

THE QUMRAN INTERPRETATION OF EZEKIEL 4, 5-6

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Several mysteries still surround the Qumran chronological note in CD i 5-11 (viz., that the sect arose 'in the period of wrath, three hundred and ninety years after he had given (*letito*) them into the power of Nebuchadnezzar', and the Teacher appeared twenty years later). What is the basis of the prophet Ezekiel's calculations, which are here being referred to (Ezek. 4:5-6)? Ezekiel symbolically enacts a period of iniquity (*'awon*) of 390 years for Israel, and 40 years for Judah. Thus a further problem is: why is the Qumran period 390 + 20 years, rather than 390 + 40? The completion of the period of forty years is not mentioned.

Discussions of the meaning of Ezekiel's prophecy have centred on the duration of the actual periods of exile of Samaria and Judaea, from 721 and 586 respectively. This has led to negative results: no reason for the figures can be suggested on this basis. It will be suggested here that there is a single explanation for both this problem and that of the Qumran variation. The reason in both cases derives from a matter of central concern to both Ezekiel and the sect: the re-establishment of the true Temple.

It is inherently probable that Ezekiel the priest had access to the annals of the reigns of the kings of Judah, if not to the nearly complete books of Kings.¹ His prophecy concerning the 430 years was issued at the time of the siege of Jerusalem (4:1-3). It was therefore possible for him to calculate the exact duration of the Temple, from its erection in the fourth year of Solomon to its fall.

But the textual basis of Ezekiel's calculations cannot now be known with certainty. The pre-Massoretic situation for the historical books in particular has been complicated by the Qumran discoveries. The fragments of Samuel bear witness to an Old Palestinian text type, allied to the LXX and the text used by the Chronicler. This text type is thought by Cross² to derive from the fifth-century Jewish community in Palestine.

The question of the origin of the proto-Massoretic text, however, has still to be settled, and Cross has made the interesting suggestion that it arose in Babylon after the return of the Exiles and was reintroduced into Palestine in the Hellenistic period or later. This suggestion has much to commend it. An origin in Babylon, the home of annalistic science, would account for the adoption by the Massorettes of what is in many ways an inferior text.

It is also relevant to the case that there is a high percentage of agreement in all known texts on the figures for the annals of Judah. There are known variants in only three out of thirty-nine figures.³ (The question of erroneous synchronisms, the chief problem of the chronology, is not at the moment relevant.)

This high level of agreement, together with the possibility of a Babylonian origin for the Massoretic tradition,⁴ means that there is, after all, a very good chance that Ezekiel had before him the same figures as are now preserved in the MT.

The figures for the reigns of the kings of Judah show that the duration of the First Temple was $430\frac{1}{2}$ years.⁵ Its history had two marked stages: during the reign of Solomon, 40 years in round figures, when it was the centre of a united kingdom, and 390 years (in round figures) when Israel had seceded and it served Judah alone. Thus Israel (considered to be a continuous entity even after 721, from Ezekiel's viewpoint, cf. 37:19) was without a true Temple for 390 years, from its secession to 586. After 586, Judah also was without a Temple. Both of these could be considered 'times of iniquity', of uncleanness (cf. 4:13). They are symbolically depicted by Ezekiel in the correct order and designation, first 390, for Israel, then 40 years for Judah. The prediction of 40 years for the Exile of Judah after 586 does not agree with Jeremiah's estimate. But it makes a total period of Templelessness for Israel and Judah combined of 430 years, equivalent to the exact duration of Solomon's Temple. Ezekiel is saying that when the years of iniquity, for Israel and Judah combined, have equalled the years of the Temple, then the new Temple, for Israel and Judah combined, may be built.

But the Return did not bring the expected fulfilment. The new Temple had no King, and for this or other reasons was opposed by the northern part of the land. The men of Qumran, like the Samaritans, opposed the extant Second Temple, but still looked forward to a corporeal Temple of their own (cf. the Temple Scroll). It was manifest that the prophecy of Ezekiel concerning

the period that must precede the appearance of the Temple, with its related Messiahship, had not yet been fulfilled.

A new point of departure is found in CD i 5-11. The period of wrath (rather than iniquity, the emphasis being shifted to punishment) must date, not from Israel's disobedience, but from the Fall of Jerusalem.⁶ It must concern only the period when the Temple of Solomon was no longer standing. This period was drawing to a close about the time the Qumran sect arose, i.e. the sect came into being as a response to the imminent appearance of the new Temple, together with its associated Messiahship.

Chronological calculations were of the greatest interest to the men of Qumran. It can be assumed that all available sources of such information would be collected. Their library contained both proto-Massoretic texts, and texts related to the Hebrew underlying the LXX, as is shown in the case of Jeremiah. They were in a position, therefore, to recognise the basis of Ezekiel's prophecy as the period of duration of the First Temple, according to one version of the annals of Judah.⁷ But other versions of these records were also available to them. On the basis of the 'Babylonian' (later Massoretic) figures for the annals of *Israel*, the total period of duration of the Temple was 412 years.⁸ Ezekiel had either disregarded the Israelite records, or, what was more likely, was making use of the annals of Judah only, rather than a partially complete book of Kings.

