

EZRA-NEHEMIAH OR NEHEMIAH-EZRA?

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE VALIDITY OF THE VAN HOONACKER THEORY

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The purpose of this paper¹ is to analyze a theory of long standing which was first suggested in 1889 by Maurice Vernes in a footnote of his work *Précis d'histoire juive*, but which was systematically developed by Albin Van Hoonacker in numerous publications between 1890 and 1924.² Van Hoonacker contested the traditional priority of Ezra and attempted to prove that while Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in 444 B.C., Ezra followed 46 years later, i.e., in 398. On account of its implications this controversy has become the subject of countless papers, articles, and learned discussions. Although Van Hoonacker's theory has been rejected by many scholars since its introduction 75 years ago, it nevertheless has found an increasing acceptance by some. However, final agreement among biblical scholars has not yet been obtained.

This investigation will not cover the whole range of the Ezra-Nehemiah problem, but will be limited to a critical analysis of the Van Hoonacker theory. He artificially augmented the number of his arguments by some that dealt with irrelevant and imaginary problems, although he formulated them ingeniously and adroitly. Later his position intrigued many scholars because of the fusion between certain biblical material and the Aramaic papyri which came to light shortly after his theory was published and which seemed to give to it historical substance.

The present study tries to investigate whether Van Hoonacker's views present sound scholarly reasoning, facts, and a candid use of Scripture, or whether they are intelligently composed and fascinating, but outdated, conjectures.

¹ This paper was read as the presidential address at the 26th annual meeting of the Midwest Section of the Society of Biblical Literature April 15, 1965, at the Center for Continuing Education of the University of Chicago.

² Van Hoonacker's works on the subject discussed in this article are conveniently listed by H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (London, 1952), p. 133, n. 1.

A concise synopsis of Van Hoonacker's viewpoints can be found in R. A. Bowman's summary of the arguments in his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah in *The Interpreter's Bible*, which, for the sake of convenience, has been used in this study.

Several of Van Hoonacker's arguments can be eliminated without much discussion. Let us first dispose of his last three objections (Nos. 13, 14, and 15) since they belong to a group of irrelevant problems. He argued that the traditional order implied a failure of Ezra's reforms with regard to law, tithing and mixed marriages, which, he felt, pointed to the priority of Nehemiah. First, scholars are divided in their opinion as to whether these reforms were a success or a failure. Second, Van Hoonacker's argument is refuted by Nehemiah himself who records that reforms of a similar nature, which he had initiated in 444, had proved to be a failure when he returned to Jerusalem for his second term as governor several years later.³ Regardless of success or failure, these questions have no bearing on the priority of either Ezra or Nehemiah and can thus be eliminated as irrelevant.

Objection One. Van Hoonacker's objections begin with either a misstatement or a misunderstanding of the official status of Ezra and Nehemiah. His first objection reads as follows:

It is unlikely that the same king would send to Palestine two men with official support and authority at the same time. The powers granted Ezra and Nehemiah were so similar that it is improbable that they would have exercised them simultaneously. Nor was there a division of labor whereby Nehemiah left religious matters to Ezra the priest, for he himself was concerned with regulating the priests . . . the tithes and temple treasurers . . . and the sabbath.⁴

This objection is characteristic of the way in which Van Hoonacker formulated his arguments. There is no evidence that the appointment by Artaxerxes I was made at the same time since Ezra, according to the traditional account, was nominated in 457, while Nehemiah came to Jerusalem 13 years later, in 444. Neither was there a similarity in office, as Nehemiah was a *pehā* or governor with administrative powers. Ezra's authority con-

³ Neh 13:4-31.

⁴ R. A. Bowman, "Ezra and Nehemiah," *The Interpreter's Bible*, III (Nashville, 1954), 562, hereinafter cited as Bowman.

cerned judicial matters—the teaching, enforcement, and reconciliation of the king's law (Persian law) with Jewish religious law. Nehemiah was independent and chronologically separate from Ezra and exerted strong religious influence on the community. This can easily be understood when one remembers that the Jewish concept of government does not separate civil administration from religious legislation. Therefore, since both the presumption of simultaneous appointment and the presumption of identical office are factually incorrect, this objection is invalid.

