for Nehemiah to have been around at this time, he would have been a very old man.

<sup>95</sup> Ezra 7:12

<sup>96</sup> Ezra 7:27 to 9:15

*reviewed the people and the priests, I found no sons of Levi there.*

So a request went via the elders, and:

*Since the gracious hand of our God was upon us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the descendants of Mahli, son of Levi, son of Israel: namely Sherebiah. I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, so that we might deny ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and cavalry to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king that the hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him. We left the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem; the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes along the way.<sup>97</sup>*

When they reached Jerusalem they presented their offerings to the temple and to Yahweh.

It is at this point than some scholars think the original memoir contained a description of the occasion when Ezra read the law to the people. Later, when Ezra-Nehemiah was edited, this was moved to a position within the Nehemiah memoir<sup>98</sup> and changed to a third person account. Thus, in part, it could have originally read:

*I opened the scroll in the sight of all the people, for I was standing above all of them; and when I opened it, all the people stood up. Then I praised Yahweh, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped Yahweh with their faces to the ground....*

*Levites helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. So they read from the book, from the law of God, translating it and interpreting it, so that the people understood the reading.*

The continuation of the memoir from this point is now to be found in Ezra 9:1-10:44

*After these things had been done, the leaders approached me and said, "The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not kept themselves separate from the peoples of the lands with their detestable practices...for they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, and the holy seed has been mixed with that of the peoples of the lands; and the officials and leaders have led the way in this unfaithfulness."*

Ezra was appalled by this, and at the evening sacrifice uttered a prayer for forgiveness:

*Now, for a brief moment, Yahweh our God has been gracious to us and has left us a remnant, and given us a stake in his holy place. Thus our God gives light to our eyes and a relief in our slavery. For though we are slaves; yet our God has not deserted us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to give us new life, to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.*

*...What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and of our great guilt, and yet you, our god, have punished us less than our sins deserved and have given us such a remnant as this. Shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you destroy us leaving no remnant or survivor?*

The people responded in fear, and one of them, a descendant of Elam said

*"We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples round about, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my*

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<sup>97</sup> Ezra: 8:15-36 various verses.

<sup>98</sup> Nehemiah 7:73b-8: 18

*lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law... ”*

So Ezra called a meeting of the ‘community of exiles’ – that is of those who have returned from exile and now represented the ‘true Israel’, for those who remained in Judah and the neighbouring areas were seen as part of the problem. The meeting agreed in principle that the members of the community should divorce their foreign wives, so a committee was set up to review this case by case and ensure it was done according to the law.

*On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to examine the matter. By the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.<sup>99</sup>*

There followed a listing of those leading citizens who then ‘put away’ their wives. The next part of the memoir is now to be found back in Nehemiah 9:1-37. This described a great ceremony of repentance. They gathered in sackcloth and ashes having separated themselves from those of non-Israelite descent. They confessed their sins and those of their fathers. They read the Torah for a quarter of the day and spent another quarter in confession and worship. The Levites recited a history of Israel and its failure to stick to the covenant with Yahweh. It ended with an appeal to Yahweh to consider the punishments they had already received, *‘for we are slaves to this day, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers!’*

The historical reality of Ezra is subject to extreme views. On the one hand, rabbinical tradition attributed the creation of Judaism to him. “Ezra and the Torah surpassed in importance the building of the Temple”<sup>100</sup> and “Ezra would have been worthy of receiving the Torah had Moses not preceded him.” Surah 9:30 of the Koran probably reflects a sixth century CE situation in which “The Jews say Ezra is the son of God.” On the other hand, a number of scholars claim that Ezra never existed at all. He was, they believe, created in the second century BCE to give some force to a religious reform movement.<sup>101</sup>

#### **Nehemiah: the man and his memoir (445 – 424)**

Greece’s influence in the Levant was growing; by 454 BCE the coastal city of Dor was paying tribute to Athens<sup>102</sup> and perhaps others in the area were doing likewise. Artaxerxes needed to ensure that his armies could always rely on a quick route to Egypt and he would not want their supply route to be threatened by cities with mixed loyalties. It happened that his ‘cupbearer’ at the time, Nehemiah, was of Judean descent. Cupbearers did not just manage the king’s cellar and check his drinks; they were also great listeners to the lonely worries of the monarch; quite possibly they acted as social secretaries. Some had significant administrative duties as well. Ahilar, the cupbearer of Esarhaddon was also “keeper of the signet, in charge of the administration of the accounts” and one whom Esarhaddon had appointed “second to himself”<sup>103</sup>. Above all, in an empire where many close to the throne had their lives ended by assassination, the cup-bearers were the people the monarchs trusted. Thus it would have been as a trusted servant of his king, that Nehemiah found himself travelling to take up an appointment as Jehud’s 6<sup>th</sup> governor in 445 BCE. His first governorship lasted from 445 to 433.

Nehemiah had heard of the difficulties that confronted Jehud even before he left the Persian capital. Jerusalem had been raided. Jerusalem had broken walls – walls that had remained un-repaired because Artaxerxes had not allowed it. At the start of his reign Artaxerxes had not trusted the loyalty of Jehud. Now, however, following the Egyptian revolt, a number of garrison forts had been built to protect the road system required for rapid military deployment to the south. It would have seemed logical to secure Jehud’s loyalty by the appointment of a trustworthy governor, and to have him build a garrison city for the Persians.

Nehemiah was a superb project manager and his first-hand account of the ‘Jerusalem Walls Rebuilding Project’ occupies Nehemiah 1-7 and, perhaps, some of the later portions of the book. He began with a secret inspection of the walls: -

*I got up during the night, I and a few men with me. I told no one what Elohim had put into my*

<sup>99</sup> Ezra 10:16

<sup>100</sup> *b. Megilla* 16b: quoted in Robert North’s ABD entry on Ezra.

<sup>101</sup> North (1997,1992); *Ezra*; ABD provides details.

<sup>102</sup> Yamauchi, 1990; *Persia in the Bible*; p 254

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*; p 259

*heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the animal I rode. I went out by night by the Valley Gate past the Dragon's Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and had been destroyed by fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool; but there was no place for the animal I was riding to continue. So I went up by way of the valley by night and inspected the wall. Then I turned back and entered by the valley Gate, and so returned. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing. I had not yet told the Judeans, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest that were to do the work.<sup>104</sup>*

He vividly described the opposition he got, in particular from Sanballat, the governor of Samaria; Tobiah, a Yahwist member of a leading Ammonite family; and Geshem, a Kedarite Arab leader. It looks as if this triumvirate of neighbouring leaders had filled the power-void that had developed in Jerusalem during the exile. Sanballat was probably Yahwist since he gave his children Yahwist names. His own name, which means 'Sin (the moon god) gives life', suggests that his parent held different beliefs. Appointed by the Persians, Sanballat's family would govern Samaria for the next four generations. His home was in Beth-Horon, about five miles north of Jerusalem. Until Nehemiah arrived he may well have included Jerusalem in his sphere of influence – hence his opposition to Nehemiah's appointment and actions. The description of Tobiah as an Ammonite official suggests that he too was a Persian appointee – perhaps also a governor. His grandson was governor of Ammon. He had a significant influence over many inhabitants of Jerusalem as a result of marriages between his family and leading members of the city<sup>105</sup>. Archaeological evidence in the form of a plates belonging to the Geshem family suggest this Kedarite dynasty controlled much of Arabia from northeast Egypt to the southern Levant, including the area previously regarded as the state of Edom.<sup>106</sup>

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, resenting their loss of influence over Jerusalem, wrote to Artaxerxes suggesting that the rebuilding of the walls was an act of rebellion. But Nehemiah continued the work, so their official protests seem to have had little effect. What may have been more effective was the regular physical harassment that Nehemiah's men had to survive. Nehemiah claims he had to set armed guards to protect both the workers and the work from harassment and sabotage by day and by night. But the work was accomplished.

As governor, he was also concerned with the administration of justice; he heard the citizens' complaints and noted in his memoir: -

*There was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their brother Judeans... "We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards and our houses in order to get grain during the famine... Although we are of the same race as our brothers and our children are just like their children, we shall be forced to sell our sons and daughters into slavery; indeed, some of our daughters have already been sold..."*

*I was very angry when I heard this... I brought charges against the officials... and said to them "as far as we were able, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who had been sold to other nations; but now you are selling your own brothers ... Restore to them this day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards..."<sup>107</sup>*

He called an assembly and persuaded the nobles and officials to restore everything and to take nothing more:

*I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may Elohim shake out everyone from house and from property who does not perform this promise. Thus may they be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen," and praised Yahweh<sup>108</sup>.*

Part of the problem may have been the high rate of taxation imposed by the Persian authorities on their dependencies. Herodotus claims that Syria and Palestine paid about 350 talents of gold and silver (about 12,000 kg) annually. This was 2.5 % of the annual tax take of the entire empire. It was not all spent and the result was that interest rates across the empire rose to 40 percent by the end of the

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<sup>104</sup> Nehemiah 2:12-16

<sup>105</sup> Nehemiah 6:18

<sup>106</sup> Yamauchi (1990); *Persia and the Bible*; p 268

<sup>107</sup> Nehemiah 5:1 onwards

<sup>108</sup> Nehemiah 5:13

century.

This was much to the advantage of the wealthy banking business of Marashu and Sons, based back in Nippur in Babylonia. This family of Judean exiles had formed a lucrative and diversified business. They were agricultural contractors, suppliers of cash credit and managers of the farms that they received as security. Amongst their customers were several members of the royal household. No wonder they did not eagerly return to the land of their fathers. Their archives give an insight into the economy of the time, and the names of their customers show the extent to which the transplanted communities were integrating with one another. There are only about 80 Jewish names amongst the 2200 known customers of the Marashu Group. In terms of their inclination to give their offspring Babylonian – rather than Jewish – names, they appear to have been just as integrated as the other minority communities<sup>109</sup>.

