Nehemiah of our Times

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Dov S. Zakheim was United States Under Secretary of Defense, 2001-2004, and Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, 1985-87. He earned his B.A. at Columbia, his D. Phil. at the University of Oxford, and Semikha from HaGaon Harav Shmuel Walkin. This article originally appeared in the UK prayer book for Yom HaAtsmauth.

Sir Herbert Samuel, later Lord Samuel of Mount Carmel and Toxteth, was the first Jewish governor of Palestine since the fall of the Bar Kokhba regime some 1800 years earlier. In many respects, however, it was Nehemiah, rather than Bar Kokhba, who was Samuel's ancient precursor. Bar Kokhba led an independent Jewish state, however short-lived it might have been. Nehemiah, on the other hand, was, like Samuel, a senior official in the administration of a major superpower, appointed by its ruler to govern the mixed population of one of its outlying possessions.

Nehemiah served as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I, the absolute ruler of the Persian Empire. That he could taste non-kosher wine was a result of his official position; so, at least, was how the Rabbis of the Talmud justified what appeared to be a violation of Jewish law.[1] The cupbearer was a key advisor to the king; he was one of the most powerful men in the Empire. As a Jew, Nehemiah was especially valuable to Artaxerxes, since he posed no threat to the king's person. Xerxes, the king's father, had been murdered by Artabanus, the commander of the royal bodyguard. Artaxerxes himself had survived an assassination attempt by two other bodyguards, who, according to the Book of Esther, were Bigtan and Teresh. The Talmud asserts that the plot involved poisoning Xerxes's food; the Aramaic Targum has them poisoning Esther's wine and then stabbing Xerxes with a sword.[2] Nehemiah, the outsider with no pretensions to the throne, could be trusted not to adulterate the royal drink. Moreover, Nehemiah, precisely because he was not a Persian, could stand aloof from the intrigues that convulsed the

Persian royal court, as they did all oriental despotisms. In this regard as well, it was easier for Nehemiah to win the king's trust.

That a Jew could rise so high in the Persian Court was not as surprising as it might seem. The substantial Jewish community that descended from the exile to Babylonia had assimilated well into the Persian economy, becoming land holders and financiers, as well as tenant farmers. They also served in the Persian military, including its navy.[3] Jews also held senior positions in the Persian bureaucracy; one such individual was a Jew named Asaph, keeper of the king's forests, a not unimportant post in those times. Presumably, those Jews like Nehemiah who did function as Persian officials needed to possess a degree of secular knowledge, at a minimum, the ability to speak Persian, the language of the royal court.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its having adapted so comfortably to the Persian environment, the Jewish community suffered from a trend toward intermarriage, foreshadowing a situation that continues to plague contemporary Jewry. Perhaps as a result of his awareness of the deleterious consequences of intermarriage in the Persian/Babylonian Jewish community, Nehemiah was strongly opposed to intermarriage. His opposition would manifest itself when he became Governor of Judah.

Nehemiah appears to have been the scion of a prominent family, though in his eponymous Biblical book he only relates his father's name. Unlike Ezra and many other Biblical figures, he does not give the names of his earlier forbears. The *Midrash of the Ten Kings* relates that Nehemiah was descended from the Davidic line of kings that ruled over ancient Judah. Another Talmudic assertion identifies him as the son of King Jeconiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had exiled to Babylon. Various kabbalistic traditions claim that Nehemiah was actually the reincarnation of the child that had been born out of wedlock to David and Bathsheba; or that he was the reincarnation of Rabban Gamaliel, leader of the Sanhedrin, prince of Judah, and himself a scion of the kings of Judah. Whatever Nehemiah's connection to the royal Judean house, it is clear that Nehemiah's family was a prominent one. His father, Hakhaliah, appears to have been of Egyptian-Jewish background who together with his family moved to Jerusalem, where he and his wife were buried. Nehemiah's relative Hanani, whom he termed his brother, led the delegation to Susa from Judah (as the sub-province of the Persian province of Abar Nahara was called) that, upon Nehemiah's request for news of the city and the Jewish community, relayed to him the sorry state of Jerusalem. Its walls had been breached; its gates had been burnt; and its residents lived in terror of the indigenous non-Jewish peoples, from whom they were subjected to frequent attacks.

