

Prophecy and Prophets in Stories

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Edited by

Bob Becking
Hans M. Barstad



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Haggai and Zechariah in the Stories of Ezra and 1 Esdras

Bob Becking

1 Introduction

Generally, the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are not connected with the world of prophecy as has already been observed by Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 18:36 'Esdras . . . who is historical rather than prophetic'. This longstanding tradition might be based on some sort of prejudice on two fronts: Ezra and Nehemiah are seen as expressions of a legalistic world view that is difficult to combine with the traditional view on prophecy as an individual expression of a free spirit. The last years have produced a shift in the basic view on both features. Ezra and Nehemiah are no longer seen as dull books presenting a legalistic view on reality.¹ On the other hand, prophecy is more and more construed as part of the divinatory continuum.² I therefore dare to talk about two stories and two prophets from the post-exilic era. The stories are:

- (1) The report on the problematic rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem after the Babylonian Exile as narrated in the biblical book Ezra 3–6, and
- (2) The relatively free rendition of that same report in the Greek book 1 Esdras.

The two prophets are Haggai and Zechariah who are referred to in both texts. My focal question would be to ask after the role these two prophets play in the

1 See, e.g., B. Becking, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity* (FAT 80), Tübingen 2011; L.S. Fried, *Ezra and the Law in History and Tradition*, Columbia 2014, 148–169.

2 There exists a wealth of literature on this topic, I confine myself here to F.H. Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-historical Investigation* (JSOT Sup 142), Sheffield 1994; J. Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 56), Leiden 2012; S.M. Maul, *Die Wahrsagekunst im Alten Orient: Zeichen des Himmels und der Erde*, München 2013; M. Nissinen, 'Prophecy as Construct: Ancient and Modern', in: R.P. Gordon, H.M. Barstad (ed.), *"Thus speaks Ishtar of Arbela": Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, Winona Lake 2013, 11–35; A. Lenzi, J. Stökl (eds), *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires* (SBL ANEM 7), Atlanta 2014.

development of the plot in both stories, or phrased differently: which function did they have in the coming about of the main narrative programme?³

2 Ezra 3–6

As I have argued elsewhere, Ezra 3–6 narrate the problematic trajectory of the rebuilding of the post-exilic temple in Jerusalem.⁴ I will not dwell here too much on questions of composition and emergence of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, although this is an interesting, but complex scholarly discussion.⁵ I just lay out my position:⁶ Nehemiah came first, the person as well as the book – at least its basic layer – are to be dated to the middle of the fifth century. In the Nehemiah story – memoir if you like the term – Ezra is only a minor character. Neh. 8 narrates that Ezra presents the ‘book of the law of Moses’ which is then read aloud by the Levites. Ezra explains the text and invites the people to study the book of the law. Out of this minor character, a pseudographic book came into being, known to us as the Book of Ezra. The book was composed around 400. This time is relevant for several reasons.

- (1) The Persians increasingly took an interest in the area of Yehud which after the regained independence of Egypt was on the border of the empire;

3 I will not discuss the narratological or semiotic categories involved here, but only refer to E.J. van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2–3: A Semiotic Theory and Method of Analysis Applied to the Story of the Garden of Eden* (SSN 25), Assen 1989; M. Bal, *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Toronto 1985; S. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (second edition), Abingdon 2002.

4 Becking, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 1–23; see also D.V. Edelman, *The Origins of the ‘Second’ Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem*, London Oakville 2005; D.V. Edelman, ‘Ezra 1–6 as Idealized Past’, in: E. Ben Zvi, D. Edelman, F. Polak (eds), *A Palimpsest: Rhetoric, Ideology, Stylistics, and Language Relating to Persian Israel*, Piscataway 2009, 47–59.

5 From the abundance of scholarly literature, I only present a selection: C.C. Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, Chicago 1910; H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (OTGu), Sheffield 1987; J. Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe: The Development of Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8* (BZAW 347), Berlin, New York 2004; J.L. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah Memoir and its Earliest Readers* (BZAW 348), Berlin, New York 2004; Edelman, *Origins*, 151–208; J. Blenkinsopp, *Judaism, the First Phase: The Place of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Origins of Judaism*, Grand Rapids 2009; R. Rothenbusch, “. . . abgesondert zur Tora Gottes hin”: *Ethnische und religiöse Identitäten im Ezra/Nehemiabuch* (HBS 70), Freiburg, Basel, Wien 2012, 1–246.

