

Conflicts during Second Temple Period

and their

Influence on Prophetic Literature

by

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Preface

In this book an attempt has been made to remove the cloak of mystery over the early stages of Second Temple period. Researchers are now convinced that the Second Temple Period is the formative period of present five books of Torah. The author proposes that not only Torah but also the prophetic literature is actually an outcome of political rifts and religious divisions in this period.

There is a growing awareness of importance of the Second Temple Period among the Judo-Christian scholars. We can see number of books published in recent years which are devoted to this important era of Jewish history. The focal point of this study is also the Second Temple politics. If one reads prophetic literature, one would find that pre-exilic prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah etc have discussed issues related to early second temple period. For example walls surrounding Jerusalem and mixed marriages issues which were actually the point of strife in the early second temple period. Authors thus projected themselves in the pre-exilic period and tried to change the present. Because of these political and religious contentions, bible and prophetic literature become the corpus of conflicting prophecies and ideas. Later Jews and Christians used the same conflicting prophecies for the arrival of Messiah figure. The concept of two messiahs was present among Qumran community as revealed by dead sea scrolls¹ and the second coming of the Christ is also deduced from the similar conflicting verses of the prophetic books.

A natural question arises that why these prophets are discussing issues which occurred in early second temple period, though they claimed they belong to different ages. The reason of development of biblical literature was priestly differences in the early second temple period. There are number of questions for example:

- Why the author of Book of Jeremiah did mistakes in calculating the period of captivity?
- How the visions of Ezekiel are related to second temple period?
- Who was the true root of Davidic dynasty?
- How Messianic ideas are weaved into biblical literature to fulfill some political needs?
- What differences in priestly lines caused the murder of the Prophet Zechariah?
- How the Nehemiah and Ezra high-lighted their political agenda in the Torah?
- What caused the Samaritan schism?

¹Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, Harper, San Francisco, 1999

It is explained in this book that the authors of book of Jeremiah, Amos, Zephaniah, Ezekiel belong to the group supporting Ezra and Nehemiah whereas the authors of books of Haggai and Zechariah were supporters of Zerrubabel i.e. they belong to anti-Ezra group. The bloody feud resulted in murder of the prophet Zechariah son of Iddo, as informed by Jesus in gospel of Mathew. The scribal editions and "corrections" have masked the influence of the Persia on Judean politics.

The question of credibility of prophetic literature in bible is evaluated under the light of internal evidences present in the historical books like Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and prophetic literature.

To correct the history, in the book of Nehemiah, it is informed that Ezra the scribe recited the whole Torah with verses never heard before. The complex characters of Ezra and Nehemiah have caused the Samaritan schism in Judaism. Further if we analyze the bible through Grafian Hypothesis²- the doctrine that the Levitical Law and the connected parts of Pentateuch were not written till after the fall of kingdom of Judah, and that the Pentateuch in its present compass was not publicly accepted as authoritative till the reformation of Ezra, the compilation of bible would become a human endeavor to win over the opponents. ¹

The most noteworthy exploration of this Hypothesis is by Richard E. Friedman. His research is now available in books titled *Who wrote the Bible?*³ and *The Bible with Sources revealed*⁴. The hypothesis is now called Documentary hypothesis. Elliot has proposed that the bible especially the so called five books of Moses are composed of different writings. These writings were created under the influence of different political conditions and tastes. For example the details of Temple services in Bible comes from Priestly Writings. Then there are writings which have clear influence of politics of southern and northern kingdoms. Some parts of the biblical text we have today are made up of the interweaving done by the Redactor. Not only that but the last book Deuteronomy has three different writings called Dtr1, Dtr2 and the text ranging from chapter 12 till chapter 26 of Deuteronomy, which has not been specified to any body.² In a recently published book 'The origins of the Second Temple'⁵ author claims that the editors of Haggai and Zechariah had mistakenly set the event of building of Second Temple under Darius I. The basis of this conclusion is the presumption that the prophetic literature like Ezekiel and Jeremiah was present before the end of Babylonian captivity.

²Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, The Project Gutenberg EBook, 2003

¹Preface, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* by W. Robertson Smith *The Grafian Hypothesis comes from Graf's teacher Eduard Reuss. And it will be more correct to attribute this hypothesis to Wilhelm Vatke and Leopold Gorge.*

³Richard E. Friedman, *Who wrote the Bible*, Harper, San Francisco, 1997

⁴Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, Harper, San Francisco, 2003

²R. E. Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, Harper, San Francisco, 2003 The texts are identified as J, P, E, R, Dtr1, and Dtr2

⁵Diana Vikander Edelman, *The origins of the Second Temple*, 2005

However there is no need of these corrections as the text itself speaks out in opposite. The conflicting voices of Zerrubabel and Ezra in the Second Temple Period cannot be silenced by mere readjustment of the dates.

It is proposed in the present work that one can go back even further down in history to know the motives behind these writings. Early stages of Second Temple Period thus become the starting point of the analysis. The theory proposed may helps in explaining not only the complexity of the Pentateuch but also the so called prophetic literature along with it.

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| Kings of Israel | Kings and Queens of Judah |
|------------------------|--|
| JEROBOAM I | |
| 930 - 909/ 928 - 907 | Rehoboam 930 - 913/ 928 - 911 <i>Abijam = Abijah</i> 913- 910/ 911 - 908 Asa 910 - 869/ 908 - 867 |
| Nadab | |
| 909 - 908/ 907 - 906 | |
| BAASHA | |
| 908 - 886/ 906 - 883 | |
| Elah | |
| 886 - 885/ 883 - 882 | |
| Zimri | |
| 885/882 | |
| [<i>Tibni</i>] | |
| 885 - 880/ 882 - 878 | |
| OMRI | |
| 885 - 874/ 882 - 871 | |
| Ahab | |
| 874 - 853/ 873 - 852 | Jehoshaphat 872 - 848+/ 870 - 846+ |
| Ahaziah | |
| 853 - 852/ 852 - 851 | |
| Jehoram | |
| 852 - 841/ 851 - 842 | Joram 853 - 841+/851 - 831+ <i>Ahaziah = Jehoahaz</i> 841/843 - 842 |
| JEHU | |
| 841 - 814/ 842 - 814 | [<i>Athaliah</i>] 841 - 835/ 842 - 836 <i>Joash = Jehoash</i> 835 - 796/ 836 - 798 |
| Jehoahaz | |
| 814 - 798/ 817 - 800 | |
| Jehoash | |
| 798 - 782/ 800 - 784 | Amaziah 796 - 767/ 798 - 769 <i>Azariah = Uzziah</i> 792 - 740/ 785 - 733 |

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Table 2: Kings and Queens of Judah and Israel; continued

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Jeroboam II | |
| 793 - 753+ / 788 - 747+ | |
| Zechariah | |
| 753 / 747 | |
| shallum | |
| 752/747 | |
| MENAHM | |
| 752- 742/ 747 - 737 | |
| Pekah | |
| 740 - 732/ 735 - 732 | |
| | Jotham |
| | 750- 735/ 759 - 743 |
| | Ahaz=Jehoahaz I |
| | 735 - 715/ 743 - 727 |
| Hoshea | |
| 732 - 723/ 732 - 724 | |
| | Hezekiah |
| | 715 - 686/ 727 - 698 |
| | Manasseh |
| | 697 - 642/ 698 - 642 |
| | Amon |
| | 642 - 640/ 641 - 640 |
| | Josiah |
| | 640 - 609/ 639 - 609 |
| | JehoahazII= Shallum |
| | 609/ 609 |
| | Jehoiakim=Eliakim |
| | 609 - 598/ 608 - 598 |
| | Jehoiachin=(Je)coniah |
| | 598 - 597/ 598 |
| | Zedekiah=Mattaniah |
| | 597 - 586/ 596 - 586 |

Key to Table

Name

Date of Edwin R. Theile/Date of M. Cogan

Capitalized name means founder of a dynasty

= King given two names

+ includes year as a coregent

Source: The Politics of Ancient Israel by N. K. Gottwald

Chapter 1

Out of Promised Land

Before we embark on the journey through the pages of the Bible, we should remind ourselves that the Middle eastern faiths like Judaism, Christianity and Islam claim that they are the divinely revealed religions. All three faiths share many commonalities like they all regards Abraham as a devout person, believing in an Omnipotent God, who acts in History to fulfill his desires. Also the three faiths are divided over the personality of Jesus. For Christians he is the Son of God, for Muslims he was the messenger of God and for Jews he was a liar or revolutionary depending on the taste.