The political context in which Herbert Samuel served his government was obviously very different from that of the Persian Court. Samuel was a minister in a democratic government, not in an absolute monarchy, where the shifting whims of the king often meant life or death for his courtiers. Again unlike Nehemiah, who served one king and had no true peers, Samuel interfaced with two Liberal Prime Ministers, Herbert H. Asquith, in whose cabinet he served with other ministers, and David Lloyd George, upon whose ascent to the prime ministership Samuel returned to the Parliamentary back benches. Even when serving in cabinet, Samuel's relationship with Herbert Asquith was nothing like that of Nehemiah to Artaxerxes, whose confidant he was; Asquith certainly thought sufficiently highly of Samuel to appoint him Home Secretary, but he rose no further.

Herbert Louis Samuel's background was neither a secret nor mystical. His family was among the most prominent in the Anglo-Jewish community. His father was a wealthy banker, who partnered with Samuel's more famous uncle, Lord Swaythling, the one-time Liberal Member of Parliament known as Samuel Montagu, who had earlier changed his name from Montagu Samuel. Herbert's brother, Sir Stuart Samuel, was also a prominent Liberal politician, who succeeded Swaythling as M.P. for Whitechapel and in 1917 was elected chairman of the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

The prominence of Samuel's family was an indicator of how far the Jews of Britain had risen in the preceding hundred years. Having returned to England in 1656 to live openly as Jews, members of the community soon became prominent in British economic circles. Jews continued to suffer from a variety of discriminatory restrictions until the mid-nineteenth century, however, when a series of legislative acts enabled them to serve in Parliament, hold Cabinet positions, including Lord Chancellor, and attend the "ancient universities" of Oxford, Cambridge and Durham. Thus, just as the prosperous Jewish community served as a backdrop to Nehemiah's position at court, so too did the increasingly wealthy and influential Jewish community bolster the prospects and status of Herbert Samuel and other Jews, who like him, had entered British politics.

Samuel was not a particularly religious man, as Nehemiah certainly was. Nevertheless, Samuel was a traditional Jew. He kept a kosher home, maintained membership in his Orthodox synagogue, which his wife, Beatrice, and their children attended every Shabbat (he attended on major festivals), and gave his children a religious upbringing. Importantly, Samuel also shared Nehemiah's abhorrence of intermarriage, considering a Jew who married out of his faith as a "renegade." When some of his grandchildren married non-Jews, he broke off contact with them until shortly before his passing.[4]

Most important, however, was the concern that Nehemiah and Herbert Samuel shared in common for their Jewish brethren, especially for those in Palestine. Both men, when serving as governors, also faced challenges not only from the majority indigenous peoples, but from elements in the Jewish community itself.

Finally, both men did not receive anything like the recognition they deserved for their efforts to better the lives of the Jewish people. Nehemiah was criticized in the Talmud for arrogating too much credit to himself.[5] For more than a millennium after it was written, his memoir was not treated as a separate book of the Tanach, the Biblical canon. For his part, Samuel to this day is seen by many of his co-religionists as a Jew who did offer sufficiently strong support for Zionist interests once he became Governor of Palestine. Only in the past few decades have historians reconsidered his position and recognize him for what he was: a strong advocate for a Jewish National Home in Palestine, and ultimately for a Jewish state there. Indeed, as world Jewry commemorates the centenary of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which codified the principle of a Jewish National Home, Samuel's role in the formulation of that document should, like Nehemiah and his memoir, receive recognition that is long overdue.

Nehemiah at Court

Nehemiah was deeply distressed when he was told about the state of affairs in Judah in general and Jerusalem in particular. He felt keenly for the community and for the country, even though he had chosen not to make Aliyah. Perhaps he had not done so because, like many wealthy and prominent Jews of later generations, he felt that he could be of more assistance to his brethren by remaining where he was. After all, Persia was the regional hegemon, and Judah was under its control.

Indeed, when Nehemiah inquired after what he termed "the remnant who survived the captivity,"[6] he was specifically referring to the lower economic and social classes of pre-exilic Judean society that the Babylonians had not even bothered to expel. That he did so was an indication of Nehemiah's concern for those Jews less fortunate than himself, and his determination to better their lot.

