

The Chronology of Ezra 4

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Introduction

One's understanding of Ezra 4:7-23 has a surprisingly wide range of implications for other parts of Scripture, directly affecting his or her views for example on Ezra 7, Neh 1-7, and Dan 8-9. The problem is that the events reported in Ezra 4 are not in chronological order, nor does the text of the passage imply that they are. The order of events and the sequence of narration are both clear from the passage but are not the same. This fact illustrates a literary device called prolepsis,¹ whereby the story line reaches a certain point, then looks beyond it to events known to have happened later, and finally continues from the point where it had been interrupted. Because Ezra 4:7-23 describes events historically later than those that precede and follow them textually, the relationship of that section to other chapters and to material from other books cannot be taken for granted but must be explicitly determined.

What I seek to demonstrate below is that the events of Ezra 4:7-23 are not only later than Ezra 5-6, which many grant, but also later than Ezra 7-8 and 9-10 and that as a result Ezra 7 and 4 are related. The decree authorizing Ezra and a caravan of others to return to Judea in chap. 7 must be taken in the context of chap. 4, where the work they do there is described. And the reverse is also true. The activity of the builders in chap. 4 must be taken in the context of Ezra's royal mandate in chap. 7. Nehemiah's work should be seen in this same context. His ability to finish the wall around Jerusalem in only fifty-two days (Neh 6:15), for example, is in part the result of work done by others not long before who had pioneered in the work of "restoring the walls and repairing the foundations" (Ezra 4:12). More importantly, if repairs to the city walls are the type of consequence that follows from the royal decree in Ezra 7, then that decree is an appropriate basis for dating the seventy week and 2300 day prophecies of Dan 9 and 8 respectively, which require a "decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" (Dan 9:25) as their starting point. A lot rests on our understanding of Ezra 4.

The Order of Events within Ezra 4

Up to vs. 5 the narrative of Ezra 4 is set in the time of Zerubbabel the Jewish governor and Darius the Persian king.² The task at hand is to rebuild the temple. In vs. 24 the timeframe is again the same. But in between vss. 5 and 24 the scene shifts to other later events. In vs. 6 there is a brief mention of trouble encountered during Xerxes' reign and then in vss. 7-23 attention is directed to an entirely different building project (the city, not the temple), different Jewish leaders (unnamed, not Zerubbabel), and a different Persian king (Artaxerxes, not Darius). Because the story line then returns to an earlier time--when the temple is incomplete, Zerubbabel is active, and Darius is king--rather than going on to still later events, the verses between 5 and 24 are proleptic. No rearranging of text is called for in this model. The events in question were discouraging and the writer did not wish to emphasize them. Thus, he chose to deal with this part of the story ahead of time as it were, rather than last where it would be more prominent.

Sequence of Jewish building projects

The returned exiles started the work of rebuilding with their need for a place of worship primarily in view. Thus, the altar was built first (Ezra 3:3, cf. 6), then the foundation of the temple was laid around the altar (3:10-13). The work on the temple was begun (4:1-3), interrupted (4:5, 24), and finally completed (6:15). When Nehemiah came the issue was no longer the temple but the city walls (Neh 1:3), so the city was rebuilt last, i.e., after the temple was fully complete. Placing the work on the city wall in Ezra 4:7-23 at a point before the completion of the temple in chaps. 5-6 does not fit the above sequence. See table 1.

Table 1
Sequence of Objects Built
in the Book of Ezra

Object	References
Altar	3:3, cf. 6
Foundation	3:10, 11, 12
Temple	4:1, 3, 24; 5:3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17; 6:3, (5), 7, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 22
City	4:12, 13, (15), 16, (19), (20), 21

In Ezra 4:1 and 3 the temple was being built. In Ezra 4:12, 13, 16, and 21 the city was being built. In vs. 24, however, the focus of attention reverts to the temple. The middle of the chapter does not have the same timeframe as the beginning and end of the chapter. The above facts are summarized in fig. 1.

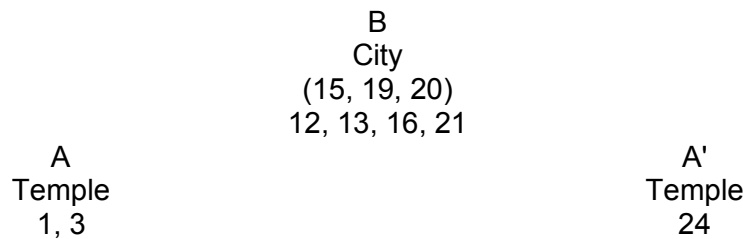


Fig. 1. Chiastic summary of references to the two main building projects mentioned in Ezra 4.

Sequence of Jewish leaders

Four Jewish leaders active during the construction of the second temple were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai, and Zechariah. The first two held administrative offices in a secular and religious capacity respectively. The second two were prophets of God. Zerubbabel and Jeshua are mentioned together in Ezra 2, 3, 4, and 5. Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned together in Ezra 5 and 6. All four were active at the same time, as can be seen from the following passage.

(1) Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. (2) Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them. (Ezra 5:1-2)

There is no contrast between the fact that Zerubbabel and Jeshua are mentioned only in chaps. 2-5 and that Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned only in chaps. 5-6. There is a uniform historical setting for all but one part of Ezra 2-6. See table 2.

Table 2
Persons Active in Building Program
in Ezra 3, 5, and 6

Person	Ezra 2	Ezra 3	Ezra 4	Ezra 5	Ezra 6
Zerubbabel	2	2, 8	2, 3	2	...
Jeshua	2	2, 8, 9	3	2	...
Haggai	...	...	...	1	14
Zechariah	...	...	...	1	14

There is a contrast, however, between the fact that in some combination the above four Jewish leaders are present throughout Ezra 2-6 generally, rebuilding the temple, and the fact that they are absent from Ezra 4:7-23, where the project is the city wall.

Sequence of Persian kings

If the evidence from Ezra's references to Persian kings were isolated from the above information, it could be interpreted in more than one way. There is a Darius between Cyrus and Xerxes, for example, and a Darius that follows Artaxerxes. See table 3.