6 Following to some degree the insights of Th. Willi, *Ezra: Der Lehrer Israels* (Biblische Gestalten 26), Leipzig 2012.

- (2) The Persians ended the ban on the cult that was imposed on the temple of Jerusalem after the defiling murder of Joshua by his brother Johanan in 408. With 'Ezra' a new episode in the history of the Second Temple starts.⁷

The narratives on the return from exile (1–2) and the rebuilding of the temple (3–6) function as a motivating introduction to 7–10. In those final four chapters of the Book of Ezra, the profile of an orderly community is depicted. The lengthy introduction is narratively needed to present the measures as approved by King and God.

I therefore do not read Ezra 3–6 as a primary historical source, but as an ideological text that 'uses' historical elements to convince the audience of a specific view on temple, cult, and community. For the analysis of a narrative it is necessary to define its main narrative program. This remark is based on the conviction that a narrative text is characterized by a plot or a development of the story from a situation at the beginning of the story to the situation at the end of the story. This development in the story takes place as a result of the actions of the characters/individuals/actants. Ezra 3:1–6 relates the celebration of burnt sacrifices and the feast of Booths at the altar for YHWH in Jerusalem by a group of men who had returned from the exile. In a discursive remark in verse 6 it is noted: "The foundations of the temple of YHWH had not yet been laid, though." At the end of Ezra 6, three features are narrated. Ezra 6:16 reads: "By the third of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of king Darius, this house was completed." Ezra 6:17–18 narrates the dedication of the temple, while Ezra 6:19–22 relates the celebration of the Passover.

These observations make clear that two shifts have taken place:

- (1) From feast of Booths to Passover
- (2) From altar to Temple

These shifts are narrated in some fifteen smaller units, all presenting a step toward the end of the plot, or its complication.

At the end of chapter 4, Artaxerxes is said to have delivered a decree on the basis of which the work on the house of God in Jerusalem is halt. In the next unit it is narrated:

7 See R. Albertz, 'The Controversy about Judean versus Israelite Identity and the Persian Government: A new Interpretation of the Bagoses Story (*Jewish Antiquities* XI.297–301)', in: O. Lipschits, G.N. Knoppers, M. Oeming (eds), *Judah and the Judaeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identities in an International Context*, Winona Lake 2011, 483–504; S. Ruzicka, *Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire, 525–332 BCE*, Oxford 2012, 35–48.

Now the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Yehudites who were in Judah and Jerusalem; in the name of the God of Israel they prophesied to them. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them.⁸

The contents of the prophecy by Haggai and Zechariah are not revealed. Important is to note that the narrator *expressis verbis* mentions the source of the prophecy: ‘They prophesied *b^ešum ’elā yisrā’ēl* (in the name of the God of Israel)’. As a consequence, Zerubbabel takes the lead and restarts the rebuilding of the temple. It is interesting to note that in this building process they are ‘helped’ by the prophets. Two problems need to be discussed.

- (1) Are the *nebi’ayyā*, ‘the prophets’, identical with Haggai and Zechariah, or are they to be construed as a group of religious specialists? Both options can be defended.
- (2) What is the character of the prophetic help? The Aramaic verb *s^e’ad* – here as a Participle of the Pa’el – is in Biblical Aramaic only attested at Ezra. 5:2. The verb, however, occurs in various Aramaic dialects.⁹ Its meaning is ‘to help; to support’. In the Aramaic version of Darius’ Bisitun inscription § 5 and parallels, the text proclaims that Darius became king while ‘Ahuramazda helped me’.¹⁰ The main Persian god has applied his heavenly powers in favour of the new king. In the same vein, the leaders in Ezra 5 were supported by the prophetic activity which in my opinion did not include the carrying of bricks, but should have been acts of seeking the divine for good omens.¹¹

8 Ezra 5:1–2; see, e.g., J.M. Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (AB 14), New York 1965, 43–44; F.C. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT), Grand Rapids 1982, 78–79; H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16), Waco 1985, 75–76; J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (OTL), London 1988, 115–17.

