

The Contributions of Cyrus, Darius I, and Artaxerxes I to the Decree to Restore and Build Jerusalem

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The question in Daniel 9:25 of who issued the “commandment,” “word,” “decree,” or “command to restore and build Jerusalem,” (NKJV)¹, has occupied Bible scholars for centuries. Three major interpretations have emerged about the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. The first view states that the decree was issued by the Persian King Cyrus the Great (reigned 559-530 BC). The second view was that King Darius I (reigned 522-486 BC) issued the decree. The third view associates the decree with King Artaxerxes I Longimanus (reigned 465-425 BC). Today most scholars hold to the first or second view, the traditional Adventist view supports the third option. This paper will look at the fundamental differences of each of these three views that have prevented them to come to an agreement on the decrees to rebuild Jerusalem and how the views of the decrees of Cyrus and Darius I can be adapted to the Adventist position.

The thesis of the paper is that there is historical and biblical evidence that the decrees of Cyrus, Darius I and Artaxerxes I all contributed to the restoration and building of Jerusalem, but that the decree of Artaxerxes I is the one that qualifies as the decree of Daniel 9:25.

¹ All Scripture references in this study are from the NKJV.

The Contribution of Cyrus

The Command to Build

Biblical scholars who stress that Cyrus was the one who was responsible for the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile refer to the prophecies of Isaiah 44 and 45. In Isaiah 44:28 the Lord prophesied of Cyrus, “He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be built,’ and to the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’” Also in Isaiah 45:13 the Lord prophesied about Cyrus, “‘I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways; He shall build My city and let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

These commentators argue that this Bible prophecy refers to Cyrus as the one who was *to build* Jerusalem and the one who would *restore* the exiles to their homeland. Both elements of building and restoring were referred to in the decree of Daniel 9:25 and Cyrus fulfilled them.

Supporters of each of the above views agree that Cyrus’ decree involved the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple. This is clearly stated in Cyrus’ proclamation in Ezra 1:2-4. In this passage Cyrus acknowledged that “the Lord God of heaven . . . has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem.” As a result, Cyrus commanded that the exiles “go up to Jerusalem . . . and build the house of the Lord God of Israel . . . which is in Jerusalem.”

What is the evidence that Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled by Cyrus issuing a decree to rebuild Jerusalem that led the returning Jewish exiles under Zerubbabel to begin the rebuilding of the city itself? Some scholars who hold that Cyrus issued the decree of Daniel 9:25 have suggested that the rebuilding of Jerusalem was postponed till the time of Ezra under King Artaxerxes I of Ezra 7, nearly a century later. If there is, no biblical evidence of a rebuilding of Jerusalem prior to Ezra’s journey to Jerusalem in 457 BC, is there any evidence from extra biblical sources about the rebuilding of the city?

Cyrus’ Decree to Build Jerusalem

Some early extra biblical Jewish sources such as the apocryphal book of 1 Esdras (2nd cent. BC) and the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37–c. 100), recounting the Jewish experience during Persian times do not support the view that the building of the city had to wait till Ezra’s return to Judah. These documents start the beginning of Jerusalem’s rebuilding after the Babylonian captivity at a much earlier date.

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Josephus reported that after Cyrus read Isaiah's prophecies "an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written; so he called for the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon, and said to them, that he gave them leave to go back to their own country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem, and the temple of God, for that he would be their assistant."²

Josephus quoted Cyrus' letter that was addressed as follows: "King Cyrus to Sisinnes and Sathrabuzanes, sendeth greeting." It included the decree to rebuild the city and the temple, "I have given leave to as many of the Jews that dwell in my country as please to return to their own country, and to rebuild their city, and to build the temple of God at Jerusalem, on the same place where it was before. I have also sent my treasurer, Mithradates, and Zerubbabel, the governor of the Jews, that they may lay the foundation of the temple . . ."³

The letter included a detailed account of the dimensions and composition of the temple, to all be paid out of the king's revenues. In return, Cyrus expected the Jews to "pray to God for the preservation of the king and of his family that the kingdom of Persia may continue."⁴ Cyrus concluded his letter stating that those who disobeyed this policy were to be crucified and their possessions to be confiscated, becoming part of the king's treasury.⁵

The Opposition

In spite of Cyrus' good intentions and efforts to implement plans for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple, things did not work out as he expected. In Ezra 4:1-5 we find the story of the opposition of the people of the land to the rebuilding efforts of the Jews. "The people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:4, 5).