As three faiths give high regard to the person Abraham, it is a good starting point to see what Bible says about him. Surprisingly, for the authors of the Bible the true character of the Abaraham is not important. The mere fact that he was a Babylonian and settled in the land surrounding Jerusalem is important. Therefore the true story begins with the migration of three Chaladens.

1.1 Migration of three Chaldeans

God commanded a person (from Babylon or Chaldea) called Abram to migrate to the land, which would be shown to him. Abram (later named as Abraham) migrated along his wife Sarah and nephew Lot to promised land. God promised that his progeny will become a great nation. The God said to Abram:

... To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites. Genesis 15:18 - 21

Biblical God is keen in identification of ethnicities and keep close track of races¹. Why? Because after Cyrus decree, when jews returned to holy land they were

¹Mark G. Brett, *Genesis, Procreation and the politics of Identity*, Routledge, 2000

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deeply horrified to see that other races have occupied their land and that needs to be corrected. Therefore all the competing nations were blacklisted and declared unclean ².

In later years Jews suffered the Egyptian, Babylonian and Persian captivities but God helped them to recover. In Solomon's times, they witnessed the vast and resourceful empire with influence as far as Yemen. The descendants of Solomon have ruled the Judah and Israel for four centuries. His rule gave birth to the mythic tradition that the House of David ruled by divine will, would remain on earth till the end of times. This tradition became an integral part of Jewish and Christian messianic expectations. Solomon had executed some of his opponents like Adonijah and Joab. He had also banished some from Jerusalem like Abiathar. In 1 Kings 4:4 it is informed that Zadok and Abiathar were acting together as priests under Solomon. In 1 Kings 1:7, 19, 25 it is revealed that Abiathar was working against Solomon and was a supporter of Adonijah due to which he was deposed by Solomon and banished to Anathoth (1 Kings 2:22 and 26). Later a prophet called Ezekiel from Anathoth would become an arch rival of one of Solomon's descendants, Zerubbabel.

In spite of great rule of Solomon, in Jewish rabbinical literature, he had been shown as a magician and sorcerer. Why? Because the divided priesthood didn't like Zerubbabel a descendant of Solomon. Instead the prophetic books initiated the idea of Messiah from Joseph's progeny instead of David.

Temple priesthood had played a very suspicious role in Jewish history. It is informed in the book of Chronicles and Kings that they even hid the true scroll of Torah in the crevice of Solomon's Temple and found later in the reign of Josiah.

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, carved idols and cast images. Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles, the idols and the images. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem. In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them, he tore down the altars and the

²Jeremiah knows that this would happen so he kept his land-ownership document in a jar so that it can be reproduced after 70 years. Isn't it great and pragmatic! Jeremiah's obsession with land and wealth is contrary to his role as bearer of spiritual wisdom

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Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, to purify the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and Maaseiah the ruler of the city, with Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the temple of the LORD his God.

They went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the temple of God, which the Levites who were the doorkeepers had collected from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim and the entire remnant of Israel and from all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then they entrusted it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the LORD's temple. These men paid the workers who repaired and restored the temple. They also gave money to the carpenters and builders to purchase dressed stone, and timber for joists and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had allowed to fall into ruin.

The men did the work faithfully. Over them to direct them were Jahath and Obadiah, Levites descended from Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, descended from Kohath. The Levites-all who were skilled in playing musical instruments- had charge of the laborers and supervised all the workers from job to job. Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes and doorkeepers. While they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD that had been given through Moses. Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan. Then Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: "Your officials are doing everything that has been committed to them. They have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the supervisors and workers." Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, [a] Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD;

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they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book.” Hilkiyah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, [c] the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. She said to them, ”This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, ’This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people—all the curses written in the book that has been read in the presence of the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all that their hands have made, my anger will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.’ Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, ’This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. Now I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here.’ ” So they took her answer back to the king. Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. The king stood by his pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD -to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book. Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it; the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.

Josiah removed all the detestable idols from all the territory belonging to the Israelites, and he had all who were present in Israel serve the LORD their God. As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the LORD, the God of their fathers. 2 chronicles 34

The Book of Kings also describe the Josiah Reforms. According to the description, the reforms of Josiah are according to Law of Moses but the author gives no reason for the failure of the reforms. Since at the last moment when Armies of Babylon were on the borders the obedience to God’s Words must be enough to

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stop coming Wrath of God. The author of book of Chronicles give no clear answer to this question. However in the Book of Kings we find the answer of our question:

Then Josiah looked around, and when he saw the tombs that were there on the hillside, he had the bones removed from them and burned on the altar to defile it, in accordance with the word of the LORD proclaimed by the man of God who foretold these things. The king asked, "What is that tombstone I see?" The men of the city said, "It marks the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and pronounced against the altar of Bethel the very things you have done to it." "Leave it alone," he said. "Don't let anyone disturb his bones." So they spared his bones and those of the prophet who had come from Samaria. 2 Kings 23

It means what Josiah did was incomplete and compromise. He has not destroyed on the basis of principles but rather on animosity.

1.2 Jerusalem- the Burning City

The Bible tells us that Nebuchhadnazar, the king of Babylon acts like the Wrath of God.

The commander of the guard took as prisoners Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest next in rank and the three doorkeepers. Of those still in the city, he took the officer in charge of the fighting men and five royal advisers. He also took the secretary who was chief officer in charge of conscripting the people of the land and sixty of his men who were found in the city. Nebuzaradan the commander took them all and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. There at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them executed. So Judah went into captivity, away from her landIn the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin from prison on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month. He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived. 2 Kings 25: 18-30

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The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.

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Invading Army destroyed Jerusalem's wall and burned the temple. In ancient times the city defences were based on the wall around the city. Surprisingly, the Isaiah and Micah also discuss the problem of Jerusalem without wall in their respective books. Although, in the times of these prophets, Jerusalem was a fortified city. Why the wall surrounding Jerusalem was so important for Prophets like Isaiah (lived in times of kings Uzziah, Jotham and Ahaz) and Micah (lived in times

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of king Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah)? Through out this book we would analyse all the prophetic literature in order to understand the second temple period.

Table 1.1: Prophets

| Traditional Date of Appearance | Prophets | Comments |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 792- 686 | Isaiah | Copied Book of Kings |
| 788 | Hosea | |
| 750 | Micah | Copied Book of Isaiah |
| 732 | Jeremiah | Copied Book of Kings From Josiah to Captivity |
| 725 | Amos | |
| 609 - 640 | Zephaniah | |
| 605 - 530 | Daniel | During Captivity |
| 593- 570 | Ezekiel | From Zedekiah to Captivity |
| 519 | Zechariah and Haggai | |
| 433 | Malachi | |

Note:The Life span is not indicated.

The table shows the plagiarism committed by authors of books of prophets. Is it other way round? Author of book of Kings copied prophets or authors of books of prophets copied book of Kings. You would decide yourself once you go through this book.

