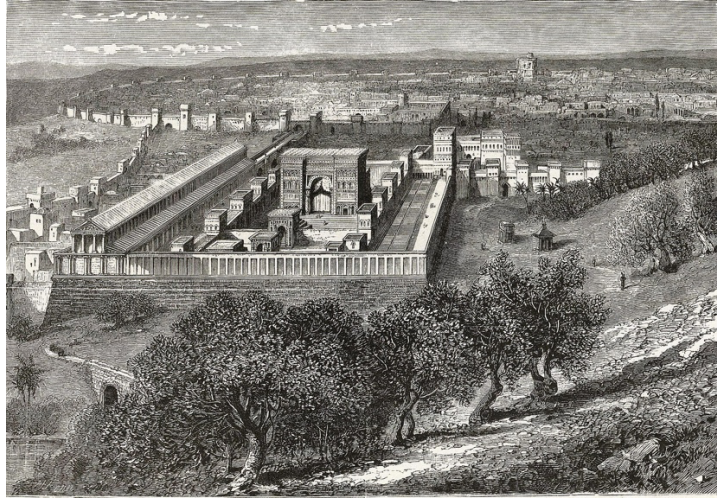


Introduction to the Apocrypha – First Book of Esdras Session Four



The Second Temple - Wikimedia Commons

The Temple Rebuilt – Part II / Ezra in Jerusalem

The Apocrypha in New Testament and in Jewish Literature

The Great Irony

The First Book of Esdras (Chapters 7 – 8:64)

Sources

The Apocrypha in New Testament and in Jewish Literature

New Testament. None of the books of the *New Testament* quotes directly from the books of the *Apocrypha*. Some of the epistles, however, seem to use ideas quite similar to those found in Apocryphal books. *Romans* 9:20 – 23 appears to be an echo of *Wisdom* 15:7. Compare *2 Corinthians* 5:1, 4 with *Wisdom* 9:15. *James* 1:19 sounds similar to *Sirach* 5:11, and *James* 1:13 may be compared with *Sirach* 15: 11 – 12.

Essene Community. *Tobit*, parts of *Sirach*, the *Letter of Jeremiah* and *Psalms* 151 were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Judaism. The books of the Apocrypha are all Jewish in origin but have never been part of the Jewish canon. First and Second Maccabees provide the original accounts of the purification of the Temple in 164 b.c.e. which is commemorated in the festival of Hanukkah. *Judith* was associated with Hanukkah as well during the Middle Ages.

Rabbinic literature quotes sayings from *Sirach*. Both *Tobit* and *2 Esdras* influenced later Jewish literature and were popular during the Middle Ages. Susanna's story is recounted in the Babylonian Talmud. Josephus makes use of 1 Esdras, 1 Maccabees, and the additions to Esther. There are many other examples where books of the Apocrypha are used in later Jewish literature.

The Great Irony

[There appear to be consistency problems within the five books of the Old Testament that we call the Torah or the Five Books of Moses. Scholars have pointed out that some sections seem to duplicate others or even contradict other sections – even within the same book. One theory that attempts to explain this has been that there are three different sources intermingled labeled J, E, and P, along with a fourth source D that is used only in Deuteronomy. One scholar who has grappled with this issue is Richard Elliot Friedman.]

The person who assembled the four sources into the Five Books of Moses is known as the redactor. The redactor is harder to trace than any of the authors of the sources. For the most part, the redactor was arranging texts that already existed, not writing very much of his or her own, and so there is little evidence to shed light on who he was.

Still, we do know a few things about this person. To start with, the redactor came from the circle of Aaronid priests. Either he was a priest himself, or he was aligned with them and was committed to their interests. The redactor used the Priestly document (P) as the structuring text of the Book of Genesis. Some of the text appears to come from a time when priests could no longer insist on the presence of the Tabernacle for sacrifice. It fits the days of the second Temple, when the Tabernacle no longer existed. The Second Temple had no Tabernacle.

There was also a law (*in Leviticus 23*) that prescribed actually living in booths on the feast of Booths. In the Book of *Nehemiah*, we are told that when Ezra read this law to the people, they were surprised: *“The children of Israel had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day.”*

The Second Temple period was also the time, as never before, that Aaronid priests had the authority to promulgate the work – and to enforce it.

One Aaronid priest in particular had all this power: Ezra. He had the backing of the emperor. He had enforcement powers. And his authority was directly linked to a scroll that he brought to Judah, a scroll that is identified as “the Torah of Moses which Yahweh God of Israel gave.”

In the entire Bible only two men are known as lawgivers: Moses and Ezra. Ezra was a priest, a lawgiver, and a scribe. He had access to documents.