Table 3
Sequence of Persian Kings
in Ezra 4

King	Verse
Cyrus	5
Darius	5
Xerxes	6
Artaxerxes	23
Darius	24

In history there really was a Darius that preceded and one that followed Artaxerxes. There was also more than one Artaxerxes. It would be possible to argue that each of the above kings is different from the others and that they all follow each other in sequence, thus: Cyrus (559-530), Darius I (522-486), Xerxes I (486-465), Artaxerxes I (465-424), and Darius II (423-404). In view of the building projects involved and the names of the Jewish leaders

connected with them, however, the fact that Darius appears twice--at the beginning and end of chap. 4--is actually evidence that the sequence repeats itself. See fig. 2.

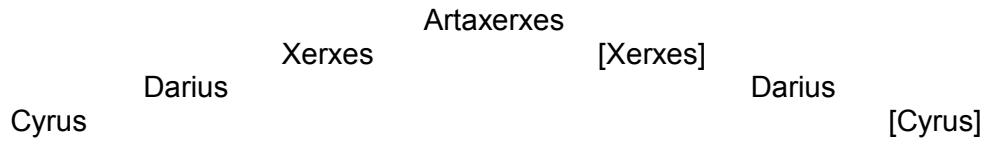


Fig. 2. Summary of Persian kings named in Ezra 4 showing that Darius in vs. 24 is the same as Darius in vs. 5. Names in square brackets are supplied.

Discussion

It is most unfortunate that the Jewish leaders active in the failed attempt to rebuild the city walls in Ezra 4 are not named, but we have an important clue to their identity.

The king should know that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations. (Ezra 4:12)

From vs. 12 we learn that the above men did not return from captivity on their own initiative. The text does not say they came "from Persia" or "from Babylon" but "from you." We must conclude, therefore, that those engaged in the work of "restoring the walls and repairing the foundations" returned to Judea with official authorization to do so. By this I do not mean that in some general sense they were allowed to return. The text implies they had a royal mandate. The king sent them.

We do not know at this point what their mandate was, but if we assume they were acting outside their authority, then some parts of the narrative remain unexplained. Artaxerxes asks no questions about the workers and expresses no surprise that they should be doing what they are. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary we may assume that he is already aware of the situation Rehum and Shimshai describe. But being reminded from his own archives about Jerusalem's past history and with a shadow of uncertainty over present Jewish loyalties placed there by persons who may well be nursing grudges but are closer to the actual situation than he is, he feels it prudent to put the work temporarily on hold: "Now issue an order to these men to stop work, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order" (Ezra 4:21).

From the above it is clear that there is more in the middle verses of chap. 4 than meets the eye on a first reading. But even the scantiness of the information the author felt it necessary to supply is instructive. It is not necessary to speak of the builders at length in chap. 4 because they receive ample attention elsewhere in the same book. And the fact that what happened comes under no emphasis is easily explained if we assume that the author himself played a part in the unfortunate events he describes.³

Summary

The historical setting for most of Ezra 2-6 deals with the restoration of the temple under Zerubbabel during the reign of Darius in the late sixth century B.C. Ezra 4:6-23 is an exception

on each of the above counts. After briefly mentioning Xerxes (vs. 6) it deals with the restoration of the city under unnamed Jewish leaders during the reign of Artaxerxes in the mid-fifth century B.C. (vss. 7-23). Those leaders returned--apparently with a large number of others--under an official mandate from Artaxerxes. I say that many returned because the text implies both supervision and labor were supplied by returnees as they worked together to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (vs. 12).

Ezra 4:7-23 in Relation to the Rest of Ezra

My purpose below is to compare Ezra 4:7-23 with a number of other sections in the same book and to determine in each case the order of events relative to each other. The comparisons I have in mind are historical rather than textual in nature. The question is not whether one bloc of text belongs before or after another, but whether the events in one section occur before or after the events in the other. Three alternatives are considered below. Ezra 4:7-23 might deal with things that happened after chaps. 5-6 but before 7, after chaps. 7-8 but before 9, or after chaps. 9-10.

Not all the later parts of Ezra have an equally important bearing on the discussion. Establishing that the middle verses of chap. 4 occur after chap. 6 has little exegetical interest, but establishing that they occur after chap. 7 would be most significant. Thus, instead of three main possibilities there are really only two. The events of Ezra 4:7-23 occur either before Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem or afterward. If before, then the two chapters are unrelated; if afterward, they cannot by any means be interpreted without reference to each other. In chap. 7 Ezra receives a broad grant of authority and the question is what he does with it. In chap. 4 there is a flurry of building activity by unnamed persons and the question is whether their work has any legal basis. The point I wish to establish is that these two sets of facts are related. The decree of Ezra 7 authorizes the work of Ezra 4.

After chaps. 5-6

Jacob M. Myers acknowledges that Ezra 4 is discontinuous historically but suggests that this was not the case originally. According to Myers the order of narration was at one time the same as the order of events but was subsequently changed by moving text from one location in the document to another.

It is probable that iv 6-23 followed v 1-vi 18 in the original document, since that appears to be the historical order of events. See Eissfeldt, *EAT*, pp. 748 f.; Rudolph, pp. 40 f.; Galling, *ZAW* 63 (1951), 67; M. Noth, *WS*, p. 153.⁴

I disagree with Myers' prior assumption that events cannot be told out of sequence for literary effect. What we have before us is a classic example of prolepsis, which accounts fully for the order in which the events are written down. But apart from how the author chose to relate them, there is a question when the events themselves occurred. Myers places Ezra 4:7-23 immediately after the completion of the temple in 5:1-6:18 (19-22)--more than half a century before Ezra came to Jerusalem. As his references indicate, this is a widely held view.

A problem left unresolved by the above suggestion, however, is that it offers no insight into who the Jews were "who came up to us from you" in Ezra 4:12. This is not a minor point. In his translation of vs. 12 Myers offers a footnote pointing out that one manuscript of the Greek Septuagint has "from Cyrus" (*apo kurou*) instead of "from you" (*apo sou*).⁵ If Cyrus sent the group in chap. 4 and Artaxerxes sent the group in chaps. 7-8, then there is obviously no relationship between the two. But it is not clear that Cyrus sent the group referred to in chap. 4. Rehum and Shimshai seek to legitimize their own status in Trans-Euphrates by referring to Ashurbanipal, an Assyrian king.

Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary, together with the rest of their associates—the judges and officials over the men from Tripolis, Persia, Erech and Babylon, the Elamites of Susa, (10) and the other people whom the great and honorable Ashurbanipal deported and settled in the city of Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-Euphrates. (Ezra 4:9-10)

Why then would they link their enemies' position there to a decree of Cyrus, the illustrious Persian founder of Artaxerxes' own dynasty? Rehum and Shimshai were aliens in the land and were brought there by a foreign king. The Jews they opposed were returning to their ancestral homeland and—in Myers' model—had received their permission to do so from the greatest of Persian monarchs. There is no reason to believe that Rehum and Shimshai would want to remind Artaxerxes of these facts, if this were the actual situation. For the above historical reasons it is unlikely that Cyrus is the king referred to in vs. 12.

Myers' position is equally unlikely for textual reasons. Codex B of the Septuagint, to which he appeals, represents an unusual reading not shared by any other Septuagint manuscript. And it represents a type of corruption that could only have a Greek source. In Greek *apo sou* ("from you") and *apo kurou* ("from Cyrus") might be considered superficially similar, but in Aramaic *min-ʿwātāk* "from you" bears no resemblance to *min-kôreš* "from Cyrus." Myers' interpretation of Ezra 4:12 relies crucially on an unlikely textual emendation drawn from a single manuscript of an ancient version. If we do not resort to such measures, i.e., if we take the Aramaic as we actually have it to be correct,⁶ then the men opposed by Rehum and Shimshai cannot have been those sent to Judea many years earlier by Cyrus but instead must be considered recent arrivals. If they were recent arrivals, the fact must be accounted for historically.

After chaps. 7-8

I have argued that Cyrus is not the king who sent the men referred to in Ezra 4:12 and it is clear on the other hand that Zerubbabel and Jeshua, who lived in the sixth century B.C., were not sent to Jerusalem by Artaxerxes. In chap. 8, however, there is an extensive list of people who did come to Judea during the reign of Artaxerxes—at the right time and in sufficient numbers to satisfy the contextual requirements of chap. 4.

These are the family heads and those registered with them who came up with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes: (2) of the descendants of Phinehas, Gershom; of the descendants of Ithamar, . . . (Ezra 8:1-2)

Ezra's commission from the king (7:11-26) and the size of the group he brought back with him from exile (8:1-14) correspond in time, situation, and numbers to those Jews who came back to Jerusalem and started "restoring the walls and repairing the foundations" (4:12) "in the days of Artaxerxes" (4:7).

The only particular on which there can be any question is the matter of building. The people who came from Artaxerxes in Ezra 8:1 came under a mandate that did not explicitly provide for building activity. The people who came from Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:12 were busily engaged in rebuilding the city wall when they were stopped. One way to interpret these facts would be that Rehum and Shimshai were right, i.e., that the builders were acting treasonably. This view is superficially attractive but does not account for all the data. Another interpretation is that the builders were stopped not because they had gone beyond the legitimate scope of their mandate--as both they and the king understood it--but because Artaxerxes could not afford to ignore any accusation of disloyalty in his western provinces at this time from any quarter.⁷

But whatever we may say to explain the royal decree halting the Jews' construction activity in chap. 4, the recorded evidence is that only one large group of former exiles came to Jerusalem from Artaxerxes and that was the one led by Ezra. Thus, chap. 4 follows chaps. 7-8 as well as 5-6 and provides evidence that Ezra organized a concerted building effort as well as leading in matters that were more directly spiritual.

After chaps. 9-10

There is a question how soon after Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem he was able to get started on the work of reconstruction. In my view the problem of mixed marriages had to be addressed first. Rebuilding the city walls was too formidable a task to accomplish without a broad base of cooperation. The fact that some had married foreign wives while others were deeply offended over the situation was divisive. Ezra's direct and immediate handling of the problem of mixed marriages was a unifying measure. First the community must be purged and unified, then they could work effectively under God's blessing. First the events of chaps. 9-10 had to take place, then those of chap. 4.

But even if the above sequence of events is accepted, there is still a question how soon Ezra found himself able to address the problem of mixed marriages. According to Eissfeldt fully two chapters of additional material (Neh 8-9) should be inserted between Ezra 8 and 9, thus delaying the time for Ezra's judicial actions by a matter of days or weeks.

The beginning of ix,¹ *And when I had completed this* presupposes, furthermore, that something has happened previously, and naturally something more than the delivery of the sacred gifts which he had brought and the handing over of his letter of authorisation to the Persian authorities, to which alone there is reference just before (viii,32-6).⁸

I disagree. Time is being marked on a small grid in the final verses of chap. 8. "On the fourth day, in the house of our God, we weighed out the silver and gold . . ." (8:33). As I reconstruct the situation, after resting three days Ezra and his companions would be ready to get an early start on their first official day's business. The vessels from Babylon were weighed out at a time close to that for the morning sacrifice. "Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs, and as a sin offering, twelve male goats" (8:35). After leaving the temple compound, "They also delivered the king's orders to the royal satraps . . ." (8:36).

The first part of the day had been used productively and now as occasion presented itself the conversation turned to a topic of deep concern for those who reported it. Not all was well in the community where Ezra would be taking up residence. "The people of Israel,

including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples . . ." (9:1). Ezra was devastated by this information and all other business was forgotten.

When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. (4) Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice. (5) Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, . . ." (Ezra 9:3-5).

What follows is Ezra's prayer (9:6-15), which he offers in front of the temple. "While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites--men, women and children--gathered around him. They too wept bitterly" (10:1). Before letting the crowd disperse Ezra makes the leading men who were present swear a solemn oath that they would take all appropriate action. He then withdraws to a room in the temple and refuses both food and water (10:6). Despite the fact that it has been a very full day he denies himself the comfort of an evening meal. In my view all of the events from Ezra 8:33 to and including 10:6 take place within a single day and probably within a period of no more than twelve hours.

The next day a proclamation is issued (10:7) and, "Within three days all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem" (10:9). There is an element of urgency in the above account that is lost by suggesting that material from Nehemiah should be interspersed through it. The account is such that no additional material can possibly appear between the end of chap. 8 and the beginning of chap. 9.