Objection Two. The second objection is formulated as follows:

Ezra and Nehemiah ignore each other in a way that would be surprising if they were contemporaries. Ezra is not mentioned until Neh 8, and then only in a passage originally not part of the Nehemiah story.⁵

I share with other scholars the view that Ezra and Nehemiah were not contemporaries, but differ with Van Hoonacker who moves Ezra's return from the traditional date of 457, the 7th year of Artaxerxes I, to the 7th year of Artaxerxes II, which is 398. Because I also agree with Van Hoonacker that Ezra and Nehemiah were not contemporaries as office holders in Jerusalem, there is no need for further investigation of this specific problem. We may profit, however, from a discussion of the question why the two leaders ignored each other. If Ezra died before the arrival of Nehemiah, or vice versa, it is natural that neither one would mention the name or work of the other. On the basis of a corrected text-sequence—mentioned by Van Hoonacker in this objection—and a statement in Josephus' *Antiquities* (XI. § 158), it appears that Ezra died approximately 456/55, or eleven years before the traditional date for Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem. His memoirs, therefore, could not mention Nehemiah. Although we do not know why Nehemiah makes no mention of Ezra and/or of his reform, there may have been a reason for this silence.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah provide a parallel example. They were concerned with the *same* problems, lived in the *same* place and were contemporaries, but Haggai does not mention Zechariah, nor does Zechariah mention Haggai. Whether this

⁵ Bowman, p. 562.

lack of reference to each other's work was an accident or done intentionally cannot now be ascertained; however, this analogy furnishes additional evidence that Van Hoonacker's objection is of no importance and thus ceases to be a problem in deciding the priority of either Ezra or Nehemiah.

Objection Three. The third objection reads as follows:

Nehemiah would scarcely have designated the inhabitants of Jerusalem as those who had escaped exile (Neh 1:2, 3) if shortly before a great caravan had arrived there from Babylon with Ezra.⁶

This statement is an unfortunate misquotation of Neh 1:2, 3 which actually reads: “. . . and I asked them concerning the Jews that survived, who had escaped exile, and concerning Jerusalem” (RSV). While the first part of the question refers in general to the Judeans (*y^ehúdim*) of the entire province and not merely to the inhabitants of Jerusalem alone, the second question refers to the condition of the city itself, but not to the inhabitants, as Van Hoonacker formulated and applied it. For this reason alone the objection becomes meaningless.

Van Hoonacker, who intended to prove that there was no Ezra and no caravan in 457, apparently wanted the reader to believe that these verses refer to the beginning of the exile in 586. It would be strange indeed for Nehemiah to have been so concerned and deeply affected about events that had taken place 140 years before his time. Consequently, a brief summary of the political events of his period might be useful to show that Nehemiah's grief over those who had escaped exile and the destruction of Jerusalem's walls and gates was caused by a more recent calamity.⁷

Biblical as well as secular sources indicate that the province of Judea was exposed to extensive hostile actions about the middle of the fifth century at a time when the Persian empire passed through a serious internal crisis. The revolt of Inarus in Egypt (460-456) and the sedition of the hero of the battle of Egypt, Megabyzus (brother-in-law of Xerxes) as reported by Ctesias (*Persica*, *Epit.* 68-70) had created a new political situa-

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Wilhelm Rudolph, *Esra und Nehemia* (Tübingen, 1949), pp. 103, 104, hereinafter cited as Rudolph.

tion in Syria and the whole fifth satrapy. Artaxerxes ordered Rehum, the *b^eēl t^eēm*, a Persian civil representative of the king in Palestine, to stop the work on the walls of Jerusalem which the Jews were restoring, apparently without royal authorization.⁸ Rehum's complaint, which had instigated this royal intervention, mentions that the rebuilding was being carried out by a group of Jews who had "come up from you the king . . . to Jerusalem" (Ezr 4:11-16). There is no reason to doubt that this group was the one headed by Ezra in 457 (cf. Objection Four).

