

EXCHANGES BETWEEN PERSIA AND ISRAEL

Dr. Kersey Antia, Feb 20, 2019; updated Mar 23, 2019

As Norman K. Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) points out, interpreting foreign dominion as the hand of Yahweh, for example, Yahweh declaring Cyrus as the Messiah to Isaiah as seen earlier ensured Israel's survival by retaining its cosmic history. The relationship between religion and politics was “interpreted in terms of the “law of God” and the law of the king” (Ezra 7.26), which ushered in the positive and constructive response to the Persian rule, leading to the safety and prosperity of Israel all through the Persian rule.

Rodney Alan Werlene (“Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution,” SBL, *Early Judaism and Its Literature, Volume 13*, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1998) examines the development of a penitential prayer as a religious institution in the Judaism of the Second Temple period and suggests that penitential prayer became a genuine religious institution since it is mentioned first time in the Hebrew Bible in Ezra 9. However, since Moses’ prayer in Exodus 32 as well as Psalms 51 and 130, if not some texts in Tito-Isaiah, come close to matching the essence of Ezra 9, here again, as we have maintained earlier, the knowledge of Persian practices may have led the Jews to search into their own scriptures for finding “similar” practices and emphasize them.

Philip R. Darvi (“Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of Hebrew scripture,” Library of Ancient Israel, Louisville, Ky., Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998) assigns the Persian period as the time when the canonization of Hebrew scriptures took place. He maintains that a class of trained scribes, implanted by Persian authority in the Jerusalem temple, produced canonical texts and collections with a view to imposing on the population a particular ethnic identity which was a “political act, intended to create a consensus” among the various competing Jewish groups. If so, it shows the degree to which the Persian administration took interest in Jewish religion affairs which is hardly the case in its dealings with other nations. It may also suggest a reverse scenario where Jews were equally interested in getting to know the Persians.

As there is a plethora of research publications denoting the impact of Persian rule on the Jewish religious beliefs and convention, it is not possible to review them all here but they indicate the extent of interactions between the two nations during this period.