Nehemiah returned to Persia in 433 BCE, but he was to go back to Jehud later for a second governorship some time before 424. Tobiah took advantage of Nehemiah's absence. By making good use of his excellent family connections, he established an office in the temple precincts. He cleared the space he needed by moving out the stores of grain, frankincense, wine and oil that were part of the temple receipts given to the Levites. This, at any rate is what Nehemiah tells us in his resumed memoir. On his return he wrote: -

*I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the room. Then I gave orders for the room to be purified, and I brought back the vessels of the house of God, the grain offerings and the frankincense.*

*I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them; so that the Levites and the singers, who had conducted the service, had gone back to their fields.<sup>110</sup>*

He was further incensed by the breaches of the law concerning the Sabbath:

*In those days, I saw people treading wine presses in Judah on the Sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading donkeys. They were bringing wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of merchandise into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day<sup>111</sup>*

And further:

*I saw Judeans who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke dialects of Aramaic, and could not speak the language of Judah.*

It seemed that the very existence of Judean culture was threatened. Language, customs and worship were all in danger of being lost. With a population of less than 17,000, of whom only a fraction could understand their scripture in the language in which it was written; with commercial interests and trading on the Sabbath were squeezing out the worship of the god of Israel; with the scattered Jews in Babylon, Egypt and Persia showing little inclination to return to the motherland, it must have seemed to Nehemiah that his culture, religion and race were on the point of extinction - about to be absorbed by the world around them. According to the biblical text, Nehemiah's response was radical:

1. He enforced the Sabbath, closing the gates of Jerusalem and posting guards to prevent trading.
2. He required the ethnic Jews to separate themselves from the others and to make an act of national repentance (Nehemiah 9)
3. He repopulated Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 11)
4. He fought against mixed marriages. In his memoir he wrote:

*I reprimanded them; I cursed them; I struck some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women, even though there was no king like him...? Did you listen*

<sup>109</sup> Mathew Stolper: *Archive of Murashu*: ABD

<sup>110</sup> Nehemiah 13:8-10

<sup>111</sup> Nehemiah 13: 15

*when you committed this great evil, breaking faith with our God by marrying foreign women?"<sup>112</sup>*

The last words in Nehemiah's memoir were: -

*Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; and I provided for the wood offering, at appointed times, and for the first fruits.*

*Remember me, O my God, for good.<sup>113</sup>*

Nehemiah's second governorship came to an end no later than 407 BCE when a new name appears in this role<sup>114</sup>.

## **Darius II**

Artaxerxes forty-year reign had ended in 424 when the old man died in his bed. His successor was Darius II. The Greeks had by now tied themselves up in the Peloponnesian war (431 to 404) and thus Darius II was able to contain the Greek threat by spreading disunity through diplomatic initiatives.

Around 410 BCE, Egyptian priests attacked and destroyed the temple at Elephantine, probably with the consent of the Satrap of Egypt. Some traditions believe that this was where the Ark of the Covenant was moved to just prior to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonian punishment division. Ethiopian tradition asserts that the Ark avoided capture on this occasion too, as it was safely removed from Elephantine and taken to up river to Lake Tana. The Judean Community in Elephantine survived the attack and sought permission to rebuild the temple. The Yahwist community in Elephantine regarded Samaria as an important centre for Yahwist believers. Thus it was to Samaria that they wrote asking for support in their campaign to get their temple rebuilt. The petition to Samaria, dated 407 BCE, eventually provoked a joint response in which the priesthood in both Samaria and Jerusalem agreed that rebuilding could go ahead, provided there were no blood sacrifices – a ritual that Jerusalem claimed was reserved to them. A later note indicated that by 402 there was a new or rebuilt temple in Elephantine<sup>115</sup> - though whether they obeyed the strictures about sacrifice is less certain.

An Elephantine papyrus also helps to substantiate some of the second temple dates. It shows that by 407 BCE, Sanballat, Nehemiah's Samaritan opponent, was an old man who had handed over his affairs to his sons, and that the high priest was then Johanan, who was the second successor to Eliashib – the high priest in the time of Nehemiah's first governorship.

## **The work of the Chronicler (ca 410)**

Towards the end of the fifth century, a Levitical scribe created a revised version of the national Epic from the Death of Saul to the Return from Exile – the period of the house of David from David himself to Zerubbabel and on to the governorships of Ezra and Nehemiah. This work was subsequently split into the four books of I and II Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, all of which display the same language and style of writing. Additional evidence supporting the view that these books were originally parts of one work comes from the fact that the ending of II Chronicles is repeated as the beginning of Ezra – something that arguably would only have been done if and when Ezra later needed to be separated from II Chronicles.

Included in this lengthy work are a number of lists including one that details the Royal family down to six generations after Zerubbabel, concluding with the naming of the seven sons of Elionai.<sup>116</sup> Presumably the reason that the author stopped there was because Elionai was still the head of the family at the time he was writing. Zerubbabel led the first return in 537 and thus, assuming 20 to 25 years for a generation, we can conclude that the Chronicler worked sometime between 420 and 370. This dating is confirmed by an examination of the language of the texts. The Aramaic sections of Ezra have the same syntax, vocabulary, idioms and expressions as other fifth century Elephantine Aramaic

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<sup>112</sup>Nehemiah 13:23-27

<sup>113</sup> Nehemiah 13:30-31

<sup>114</sup> Yamauchi, 1990; *Persia and the Bible*; p 265

<sup>115</sup> Bezalel Porten; *Elephantine Papyri*; ABD

<sup>116</sup> I Chronicles 3:10-26

scripts.<sup>117</sup> The presence of many Persian loan words and almost no Greek words points to a date towards the end of the Persian period.<sup>118</sup> The last Persian King mentioned was Darius II. The last priest mentioned was Johanon who was in post around 410 BCE.<sup>119</sup> All these factors point to a late 5<sup>th</sup> century date for the compilation of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah

The author was undoubtedly someone closely connected to the temple – probably a Levitical scribe. Albright and others have argued that it was Ezra himself<sup>120</sup>. This argument inevitably gets entangled in the problem of Ezra's dates, for if he arrived in 458 at the age, say, of 25, then he would have been 73 in 410 BCE – a great but not impossible age for attempting this great scribal exercise. Of course, those who argue that he arrived in 428 have no such problem. Their problem is to explain why the people in the time of Nehemiah's governorship already seemed familiar with the Torah that Ezra brought with him. But the dates are not precise enough to be decisive. The author may have been Ezra; he may have been a close collaborator or a student of Ezra; but he must have been someone with access to the temple and state archives and be possessed of a vision for the establishment of a 'new' Israel with institutions based around the state religion rather than a royal dynasty.

In compiling this large work the author, or authors, had access to a number of sources: copies of official correspondence between the local authorities and the Persian kings; prophetic compilations such as Haggai and Zechariah; various psalms; lists of temple officials, returnees and other citizens; the Torah (the edited version of the first five books of the bible) and the work of the Deuteronomic Historian. Some scholars take the view that the author or authors also had available to them alternative material for the periods covered by Samuel to Kings which gave a different account of the events described. The work created by the Chronicler – let the singular encompass a possible plural – relied heavily on its sources, often using them verbatim. The points at which the DH text was omitted or changed, or new text added, are therefore of particular interest.

Scholars argue that the purpose of the Chronicler was to provide intellectual support for a political movement. The object was to define the community of Yahwists who had been through the exile experience as the 'New Israel', and to establish the spiritual core of this body as a 'nation of priests' centred on Jerusalem. Thus the progress of the nation would be achieved through a living religious institution, led by the high priest, and not by a king. These purposes can be inferred from the author's obsession with genealogies and the great emphasis he placed on priests and Levites whose institutions were often central to his interpretation of history. Only the right people with the right background could be part of the 'New Israel'

In the late 5<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of a leadership by a king was not especially appealing because:

- The state was diminished in size; no more than 40 miles from north to south; no more than 20,000 inhabitants.
- The governor was appointed by Persia, not dynastically derived.
- The concept of 'Israel' was no longer geographically bounded; it was now defined as all approved Yahwists wherever they may be – and the approving body was the 'community of exiles' in Jerusalem.
- The head of such an entity was most appropriately a high priest.
- The Persians worked through the religion of their vassals and thus dealt with its high priests. The Persians may have found the priesthood a more acceptable medium for the collection of tribute than 'tax farming' through local secular leaders.

The key ideas were thus: -

- That true 'Israel' is a selected group of families who have been through the exile
- That David founded a priestly tradition (rather than a royal dynasty), whose true succession is to be found in the anointed High Priest.

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<sup>117</sup> Cowley, Kraeling & Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century BC* (Oxford 1954)

<sup>118</sup> The exception that proves this rule is the greek 'drachma'. Coins with this name were however in circulation even during the Persian period – and often with the word 'Yehud' inscribed.

<sup>119</sup> Nehemiah 12:23. See also Jacob Myers, "Chronicles I" p 87-89 of the Introduction (AB series; published by Doubleday, New York in 1965).

<sup>120</sup> Albright (*Ezra studies*; Chapter vi; pp.243 ff.). Torrey (*The date and personality of the Chronicler*; *Journal of Biblical Literature and Exegesis* 40 (1921) These and others are referenced by Myers (1965) in the introduction to his AB volume on '*I Chronicles*'; p LXXXVI

Sometimes the Chronicler seems to give us his working files, rather than a finished literary work. At the beginning of what is now I Chronicles, we have a folder holding lists of people in various categories culled from elsewhere in the bible and some other sources.