There are other indications of political unrest in Palestine during that period which also affected the province of Judah. The prophet Malachi refers to an important event that had taken place in his time, i.e., that Edom had been laid waste and shattered beyond any hope of restoration.⁹ It is, therefore, not surprising that Ezra and Nehemiah mention only two of Judah's traditional enemies, the Ammonites and the Moabites, but do not name Edom (Ezr 9:1; Neh 13:1, 2, 5, 6). The Arab Nabateans who had destroyed Edom also posed a threat to the Jews, since the southern part of Judea had been Edomite territory and part of the Arab province of the Persian empire.¹⁰

Hubert Grimme suggested in 1941 that the Edomites were not destroyed by the Nabateans but by the Liḥyān Arabs before 450 B.C.¹¹ The historicity of their leader, Geshem or Gashmu, repeatedly mentioned by Nehemiah, is confirmed through an Arabic inscription and an inscribed silver bowl from Tell el-Maskhuta.¹² Chronologically the rule of that Arab chieftain has also been established through a hoard of silver coins found with the bowl confirming the biblical date for Geshem as having

⁸ Ezr 4:17-23.

⁹ Mal 1:3, 4; Robert C. Dentan, "Malachi," *The Interpreter's Bible*, VI (Nashville, 1956), 1123, 1124.

¹⁰ F. M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine* (Paris, 1938), II, 122, 123.

¹¹ H. Grimme, *Die Welt als Geschichte* (Stuttgart, 1937), III, 452-463; Grimme, "Beziehungen zwischen dem Staate Liḥjān und dem Achämenidenreiche," *OLZ*, 44 (1941), 337-343; A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 295, 316, hereinafter cited as Olmstead.

¹² A. J. Jaussen and R. Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie* (Paris, 1921), No. 349; Isaac Rabinowitz, "Aramaic Inscriptions of the Fifth Century B.C.E. from a North-Arab Shrine in Egypt," *JNES*, 15 (1956), 1-9, hereinafter cited as Rabinowitz.

ruled shortly after 450.¹³ Thus, when Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem he was confronted not only with Tobiah, the Ammonite, and Sanballat of Samaria, but also with a third enemy, Geshem the Arab.¹⁴ It seems, therefore, to be justified to connect the events reported in Neh 1:2, 3 with this Arab invader and ally of Judah's traditional foes. Josephus, too, obviously speaking of these same events, states:

They said that these were in a bad way, for the walls had been torn down to the ground, and the surrounding nations were inflicting many injuries on the Jews, overrunning the country and plundering it by day and doing mischief by night, so that many had been carried off as captives from the country and from Jerusalem itself, and every day the roads were found full of corpses.¹⁵

A few observations concerning the trustworthiness of Josephus as a historian may be in order in this connection. Not only have many of his reports found increasing confirmation through archaeological findings, but a critical study of the 11th book of *Antiquities* also shows the credibility of several details which he reports.¹⁶ In my opinion the 11th book of *Antiquities*—with corrections easily explained by Josephus' own narrative—should be accepted as reliable source material with the exception of the last parts of the book, which with our present knowledge seem to contain problems too difficult to reconcile with known historical facts.

We can therefore claim that Van Hoonacker's third objection has no validity not only because it is based on a misconstruing of the Bible text, but also because it does not agree with historical facts. The events referred to in Neh 1:2, 3 are to be sought in the period between 455 and 445 but not in 597 or 586.¹⁷

Objection Four.

In preparation for a census Nehemiah is concerned with the list of those who returned with Zerubbabel some time before (Neh 7:7-73), but he is silent regarding those who returned with Ezra (Ezra 8:1-14).¹⁸

Biblical scholars and historians understand that the genealogies

¹³ Olmstead, p. 295; W. F. Albright, "Dedan," *Geschichte und Altes Testament* (A. Alt Festschrift, Tübingen, 1953), p. 6; Rabinowitz, p. 6.

¹⁴ Neh 2:19; 3:7, 8; 4:1, 2, 7, 8; 6:1, 2, 5, 6.

¹⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, § 161.

¹⁶ Tuland, "Josephus, *Antiquities* Book XI," *AUSS*, 4 (1966), 176-192.

¹⁷ Rudolph, p. 103.

