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CONTRASTING LEADERSHIP STYLES IN POSTEXILIC JUDAISM—A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EZRA 9:1-5 AND NEHEMIAH 13:23-27

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This paper examines the leadership styles of Nehemiah and Ezra, two figures in postexilic Hebrew society. Their leadership styles are examined through the use of a historical intertexture textual analysis of the Hebrew scripture texts in which they are found; namely Ezra 9:1-10:1 and Nehemiah 13:23-27. Through this analysis, it is posited that Ezra and Nehemiah exemplified different forms of leadership approaches and that each was effective in a large degree. It is further postulated that both Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrated spiritual leadership as defined in a practitioner sense by Blackaby and Blackaby, but that beyond spiritual leadership, Ezra demonstrated what Collins defines as level 5 leadership while Nehemiah demonstrated what Hersey and Blanchard describe as situational leadership. Finally, it is argued that effective leaders lead with an understanding of their respective personality types and not necessarily according to some one-size-fits-all leadership typology.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra, two central figures in the postexilic Jewish history. According to Matthews, Nehemiah and Ezra were contemporaries to one another who played central roles in postexilic Hebrew history.¹ The narratives of Ezra and Nehemiah are recorded in the two books found in the

¹ Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 140.

Hebrew scriptures bearing their names, Ezra and Nehemiah.² Due to the general obscurity of the postexilic period and the dearth of corroborating sources, there is some dispute by scholars as to the true identity of the chronicler and the final dates of compilation.³ The majority view attributes the compilation of the books to a person referred to as “the chronicler.”⁴ Traditionally, the Jews believed that chronicler was Ezra and that he penned Nehemiah and Ezra along with 1 and 2 Chronicles.⁵ Hill and Walton explain, “It is assumed that the compiler of the books of Chronicles also edited the book of Ezra–Nehemiah because 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 constitutes a colophon, or closing inscription, presupposing the introductory verses of Ezra 1:1-2.”⁶ From the text themselves, scholars concede that a number of sources probably contributed to the final edition due to the fact that much of the material found in the books seems to predate the composition of the books.⁷ Such sources likely include Nehemiah and Ezra as their memoirs were included in the final compilations. Yet apart from the traditional view that Ezra was the chronicler, no other name has emerged.

A number of suggestions have been offered for the date of the final compilation of Ezra–Nehemiah, ranging from 400 to 100 BCE.⁸ Cabal observes:

In the absence of any definitive statements resolving the date question, it becomes necessary to rely on clues from the text itself. Nehemiah was still active in 433 BCE, so it is likely he wrote his own memoir sometime after that. This gives an approximate date of 400 BCE as a likely early date for final composition. If Jaddua (mentioned in Nehemiah 12:22) was the same person whom the first-century AD Jewish historian Josephus says was high priest when Alexander the Great invaded Persia, then it would make him the last mentioned high priest in Nehemiah’s list of priests, and it would mean that the compilation of Ezra/Nehemiah would have to have been around 333 BCE.⁹

According to Hill and Walton, regardless of the date of compilation, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah report a significant portion of the history of Israel during the postexilic era. As such, the purpose of the books seems to be historiographical, driven by the need to preserve a record of the return to Jerusalem from Babylonia.¹⁰ Moreover, Hill and Walton suggest that the accounts were written to highlight Yahweh’s faithfulness in order to affirm his promises to renew the remnant of Israel.¹¹ On the pragmatic side, they further suggest that the writing of the history of this period probably

² Ted Cabal, *The Apologetics Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), 677, 695.

³ Duane A. Garrett and Joan Davis Wanner, *Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 690.

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, A. I. Millard, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 813.

⁵ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 331-332.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cabal, *The Apologetics Study Bible*, 678.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 678.

¹⁰ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 336-337.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 337.

stemmed from an obligation placed on Ezra and Nehemiah to report their progress to the king of Persia.¹²

As to the individual books, the author of the book of Ezra is assumed to be Ezra himself, but as discussed above, his authorship is under dispute; regardless, the book does seem to contain a selection of his memoirs.¹³ The contents of the book cover a period of about eighty years from the time of Cyrus's decree (536 BCE) to the religious reformation led by Ezra (456 BCE) and can be read in two main sections or divisions.¹⁴ The first section, chapters 1-6, concerns: (a) the return of the Hebrew people from exile in Babylonia back to their ancestral homelands and (b) the restoration of the Jewish community after the exile and includes a number of source documents including official governmental decrees and letters.¹⁵ More specifically, the first division of the book covers: (a) Cyrus's decree to allow the captive peoples to return to their ancestral homelands and to worship their former gods (Ezr 1); (b) a list of the returned Jewish exiles who joined the first caravan to the Israel homelands (Ezr 2); (c) an account of the rebuilding of the altar and temple in Jerusalem (Ezr 3); (d) local opposition and King Artaxerxes subsequent decree to halt reconstruction of the temple (Ezr 4); (e) a new wave of construction on the temple led by Zerubbabel, followed by more opposition (Ezr 5); and (f) the decree of Darius the Mede to allow the reconstruction of the temple to continue, followed by the completion and dedication of the temple (Ezr 6).¹⁶ The second section of the book, chapters 7-10, concerns the account of Ezra's mission in regards to: (a) the history of the second return of Jews from exile under Ezra and (b) events that took place after Ezra's arrival. More specifically, the second section of the book contains excerpts of Ezra's memoirs concerning (a) Artaxerxes Longimanus's (Artaxerxes I) letter granting him (Ezra) permission and authority to lead a second wave of Jewish exiles back to Israel (Ezr 7), (b) an account of those who returned with him and his first activities upon arrival to Jerusalem (Ezr 8), and (c) his response to the news of the problem of fellow Jews intermarrying with the non-Jewish peoples living among them (Ezr 9-10).¹⁷ The importance of the intermarriage issue to Ezra seems self-evident given that of the four chapters dedicated to Ezra and his mission, half of it covers this one issue. Indeed, one commentator wrote, "The most critical incident under Ezra and Nehemiah was the exclusion of foreign wives and their children from the Jewish community."¹⁸

The book of Nehemiah was mostly regarded as the second part of Ezra–Nehemiah in the Hebrew scriptures, which together were thought to be the second part of a two-part sequel with 1 and 2 Chronicles.¹⁹ The book covers a period of 12-plus

¹² Ibid., 337.