From the above I draw that if the events of chap. 4 follow those of chap. 7-8, they follow 9-10 as well. Historically Ezra 4:7-23 documents the very last events recorded anywhere in the book.

Discussion

The theory reported by Eissfeldt--that Ezra's reading of the law and the public response to it as described in Neh 8-9 belongs between Ezra 8 and 9--has been discussed above but there are a number of additional reasons for rejecting it.

Ezra 9:1 and the deletion hypothesis. Recall Eissfeldt's earlier statement that, "The beginning of ix,1 *And when I had completed this* presupposes, furthermore, that something has happened previously, . . ." ⁹ The use of first person is significant, as the same writer points out elsewhere:

Whereas ix,1-5, the introduction to the narrative about the setting aside of mixed marriages, is taken from the Ezra Memoirs, in the narrative itself there is no use of first person forms, whether singular or plural, by Ezra himself. Everywhere reference is made to him in the third person. ¹⁰

But Ezra 9:1 does not say, "And when I had completed this . . ." It says *ûk^ekallôt ʿēlleh* "And when these things had been done . . ." There is nothing in the text which would imply that a further account of the personal acts of Ezra was present at first and had subsequently been omitted. The delivering of the sacred gifts and the handing over of his letter of authorization to the Persian authorities are quite adequate to account for the language used at the beginning of chap. 9. Nothing more than this is required or allowed by the text.

Neh 9:2 and the sequence of reforms. In addition notice very carefully that Neh 9:2 says, "Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners," while Ezra 9:1 explicitly says they had not.

After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites." (Ezra 9:1)

There is no contradiction here if we put the passages in the right order. When Ezra came there was a problem with mixed marriages. He instituted the appropriate reforms. When Nehemiah arrived the problem had been resolved. This did not keep it from coming up again (Neh 13:23-31), but the point is that Ezra 9 describes earlier events than Neh 9.

The scope of the statement made in Neh 9:2. Nor is Neh 9:2 a reference to one part of the Israelite community by contrast with another part, allowing Ezra 9:1 to refer to the non-complying remainder. Myers suggests a rendering in the Anchor Bible that seems to allow for this possibility, but he has to insert a word to maintain his interpretation and this changes the meaning of the passage.

Then those of Israelite stock who had severed relations with all foreigners stood up and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. (Neh 9:2, Anchor Bible)

The word Myers inserts is "who," which divides the crowd into two groups, but the sense of the Hebrew (*wayyibbād'lu zera' yiśrā'el mikkōl b'ne nēkār*) is translated more accurately in NIV: "Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners." Here the crowd is seen as a unified whole. The point is that Neh 9:2, correctly translated, makes a general statement about all the Israelites present and not only about a pious faction among them. In Ezra 9 the needed reforms had not yet taken place. In Neh 9 they had. The sequence of chapters is therefore Ezra 9, then Neh 9, and not the reverse.

More on Neh 9:2. Another reason for claiming that Neh 9:2 makes a general statement about all Israel is that Hebrew *zera' yiśrā'el* (lit., "seed of Israel") is singular while the corresponding verb *wayyibbād'lu* (lit., "and they separated themselves") is plural. This type of construction occurs frequently in late biblical Hebrew. The reason for this difference in number between noun and verb is that the former is understood collectively.¹¹ The nature of a collective noun, or construct chain, is that many items are referred to but they are viewed as a single group. One would not use this type of expression to set one part of Israel off in contrast with another part. Collectives do not deal in contrasts at all but in sweeping generalities.

Thus, while allowing for a negligible number of exceptions, in Neh 9:2 the general case is that Israel had already separated itself from foreigners. In Ezra 9:1 and throughout Ezra 9-10 the problem is how to get them to do this. Ezra 9-10 describes the process by which the result in Neh 9 was achieved. From this I draw that Neh 8-9 does not belong between Ezra 8 and 9 and cannot be inserted there.¹² Instead Ezra 9 follows Ezra 8 immediately and without interruption.

Summary

Ezra did not lead a large company of returned exiles back to their homeland under a royal mandate from Artaxerxes just to make sure that the temple would not run out of wheat, wine, oil, and salt (7:22). This was not the thrust of the king's decree but a mere aside expressing his support. On the other hand it is not stated that Ezra would be allowed to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. But he is given so broad a grant of administrative authority—including power over the lives and property of the king's subjects (vss. 25-26)—that some have challenged it as being "historically illogical."¹³ It is possible to find middle ground between these two extremes. Ezra did not simultaneously have too little authority to repair a wall and too much to be historically logical.

If we accept what the Aramaic text of chap. 7 says at face value, then we must ask what sense it makes for Ezra to be given authority over the lives and property of Artaxerxes' Jewish subjects in Trans-Euphrates but be restrained from doing repairs to public structures in the city where he takes up residence. I submit that the king's decree includes within it all the authority Ezra could possibly need in order to do anything he wanted with the wall around Jerusalem. "You and your brother Jews may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of your God" (7:18). And apart from such exegetical arguments there are sound historical reasons to believe that what the king wrote was not illogical at all.¹⁴

It is clear at the outset that Ezra 4:7-23 follows 4:24-6:18 (19-22), but it follows more than this. Chapters 5-6, 7-8, and 9-10 are all inseparable units and neither the transition between Ezra 6 and 7 nor that between Ezra 8 and 9 provides an appropriate place for the events in question. From this I conclude that historically the events of Ezra 4:7-23 are the last to occur in the book.

The reason why it is important to understand that Ezra 4:7-23 follows Ezra 7:11-26 is that only when taken in this order can the passages be seen in relation to each other. In chap. 7 authority is given; in chap. 4 it is used. See table 4.