About the attempts to interrupt the Jewish efforts to rebuild the city and the temple during the reign of Cyrus, Josephus wrote that these

² Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, in *Josephus Complete Works*. Translated by William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1960), book XI, chapter i, section 2. Although this translation is old, it is still in harmony with the latest scholarship supporting the arguments used in this paper.

³ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI,i, 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

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opponents “besought the governors, and those that had the care of such affairs, that they would interrupt the Jews, both in the rebuilding of their city, and in the building of their temple.”⁶ Through bribes they were successful in slowing down the rebuilding efforts during the rest of Cyrus’ reign. During this time Cyrus was preoccupied with the affairs of his own kingdom and was unaware of the schemes of the Samaritans.⁷

Ezra wrote that the attempts to interrupt the rebuilding efforts began under the reign of Cyrus and continued during the reign of the following two Persian kings, Ahasuerus, also named Cambyses, and Artaxerxes, also called False Smerdis, till the reign of Darius I (Ezra 4:5, 24) about 8 years later.

Letter to Ahasuerus about Building the City

After Cyrus’ death, his son Cambyses succeeded to the throne of Persia. Now the Jewish adversaries wrote a letter of complaint to Ahasuerus (Cambyses) and another letter to Artaxerxes (the False Smerdis), the two Persian kings who reigned during the eight year time interval between Cyrus and Darius I.

The first letter of complaint was written in the beginning of the reign of Ahasuerus (Cambyses) (Ezra 4:6). This letter was recorded by Josephus who described how these opponents complained that the Jews “are building that rebellious and wicked city, and its market places, and setting up its walls and raising up the temple.”⁸ They warned Cambyses (Ahasuerus) that after the Jews finished the rebuilding, they would not be willing to pay tribute to the king because “the Jews have been rebels, and enemies to kings.”⁹

In response to this letter, Cambyses (Ahasuerus) issued a decree that the Jews cease the rebuilding of Jerusalem: “I give order, that the Jews shall not be permitted to build that city, lest such mischief as they used to bring upon kings be greatly augmented.”¹⁰ As a result, the regional authorities quickly went to Jerusalem “and forbade the Jews to build the city and the temple.”¹¹ Thus the rebuilding, according to Josephus, was interrupted till the second year of Darius I.

⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, ii, 1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, ii, 2.

¹¹ Ibid.

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Letter to Artaxerxes about Building the City

The second letter of complaint by the Jewish adversaries used similar arguments as in the previous letter the Jewish adversaries wrote to King Ahasuerus (Cambyses) However, this second letter was written to King Artaxerxes (the False Smerdis) (Ezra 4:7). This letter is mentioned in 1 Esdras 2. Here we find correspondence between the Jewish adversaries writing to Artaxerxes (the False Smerdis), requesting the cessation of the rebuilding activities. This letter, similar to the one in Ezra 4:11-16, led to the interruption of the rebuilding efforts of the city and temple before the reign of King Darius I Hystaspes (Ezra 4:8-24). There is, however, one difference. 1 Esdras 2 mentions the rebuilding of the city as well as the temple. It said that the Jews were “building that rebellious and wicked city, repairing its marketplaces and walls and laying the foundations for a temple.”¹²

In response, Artaxerxes (the False Smerdis) issued orders to stop the rebuilding of the city. The result was that “the building of the temple in Jerusalem ceased until the second year of reign of Darius king of the Persians.”¹³ The content of this letter clearly shows that the Artaxerxes (the False Smerdis) of this letter is not the Artaxerxes I from Ezra 7, because under Artaxerxes I the foundations of the temple were already laid many years prior to his reign.

Again we notice that the narrative in 1 Esdras 2 is written in a continual chronological order or sequence, as was the case with the letter of the Jewish adversaries to Cambyses. In reviewing the history of the interpretation of Ezra 4 most commentators until the 19th century interpreted this narrative in a continual chronological order. These commentators interpreted Ezra 4:6-23 as a record of the opposition against the Jews between the reigns of Cyrus and Darius I. They, therefore, identified the name Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6 and the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7 with the Persian kings Cambyses and the False Smerdis, so named by the Greek historians.

Today, instead of a continual chronological reading of the Book of Ezra and Ezra chapter 4, commentators generally follow a thematic arrangement of the order of events in Ezra 4 that assumes that Ezra 4 reports all opposition against the rebuilding efforts covering a period of more than 70 years from Cyrus till the Artaxerxes I Longimanus of Ezra 7 (457 BC), instead a period of about 8 years from Cyrus till Artaxerxes,

¹² 1 Esdras 2:18.

¹³ 1 Esdras 2:30.