¹³ David Horton, *The Portable Seminary* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2006), 237.

¹⁴ Paul J. Achtemeier, "The Book of Ezra," in *Harper's Study Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 295.

¹⁵ Marshall et al., *New Bible Dictionary*, 356.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The Jewish Chronicles, "Religious Legislation in Post Exilic Judea," <http://thejewishchronicles.com/religious-legislation-in-post-exilic-judea/>.

¹⁹ Edwin Yamauchi and Ronald Youngblood, "Nehemiah," in *NIV Study Bible*, rev. ed., ed. Kenneth L. Barker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

years from 445 to 433 BCE, with a few references in chapter 12 concerning a time after 433.²⁰ The book is narrated in the first person²¹ and contains Nehemiah's memoirs of his activities from (a) the time he petitioned King Artaxerxes permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall, (b) through his first governorship, and (c) a short unspecified time after his first governorship that some indicate as the time of his second governorship.²² The bulk of the account concerned a 52-day period during which Nehemiah led the Jewish community in the reconstruction of what scholars identified as the eastern portion of the wall of Jerusalem.²³ Upon his second return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah encountered other problems and instituted further reforms in the Jewish community in Judea and Jerusalem during what some posit was his second governorship.²⁴ It was during this time that he dealt with the problem of intermarriage between his fellow Jews and the peoples of the surrounding areas.²⁵

Together the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah converged in a common era in which they faced common problems. Indeed, the two encountered a mutual problem perpetrated by their fellow Jews who had migrated back to Judea and Jerusalem following the end of Babylonian exile period in 538 BCE²⁶ In violation of the laws and customs of the Yahweh sect, a number of their Jewish compatriots intermarried with the non-Jewish peoples living among them in Judea and Jerusalem.²⁷ In the past, this same problem—i.e., intermarriage with the inhabitants of the Canaan lands and surrounding regions—contributed to (a) the end of Israel's hegemony over the Canaan and Transjordan lands; (b) the desolation of the pride of Hebrew existence, namely the city of Jerusalem and the temple; and (c) exile in Babylonia and other locations.²⁸ According to their personal memoirs, both Nehemiah and Ezra were upset upon learning of their Hebrew compatriots' ill-advised activities; yet, as they explained their reactions, each one handled the situation in a very different manner.²⁹ This incident was recorded in Nehemiah 13:25-27 and Ezra 9:3-5 and 10:1 of the Hebrew scriptures. In order to gain some insight into the setting in which this incident occurred, an exegetical analysis was performed in relation to the above texts using the historical intertexture level of socio-rhetorical textual criticism. The aim of the analysis is to understand Nehemiah and Ezra and the postexilic Hebrew people within their respective and shared historical contexts with the ultimate purpose to gain insights into their leadership styles and to show how diverse leadership approaches can be effective given similar circumstances.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Harold L. Wilmington, *Wilmington's Bible Handbook* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), 273.

²³ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 142.

²⁴ Yamauchi and Youngblood, "Nehemiah."

²⁵ Wilmington, *Wilmington's Bible Handbook*, 278.

²⁶ Cabal, *The Apologetics Study Bible*.

²⁷ The Jewish Chronicles, "Religious Legislation."

²⁸ Richard Hooker, "The Birth and Evolution of Judaism: Post-Exilic Religion," *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Exilic.html> (accessed June 21, 2011).

²⁹ Neh 13:23-27; Ezr 9:1-10:1. All scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Exegetical Analysis of Historical Intertexture

Socio-rhetorical textual criticism is a form of exegetical study by which an interpreter peers into aspects of the social system or various layers of context of a given passage of the literature.³⁰ The intention of an exegetical study is to gain a deeper understanding of (a) the context in which a passage was written and (b) how the literary figures presented within a given text carried out the activities of their lives.³¹ To this end, Robbins concludes that “the aim of this type of criticism is to build an environment for interpretation that provides interpreters with a basic, overall view of life as observers know it and language as they use it.”³² In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of a given text, the socio-rhetorical method, as outlined by Robbins, employs five different angles of analysis to explore multiple textures of the text including: (a) inner texture, (b) intertexture, (c) social and cultural texture, (d) ideological texture, and (e) sacred texture.³³ This study employed a modified form of the historical texture of intertexture analysis in order to (a) gain an understanding of the context within which Ezra and Nehemiah lived and breathed and (b) gain insight to their respective reactions to the incident of intermarriage as recorded in their memoirs found in Nehemiah 13:25-27 and Ezra 9:3-10:1.³⁴ The historical intertexture is presented from the wider historical context of Hebrew history to the time when the incident of intermarriage was encountered.

Nehemiah and Ezra and the Postexilic Jewish Remnant—A Common History

The stories of Nehemiah and Ezra were set in a wider historical context common to all Jewish inhabitants of postexilic Judea and Jerusalem. Although the date is difficult to pin down, the story of the Hebrews began in around 1950 BCE with an account of their own history in the age of the patriarchs in which a Semite named Abram (later Abraham) and his descendants were selected by Yahweh to be his chosen people over all the peoples.³⁵ Yahweh asked Abraham to leave his land, his family, and his inheritance, and promised him in return his own land, his own family, and his own inheritance.³⁶ This history contained in the patriarchal stories demonstrated for the Hebrew people that God had a special purpose in history and had chosen the Hebrews and the Hebrews alone to fulfill that purpose.³⁷ Moreover, in order to fulfill that purpose God entered into a covenantal relationship with Abraham and the Hebrews through which God would prosper them and build them into a great nation that would bless

³⁰ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation*. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1-2.

³¹ Horton, *The Portable Seminary*.

³² Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Richard Hooker, “The Age of the Patriarchs,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/hebpat.html>.

³⁶ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 86.