Chapter 2

After Babylonian Captivity

2.1 Decree of Cyrus II

In the streets of Babylon, people were listening the Decree of the King, *Cyrus*¹, the Great. The Government personal were announcing some thing like this:

*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. 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. 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.*¹

This decree was addressing the rights of minority group the Jewish Community to return to land of their forefathers, the Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Cyrus become King of Anshan in 559 B.C. He fought with great success with Babylon and his general conquered the Babylon in 539 B.C. The first year of Cyrus is in fact the first year of Cyrus as king of Mesopotamia. Cyrus has been shown to recognize the God of Heaven, this god is certainly different from Yahweh as in Isaiah we have been informed that Cyrus does not recognize the Yahweh, the God of Bene Yisrael. In spite of this, God liked Cyrus and even called him my Messiah.³

"This is what the LORD says- your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone

¹The Kurus in Persian

¹Ezra 1:2 -4

³Isaiah 44: 24 - 28 and 45: 1-13

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stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, 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,' who says to the watery deep, 'Be dry, and I will dry up your streams,' 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." ' - Isaiah 44:24- 28

Book of Isaiah comprised of three different writings done in different times.

The God's Messiah (the anointed one) is an epithet of great importance. Cyrus is also called My Shepherd. In any case the great flattery of Cyrus can never be written before 538 B.C.

This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to CYRUS, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains ; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the LORD, have created it. Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'He has no hands'? I will raise up CYRUS in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty. -Isaiah 45

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Table 2.1: Structure of Book of Isaiah by Duhm 1892

| Part | Chapters | Comments | Important Personalities | Possible Date |
|------|----------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| I | 1 - 39 | Complex composition; Apocalypse | Davidic Messiah/ Eliaikim ben Khaliah | Pre-Captivity Period |
| II | 40 - 55 | Exilic/Post Exilic | Cyrus and unknown Servant | After 538 |
| III | 56 - 66 | Post Exilic | Suffering Servant | 515 -433 |

Note:

B. Duhm 1892, *Das Buch Jesaja übersezt und erklärt* (HKAT, 3.1, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht)

Isaiah chapter 36 - ch 38: 9 = 2 Kings 18 - 20

Isaiah chapter 38:10 - . = Psalm

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Cyrus not only allowed the Judeans⁴ to return to their homeland but he also allowed them to take with them the Holy vessels of Temple, which Babylonians have taken. This is interesting because the Exilic literature like book of Kings explicit states that not a single gold vessel has been left intact.

He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had said. - 2 Kings 24:13

The Holy Vessels which have been recovered can only be of non-gold metal. Atleast 30 Gold vessels have been discovered and bought to Judah. In ancient world it is a general practice to maintain peace and order by supporting the Priesthood and cults. The Persian Government financing the Temple is no wonder.

Table 2.2: **The List of Holy Vessels**

| Vessel-Type | Quantity |
|---------------|----------|
| Gold-Dishes | 30 |
| Silver-Dishes | 1000 |
| Duplicates | 29 |
| Gold Bowls | 30 |
| Silver Bowls | 410 |
| others | 1000 |
| Sum | 5400 |

Note: The summation reported in book of Ezra is 2469

The God's appointed Messiah Cyrus not only allowed the Judeans to return to Judah but also allowed the other minorities to go back to their respective homelands. This is like accepting freedom of exiles. The Text found from ruins on Baked clay cylinder and now in British Museum says:

I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four rims of the earth, son of Cambyses, great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, great king, king of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, great king, king of Anshan, of a family which always exercised kingship, whose rule [the gods] Bnd Nab love, whom they want as king to please their hearts.All the kings of the entire world from the Upper to the Lower Sea

⁴The book of Ezra insist that the Building of Temple is the task undertaken by Judean only

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[i.e., from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf], those who are seated in throne rooms, those who live in other types of buildings as well as all the kings of the West land living in tents, brought their heavy tributes and kissed my feet in Babylon. As to the region from [lacuna] as far as Assur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the towns of Zamban, Me-Turnu, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, I returned to these sanctuaries on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which had been ruins for a long time, the images which used to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I also gathered all their former inhabitants and returned to them their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus had brought into Babylon to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their former chapels, the places which make them happy. - Cyrus Cylinder⁵

According to statement made by Strabo (XI.13.9), it was accepted practice among the persians to worship the gods of people who were subject to them.⁶

2.2 Cultural Shock:*Bene haggolah* in Conflict

Acting upon the Decree of Cyrus some 42,360 Judean return to Jerusalem. The leaders of this caravan were:

Zerrubabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. (Ezra 2: 1-2)

Zerrubabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum and Baanah (Nehemiah 7:7)

Because of some political reason the list has been edited by author of Book of Nehemiah. The Prince of Jews is called Sheshbazzar. The Sheshbazzar could be a non jew who is acting as an administrator from Persian side. This could explain the utter silence of biblical sources about the Jewishness of Sheshbazzar. The list of Jewish leaders provided by authors of Book of Ezra and Nehemiah also does not list him in leaders as shown above.

⁵This translation was made by A. Leo Oppenheim and is copied from James B. Pritchard's Ancient Near Eastern texts relating to the Old Testament, 1950 Princeton.

⁶M.A. Dandamaev and V.G.Lukonin *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran, Cambridge Uni. Press 1989*

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Zerrubabel son of Shealtiel⁷ is the descendent of the King Jeconiah⁸ and hence belongs to Davidic Dynasty like the staff of Jesse he has the chance to rule the Judeans again. The word Shealtiel sounds very similar to Sthiyl and Shathal, meaning root plant.

Another important figure of this list is Joshua son of Jehozadak (as in Haggai and Zechariah). Also known as Joshua son of Jozadak (as in Ezra). In First Book of Chronicles we have been informed that Jehozadak was the High Priest of Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem⁸. The question is if the Jehozadak was father of Joshua and this fact is clear to authors of book of Chronicles, Haggai and Zechariah then why the author of book of Ezra distorted the name of father of Joshua?

This shows that Zerrubabel belongs to Davidic dynasty and the Joshua belongs to the high priest family. This theocratic administration under the guidance of Sheshbazzar was the first Judean administration after Babylonian Exile.

As soon as Bene-haggolah (Sons of Diaspora)⁹ come back to Judah, they got the cultural shock. Jerusalem is longer a dream-land. It is important to note that not all Jews of Judah were taken as captive by Babylonian army. The Babylonian army took 832 Men in first attack and in second and last they took 745 Men. This is total 4600 Men.¹⁰ Another report in book of Kings says that 10000 then 8000

⁷Haggai 1:12 Zerrubabel is even called Governor in Haggai 1:14 and the Signet of God's hand, Haggai 2:23, In 1 Chronicles Zerrubabel is grandson of Shealtiel see 3:18; Also R Aha bar Abun bar Benjamin, citing R. Abba bar R. Papi, said: Great is the power of repentance, which led God to set aside an oath even as it led Him to set aside a decree. Whence the proof that a man's repentance led Him to set aside the oath He made in the verse As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim were the signet on a hand, yet by My right, I would pluck thee hence (Jer. 22:24)? The proof is in the verse where Scripture says [of one of Jeconiah's descendants] In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerrubabel . . . the son of Shealtiel . . . and will make thee as a signet (Haggai 2:23). And the proof that a man's repentance led God to set aside a decree He issued in the verse Thus saith the Lord: Write ye this man childless, etc. (Jer. 22:30)? The proof is in the verse where Scripture says, The sons of Jeconiah – the same is Asir – Shealtiel his son, etc. (1 Chron. 3:17). R. Tanhum bar Jeremiah said: Jeconiah was called Asir, "one imprisoned," because he had been in prison ('asurim); **and his sons called "Shealtiel" because he was like a sapling, newly set out (hustelah), through whom David's line would be continued**, Pesikta de-Rab Kahana (5th c.), Yale Judaica edition translated by William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975)

⁸Jehoiachin=(Je)coniah

⁸1 chro 6:15 Jehozadak was also deported to Babylon along with King Jeconiah. In this way Joshua belongs to the Bene Zadok of priestly descent

⁹Ezra 4:1, 6:19 -21 or qahal-haggolah Diaspora Assembly in Ezra 2:64, Neh 7: 66

¹⁰Jeremiah 2: 28- 30 This is explained that those who had been left were poor Jews. They had been left for tilling the fields. Hence only the elite class was taken as a captive, 2 Kings 24: 14, Jere 52: 16

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were taken as captive. This is possible that figures includes the women also. In any case some unknown figure of poor jews were left in Country for looking after the gardens and fields in Judah. With all demographic, sociological and statistical dimensions the number of poor in kingdoms is always higher than elite class. For repatriates from Babylon this is a shocking return. Not only the jews of poor caste have occupied their inheritance but the former enemies like Moabites, Ammonites etc are also claiming the Land ownership. This is utter devastation.