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the False Smerdis, of 522 BC. This thematic interpretation assumes that the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4 is the same as King Artaxerxes I of Ezra 7. The problem with this view is that events are out of order: king Artaxerxes in Ezra 4 issues a decree to *cease* the rebuilding of Jerusalem while later in Ezra 7 king Artaxerxes issues a decree to *begin* restoring and building Jerusalem. Furthermore, for Artaxerxes to call a halt to the rebuilding of Jerusalem in chapter 4, while the same king and his counselors early in his reign in Ezra 7 issued a royal decree for the rebuilding of the city is very problematic because the laws of the Medes and Persians are unchangeable (Esther 1:19; Dan. 6:14-16). In addition, there are significant differences between Artaxerxes' letter in Ezra 4 and Artaxerxes' letter in Ezra 7 that make it difficult to assume that they are written by the same king.¹⁴

An often-cited objection against the chronological order of events in Ezra 4 has been that the Samaritans identified the Jews who were rebuilding Jerusalem as “the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem” (Ezra 4:12). This has been seen as evidence that it referred to the Jews who had returned under Ezra to Palestine in 457 BC which means that the letter by the Samaritans was sent to Artaxerxes I.

The phrase “from you have come to us,” however, does not necessarily mean that the Jews came from Artaxerxes I. It could also be a general statement that referred to the Jews who had come from Persia during the first and largest Jewish migration under King Cyrus. We should keep in mind that the local population had been conspiring against the Jewish exiles ever since their return during the reign of Cyrus (Ezra 4:5).

In summary, there is solid evidence that Ezra 4:4-23 depicts the events between Cyrus and Darius I that provides biblical evidence of a rebuilding of Jerusalem by the Jews during that period. Then the account of Ezra 4:4-23 reveals that the Jews who returned during the first exodus from Babylon “are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations” (Ezra 4:12). This means that a chronological order of events in Ezra 4 would be in full harmony with the chronological accounts of 1 Esdras 2 and Josephus' *Antiquities* XI, ii.

If, however, one accepts a thematic interpretation of Ezra 4, assigning the events in Ezra 4:4-23 to King Xerxes and King Artaxerxes I, then there is no biblical evidence for building the city from the time of

¹⁴ See the Appendix, “An Analysis of Artaxerxes' Letters and Their Relevance for the Chronology of Ezra 4.”

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Cyrus till Darius I onward. It is no wonder that scholars supporting the thematic interpretation of Ezra 4 do not refer to Persian history as described in 1 Esdras 2 and Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, ii.

Early Adventist commentators,¹⁵ including Ellen G. White, also interpreted the continual chronological order of the opposition harassments in Ezra 4 and mentioned that the Samaritans persuaded the False Smerdis, called Artaxerxes in Ezra 4, to issue a decree forbidding the Jews to rebuild their temple and city. Ellen White also held that in the Book of Ezra there were two kings named Artaxerxes. The first Artaxerxes in Ezra 4 was the False Smerdis (522 BC), the second Artaxerxes was Artaxerxes I Longimanus (465-424 BC) in Ezra 6-8.¹⁶

In response to the question if Cyrus contributed to a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, we can affirm that our research shows that Cyrus issued a decree that gave the returning Jews the permission to do just that. This means that Cyrus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that he would issue a decree to build Jerusalem.

However, we still need to show if Cyrus issued the very decree of Daniel 9:25. Keep in mind that Daniel's decree is part of the 70 weeks prophecy which stipulates that from the "going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince there shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks." This means that there are a total of 69 prophetic weeks from the issuing of the decree to build Jerusalem till the coming of the Messiah. These 69 prophetic weeks amount to $69 \times 7 = 483$ prophetic days. Using the historicist hermeneutic that employs the year-day principle that a prophetic day is an actual solar year, most Protestants have used since the Reformation to explain the time element in apocalyptic prophecy, we arrive at a period of 483 years from the time of the issuing the decree till the appearance of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. If we accept that the proclamation of Cyrus' decree took place in c. 537 BC we find that the appearance of Jesus Christ as Messiah would be 483 years later which comes to the year 54 BC. This is more than 50 years before the birth of Christ. It becomes clear that Cyrus decree in c. 537 to build Jerusalem does not qualify to be the very decree of Daniel 9:25.

¹⁵ See e.g. John N. Andrews, *The Command to Restore and Build Jerusalem* (Battle Creek, MI: SDA Pub. Assn., 1865), 25.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White *Prophets and Kings*, 572; "The Return of the Exiles—No. 5," *Review and Herald*, Dec 5, 1907.