³⁷ Hooker, “The Age of the Patriarchs.”

every nation on earth.³⁸ An additional figure in the patriarchal era was Abraham's great grandson Judah who was the probable ancestor of Nehemiah the cupbearer.³⁹ In a patriarchal blessing pronounced by his father Jacob (also known as Israel), Judah was bequeathed the royal scepter, a sign that he would be ancestor to the monarchy established much later in Hebrew history.⁴⁰ Even though God's covenant with Abraham included a promised land, the Hebrews would have to suffer 400 years as slaves in a foreign land before they would see that promise come to pass.⁴¹ At the end of the patriarchal period, in order to avoid a severe famine, the Hebrews resettled in Egypt where they remained and were eventually subjugated to Egyptian rule.⁴²

According to some Jewish commentators, perhaps the single most important event in Hebrew history was the exodus out of Egypt in around 1250 BCE.⁴³ As Hooker describes, "More than any other thing this event gave the Hebrew people an identity."⁴⁴ Even as Yahweh himself was the primary character in the Exodus narrative,⁴⁵ the central human figure in the story of the Hebrew's migration was a literary figure named Moses.⁴⁶ Like the Hebrew patriarchs, Moses had no other reference outside the Hebrew scriptures. Acting at Yahweh's behest,⁴⁷ Moses united a foreign people in revolt against Egyptian domination and led those people out of slavery, most notably his fellow Hebrews.⁴⁸ Through that defining event, Yahweh reiterated his promise with the Hebrews through a new covenant known as the Mosaic covenant.⁴⁹ This new covenant sought to organize the Hebrews as a formal body governed by Yahweh through a codified law and the establishment of a holy priesthood that would intercede for the Hebrew people before Yahweh. However, this new covenant differed from the previous Abrahamic covenant in that it was conditional upon the people's obedience to Yahweh's laws and decrees.⁵⁰ If the people chose to disobey Yahweh's laws and decrees, the promises would be forfeited,⁵¹ and the Hebrews would be disinherited from the promise land and sent into exile.⁵² One of Yahweh's decrees given to the Hebrews was a command to abstain from intermarriage with the foreign peoples of the non-Hebrew

³⁸ Horton, *The Portable Seminary*, 223.

³⁹ M. G. Easton, "Nehemiah" in *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996).

⁴⁰ Gn 49:10.

⁴¹ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 87.

⁴² Hooker, "The Age of the Patriarchs."

⁴³ Richard Hooker, "Egypt and the Wanderings," *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/hebegypt.html>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 103.

⁴⁶ Richard Hooker, "Moses," *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/moses.html>.

⁴⁷ Wilmington, *Wilmington's Bible Handbook*, 46.

⁴⁸ Lawrence O. Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991), 55.

⁴⁹ C. S. Lim and Anna Lim, "God's Covenants with the Hebrews," *Hebrew Roots of Christianity*, 1999, <http://www.patriarchywebsite.com/bib-patriarchy/jr-part2-covenants-of-the-hebrews.htm>.

⁵⁰ Paul George, "Mosaic Covenant," *Spreading Light Ministries*, <http://www.spreadinglight.com/biblestudies/covenants/mosaic-covenant/>.

⁵¹ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 176.

⁵² Dt 28:36.

inhabitants in the land of Canaan or surrounding.⁵³ Additionally, in regards to the priesthood, Yahweh anointed Moses's brother Aaron and his lineage to serve in the capacity of high priesthood and to oversee the duties of the priesthood.⁵⁴ This was especially important to the background story of Ezra the priest and scribe who was a direct descendant of Aaron through the high priestly line and thus heir of the responsibility to intercede on behalf the Hebrew people before Yahweh.⁵⁵

Even as the exodus from Egypt under Moses gave the Hebrews an identity as a people, the transition from a loosely-formed confederation of tribal clans to an urban-based monarchy gave the Hebrews an identity as a nation.⁵⁶ While Saul of the tribe of Benjamin was the first anointed monarch of the Hebrew people, the scepter belonged to a descendant of the tribe of Judah as was announced through the patriarchal blessing of Jacob on his son Judah and his descendants.⁵⁷ David, the son of Jesse, a member of the tribe of Judah, ascended the throne of Israel upon the death of Saul and his son Jonathan in the battle against the Philistines at Gilboa.⁵⁸ In his 40 years as ruler, estimated between 1010 and 970 BCE, David united the Hebrews as the nation of Israel and led them in conquest and dominance of the land of Canaan and surrounding lands beyond the Jordan River.⁵⁹ After the nation of Israel conquered the land under his rule, David captured and established Jerusalem as the capital and most holy and sacred city of the nation of Israel and the Hebrew people.⁶⁰ Upon occupying the city, Jerusalem along with the subsequent construction of the king's palace, became the symbol of Israel's political strength and glory, the culmination of Yahweh's promise to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation.⁶¹ Over 500 years after the establishment of Jerusalem as the holy and sacred center of Israel, it was the desire to rescue Jerusalem from its disgrace and restore the pride of the Hebrew people that burdened and drove Nehemiah to travel to Israel in order to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.⁶²

Despite Yahweh's frequent warnings to set aside household gods and abstain from the religious practices of the inhabitants of the Canaan lands, the Hebrew people had not yet made the full transition to monotheism.⁶³ After David secured Israel's power over the Canaan and Transjordan lands, he and his son Solomon began to establish the Yahweh cult and the priesthood in Jerusalem.⁶⁴ Subsequently, David brought Israel's most sacred religious artifact, the Ark of the Covenant, into Jerusalem and desired to

⁵³ Eliezer Shemtov, "On Intermarriage: The Basis for the Jewish Opposition to Intermarriage," *Chabad.org*, http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/148995/jewish/On-Intermarriage.htm.

⁵⁴ Patrick Young, "Lineage of Aaronic Priesthood," *JudicaWorld Archives*, <http://judaicaworld.wordpress.com/lineage/>.

⁵⁵ Garrett and Wanner, *Archaeological Study Bible*, 680.

⁵⁶ Matthews, *Manners & Customs*, 79.

⁵⁷ Spiro Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1984), 75.

⁵⁸ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 84.