Nehemiah did not immediately petition Artaxerxes, although the king was known to have what Plutarch later described as "a gentle and noble spirit."[7] Still Nehemiah recognized that timing was everything, and that if he caught the absolute monarch at a bad moment, not only would his petition be rejected, but his life could be in danger. Esther had recognized the same risk when she had responded to Mordecai's request that she intercede with the king by pointing out that "if any person, man or woman, enters the king's court without having been summoned, there is but one law for him—that he be put to death."[8]

Accordingly, Nehemiah spent several months in prayer and contemplation, and perhaps suffered from depression as well.

When Nehemiah finally did seek the king's permission to travel to Judah, he did so in response to the latter's concern that Nehemiah seemed out of sorts. But he also seized upon the fact that it was Persian New year, a time when the king was likely to grant requests put to him. To strengthen his appeal, Nehemiah enlisted the support of the queen, and, recognizing the Middle Eastern respect for ancestral tombs, astutely formulated his request in terms of his concern for the condition of his forebears' graves.

Nehemiah did not mention Jerusalem at all. He was concerned that Artaxerxes, having recently put down a revolt by a local satrap (in which Jews might have participated), would not have been accepting of the notion of an emergent Jewish political entity. Persia tolerated other religions, including Judaism and its Temple in Jerusalem. Artaxerxes himself had authorized Ezra, some thirteen years earlier, to lead what was clearly a religious mission to Jerusalem. Nationalism was entirely different matter, however, and anything that smacked of establishing Jerusalem as the capital of an independent state was certain to provoke a hostile reaction from the king.

In the event, Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's request for a leave of absence, after the latter uttered yet another prayer, this time a silent one. Seizing the moment, Nehemiah pressed his advantage and also requested permission to rebuild the city, again couching his request in terms of "the city of the graveyard of my ancestors."[9] In so doing, Nehemiah no longer was merely advocating a policy; he was seeking to implement it himself.

Moreover, Nehemiah was fully aware of the fact that his request was consistent with Persian strategic policy. Having endured multiple revolts in Egypt, and faced with an ongoing threat from Greece, Persia's superpower rival, Artaxerxes had begun to fortify towns in the western part of his empire. A fortified Jerusalem, under the guidance of his loyal cupbearer, dovetailed well with the king's objectives in that part of his empire.

Artaxerxes therefore acceded to Nehemiah's request. Not only did he issue him a *laissez passer* through the empire, but he ordered Asaph, the Jewish keeper of his forest, to provide Nehemiah with whatever supplies of wood that the latter required. In addition, and unlike Ezra, Nehemiah was accompanied by an armed guard, signifying that his entry into Judah was as a Persian official, not as a Jewish religious leader.

Nehemiah's approach to the king, the nature of his proposal, and his official appointment, all foreshadowed to a great extent what Sir Herbert Samuel attempted to do more than two millennia later. And, like Nehemiah, Samuel's efforts met with success, at least until he actually took office as Governor of Palestine.

Samuel in Cabinet

On October 28, 1914, Turkey bombed Russia's Black Sea ports, thereby formally entering World War I. Less than two weeks later, on November 9th, Prime Minister Asquith announced that "the Turkish Empire has committed suicide."[10] Later that month, Herbert Samuel, then serving in the cabinet as President of the Local Government Board, proposed to both Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George and Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, the "establishment of as Jewish State in Palestine under Jewish protection.[11] The following month Samuel met with Chaim Weitzmann, at his request. Weitzmann came away convinced that Samuel was a supporter of the Zionist cause. Both Samuel's proposal, and the meeting with Weitzmann marked a sea-change for Samuel, who had not been a Zionist, took little interest in Zionist matters, and came from a Jewish milieu that was at best apathetic and at worst hostile to the Zionist cause.[12]

In January 1915, anticipating the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Samuel circulated two Cabinet memoranda urging British sponsorship of a Jewish entity in Palestine. He argued in his second memorandum entitled "The Future of Palestine" that "the course of events opens a prospect of change, at the end of the war, in the status of Palestine…A feeling is spreading that now, at last, some advance may be made…for the restoration of the Jews to the land to which they are attached by ties almost as ancient as history itself."[13]

Samuel backtracked from his support of a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine; his proposal was now far more modest. He felt that the fact that the Jewish population was but a sixth of the land's Arab inhabitants rendered "the time…not ripe for the establishment thereof an independent autonomous Jewish state." Nevertheless, he "hoped…that Jewish immigration, carefully regulated, would be given preference so that in the course of time the Jewish people, grown into a majority and settled in the land, may be conceded a degree of self-government as the conditions of that day may justify."