The Contribution of Darius I Hystaspes

Darius' Decree to Build Jerusalem

After the death of Cyrus, his son Cambyses ruled Persia, followed by the short reign of Artaxerxes, the False Smerdis, the usurper to the Persian throne. After defeating the False Smerdis, Darius I Hystaspes became king of Persia. Josephus mentioned that there was an old friendship between Darius and Zerubbabel, governor over the Jewish exiles who had returned to Jerusalem. In the first year of Darius' reign, Zerubbabel visited the king. During this visit Zerubbabel reminded King Darius I of a vow he made as a private citizen that if he became king he would "rebuild Jerusalem, and to build therein the temple of God, as also to restore the vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had pillaged, and carried to Babylon."¹⁷ Accordingly, Darius wrote to the toparchs and governors requesting them to assist Zerubbabel with continuing the building of the temple. He also sent "letters to those rulers that were in Syria and Phoenicia to cut down and carry cedar trees from Lebanon to Jerusalem, and to assist him in building the city."¹⁸

Josephus concluded his comments on Darius with the following: "And all that Cyrus intended to do before him, relating to the restoration of Jerusalem, Darius also ordained should be done accordingly."¹⁹

The Book of 1 Esdras affirms this story.²⁰ From this is it clear that soon after Darius became king of Persia, he unknowingly revived Cyrus' command regarding the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. Following Darius' orders, the building activities were resumed. These efforts prospered under the ministry of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah and the political and spiritual leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 5:1, 2).

The Opposition

Soon, however, there was another attempt to interfere with the rebuilding. Several Persian officials in charge of the area visited the city and demanded to know who had authorized the rebuilding activities. The Jews stressed that all they were building had originally been authorized by the decree of Cyrus. Tattenai, the Persian governor, wrote a letter to

¹⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, iii, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, X I, iii, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ 1 Esdras 3-6.

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Darius, asking him to see if indeed Cyrus issued such a decree (Ezra 5:7-17).

Darius' Decree Affirmed Cyrus' Decree to Build Jerusalem

Upon investigation, Darius discovered that indeed Cyrus had issued a decree, giving the returning exiles permission to rebuild. As a result, in about 520/519 BC, Darius issued his own decree that affirmed Cyrus' decree and emphasized that the building of the temple should be paid out of the king's treasury as well as all the expenses of the sacrifices. The king stressed that no one should interfere with this building process. It was his desire that the Jewish priests "may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons" (Ezra 6:10).

He ended his decree by stating that whoever would alter this edict, "let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this" (Ezra 6:11). The temple was finished in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius (Ezra 6:15), about 515 BC.

The above events are also described in 1 Esdras 6 and 7. In addition, Josephus wrote that the Persian authorities contacted Darius and "accused the Jews how they fortified the city, and built the temple."²¹ These Persian authorities asked Darius to investigate whether these matters had been authorized. The Jewish exiles became very concerned about this matter. Josephus wrote: "The Jews were now under terror, and afraid lest the king should change his resolution as to the building of Jerusalem, and of the temple."²² At that time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the Jewish exiles to be "of good cheer, and to expect no discouragement from the Persians, for that God foretold this to them"²³ This had a positive effect and "they applied themselves earnestly to building, and did not intermit one day."²⁴

When Darius received the letter from the Persian authorities who showed him "the epistle of Cambyses [Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6], wherein he forbade them to build the temple" Darius made an investigation into the royal records.²⁵ Upon locating Cyrus' decree permitting the Jews to build the temple, Darius wrote a letter instructing the Persian officials to

²¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, iv, 6.

²² Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, iv, 5.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, iv, 6.

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assist the Jews with the building of the temple, pay for the temple sacrifices from the taxes collected in their regions.²⁶

One observes that Josephus' account is very similar to that of Ezra 4 and 1 Esdras, except he mentions that the rebuilding of the city was also in progress.

In summary, we observe that Darius did not add anything to Cyrus' decree about the rebuilding of the city and the temple. Darius was responsible for restarting the interrupted rebuilding process by his decree that basically reaffirmed the decree of Cyrus.

In response to the question if Darius contributed to a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem we can affirm that Darius' decree was responsible for restarting the interrupted rebuilding process.

However, we still need to determine if Darius I's decree could be considered the decree of Daniel 9:25. We will use again the historicist hermeneutic that uses the year-day principle most Protestants have used since the Reformation to calculate the appearance of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. If we assume that the proclamation of Darius I's decree took place in c. 520 BC we will find that the appearance of Jesus Christ as Messiah took place 483 years later which would be the year 37 BC. This is more than 30 years before the birth of Christ. Again, it is obvious that Darius I's decree in c. 520 BC to rebuild Jerusalem does not qualify to be the very decree of Daniel 9:25.