<b>List</b>	<b>Main sources</b>
Adam and the Patriarchs to Abraham	Gen 5,10
Abrahams descendants	Gen 25,36
Descendants of Seir	Gen 36
The Kings of Edom	Gen 37
Descendants of Israel	Gen 35,38,46, I kings 5, Joshua 7
The Ancestors of David	Numbers 1, Ruth 4
Descendants of Caleb	
Descendants of Jerahmeel	I Sam 27,30
More Calebites	
Descendants of David	II Sam 3
Kings of Judah to the exile	II Sam & kings
The royal line in exile and afterwards	
Southern tribes	various incl. some non-biblical
Trans-Jordanian tribes	various incl. some non-biblical
Northern tribes	Gen 46, Numbers 26,46, I Sam 14
Chief priests	Gen 46, Exodus 6, numbers 26
Sons of Levi	Numbers 3, I Sam 1
Temple singers	
Sons of Aaron	
Levitical land and towns	Joshua 21
Returnees	

In these lists, the Chronicler both copied material from the scriptures he had, but also made use of source material, perhaps temple archives, not found elsewhere in the bible. His purpose seems to have been to link the returnees to the whole history of Israel. He divided the returnees into the four classes of laity, priests, Levites, and temple servants – the last comprising the temple gatekeepers and musicians<sup>121</sup>. At the end of I Chronicles 8, the author wrote “*Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. Now the first to live again in their possessions in the towns were the Israelite priests, Levites and temple servants.*” The Chronicler was not much interested, it would seem, in those Judeans that were not taken into exile, and whose families had remained in Judah/Jehud all the time. It is interesting that he also used the term ‘Israelites’ to refer to the returnees, despite the fact that they were the descendants of the Judeans that were taken into exile. The exile experience has turned the exiled Judeans into newly defined ‘Israelites’

### 1 and 2 Chronicles

The main story of Chronicles begins in chapter 10 with the death of Saul ‘*and his whole house*’ in the battle of Gibeon. The text comes from I Samuel 31 but it is slightly modified so as to kill off Saul’s son Ishbaal as well as the others. After the end of the Samuel text, the chronicler adds his own explanation of the theological reasons underlying the death of Saul: -

“*Saul died for his unfaithfulness;*  
 ○ *he was unfaithful to Yahweh in that he did not keep the command of Yahweh,*  
 ○ *he had consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and*  
 ○ *he did not seek guidance from Yahweh.*  
*Therefore Yahweh put him to death and turned the Kingdom over to David, son of Jesse.*”

Having killed off Ishbaal, the Chronicler did not need chapters 1 to 4 of II Samuel, which largely dealt with the struggle between the royal northerner, Saul’s son Ishbaal, and the youthful southern rebel David. Instead the Chronicler took his readers straight to the anointing of David as King

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<sup>121</sup> A similar list can be found in Nehemiah 11.

and his capture of Jerusalem - copying the text from II Samuel 5. This was followed by material glorifying David and his '*mighty men*', his followers, supporters at Hebron and a list of the forces at his command. Whilst the mighty men came from II Samuel 23, the rest came from an otherwise unknown source. The conventional translation provides David with a massive army with, for example, the people of Judah alone providing '*six thousand and eight hundred armed troops*'. An alternative translation which understands 'eleph' to mean a military unit, such as a platoon or company, would indicate that Judah provided '*six companies with eight hundred armed troops*' – a much more plausible arrangement.<sup>122</sup>

Next the Chronicler devoted four chapters to the removal of the Ark to Jerusalem. The essential story had been told in II Samuel 6, but here it was much expanded and the two attempts were separated by a note on the Philistine wars taken from II Samuel 5. The emphasis here was on the great care taken in preparation for the second attempt to move the ark, and in the appointment of proper persons to carry out the tasks. The author once more indulged his delight in lists; here he provided the names of the priests and Levites summoned to be present, since: -

*"It was because you did not carry it the first time that Yahweh our God burst out against us; we did not give it proper care."*<sup>123</sup>

He went on to name the porters, the singers, the musicians, the musical director, and the gatekeepers for the Ark. When the Ark had been successfully moved, the author had David assign to Asaph and his brothers the task of giving thanks to Yahweh. The instruction can be found in the first fifteen verses of today's psalm 105. The essence of the assignment given to the Asaph brothers was that they should: -

*Give thanks to Yahweh, call on his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples.  
Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wonderful works.*

So Asaph, the Levite, and his brothers ministered before the ark in Jerusalem whilst Zadok, the priest, and his brothers continued to minister before the tabernacle at the high place at Gibeon. The high places remained valid places of official worship until the temple was built.

The Chronicler took up David's wish to build a temple for Yahweh in Jerusalem. He used the story in II Samuel 7, although without the introductory 'when Yahweh had given him rest from his enemies', thereby implying that David lost no time in addressing the issue of the temple. David was refused permission to build the temple as he was a man of war, so immediately after the chapter on the temple question, the chronicler used three chapters to detail David's wars, taking his material from parts of II Samuel 8–21, but omitting the 'domestic' episodes.

The 'domestic' material that is omitted in Chronicles was David's adultery with Bathsheba and all its consequences, Amnon's rape of Tamar and its consequences, and Absalom's seizure of the kingdom and the resulting civil war. Scholars coyly group these as 'domestic' matters, to distinguish them from the 'cultic' matters with which the chronicler principally concerned himself.

The opening line of 1 Chronicles 21 is '*Satan rose up against Israel by inciting David to count the people.*' This differs from the comparable passage in Samuel, where we read "the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, 'Go, count the people of Israel and Judah.'" This is the only instance in the Old Testament where the word Satan is used as a proper name<sup>124</sup>. Satan as a distinct spiritual entity was a theological concept new to Judaism. Its occurrence here probably reflected ideas imported from Zoroastrianism, where an evil spirit was opposed to the good spirit of the one great god. The story it introduced was important to the Chronicler since it led to David's purchase of the site for the temple. David's punishment for taking the census was a plague that was only stopped when David sacrificed to Yahweh on the threshing-floor of Ornan of Jerusalem – the site he purchased.

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<sup>122</sup> Myers, 1965; '*I Chronicles*'; p 98. Mendenhall's suggestion is used as a basis of a full retranslation.

<sup>123</sup> I Chron 15:13

<sup>124</sup> Satan is used here as plain 'Satan'. Elsewhere the word appears with an article as 'The Satan', where it is better translated as 'the adversary' (the prose part of Job) or as a verb (as in to 'oppose' (Numbers 22:32) or as a role (e.g. in I Kings 11)

The next chapter has no parallels elsewhere; it described David's preparations for the building of the temple and the private discussion between David and his son Solomon about that great task. Although not permitted to build the temple himself, he was not prevented from ensuring that his son did. David procured all the necessary materials and thoroughly briefed Solomon on how it was to be done. After the private briefing David called together all the *'princes of Israel together with the Priests and Levites'* and there made his son Solomon king. The 'minutes' of this meeting occupy the next seven chapters; six of them concern David's instructions for the building of the temple and the organization of the temple staff – one chapter each for the organization of the Levites, the organization of the priests, the temple musicians, the gatekeepers, the temple treasury and detailed plans for the design and equipment of the temple. In amongst this was included a solitary chapter on the organization of the state. David concluded by saying: -

*"Now therefore in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of Yahweh, and in the hearing of our god, observe and search out all the commandments of Yahweh your god; that you may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children after you forever.*

*"And you, my son Solomon, know the god of your father, and serve him with single mind and willing heart; for Yahweh searches every mind, and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, you will find him; but if you forsake him, he will abandon you forever. Take heed now, for Yahweh has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary; be strong, and act." Then David gave his son Solomon the plan of the porch of the temple, and of its houses, its treasuries, ... and for the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, and all the work of the service in the house of Yahweh;<sup>125</sup> ...*

This is a very different succession story from the one that is found in the first two chapters of Kings. The chronicler did not trouble his readers with the story of the beautiful virgin Abishag brought in to warm the bed of the ageing king, nor of Adonijah's determined attempt to grab the kingdom supported by general Joab and the priest Abiathar, nor of Bathsheba's intervention on behalf of Solomon. The chronicler's version was a much more orderly affair, purged of all the sex and violence found in Kings. Nevertheless, the charge given to Solomon in Chronicles may have been based on the charge given to Solomon in Kings. The two charges start in a similar way with an admonishment to walk in Yahweh's way and to keep his commandments, but whereas the ensuing advice in Kings was largely political and secular and was given in private, here it was to do with the temple and its administration and was given in public.

At the end, the meeting took on a religious character. At one stage during this part of the gathering David appealed for offerings in aid of the temple building fund. After the freewill offerings had been collected, David recited a prayer of thanksgiving which in essence is still used to this day whenever a congregation makes an offering:

*"Yours, Yahweh, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and earth is yours.....  
And now... we give you thanks and praise...  
For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you"<sup>126</sup>*

David was portrayed as presiding over the enthronement of Solomon, with himself in the priest's role:

*Then David said to the whole assembly, "Bless Yahweh your god."  
And all the assembly blessed Yahweh, the god of their ancestors, and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before Yahweh and the king.*

Whereas, in Kings, Zadok the priest anointed Solomon, in Chronicles both Zadok and Solomon are anointed, the one as priest, the other as king: -

*Then Solomon sat on the throne of Yahweh, succeeding his father David as king. He prospered, and all Israel obeyed him.<sup>127</sup>*

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<sup>125</sup> I Chron 28: 8 onwards

<sup>126</sup> I Chron 29: 11 - 14

<sup>127</sup> I Chron 29:23

Solomon's acts in eliminating opposition at the start of his reign (I Kings 2) were omitted from the Chronicler's account, as one might expect for the Chronicler had an aversion to writing about the spilling of blood. He began his description of Solomon's reign by quoting Solomon's prayer for wisdom at the high place of Gibeon. Whereas in Kings, Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream, here he appeared directly. The text now found in 2 Chronicles 2-7 focused on Solomon's building of the temple. The Chronicler made use of the corresponding parts of Kings (I Kings 6, 7 & 8), sometimes transmitting the tradition in his own words,

When all was completed, Solomon's Deuteronomic prayer of dedication was retained, including its open approach, "*likewise when foreigners...pray toward this house, may you...do whatever foreigners ask of you*", in sharp contrast to Nehemiah's 'laws' concerning racial purity and the banning of foreign wives. The chronicler added some verses from the ancient psalm 132 at the end of the prayer:

*Rise up, Yahweh Elohim, go to your resting place,  
you and the ark of your might.  
Let your priests, Yahweh Elohim, be clothed with righteousness,  
and let your faithful shout for joy.  
Yahweh Elohim, do not turn away the face of your anointed.  
Remember the loyalty of your servant David.*<sup>128</sup>

The rest of Solomon's reign followed the account in Kings except that the section on Solomon's errors in I Kings 11 was omitted – there was no mention here of the way Solomon loved many foreign women, built temples for their gods and provoked the rebellion of Jeroboam through oppressive taxation of the North.