¹⁸ Bowman, p. 562.

in Ezr 2 and Neh 7 served also the purpose of establishing the legal claims to citizenship and property rights of those who returned from the Babylonian captivity. Jews who had been left behind in the province of Judea in 586 had in the meantime taken possession of fields, vineyards, and other properties.¹⁹ The legal problems resulting from the return of the original owners after 538 could therefore be settled only on the basis of a detailed genealogical list of the returnees. Their families had to belong to a respective clan in order to make their claims legitimate.

Now the question arises: Is the charge valid that Nehemiah "is silent" regarding those who returned with Ezra? The biblical text provides evidence that such a group had actually arrived before Nehemiah's days. A simple comparison reveals that except for the families of David and of some priests, the ancestors of the people who returned with Ezra are also found in the list of Neh 7:

Parosh	Ezr 8:3;	Neh 7:8;	Ezr 2:3;
Pahath Moab	Ezr 8:4;	Neh 7:11;	Ezr 2:6;
Zattu	Ezr 8:5;	Neh 7:13;	Ezr 2:8;
Adin	Ezr 8:6;	Neh 7:20;	Ezr 2:15;
Elam	Ezr 8:7;	Neh 7:12;	Ezr 2:7;
Shepathiah	Ezr 8:8;	Neh 7:9;	Ezr 2:4;
Joab	Ezr 8:9;	Neh 7:11;	Ezr 2:6;
Bani	Ezr 8:10;	Neh 7:15;	Ezr 2:10; (Binnui in Neh)
Bebai	Ezr 8:13;	Neh 7:16;	Ezr 2:11;
Azgad	Ezr 8:12;	Neh 7:17;	Ezr 2:12;
Adonikam	Ezr 8:13;	Neh 7:18;	Ezr 2:13;
Bigvai	Ezr 8:14;	Neh 7:8;	Ezr 2:2;

Inasmuch as the genealogical requirements of those families who returned with Ezra are fully covered in Nehemiah's list, Van Hoonacker's objection appears to be inaccurate.

Objections Five and Six. These objections refer to the population of Jerusalem as a criterion of the priority problem.

Nehemiah found Jerusalem almost uninhabited and subsequently took steps to repopulate it (cf. Neh 7:4; 11:1, 2), whereas Ezra lived and worked in a busy city (Ezr 9:4; 10:1).

In Ezr 8:29 and 10:5 the priests, Levites, and the heads of the families are dwelling in Jerusalem, while according to Neh 11:1 ff., Nehemiah had sent them to the capital.²⁰

These are inaccurate as well as exaggerated statements. After 538 many Jews, their leaders, officials, priests and Levites as well

¹⁹ Jer 31:10; 40:10, 11.

²⁰ Bowman, p. 562.

as others had settled in Jerusalem (Neh 7:73; Ezr 2:70). They had built elaborate houses even before they started rebuilding the temple.²¹ When the wall was finally built under Nehemiah there appeared groups and individuals who repaired sections "opposite the high-priest's house," "their houses," "their own houses," etc. Thus, no doubt, the expression that Jerusalem was almost uninhabited appears exaggerated. We do not even have to decide the controversial question raised by some commentators whether the "very large crowd" which gathered with Ezra for a special convocation was from Jerusalem only, or included people from the whole province (Ezr 10:1, 5), for the city's population in Ezra's days had probably been larger than under Nehemiah, because Jerusalem suffered twice under wars and raids during the decade preceding Nehemiah's arrival (Neh 1:2, 3). Therefore her population had probably substantially decreased during the years between Ezra's and Nehemiah's respective arrivals.

Thus, Van Hoonacker's argument rather proves the priority of Ezra, and Kittel's answer to "Objection Five" can also be applied to Six: ". . . es kann nicht als ernster Einwand gelten," i.e., it cannot be considered a serious objection.

Objection Seven. This objection is a typical illustration of Van Hoonacker's use of the Hebrew text and its interpretation.

Nehemiah found the defenses of Jerusalem destroyed (Neh 1:3; 2:13, 17; cf. 3:1-32; 4:6), but Ezra thanks God for the wall in Jerusalem (cf. Ezr 9:9).²²

Ezr. 9:9 obviously does not support Van Hoonacker's statement, for it reads: "*wayyat 'ālēnū hesed . . . w'latet lānū gādēr bīhūdāh ūbirūsālāim.*" It is true that the KJV renders this passage: ". . . but [God] has extended mercy unto us . . . to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem." But today hardly any scholar would agree with the translation of *gādēr* as "wall" for the protection of a city or fortress. A city wall was always called a *hómāh*. A *gādēr* usually refers to a wall that served to protect vineyards, separated properties, or was erected along a road, hence is frequently referred to as a hedge or fence.²³ The Greek

²¹ Hag 1:4, 9.