In all civilized societies the proof of Land ownership is important. One of the prophets called Jeremiah had made an agreement of the Landownership and kept it in jar for longer preservation. ¹¹

Jeremiah identifies himself as a priest from Anathoth, the confinement place of Abiathar. Abiathar has been deported from Jerusalem by King Solomon. Is Jeremiah linked with Shiloh Priesthood? Through out the book, Jeremiah maintained a sarcastic tone especially for the Jerusalem Temple Priesthood.

The Book of Zephaniah says:

I have heard the taunt of Moab and the reviling of the children of Ammon, with which they have taunted my people, and boasted against their territory.. -Zephaniah 2:8

Another problematic community was of the Samaritans. The Samaritans consider themselves descendants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and the Levite priests who lived in Shechem, since the Israelite conquest of Canaan. The traditional view about Samaritans is that they are the descendants of the mixed jewish and pagan population that existed in Samaria following the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in 722 B.C. The Rabbis use the term Kutim as a synonym for Samaritan, (used in 2 Kings 17:24) The (Kutim) Cutheans were among the people brought in by the king of Assyria to settle the land after the conquest.

Old enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building The Temple of the GOD of Israel. They came to Zerrubabel and the family heads and said, "We'll help you build. We worship your God the same as you. We've been offering sacrifices to him since Esarhaddon king of Assyria brought us here." Zerrubabel, Joshua, and the rest of the family heads of Israel said to them,

¹¹Jeremiah 32: 6 - 15 Surprisingly even in dungen, the Jeremiah has 70 pounds of Silver in his pocket which he paid to his cousin after weighing for field in Anathoth. Not only this he even had the seals to make the document legally sound!

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”Nothing doing. Building The Temple of our God is not the same thing to you as to us. We alone will build for the GOD of Israel. We’re the ones King Cyrus of Persia commanded to do it.”Ezra 4: 1- 3

The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over Samaria and lived in its towns. When they first lived there, they did not worship the LORD; so he sent lions among them and they killed some of the people. It was reported to the king of Assyria: The people you deported and resettled in the towns of Samaria do not know what the god of that country requires. He has sent lions among them, which are killing them off, because the people do not know what he requires. Then the king of Assyria gave this order:Have one of the priests you took captive from Samaria go back to live there and teach the people what the god of the land requires. So one of the priests who had been exiled from Samaria came to live in Bethel and taught them how to worship the LORD. Nevertheless, each national group made its own gods in the several towns where they settled, and set them up in the shrines the people of Samaria had made at the high places. The men from Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men from Cuthah made Nergal, and the men from Hamath made Ashima; the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. They worshiped the LORD, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places. They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought. To this day they persist in their former practices. They neither worship the LORD nor adhere to the decrees and ordinances, the laws and commands that the LORD gave the descendants of Jacob, whom he named Israel. When the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites, he commanded them:Do not worship any other gods or bow down to them, serve them or sacrifice to them. But the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt with mighty power and outstretched arm, is the one you must worship. To him you shall bow down and to him offer sacrifices. You must always be careful to keep the decrees and ordinances, the laws and commands he wrote for you. Do not worship other gods. Do not forget the covenant I have made with you, and do not worship other gods. Rather, worship the

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LORD your God; it is he who will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies.” They would not listen, however, but persisted in their former practices. Even while these people were worshipping the LORD, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their fathers did.-2 Kings 17:24

In the Babylonian Talmud Rabbi Ishmael informed that they were righteous proselytes in the beginning but were excluded from community because they used to marry illegitimate women but not a brother’s widow. They will only be accepted when they deny Mount Gerizim and confess Jerusalem and the resurrection of the dead. In words of R. Ishmael, After this, he who robs a Samaritan is like one who robs an Israelite. — Babylonian Talmud (supplement), Kuthim 2.7

In 49 years of Babylonian Captivity the Judeans has lost the interest in going back to homeland. The Babylon is the center of civilization where Jerusalem is a city with out walls and moreover with 'others' occupied the areas.

2.3 Edict of Cyrus to Achaemenidian Administration

This is clear from the above discussion that Achaemenid Empire was promoting Multi-religious society. For them the Religious Buildings and Priest-hood is very important. The reason is explained in Book of Ezra:

In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem: Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be ninety feet [a] high and ninety feet wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. **The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury.** Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God. Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and you, their fellow officials of that province, stay away from there. Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site. Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God: **The expenses of these men are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so**

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that the work will not stop. Whatever is needed young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons. Furthermore, I decree that if anyone changes this edict, a beam is to be pulled from his house and he is to be lifted up and impaled on it. And for this crime his house is to be made a pile of rubble. May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence. ...Ezra 6: 1- 12

From 538 to 519 B.C.E. the most of returnees were poor except some elite clan of former king's and high priest's family. The High priest Joshua and Judean leader Zerrubabel allowed the people of the land and judeans to inter-marry and many of the priest and levites had married with the non jewish communities in Jerusalem. The fact only revealed at the end of book of Ezra.

In Judah a strong tension has been created within the Priestly class. Some supported the marriages with local communities and some straight away rejected them. The Group Dynamics has effected the religious literature of this period.

Chapter 3

Pax Persica: Policy towards Yehud

Cyrus died in year 580 B.C. He left two sons Cambyses (Kambujia) and Bardiya (also known as Smerdis). His son Cambyses became the ruler. During the military expedition in Egypt, Smerdis has been assassinated. In meanwhile, Darius one of the Achaemenidian family member took the throne. Cambyses killed himself or died because of an accident. Darius maintained the policy of Cyrus of protecting the religious institutions, like the priesthood of Apollo at Magnesia on the Maeander or the medical school connected with temple at Egyptian Sais. He constructed the temple of Amon Ra in Khargeh oasis and other temples at Edfu, Busiris and Elkab.¹

Table 3.1: List of Persian Achaemenid Kings

| Reign | King |
|-----------|--------------|
| 559 - 529 | Cyrus II |
| 529 - 521 | Cambyses II |
| 521 - 486 | Darius |
| 486 - 465 | Xerxes I |
| 465 - 424 | Artaxerxes I |

3.1 Jewish Aspirations for Kingdom

According to book of Ezra, the Judeans started the construction of temple. They have not allowed the other Jews to participate into this holy work like Samaritans. Also nothing has been said about the so called lost tribes of Jews. The major tribe who has survived the Babylonian captivity was Judah. Even the Jewish homeland becomes the 'Yehud' in Persian era. According to book of Ezra, the people of Land oppose the temple construction and, contrary to policies of Persian empire,

¹Culican, *The Medes and the Persians*, Thames and Hudson, 1965

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the Persians stopped the construction. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah helped the people to construct the temple. On the other hand when we compare the books of Haggai and Zechariah with the historical hodge-podge in book of Ezra, we find that there was no real impetus from the people to construct the temple. Contrary to the account of book of Ezra, the prophet Haggai and Zechariah mentioned no opposition from People of Land or Samaritans. Haggai mentioned explicitly the statement of Jews that it is not the time of construction!