Table 4
Main Events in Ezra

Event	Chapter
Sheshbazzar returns	1-2
Altar rebuilt	3a
Temple rebuilt	3b, 5-6
Ezra's commission	7
Return of exiles	8
Mixed marriages	9-10
Attempt to repair wall	4:12
Work stopped	4:21

Ezra 4:7-23 in Relation to Nehemiah

I have argued above that Ezra attempted to repair the wall of Jerusalem and that he did so after addressing the matter of mixed marriages. If Ezra's building activity is the latest episode recorded in that book, then it falls in the period between Ezra 10 and Neh 1. The alternative hypothesis that Nehemiah came to Jerusalem before Ezra has been discussed at length by many individuals.¹⁵ I make no attempt here to answer all objections, but merely point out that the evidence introduced in the present paper is fully accounted for under the traditional assumption that Ezra came first.¹⁶

Coming now from the opposite direction, we arrive at a similar conclusion. Nehemiah was not the first person to try rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem after Nebuchadnezzar tore it down. There was a prior attempt in Ezra 4:12, as noted above. Nor does saying so rest on a theory about Ezra 4 alone. The book of Nehemiah opens with a report of Hanani and his companions that supports the same view:

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."
(Neh 1:3)

Consider what this passage does and does not say. It is a report on the current state of affairs in Judea. It is not a new expression of historic grief that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the city walls some 141 years previously. From the viewpoint of Hanani and his companions, reporting on the original damage to the city as if Nehemiah were unaware it had happened would be irrational and insulting. And from Nehemiah's viewpoint, a fresh outpouring of old sorrow that Jerusalem was destroyed under Nebuchadnezzar would not have the effect of depressing him so thoroughly that he could no longer hide his feelings from the king, even when failing to do so might potentially have cost him his life. When Hanani gave his report he was saying things that Nehemiah would not have been able to know and when Nehemiah heard the report he was utterly devastated by it. Neither of these facts is accounted for under the assumption that Hanani's news was already a century and a half old. Hanani and his companions were reporting on recent developments.

If the developments were recent, they were also surprising. This is a point that must not be missed. What Hanani said was unexpected as well as current. The real interest of Neh 1:3-4 is not that it documents a negative situation in Judea, but that it implies there was some reason to expect otherwise. I suggest that the basis for such hopeful expectations was Ezra's recent appointment by the king to go and "inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of God" (Ezra 7:14), financed by both private contributions (vs. 15) and the royal treasury (vs. 22), and supported by a broad grant of secular administrative authority (vss. 25-26). No informed Jew in the diaspora community would be unaware of Ezra's appointment and the response throughout would be the same as Ezra's own:

Praise be to the Lord, the God of our fathers, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem in this way (28) and who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. (Ezra 7:27-28)

As time went by Babylonian and Persian Jews would also have been joyfully aware that those who returned with Ezra were "restoring the walls and repairing the foundations" (Ezra 4:12). But, as Hanani indicates, these very encouraging prospects did not last. Ezra's work was undone. There is only one recorded occasion that provides for any hostile actions and possible damage to Jerusalem in the period after 586 B.C.: "As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and their associates, they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force [*be^cedrā^c w^fhāyil*] to stop" (Ezra 4:23). If the damage to Jerusalem that discouraged Nehemiah was not imposed by Nebuchadnezzar, then it was imposed by Rehum and Shimshai. There are no other alternatives. Thus, the broader context for Neh 1 lies squarely in Ezra 4.

Bringing the above passages together gives insight into both. On the one hand it is clear that the amount of force used by Rehum and Shimshai was considerable. By the time they and their men had finished compelling the Jews to stop their work the city wall was again broken down and its gates were burned with fire (Neh 1:3). And on the other hand we have clear historical evidence verifying the truth of Hanani's report (Ezra 4:23).

Establishing a Timeframe for Ezra's Attempt to Rebuild the Wall

I have argued above that Ezra himself was the one responsible for the building recorded in Ezra 4, that his efforts could be focused on this cooperative enterprise only after the divisive problem of mixed marriages was addressed in Ezra 10, and that the undoing of his work provides a reasonable context both for the substance of Hanani's report and for Nehemiah's response to it in Neh 1. Thus, Ezra 4 belongs historically to the period between Ezra 10 and Neh 1. Textually it belongs exactly where it is.

If the wall was partially rebuilt in the period between the last chapter of Ezra and the first chapter of Nehemiah, there are still questions as to when the work was begun, when it was brought to a halt, and how far it had progressed before this happened.

When did the work begin?

It is simply unclear how much time passed between Ezra's initial resolution of the problem of mixed marriages¹⁷ and his campaign to start work on the city wall. But if the energy he displayed on the one project is any indication, the other could not have waited long before being addressed.

The last recorded date in the book of Ezra is "the first day of the first month" (Ezra 10:17), presumably in the eighth year of Artaxerxes. Using a fall-to-fall calendar this corresponds to April 15, 456 B.C. See table 5, repeated here from an earlier paper.¹⁸

Table 5
Dates In Ezra

Ref	King	Yr	Mo	Dy	Julian F-F
Ezra 1:1	Cyrus	1	-	-	538/37
Ezra 3:1	[arrival]	[2]	7	-	Oct/Nov 536
Ezra 3:6	[arrival]	[2]	7	1	Oct 5, 536
Ezra 3:8	arrival	2	2	-	Mar 31, 536
Ezra 4:24	Darius	2	-	-	520/19
Ezra 6:15	Darius	6	Adar	3	Mar 12, 516
Ezra 6:19	[Darius]	[6]	1	14	Apr 21, 515
Ezra 7:7	Artaxerxes	7	-	-	458/57
Ezra 7:8	The king	7	5	-	Jul/Aug 457
Ezra 7:9	[Artaxerxes]	[7]	1	1	Mar 27, 457
Ezra 7:9	[Artaxerxes]	[7]	5	1	Jul 24, 457
Ezra 8:31	[Artaxerxes]	[7]	1	12	Apr 7, 457
Ezra 10:9	[Artaxerxes]	[8]	9	20	Dec 8, 457
Ezra 10:16	[Artaxerxes]	[8]	10	1	Dec 18, 457
Ezra 10:17	[Artaxerxes]	[8]	1	1	Apr 15, 456

This final date of April 15, 456, when "they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women" (Ezra 10:17), is almost exactly one year after April 7, 457, when Ezra "set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem" (Ezra 8:31). The last four chapters of the book therefore deal with a twelve month period and the work on the city wall could have been started at any point after this.

When was the work brought to a stop?