9 See *DNWSI*, 795–96.

10 The phrase is repeated throughout the inscription; text: *TADAE* C2; see J.C. Greenfield and B. Porten, *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great Aramaic Version: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum I, IV), London 1982; A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*, London, New York 2007, 141–157; G. Granerod, ‘By the Favour of Ahuramazda I Am King: On the Promulgation of a Persian Propaganda Text among Babylonians and Judaeans’, *JSJ* 44 (2013), 455–480.

11 D.J.A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (NCBC), Basingstoke 1984, 84: “presumably by impressing on the people that neglect of the temple was a token of neglect of God”; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 70: “Moral, rather than manual support is suggested by 6:14”.

All these activities induced by the prophecy met resistance from the side of the powers that be, Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and some of his co-workers.¹² The new king Darius, however, is presented as having a favourable stand toward the Yehudites and starts a search in the archives of Ecbatana – an action that retards the pace of the story. This element of *Dehnung* adds to the suspense of the story.¹³ All's well that ends well: a document is found in the archives and the rebuilding of the temple is soon finished.¹⁴ Later in the story the narrator refers back to the prophetic initiative:

And the elders of the Yehudites were successful in building as a result of the prophecy of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.¹⁵

The Aramaic preposition *b* in *binbû'at* should be rendered with 'as a result of' and stresses the view of the narrator that the builders could not have been successful without the prophetic initiative.¹⁶

In short, the role of the prophecy in Ezra 3–6 seems to be rather clear: the prophecy functions as a cross-over point in the development of the plot.¹⁷ The resistance against the plans to rebuild the temple seemed to bring the plot of the story into a dead-end-street. As a result of the prophecy – presented as the embodiment of the divine power – the rebuilding is resumed with, as its final effect, that the festival of unleavened bread could be celebrated in the Temple. The prophetic role brought the narrative to its intended aim.

12 Ezra 5:3–5.

13 Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 43–58.

14 Ezra 6:1–5.

15 Ezra 6:14; see, e.g., Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 52–53; Fensham, *Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 92–93; Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 95; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 83–84; see, e.g., Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 128–31.

16 See D.J.E. Nikolaishen, 'The Restoration of Israel by God's Word in Three Episodes from Ezra-Nehemiah', in: Boda, Redditt (eds), *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah*, 184 (176–99).

17 With Nikolaishen, 'Restoration of Israel by God's Word', esp. 190; pace T. Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBL MS 36), Atlanta 1988, 46–60, who seems to have overlooked this important narrative clue in her analysis of the 'First Movement', Ezra 5:1–6:22.

3 *1 Esdras*

The Greek language book *1 Esdras* is a free rendition of sections from the Hebrew – and Aramaic – texts from 2 Chronicles 35–36; the Book of Ezra, and Nehemiah 7–8.¹⁸ As such the Book is a piece of Biblical historiography and can be labelled as ‘rewritten scripture’.¹⁹ It should be noted that the ‘translator’ partially rearranged the material and – most importantly – added a narrative in the middle of the story. *1 Esdras* 3–5 tells the beautiful story of the three young courtiers and their quest for ‘What is the strongest?’²⁰ The historical context for the composing of *1 Esdras* is – in my opinion – the Maccabean era. Hermeneutically, the story of *1 Esdras* fits the ‘lock’ of the cultic cleansing by the Maccabeans, after Antiochus IV defiled the temple.