Chronicles generally followed Kings through Rehoboam and Abijah. It provided rather more detail concerning Shishak's invasion, confirming the Egyptian account that he did not take Jerusalem, although the Chronicler did claim that Rehoboam used the temple's gold to pay-off the Pharaoh. King Asa (910 – 867) of Judah got three chapters from the chronicler compared with 15 verses in Kings 15. Asa was a reforming king and therefore judged to be good: the extra material related to an alleged war with the Kushites<sup>129</sup> which Judah won since they trusted in Yahweh. Following that victory, the Chronicler put into the mouth of Azariah the prophet some words filled with Deuteronomic sentiments;

*Yahweh is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, you will find him, but if you forsake him, he will abandon you. For a long time, Israel was without the true god, and without a teaching priest, and without law; but when in their distress they turned to Yahweh, the god of Israel and sought him, they found him.*<sup>130</sup>

The Chronicler inserted passages of his own describing the reign of Asa's son Jehoshaphat (867 – 851). It was Jehoshaphat's willingness to promote the 'law of Yahweh' that the Chronicler wished to stress. In the third year of his reign, we learn, he sent his officials and some Levites (the chronicler provided a list) to teach the people: -

*They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of Yahweh with them; they went around through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.  
The fear of Yahweh fell on all the kingdoms of the lands around Judah, and they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. Some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute; and the Arabs also brought him seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred male goats. Jehoshaphat grew steadily greater.*<sup>131</sup>

The Chronicler followed Kings in the account of his cooperation with Ahab in the battle

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<sup>128</sup> 2 Chronicles 6:41-42. The Yahweh Elohim formulation was unusual outside Ezekiel. Psalm 132:8-10 has a similar text, but without 'Yahweh Elohim'. The psalm celebrated David's bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem.

<sup>129</sup> Hebrew '*Cushi*'; possibly people from Kushan in Midian; the usual translation of 'Ethiopians' implies an Ethiopian power in northern Egypt. But Asa ruled from about 910 till 867, whilst the Ethiopian control of Northern Egypt did not begin until about 760 under the conventional chronology.

<sup>130</sup> 2 Chronicles 15:2-4. See also Deuteronomy 4:29

<sup>131</sup> 2 Chronicles 17:9-12

against the Arameans, but then added two further chapters of his own. Although Jehoshaphat was credited with victory over the Arameans, the chronicler stated that the king was met on his return to Judah by the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, who accused him of helping the wicked and those who hate Yahweh (i.e. Ahab's northern kingdom), but also recognised that there was some good in him because he had removed the representations of Asherah from the land.

The subsequent discussion of Jehoshaphat's reforms was unique to the Chronicler: -

*He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, "Consider what you are doing, for you do not judge on behalf of men, but on Yahweh's behalf; he is with you in giving judgment. Now, let the fear of Yahweh be upon you. Take care what you do, for with Yahweh our God there is no perversion of justice nor partiality nor the taking of bribes."<sup>132</sup>*

Chronicles is also the only place where the response of Jehoshaphat to an invasion from Moab and Ammon was described. The response was prayerful.

*They rose early in the morning...and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, people of Judah and of Jerusalem! Have faith in Yahweh your god and you will prevail; believe his prophets." ...*

*He appointed those who were to sing to Yahweh and praise him in holy splendour; as they went before the army saying, "Give thanks to Yahweh, for his steadfast love endures forever"*

As a result of this approach Yahweh confused the invaders and they fought against each other for

*Yahweh set an ambush against the Ammonites, the Moabites and the people of Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed. For the Ammonites and the Moabites attacked those from Mount Seir, destroying them utterly; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another.<sup>133</sup>*

The Chronicler omitted most of the Elijah and Elisha stories, possibly because they concerned Northerners with whom the Chronicler had little interest. But he did introduce a new Elijah story in the form of a letter from the prophet to Jehoram, king of Judah, prophesying an unpleasant death because of his extensive transgressions. (Jehoram had murdered his brothers and set up high places in Judah). Jehoram lost Edom, and was attacked by the Philistines 'near the Kushites'<sup>134</sup> because of Yahweh's anger. He had a long lingering death in which his bowels came out, day after day, over two years. He departed this life "to no-one's regret" and he was not buried amongst the tombs of the kings.

When the Chronicler came to the reign of Joash, he departed from the text of Kings to emphasise the role of the priest Jehoiada. Joash was only seven when he came to the throne and Jehoiada was therefore acting as his guide. Effectively the priest was running the country and the Chronicler wanted his readers to know just how successful that arrangement had been: -

*Joash did what was right in the sight of Yahweh all the days of the priest Jehoiada. Jehoiada got two wives for him and he became the father of sons and daughters.*

Under the priest's guidance Joash restored the temple and its finances. When the priest died, he was so respected that they buried the priest in the place normally reserved for kings. The Chronicler then compared the success of the nation under the priest's guidance with subsequent events:

*Now after the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king listened to them. They abandoned the house of Yahweh, the god of their*

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<sup>132</sup> 2 Chronicles 19:5-7

<sup>133</sup> 2 Chronicles 20:20-23

<sup>134</sup> 2 Chronicles 21:16 Although translators often interpret references to the hebrew 'kush' as Ethiopia, it may also be a reference to Kushan in Midian. This was the probable origin of Moses wife. Its location here is described as being near the Arabians and Philistines suggests Kushan rather than Ethiopia. His dates do not coincide with Ethiopian control of the Delta.

ancestors, and served the sacred poles and the idols.<sup>135</sup>

The old priest's son then spoke out against Joash, but at the command of the king, he was stoned to death. As a punishment for this, Joash himself died at the hands of his servants and, in contrast to his priestly mentor, he was not buried amongst the tombs of the kings.

Chronicles moves fairly swiftly on to Ahaz - skipping a few rulers who had been dealt with in a formulaic way in Kings. The next insertion comes after the defeat of Judah by Aram and Samaria in Ahaz's time. Despite the defeat, the prophet Oded says to the victors: -

*“Because Yahweh...was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven...What have you except sins against Yahweh your god? Now...send back the captives whom you have taken from your kindred...” ...  
Then those...got up and took the captives, and they clothed all that were naked with the booty they had taken; they clothed them and gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink and anointed them; and, carrying all the weak amongst them on donkeys, they brought them to their kindred at Jericho...”<sup>136</sup>*

It was during the reign of Ahaz of Judah that the Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians and the people taken off into exile. There is no mention of this event in Chronicles. At first sight, it seems a remarkable omission. In fact, this is just an extreme example of a policy consistently followed by the Chronicler. He was only interested in Judah, and only mentioned events in Samaria in so far as they have an impact on Judah. All of DH's standard references to the parenthood of the northern kings were omitted in Chronicles: also omitted were all mentions of their death, the place of their burial and any judgements as to whether they were bad or good kings. As a result, some of the Northern kings got no mention whatsoever. The table illustrates this by comparing the number of verses allocated to Northern kings in DH's work with the number of verses in Chronicles.

Table listing the number of verses in which a particular Northern King is mentioned

<u>Northern King</u>	<u>Kings</u>	<u>Chronicles</u>	<u>Northern King</u>	<u>Kings</u>	<u>Chronicles</u>
Jeroboam	85	19	J(eh)oahaz	5	2
Nadab	7	-	J(eh)oash	16	6
Baasha	22	4	Jeroboam II	4	-
Elah	4	-	Zechariah	3	-
Zimri	8	-	Shallum	4	-
Omri	11	1	Menahem	8	-
Ahab	65	12	Pekahiah	3	-
Ahaziah	21	10	Pekah	9	1
Jehoram	4	-	Hoshea	8	-
Jehu	48	3			

For the chronicler, the people of 'Israel' were just those who had experienced the exile. Paradoxically, any actual resident of historical Israel could not be part of this. They had cut themselves off from this community when they, as the Judean authors saw it, had rebelled against Rehoboam.