The Contribution of Artaxerxes I Longimanus

Artaxerxes' Decree to Restore and Build Jerusalem

The last Persian king who issued a command related to Jerusalem was Artaxerxes I Longimanus. In his seventh year, Artaxerxes I issued a decree about the Jews in a letter to Ezra, a priest and "skilled scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6). This decree is the third decree related to the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem. Analyzing this decree, one observes that it went further than the previous decrees by providing religious and political liberty to the Jews.

First, the decree provides financial assistance to the priests and those involved in the religious services and granted their ancient privileges by removing all obstacles to their work. The decree says, "We inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God" (Ezra 7:24).

²⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, iv, 7.

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Second, the decree also restores a certain amount of political and judicial freedom to the Jews by giving Ezra the liberty to appoint civil officers to rule the people Beyond the River with the Jewish law code. The decree states, “And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God and teach those who do not know them” (Ezra 7:25).

Third, the decree specifies Artaxerxes’ continued commitment to improving the appearance of the temple. Ezra writes that God had put it in the king’s heart “to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 7:27).

The resulting decree restored religious and political freedom, until both the temple and the city would be fully finished. Thus, Ezra could state about the impact of King Artaxerxes’ “commandment to restore and build Jerusalem,” “He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem” (Ezra 9:9).

These events in the history of Artaxerxes I we find also recorded in 1 Esdras 8. Josephus also recounts a similar history. However, Josephus assigns this decree to King Xerxes, the son of Darius I.²⁷ It is clear Josephus confused Artaxerxes I with Xerxes. If he would have placed these events under Artaxerxes I, the history would have been identical.

The Opposition

Ezra’s rebuilding efforts too faced challenges. After thirteen years of labor, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I, the Jewish adversaries once again succeeded in interrupting the work of rebuilding the city. At that time Nehemiah, the king’s cupbearer, met some Jews from Jerusalem who had just arrived in Shushan, the Persian capital. When he inquired about the condition of the Jewish exiles in Judah he received a bad report: The Jews are “in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire” (Neh. 1:3).

This news so deeply affected Nehemiah that the king noticed it. When the king asks Nehemiah what troubled him, he responded, “Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?” (Neh. 2:3).

²⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, v, 1, 2.

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Then King Artaxerxes I asks Nehemiah if he has any requests. Nehemiah petitions the king to send him “to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it” (Neh. 2:5). He also requests the king to give him letters of safe passage “for the governors of the regions beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah” (Neh. 2:7). He also asks for a letter to the keeper of the king’s forest “that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy” (Neh. 2:8). The king grants his requests and Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem without difficulty.

As soon as Nehemiah arrives in Judah, he “viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire” (Neh. 2:13). Then he quickly designs plans to finish the rebuilding of the walls of the city. In spite of strong opposition, he with the concerted effort of the loyal Jews, completes the rebuilding of the walls in only fifty-two days (Neh. 6:15).

Artaxerxes I’s Decree Affirms the Time of the Messiah

Finally, we need to determine if Artaxerxes I’s decree can be considered as the decree of Daniel 9:25. Using the historicist hermeneutic we indeed are able to find the time when Jesus Christ became the Messiah. If we accept that the proclamation of Artaxerxes I’s decree took place at the beginning of the 70th week, in 457 BC, we find that the appearance of Jesus Christ as Messiah took place 483 years later. At the end of the 69th week, which would be in the year AD 27. This is exactly the year that Jesus of Nazareth became the Messiah. In that year which was the 15th year of Emperor Tiberius Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan (Luke 3:1-3, 20. 21). At the time of his baptism Jesus of Nazareth was anointed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38) and became Jesus the Messiah (Hebrew), the Anointed, which is Jesus the Christ (Greek), the Anointed. This confirms that the decree of Artaxerxes I issued in 457 BC to rebuild Jerusalem qualifies to be the very decree of Daniel 9:25.

Conclusion

From this research it has become clear that each of the Persian kings, Cyrus, Darius I, and Artaxerxes I contributed to a decree to restore and build Jerusalem. It is especially the extra biblical evidence provided by 1 Esdras and Josephus that shows that the decrees of both Cyrus and Darius I involve a command to rebuild Jerusalem.

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In addition, the chronological reading of the order of events in Ezra 4 affirms that the Jews were rebuilding Jerusalem during the reigns of Cyrus and Darius I showing that this rebuilding was the result of the decree of Cyrus. This evidence confirms that in the Book of Ezra there were two kings with the name Artaxerxes. The Artaxerxes of Ezra 4 is the False Smerdis, and the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7 is Artaxerxes I Longimanus. The thematic reading of Ezra 4 and the Book of Ezra with only one king Artaxerxes who in Ezra 4 first decrees to cease the rebuilding of Jerusalem and later on in Ezra 7 issues a decree to begin rebuilding the city conflicts with the fact that the laws of the Medes and Persians are unchangeable (Dan 6:14-17).