²² Bowman, p. 562.

²³ Num 22:24; Is 5:5.

text, like the Hebrew, also distinguishes between *teichos* for *hómāh*, "wall," and *phragmos* for *gādēr*, fence.

It is quite obvious that Ezra meant neither a real wall nor a real fence. That can clearly be seen from the formulation of the phrase: "a *gādēr*, a fence in Judah and in Jerusalem." Van Hoonacker had to omit "in Judah," since he could not visualize that an actual fence had surrounded the whole province of Judea; furthermore, it is noteworthy to observe that wherever the Hebrew text refers to a wall *around* a city, it does not use the particle *bē*, "in," but the word *sāhīb*, "around."²⁴

The figurative sense of the phrase is not only supported through texts such as Isa 5:5, but is so translated in the very same context used by Van Hoonacker, Ezr 9:8, where the "nail" in the holy place, *yātēd*, or tent-pin, is conceived as the most "secure hold," and *gādēr*, fence, stands for "protection" (RSV). Most recent translations such as the NEB, the Amplified Bible and the Jerusalem Bible have been rather consistent in using the figurative sense of these words in Ezra's prayer. Thus Menge renders it "Wohnsitz," Schlachter "geschützter Ort," while RSV and Moffat use the word "protection."

Consequently, the Hebrew text as well as its obvious figurative meaning refute both Van Hoonacker's translation and his interpretation.

Objection Nine. Inasmuch as Objection Eight will be discussed in another group of objections, we will turn to Objection Nine of his list. It is an outstanding example of mixing facts with fiction.

Whereas Nehemiah was a contemporary of the high priest Eliashib (cf. Neh 3:1, 20, 21; 13:4, 7, 28), Ezra lived during the period of the high priest Jehohanan, the grandson of Eliashib (Ezr 10:6; cf. Neh 12:10, 11, 22). Jehohanan is attested by the Aramaic Papyri as high priest in Jerusalem in 407 B.C., under Darius II. This most important evidence indicates that Ezra was active under Artaxerxes II, at least a generation after Nehemiah.²⁵

While it is a fact that Nehemiah and Eliashib were contemporaries, there is not the slightest biblical or extra-biblical evidence, including the Aramaic papyri, Cowley, Nos. 30 and 31,²⁶

²⁴ 1 Ki 3:1, 2; 2 Chr 14:6; Eze 40:5.

²⁵ Bowman, p. 562.

²⁶ A. Cowley, *The Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1923), pp. 108-114, hereinafter cited as Cowley.

that Ezra and Jehohanan lived at the same time, although Van Hoonacker maintains that they did and calls this argument his "most important evidence." This is fiction. To uphold his contention, Van Hoonacker used the following texts (quoted here according to the RSV):

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and they built the sheep gate. They consecrated it and set its doors; they consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel (Neh 3:1). After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section from the Angle to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest (v. 20). After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz, repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib (v. 21).

These verses refer to the high priest Eliashib and to an event that took place in the year 444, under Nehemiah.

Now before this came Eliashib *the priest* who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was connected with Tobiah (Neh 13:4). And came to Jerusalem and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God (v. 7). And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I chased him from me (v. 28).

Here a confusion is introduced, since Van Hoonacker identifies Eliashib *the priest* (*expressis verbis*), "appointed over the chambers of the house of the Lord" (vs. 4, 7), with *the high priest* Eliashib of v. 28.

In Ezr 10:6 a Jehohanan, son of Eliashib, is mentioned *without title* in whose chamber Ezra spent a night, in 457 B.C. according to the traditional chronology.

In Neh 12:10, 11 the order of Eliashib in the high-priestly *genealogy* is presented and in v. 22 his position within the high-priestly *succession*.