Finally, whereas Nehemiah implicitly recognized the strategic importance of Jerusalem to Artaxerxes and Persian security, Samuel was explicit about the benefits that control of Palestine, with support for a growing Jewish population, would confer on British strategic interests. Clearly assuming that the allies would defeat Turkey, and that Britain could seek to control Palestine, Samuel asserted that "from the standpoint of British interests there are several arguments for this policy." These included "enabl[ing] England to fulfill in yet another sphere her historic part of civilizer of backward countries;….add[ing]…lustre…to the British Crown; ….obtain[ing] the compensations, which public opinion will demand, in Mesopotamia and Palestine;" and providing a buffer against the French in the Middle East.

Lastly, Samuel asserted that implementation of his proposal would "win for England the lasting gratitude of the Jews throughout the world…In the United States…they would form the body of opinion whose bias…would be favourable to the British Empire."[14] Indeed, at the time Samuel wrote his memorandum, British officials considered American Jewry to be pro-German, in no small part because the Central Powers were fighting anti-Semitic Russia.

Samuel's memoranda, and his subsequent lobbying, whether out of Cabinet beginning in May 1915, during his relatively brief tenure as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster later that year and then Home Secretary in 1916, or once again out of the Cabinet, may have helped sway the British Government. To the extent that his efforts met with success, however, it was his strategic arguments, rather than support for the Zionist cause, that resonated with Sir Mark Sykes, Britain's Middle East negotiator—and co-author of the Sykes-Picot Treaty—and other British decision-makers. Britain feared a French presence abutting Egypt and the strategic Suez Canal; control of Palestine obviated that possibility.[15] If support for a Jewish National Home, and the sympathy such a position generated among world Jewry, buttressed the British case in negotiations with France, so much the better.

Samuel's support for the Zionist project did play a major role in the years 1915-20 in another respect, however. It was critical in gaining support for the cause among the Anglo-Jewish leadership, some of whom, like Claude Montefiore, President of the Anglo-Jewish Association, and Samuel's nephew, Edwin Montagu, himself a member of the Cabinet under both Asquith and Lloyd George, were bitterly anti-Zionist. [16] Moreover, when the War Cabinet elected to consult Zionist leaders in the run-up to a decision as to whether to issue what became known as the Balfour Declaration, Samuel, now no longer in the Cabinet but clearly still influential, joined Weitzmann, Lord Rothschild, Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz,

and Nahum Sokolow in appearing before the cabinet to make the case for a declaration.

In many ways, the plea that the five men put forward was as crucial for the Jewish people in its time as Nehemiah's request to Artaxerxes so many years before. And, like Nehemiah's request, the Zionist entreaty met with success. On October 31, 1917, the War Cabinet decided to issue a declaration regarding the future status of Palestine; two days later, Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour relayed its contents to Baron Rothschild, for transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland.

Governing Judah; Governing Palestine

Once Nehemiah and Herbert Samuel assumed their respective roles as governor of the territory that the Persians called Judah and the British Palestine, the parallels between them faded away. For Nehemiah, providing for the military, economic, and social security of the small, weak Jewish community was paramount. For Samuel, it was the need to propitiate the Arab majority even as he supported the aspirations of the Jewish minority.

Nehemiah gave top priority to rebuilding and restoring the walls and gates of Jerusalem. He organized a militia to defend the city during its restoration, and subsequently maintained a force to deter any possible attacks from the indigenous peoples—Samaritans, Arabs and others—who rightly viewed Nehemiah and his Jewish supporters as a threat to their overlordship of the sub-satrapy of Judah. He followed these efforts by drawing up and implementing a plan to populate the near-empty city with Jews, based on a census that he organized.