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- 18 Good introductions into *1 Esdras* are found in: K.-F. Pohlmann, *Studien zum dritten Esra: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem ursprünglichen Schluß des chronistischen Geschichtswerks* (FRLANT, 104), Göttingen 1970; H.G.M. Williamson, ‘The Problem with *1 Esdras*’, in: J. Barton and D.J. Reimer (eds), *After the Exile, Essays in Honour of Rex Mason*, Macon 1996, 201–216; L.L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (OTR), London, New York 1998, 69–92; K. de Troyer, ‘Zerubbabel and Ezra: A Revived and Revised Solomon and Josiah? A Survey of Current *1 Esdras* Research’, *Currents in Biblical Research* 1 (2002), 30–60; L.S. Fried (ed.), *Did First Esdras Come First?* (AHL 7), Atlanta 2011; M. Bird, *1 Esdras: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Vaticanus* (SCS), Leiden 2012.
- 19 This term is to be preferred over the more traditional, but rather anachronistic label ‘rewritten Bible’; see J.G. Campbell, ‘‘Rewritten Bible’ and ‘Parabiblical Texts’: A Terminological and Ideological Critique’, in: J.G. Campbell, W.J. Lyons, and K. Pietersen (eds), *New Directions in Qumran Studies: Proceedings of the Bristol Colloquium on the Dead Sea Scrolls, 8–10 September 2003* (LSTS 52), London 2005, 43–68; M.J. Bernstein, ‘‘Rewritten Bible’: A Generic Category Which Has Outlived its Usefulness?’, *Textus* 22 (2005), 169–96; S.W. Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, Grand Rapids 2008; with the essays in J. Zsengellér (ed.), *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques? A Last Dialogue with Geza Vermes* (JSJ Sup 166), Leiden 2014. See also Bird, *1 Esdras*, 7–8.
- 20 On this story see, e.g., F. Zimmermann, ‘The Story of the Three Guardsmen’, *JQR* 54 (1963/64), 179–200; Pohlmann, *Studien zum dritten Esra*, 35–53; W.Th. in der Smitten, ‘Zur Pagenerzählung im 3. Esra (3 Esr. III 1–v 6)’, *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972), 492–95; A. Hilhorst, ‘The Speech on Truth in *1 Esdras* 4,34–41’, in: F. Garcia Martinez, A. Hilhorst, C.J. Labuschagne (Eds), *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A.S. van der Woude on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, Leiden 1992. 135–151; T.J. Sandoval, ‘The Strength of Women and Truth: The Tale of the Three Bodyguards and Ezra’s Prayer in First Esdras’, *JJS* 58 (2007), 211–27; B. Becking, ‘The Story of the Three Youth and the Composition of First Esdras’, in: Fried (ed.), *Did First Esdras Come First?*, 61–71; P.B. Harvey, ‘Darius’ Court and the Guardsmen’s Debate: Hellenistic Greek Elements in *1 Esdras*’, in: Fried (ed.), *Did First Esdras Come First?*, 179–190; Bird, *1 Esdras*, 141–189; Fried, *Ezra and the Law*, 54–64.

The remark on the prophetic initiative is given at about the same stage of the narrative. At the end of *1 Esdras* 5 the building of the temple has been stopped. Chapter 6 opens with:

ἐν δὲ τῷ δευτέρῳ ἔτει τῆς τοῦ Δαρείου βασιλείας ἐπροφήτευσεν Ἀγγαῖος καὶ Ζαχαρίας ὁ τοῦ Εδδὶ οἱ προφήται ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους τοὺς ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου θεοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἐπ’ αὐτούς²¹

In the second year of the reign of Darius, Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Eddi, the prophets prophesied to all the Jews who were in Judea and Jerusalem in the name of the Lord, God of Israel, about them.

The texts of *1 Esdras* 6:1 is an almost verbatim reproduction of LXX Ezra 5:1, the only difference being the spelling of the name of Zechariah’s father: Εδδὶ instead of Αδδω.²² The complex syntax – two adverbial adjuncts beginning with ἐπὶ, both dependant on the main verb is probably due to the contraction of the two clauses in the Aramaic text into one Greek sentence.²³ In the next verse the prophetic call is answered by Zorobabel, Salathiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak. As in *1 Esdras* 5:54; as well as in LXX Ezra 3:2,8 the dual leadership mentioned in MT Ezra – Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak – is rendered as a triumvirate in the Greek Esdras-traditions. As for *1 Esdras* one is tempted to construe the threefold leadership as a narrative counterpart to the number of three bodyguards in the story of *1 Esdras*. The leaders stand up and (re)start the building process of the house of God. As is the case in MT Ezra, in *1 Esdras* 6:2 they are supported by the prophets of the LORD:

συνόντων τῶν προφητῶν τοῦ κυρίου βοηθούντων αὐτοῖς

the prophets of the LORD being with them, supporting them.

Although the wording is slightly different from LXX Ezra 5:2:

21 *1 Esdras* 6:1; see J.M. Myers, *1 & 2 Esdras* (AB 42), New York 1974, 77; Z. Talshir, *1 Esdras: A Text Critical Commentary* (The Story of the Three Youths [1 Esdras 3–4] in Collaboration with David Talshir; SBL SCSS 50), Atlanta 2001, 324–25; Bird, *1 Esdras*, 211–12.