Ezr 10:6 refers to an incident when Ezra, grieved by the transgression of the people, "withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan, son of Eliashib, where he spent the night." Van Hoonacker contended that this Jehohanan is identical with the high priest of the same name mentioned in the Neh texts and in the Aramaic papyri, Cowley Nos. 30 and 31. He also believes that this event took place about 398 instead

of 457. Ezr 10:6 is thus the crucial text which must be investigated. Even today Van Hoonacker's ingenious conclusions are perplexing to many outstanding biblical scholars. Heinrich Schneider recently confirmed that Ezr 10:6 is the reason why he and others favor the priority of Nehemiah over Ezra. Significant, however, is his final conclusion: "Überzeugt bin ich immer noch nicht."²⁷ To this may be added the judgment of R. de Vaux: "Je ne suis toujours pas convaincu."²⁸ Besides the "I-am-not-yet-convinced" attitude of some scholars there is outright rejection of this hypothesis by others.²⁹

1. It is significant that this Jehohanan, son of Eliashib, appears without a specific title. In another passage, Neh 13:4, Eliashib is explicitly classified as "the priest," i.e., a common or ordinary priest. But in Neh 12:10, 11 Jehohanan (variant Jonatan), son of Eliashib, is a high priest and as such is listed in the high-priestly genealogy while appearing also in ch. 12:22, 23, the list of high-priestly succession. Furthermore Eliashib is mentioned as the father of the high priest Jehoiada.³⁰ This leads to our first conclusion that the biblical record distinguishes between two "sets" of Jehohanan ben Eliashib—one of which consists of common priests while the other set consists of high priests. An historical support for this inference comes from Josephus who consistently mentions the position or title of all persons of importance in his accounts. He accords the title of high priest without exception to Joiakim, Eliashib, Jehoiada, and Jehohanan, as well as to Jaddua,³¹ but when he refers to Eliashib and his son Jehohanan of the Ezr 10 story he omits the title.³² Scholars have taken cognizance of this distinction, namely that the difference in rank is also an indication of the difference in families. Kittel made the following observation with reference to Neh 13: 4-7: "Eljaschib ist schwerlich der Hohepriester dieses Namens, sondern der Oberaufseher über die zahlreichen für die Privat-

²⁷ Heinrich Schneider, "Die Bücher Esra und Nehemia," *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments*, ed. Friedrich Nötscher (Bonn, 1959), p. 75.

²⁸ R. de Vaux, *RB*, 63 (1956), 423-427.

²⁹ Rudolph, pp. 67-71.

³⁰ Neh 12:10, 11; 12:23; 13:28.

³¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, §§ 121, 158, 297, 300, 302, 306, 322.

³² *Ibid.*, § 147.

opfer u. dgl. dienenden Räume.”³³ Rudolph is even more emphatic: “Der Priester Eljaschib, dem die Tempelmagazine unterstanden, hat mit dem Hohepriester gleichen Namens (3:1, 20 f; 12:10, 22) nichts zu tun, sonst hätte ihm Nehemia den Hohepriestertitel nicht vorenthalten (vgl. auch Esr 10:6).”³⁴

2. The distinction in rank is closely related to the difference in office. Eliashib as high priest was the religious head of the post-exilic Jewish community, while according to Neh 13:4 the other Eliashib was merely the guardian of the temple chambers. Bowman in commenting on the complications resulting from an incorrect identification of the priest Eliashib in Neh 13:4-7 with the high priest Eliashib says: “It would be unusual for the high priest to do the limited work of superintending temple cells, a task more appropriate for a minor official. Furthermore, it would be strange for one who favored Nehemiah and helped in his work to turn suddenly to support his foes.”³⁵

3. A third point is the difference in family relationship. Some interpreters in support of Van Hoonacker conclude that since in Neh 12:23 *ben* is used in a case of grandfather-grandson relationship, it has also to be thus understood in Ezr 10:6.³⁶ But the situations are different. In Ezr 10:6 only two persons are involved without reference to any other third name; thus *ben* must be translated as “son.” Neh 12:23 serves only to fix a point of time for the registration of the Levites. Therefore, this text does not intend to establish a family relationship, a genealogical sequence, or the high-priestly succession which had already been stated twice in vs. 11 and 22. Thus, the use of *ben*, “son” for “descendant” for this grandfather-grandson relationship (Jehohanan, son, i.e., descendant or grandson of Eliashib the high priest) is correct and in agreement with the customs of that period.³⁷

Thus far three basic differences exclude the identification of the high-priestly Jehohanan-Eliashib “set” (of Neh 3:1, 20, 21;

³³ Rudolf Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, III (Stuttgart, 1929), 646.