The Chronicler made extensive additions to the record of Hezekiah's reign. In fact, in the five chapters the Chronicler assigned to Hezekiah, he only used 18 verses from Kings. His new material described the cleansing of the temple, the re-sanctification of the priests, the restoration of temple worship and the celebration of the great Passover. The Chronicler pictures Hezekiah as an early incarnation of the future Josiah. For the cleansing of the temple, he may have taken as his starting point some lines that DH wrote in connection with Josiah. DH had written that: -

*“The king (Josiah) commanded the high priest Hilkiah, the priests of the second order, and the guardians of the threshold, to bring out of the house of Yahweh all the vessels made for Baal, and for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron”*

<sup>135</sup> 2 Chronicles 24: 15-18

<sup>136</sup> 2 Chronicles 28:9b-

So when the Chronicler came to write about Hezekiah's cleansing of the temple, he began with a long bidding speech by King Hezekiah and then: -

*the Levites arose, Mahath son of Amasai, and Joel etc. ... (the chronicler names 14 of Levites by families). They gathered their brothers, sanctified themselves, and went in as the king had commanded, by the words of Yahweh, to cleanse the house of Yahweh. The priests went into the inner part of the house of Yahweh to cleanse it, and they brought all the unclean things... and the Levites took them and carried them out to the valley of Kidron.*

The Chronicler was writing in his own words about Hezekiah, but the action he described could be the same as that described by DH concerning Josiah. In DH, when describing Josiah's reign, the cleansing of the temple was followed by the destruction of the rural shrines including the burning of Asherah poles, and then by the holding of a Passover with all the people. The Chronicler, when describing Hezekiah's reign, placed the cleansing of the temple before the holding of the Great Passover. DH does not have a great Passover celebrated in Hezekiah's time. He does not need, therefore, to say much about the cleansing of the temple. In DH the destruction of the rural shrines and the removal of Bronze serpent is the first thing that is mentioned after the start of his reign is announced. The DH text then goes on immediately to Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria.

The Chronicler described how Hezekiah re-organised the priests and Levites reaffirming their roles in line with his account of David's instructions. He went into a great deal more detail with regard to the religious reforms than DH had

Both authors described the Assyrian threat and the message from the Assyrian king to the people of Judah, but the Chronicler omitted the political and military arguments and concentrated on the religious ones. According to the Chronicler, the Assyrian envoy appealed to popular religion and the anti-reform elements: -

*Is not Hezekiah misleading you, handing you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, 'Yahweh our God will save us from the hand of the king of Assyria'? Was it not this same Hezekiah who took away the high places and the altars and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, 'You shall worship before just one altar, and upon it you shall make your offerings'? Do you not know what I and my ancestors have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands in any way able to save their lands from my hand?*

The Chronicler commented with contempt that *'They spoke of the God of Jerusalem as if he were like the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of human hand.'*

Hezekiah prayed with Isaiah about all this, but the Chronicler did not quote Isaiah's oracle in response as DH does. Instead he simply wrote: -

*Yahweh sent a messenger who cut off all the mighty warriors, the commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So the Assyrian returned in disgrace to his own land. When he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down with the sword<sup>137</sup>*

For the Chronicler, Hezekiah was a true king after the manner of David, re-establishing the orders of priests and Levites that David had ordained.

Hezekiah's son, Manasseh was, according to DH, one of the worst of Judah's Kings for he 'misled them into doing more evil than the nations that Yahweh destroyed'. This is repeated in Chronicles, but whereas DH went on to write of the innocent blood that Manasseh shed, the Chronicler described how Manasseh repented. Perhaps the Chronicler had additional material for he wrote of Manasseh that: -

*He took away the foreign gods, and the idol from the house of Yahweh, and all the altars that he had built on the Temple Mount and in Jerusalem, and he threw them out of the city. He also restored the altar of Yahweh and offered on it sacrifices of well-being and of thanksgiving; and he commanded Judah to serve Yahweh, the God of Israel<sup>138</sup>.*

<sup>137</sup> 2 Chronicles 32: 21. In reality it was 20 years later that he was killed by his sons; not immediately.

<sup>138</sup> 2 Chronicles 33:15-16. It is possible that the Chronicler needed to believe in Manasseh's repentance in order to account for the 'good old age' with which Yahweh rewarded him; it is equally possible that

DH, in his final version, put much of the blame for Yahweh's abandonment of Judah on Manasseh. That would have been hard to do in the light of the repentance described by the Chronicler. DH was trying to understand the destruction of Judah and the exile, the overwhelming event of his day, and he had a thesis that he was trying to prove. The Chronicler, writing many years after the event, was not concerned with DH's thesis and therefore not concerned to find a specific culprit; for him the kingdom had, with few exceptions, failed to fully live up to its priestly calling for the whole period from David onwards. The chronicler's proposition was that a new way had to be found to run the country, and this way should be based around the law of Yahweh and the religious institutions. The Chronicler was thus free from the need to present Manasseh as the most evil of kings. Is it possible that his account was the more reliable of the two?

The Chronicler then took his readers on towards the fall of Jerusalem, largely following DH. Josiah was DH's great hero, but despite this he was given only one and a half chapters. The Chronicler gave him two, but the high praise given by the Deuteronomistic Historian ("before him there was no king like him, ... nor did any like him arise after"<sup>139</sup>) was excluded. The Chronicler provided additional material:

*In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a boy, he began to seek the god of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles, and the carved and the cast images<sup>140</sup>*

This provided useful information regarding the timing of Josiah's reforms, and has led to the Chronicler's account being generally regarded as probably the more accurate. Both authors wrote that the money collected in the temple was used to pay for temple repairs, but the Chronicler added;

*The men did the work faithfully. The Levites Jahath and Obadiah, of the sons of Merari, were appointed as supervisors together with Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathite as accountants. Other Levites, all skilful with instruments of music, supervised the porters and directed all who did work in every kind of service. Some of the Levites were scribes, officials, and gatekeepers.*

The discovery of the hidden book was included for 2 Chronicles 34:15 – 18 is a copy of 2 kings 22:8 – 10, but the Chronicler provided a date; he wrote that the book was found in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign<sup>141</sup>, significantly after the execution of Josiah's purge of the rural shrines which had begun in his twelfth year. The Chronicler went on to describe a second great Passover kept by Josiah in Jerusalem. Whereas the first great Passover was celebrated a month late on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the second month, this Passover was celebrated on the correct date. Josiah contributed thirty thousand lambs and kids and three thousand bulls whereas his grandfather Hezekiah had contributed seven thousand sheep and a thousand bulls – both very substantial royal contributions. The extensive description of this Passover was given in the Chronicler's own words concluding 'No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel, which is odd in the light of the very similar Passover the author had recorded for the days of Hezekiah; perhaps a scribe had erroneously copied a line from Kings where DH had written, also in reference to Josiah's Passover, that 'No such Passover had been kept since the days of the Judges'. Both authors continued by stating that this Passover occurred in Josiah's eighteenth year. Whilst DH had covered the Passover celebration in three verses, the Chronicler used nineteen mentioning such details as the fact that "the singers, the descendants of Asaph, were in their places specified by the instructions of David."

Josiah's death at Megiddo was dealt with and then the successive waves of Babylonian conquest: first Jehoiakim was taken to Babylon, then his son Jehoiachin, then Zedekiah. The chronicler offered his explanation for the destruction of Judah and the exile: -

*Yahweh, the god of their ancestors, persistently sent his messengers to them, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they mocked the messengers of God,*

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DH wanted to omit any repentance in order to justify the punishment that Yahweh subsequently visited upon Judah.

<sup>139</sup> 2 Kings 23: 24-26

<sup>140</sup> 2 Chronicles 34:3

<sup>141</sup> 2 Chronicles 34:8

*despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the anger of Yahweh against his people became so great that there was no remedy  
Therefore Yahweh brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their youths with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young men or young women, the aged or the infirm; He gave them all into his hand. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became slaves to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, in fulfilment of the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah.*

The Chronicler did not trouble his readers with any information about the exile. He simply concluded with Cyrus' edict authorising the exiles to return to Jerusalem: -

*"Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: Yahweh, the God of Heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may Yahweh his god be with him! Let him go."<sup>142</sup>*

A notable difference between DH and the Chronicler was the nature of the sources he used. The Chronicler used core DH material but avoided material that might have come from the pen of the Yahwist. The Chronicler was not satisfied with referring to state annals in support of his history – possibly because those had been lost with the destruction of the temple.<sup>143</sup> Instead he chose to use material from the southern prophets. For example, whilst DH ended his section on Hezekiah by asking "The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah, all his power ... are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?", the Chronicler stated that "*The rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his good deeds, are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.*" Consistently, the Chronicler pointed his reader to the words of the prophets for further information – examples are Samuel, Nathan and Gad in I Chronicles and Nathan, Abijah, Iddo, Shemiah, Jehu ben Henani, Isaiah and the seers of Manasseh in 2 Chronicles.<sup>144</sup> For him, the visions of the prophets could have been as good a testimony to the truth as archaeological support is to the modern mind.

### Ezra-Nehemiah

At some time, the texts of Ezra-Nehemiah were detached for the work that was to become the books of Chronicles. For many years those texts were kept as a single book, known simply as Ezra. It was only split into two books by Origen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.

The first edition of Ezra-Nehemiah is substantially the work that is now found between Ezra 7 and the end of Nehemiah. In compiling this text, the chronicler first assembled the two memoirs, and in doing so he moved the central passage of Ezra's Memoir, the recitation of the law, and placed in as the climax of the combined work where it now stands (Nehemiah 8). He may also have moved the passage describing how the returned exiles came together '*in sackcloth and ashes*', separated themselves from all foreigners and confessed their sins. In making these changes he created a work which has been a puzzle for those who want, as historians, to know what really happened. The combined work suggests that Ezra arrived in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Artaxerxes and stayed just a year, whilst Nehemiah arrived in his 20<sup>th</sup> year. Yet the text indicates that Nehemiah was around when Ezra read the law. As discussed above, various hypotheses have been advanced for the dates of these two officials, but as there is not enough data to come to a definitive conclusion, all that can reasonably be said is that they were both probably around between 445 and 397 BCE and that the chronicler, or his sources, or a later editor, has made some minor mistakes.