The census revealed that there were many returnees who were undocumented; their names did not appear on the genealogical register. A significant proportion of these people claimed to be priests, yet their inability to substantiate their claim rendered them susceptible to exclusion from the Jewish community. In a move that should serve as a lesson for today, and that reflected both his political realism and his desire not to undermine communal unity, Nehemiah did not disqualify these families from the priesthood. Instead he barred them from partaking of sacrifices for the foreseeable future. He did not, however, prohibit them from eating *teruma*, the grain allotment reserved for priests, which could be eaten outside the Temple and, for that matter, outside Jerusalem. In effect, therefore, Nehemiah treated undocumented priests as priests with blemishes, who were permitted to eat *teruma*, whose pedigree was not challenged, but who could not partake of the sacrifices. It was a brilliant solution to a potentially

explosive political problem.

Having dealt with repopulating the city, and with associated genealogical issues, Nehemiah undertook to inject the community with a new degree of religious fervor. He conducted special services to celebrate holidays, notably Sukkot and its successor holiday, Shemini Atzeret, that despite the presence of the Temple had not been properly commemorated “since the days of Joshua bin Nun.”[17] Together with Ezra he led the community in two special days of prayer and fasting immediately after it had celebrated Shemini Atzeret.

Nehemiah was a proponent of economic and social reform within the Jewish community. He chastised the rich for exploiting the hardships of the poor, forcing the latter to sell their fields and, in the worst case, their children as slaves. He entertained, rather than dismissed, the protests of the community’s women, many of whom had been left to look after farms while their husbands were working to restore the city walls and gates or serving in the militia. Indeed, Nehemiah went even further; he had no issue with women working alongside the men in the completing the city’s restoration.

Nehemiah faced opposition from within the community as well as without. Leaders such as Eliashib the High Priest and Tobiah, a Jew who was an Ammonite official, had made common cause with the Sanballat and other indigenous leaders who resented Nehemiah as an interloper seeking to upend the ruling order. Nehemiah also had to cope with accusations both in Judah and at the Persian royal court that he was seeking to establish an independent Jewish polity with himself as king. Worse still, he was the target of assassination plots, which both his non-Jewish and Jewish opponents sought to carry out.

By means of shrewd political leadership, Nehemiah was able to outsmart his enemies. He elevated the status of the Levites, establishing them as a political counterweight to the priests, many of whom, like the High Priest Eliashib, were allied to the non-Jewish elites. His generous treatment of undocumented priests assured him of support from that segment of the population. His economic and social reforms won him the allegiance of the lower classes. Finally, he appointed his allies and kinsmen to govern Jerusalem's districts and to command the militia, the core of which was the force that had accompanied him from Persia.

At the same time, Nehemiah revived the morale of what had been a downtrodden, depressed and vulnerable Jewish community. By choreographing major quasi-religious ceremonies, one of which was led by Ezra, he stimulated both the people’s religious conscience and their long-dormant nationalist emotions. Moreover, by overseeing, and probably drafting, the first-ever Jewish

constitution, perhaps the first such document anywhere, he codified the community's national and religious character.

The *Amana*, as it was called, bore the signatures of the polity's leading citizens, not just its religious elite. The *Amana* was a secular document that nevertheless bound its signatories to a series of religious commitments. It sought to prevent intermarriage in the younger generation—Nehemiah deliberately did not attempt to break up mixed marriages that already existed. It adjured the community to avoid conducting business on Shabbat. It called for rigorous enforcement of the laws of *Shemitta*, the final year of the seven year cycle when the land was to lie fallow and debts were forgiven. It also dealt with non-ritualistic, practical issues, such as managing contributions for both theTemple ritual and its operations and maintenance. The *Amana* thereby reflected Nehemiah's own predilection for blending religious rigor with practical concerns.

It should be recognized that Nehemiah had virtually total freedom of action when he arrived in Judah, at least insofar as Artaxerxes was concerned. This was not at all the case in April 1920 when Lloyd George appointed Samuel as High Commissioner of Palestine, which the League of Nations had designated to Britain as a Mandated territory. To all appearances, the High Commissioner had all the powers of a colonial governor. Not surprisingly, many concluded that "Britain had assumed the role of Persia in Jewish history, Balfour of Cyrus [sic--actually Artaxerxes] and Samuel, prophet and courtier, Nehemiah."[18] Not long after he arrived in Palestine in June 1920, when he was welcomed by a seventeen-gun salute, Samuel walked two miles on Shabbat *Naḥamu* from Government House to the Hurva synagogue. Called up to the Torah as *Maftir*, which he then followed by chanting Isaiah's stirring call to "comfort ye, comfort ye my people,"[19] Samuel only reinforced the impression among the Jewish community, both within Palestine and throughout the Diaspora that he was the "Nehemiah of our times.".