However, which decree issued by these three kings is the decree of Daniel 9:25 has to be evaluated in the context of the 70-week time prophecy of Daniel 9:25. In the light of the historicist hermeneutic that a prophetic day is a solar year, the 69 prophetic weeks or 483 prophetic days are 483 solar years that cover the time period from the issuing of the decree of Daniel 9:25 till the time of the Messiah. It is only the third decree under Artaxerxes I issued in 457 BC that gives the correct calculation that reaches to the time of the appearing of Jesus as the Messiah. When we take the beginning of the issuing of the decree of Daniel 9:25 in 457 BC and add 483 years, we arrive in the year AD 27 when Jesus was baptized and anointed by the Holy Spirit to become the Messiah or Jesus Christ. If one makes calculations based on the decrees of rebuilding Jerusalem by Cyrus and Darius I Hystaspes which were issued respectively in c. 537 BC and c. 520 BC it leads to a time of 50 and 30 years prior to the appearing of the Messiah.

This study, therefore, affirms the thesis that there is historical and biblical evidence that the decrees of Cyrus, Darius I and Artaxerxes I all contributed to the restoration and building of Jerusalem, but the decree of Artaxerxes I is the only one that qualifies to fulfill the prophecy that there are 69 prophetic weeks from the issuing of the decree of Daniel 9:25 to restore and build Jerusalem that reach till AD 27, the very year that Jesus became Messiah the Prince.

Appendix

**An Analysis of Artaxerxes' Letters and Their Relevance
for the Chronology of Ezra 4**

Introduction

No careful attention has been given to the nature and content of the letters of Artaxerxes in Ezra 4 and 7 and their value for the chronology of Ezra 4. This essay attempts to investigate these letters in the light of their specific content, structure, composition, their audience, and unique context. The findings of this linguistic and contextual exegesis of Artaxerxes' letters point out that the author of the letter of Ezra 4 and that of Ezra 7 is not the same person. Based on the internal evidence of the Book of Ezra, the essay suggests the need to adjust current views of the structure of Ezra 4.²⁸

Issues in the Identification of the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4

This research brings out significant arguments for a harmonious chronology of Ezra 4 that are necessary for a proper understanding of the historical interaction between the Persians rulers, the Samaritans, and the Jews between the time of Cyrus and Ezra and Nehemiah.

Current studies on Ezra 4 interpret the chapter in a thematic manner. Extra-biblical documents show that there were three kings with the name Artaxerxes. The first was Artaxerxes I Longimanus who reigned during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah from 465 to 424 BC, the second was Artaxerxes Mnemon (404-359 BC), and the third was Artaxerxes Ochus (358-338 BC). These three similar names have led scholars to conclude that the Artaxerxes mentioned in Ezra 4:7; 6:14; 7:1 is one and the same, namely Artaxerxes I. But is this correct?

Of late, no attention has been given to analyzing the two letters from Artaxerxes in the Book of Ezra. The first letter is found in Ezra 4, the other in Ezra 7. According to the current non-chronological but thematic interpretation of Ezra 4, Artaxerxes I wrote both these letters, with the letter in Ezra 4 written first, calling for a cessation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, followed by the one in Ezra 7 calling to begin rebuilding the city, written several years later. At this point one may like

²⁸ This appendix was adapted from of a paper under a similar title presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington, D.C., Nov. 15, 2006.

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to raise the following questions, “How strong is the evidence that the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7 is the same person as the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7?” “What is the evidence that these letters have been written by two different Persian kings named Artaxerxes?”

Let us now begin our analysis of the two letters in the Book of Ezra.

Internal evidence in Ezra

To establish if the Book of Ezra has one Artaxerxes or two, we will first consider the immediate context of the Artaxerxes of 4:7. Then we will consider the larger context of the two letters in chapter 4 and 7.

Immediate context of Artaxerxes’ letter in Ezra 4

According to the traditional viewpoint, Ezra 4 discusses the continual opposition against the Jewish rebuilding efforts in a chronological order from Cyrus (536/535 BC) until the second year of Darius I (520 BC). During this time the Samaritans finally succeed in bringing the building process to a halt.

Chapter 4 mentions that the Samaritans wrote two letters against the Jews to the Persian kings to interrupt the rebuilding process. The first letter was to Ahasuerus, accusing the Jews of rebuilding Jerusalem. The second letter was written, to Artaxerxes, warning that if the Jews succeeded in rebuilding the city the Jews would rebel and the king would lose his dominion over the region Beyond the River.