The Chronicler enhanced the combined memoir by incorporating a number of additions. One, inserted into the account of the great assembly of the returnees, is a prayer from the liturgy of his day, a prayer which confessed the wickedness of their ancestors and reminded Yahweh of the punishment that

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<sup>142</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:23

<sup>143</sup> Earlier it was argued following Redford that there was no such document as the annals of the Kings of Judah and that what DH was referring to were the inscriptions on the memorials to the Kings in the temple grounds. Any such inscriptions would have been destroyed along with the Temple. The Chronicler's reference to the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel is simply the version of the present day biblical Book of Kings that was available to him.

<sup>144</sup> See I Chron 29, II Chron 9, 12,13,20,26,32 and 33

the exiles endured, ending: -

*Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land whose fruit and good gifts you gave to our ancestors to enjoy. Its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They also use their power over our bodies and over our livestock as they please. We are in great distress.*<sup>145</sup>

He added the text of the covenant signed by the members of the community of the exiles, in which they say: -

*We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. If the peoples of the land bring in merchandise or any victuals on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy it from them ...; and we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.*

And of course he added a good few lists: of those who signed and witnessed the covenant; of those who accompanied Zerubbabel in the original return; of those who participated in the programme to repopulate Jerusalem.

The resultant text, Ezra 7 to the end of Nehemiah, was the first edition of 'Ezra'. It can be dated by the mention of Johanan as the last high priest in one of the lists. Johanan served around 410 BCE and his successor was in post before 400<sup>146</sup>. It is possible that this edition of 'Ezra' may have been written before Chronicles. But whatever hypothesis is taken, the composition of Chronicles and of 'Ezra' occurred at roughly the same time and followed a similar approach. The purpose of the author of 'Ezra' was the same as the author of Chronicles; both sought to show that the 'true Israel' comprised the Judean returnees, that they were the real inheritors of the Davidic tradition and that firm adherence to a pure and orthodox faith through the expanded institutions of the temple was essential for the survival of Yahwism and Judean culture. He may also have been laying the foundations for the idea that Israel was a priestly nation and should therefore be led by its high priest.

By 400 BCE it is possible that the first three books of psalms (2 to 89) were becoming well established favourites in the liturgy. But new psalms were still being written. With the renewed interest in the law it is possible that the long and beautiful psalm 119 (eventually to be part of book 5) was put together in the late 5<sup>th</sup>/early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. There is some internal evidence that it was written in the Diaspora, perhaps by someone who moved between Judah and a foreign land.

*Deal bountifully with your servant, so that I may live and observe your word.*

*Open my eyes, so that I may see wondrous things out of your law.*

*I live as a foreigner in this land; do not hide your commandments from me.*

*Teach me, Yahweh, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.*

*Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.*

*Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.*

*Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.*

*Your statutes have been my songs wherever I make my home.*

*I remember your name in the night, Yahweh, and keep your law*<sup>147</sup>

### **Free Egypt (405 – 360)**

In 405 BCE Darius II faced a serious revolt in Egypt. His nominated successor, the future Artaxerxes II, was engaged in a power struggle with his eldest son Cyrus. This internal struggle and the illness of the ageing emperor prevented the Egyptian rebellion from being dealt with effectively. Darius died in 404. Despite a plot against him organised by his brother Cyrus, Artaxerxes II was crowned at Pasargadae. The new emperor was persuaded to pardon his brother and return him to his Satrapy, but Cyrus revolted again in 401 BCE – this time with the aid of Greek mercenaries who, following the ending of the Peloponnesian war in 404 BCE were available in considerable numbers for military adventures in the service of anyone able to pay. Nevertheless, Cyrus' revolt was defeated and the

<sup>145</sup> Nehemiah 9:6-37 contains the full prayer; the quotation is from verse 36

<sup>146</sup> Leith, 1998; from the Oxford History of the Biblical World. p 416

<sup>147</sup> Psalm 119: 17-19;33-36;54-55

mercenaries, known to history as ‘The Ten Thousand’ returned to Greece, in an Epic retreat immortalised by Xenophon <sup>148</sup>.

Artaxerxes II attempted to regain Egypt in 389-387, but was repulsed by the leaders of the Western Delta, partly because Persia was simultaneously contending with Greek forces on its western borders. Relations with the Greeks were stabilised when a peace treaty was signed in 386 by which the Greeks relinquished all claims to territory in Asia Minor and Cyprus. This enabled another attempt to regain Egypt to be launched in 374 using Greek mercenaries; but disagreement amongst the leadership led to another failure.

In 366, a significant number of the regional governors, the Satraps, revolted against the king in pursuit of their own ambitions. This revolt was still ongoing when, in 361 BCE, a new leader in the Western Delta came to the throne and emboldened by his father’s success in repulsing the Persian expedition of 374, Teos decided to take the fight to the Persians. With assistance from Sparta and Athens, Teos and his army pushed north into Jehud and Phoenicia, possibly reaching Gezer – 45 miles northwest of Jerusalem. He would probably have been more successful had not insurrections at home caused him to return - insurrections that were probably caused by the high taxes he had imposed to finance his expeditions.

Armies lived off the land. Their passed through the country like a plague of locusts, devastating the crops. This was especially true of a defeated army in retreat, with its supplies exhausted and a desperate need to secure some form of recompense – often in the form of looted goods and captured slaves. Three times in little more than a single generation Jehud had suffered the ravages of defeated armies; in the last instance by Egyptians and their Greek mercenaries. It is possible that this experience inspired Joel to call for vengeance in form of an apocalyptic ‘Day of Yahweh’ upon those in Phoenicia who had sold his people to the Greeks as slaves and upon Egypt because of ‘*the violence they have done to the people of Judah in whose land they have shed innocent blood*’<sup>149</sup>.

#### **Joel (early 4<sup>th</sup> century)**

This short book was probably the work of a Judean prophet active in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, although this is not a universal consensus. The main datable references are found in the last chapter which comprised an apocalyptic vision of the Day of Yahweh. That chapter contained references to Tyre and Sidon selling Judean slaves to the Greeks and a bitter comment about the devastation caused by Egyptian troops in the land of Judah. Whilst these conditions could suggest any time when there was a Greek presence in the coastal Levant and an Egyptian army of invasion in Judah, Teos invasion of 374 BCE provides the best, if not the only, occasion when these two circumstances prevailed. Those commentators who advocate an alternative date point to the nature of the Hebrew used, describing it as similar to the fluid style of the seventh century prophets rather than the relatively stilted style of the 4<sup>th</sup> century authors who wrote in what to them would no longer have been their common tongue.<sup>150</sup> One solution is to divide Joel into two distinct parts: 1:2 to 2:27 can be read as a liturgical response to a devastating plague of locusts; whilst 2:28<sup>151</sup> to the end is an apocalyptic vision of the Day of Yahweh. Thus some scholars postulate two authors writing at different times. Against this it must be observed that the two parts are closely linked; the theme of the Day of Yahweh is trailed in the first part – it is ‘*at hand*’ (1:15); it ‘*has come*’ (2:1); it is terrible, ‘*who can endure it*’ (2:11). And there are further linguistic connections. For example, 2:24 says ‘*the vats shall overflow*’ and in 3:13 the vats do overflow.<sup>152</sup> These conflicting evidences can be resolved by supposing that the 4<sup>th</sup> century author of Joel made use of earlier material relating to the devastation caused by a plague of locusts, adapting it as a metaphor for the events that occurred in his own time and for his apocalyptic message concerning the final triumph of Yahweh.

The first part of the book - the ‘Plague of Locusts’ material had a chiasmic structure: -

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<sup>148</sup> Xenophon was the Greek historian who wrote ‘Anabasis’, the story of the retreat back to Greece of the mercenary army known as “The Ten Thousand”. The story has inspired numerous novels including Iris Murdoch’s Booker prize winning work entitled “The sea, the sea” – the cry the mercenaries gave when they first saw the way open to them to return to Greece.

<sup>149</sup> Joel 3:6 & 19

<sup>150</sup> See for example Keller’s introduction to the book of Joel in the Oxford Bible Commentary.

<sup>151</sup> Verse numbering follows that adopted in most English bibles. In the Hebrew bible chapter 3 begins with the words “And afterwards” which occur at 2:28 in English bibles.

<sup>152</sup> These verses account for two of only three uses of the Hebrew word for ‘vats’ in the Bible; the third comes from Proverbs 3:10.

1:4-12	A Lament over the ruin of the country
1:13-20	The prophet calls the people to repentance
2:1-2	The day of Yahweh
2:3-9	The invasion
2:10-11	The day of Yahweh
2:12-17	Yahweh calls the people to repentance
2:18-27	A Song of Joy over a land restored

The poem opened with the words ‘*Hear this, old men; listen, everyone in the land! Has this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?*’, suggesting that the poem was originally a performance piece intended for public recitation. After this introduction, the poet laments the ruin of the land following devastation from successive waves of aggressors, saying: -

*What the worm left, the locust ate.  
What the locust left, the canker ate,  
and what the canker left, the caterpillar ate.*<sup>153</sup>

This is reminiscent of the Yahweh’s instruction to Elijah concerning the destruction of the priests of Baal for there it was said that ‘those who escape the sword of Hazael, Jehu will slay, and those who escape the sword of Jehu, Elisha will slay’

The poet calls on drinkers to weep because ‘*a nation has come up into my land*’, killing the vines and destroying the trees. ‘*Lament like a virgin wrapped in sackcloth for her husband*’ he cries. There is no grain or wine for the temple offerings, so the priests mourn; the earth is devastated, so the ground mourns.

Therefore the prophet calls the people to repentance. ‘*Gather the old men and everyone in the land*’ for the Day of Yahweh is at hand. It will come as a destruction (Hebrew ‘shod’) from Shaddai. ‘*Has not joyfulness and sacrifice departed from the temple?*’ he asks. The seeds rot in the ground, barns are robbed, corn withers, cattle groan, fire destroys pasture and trees, and the rivers dry up.