Even people commented on the construction of Temple that it is not majestic as before! God abhor this and replenish them by saying:

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua [a] son of Jehozadak, the high priest: This is what the LORD Almighty says: These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'

Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?

Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD. You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why? declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands. -Haggai 1: 1- 11

'Now give careful thought to this from this day on when no stone was laid on another in the LORD's temple. When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me,' declares the LORD. 'From this day

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on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid. Give careful thought: Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. 'From this day on I will bless you.' -Haggai 2: 15-19

The prophet Haggai also mentioned the plan of God that He will shake the nations and kingdoms to support the Judean leader Zerrubabel and God has declared him as his hand signet.

'On that day,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,' declares the LORD, 'and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the LORD Almighty.'" -Haggai 2:23

At the same time another prophet Zechariah were receiving the revelations from God almighty that He has purified the High Priest Joshua. God announces to Joshua and his companions that He is about to bring in his slave meaning the branch. zech 3 and 6:9-15

Important revelations received by Haggai and Zechariah are tabulated in table¹.

Table 3.2: Significant Events after Babylonian Captivity

| Date | Comments | Source |
|-----------|---|--------------------------|
| 538 | Cyrus II allowed the Jews in Babylon to return to Judah | [<i>Ez.ch1</i>] |
| 536 | Zerrubabel and Joshua the priest assign duties for Temple Services | [<i>Ez. – ch.1</i>] |
| 536 | Temple foundations were laid | [<i>Ez. – ch.3</i>] |
| 525 - 404 | Egypt under Persian Control | - |
| 519 | Revelation of God comes to Prophet Haggai and Zechariah | [<i>Hagg. – Zech.</i>] |
| | Work stopped at Temple site till the second year of reign of Darius | [<i>Ez. – ch.4</i>] |
| 515 | Work on Temple completed in the sixth year of reign of Darius | [<i>Ez. – ch.6</i>] |
| 515 - 458 | No information, 61 year silence | - |
| 458 | Ezra arrived Jerusalem on the orders of Artaxerxes I | [<i>Ez. – ch.7</i>] |
| 445 | Nehemiah comes with Persian Army to Jerusalem | [<i>Neh. – ch.1</i>] |
| | In 52 days the Wall surrounding Jerusalem completed | [<i>Neh. – ch.6</i>] |
| 433 | Nehemiah visited Artaxerxes I | [<i>Neh. – ch.13</i>] |

Note: Sources indicated by Book and chapter Number

The name of Judean leader was Zerrubabel son of Shealtiel which sounds like a sapling (newly set out (hustelah), through whom David's line would be continued, Pesikta de-Rab Kahana) The spun on the name of Zerrubabel is used by the prophets.

¹For dates please consult Jon L. Berquist, *Judaism in Persian Shadow*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989

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In Prophetic literature the opposing voice comes from Anathoth, the prophet Jeremiah (lived in times of last Judean king Zedekiah) strongly denounces the idea that God has accepted any one as king from the (Je)coniah family (Jeremiah 22:24). The traditional answer to this contradiction is given by Rabbis that God has condoned the King (Je)coniah and accepted his repentance and later one of his grandson Zerrubabel is accepted as Judean leader. But the most likely scenario is that some one was writing the revelations in the name of prophet Jeremiah against the ruling elite. The original scroll of book of Jeremiah was once lost in fire (Jeremiah 36:23) and for the another scroll Jeremiah has instructed his disciple to through it into Euphrates river (Jeremiah 51:63).

3.1.1 70 years captivity

The close reading of prophetic literature reveals the distinct traces of second temple period. A common error is in counting the number of years of Babylonian Captivity. While writing in name of Prophet Jeremiah the author of the book in chapter 24 started the discussion with the date that the revelation is revealed when King Nebuchadnazzar has first year of his reign. Then it has been revealed that the nations will have the yoke of Babylonian serfdom for seventy years! (Jeremiah 25:11) Also God said to Jeremiah: I will remember you when 70 years will passed in Babylon (Jeremiah 29: 10). This is a unsolvable problem. The first year of King of Babylon is 605 B.C.E. and the end of Babylonian captivity is in year 538 B.C.E. But it is not the period of Captivity in Babylon as God promised to Jeremiah especially in verse of Jeremiah 29:10. The original period of captivity is 49 years hardly.

The question of period of captivity is also touched in the book of Zechariah. The revelation of God comes to Zechariah and corrected this confusion by considering the Persian period also as captivity. The angel of lord asked the God about 70 years of his indignance against Judah (Zech 1: 13). In this way not only the Babylonian period but also the Persian period is considered as period of God indignance. This complicates the problem even further, where stand the revelations in book of Isaiah that Cyrus is his servant. This one Prophetic revelation of Zechariah is truly revealing.

This again raise a question of authenticity of these books.²

²The book of Daniel addresses the question of period of captivity with numerological dimensions. The book is replete with historical anomalies. The author has no idea of Chronology of Babylonian empire. Belshazzar was neither king nor son of Nebuchadnazzar. The last ruler was Nebonidus, defeated by Cyrus not by Darius (the Mede?) as Daniel presumed *There has never been a king by name Darius the Mede*

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3.1.2 Ubiquitous False Prophets

According to Prophetic literature, the Judaism is plagued with False Prophets through out its history. Is this really the case or are the prophets belonging to opposite sides claiming the falsehood of the opponents? Soon after the return to Judah after the Babylonian Captivity the false prophets started appearing. In one of his prayer, Nehemiah said: O God remember the other prophets who tried to frighten me. (Neh 6:14)

God revealed to the post Exilic Prophet Zechariah that God will remove the spirit of false prophets from the land (Zech 13: 2). It is also revealed that the False prophet will not survive and will be killed by his own family and even the false prophet will say that he is not a prophet but a farmer and was slave from very beginning (Zech 13:5-6). This shows that many Judeans who were slaves before, now claiming as prophets. This interesting to know that Zechariah has quoted the words of Prophet Amos:

Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees.

Although there is a very big time lapse between the Amos and Zechariah, God likes to discuss the plum line issue:

Amos said Thus he showed me, and behold the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plum line, and a plum line was in his hand. and Lord God said to me: Amos what do you see? And I said, A plum line. Then the Lord said, Behold, I have set a plum line in the midst of my people Israel. I will never again pass them by and the places of Israel shall be desolate.. (Amos 7:7- 8)

Zechariah informed that the Seven Eyes of God which moves over whole Earth look happily on the plumb line in hand of Zerrubabel (Zech 4:10)

The book of Jeremiah provided a test to check the authenticity of the Prophets. God revealed to Jeremiah that:

But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true." -Jeremiah 28: 9

Unfortunately, even Jeremiah has failed this test due to the revelation of period of the Babylonian Captivity i.e. God will remember the Jews when 70 years are passed in Babylon. The Prophet Isaiah also failed the same test. God revealed to Isaiah that:

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To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. (Isaiah 54:9)

But even then the second temple is destroyed!

A very enigmatic situation is created when one see that on one side God said that he will punish the Judah and Israel by Babylonians and on the other side the same God wants to punish those who were laughing when Judah and Israel were made captives and the God will destroy Babylon because the Babylonians had destroyed his Temple. The reason of these rampant revelation to the Judean, has been revealed by Micah in chapter 3 verse 10.

Another book attributed to Exilic prophet called Ezekiel (also from Anathoth) says this for false prophets:

For there will be no more false visions or flattering divinations among the people of Israel. -Ezekiel 12:24

The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: 'Hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! Your prophets, O Israel, are like jackals among ruins. You have not gone up to the breaks in the wall to repair it for the house of Israel so that it will stand firm in the battle on the day of the LORD. Their visions are false and their divinations a lie. They say, The LORD declares, when the LORD has not sent them; yet they expect their words to be fulfilled. 7 Have you not seen false visions and uttered lying divinations when you say, The LORD declares, though I have not spoken? 'Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because of your false words and lying visions, I am against you, declares the Sovereign LORD. 9 My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will not belong to the council of my people or be listed in the records of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD.