⁵⁹ Shira Schoenberg, "David—Biblical Jewish King," *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/David.html>.

⁶⁰ Mitchell Bard, "Jerusalem—An Introduction," *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Jerusalem.html>.

⁶¹ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 104.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

build a temple for the one God, Yahweh.⁶⁵ Though Yahweh established an everlasting covenant with David to provide an heir to the throne unto eternity, the temple was to be constructed by his successor.⁶⁶ Upon replacing his father David, Solomon built the temple.⁶⁷ As Jerusalem became the symbol of Yahweh's promise to establish Israel as an everlasting kingdom, so the temple became the symbol of Yahweh's everlasting presence among the Hebrew people.⁶⁸ However, Solomon through heavy labor forced upon the people and idol worship encouraged by his foreign wives started the Hebrews down a long road of infidelity to Yahweh and his decrees stipulated in the Mosaic covenant.⁶⁹ The eventual result was a schism in the monarchy and then exile as foretold by their deliverer Moses. In 722, 606, and 586 BCE, the kingdom of Israel and then the kingdom of Judah came to an end with the people of the northern tribes scattered among many foreign locations by commanders of the Assyrian Empire and the people of Judah relocated to Babylon, the center of the Babylonian empire.⁷⁰ In his last attack against Jerusalem, Babylonian commander Nebuzaradan destroyed the city walls and the temple, leaving the pride of the Hebrews in utter shame and disgrace.⁷¹

Nearly 70 years after the first wave Judeans were taken into captivity, the Babylonian exile of the Hebrew people ended around 539 BCE when the people of Babylon surrendered to Cyrus the king of Persia. At that time, Cyrus issued a decree allowing all captive peoples to return to their homelands.⁷² Moreover, Cyrus allowed his foreign subjects, including the Hebrews, freedom to worship their gods. This decree was confirmed by an artifact called the Cyrus Cylinder discovered in Babylon in 1879 AD that documented the Persian king's policy of religious tolerance and liberation for all the foreign peoples under his rule.⁷³ Under this attitude of tolerance and liberation, a remnant of the Jews returned to Jerusalem under the direction of Sheshbazzar in 537 BCE.⁷⁴ Subsequently, although they endured much opposition and delays, the Jews began reconstruction of the temple in 537 BCE and finished it around 516 BCE.⁷⁵ After the temple was rebuilt, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem in the mid-fifth century BCE and led the people in the reconstruction the eastern wall of Jerusalem.⁷⁶ After the temple and the wall were rebuilt, the Jewish inhabitants residing in Judea and Jerusalem became complacent and began to intermarry again with the non-Jewish inhabitants living around them.

⁶⁵ 1 Chr 17: 1-27.

⁶⁶ Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 270.

⁶⁷ Henry H. Halley. *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 218.

⁶⁸ Horton, *The Portable Seminary*, 236.

⁶⁹ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 294-295.

⁷⁰ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 133-135.

⁷¹ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The Bible Background Commentary—Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic), 412.

⁷² Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 139-140.

⁷³ Garrett and Wanner, *Archaeological Study Bible*, 679.

⁷⁴ Hooker, "The Age of the Patriarchs."

⁷⁵ Marshall et al., *New Bible Dictionary*.

⁷⁶ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 140.

In summary, the following highlights constituted the historical intertexture common to the Hebrew people who resided in Judea and Jerusalem in the postexilic era:

1. The Hebrew people believed they were chosen by Yahweh to fulfill a purpose only they could fulfill in accordance with a covenant between Yahweh and the Hebrew patriarch Abraham.⁷⁷
2. After a time of slavery, Yahweh recommitted himself to the Hebrew people through the Mosaic covenant which was conditioned upon the Hebrew peoples' obedience to Yahweh's decrees.⁷⁸
3. According to the conditions set by Yahweh in the Mosaic covenant, the Hebrew people were forbidden among other things to intermarry with the inhabitants of Canaan or the surrounding regions.⁷⁹
4. Under King David and his son Solomon the city of Jerusalem and the temple were established as signs of Yahweh's fulfilled promises and continual presence with the Hebrew people. Moreover, they became a symbol of the pride of the Hebrew people.⁸⁰
5. Rebellion against Yahweh's decrees during the monarchy period including the worship of foreign idols and intermarriage with the inhabitants of the Canaan lands eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem, the desecration of the temple, and the exile of the Hebrew people.⁸¹
6. After the exile, Cyrus king of Persia issued a decree that all foreign peoples could return to their ancestral homelands and gave them freedom to practice their indigenous religions, including the Jews who had been carried off into captivity by the Babylonians. Subsequently, from 538 to mid-fifth century BCE, the Jews returned to Judea and Jerusalem and, despite much opposition from the non-Jewish inhabitants of land, rebuilt the Temple and repaired the eastern portion of the wall of Jerusalem,⁸² the pride of their people.⁸³
7. The Jewish inhabitants who resettled in Israel began to intermarry with the inhabitants residing around them in Judea and Jerusalem much to the chagrin of Ezra and Nehemiah.⁸⁴

Ezra and Nehemiah—Converging for a Common History

Hill and Walton assert that the stories of Nehemiah and Ezra overlapped and intertwined during the Persian Empire in the mid- to late-fifth century BCE.⁸⁵ However,

⁷⁷ Hooker, "The Age of the Patriarchs."

⁷⁸ Hooker, "Egypt and the Wanderings."

⁷⁹ Shemtov, "On Intermarriage."

⁸⁰ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 104.

⁸¹ Hooker, "The Birth and Evolution of Judaism."

⁸² A. B. du Toit, *The New Testament Milieu* (Halfway House, ZA: Orion, 1998).

⁸³ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 104.