The first date recorded in the book of Nehemiah is "the month of Kislev in the twentieth year" of Artaxerxes (Neh 1:1). Using a fall-to-fall calendar, as we must in Nehemiah,¹⁹ the month of Kislev in Artaxerxes' twentieth year corresponds to November/December 445. See table 6.²⁰

Table 14
Dates in Nehemiah

Ref	King	Yr	Mo	Dy	Julian F-F
Neh 1:1	[Artaxerxes]	20	Kislev	-	Nov/Dec 445
Neh 2:1	Artaxerxes	20	Nisan	-	Mar/Apr 444
Neh 5:14	Artaxerxes	20	-	-	445/44
Neh 5:14	[Artaxerxes]	32	-	-	433/32
Neh 6:15	[Artaxerxes]	[20]	Elul	25	Sep 21, 444
Neh 7:73	[Artaxerxes]	[21]	7	-	Sep/Oct 444
Neh 8:2	[Artaxerxes]	[21]	7	1	Sep 27, 444
Neh 8:13	[Artaxerxes]	[21]	[7]	2	Sep 28, 444
Neh 9:1	[Artaxerxes]	[21]	[7]	24	Oct 20, 444
Neh 13:6	Artaxerxes	32	-	-	433/32

Hanani and his companions are able to report on events in Judea only after a long trip to the capital. The events they report must then have occurred before they left. Allowing a reasonable amount of time for their trip, the latest available date for the outrages of Rehum and Shimshai and their troops would be sometime in the summer or early fall of 445.

How far did the work progress?

The time between mid-April 456 and the beginning of December 445 is eleven years seven and a half months. Thus, allowing perhaps a month for Hanani's travel time, there are eleven and a half years of history available to Ezra for the work of rebuilding the wall sufficiently that there could have been gates for Rehum and Shimshai to burn. How much of this period was actually spent in this way remains an open question. There is evidence that favors a short reconstruction model under Ezra and evidence that favors a long reconstruction model.

Short reconstruction model. One internal clue that argues for an early end to the work on the city wall in Ezra 4 is that the Samaritan letter to Artaxerxes (4:11-16) does not imply the work was near completion, but well under way. The complaint was that, "They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations" (4:12). At face value this would indicate an early stage of construction, although the one task could not be done without the other and foundations may have been mentioned in summary.

A second argument that the work did not approach completion under Ezra is the response of the Samaritans when Nehemiah passed through the same stages of construction. Closing all the gaps in the wall did not deter the enemies of the Jews. It merely made them angry (Neh 4:7). It was only when the wall was fully complete that "our enemies lost their self-confidence" (Neh 6:16). Ezra did not reach a stage of construction that brought about the latter response, although the stage he did reach evidently challenged their self-confidence because they felt forced to take their appeal to the king.

Long reconstruction model. An argument that the work under Ezra reached an advanced stage before being stopped is that gates are mentioned in Neh 1:3. When Nehemiah set his own gates in the wall at a later time it was one of the last things he did: "I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it--though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates" (Neh 6:1). On this evidence Ezra may have been very near completion by the time his work was stopped and partially destroyed by the king's Samaritan officials.

A second argument is that the work was stopped only a short time before Nehemiah received his discouraging news from Hanani. We can be sure this is the case because word had not yet had time to reach the capital by any other means. An interval of a few months would fit the data in this case, while anything more than a year would not. Such news would travel rapidly among Jews, who have always been a commercial people and could be expected to have widespread contact among each other as merchants.

A third argument to the same effect is that when Nehemiah began his own reconstruction project some time later he was able to complete it in the amazingly short period of fifty-two days (Neh 6:15). Nehemiah evidently did not have to start all over again at the beginning by "repairing the foundations" (Ezra 4:12) as Ezra had been forced to do. Rehum and Shimshai did not level the city, but merely damaged the walls badly and burned the gates.²¹ Thus, Nehemiah was able to take the remaining parts of Ezra's earlier work as his starting point,

repair the damage done by Rehum and Shimshai, reset the gates, and bring the task to full completion in record time.

Discussion

There is no way to know exactly when Ezra began the task of "restoring the walls and repairing the foundations" (Ezra 4:12). In my view he was nearing completion but was not yet finished when Samaritan opposition took the form of appealing to the king against him. The burned gates of Neh 1:3 supply the main evidence for this position. Thus, I would favor the long reconstruction model above.

One possible synthesis of the available data is as follows. The Samaritan letter was written at some point during the dry summer months of 446. It was carried to the capital by courier, which would take the better part of a month to arrive. Upon reaching the capital the letter could very well have fallen victim to bureaucratic delays before being read to the king and when it was read there were documents to locate in a cumbersome network of archives located in various places. Once the necessary material for a royal decision had been assembled it would again have to go through all the appropriate channels to come to the king's attention and be acted upon. When the response was finally drafted it would then have to be taken back to Samaria by courier. It is easy to imagine this process fully occupying the rainy winter months of 446/45. Thus, Rehum and Shimshai would not have known that their case was successful until the spring or early summer of 445.

When they finally saw the outcome there was no more waiting. "As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and their associates, they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop" (Ezra 4:23). From what we can learn of their work in Neh 1:3 the Samaritans must have expended considerable energy on the task of undoing whatever they could of the work that Ezra had labored to accomplish.

Many years earlier when the Samaritans appealed to Darius against Zerubbabel (Ezra 4:1-3) they were forced to give their Jewish enemies enthusiastic support (6:12-13). This must have caused the most bitter resentment. Now when they appeal successfully to Artaxerxes against Ezra they act with utmost rigor. They are, as Artaxerxes had urged, careful not to neglect the matter (Ezra 4:22).

The excesses of Rehum and Shimshai were directed against a project that the king had initially supported. The Jews now had a case of their own to present. In my view this is one possible reason why Hanani and the others with him came to the citadel of Susa, arriving in early autumn 445. These men had not come to see Nehemiah, but the king and his advisers. While there they paid a visit to the king's Jewish cupbearer as well. The news they shared with Nehemiah was a summary of their business--an explanation of the events that had brought them to the capital.