'Because they lead my people astray, saying, Peace, when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash, 11 therefore tell those who cover it with whitewash that it is going to fall. Rain will come in torrents, and I will send hailstones hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth. 12

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When the wall collapses, will people not ask you, "Where is the whitewash you covered it with?"

'Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: In my wrath I will unleash a violent wind, and in my anger hailstones and torrents of rain will fall with destructive fury. I will tear down the wall you have covered with whitewash and will level it to the ground so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you will be destroyed in it; and you will know that I am the LORD. So I will spend my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. I will say to you, The wall is gone and so are those who whitewashed it, those prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her when there was no peace, declares the Sovereign LORD.'

Now, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own imagination. Prophesy against them 18 and say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the women who sew magic charms on all their wrists and make veils of various lengths for their heads in order to ensnare people. Will you ensnare the lives of my people but preserve your own? You have profaned me among my people for a few handfuls of barley and scraps of bread. By lying to my people, who listen to lies, you have killed those who should not have died and have spared those who should not live.'

'Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against your magic charms with which you ensnare people like birds and I will tear them from your arms; I will set free the people that you ensnare like birds. I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power. Then you will know that I am the LORD. Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies, when I had brought them no grief, and because you encouraged the wicked not to turn from their evil ways and so save their lives, therefore you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the LORD.' ” -Ezekiel 13

3.1.3 The Horse-Gate Problem

We have been informed that the Priest in time of Nehemiah live near the Horse Gate. The priest in Wall construction project in era of Nehemiah constructed the wall in front of their houses near this horse gate.

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Damascus Gate which is called Sha'ar Sh'khem i.e. Road to Shechem in Hebrew, was one of the main entrances to the Jerusalem. It was located in the wall on the city's northwest side where the highway leads out to Shechem (Nablus). The same gate is called Horse gate and it was the main entrance to enter the city. Hosea laments that Priests kill in way of Schechem (Hosea 6:9). God said that he will punish the leader who like to wear the foreign dresses and on his day there will be crying from Horse gate (Zepheniah 1:8).

3.1.4 Wrong Design of Second Temple

The internal rifts in the priestly lines in the second temple period is also revealed in the book of Ezekial. The exiled prophet saw a remarkable vision with a chariot moving in sky with angelic figures and in the midst a being with appearance of Man (Ezekial 1: 27) The chariot is surrounded by bow-shaped lights, as seen in the clouds of rainy days (Ezekial 1:28). In the vision the prophet has been toured through the Jerusalem and the temple. He saw that Bene Yisrael are involved in worshipping insects and reptiles and crawling animals (Eze 8:8-11). The book does not specify the time frame of these acts. But the tone of the book indicates that some thing bad was going on in the temple. The prophet Ezekiel started receiving his revelations in year 593 as indicated by the beginning of the book, and at that time there was no longer a temple in place. The only possibility is that the prophet was criticizing a current situation in Jerusalem and hypothetically projecting himself in the Exilic period. In plane words he is concocting the divine literature in order to criticize his contemporary priesthood of the temple. The prophet has a distinct interest in the priestly clan. The book ends with the details of design for second temple and the role of levites and priests. The book articulates the law of marriage for levites and priests (Ezekiel 44:22). The marriages of the temple personal with non-Jewish nations was a contentious issue in the beginning of second temple. The solution is provided by book of Ezekiel, a Man with Tablet and ink will rectify the Land (Ezekiel 9 and 10) not the Babylonians. This refers to either a priest (wearing cotton) or a scribe (Tablet or ink) will correct the land. He will do the catharsis of society starting from temple (Eze 9:4-11)and this is exactly what we see in the episode of Ezra. On the orders of King Artaxerxes he arrive Jerusalem.

3.2 Rise of Messianism in Judah

The book of Haggai ends with the promise of God that God will shake the earth to support his servant Zerrubabel. In second temple period, Zerrubabel is the second person after Cyrus whom God has declared as his servant (Haggai 2: 20-23). The prophet Zechariah also mentioned the divine promise for Zerrubabel that:

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So he said to me, This is the word of the LORD to Zerrubabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.

What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerrubabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'

Then the word of the LORD came to me: 9 The hands of Zerrubabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you.

Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerrubabel. (These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth.)

Then I asked the angel, What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?

Again I asked him, What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?

He replied, Do you not know what these are?" No, my lord, I said.

So he said, These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth. -Zechariah 4:6-14

Also it is revealed that:

The word of the LORD came to me: Take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak. Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.' The crowns will be for Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the LORD. Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the LORD, and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the LORD your God. Zechariah 6:9 - 15.

Note that the word crowns is used i.e. plural . It is intentionally changed in translations.

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The Prophets Haggai/ Zechariah and prophet Jeremiah belongs to opposite blocks. On contemptuous issue is the question of owner of Davidic Dynasty.

Riding the donkey or the horse

For Zechariah the rightful owner comes on donkey.

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, a foal, a calf of she-donkeys.-Zechariah 9:9

Where in Jeremiah he comes on horse.

then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this city with their officials. They and their officials will come riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by the men of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever. -Jeremiah 17: 25

Also, god revealed to Jeremiah :

For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people. - Jeremiah 22:4-5

Davidic Messiah from Jeconiah progeny

Haggai has received the revelation that Zerrubabel is the signet of his hand. But Jeremiah denounces this with full force.

As surely as I live, declares the LORD, even if you, Jehoiachin [c] son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians. I will hurl you and the mother who gave you birth into another country, where neither of you was born, and there you both will die. You will never come back to the land you long to return to.

Is this man Jehoiachin a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants?
Why will he and his children be hurled out, cast into a land they do not know?

O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD!

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Table 3.3: Revelation of God to Haggai and Zechariah

| Second year of Reign of Darius 519 | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Date | Revelation |
| 1st day - 6th month | People say it is not the time of Construction of Temple! |
| 21st day - 7th month | People say: Temple not majestic as before |
| 8th month | God says: Return to me I will return to you |
| 24th day -9th month | Temple foundations laid |
| 24th day - 11th month | God says: Jerusalem constructed with out walls |
| Fourth year of Reign of Darius 517 | |
| 4th day - 9th month | - |
| - | Pray for rain |
| - | People shall mourn for whom they pierced |
| | Zechariah chapter 7 |
| | Zechariah chapter 10 |
| | Zechariah chapter 12 |
| | Zechariah chapter 1 |
| | Haggai chapter 2 |
| | Zechariah chapter 1 |
| | Haggai Chapter 2 |
| | Zechariah chapter 1 |

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This is what the LORD says: Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah. -Jeremiah 22: 24 -30

Therefore, this is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night. -Jeremiah 36:30

Green Branch

Zechariah referred to Zerrubabel with spun on his name that God ..Zechariah 9:13, Zechariah 4:10. Also see Isaiah 11: 1-10

The so called second and third Isaiah introduced the idea of 'My Servant'. An epithet God used for Cyrus and one of the Judean returnees. Isaiah 42:1-5 18-22 49:1-7 50:10-11 53:1-9

Two Messiahs

Norman Gottwald in his book, *The politics of ancient Israel*² has commented that:

Although there are some indications of Judahite antipathy towards Persia, even open resistance to against its rule, in prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah, the evidence of actual revolt in 520 - 515 B.C.E. is based on obscurities in biblical texts that have been taken to indicate deliberate censorship of an overt rebellion. In any case, lack of Persian confidence in Zerrubabel, the governor of Judah who was also of the Davidic line, may be indicated by his disappearance from the record and by the fact that later governors of Judah were non davidic.