⁸⁴ Rabbi Hayyim Angel, "The Contrasting Leadership Models of Ezra and Nehemiah," *Conversations: The Journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals*, <http://www.jewishideas.org/articles/contrasting-leadership-models-ezra-and-nehemiah>.

there is some dispute as to which of the two first arrived in Jerusalem.⁸⁶ Traditional views place Ezra's mission as primary, but modern research suggests Ezra followed Nehemiah.⁸⁷ The traditional view is based on the personal accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah recorded in Ezra 7:1 and Nehemiah 2:1 in which Ezra recorded his arrival to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (458 BCE) and Nehemiah cited his arrival in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I (445 BCE).⁸⁸ However, modern research has raised a number of objections against the traditional sequence, suggesting Nehemiah's mission occurred prior to Ezra's.⁸⁹ Cabal asserts that those who object to the traditional sequence cite at least two principal arguments. First, there is alleged archaeological data that suggests the geopolitical climate during the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-359 BCE) was more suited to the kinds of activity in which Ezra engaged.⁹⁰ This was due to a revolt by Egypt against Persian rule during the reign of Artaxerxes II that may have precipitated the desire to establish stronger ties with other outlying regions of the empire.⁹¹ The counterargument to this objection is that Egypt had also revolted around 459 BCE in the time of Artaxerxes I.⁹² If that was the case, then it seems conceivable that Persia could have moved at that time to establish stronger relationships with the same outlying areas of the empire.⁹³ Additionally, Cabal argued that in order to accept the later date of Ezra, adherents must ignore the occasions in which Ezra appeared in Jerusalem with Nehemiah.⁹⁴ Most scholars agree that Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 445 BCE and remained governor until 433 BCE; thus, if Ezra did not arrive until the seventh year of Artaxerxes II (398 BCE), that would exclude the possibility of Ezra and Nehemiah appearing together as recorded in Nehemiah 8:1-10:39 and 12:27-47.⁹⁵ The second argument for a later date of Ezra involves discrepancies in the two texts as to the succession of high priests.⁹⁶ Critics of the earlier view of Ezra argue: (a) Jerusalem was better populated during Ezra's time than Nehemiah's time; (b) the high priest during Ezra's activity was listed as Jehohanan, who appears to have been the grandson of Eliashib, who was high priest during Nehemiah's activity; (c) Nehemiah had to appoint temple treasurers, whereas they were already appointed in Ezra's time; and (d) Ezra thanked God for giving them a wall in Judah and Jerusalem, whereas Nehemiah is credited with building Jerusalem's wall.⁹⁷ That Jehohanan was high priest in 410 BCE appears to receive confirmation from the Elephantine papyri which were documents from a Jewish colony in Egypt.⁹⁸ One third alternate dating for Ezra has been offered,

⁸⁵ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 334-336.

⁸⁶ Garrett and Wanner, *Archaeological Study Bible*, 690.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 335-336.

⁸⁹ Garrett and Wanner, *Archaeological Study Bible*.

⁹⁰ Cabal, *The Apologetics Study Bible*, 679.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Garrett and Wanner, *Archaeological Study Bible*.

⁹⁷ Cabal, *The Apologetics Study Bible*.

⁹⁸ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 336.

placing his arrival to Jerusalem during the 37th year of Artaxerxes I, however, no textual evidence has yet been uncovered that suggests scribal error in Ezra 7:8.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Garrett and Wanner, *Archaeological Study Bible*.

Ezra the Levite Priest and Scribe—A Brief History

According to various scholars, Ezra was a scribe and a Levite priest who lived in Babylonia until he received the favor of the Persian emperor Artaxerxes Longimanus to return to Jerusalem in 458 BCE.¹⁰⁰ First Ezra was a scribe.¹⁰¹ Garrett and Wanner assert that scribes occupied an important position as a professional class in the society of the ancient world.¹⁰² Furthermore, they report that the tribal arts of reading, writing, and interpreting written documents assured them a vital role in the affairs of person, state, and sanctuary.¹⁰³ Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas explain, “As a scribe, Ezra was possibly a member of the Persian bureaucracy. It was a common practice in the Near Eastern governments to employ persons trained not only as secretaries or clerks, but as diplomats and lawyers.”¹⁰⁴ Even so, du Toit argues that within Judaism, Ezra lifted the prominence of scribal scholarship.¹⁰⁵ He further claims that from the time of Ezra forward, the scribal group would exert an increasing influence on Judaism, until after the fall of Jerusalem in the first-century CE.¹⁰⁶ However, the full reason for Ezra’s move to Jerusalem is not fully known or understood.¹⁰⁷ Matthews speculates that as an official scribe in the Persian bureaucracy, the Persian king may have had an ulterior motive for allowing Ezra to return to Jerusalem.¹⁰⁸ During that time, the Persian monarch was enduring unrest in Egypt and may have wanted to increase his control over Judea. Matthew further comments, “Whatever the reason for his coming, Ezra was given extraordinary powers of authority to administer the province [of Judea].”¹⁰⁹

Second, Ezra was a Levite priest who descended from the high priestly line of Aaron.¹¹⁰ Although he himself did not ascend to the office of high priest during the postexilic period, Ezra traced his heritage through the entire high priestly line in the time of the monarchs to Aaron himself.¹¹¹ This type of pedigree would have been especially important to exert authority over his fellow Hebrew compatriots. As Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas observe, “As he came to Jerusalem, it would have been important for Ezra that he be recognized as having the proper credentials so that his mission would be sanctioned and his actions would have the force of law.”¹¹² Although sent by the Persian king Artaxerxes, Ezra’s own purpose for going to Jerusalem was the desire for further study of the law of Yahweh, to put it into practice, and to teach the statutes and

¹⁰⁰ M.G. Easton, “Ezra” in *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (see note 39).

¹⁰¹ Achtemeier, “The Book of Ezra.”

¹⁰² Garrett and Wanner, *Archaeological Study Bible*, 682.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Walton et al., *The Bible Background Commentary*, 468.

¹⁰⁵ A. B. du Toit, *The New Testament Milieu*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 142.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Wilmington, *Wilmington’s Bible Handbook*, 268.

¹¹¹ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 142.