The better part of a year had passed since Artaxerxes made and communicated the decision of Ezra 4:17-22. In his letter to the Samaritans he had said, "Now issue an order to these men to stop work, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order" (4:21). Shortly after Hanani leaves, the king gives Nehemiah permission to complete the work that he had only recently prevented Ezra from doing.²²

Ezra 4 in Relation to Daniel

The major reason why it is important to understand that Ezra 4 follows Ezra 7 historically is that on this basis the decree of Ezra 7 is seen to be connected with an attempt to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. The seventy weeks time prophecy, which shows the time of Christ's death on the cross centuries in advance, begins with a reference to just such a decree:

"Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'weeks,' and sixty-two 'weeks.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble." (Dan 9:25, margin)

Assuming that similar time symbolism is used in Dan 8 and 9 and assuming that the seventy weeks begin together with the 2300 days rather than at some other point in history, we gain an important insight into why the seventy weeks prophecy should be given to Daniel when it was. Daniel had been made physically ill by his correct intuition of how long a period of 2300 symbolic days would last. He had looked for the restoration of his beloved temple in the immediate future and now understood God to be telling him that the promise would remain unfulfilled for more than two millennia. The prophecy of chap. 9 showed him that the temple he had in mind would be restored at the beginning of that immense period rather than at its end. In fact it would already be restored before that time because the pivotal event that marks the beginning of the unified network of time prophecies in chaps. 8 and 9 is a decree "to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" (Dan 9:25)--a project later than restoring and rebuilding the temple.²⁴

Seventy symbolic weeks represent 490 literal years just as 2300 symbolic days represent 2300 literal years and the Messiah was to be cut off in the middle of the seventieth week (Dan 9:26). As nearly as we can determine, Christ's death on the cross occurred at Passover time in the spring of A.D. 31. If the spring of A.D. 31 is the middle of the seventieth week, then the end of the seventieth week would come three and one half years later in the fall of A.D. 34. Counting back 490 years from the fall of A.D. 34, with no zero year at the interface between A.D. and B.C., we come to the fall of 457 B.C.²³--precisely the time in history when Ezra, with a number of his fellow exiles, was arriving in Judea with a royal mandate issued by Artaxerxes and his advisers to go to Jerusalem and administer Jewish affairs in Trans-Euphrates from that location.

The decree of Ezra 7 was issued in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:1, 8-9). There is a question whether the king that bore this name was Artaxerxes I Longimanus (465-424) or Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404-359) and, if it was Artaxerxes I, whether his seventh year was 459/58 or 458/57. If we are dealing in Ezra 7 with Artaxerxes II, then Christ was still crucified in A.D. 31, it is still 490 years from the fall of A.D. 34 back to the fall of 457 B.C., and the order of events in the book of Ezra is still chap. 7 then chap. 4 rather than the reverse. All we have done is to separate Ezra 7 from the time prophecy of Dan 9. If, on the other hand, we are dealing with Artaxerxes I, then all the above conditions apply just as before and in addition the prophecy of Dan 9 has a clear biblical and historical basis in the words of Ezra 7 and in the closely related deeds of Ezra 4.

Conclusion

The object in all of this is not to see whether the passages in question can be separated and disjointed from each other, but whether when each is correctly understood they can fit together. Any set of relationships can be missed if we choose to miss them. But it is not necessary to do this. I submit that when we consider what was happening at the time each passage was written, the result is an exegetical tapestry that is at once complete and beautiful, with each part corresponding to the others.

The importance of Ezra 4 is that it shows one crucially important aspect of what both Ezra and Artaxerxes interpreted the royal decree of Ezra 7 to mean. The wording does not explicitly state that Ezra could restore and rebuild Jerusalem, but it was on the basis of that decree that he subsequently did so. It is immaterial to the present argument that he was unable to finish what he started. The decree of Ezra 7 does truly supply all the authority the returned exiles needed to start "restoring the walls and repairing the foundations" (Ezra 4:12). But this aspect of its meaning is lost if we do not take the decree of Ezra 7 in the context of Ezra 4 where we see what actually happened as a result of its being given. Taking the two chapters together, the decree recorded by Ezra then supplies the needed starting point for the seventy weeks and 2300 days time prophecies revealed almost a century earlier to Daniel.

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. The title for the paper is adapted from that of Siegfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood's magisterial work, *The Chronology of Ezra 7*, rev. ed. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1970).

¹Prolepsis allows the focus of attention and the sequence in which materials are presented to be treated separately. Under normal circumstances focus and sequence have a pervasive influence on each other. See Hardy, "Notes on the Linear Structure of Dan 11," *Historicism* No. 7/ Jul 86, pp. 21, 41, n. 10.

²Verse 6 participates in the prolepsis of chap. 4, but does not follow the events of chap. 7 historically, as vs. 7-23 do. Verse 6 has its setting during the reign of Xerxes rather than Artaxerxes: "At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem" (vs. 6). Xerxes I ruled 486-465 and Artaxerxes I ruled 465-424. There was also a Xerxes II (424-423) that preceded Artaxerxes II (404-359).

³It may be that an explanation along these lines could explain why these events are treated in a prolepsis rather than at the point in the book where they would otherwise occur. The first, last, and middle positions in a narrative are important because they help determine the impact a story will have. To end with the failure of chap. 4 would have given those events a level of importance that the writer did not want them to have.

⁴Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Anchor Bible, vol. 14 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), p. 34. See also Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 543, 551.

⁵Only codex B reads *apo kurou*. A majority of Septuagint texts have *apo sou*, which agrees with the Aramaic textual reading *min-l'wātāk*.

⁶Notice that in 1 Esdras 2:18 also the reading is "from you" (Bruce M. Metzger, *The Apocrypha of the Old Testament*, Oxford Annotated Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version [New York: Oxford University Press, 1977]). There is no reason whatever to believe that the Aramaic text is corrupt or that Myers' proposed emendation is necessary.

⁷The historical background for Ezra's mission is discussed in a forthcoming paper.

⁸Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, p. 548. Eissfeldt concludes, "In short, it appears clear that Neh. viii-ix has its right position, both as regards content and date, between Ezra vii,36 and ix,1" (ibid.).

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 544.

¹¹See Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 12 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 40-42. In a very well written paper Mark A. Throntveit remarks on Polzin's claims concerning late biblical Hebrew's preference for plural collectives as follows: "Eight of the twelve examples cited by Polzin that occur in Ezra involve the use of ^cam. All the examples cited above under 'Other' display the same usage. Furthermore, as Polzin has shown, collectives are always construed as plurals in the War Scroll (p. 41). That this evidence cannot be employed to argue for common authorship [of Ezra and Chronicles] is as much as admitted by Polzin when he states, ' . . . P⁹ (Polzin's special term for the basic strata of the Priestly Document), like Chronicles and *LBH in general*, prefers to construe singular collectives in the plural' (p. 103, parenthesis and emphasis mine)" ("Linguistic Analysis and the Question of Authorship in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah," *Vetus Testamentum* 32 [1982]: 210-11.)