(In note to this text)The references to Zechariah 3:1, 6, 6:11 to Joshua, the high priest and in Zechariah 4:6-10 to Zerrubabel, the governor, relate the two figures in a confused manner, but when they are read together in context, it is evident that branch of 3:8 and 6:12 is none other than Zerrubabel, who is touched as future king of Judah. The plural crowns in 6:11 , 14 makes it virtually certain that the name of Zerrubabel once stood in the passage alongside Joshua.

We cannot dismiss the strange removal of Zerrubabel from the sources by saying that messianic expectation for Zerrubabel is an hypothesis. He is highly regarded by God that he is called signet of his right hand and his servant in Haggai

²N. K. Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel*, Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky, 2001

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and Zechariah. Darius passed through Palestine in 518 and probably Zerrubabel was executed³.

We know that temple priesthood was involved in marriages with non-Jewish nations regarded sin by Ezra, Nehemiah and Ezekiel. The only possibility is that the Haggai and Zechariah belong to opponent group lead by Zerrubabel and Joshua. The prophet Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea and Ezekiel had denounced the false prophets and most likely they consider the Haggai and Zechariah of same breed. Ezekiel demanded that the catharsis must begin from the temple and had happened as Jesus said:

so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Mathew 23:35

In Zech 1:1 we have Zechariah full name is written as son of Berechiah son of Iddo.

Zechariah was thus murdered for his support of Zerrubabel and High Priest. He was the false prophet denounced by others.

3.3 Royal Scribe for Reformation

In Judah the internal strife in the community has forced the Babylonian Jewry to intervene. As God of Ezekiel wanted, they sent a priestly Scribe who has the knowledge of Law (Ezra 7:1-6). The scribe requested the authority from Achaemenid administration (Ezra 7:6). We are not told what were the requests but we can imagine that these requests were:

Ezra was a scholar with a thorough knowledge of the Law which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given to Moses. Because Ezra had the blessing of the Lord his God, the emperor gave him everything he asked for. In the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes, Ezra set out from Babylonia for Jerusalem with a group of Israelite which included priests, Levites, Temple musicians, Temple guards, and workers. They left Babylonia on the first day of the first month, and with God's help they arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month. Ezra had devoted his life to studying the Law of the Lord, to practicing it, and to teaching all its laws and regulations to the people of Israel. (Ezra- Good News Translation)

³Edwin M- Yamauchi, Persian and the Bible, Baker books, 1996

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And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by **death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment** -Ezra 7:25-26

From the very start of his mission Ezra had the plan to replace the temple personal. He was in need of levites which he fortunately got.

3.4 Cleansing of Priesthood and Leadership

Unholy matrimony of Joseph

Marrying with the foreign nations was not prohibited, we know that Joseph had married the daughters of Egyptian priest.

Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Ase-nath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt. Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. - Genesis 41: 45- 46

Unholy matrimony of Moses

Moses had two wives, one was Madiannite (Exodus 2:21) and other was Cushite.

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, he said, "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.

But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house.

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With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.

When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. 12 Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away."

So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, please heal her!"

The LORD replied to Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back." So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back. -Number 12: 1-15

What is surprising is the God abhorrence towards the marriage of *leaders and chiefs* of Judah with people of land (Ezra 9:2-3), but the same God totally seems happy with the marriage of Esther with unholy King Artaxerxes (Book of Esther). Ezra had used the inter-marriages issue to fulfill his ulterior motives. He had not only victimized the Priests and Levites by this but also used the same weapon to injure the leadership of Judah.

Chapter 4

Under Persian Satrapy

4.1 Nehemiah - The Tirshatha

The book of Nehemiah begins with a dramatic scene. A cup-bearer of the King Artaxerxes in the palace Susa met with the Judeans. The Judeans narrated to the Royal cup-bearer the plight of Jews in Judah and the sorry state of holy city. We have been informed that Nehemiah had no prior knowledge of the Judeans and it seems like as if for the first time he heard the news that Jerusalem is the city with out walls with burned entrances and thresholds! Nehemiah cried and fasted. Nehemiah and Ezra both consider fasting as a ultimate symbol of holiness. The Nehemiah like Persians started to call his God as Lord of Heaven. The same attribute is used by Cyrus and Artaxerxes in there decrees (Ezra 1:2 and 7:23).

There were in the 445 B.C.E. great upheavals in the Persian empire. In Egypt in year 460 B.C.E. revolt broke out, which was put down in 455 B.C.E. In 448 B.C.E. Megabyzus, the satrap of trans-Euphrates rebelled ¹. It means that just three years before Nehemiah met Judeans, a revolt has broke out in the vicinity of Judah. It is quiet possible that some revolutionary tendencies were emerging in Judah also. Nehemiah asked for the king's permission to go to Judah to control the administration. Nehemiah's visit of Judah looks more like an attempt to remove the Jewish junta from power. He arrived in Jerusalem with army commanders and soldiers. We have been informed that he stayed in city for three days and told no body about his plans even the local Jews, priests, elites etc were ill informed (Neh 2:16). The mission was kept in utter Secrecy and at one night he inspected the city surroundings as well. No information has been given about the so called rulers of the city. The Nehemiah is also very critical of former rulers and priests of the city. He denounced the rulers for heavy taxes on the population. The taxes were so high that people were mortgaging their property even selling their children into slavery. Nehemiah forced the Judean leaders and priests to take the oath of returning what

¹F. Charles Fensham, *The book of Ezra and Nehemiah*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Michigan, 1982

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they lent from the farmers.

We know that 13 years ago Ezra-the scribe, had got the the power from King Artaxerxes to appoint judges for all the people of trans-Euphrates and the power to confiscate property, imprisonment and death (Ezra 7:26). However how the power had been shifted from Ezra and someone else is not revealed. Nehemiah had benign relations with Ezra and he even appointed Ezra as the spokesman of Judean-satrapy.

4.2 Construction of Wall

Before the Babylonian invasion there was a defensive wall surrounding Jerusalem. The Book of Kings and Chronicles state that the wall had been destroyed and heavily burned. Surprisingly the pre-exilic prophets like Isaiah and Micah also laments that there is no Wall!

God informed Isaiah that: 60:10

”Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you.
Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion.

Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations their kings led in triumphal procession.

Micah discussed Wall construction:

The day for building your walls will come, the day for extending your boundaries. Micah 7:11

Amos discussed Wall also:

”In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, Amos says: 9:11

Ezekiel discussed Wall:

’Because they lead my people astray, saying, Peace, when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash, 11 therefore tell those who cover it with whitewash that it is going to fall. Rain will come in torrents, and I will send hailstones hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth. 12 When the wall collapses, will people not ask you, ”Where is the whitewash you covered it with?

Ezekiel 13: 10

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Also God of Ezekiel laments that there is nobody to build the wall:

I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none Ezekiel 22:30

In spite of all these revelations we have been informed that the Jerusalem will be a city with out walls. Prophet Zechariah says:

Then I looked up and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand! I asked, Where are you going? He answered me, "To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is. Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the LORD, 'and I will be its glory within.' Zech 2:1- 5

The latest revelation (i.e in Zechariah) considering Wall is explicitly forbid body to build Wall surrounding Jerusalem. Nehemiah started to construct the Wall surrounding the city and in this unholy task not only the local population but also the priest helped, defying the recent holy promise of God uttered through the mouth of Zechariah. A long list of personalities and work assigned is given in Nehemiah, but for us the most important personalities who had helped the Nehemiah in Wall construction were high priest Eliasib (the grandson of Joshua the high priest in time of Zerrubabel) and a person by name Meshullam the son of Berekiah , the son of Meshezabel. In 52 days the work had been completed.