22 On the variants of this name in various manuscripts and translations, see Bird, *1 Esdras*, 212.

23 Bird, *1 Esdras*, 75, adopted the view of Myers, *1 & 2 Esdras*, 72, in construing ἐπ’ αὐτούς as an adverbial adjunct to be connected with ‘God’: ‘who is over them’.

μετ' αὐτῶν οἱ προφῆται τοῦ θεοῦ βοηθοῦντες αὐτοῖς

with them were the prophets of God, who supported them,

the meaning of both versions is equivalent. Here, the same two problems as with MT Ezra 5 need to be discussed.

- (1) Are the προφῆται, 'the prophets', identical with Haggai and Zechariah, or are they to be construed as a group of religious specialists? Both options can be defended.
- (2) What is the character of the prophetic help? The Greek verb βοηθέω is attested slightly over a 100 times in the Septuagint. Generally, it is the rendition of the Hebrew verb 'zr, 'to help'. The verb βοηθέω is widespread in classical Greek with as meaning 'to help; to come to aid'.²⁴ It is unclear whether the verb in 1 Esdras would refer to practical aid, or to a more specific prophetic activity supporting the building process in all its critical phases.

As a side remark, I would like to refer to the version Josephus has:

κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν ἐκεῖνον δύο προφῆται παρ' αὐτοῖς Ἀγγαῖος καὶ Ζαχαρίας θαρρεῖν αὐτοὺς παρῶρμων καὶ μηδὲν ἐκ τῶν Περσῶν ὑφορᾶσθαι δύσκολον ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ ταῦτα προλέγοντος πιστεύοντες δὲ τοῖς προφῆταις ἐντεταμένως εἶχοντο τῆς οἰκοδομίας μηδεμίαν ἡμέραν ἀνιέμενοι

there were two prophets at that time among them, Haggai and Zechariah, who encouraged them, and bid them be of good cheer, and to suspect no discouragement from the Persians. So, God foretelling these things, in dependence on the prophets they applied themselves earnestly to building, and did not intermit one day.²⁵

Josephus gives the impression that all Haggai and Zechariah did were acts of encouragement. They did support the builders in their activities with advice.

1 Esdras 6:1–7:15 follows the same narrative order as MT Ezra 4:24–6:22. This implies that – as in MT Ezra – the prophetic interruption is followed by a series

²⁴ See LSJ, 320.

²⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 11.96; see C.T. Begg, "The 'Classical Prophets' in Josephus' Antiquities", *Louvain Studies* 13 (1988), 341–357; P. Höfken, *Josephus Flavius und das prophetische Erbe Israels* (Lüneberger Theologische Beiträge 4), Münster 2006, 29.

of reports concerning resistance to the building project and later on the finding of the document in Ecbatana (1 *Esdras* 6:22) which lead to the commission by the Persian king to finish the building of the temple.

At the end of the narrative stands a note reflecting the prophetic initiative. Their conduct is summarized as follows:

καὶ εὐοδα ἐγένετο τὰ ἱερά ἔργα προφητευόντων Ἀγγαίου καὶ Ζαχαρίου τῶν προφητῶν καὶ συνετέλεσαν ταῦτα διὰ προστάγματος τοῦ κυρίου θεοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ μετὰ τῆς γνώμης Κύρου καὶ Δαρείου καὶ Ἄρταξέρξου βασιλέως Περσῶν συνετελέσθη ὁ οἶκος ὁ ἅγιος ἕως τρίτης καὶ εἰκάδος μηνὸς Ἀδαρ τοῦ ἔκτου ἔτους βασιλείως Δαρείου καὶ ἐποίησαν οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ οἱ Λευῖται καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ ἐκ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας οἱ προστεθέντες ἀκολούθως τοῖς ἐν τῇ Μωυσέως βίβλῳ

And so the holy works prospered, when Aggeus and Zacharias the prophets prophesied. And they finished these things by the commandment of the Lord God of Israel, and with the consent of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. The house was finished by the 23rd of the month of Adar in the sixth year of King Darius. And the sons of Israel and the priests and the Levites and the rest of those who returned from captivity were added to them, did that which was according to what was written in the books of Moses.²⁶

The text of 1 *Esdras* 7:3–6 makes the impression of being an extended version of MT Ezra 6:14. Some details are added such as the remark that the building activities were according to Mosaic law, but some differences are detectable. One difference needs to be discussed.