¹¹² Walton et al., *The Bible Background Commentary*, 468.

ordinances in Israel.¹¹³ To that end, du Toit points out, “[Ezra] reinforced the temple worship, and bound the people to the law with great zeal.”¹¹⁴ Hooker notes that the Hebrew religion underwent a profound shift during the exile which led to reforms during the postexilic period.¹¹⁵ This desire to reform was driven by a small group of Jewish peoples who were convinced that the calamities endured by the Jews were due to the corruption of their religion and ethics.¹¹⁶ Hill and Walton conclude that the dominant theological idea of the memoir material of both Ezra and Nehemiah is covenant renewal and that they were driven to rebuild and reform postexilic Jerusalem inspired by the notion of Yahweh as covenant keeper.¹¹⁷ Given his sense of deep commitment to the law of Yahweh, it is not surprising that when told of the Jews intermarrying with the other people groups in the land, Ezra tore his clothes, pulled his hair, and sat appalled.¹¹⁸

Nehemiah the Cupbearer—A Brief History

As discussed in the introduction, Nehemiah’s story was recorded in the form of personal memoirs placed in the book of Ezra–Nehemiah of the Hebrew scriptures.¹¹⁹ It has also been established that his story was set at the time of the Persian Empire in the mid-fifth century BCE.¹²⁰ However, as one person’s journey is never identical to another’s, Nehemiah’s situation was different from that of Ezra. While Ezra lived in Babylonia and was employed as a scribe in the Persian bureaucracy, Nehemiah lived in Susa, the Persian capital, and was the cupbearer to the King Artaxerxes.¹²¹ In the ancient Near East, a cupbearer was a confidant in the royal entourage who could exercise influence on a king’s policies. This seemed to be the case with Nehemiah in his relationship with the Persian king, Artaxerxes I.¹²² According to his memoirs, when Nehemiah was sad in the king’s presence, the king not only noticed and asked about his emotional state, but was of the disposition to grant Nehemiah his petition.¹²³ In his own words, Nehemiah was greatly saddened by a report from his brother that the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem felt ashamed and disgraced due to the poor condition of the city and its walls, the pride of Israel’s glory.¹²⁴ It was while Nehemiah was in that saddened state that the king granted his petition to return to the land of his forefathers to rebuild the wall.¹²⁵ Apparently, King Artaxerxes had so much confidence in Nehemiah that he not only granted him safe passage and authority to restore the Jerusalem wall,

¹¹³ Matthews, *Manners and Customs*, 142.

¹¹⁴ du Toit, *The New Testament Milieu*.

¹¹⁵ Hooker, “The Birth and Evolution of Judaism.”

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 337, 340.

¹¹⁸ Ezr 9:3.

¹¹⁹ Horton, *The Portable Seminary*, 237.

¹²⁰ Yamauchi and Youngblood, “Nehemiah.”

¹²¹ Walton et al., *The Bible Background Commentary*, 472.

¹²² Yamauchi and Youngblood, “The Book of Nehemiah.”

¹²³ Wilmington, *Wilmington’s Bible Handbook*, 274.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 274-275.

but also appointed him to a twelve-year term as governor of the province.¹²⁶ After receiving permission, Nehemiah went to Jerusalem, surveyed the conditions of the wall, organized the Jewish people for the work, and led them to rebuild the city wall in 52 days.¹²⁷ Beyond the rebuilding of the wall, Nehemiah led the Jewish inhabitants of postexilic Judea and Jerusalem in a number of reforms: (a) he rescued the poor from oppression and slavery by the nobles and rich by repressing the exactions of the nobles and the usury of the rich on the poor, (b) he refused to receive his lawful allowance from the people while as governor, (c) he made provisions for the maintenance of the Levites and priests and for celebration of worship, and (d) he expelled from members of the high priest's family and rebuked and punished the common people for intermarriage with other non-Jewish peoples.¹²⁸ Perhaps, interesting to note from Nehemiah's memoirs is how frequently he seems to pat himself on the back for his accomplishments by petitioning God to remember him for the things he did, especially in the accounts of his reforms mentioned in verses 14, 22, and 31 of chapter 13.¹²⁹ Angel concludes that Nehemiah's manner of dealing with problems and his petitions to God for recognition give insight to his personality and leadership style.¹³⁰ However, *The New Bible Dictionary* intimates that Nehemiah's desire for recognition was not that of men but of Yahweh.¹³¹ They observed his memoir account read like a report a civil servant would send to his superiors; however, in this case, Nehemiah probably had Yahweh in mind rather than the Persian king Artaxerxes.¹³²

II. ANALYSIS OF A MUTUAL PROBLEM

Through the historical intertexture analysis highlighted above, it can be seen that Ezra and Nehemiah were two Jewish figures with a common heritage, but whose divergent lives merge together in the second part of the postexilic Jerusalem.¹³³ Over the course of their respective ministries in Jerusalem, Ezra and Nehemiah encountered a mutual problem: the intermarriage between the Jewish remnant which returned to Israel during the postexilic period and the non-Jewish inhabitants living among them.¹³⁴ The following passages from the Hebrew scriptures describe the problem and the responses of Ezra and Nehemiah after becoming aware of this problem.

Ezra 9:1-5 and 10:1:

After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as

¹²⁶ Yamauchi and Youngblood, "The Book of Nehemiah."

¹²⁷ Wilmington, *Wilmington's Bible Handbook*, 474-477.

¹²⁸ "Nehemiah," *Bible Commentary Guide*, <http://biblereferenceguide.com/study/prophet/nehemiah.html>.

¹²⁹ Angel, "The Contrasting Leadership Models."

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Marshall et al., *New Bible Dictionary*.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 330.

¹³⁴ The Jewish Chronicles, "Religious Legislation."

wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way.” When I heard this, I tore my garment and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled. Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. At the evening sacrifice I got up from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle torn, and fell on my knees, spread out my hands to the LORD my God, and said, “O my God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you.”

Nehemiah 13:23-27:

In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples. And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?”