The reality was quite different, however. Samuel was answerable to the British Colonial Office, itself subject to pressure from the local Arab population. He also was subordinate to a Cabinet not all of whose members liked the idea of a Jew governing Palestine. Samuel himself recognized the limitations of his position. He warned Lloyd George that his appointment "was open to the dangers that measures, which the non-Jewish population would accept from a British Christian governor, might be objected to if offered by a Jew."[20]

Samuel's warning was based on his first visit to Palestine in January 1920, when "the over-riding impression he received was of the strength and seriousness of Arab nationalist hostility to Zionism."[21] Initially, he pushed back against Arab

critics whom he met on that trip and who warned of a "terrible revolution" if Zionist immigration were to continue. His rejoinder that "the Jews...have historic rights in the country,"[22] echoed Nehemiah's refrain to Sanballat and his supporters who opposed any change in the status quo that had enabled them to dominate Judah. Nevertheless, the depth of Arab hostility almost led Samuel to decline Lloyd George's offer of the governorship.

Once in office, Samuel confronted not only Arab hostility, but also opposition from the British military both in London within his own administration, from civilians within his administration, at times from the Colonial Office, and, after a brief honeymoon, from the Jewish community as well. The military leadership in Palestine, including General Allenby who had liberated the territory from the Turks, opposed the appointment of a Jew, whether Zionist or not, to be the civil head of the Mandate. Equally adamant was General Thwaites, Director of Military Intelligence, who returned to Britain from a visit to Palestine with the view that the governor should be a "good Christian."[23] Once Samuel took office, the military continued to lobby against him and to argue for "curbing" the Zionists; some officials were at least somewhat sympathetic to their view.[24] Though he generally had the support of the Colonial Office, Samuel found that his plans for integrating the "Jewish home" into the Arab Middle East by creating "a loose confederation of the Arab-speaking states" that included a Jewish Palestine were repeatedly rejected by the Colonial Office.[25] Similarly, the Colonial Office rebuffed Samuel's support of a 1924 request by Jewish leaders that the Government formally recognize the community as a religious national body.[26] Samuel was also undermined by some of his own staff. Ernest Richmond, who served as Samuel's chief advisor on Arab affairs, was viewed in Whitehall as a counterweight to the Zionist Organization. Indeed, one official described Richmond as not only "a declared enemy of the Zionist policy and almost as frankly declared an enemy of the Jewish policy of H.M.G."[27]

At the same time, it was opposition from the Arabs of Palestine, not from the Colonial Office, that undermined Samuel's efforts to create a "constitutional government of partially representative character," which by definition would have granted official recognition of the Jewish community's role in the governance of the Mandate.[28] Samuel actively sought to win the support of the Arab population to no avail. In 1921, he pardoned Amin el-Husseini, who had been sentenced to ten years in prison after instigating the anti-Jewish Nebi Musa riots in April 1920 and was a leading opponent of Jewish immigration to Palestine. He supported el-Husseini appointment to succeed his elder brother as Mufti of Jerusalem in 1921. Two years later he resolved a major dispute between the Jewish and Arab communities by ruling in favor of Bedouin claims to state land

between the Sea of Galilee and Beisan, which the Zionists had hoped to cultivate. Nevertheless, as early as March 1921, an Arab deputation met with the visiting Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill, to protest against the Zionist enterprise. The following May, what began with an Arab attack on a Jewish hostel in Jaffa evolve into widespread attacks on Jewish settlements that were finally brought to an end when the rioters were bombed by British aircraft.