The Aramaic adverbial adjunct *binbū'at*, 'according to the prophecy', in MT Ezra 6:14 is correctly rendered by LXX Ezra with ἐν προφητείᾳ. 1 *Esdras* 7 applies a participle προφητευόντων that I construe as a circumstantial clause. A circumstantial participle in Greek indicates the circumstance(s) under which the action of the main verb takes place.²⁷ Phrased otherwise, according to 1 *Esdras* 7 Haggai and Zechariah were still prophesying during the whole process of the completion of the rebuilding of the temple. Here we meet a different concept.

26 1 *Esdras* 7:3–5; see Myers, 1 & II *Esdras*, 79–80; Talshir, 1 *Esdras: A Text Critical Commentary*, 368–77; Bird, 1 *Esdras*, 222–27.

27 A. Rijksbaron, *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek: An Introduction*, Chicago 2002, § 38; J.E. Beck, S.A. Malamud, I. Osadcha, 'A Semantics for the Participle in and outside Conditionals in Classical Greek', *Journal of Greek Linguistics* 12 (2012), 51–83.

Other than in MT Ezra, in *1 Esdras* they not only initiated the escape from the cul-de-sac, but also accompanied the building process with prophetic direction whose contents are unknown to us. Would it be possible that through the Hellenistic context of *1 Esdras*, a different view on prophecy was introduced? In the Hellenistic world, a person with the ability to deliver unsought for utterings of free speech is called a *mantiké*. A ‘prophet’ in the Hellenistic world was more of a religious specialist with an official position in the hierarchy of an oracular centre.²⁸ Such a prophet could be consulted occasionally. The text in *1 Esdras* 7 gives the impression that Haggai and Zechariah were seen as consultants during the whole of the process.

In the overall plot of *1 Esdras*, the interruption of Haggai and Zechariah has about the same narrative force: the prophecy functions as a cross-over point in the development of the plot. As a result of the prophecy, the rebuilding is resumed with, as its final effect, that the festival of unleavened bread could be celebrated in the Temple. The insertion of the story of the three young courtiers and their quest, however, shifts the balance a little bit. In the narrative order of *1 Esdras* there is already an attempt to rebuild the temple in the earlier parts of the story.²⁹ This attempt is situated in *1 Esdras* after the declaration of the Edict of Cyrus and after the report of the return of the temple vessels but before the return of the bulk of the exiles. The narrative counterpart of this ‘pre-return’ attempt of *1 Esdras* is found in Ezra after the list of the returnees and after another attempt to rebuild the temple was interrupted.³⁰ The story of the three youths is placed between them in the *1 Esdras* tradition. This story narrates that after a wisdom quest – centred on the question what is the strongest? – the Persian emperor endows the winner, Zerubbabel, on his bequest with the right to return to Jerusalem taking the temple vessels with him, and to:

ἀναβῆναι καὶ οἰκοδομῆσαι Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ τὸ ἱερόν οὐ ὠνομάσθη τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ καὶ ἐκωθωνίζοντο μετὰ μουσικῶν καὶ χαρᾶς ἡμέρας ἑπτὰ³¹

28 See, e.g., C. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (WUNT 2.75), Tübingen 1995, 189–90; M.A. Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, Berkeley 2008; F. Young, *God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity*, Cambridge 2013, 260–312.

29 *1 Esdras* 2:15–26; see Myers, *1 & II Esdras*, 40–43; Bird, *1 Esdras*, 135–41.

30 Ezra 4:7–24.

31 *1 Esdras* 4:63; see Bird, *1 Esdras*, 187–89.

...go up, and to build Jerusalem, and the temple which is called by his name: and they feasted with instruments of music and gladness seven days.

I see this allowance as a preparation to the prophetic initiative. This implies that in 1 *Esdras* the *cooperatio potestatorum* is even more stressed than in MT Ezra. King and God determine hand in hand the future of Israel.