Artaxerxes responded to the second letter issuing a command to the Jews prohibiting any further rebuilding of Jerusalem (522 BC). As a result of this letter the building of the temple was discontinued till the second year of Darius I (520 BC) (Ezra 4:24).

At first glance, a straightforward natural reading of these events suggests Artaxerxes’ letter (4:17-22) would have to be written decades earlier than the Artaxerxes letter in chapter 7. This would indicate that different persons would have written these letters and that the book of Ezra should be read chronologically instead of thematically.

Comparisons of the Artaxerxes’ Letters in Ezra 4 and 7

An analysis of the letters by Artaxerxes in Ezra 4 and 7 provides further insight into whether or not these letters had the same author. Careful comparison of the two Artaxerxes letters reveals significant differences in how the writer addressed the recipients, his familiarity with the Jews’ recent history, the manner in which he communicated the

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letters, the motives underlying his actions, and the subject matter of the letters.

Differences in addressing the letters

First, one notices differences in the way each of these letters addressed recipients. In Ezra 4:17 Artaxerxes began his letter simply with the words “To Rehum the commander.” By contrast, in the letter of Ezra 7, Artaxerxes started by announcing himself as supreme ruler, “Artaxerxes, king of kings” (Ezra 7:12).

This difference shows the disparity in authority and governmental support of the authors of these letters. The manner the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7 addresses the recipients reveals kingly authority and dignity. The document has the authority of the king as well as that of his seven counselors and is addressed to Ezra and all the treasurers of the region Beyond the River. The document sent by the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4 seems to be nothing more than a personal letter that lacks any kingly authority. It is only directed to local authorities and not to the Persian governmental authorities in charge of the Persian province Beyond the River.

Differences in Familiarity with Jewish History

Second, there are substantial differences in the Artaxerxes’ familiarity with the God of the Jews and the Jewish experience. In Ezra 4 Artaxerxes did not seem to be well acquainted with Jewish history. Following the charges of the Jewish adversaries, he launched an investigation into the history of the Jews to examine the validity of the charge of their wickedness. After he found out the rebellious history of the Jews, he issued orders stopping the building of the city out of fear that it would have a damaging impact on the kings of Persia (Ezra 4:22).

In Ezra 7, however, Artaxerxes appears to be well acquainted with the Jews and their history. The contents of the letter seem to point to a more intimate relationship between the king and Ezra and when the king signed the document, he understood what he was signing.

In this decree the king showed great respect for the God of the Jews whom he addressed as “the God of heaven” (Ezra 7:23). The king recognized that refusing to honor this God would bring “wrath against the realm of the king and his sons” (Ezra 7:23).

The king acknowledged Ezra as “the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven” (Ezra 7:12). The king’s decree allowed any Jew to return with Ezra to Jerusalem, provided lavish contributions for the

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temple services and its beautification, and granted a tax-exempt status to those who served in the temple (Ezra 7:16-20, 23, 24, 27).

Artaxerxes' comment about Ezra's "God-given wisdom" (Ezra 7:25) seem to indicate that the king was well acquainted with Ezra. From this relationship the king might have developed his great respect for Ezra's God.

Artaxerxes' great confidence in Ezra's "God-given wisdom" was reflected in the king's decree that commissioned Ezra to set up an administrative and judicial system that oversaw the whole area Beyond the River. The king went so far as to place this region under the jurisdiction of the law of Israel's God and the law of the king of Persia, threatening transgressors of these laws with severe penalties (Ezra 7:25, 26). This action seems to indicate that Ezra was a special representative of the Persian kingdom with extensive powers to set up a governing body to take care of this extensive region. Again, this would indicate that different persons wrote the letters.

Differences in Communicating the Letters

Third, there are also major differences in the manner the letters of Ezra 4 and 7 were communicated. In Ezra 4 Artaxerxes wrote a personal letter addressed directly to a local commander, a scribe, and representatives of the people settled in the region of Samaria, giving them orders to stop rebuilding Jerusalem.

By contrast, in Ezra 7 the Artaxerxes' letter contained a decree that had the approval of the king and his counselors and was sent to Persian government officials, "the king's satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River" (8:36). This meant that the Persian king and his counselors informed every official in the western Persian province Beyond the River about the royal decree that gave Ezra full permission to appoint administrators and judges who were familiar with the laws of Moses and were able to teach them how to comply with them (7:25).