*Let everyone in the land tremble, for the Day of Yahweh is coming, a day of darkness and calamity. A great and powerful people approach like darkness spreading over the mountain. Fire burns all before them, flames burn after them. They appear like horses and run like horsemen, they never break ranks. Should they fall upon a sword they are not wounded. Nothing escapes. They rove the city, run on the wall, climb on the houses, and enter windows like a thief.  
The sun, moon and stars are blotted out. It is Yahweh who commands this army. The day of the Yahweh is terrible. Who can endure it?*

But Yahweh calls his people to repentance

*Even now, says Yahweh, return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, weeping and mourning.  
Tear your hearts and not your clothes  
and turn to Yahweh your god.  
For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger  
And full of loving kindness*<sup>154</sup>

In the last lines are familiar from the theological declaration of the author of the Judean Epic.

Finally, the opening Lament was matched with a Song of Joy (*Land, be not afraid...Sons of Zion rejoice*). Anticipating the repentance of the people, the prophet described Yahweh restoring what had been destroyed and pouring out his spirit of prophecy upon the people.

*I will make up to you for the years the locusts have eaten...  
You will have plenty to eat  
And will praise the name of Yahweh your god  
who has treated you so wonderfully.*

<sup>153</sup> Joel 1:4 The translation of the insects is problematic, but the first (Hebrew ‘gazam’) has associations with the idea of ‘devouring’ and the third (Hebrew ‘yelek) suggests ‘licking up’.

<sup>154</sup> Joel 2:12 – 13. (see also Exodus 34: 4-7)

*Then you will know that I am in Israel  
and that I am Yahweh your god – there is no other.  
My people will never be ashamed.*

The text continued with an Apocalyptic Vision of the Judgement of the Nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat. -

*And afterwards I shall pour out my spirit upon all flesh  
Your sons and daughters shall prophesy,  
Your old men shall dream dreams  
Your young men shall see visions.<sup>155</sup>  
...  
I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth,  
blood and fire and columns of smoke.  
The sun shall be turned to darkness,  
and the moon to blood,  
before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes.<sup>156</sup>*

All who call upon Yahweh will be saved ‘for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as Yahweh had said’ presumably through the voice of Obadiah who Joel is quoting here<sup>157</sup>. In the Day of Yahweh, the nations will be brought to the valley of ‘Jehoshaphat’ – the valley of Yahweh’s Judgement – and there the nations will be judged for their crimes against Judah. The crimes included dividing up Yahweh’s land, and casting lots for Yahweh’s people.

*bartering a boy for a prostitute –  
selling a girl for a drink of wine.<sup>158</sup>*

Yahweh will stir up the nations for war. The prophet deliberately inverted Isaiah, saying:

*Beat your ploughshares into swords,  
and your pruning hooks into spears;<sup>159</sup>*

The nations who oppressed Judah are to be harvested and trodden down in the valley of judgement as the sun and moon are darkened. The prophet quotes Amos – ‘Yahweh roars from Zion, thunders from Jerusalem’ – but though heaven and earth tremble, Yahweh will be a shelter for his people.

In verses that recall the endings of Ezekiel and Amos<sup>160</sup>, the prophet looks forward to the glorious future for Judah – free at last from the ravaging of the passing armies of strangers:

*Jerusalem shall be holy,  
and strangers shall never pass through it again.*

*In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
And the hills shall flow with milk,  
All the ravines of Judah shall flow with water  
and a fountain shall come from the house of Yahweh.<sup>161</sup>*

And finally

*Judah shall be inhabited forever,  
and Jerusalem for all generations.  
I will avenge their blood,*

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<sup>155</sup> Joel 2:25-27 In the Acts of the apostles this text is quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost to justify the prophetic behaviour of the disciples. (Acts 2:17)

<sup>156</sup> Joel 2: 28-32

<sup>157</sup> Obadiah 1:17

<sup>158</sup> Joel 3:3

<sup>159</sup> Joel 3:10

<sup>160</sup> Ezekiel 47:1-12 & Amos 9:13

<sup>161</sup> Joel 3:17b-18

*I will not clear the guilty  
For Yahweh dwells in Zion.*

### Jonah (a little later)

The extensive references to other books (Jeremiah, Kings, Exodus, Psalms, Nahum and Joel), and Aramaic loan words in the text point to a late post-exilic date for the composition of Jonah. Jonah may be the work of a member of the Diaspora, rather than a Jerusalem based author, as it has something in common with the stories of the Jews of the Diaspora such as Esther, Daniel, Judith and Tobit. Some of its ideas seem to be a repudiation of Nehemiah's narrow nationalism. Taking these matters into account, and noting in particular the quotations from Joel, the 4<sup>th</sup> century may be the most likely time.

According to classical Jewish tradition, Jonah was the son of the widow of Zerephath whom Elijah restored to life. Tradition often portrays Jonah as one of the Righteous Men – along with Job and Daniel. DH mentioned a Jonah who was the 'son of Amittai' and who was active in the Northern Kingdom sometime before 750 BCE<sup>162</sup>. The author seems to have chosen this Jonah to be his anti-hero and set the action at a time when Nineveh was still 'great'.

One can scarcely read the story without smiling. In part the humour is due to the preposterous situations described and in part because the author was gently poking fun at some of the serious prophetic works he alluded to.

All true prophets were resistant to their calling, but Jonah's resistance was absurd; on being called to preach to Nineveh, he took a boat for Spain. When a 'great storm' blew up, Jonah was not to be found responsibly praying to Yahweh, as a good prophet surely should, but having a kip in the hold whilst the pagan crew desperately tried to save the ship. When they recognized that their problem was the presence of Jonah, he neither prayed nor dived overboard himself, but rather casually invited them to throw him overboard, thereby putting them in a 'catch 22' situation. If they did not throw him overboard, they believed they would die in a shipwreck, but if they did, they would put their souls in peril. The outcome of this scene was that it was the sailors who prayed to Yahweh, and Yahweh who solved their dilemma by picking up Jonah in a 'great fish'.

The repetition of 'great' – great city, great storm, great fish etc – is a characteristic of this story. Something is being mocked here; the pomposity of 'great' priestly preaching, perhaps.

Prophets generally called upon Yahweh from the depths of distress, but Jonah prayed from the depths of a fish – reciting standard texts of thanksgiving even though there was little evidence that he had anything to give thanks for. The author has some fun building up the bundle of quotations Jonah used.

Verse	<i>Jonah's Prayer</i>	<i>Psalms</i>	<i>Source of Quotation</i>
2:2	I called to Yahweh out of my distress and he answered me	120:1	<i>I call to Yahweh in my distress and he answers me.</i>
	Out of the belly of Sheol I cried You heard my voice	30:3	<i>Yahweh, you brought me up from Sheol,</i>
2:3	You cast me into the deep into the heart of the seas; and the flood surrounded me	69:15	<i>Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up:</i>
	All your waves and billows passed over me. Then I said; "I am driven from your sight.	42:7 31:22	<i>All your waves and billows passed over me I said in my alarm, "I am driven from your sight."</i>
2:4	How shall I see your holy temple again?"	5:7	<i>I may come into your house and bow before your holy temple</i>
	The waters round me rose to my neck The deep was closing round me ...	69:1-2	<i>Save me, O god, for the waters have come to my neck. I sink into the miry deep</i>
2:5	Yet you brought up my life from the Pit, Yahweh my God,	30:3	You restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.
2:6 2:7	When my soul was growing weaker Yahweh, I remembered you and my prayer reached you		

<sup>162</sup> II Kings 14:25

	in your holy Temple		
2:8	Some who worship false gods may abandon their loyalty But I shall sacrifice to you with songs of praise	97:7	Worshippers of images – those who boast in idols – are put to shame,
2.9	The vows I have made I will fulfil	22:25	I will fulfil my vows before those who fear you.
2.9	Deliverance belongs to Yahweh	3:8	Deliverance belongs to Yahweh

When at last Jonah got to Nineveh, which was such a *great* city that three days should be allowed for a visit, or so the author, in travel-agent mode, informed his readers. On the first day Jonah starts by going into the city and saying just seven words: -

*“Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”*

And at once the Ninevites believed! The king himself, on merely hearing about this, immediately stripped, put on sackcloth, sat in ashes and proclaimed that no human or animal should feed or drink and that everyone, including the animals, should wear sackcloth.

Yahweh relented.

Jonah was furious, for his prophesy was invalidated. He knew it was going to be a waste of time all along! He complained to Yahweh:

*Isn't this just what I said would happen when I was still in my own country? ... for I knew that you are a 'merciful and compassionate God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love', – ready to relent from punishing.<sup>163</sup>*

*So now Yahweh, take my life, for I might as well be dead.*

A bit of an extreme reaction to what had been an outstandingly successful mission. But recall Elijah's reaction to his success in I Kings 19:4 – he too 'sat down under a solitary broom tree and asked that he might die'. And, of course, Jonah will not now see the destruction of Nineveh for which he had been hoping.

Jonah went to the outskirts of the city to await events. There Yahweh Elohim arranged for a bush – a castor oil plant – to give him shade and sooth his humour, and Jonah was happy about the bush; but then Elohim arranged for a worm to eat the bush and a sultry east wind to make matters worse. Jonah was furious and wanted to die – again.

*But Elohim said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.”*

*Then Yahweh said, “You are concerned about the bush?” ... Should I not be concerned about that great city, Nineveh - that great city, where there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left – and many cattle as well?”*

The humour is great, but so is message – that even the citizens of despicable foreign cities are God's creation and under his care. It stands as a rebuttal of Nehemiah's xenophobic attitude.