Finally, it should be noted that within the composition of 1 *Esdras* prophets are mentioned at two decisive crossroads of the story.³² 1 *Esdras* 2:1 reads as follows:

βασιλεύοντος Κύρου Περσῶν ἔτους πρώτου εἰς συντέλειαν ῥήματος κυρίου ἐν στόματι Ιερεμίου ἤγειρεν κύριος τὸ πνεῦμα Κύρου βασιλέως Περσῶν καὶ ἐκήρυξεν ἐν ὄλῃ τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἅμα διὰ γραπτῶν λέγων

Here too, the incentive for change is based on a divinely inspired prophetic persona. The ‘stirring up of the spirit of Cyrus’ is seen as an act of God and construed as a fulfilment of a word spoken by Jeremiah. As in MT and LXX Ezra 1:1, Jeremiah is not presented as a prophet. The collocation of words like ῥήμα, ‘word’, στόμα, ‘mouth’, and συντέλεια, ‘fulfilment’, indicates clearly a prophetic understanding of Jeremiah. All this adds to the view of the author of 1 *Esdras* on history as divinely inspired and guided.

4 Ezra-Nehemiah Read as One Book

As noted above, I am of the opinion that the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah emerged as separate books.³³ At a given moment in time the Nehemiah story and the Ezra report were joined and edited as one ‘book’. This joining of the stories was probably based on the mention of Ezra in the Nehemiah report. The moment at which the two were brought together is difficult to determine. The earliest pieces of evidence for the join are to be found in the manuscripts of the LXX that are to be dated after the turn of the era: Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Vaticanus. The Hebrew Codex L that treats Ezra-Nehemiah as one

32 See also S. Honigman, ‘Cyclical Time and Catalogues: The Construction of Meaning in 1 *Esdras*’, in: L.S. Fried (ed.), *Did First Esdras Come First?* (AHL 7), Atlanta 2011, 191–208.

33 I will not summarize the existing discussion here; very instructive are the essays in M.J. Boda, P.L. Redditt (eds), *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader* (HBM 17), Sheffield 2007.

book is even later. In Qumran, fragments of the Book of Ezra were found.³⁴ A fragment of the Book of Nehemiah, however, has not been found or published thus far.³⁵

It is of great importance to note that in this final composition – Ezra-Nehemiah – a balance of mirroring prophecies can be detected. In contrast to the positive role of Haggai and Zechariah in Ezra stand the reports in Nehemiah 6. After Nehemiah had sent *mal'ākîm*, 'messengers', to Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (Neh. 6:3), Sanballat sent him a messenger with an *'iggeret p'etûhâ*, 'open (= unsealed) letter', that contains – amongst other topics – the reproach aiming at the incrimination of Nehemiah:

And you have also appointed prophets (*n'ebî'im*) to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you:

'A king is in Judah!'³⁶

Later in that same chapter other activities occur that are labelled as 'prophetic'. A certain Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel tries to ambush Nehemiah in the enclosure of the temple. Nehemiah, however, sees through his smarty plans and stays away from the ambush:

Because I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he had spoken this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.³⁷

This Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel turns out not to be the only prophet in the service of Sanballat and his associates. In Neh. 6:14, Nehemiah asks God for redemption also for the 'prophetsess Noadiah'. Within

34 E. Ulrich e.a. in DJD XVI (2000); see also E. Ulrich, 'Ezra and Qoheleth Manuscripts from Qumran (4QEzra and 4QQoh^{AB})', in: E. Ulrich e.a. (eds), *Priests, Prophets, and Scribes: Essays on the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp* (JSOT Sup 149), Sheffield 1992, 139–157.

35 Despite earlier rumours that a fragment of Nehemiah was found in Cave 4 at Qumran, the forthcoming publication by T. Elgvin, *Gleanings from the Caves: Dead Sea Scrolls and Artifacts from the Schøyen Collection* (LSTS 71), London, New York 2015, does not contain a fragment of Nehemiah.

36 Neh. 6:7; see, e.g., Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 138; Fensham, *Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 201–02; Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 174; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 256–257; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 268–69.

37 Neh. 6:12; see, e.g., Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 138–39; Fensham, *Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 204–06; Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 175–76; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 259; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 270–71.

the final composition Ezra & Nehemiah, this couple Shemaiah and Noadiah function as a counterpoint to Haggai and Zechariah. Instead of speaking in the name of God, they had placed themselves in the service of the inimical, or at the least unfriendly governor of Samaria.