Arab lobbying, like the riots, did not end in 1921. As the British Government wrestled with the question of how to give the Jewish and Arab communities some role in the governance of Palestine, the Arabs sought to reverse the Balfour Declaration. For example, when the Government met in the summer of 1923 to consider whether it should continue to adhere to the Declaration, an Arab delegation travelled to London to argue for its complete abrogation. It was a scene reminiscent of the efforts by paid lobbyists, including--according to the medieval commentator Rashi--a son of Haman, who sought to convince Artaxerxes both to put a halt to any construction in Jerusalem and to destroy the Temple.[29] Samuel actively sought to embed the Jewish community into the fabric of Palestine. It was during his tenure that Hebrew became the third official language of Palestine. This development hearkened back to Nehemiah’s command that Hebrew be the spoken language of Judah’s Jewish community. Again, like Nehemiah, Samuel employed his secular authority to promote religious leadership: the Chief Rabbinate was formally established during Samuel’s term of office. Finally, and critically, the annual rate of Jewish immigration continued to rise through 1925 when Samuel relinquished his post.

Nevertheless, just as he failed to assuage the Arabs of Palestine, Samuel also disappointed the Zionist leadership. Speaking of Samuel's appointment of the new Mufti, a bitter David Ben Gurion told the 1921 Zionist Congress, "we regarded him [Samuel] with reverence when he came...but what did he give us? Haj Amin El Husseini as Mufti of Jerusalem."[30] He upset the Zionists even more when he chose to suspend Jewish immigration after the 1921 riots (in which 47 Jews were killed and 146 wounded) in the face of Arab threats of more violence if immigration were to continue. He antagonized the Zionist leadership even more when in June 1921, he reinterpreted the Balfour Declaration by emphasizing that it did not mean the establishment of a Jewish government that might rule over the Arab majority. Even though his suspension of immigration lasted only a few months Samuel was never again able to restore Zionist confidence in his leadership.

AFTERMATH: NEHEMIAH'S LEGACY; SAMUEL'S FRUSTRATION

Having served for twelve years as governor of Judah, Nehemiah was recalled to Susa. He left without much fanfare, perhaps because, despite all his efforts to strengthen the position of the Jewish community *vis a vis* its non-Jewish neighbors, many in that community may have harbored resentments of various kinds. Some may have opposed his strictures against intermarriage. The elites no doubt were angered by his social reforms. The indigenous population certainly was happy to see him go.

After an unspecified time in Susa, however, Nehemiah returned, only to find that in his absence, many of his reforms had been overturned. Eliashib, who was a relative of Tobiah, not only arrogated to himself rooms in the Temple, but assigned to Tobiah a large room that had been a Temple storehouse; he gave a room to Sanballat as well. By having so prominent a position in the Temple, Tobiah and Sanballat, Nehemiah's long-time nemeses, were in a position to rally the people against the governor's reforms and restore the status quo ante.

Nehemiah found that the Levites had once more been relegated to lower class status, having been deprived of the gifts mandated for them. Worse still, he found that the people were once again violating Shabbat, either by working themselves, or by purchasing goods from non-Jewish vendors. Equally troubling was his realization that intermarriage was again rife throughout the community, with as many as half the children of mixed marriages speaking languages other than Hebrew.

Nehemiah, ever the man of action, responded quickly and forcefully. He drove Tobiah and Sanballat out of the Temple, purified their rooms, and restored the giving of the meal offering and frankincense that had fallen into abeyance when his opponents had moved in. He restored the Levites' privileges. He reinforced the holiness of Shabbat by shutting the city's gates Friday at sundown and by issuing decrees, in what came to be termed rabbinical legislation, that prevented both commercial transactions and the treading of winepresses on the day of rest. Finally, while retaining his policy of not breaking up families that included a non-Jewish spouse, he insisted that the children speak Hebrew (as opposed to Aramaic, the Yiddish or Ladino of the era) and that no further intermarriages would be tolerated. To enforce the latter edict, and to make an example of his determination to root out the problem, he first expelled a son of Eliashib, who had married a non-Jewish woman. He then turned on others who had already intermarried and "cursed them, flogged them tore out their hair and adjured them by God”[31] that neither their children, nor they, were to marry non-Jews.

Having reinforced his earlier mandates, Nehemiah ruled in Judah for a further unspecified period before returning to Persia to write his memoirs. Rabbinical annoyance at his plea to God to remember his good deeds led to his relegation to being merely an adjunct to Ezra, whom the rabbis of the Talmud venerated as saving the Torah and enacting a host of laws that prevail to this day.