From observation of these texts, it is apparent that both Ezra and Nehemiah became upset at the people’s actions, and yet each one responded differently. Ezra seemed to turn his emotions in on himself (i.e., he internalized the problem). In contrast, Nehemiah turned his emotion back on the perpetrators (i.e., he externalized the problem). That Ezra internalized the problem is seen in his reaction: (a) he tore his garments; (b) pulled out his hair; (c) sat silently, fasting until the evening sacrifice; (d) wept and threw himself before God; and (e) approached God in prayer as one accursed.¹³⁵ That Nehemiah externalized the problem is seen in his reaction towards the perpetrators of intermarriage: (a) he contended with them, (b) cursed them, (c) beat some of them, (d) pulled their hair out, and (e) boldly asked God to bless him for what he had done.¹³⁶ Yet curiously, the people naturally gravitated to Ezra’s side, confessed and repented of their involvement, and devised their own solution without coercion.¹³⁷ However, in the case of Nehemiah, there is no reference of the people endearing themselves to him after he forcefully threatened them to change their ways.¹³⁸ Angel concludes that these distinct responses epitomized the leadership styles of the two postexilic figures.¹³⁹ In fact, through an extended analysis of the broader Ezra–Nehemiah text, Angel offers a comprehensive picture of the two leadership styles, such a comprehensive and eloquently described picture that one would find it difficult to

¹³⁵ Ezr 9:3.

¹³⁶ Neh 13:25.

¹³⁷ Angel, “The Contrasting Leadership Models.”

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

improve upon.¹⁴⁰ In a contrast and comparison of their respective leadership efforts, Angel¹⁴¹ makes the following observations of Ezra and Nehemiah:

1. Ezra was given immense authority, but deliberately moderated it, as seen in the first half of Ezra 8 where he casually includes his own name among a list of many others and Nehemiah 8-10 in which he surrounds himself and shares center stage with 13 others. In contrast, Nehemiah does not list any other names of those who travelled with him and tended to take center stage.
2. Ezra raised new leaders and engaged the members of the community to take active roles in their spiritual development, as seen in Ezra 8 in which he involved others and gave them credit for their involvement. In contrast, Nehemiah credited himself for his accomplishments.
3. Ezra surrounded himself with people and shared or transferred authority to others—as seen when he invites others to help bring the Levites to Israel (Ezr 8:15-20). In contrast, Nehemiah gave orders to others, threatened, and used physical force to implement his goals (Neh 13:21, 25, 28).
4. Ezra raised many disciples, thereby broadening the base of the leadership and also ensuring continuity rather than dependence on him, as seen in lists of those who Ezra empowered to help him including a young Levite named Sherebiah who is mentioned numerous times in both Ezra and Nehemiah. In contrast, Nehemiah portrayed himself as an indispensable leader whose community failed in his absence (Neh 13:6).
5. Other Jewish sources described Ezra as a humble man and, in contrast, Nehemiah as a man prone to self-aggrandizement.
6. In turn, the people voluntarily gravitated to Ezra for guidance and teaching as seen when the people spontaneously joined him as Ezra lamented and poured himself out before Yahweh in order to intercede for them for their participation in the intermarriage problem (Ezr 9:4; 10:1). In contrast, there is no mention of others gravitating to Nehemiah or endearing themselves to him.

In making this comparison, Angel points out that it was not his intent to lift one leader over the other, but rather to show how the two leadership styles of these two contemporary figures in postexilic Israel were different and yet to a large degree effective.¹⁴² Yet, Angel does note that several rabbinic traditions demonstrated a clear preference for Ezra, but perhaps this merely reflected their natural bias in that Ezra was a fellow priest and scribe. In defense of Nehemiah's personality and leadership approach, *The New Bible Dictionary* comments:

When Nehemiah's "report" was read by others, they would have seen in it a revealing picture of a man of spirit, haughty and quick-tempered, and over-suspicious, no doubt, but passionately concerned for the well-being of his people; quick to respond to appeals of brotherhood, and zealous for the purity of Jewish worship; above all, a leader who as the opposite of a self-made man, one who was always conscious of the "good hand" and the "fear" of his God upon him.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Marshall et al., *New Bible Dictionary*.

In the end, Angel qualifies his observations by noting that both Ezra and Nehemiah, as presented in the text, were God-fearing individuals dedicated to rebuilding Israel physically and spiritually and, as such, both were effective to a large degree.¹⁴⁴ In this statement, Angel makes the point of this paper: Just as there is more than one effective way to skin a cat, so there is more than one effective way to lead others in any given situation.

III. DISCUSSION

This study examined the leadership approaches of Ezra and Nehemiah, two contemporary figures in postexilic Hebrew–Jewish history. The aim of the analysis was to gain a deeper understanding of Nehemiah and Ezra and the postexilic Hebrew people within their respective and shared historical contexts. The ultimate purpose of the study was to gain insights into their leadership styles and to show how diverse leadership approaches can be effective within similar circumstances.

Ezra and Nehemiah's Leadership Styles

The first purpose of this paper was to gain insights into the respective leadership styles of Ezra and Nehemiah. Given these descriptions of the Ezra and Nehemiah leadership approaches, it seems that in today's leadership vernacular both Ezra and Nehemiah's leadership approaches could be characterized in terms of Blackaby and Blackaby's version of spiritual leadership.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, it could be argued that Ezra's style could be characterized according to Collins' level 5 leadership,¹⁴⁶ while Nehemiah's style could be described in terms of a situational leader.

Ezra and Nehemiah—Spiritual Leadership

First, in the leadership vernacular of the 21st century, it seems that both Ezra and Nehemiah displayed spiritual leadership as defined by Blackaby and Blackaby.¹⁴⁷ Some have attempted to define spiritual leadership, but in doing so placed the emphasis not on leaders aiding subordinates in the growth of their spirituality, but merely making room for their spirituality at the workplace.¹⁴⁸ However, Blackaby and Blackaby define spiritual leadership as centered in God (as portrayed in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures) and aimed at helping followers and subordinates move from their own finite and temporal agendas to God's eternal agenda.¹⁴⁹ From their point of view, Blackaby and Blackaby show spiritual leadership as exemplifying the following distinctive elements not highlighted in other spiritual leadership theories:

1. The spiritual leader's task is to move people from where they are to where God wants them to be.
2. Spiritual leaders depend on the Holy Spirit.

¹⁴⁴ Angel, "The Contrasting Leadership Models."

¹⁴⁵ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001).

¹⁴⁶ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 17-40.

¹⁴⁷ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*.