The question still remains as to why the redactor had to mix them all together. Why not just preserve them all side by side like the Four Gospels of the New Testament? The difference was that by Ezra’s time all of the sources apparently had come to be attributed to Moses. What was the redactor to do? He could not have to or three

different texts all be by Moses, especially when they sometimes contradicted each other. And so he took on the enormous, intricate, and ironic task of combining these alternative versions of the same stories into one work.

– Richard Elliott Friedman (from *Who Wrote the Bible?* HarperCollins Publishers, 1987, 1997)

The First Book of Esdras (Chapters 7 – 8:64)

Chapter Seven

¹ Then Sisinnus the governor of Coele Syria and Phoenicia and Sathrabuzanes and their associates, following the orders of King Darius,² supervised the holy work with very great care, assisting the elders of the Jews and the chief officers of the temple. ³ The holy work prospered, while the prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied, ⁴ and they completed it by the command of the Lord God of Israel. So with the consent of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of the Persians, ⁵ the holy house was finished by the twenty-third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of King Darius.⁶ And the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of those who returned from exile who joined them did according to what was written in the book of Moses. ⁷ They offered at the dedication of the temple of the Lord one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, ⁸ and twelve male goats for the sin of all Israel, according to the number of the twelve leaders of the tribes of Israel, ⁹ and the priests and the Levites stood arrayed in their vestments, according to divisions, for the services of the Lord God of Israel in accordance with the book of Moses, and the gatekeepers were at each gate.

¹⁰ The people of Israel who came from exile kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, after the priests and the Levites were purified together. ¹¹ Not all of the returned captives were purified, but the Levites were all purified together, ¹² and they sacrificed the Passover lamb for all the returned captives and for their kindred the priests and for themselves. ¹³ The people of Israel who had returned from exile ate it, all those who had separated themselves from the abominations of the nations of the land and sought the Lord. ¹⁴ They also kept the Festival of Unleavened Bread seven days, rejoicing before the Lord, ¹⁵ because he had changed the will of the king of the Assyrians concerning them, to strengthen their hands for the service of the Lord God of Israel.

Chapter Eight

8 After these things, when Artaxerxes, the king of the Persians, was reigning, Ezra came, the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, ² son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abishua, son of Phineas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the high priest. ³ This Ezra came up from

Babylon as a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which was given by the God of Israel, ⁴ and the king showed him honor, for he found favor before the king in all his requests. ⁵ There came up with him to Jerusalem some of the people of Israel and some of the priests and Levites and temple singers and gatekeepers and temple servants, ⁶ in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes, in the fifth month (this was the king's seventh year), for they left Babylon on the new moon of the first month and arrived in Jerusalem on the new moon of the fifth month, by the successful journey that the Lord gave them. ⁷ For Ezra possessed great knowledge, so that he omitted nothing from the law of the Lord or the commandments but taught all Israel all the ordinances and judgments.

⁸ The following is a copy of the written decree from King Artaxerxes that was delivered to Ezra the priest and reader of the law of the Lord:

⁹ "King Artaxerxes to Ezra the priest and reader of the law of the Lord, greeting. ¹⁰ In accordance with my gracious decision, I have given orders that those of the Jewish nation and of the priests and Levites and others in our realm, those who freely choose to do so, may go with you to Jerusalem. ¹¹ Let as many as are so disposed, therefore, leave with you, just as I and the seven Friends who are my counselors have decided, ¹² in order to look into matters in Judea and Jerusalem, in accordance with what is in the law of the Lord, ¹³ and to carry to Jerusalem the gifts for the Lord of Israel that I and my Friends have vowed, and to collect for the Lord in Jerusalem all the gold and silver that may be found in the region of Babylonia, together with what is given by the nation for the temple of their Lord that is in Jerusalem, ¹⁴ both gold and silver for bulls and rams and lambs and what goes with them, ¹⁵ so as to offer sacrifices on the altar of their Lord that is in Jerusalem. ¹⁶ Whatever you and your kindred wish to do with the gold and silver, perform it in accordance with the will of your God; ¹⁷ deliver the holy vessels of the Lord that are given you for the use of the temple of your God that is in Jerusalem. And whatever else occurs to you as necessary for the temple of your God, ¹⁸ you may provide out of the royal treasury.

¹⁹ "I, King Artaxerxes, have commanded the treasurers of Syria and Phoenicia that whatever Ezra the priest and reader of the law of the Most High God sends for, they shall take care to give him, up to a hundred talents of silver, ²⁰ and likewise up to a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, and salt in abundance. ²¹ Let all things prescribed in the law of God be scrupulously fulfilled for the Most High God, so that wrath may not come upon the kingdom of the king and his sons. ²² You are also informed that no tribute or any other tax is to be laid on any of the priests or Levites or temple singers or gatekeepers or temple servants or persons employed in this temple and that no one has authority to impose any tax on them.