On one set of records, then, and one which might be favoured by a 'northern' viewpoint, the period of wrath equivalent to the duration of the Temple must be, in round figures, 410 years. Ezekiel's prophecy had been corrected due to enlarged sources of information. The appearance of the Teacher marks the completion of this period, the beginning of the Messianic age that would shortly be marked by the rebuilding of the Temple.

The northern viewpoint is also reflected in the preservation of the Israelite segment of 390 years, rather than the Judah segment. This figure has not been corrected, because Qumran no longer sees the fulfilment of the prophecy in the period of Israel's separation from the First Temple. The point of the sub-division has been obscured by their re-orientation.

To summarise: the basis of Ezekiel's prophecy would appear to be his estimate of the periods of isolation from the Temple of Israel and Judah respectively. When these periods combined have equalled the period of duration of Solomon's Temple, the new Temple will be built, in Ezekiel's view. The Qumran sect dated

the period from the fall of Jerusalem rather than from the secession of Israel, and also found variant figures for the basis of the prophecy. But the recognition of the background of the prophecy gives support to the view that Qumran chronological calculations were centred, not only on the beginning of the Messianic age, but on the re-building of the true Temple.

REFERENCES

1. Compiled probably between 621 and 561 B.C. See O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, Blackwell, 1965, p. 284ff. The Annals of the Kings of Judah were still available to the Chronicler in 400 B.C. (Eissfeldt, *op. cit.*, p. 532).
2. F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, Duckworth, 1958, p. 140ff.
3. In I K. 14:21, 15:2, and II K. 8:17.
4. Cross supposes a divergence of the Babylonian text from the Old Palestinian after 500 B.C. But in the case of the figures for the reigns of kings, there is an intrinsic likelihood of the preservation of the original. The variants in the different LXX texts (footnote 3) are not necessarily to be accounted for as original, despite the new conception of the Palestinian origin of the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX. Neither the various LXX figures nor the MT create harmonious synchronisms, so neither version can be accused of alteration for this purpose. On the balance of probabilities, an accidental alteration in the course of the complex history of the LXX text is more likely than a conscious alteration in this respect of the earlier Babylonian text by the later Babylonian text. LXX^B may possibly show a chronological interest which affects its witness. It alone gives a total of 460 years for the duration of the Temple (Rehoboam 12 years for M.T. 17, in additional passage at I K. 12:24, Abijam 6 for 3, Jehoram 40 for 8). Added to the 440 years from the Exodus to the foundation of the Temple, attested by all Greek versions (I K. 6:1), this gives 900 years from the Exodus to the fall of the city, rather than the MT 910 (480 + 430). LXX^L has only one variant, LXX^A only one.

5. Solomon 37 years after foundation. I K. 6:1 (second month of 4th year) and I K. 11:42

Rehoboam	17	I K.	14:21
Abijam	3		15:2
Asa	41		15:10
Jehoshaphat	25		22:42
Jehoram	8	II K.	8:17
Ahaziah	1		8:26
Athaliah	6		11:3
Joash	40		12:2
Amaziah	29		14:2
Uzziah	52		15:2
Jotham	16		15:33
Ahaz	16		16:2
Hezekiah	29		18:2

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Manasseh	55	21:1
Amon	2	21:19
Josiah	31	22:1
Jehoahaz	$\frac{1}{4}$	23:31
Jehoiakim	11	23:36
Jehoiachin	$\frac{1}{4}$	24:8
Zedekiah	11	24:18
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	430 $\frac{1}{2}$	

6. Not necessarily dated at 586 B.C. by the sect. Differing reckonings of the date of this event were extant. Cf. G. R. Driver, *The Judaean Scrolls* (Blackwell, 1965) for examples. The actual date of the rise of the sect must still depend on archaeological data and historical allusions in their literature.
7. The ambiguous preposition *l* (in *letito*) may reflect their recognition that the period occurs both before and after the Fall.
8. Solomon 37
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| Jeroboam | 22 | I K. 14:20 |
| Nadab | 2 | 15:25 |
| Baasha | 24 | 15:33 |
| Elah | 2 | 16:8 |
| Zimri | 0 | 16:15 |
| Omri | 12 | 16:23 |
| Ahab | 22 | 16:29 |
| Ahaziah | 2 | 22:52 |
| Jehoram | 12 | II K. 3:1 |
| Jehu | 28 | 10:36 |
| Jehoahaz | 17 | 13:1 |
| Joash | 16 | 13:10 |
| Jeroboam | 41 | 14:23 |
| Zechariah | $\frac{1}{4}$ | 15:8 |
| Shallum | 0 | 15:13 |
| Menahem | 10 | 15:17 |
| Pekahiah | 2 | 15:23 |
| Pekah | 20 | 15:27 |
| Hoshea | 9 | 17:1 |

+133 $\frac{1}{2}$ years from 6th year of Hezekiah to the Fall, accepting the dominant synchronism of II K. 18:9, 18:1, and 17:1, and not that of II K. 15:30, which is manifestly erroneous.

412 $\frac{1}{2}$