³⁴ Rudolph, pp. 203, 204.

³⁵ Bowman, p. 805.

³⁶ Bowman, p. 654; V. Pavlovski, “Die Chronologie der Tätigkeit Esdras,” *Biblica*, 38 (1957), 292.

³⁷ Emil G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (New Haven, Conn., 1953), pp. 108, 298.

12:10, 11, 22, 23) found in the Aramaic papyri, Cowley Nos. 30 and 31,³⁸ with the ordinary priests of Ezr 10:6:

1. the difference in rank and title;
2. the difference in office;
3. the difference in family relationship.

Since the ninth objection is based upon an incorrect identification of persons of accidentally like names, Van Hoonacker's "most important evidence" proves to be invalid. A discussion of the chronological implications follows in a subsequent section.

Objection Ten. This objection reads as follows:

The papyrus mentioning the high priest Jehohanan, contemporary of Ezra, also indicates that the power of Samaria then was in the hands of the sons of Sanballat, who was apparently an old man, rather than in his own, since he personally had been the active opponent of Nehemiah (Neh 2:10; 4:1, 2; 6:1, 2).³⁹

In this objection Van Hoonacker creates an artificial and non-historic contemporaneity of Ezra with Sanballat on the basis of the preceding refuted assumption. If this prior link in his argument is removed, the subsequent conclusion naturally collapses.

Objections Eight, Eleven and Twelve. These objections, and by implication also Objection Nine, are centered around some contemporaries of Ezra. Since Van Hoonacker does not limit himself to a general statement but also mentions specific names, we are in a position to test his claims.

In his Objection Eight he says:

No members of the families that returned with Ezra (Ezr 8: 1-20) can be identified with certainty in the list of those who built the wall of Jerusalem with Nehemiah. Hashabiah (Neh 3:17; Ezr 8:19, 24) and Meshullam (Neh 3:4, 30; 6:18; Ezr 8:16) are too common to identify, and it is obvious that the Davidic Hattush son of Shecaniah (Ezr 8:21) is not Hattush son of Hashabneiah (Neh 3:10).⁴⁰

To these names he adds the priests Jozabad, and Meremoth, the son of Uriah, in Objections Eleven and Twelve.

The biblical record states that among the Levites who were urged to join Ezra's caravan were found "a man of discretion, . . . namely Sherebiah, . . . also Hashabiah and with him Jeshaiiah of

³⁸ Cowley, pp. 108-114.

³⁹ Bowman, p. 562.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

the sons of Merari" (Ezr 8:18, 19 RSV). These two Levites occupied prominent positions. Before the caravan left its camp at Ahava, 12 priests and 12 Levites under the leadership of the two named Levites, Sherebiah and Hashabiah, were commissioned to safeguard the gold, silver, offerings, and vessels for the Jerusalem temple (Ezr 8:24). Under Nehemiah, Hashabiah the Levite had become "ruler of half the district of Keilah" by the time he repaired the wall of Jerusalem. It indicates that he had been active for several years in Judea before 444 and thus had become a civic leader. Again, Hashabiah and Sherebiah were the two Levites who signed the covenant according to Neh 10:9, 11, 12. In Nehemiah's list of post-exilic priests and Levites they appear once more together with a chronological annotation: "These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshuah son of Jozadak and in the days of . . . Ezra the scribe."⁴¹ It is by no means accidental that these Levites are in nearly every instance mentioned together in regard to events both before and in 444. Their identification as Ezra's contemporaries during those years demonstrates conclusively that Van Hoonacker's date of 398 is not tenable. How could they be Ezra's travel-companions and fellow-workers in 398, when they were leaders in the Jerusalem community and held public office more than half a century before that date?