In conclusion, the combined composition – Ezra-Nehemiah – notes the importance of prophetic activity, but stresses the fact that not all prophets stand sympathetic towards the aims of YHWH. In fact the theme of true versus false prophecy is introduced in a subtle way.³⁸

Finally, it should be noted that within the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah prophets who take a positive stand towards the aims of YHWH are mentioned at two decisive crossroads of the story. In the opening scene of MT Ezra it is stated:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of YHWH by the mouth of Jeremiah, YHWH stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.³⁹

The incentive for change is based on a divinely inspired prophetic persona. The ‘stirring up of the spirit of Cyrus’ is seen as an act of God and construed as a fulfilment of a word spoken by Jeremiah. As in 1 *Esdras* 2:1 and LXX Ezra 1:1, Jeremiah is not presented as a prophet. The collocation of words like *dābar*, ‘word’, *pēh*, ‘mouth’, and the verb *kālāh*, ‘to complete’, indicates clearly a prophetic understanding of Jeremiah.⁴⁰ All this adds to the view of the author of the combined composition Ezra-Nehemiah on history as divinely inspired and guided. In this historical view, the powers that be – the various Kings of Persia and the leadership of the *benēy gōlāh* in Yehud – play an important and cooperative role. The other decisive crossroad in the story is – as has been made clear above – the prophetic intervention in Ezra 5.

38 See on this topic, e.g., S.J. DeVries, *Prophet against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah Narrative (1 Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition*, Grand Rapids 1978; J.T. Hibbard, ‘True and False Prophecy: Jeremiah’s Revision of Deuteronomy’, *JOT* 35 (2011), 339–58.

39 Ezra 1:1; see, e.g., Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 5–6; Fensham, *Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 42–43; Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 34–35; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 8–11; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 74–75; C. Karrer-Grube, ‘Scrutinizing the Conceptual Unity of Ezra and Nehemiah’, in: Boda, Redditt (eds), *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah*, 150–57 (136–59).

40 See J.G. McConville, ‘Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfilment of Prophecy’, *VT* 36 (1986), 205–24; Nikolaiashen, ‘Restoration of Israel by God’s Word’, 179–83.

5 Haggai and Zechariah and the Biblical Books Named after Them

A final question to be discussed is: who were Haggai and Zechariah? Traditionally, they have been identified with the ‘authors’ of the Books of Haggai and (Proto-)Zechariah living in the early post-exilic period. This identification is not without argument. The theme of Haggai is clearly temple building. Here it is reported that a drought has come over the land: “Because of My house which still lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house” (Hag 1:9).⁴¹ At this Zerubbabel feels the impetus to rebuild the temple. In Zech. 6 it is prophesied that ‘the branch’ will rebuild the temple in full glory (Zech. 6:12–15).⁴²

Thus far, I have treated Haggai and Zechariah as literary figures. For the authors and ancient readers of Ezra as well as *1 Esdras* they were real people who had prophesied recently. The content of their oracles is neither narrated in Ezra nor in *1 Esdras*. The direction of their words can only be deduced from the context. As for the relation between prophetic books and prophetic figures, I see two possibilities:

- (1) The author of Ezra picked up from tradition the names of two prophets who were known for their pro-rebuilding position;
- (2) The books of Haggai and Zechariah were only composed after the completion of the pseudepigraphic Ezra-story.

A decisive answer to this question is not to be given. Provisionally, I would opt for the first possibility. It tallies with the way the author of Ezra uses tradition for his position and it leaves open the question of dating the two prophets as well as their compositions. The question, whether the Persian king Darius mentioned in the two prophetic books refers to Darius I or Darius II cannot be answered from my analysis of Haggai and Zechariah in the stories of Ezra as well as *1 Esdras* – although I would have a preference for Darius II.⁴³

41 See most recently E. Assis, “To Build or Not to Build: a Dispute between Haggai and His People (Hag 1)”, *ZAW* 119 (2007), 514–527.

42 On this unit and its message see W.H. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel: Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period* (JSOT Sup 304), Sheffield 2000; A. Finitis, *Visions and Eschatology: A Socio-Historical Analysis of Zechariah 1–6* (LSTS 79), New York, London 2011.

43 Hag. 1:11 2:1.11; Zech. 1:1.7; 7:1. For Darius II as the implied king see already Scaliger, *De emendatione temporum*, Leiden 1583, v 224; Johannes Cocceius, *Commentarius in Prophetas Duodecim Minores* (Opera Omnia, 111), Amstelodamus 1673, 215; and Edelman, *Origins*, 80–150.