¹²Asserting that they do belong together Eissfeldt states, "Furthermore, the divorce measures of Ezra ix-x link on very well too with Neh. viii-ix, in that here the law is made known which according to the indications given by Ezra in Ezra ix,1-2 is contradicted by the attitude of the people. Indeed, this complaint itself demands that there should have been some mention previously of a norm against which their attitude can be measured" (*Introduction*, p. 548). Only the sequence is wrong--in Neh 8-9 the problem is resolved, in Ezra 9-10 it is addressed. But historical sequence is precisely the point at issue in the critical claim being discussed.

¹³See Margalith, "Political Role of Ezra," n. 1, p. 110-11, p. 112. Many scholars, however, find no difficulty in accepting the substance of Artaxerxes' decree in Ezra 7, especially after the discovery of other similar edicts in recent years (Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, pp. 555-56; Klaus Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 [1974]: 184; Margalith, "Political Role of Ezra," p. 112; Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, pp. 61-63; Bezalel Porten, "The Documents in the Book of Ezra and the Mission of Ezra," *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, ed. Moshe Weinfeld [Jerusalem: Israel Bible Society, 1978-79], p. xix).

¹⁴These have to do with the political situation in Judea and the rest of Trans-Euphrates brought about by Egypt's attempt to break away from the empire at this time. "In the *Persae*, produced in 472, Aeschylus had depicted the disasters which threatened to overthrow the Persian empire; then victory at the Eurymedon and the revolt of Egypt in 460 had seemed to afford a reasonable expectation that a dismemberment of the empire would ensue. This hope proved false." (N. G. L. Hammond, *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986], p. 298). See also Margalith, "Political Role," pp. 110-112; Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 94).

¹⁵The question of whether Ezra came before Nehemiah or the reverse has been discussed extensively by scholars (see Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, pp. 553-54). The priority of Nehemiah has been championed by van Hoonacker starting in about 1880 and by those following his lead, most notably Rowley, Snaith, Kraeling, and Cazelles (ibid.). For a selective summary and rebuttal of van Hoonacker's arguments see Carl G. Tuland, "Ezra-Nehemiah or Nehemiah-Ezra," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 12 [1974]: 47-62.

¹⁶To show otherwise it is necessary to rearrange the text, as those who do so readily acknowledge. See Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, p. 548.

¹⁷This was a problem that did not go away quickly. Nehemiah had to contend with it as well. When I speak of Ezra resolving the problem what I have in mind is his efficient handling of the judicial proceedings described in chap. 10. I do not mean to imply that the problem

subsequently went away. "It needs no demonstration that the fact of mixed marriage within the community is perceived in both Ezra and Nehemiah as an obstacle to the enjoyment of a right relationship with Yahweh. . . . There are reasons for thinking, however, that the problem of mixed marriages in Ezra-Nehemiah signals a deeper malaise than any mere reform can heal. The most striking is the simple fact that both books end with the need to deal with the problem (along with others in Nehemiah's case)" (J. G. McConville, "Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 [1986]: 211).

¹⁸Hardy, "The Context for Ezra's Use of a Fall-to-Fall Calendar," *Historicism* No. 8/Oct 86, table 13, p. 40.

¹⁹Ibid., table 14, p. 45.

²⁰Kislev is month 9, Nisan is month 1 (ibid., table 1, p. 4). In a spring-to-spring calendar the year begins in Nisan with month 1, but in a fall-to-fall calendar the year begins in Tishri with month 7. Thus, in a spring-to-spring calendar Nisan comes before Kislev, but in a fall-to-fall calendar Kislev comes before Nisan. In Nehemiah the latter is the case. Kislev (Neh 1:1) comes before Nisan (Neh 2:1). See ibid., pp. 44-46.

²¹Even so, the damage must have been extensive. At one point Nehemiah could say, "So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart" (Neh 4:6). In the present model this means either that Ezra did not get more than half way, in which case the reference to gates in Neh 1:3 remains unexplained, or Rehum and Shimshai demolished more than half of Ezra's nearly completed work.

²²If this sequence of events seems unusual for a Persian king whose mandate was to administer a law that could not change (Dan 6:8, 12, 15; Esth 8:8), consider the edicts of Artaxerxes' predecessor Xerxes (Ahasuerus) first against (Esth 3:8-15) and then on behalf of (Esth 8:7-14) the Jews. To nullify an unwanted law at this point in history another could be written counteracting it. So although Persian laws could not be altered, Persian kings did in fact change their minds.

²³Horn and Wood, *Chronology*, pp. 126-27. See also Hardy, "Fall-to-Fall Calendar," pp. 41-42.

²⁴Isaiah predicted that Cyrus would issue a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, but Cyrus lived in the sixth century rather than the fifth. Thus, the timeframe is wrong for any decree of Cyrus to fulfill the time prophecy of Dan 9. Isaiah's prediction reads as follows: "I am the Lord . . . who says of Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited,' of the towns of Judah, 'They shall be built,' and of their ruins, 'I will restore them,' (27) who says to the watery deep, 'Be dry, and I will dry up your streams,' (28) who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."' (Isa 44:24, 26-28)

The only decree of Cyrus recorded in Scripture is found in Ezra 1:2-4. It speaks only of rebuilding the temple: (2) "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. (3) Anyone of his people among you--may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. (4) And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.'" (Ezra 1:2-4)

There are two problems with applying the decree of Ezra 1:2-4 to the situation described by Dan 9:25. First, as stated above, Cyrus lived in the wrong century. And second, the only thing the Jews actually built during Cyrus' reign was an altar. The temple itself had to wait until the second year of Darius (Ezra 4:24; Haggai 1:2) and the wall around the city was a much later project altogether. For a general discussion of the decrees of Cyrus and Darius see, R. DeVaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), chap. 4, "The Decrees of Cyrus and Darius on the Rebuilding of the Temple," pp. 63-96.