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## Nehemiah and Narrative Order in the Book of Ezra

*This is the second article in a four-part series "Studies in the Book of Ezra."*

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Contrary to what one might expect, reactions to the chronological anomalies in the Book of Ezra do not divide neatly into critical and conservative camps.<sup>1</sup> Three positions cover the range of responses to the chronological difficulties encountered in Ezra: (a) rejection of the narrative order and rearrangement of its materials, (b) acceptance of the narrative order and the assertion that it proceeds in chronological fashion, and (c) acceptance of the narrative order and an attempt to account for the nonchronological arrangement. There is, however, a chronological issue that logically precedes a consideration of the specific anomalies in the Book of Ezra. Who went to Jerusalem first—Ezra or Nehemiah? And when did they go?<sup>2</sup> At stake is the historical background on which literary and theological analyses build.

### The Chronological Order of Ezra and Nehemiah

With virtually one voice scholars acknowledge that the biblical text presents Ezra as preceding Nehemiah and makes Ezra and

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Nehemiah contemporaries during the latter's governorship.<sup>3</sup> Nehemiah's arrival in 445 b.c. during the reign of Artaxerxes I constitutes perhaps the only other point of agreement in this long-standing debate.<sup>4</sup> Past this point consensus disappears, even among critics.<sup>5</sup> Among the many objections raised to the biblical text's presentation, three issues surface repeatedly as being the most problematic: the apparent lack of cooperation between Ezra and Nehemiah, the thirteen-year gap between Ezra's arrival and his reading of the Law, and the generational distance between the high priests associated with each of the two reformers.<sup>6</sup> The first problem arises from the fact that Ezra did not mention Nehemiah in his book and that Nehemiah mentioned Ezra in conjunction with himself only three times (Neh. 8:9; 12:26, 36–38).<sup>7</sup>

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There is nothing, however, particularly remarkable about this silence. Haggai and Zechariah, w...

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