Somewhat surprisingly this delightful satire has come to be used on solemn occasions; by Christians on Ash Wednesday and the Easter Vigil and by Jews on the feast of the atonement (Yom Kippur), probably because it illustrates the power of repentance and the impossibility of escape from God. But some may wonder if those responsible for these liturgies are wise in treating this '*great*' story with such '*great*' solemnity.

### **Esther: the Hebrew Edition**

A high proportion of Yahwists were resident not in Jehud, but in the Diaspora. It is not surprising to find some biblical works coming from that source. Esther, at least in its first Hebrew

<sup>163</sup> Jonah 4:2, but note the quotation from Exodus 34:6 etc.

edition, is an example. This book runs to at least two editions: the first edition, in Hebrew, uses language very similar to that of the Chronicler and contains many words borrowed from Persian but none from Greek. The author is reasonably accurate about Persian matters – such as the postal system, the institution of the seven advisors to the king, and the Persian custom of eating whilst reclining on couches. This edition was probably written in the Persian Diaspora in the middle years of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, about a century after the death of the king whose reign provided the setting.<sup>164</sup> Its subject is the conflict between the laws of the land and the requirements of faith.

The story, in its Hebrew version makes no mention of God, prayer, the temple, or the Torah. The lack of the ethics of Judaism or Christianity have led theologians down the ages to oppose its inclusion in the canon of biblical books. Nevertheless, it did enter the Jewish canon in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE, although it was controversial even then. It was not accepted as scripture by the Eastern Orthodox church until the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.

The Persian king in the story was a real historical figure, whose name was Kshajjarsha I (486-465 BCE), of which Ahasuerus is a rough English transliteration of the author's attempt to render the Persian name in the Hebrew alphabet. He is often commonly known as Xerxes, following Greek usage. The king is probably the only real figure in what is a fascinating historical novella. Xerxes real queen was not the Vashti of this story, but a strong-willed woman called Amestris. On one occasion, when she suspected her husband of being unfaithful, she had the mother of the luckless woman mutilated. Amestris was still around and still a power in the land during the reign of Xerxes successor.

Some scholars have suggested that the names Esther and Mordecai derive from the Babylonian gods Ishtar and Marduk, whilst Haman and Vashti derive from Humman and Mashti, gods of Elam. Thus the story may be a makeover of an ancient Mesopotamian legend.

In this version, Mordecai is described as being a descendant of Kish, the father of the Benjamite King Saul. His mortal enemy in the story, Haman, is a descendent of Agag, the king of the Amelkites whom Saul defeated<sup>165</sup>. Both the principal characters thus come from royal families, justifying their high positions in the Persian court. It is interesting to note this story promotes a pro-Saulide position at a time when the Davidic royal line had failed, and when it might have been expected that any acrimony between the two royal houses would have completely dissipated.

The story begins with a description of a splendid banquet in which the drunken Xerxes, 'in high good humour', sent his eunuchs to bring the queen to him in order 'to have her display her beauty to all the governors and the people of various nations.'<sup>166</sup> The Queen, Vashti, refuses. The king is furious and consults his advisors who suggest that she be deposed and another found; and further that a decree be issued, 'among the laws of the Medes and Persians so that it may not be altered' announcing these changes and 'declaring that every man should be master in his own house.'<sup>167</sup> A search is initiated to find the most beautiful virgin in the Kingdom; many girls are brought to the King's harem, including Esther, the cousin of Mordecai, and there, after a prolonged period of beautification, they get the opportunity to spend a night with the king. Esther, without revealing her identity, finds favour with the king, above all the other virgins, and becomes the new queen.

Some time after this, Mordecai hears of a palace plot to assassinate the king. He told Esther, who in turn informed the king in Mordecai's name. But, though it was officially recorded in the daily record that Mordecai had saved the king's life, Mordecai was not rewarded.

Meanwhile the king's principal advisor, Haman, had taken a dislike to all Judeans, mainly because Mordecai would not bow to him, as was the custom and the King's command. He approached Xerxes with a proposal:

*"There is a certain people scattered among the other peoples throughout the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the laws of the king. It is not expedient for the king to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let it be decreed that they are to be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the king's treasury."<sup>168</sup>*

The king agreed, but the Judeans found out and Mordecai asked Esther to go to the King and plead with him for lives of the Judeans. She was reluctant to do this since it was death to enter the

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<sup>164</sup> C.A.Moore, *Esther* in ABD (1992)

<sup>165</sup> I Samuel 15:1-9

<sup>166</sup> Esther 1:11

<sup>167</sup> Esther 1:19-22

<sup>168</sup> Esther 3:8-9

Kings presence un-summoned. Mordecai pleaded with her saying:

*“Who knows? Perhaps you have come into your royal position for just such a time as this.”*

Esther responded:

*“Gather up the Judeans in Susa and hold a fast for my sake for three days, neither eating nor drinking – and I and my maids will fast with you. Then I will go to the King – even though it is against the law – and if I die, I die”*

She dressed in her finest clothes and entered the king’s presence. There to her relief she was greeted sympathetically; but instead of pleading the Judean’s case, she simply invited the king and Haman to dinner in her apartments. Haman was delighted, but his irritation with Mordecai grew when Mordecai virtually ignored him when the two men pass. At his wife’s suggestion, Haman erected a high gallows and determined that the very next morning he would ask the king for permission to have Mordecai executed on it. At the dinner, the king, delighted by the evening, offered Esther anything she wanted; but all she asked was that the three of them should dine again the following day.

That night the king, unable to sleep, found in the royal archives the note to the effect that Mordecai had saved the King’s life and noted that Mordecai had not yet been rewarded for this. Haman happened to be outside the king’s rooms at the time, no doubt anxious to get permission to hang Mordecai, and the King invited his adviser in and asked him, *“What shall I do for a man I wish to honour?”*. Thinking the King meant him, Haman suggested gifts of the king’s own linen and horses. Haman was then mortified by having to arrange these gifts for Mordecai and to lead him through the city proclaiming *“This shall be the lot of any man whom the king wishes to honour”*.

At the second banquet, Esther is able to tell the king of the plot against the Judeans and plead for her life and that of her people. The king was shocked and stormed out of the room, only to return to see Haman virtually on top of Esther – an unforgivable act. Haman was sentenced to death on the spot, and when the king found out about the gallows prepared for Mordecai, selected that to be the means of Haman’s execution. Mordecai was appointed principal advisor in Haman’s place and Esther was awarded Haman’s house.

In a final reversal of Haman’s plan, Esther obtained permission for Mordecai to draft a new law such that, on the day selected by Haman for the Judean’s extermination, the Judeans should be allowed freedom to kill their enemies. The regional officials, recognising Mordecai as the new power in the land, sided with the Judeans when the day came.

*That day the number of those killed in Susa was reported to the king. The king said to Esther, “In Susa, the capital, the Judeans have destroyed five hundred people. What do you suppose they have done in the surrounding countryside? Whatever more you ask will be done.” Esther said to the king, “Let the Judeans be allowed to do the same tomorrow - and to hang up the bodies of Haman’s ten sons.” So he permitted this to be done, and handed over to the Judeans in the city the bodies of Haman’s sons to be hung up. The Judeans who were in Susa gathered on the fourteenth and killed three hundred people, but took no plunder.<sup>169</sup>*

The emphasis on not taking plunder (repeated three times) may be intended to distinguish this story from the conflict between Mordecai’s ancestor, Saul, and Haman’s ancestor Agag. Having defeated Agag, Saul did take plunder in defiance of the Samuel’s instructions – and as a result, the kingdom was taken from him.<sup>170</sup>

This is the story of the origin of the festival of Purim, for the day that had been planned by Haman for the assassination of all Jews was determined by lot (Hebrew *‘Pur’*). Purim remains a national holiday in modern day Israel. It is to be celebrated with much feasting and joy. The Mishnah says that Jews celebrating Purim are to drink until they are unable to distinguish between “Blessed is Mordecai” and “Cursed is Haman”! The inebriated way that Purim is intended to be celebrated suggests to some that in reality it was a non-Jewish festival that has been appropriated by the Jewish community and, since Purim is celebrated at the turn of the Persian year, it might be a derivative of the Persian New Year celebrations.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Esther 9:11-15

<sup>170</sup> I Samuel 15:9-35

<sup>171</sup> C.A.Moore (1992)

### Twilight of the Persians

Artaxerxes II had not proved to have the abilities needed to sustain the Persian empire. Plutarch praised Artaxerxes as just, mild, and affable<sup>172</sup>, yet he seems to have been too easily influenced, and often tied up in harem intrigues. When action was forced upon him he often acted too late to be effective with the result that the empire endured too many rebellions. Artaxerxes III (359 – 338) was able to restore the empire to its former glory for a while. He helped his father to end the Satraps revolt (360), and in his own reign was able to put down a Phoenician uprising (350–345) and to restore Persian sovereignty over Egypt in 343. In these events, both the Persian rulers and their enemies had made extensive use of Greeks to do the actual fighting – a profound flaw in the empire’s security.

Greek cultural influence in the Levant was considerable in the early part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. An illustration of how strong the hold of non-Judaic - and non-Persian - ideas had become is given by a coin used in Jehud at this time: on one side there is a helmeted Greek warrior; on the other a deity, perhaps Yahweh (but ‘you shall make no graven images’) or Zeus (but ‘you shall have no other gods’) sits on a winged wheel (remember Ezekiel’s vision – and the symbol of Ahura Mazda).



This was well into the Greek classical age (480 to 320 BCE); the time of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle, in 340 BCE, was tutor to the son of Philip of Macedonia, a young man called Alexander, whose deeds would change the world.

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<sup>172</sup> Diodorus 15.93.1, Cornelius Nepos, *De regibus* 1.4