¹⁴⁸ Louis A. Fry, "Toward a Theory of Spiritual Leadership," *The Leadership Quarterly* 14(2003): 693-727.

¹⁴⁹ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 20.

3. Spiritual leaders are accountable to God.
4. Spiritual leaders can influence all people, not just God's people.
5. Spiritual leaders work from God's agenda.¹⁵⁰

Given the above description, it appears Ezra exemplified spiritual leadership in that he (a) demonstrated the desire to move his fellow Hebrews on to God's agenda (Ezr 7:9, 10), (b) showed dependence on and accountability to God (Ezr 9:5-15), (c) gained influence with the king of Persia and seemed well-respected by those under his care and tutelage (Ezr 7:11-26), and (d) was zealous for God's name and reputation (Ezra 9:5-15). Likewise, Nehemiah seemed to exemplify spiritual leadership in that much of what he did he seemed to in reference to God and for the betterment of the postexilic Jewish community.¹⁵¹

Ezra—Level 5 Leadership

In a much-publicized research study of publicly-held, Fortune 500 companies, Collins and his 21 research assistants studied the characteristics of those companies that made the transition from good (or mediocre) to great performance.¹⁵² In all, Collins's group found only 11 companies which made that transition.¹⁵³ In the process of analyzing those organizations, they found what they felt was unique in term of CEO leadership style necessary to lead such a transition (i.e., the CEOs of those companies were not of the charismatic, my agenda or no agenda kind).¹⁵⁴ Instead, they exemplified the following characteristics:

1. Quiet, humble, modest, reserved, shy, gracious, mild-mannered, self-effacing, understated, did not believe the hype.
2. Unwavering resolve; fanatically driven for results.
3. Ambition first and foremost for the future of the company.
4. Give credit to outside factors; take personal blame for failures.
5. Not afraid to surround themselves with those of greater ability.
6. Sets up his replacement for success.¹⁵⁵

In comparing this list with the observations offered by Angel¹⁵⁶ in the analysis above, it seems apparent that Ezra exemplified level 5 leadership. Ezra exemplified level 5 leadership in that he demonstrated that he (a) was self-effacing and humble in that he moderated his authority and shared the spotlight with others,¹⁵⁷ (b) gave credit for other people's accomplishments,¹⁵⁸ and (c) was more concerned about Yahweh's name than his own seen in his effort to steer the people back to Yahweh.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁵¹ Marshall et al., *New Bible Dictionary*.

¹⁵² Collins, *Good to Great*, 5.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 17-40.

¹⁵⁶ Angel, "The Contrasting Leadership Models."

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 338, 340.

Nehemiah—Situational Leadership

In his generally negative depiction of Nehemiah's leadership style, Angel concedes that Nehemiah as presented in the text was a God-fearing individual dedicated to rebuilding Israel physically and spiritually, and as such was effective to a large degree.¹⁶⁰ Despite his apparent faults, *The New Bible Dictionary* describes Nehemiah as "passionately concerned for the well-being of his people; quick to respond to appeals of brotherhood, and zealous for the purity of Jewish worship."¹⁶¹ Given these descriptions, it seems that Nehemiah not only exemplified spiritual leadership, but also Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership.¹⁶² Simply put, Northouse asserts that situational leadership, as defined by Hersey and Blanchard, focused on leadership situations as related to follower maturity.¹⁶³ The premise of situational leadership is based on the notion that different employee personalities and maturity levels require different types of leadership responses.¹⁶⁴ As dictated by the personality and maturity level of a given subordinate, the effective leader employs a combination of directive and supportive behaviors.¹⁶⁵ Matching the description of this style of leadership with Angel and *The New Bible Dictionary's* descriptions of Nehemiah's character, it seems that Nehemiah exemplified situational leadership.

Leadership Style by Personality Type

Finally, the second purpose of this paper was to show how diverse leadership approaches can be effective within similar circumstances. Stech presents the case for psychodynamic approaches to leadership. Simply stated, the psychodynamic approach recognizes that "there is no particular type of personality that is better than any other in a leadership position."¹⁶⁶ Moreover, Stech asserts that "the important point is the leader has insight into his or her own emotional responses and habitual patterns of behavior."¹⁶⁷ The premise underlying Stech's statement is that leaders function most effectively not when they attempt to exemplify some idealized or publicly preferred form of leadership, but when they lead from their own personality mix with an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in those types. This same notion is highlighted by Sugerman, Scullard, and Wilhelm in their recent study and published work in which they argue that leaders function most effectively in conjunction with their own leader personality type.¹⁶⁸

This paper has examined the leadership styles of Nehemiah and Ezra, two contemporary figures in postexilic Judaic society. Their leadership styles were

¹⁶⁰ Angel, "The Contrasting Leadership Models."

¹⁶¹ Marshall et al., *New Bible Dictionary*.

¹⁶² Ernest L. Stech, "Psychodynamic Approach," in *Leadership—Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed., ed. Peter G. Northouse (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004), 87.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Jeffrey Sugerman, Mark Scullard, and Emma Wilhelm, *The 8 Dimensions of Leadership* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2011).

examined in light of the historical intertexture of the Hebrew scripture texts in which they are found; namely Ezra 9:1-10:1 and Nehemiah 13:23-27. Through this analysis, it was posited that Ezra and Nehemiah exemplified different forms of leadership approaches and that each was effective in a large degree. It was further postulated that both Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrated spiritual leadership as defined by Blackaby and Blackaby, but that beyond spiritual leadership Ezra demonstrated level 5 leadership as defined by Collins, while Nehemiah demonstrated situational leadership as described by Hersey and Blanchard.

About the Author

Born and raised in Southern California, Eric Coggins, Ph.D., served six years in cross-cultural church organizational development in Cambodia, applying Biblical truth and God's compassion in the Khmer cultural context. He recently obtained a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership from Regent University and now serves as online faculty at Liberty University. He was chosen as one of a few to present a paper at the second Global Servant Leadership Research Roundtable in Melbourne, Australia, in June 2012. He is married to his one and only beautiful and talented wife Renee since 1986 and has five wonderful children.

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