4.3 Social Reforms

Nehemiah said that:

Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. Some were saying, We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain. Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.

Still others were saying, We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters

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to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.

When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, You are exacting usury from your own countrymen! So I called together a large meeting to deal with them 8 and said: As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us! They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

So I continued, What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? 10 I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil.

We will give it back, they said. And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say. Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied! At this the whole assembly said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year twelve years neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. 15 But the earlier governors those preceding me placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. 16 Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of

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all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people Nehemiah 5: 1- 19

4.4 Religious Reforms

4.4.1 New Covenant

In the book of Nehemiah chapter 9 there a long passage of the wording of the new Covenant.

On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the LORD their God. Standing on the stairs were the Levites Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani who called with loud voices to the LORD their God. 5 And the Levites Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah said: "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. "Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. "You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. 8 You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous. - Nehemiah 9:1-8

Nehemiah is referring to the following verses in Genesis:

To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites." - Genesis 15:18 -

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Table 4.1: **Land of Nations for Abraham and Inter-marriage Problem**

| Genesis | Nehemiah | <i>Ezra – intermarriage</i> | Deutrmony-7 |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Kenites | - | - | - |
| Kenizzites | - | - | - |
| Kadmonites | - | - | - |
| Hittites | Hittites | Hittites | Hittites |
| Perizzites | Perizzites | Perizzites | Perizzites |
| Rephaites | - | - | - |
| Amorites | Amorites | Amorites | Amorites |
| Canaanites | Canaanites | Canaanites | Canaanites |
| Girgashites | Girgashites | - Girgashites | Girgashites |
| Jebusites | Jebusites | Jebusites | Jebusites |
| - | - | Ammonites | - |
| - | - | Moabites | - |
| - | - | Egyptians | - |
| - | - | - | Hivites |

The Abraham must be renamed, any connection of Abraham with Babylon must be thoroughly eliminated. The Babylonians were disliked by God, Judeans and Persians alike. In table above the column four list the nations with whom inter marriages are forbidden as commanded by God in Deuteronomy. The column three list the nations which were probelmatic in connections with the Priest and leaders marriages. The column one and two list the nations which God gifted to Abraham as reported in genesis and Nehemiah.

We know that Abraham and Joseph married Egyptian women and Moses married Moabite woman. At the end of book of Nehemiah, we have been informed that Nehemiah saw the jews who had married the Ashdodites, Ammonites and Moabite women. In his anger Nehemiah pulled those jews, even plucked out their hairs. Nehemiah mentioned the sins of Solomon in marrying unholy nations but why Moses, Joseph and Abraham were left? We can simply infer from this information that both Ezra and Nehemiah added the Amorites, Moabites, Egyptians and Ashdodites in the list of inter-marriage Prohibition.

According to book of Nehemiah, the Eliasib (the grandson of Joshua the high priest in time of Zerrubabel) and Meshullam the son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel both were invlved in the inter-marriage with surrounding nations and committed the sin of corrupting the holy seed. Eliasib the priest was relative of Tobiah (Neh 13:4), and the grand son of Eliasib had married the daughter of Sanballat the horonitte (Neh 13:28). Both Tobiah and Sanballat were arch enemies of Nehemiah². No wonder that Nehemiah had removed his opponents by disparrag-

²John Bowman, *The Samaritan Problem*, The Pickwick Press, 1975, also John Bowman, *Samaritan Documents relating to their History, Religion and Life*, The Pickwick Press, 1977

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ing them for no good reason. What else we can expect, Nehemiah removed them from the temple personal. This was the beginning of the great schism in Judaism. Josephus has written in Antiquities (XI .306-312) that Manasseh the brother of high priest Jaddua married Nikaso, daughter of Sanballat, governor of Samaria. Meshullam the son of Berekiah , the son of Meshezabel and Tobiah were close relatives (Nehemiah 6:17-18). Both Meshullam and Eliasb helped Nehemiah in Wall construction project. It is clear that they were deceived in this project and Nehemiah like Ezra not revealed his motives in beginning. Because of this politics in temple and society the group decided to make a new temple in parallel to Jerusalem. The location was Mount Gerizim in Samaria the territory of Sanballat. The Shechem (Nablus) was under Sanballat control. In Pentateuch the region is attributed to the people who used to rape the Jews! John Hyrcanus destroyed this temple on Mt. Gerizim in second century B.C.E.

The question of unholy matrimones is also addressed by Nehemiah see Neh 13:4-5, Neh 13:28, Neh 4:7, Neh 3:1, Neh 12:10

Nehemiah like Zechariah considered the Judeans still in Serfdom.

”But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. **They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery.** But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them, even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, ’This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,’ or when they committed awful blasphemies.

”But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. **They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.**

”But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time.

”You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances,

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by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples. But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

”Now therefore, O our God, the great, mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, upon our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. 33 In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong. 34 Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the warnings you gave them. 35 Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways.

”But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.

”In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.” - Nehemiah 9:36-38

4.4.2 Feast of Seventh month, Tabernacles

They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: ”Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make booths”-as it is written.

So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts

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of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. **From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this.** And their joy was very great.

Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly- Nehemiah 8: 14- 19

Ezra wants the feast of Seventh month celebrated in Public. It is also important that this feast is ordained by God but none of the King of Jews bothered to celebrate this, not even David celebrated this.

According to Zechariah, this was not a day of Feast but of mourning.

Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?' "

-Zechariah 7: 3 - 6

After some time in the Second Temple period some days were declared by God as days of festival.

Again the word of the LORD Almighty came to me. This is what the LORD Almighty says: "The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace. Zechariah 8: 18 -

No one knows about the day as festival before Second temple period. The Judeans used to mourn on this day and later after return they changed the same days into days of celebration. The question is why they were mourning on this day and not on any other day. We know from book of Kings and Chronicles that King Josiah was very devout and religiously observed the festivals mentioned in Book of Moses (In words of author of book of Kings and Chronicles, acted on law with all his heart and all his soul 2 Kings 23:25, 2 Chr 34: 31-32). The only festival he had celebrated was feast of unleavened bread. It is now widely believed that the book found in the temple in the reign of Josiah was Deuteronomy. The tone

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of Deuteronomy chapter 12 to 26 is also different from rest of the so called books of Moses. It seems like that the original Torah is in the Deuteronomy and the rest of the books are historical, scribal and priestly additions.

Amorites and Ammonites were declared as cursed nation in final rendition of Torah:

No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live. Deuteronomy 23: 2 - 6

The same tone against Ammonites is used by Ezekiel: 25:25 and message is introduced in Leviticus 24: 37 - 41

Chapter 5

Time to look back...

This is a small effort to show to reader the key to decipher the complexity of biblical prophetic literature. The authors of books of prophets are actually living in same era i.e. early second temple period. The conflicts and issues addressed by authors are those faced by Zerrubabel, High Priest Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah. The contending and conflicting ideas caused the groups formation in which Haggai and Zechariah supported Zerrubabel and High Priest Joshua. Whereas Ezra and Nehemiah are supported by priest who brought writings of Ezekiel, Isaiah, Amos, Zephaniah etc hyperbolically projected in pre-Persian period. Each group called others as false prophets.

Later the corpus of these writings brought conflicting believes and caused formation of new sects in Judaism. Not only that the writings have instigated racial and ethnic problems with other communities living in middle east.

Prophetic literature predicted the appearance of two Messiahs (Davidic and Josephian) to resolve the disputes among jews. Their purpose is to cleanse the land from corrupt priesthood of temple. Later Messiah does appear as foretold by these prophets. But the one that came (Jesus)- was humble and not arrogant. He was not moved by the ritual complexities and burningg altar of temple; but believed in the innocence of hearts and liked the God-fearing jews. For him the temple and its priesthood have strayed from path of God. He predicted the second destruction of temple and - it happened - as foretold!