²³ "And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of God, appoint judges and justices to judge all those who know the law of your God throughout all Syria and Phoenicia, and you shall teach it to those who do not know it. ²⁴ All who transgress the law of your God or the law of the kingdom shall be strictly punished, whether by death or some other punishment, either fine or imprisonment."

²⁵ Then Ezra the scribe said, "Blessed be the Lord alone, who put this into the heart of the king, to glorify his house that is in Jerusalem, ²⁶ and who honored me in the sight of the king and his counselors and all his Friends and nobles. ²⁷ I was encouraged by the help of the Lord my God, and I gathered men from Israel to go up with me."

²⁸ These are the leaders, according to their ancestral houses and their groups, who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of King Artaxerxes:²⁹ Of the descendants of Phineas, Gershom. Of the descendants of Ithamar, Gamael. Of the descendants of David, Hattush son of Shecaniah. ³⁰ Of the descendants of Parosh, Zechariah and with him a hundred fifty men enrolled. ³¹ Of the descendants of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah and with him two hundred men. ³² Of the descendants of Zattu, Shecaniah son of Jahaziel and with him three hundred men. Of the descendants of Adin, Obed son of Jonathan and with him two hundred fifty men. ³³ Of the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiiah son of Gotholiah and with him seventy men. ³⁴ Of the descendants of Shephatiah, Zeraiah son of Michael and with him seventy men. ³⁵ Of the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel and with him two hundred twelve men. ³⁶ Of the descendants of Bani, Shelomith son of Josiphiah and with him a hundred sixty men. ³⁷ Of the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai and with him twenty-eight men. ³⁸ Of the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan and with him a hundred ten men. ³⁹ Of the descendants of Adonikam, the last ones, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them seventy men. ⁴⁰ Of the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai son of Istalcurus and with him seventy men.

⁴¹ I assembled them at the river called Theras, and we encamped there three days, and I inspected them. ⁴² When I found there none of the descendants of the priests or of the Levites, ⁴³ I sent word to Eleazar, Idueh, Maasmas, Elnathan, Shemaiah, Jarib, Nathan, Elnathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders and men of understanding; ⁴⁴ I told them to go to Iddo, who was the leading man at the place of the treasury, ⁴⁵ and ordered them to tell Iddo and his kindred and the treasurers at that place to send us men to serve as priests in the house of our Lord. ⁴⁶ And by the mighty hand of our Lord they brought us competent men of the descendants of Mahli son of Levi, son of Israel, namely, Sherebiah with his descendants and kinsmen, eighteen; ⁴⁷ also Hashabiah and Annunus and his brother Jeshaiiah, of the descendants of Hananiah, and their descendants, twenty men; ⁴⁸ and of the temple servants whom David and the leaders had given for the service of the Levites, two hundred twenty temple servants; the list of all their names was reported.

⁴⁹ There I proclaimed a fast for the young men before our Lord, ⁵⁰ to seek from him a successful journey for ourselves and for our children and the livestock with us. ⁵¹ For I was ashamed to ask the king for infantry and cavalry and an escort to keep us safe from our adversaries, ⁵² for we had said to the king, "The power of our Lord will be with those who seek him and will support them in every way." ⁵³ And again we prayed to our Lord about these things, and we found him very merciful.

⁵⁴ Then I set apart twelve of the leaders of the priests, Sherebiah and Hashabiah and ten of their kinsmen with them, ⁵⁵ and I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the holy vessels of the house of our Lord that the king himself and his counselors and the nobles and all Israel had given. ⁵⁶ I weighed and gave to them six hundred fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels worth a hundred talents, and a hundred talents of gold, and twenty golden bowls, and twelve bronze vessels of fine bronze that glittered like gold. ⁵⁷ And I said to them, "You are holy to the Lord, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are vowed to the Lord, the Lord of our ancestors. ⁵⁸ Be watchful and on guard until you deliver them to the leaders of the priests and the Levites and to the heads of the ancestral houses of Israel, in Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of our Lord." ⁵⁹ So the priests and the Levites who took the silver and the gold and the vessels that had been in Jerusalem carried them to the temple of the Lord.

⁶⁰ We left the River Theras on the twelfth day of the first month, and we arrived in Jerusalem by the mighty hand of our Lord, which was upon us; he delivered us from every enemy on the way, and so we came to Jerusalem. ⁶¹ When we had been there three days, the silver and the gold were weighed and delivered in the house of our Lord to the priest Meremoth son of Uriah; ⁶² with him was Eleazar son of Phinehas, and with them were Jozabad son of Jeshua and Moeth son of Binnui, the Levites. The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded at that very time. ⁶³ And those who had returned from exile offered sacrifices to the Lord, the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-two lambs, and as a thank offering twelve male goats—all as a sacrifice to the Lord. ⁶⁴ They delivered the king's orders to the royal stewards and to the governors of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, and these officials honored the nation and the temple of the Lord.

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