Objection Eleven is similar to Objection Eight:

Nehemiah appointed a commission of temple treasurers (Neh 11:16; 13:13) and when Ezra arrived he found a similar one (Ezr 8:33). The priest Jozabad, whom Nehemiah appointed over the outside business of the temple (Neh 11:16), may not be the one of that name functioning in that role in the time of Ezra (Ezr 8:34), but the interval between is proper for him to have been the grandson.⁴²

Again we have to take issue with Van Hoonacker's inaccurate use of biblical sources.

1. The people in Neh 11:16 were not a commission of temple treasurers, but were a group of Levites whom Nehemiah had settled in Jerusalem.

⁴¹ Neh 12:24, 26; for the elimination of "Nehemiah the Governor" cf. Rudolph, p. 195.

⁴² Bowman, p. 562.

2. Jozabad, whom Nehemiah in 444 appointed with others over the outside work of the house of God, was not a priest but a Levite (Neh 11:16).

3. Jozabad was not a member at all of the temple-storehouse treasurers in 432, according to Neh 13:13, the text referred to by Van Hoonacker.

4. The Levite Jozabad was a temple treasurer at Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem in 457 and was, therefore, not appointed by Ezra, and much less by Nehemiah, if Van Hoonacker's date of 398 is followed (Ezr 8:33).

5. Apparently, it was also the Levite Jozabad who assisted Ezra in the reading and targumizing of the law according to Neh 8:7.⁴³ Even if no allowance is made for a correction of the text-sequence, i.e., transferring Neh 8 so that it follows Ezr 10 as it is found in I Esdras, it still demonstrates that Jozabad was a contemporary of Ezra as early as 457 and of Nehemiah from 444 to 432.

The suggestion that there *must* have been another, though fictitious Jozabad, in 398 by papponymy, in order to meet the requirements of the theory, has no biblical or historical foundation. As there is nothing left in this objection to be refuted we may now turn to his twelfth:

Meremoth the son of Uriah was of the family of Koz, which could not authenticate its priestly status in the time of Zerubbabel (Ezr 2:61, 62). He appears as a builder of the wall without priestly title in the time of Nehemiah (Neh 3:4, 21), assuming a double portion, apparently in youthful enthusiasm. His family doubtless regained its priestly status during Nehemiah's administration, for at Ezra's arrival he is a priest, perhaps an aged man, who received the treasure from Ezra.⁴⁴

According to the traditional sequence Meremoth was a priest in 457 and worked with the priestly group at the rebuilding of the wall (Neh 3:21, 22) in 444. Van Hoonacker's theory creates several new problems. He suggests that Meremoth was reinstated as a priest under Nehemiah about 94 years after the governor's ruling which was to decide the legal status of those priests whose genealogies were doubtful, through the first high priest to be elected at that time (Neh 7:63-65). A delay of almost a century

⁴³ 1 Esd 9:48; Bowman, pp. 736, 737, 777.

⁴⁴ Bowman, p. 562.

is not only very unlikely but it is also disproved by the fact that it was the priest Meremoth who received the treasures from Ezra in 457 B.C. Rowley tried to reconcile Van Hoonacker's views with the biblical records in a unique way. Since his hypothesis requires 398 as the date of Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem, he faces the impossible task of harmonizing their alleged first arrival during that year with their presence and activities in Jerusalem 50 years before that date. Thus, according to Rowley, Meremoth is a man of 67 in 398 when he meets Ezra, but a youthful enthusiast when he accepts a double portion in the repair of the city wall in 444, being a civic leader and priest at the age of 20.⁴⁵ However, the standard minimum age for entering the temple service for the Levites was 30 years.⁴⁶

From this discussion it seems clear that Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jozabad, and Meremoth appear together at incidents before, during and after the year 444. Since these traveling companions and fellow-workers of Ezra were active in Jerusalem half a century before 398, it convincingly eliminates that year as the date of Ezra's coming to Jerusalem and thus disproves Van Hoonacker's theory of the Nehemiah-Ezra sequence.

On the basis of our present analysis I submit that Van Hoonacker's theory of reversing the Ezra-Nehemiah sequence has been repudiated and should be eliminated.

⁴⁵ Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord*, p. 158.

⁴⁶ Num 4:3 ff.; R. Abba, "Priests and Levites," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, 1962), III, 880.