If you remember, according to scholars' current "thematic" model, the letter of Ezra 4 was actually supposed to have been composed after the one in Ezra 7. However, it seems out of the ordinary that in Ezra 4 the king would send a personal letter to a group of foreign settlers that would abolish his earlier royal decree of Ezra 7:12, 13 that was sent to all government officials in the province Beyond the River. The proper way to reverse a previous decree would be that Artaxerxes and his counselors again would inform the king's satraps and governors about his change of mind regarding the Jews and their rebuilding operation.

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Additionally, in the light of the longstanding reputation that the laws of the Medes and Persians are unchangeable this action would be contrary to the practice of the Medes and the Persians. History shows several examples that their laws cannot be changed (Dan 6:12-17; Esther 3:5-15; 8:4-12).

From this custom one may conclude that the writing of a personal letter to reverse Artaxerxes' royal decree in favor of the Jews fits better the scenario of another Artaxerxes, who did not have full control over the whole Persian kingdom, issuing a command that went contrary to a royal law previously proclaimed. This may explain why Artaxerxes' letter in Ezra 4:17 lacked the endorsement of other royal officials that accompanied the Artaxerxes' letter in Ezra 7:14.

Differences in Motives Underlying the King's Actions

Fourth, the Artaxerxes' letters reveal significant differences in the motives that led the writers to respond to the Jews in order that the Persian kingdom would prosper. The Artaxerxes of Ezra 4 took actions against the Jews out of fear that they would rebel and become autonomous, thereby causing damage "to the hurt of the kings" (4:22). The Artaxerxes of Ezra 7 took actions favorable to the Jews, subsidizing their temple and allowing them to have administrative and judicial autonomy over the whole of the region Beyond the River to avoid God's "wrath against the realm of the king and his sons" (7:23).

The Artaxerxes of Ezra 4 curtailed the Jews to protect the Persian throne; the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7 granted the Jews great autonomy to protect the Persian throne. It is difficult to imagine that the same king wrote both letters only a few years apart with such conflicting motives, yet with the same purpose—to protect the Persian throne. Instead of the same person issuing conflicting laws for the Jews based on conflicting motives, it seems much more plausible that these letters were written by two different persons, each one called Artaxerxes.

The argument that the king was temperamental and unstable throughout his life does not seem reasonable. The high reputation the king had among Persian historians challenges the way some scholars have portrayed Artaxerxes to prove his unreliability. There is no solid evidence in Persian history that would suggest such drastic changes in the king's policies. Again, one should keep in mind the unchangeableness of Persian law at that time.

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Differences in Subject Matters of a Conflicting Nature

Fifth, the subject matters of Artaxerxes' letters are of an opposite nature. In Ezra 4 Artaxerxes took actions restricting the rights of the Jews, bringing the rebuilding of Jerusalem to a halt (4:21, 22).

In Ezra 7 Artaxerxes extends the rights of Jews, allowing them to beautify the temple, give them great autonomy by extending their judicial powers over the inhabitants of the Persian province Beyond the River, and provide religious instruction to those unfamiliar with the Jewish religious laws. The king even gave them rights to execute the death penalty, banishment, or imprisonment to anyone refusing to obey the Law of the God of Israel and the laws of the king (7:25, 26).

Instead of the same person issuing these conflicting commands, it seems more plausible that these letters were written by two different persons, each one called Artaxerxes.

Conclusion

This research of the letters of Artaxerxes in Ezra 4 and 7 has brought out significant arguments for a harmonious chronology of Ezra 4 that are necessary for a proper understanding of the historical interaction between the Persians rulers, the Samaritans, and the Jews between the time of Cyrus and Darius I Hystaspes. The analysis of these letters demonstrates that these letters were written by two different kings named Artaxerxes.

The findings of the analysis of these letters brought out that there is a significant difference in the way the Artaxerxes in Ezra 4 addresses his letter and the way that the Artaxerxes in Ezra 7 addressed his letter. Additional differences between the letters have been noticed in differences about their familiarity with Jewish history; differences in communicating the letters; differences in motives underlying the kings' actions, such as one king curtailed the Jews freedom to protect the Persian throne, the other king granted the Jews more freedom to protect the Persian throne; and differences in subjects of a conflicting nature such as restricting the Jews to build the city or expanding the freedom of the Jews to build and have greater judicial and governmental rights.

All these differences in the letters reveal that it is clear these letters were written by two different persons. The Artaxerxes in Ezra 4 was the False Smerdis, the Artaxerxes in Ezra 7 the Artaxerxes I Longimanus. Finally, this analysis has provided the evidence that Ezra 4 and the book of Ezra were written in a chronological structure, not in a thematic structure.

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