Nehemiah's obscurity also continues to the present. It is indeed a shame that so few Jews, even Orthodox Jews well versed in Talmud, know little about this remarkable layman, who thousands of years ago embodied the combination of Torah and worldly experience. Indeed, by restoring the Jews' sense of identity and nationhood, in parallel with Ezra's religious leadership, Nehemiah is in fact a model for what both religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy are all about. HIs book remains required reading, and his role as a leading light of Jewish history will forever be secure.

Herbert Samuel's name is no longer as familiar to Jews as it was a century ago. Like Nehemiah, his role in Jewish history has been overshadowed by others. Having disappointed the Zionists while in office, he returned to England to hold various senior political positions, including a second stint as Home Secretary, and later leader of the Liberal Party from 1931-1935. Named a Viscount in 1936 after having lost his seat in Parliament the previous year, Samuel supported Chamberlain's appeasement policy and the Munich agreement on which it was based.

Nevertheless, Samuel became actively involved in helping Jews who were fleeing Europe when the Nazis rose to power. He visited the US several times to establish an emergency fund and helped to raise 12 million pounds sterling, the equivalent of 546 million pounds today or $800 million at current rates. He also successfully lobbied the Home Office to ease visa regulations, which resulted in the admission of 10,000 Jewish children from Germany in a period of eight months. Finally, he lived long enough to see the creation of the State of Israel, which he supported, and, despite the hostility of many Zionists, he maintained his friendship with Chaim Weitzmann, who became Israel's first president. The Zionists saw him as "a false prophet,"[32] and by the time he died in 1963, at the age of 93, he was "a lonely figure." Like Nehemiah, he too deserves a far better place in Jewish memory than he has thus far received. And his son, the second Viscount, spoke Hebrew fluently--with an upper class English accent. Nehemiah would have been pleased.

[1] For a discussion see Dov S. Zakheim, "Practicing Jews Serving in the National Security Community: Modalities and Challenges," *Conversation*s 14 (Autumn 2012/5773), 9-23.

[2] TB *Megilla* 13b; *Targum Est*. 2:21

[3] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, trans. George Rawlinson, with an introduction by F.R.B. Godolphin (New York: Random House, 1942), VII:89, 530.

[4] Chaim Bermant, *The Cousinhood* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 332. See also Bernard Wasserstein, “Herbert Samuel and the Palestine Problem*,” English Historical Review* 91 (October 1976), 754.

[5] TB *Sanhedrin* 93b.

[6] Neh. 1:2

[7] Plutarch*, The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. John Dryden, ed. and rev. Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 1251

[8] Est. 4:11.

[9] Neh. 2:3.

[10] Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 424.

[11] Bernard Wasserstein, “Herbert Samuel and the Palestine Problem,” *The English Historical Review*, 91 (Octoeber 1976), 754.

[12] Bermant, *Cousinhood*, 342.

[13] “H.S. [Herbert Samuel], “The Future of Palestine,” January 1915,

https: en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Future_of_Palestine

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] For a discussion, see Mayir Verete, “The Balfour Declaration and Its Makers,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 6 (January 1970), pp. 48-76.

[16] V.D. Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858* (Leicester and London: Leicester University Press, 1990), 128-29.

[17]Neh. 8:17.

[18] Bermant, *Cousinhood*, 344.

[19] Isi. 40:1.

[20] Viscount Samuel, *Memoirs* (London: Cresset Press,1945), 150.

[21] Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel*, 758.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Cited in *ibid.*, 762.

[24] Evyatar Friesel, “British Officials and Palestine, 1923," *Middle Eastern Studies* 23 (April 1987, 201-202. See also Sahar Huneidi, “Was Balfour Policy Reversible? The Colonial Office and Palestine, 1921-23,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27 ((winter 1998), 26-27; and Elie Kedourie, ‘Herbert Samuel and the Government of Palestine,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 5 (January 1969), 47-48.

[25] Wasserstein, “Herbert Samuel,” 760; the quote is from a letter from Samuel to Lord Curzon, cited *ad. loc.*

[26] Daphne Tsimhoni, "The Status of Arab Christians under the British Mandate in Palestine,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 20 (October 1984), 170.

[27] (Kedouurie, “Sir Herbert Samuel and the Governent of Palestine, 53).

[28] For a discussion see Bernard Wasserstein, "Clipping the Claws of the Colonisers: Arab Officials in the Govenrment of Palestine, 1917-48," *Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (May 1977), 175).

[29] These efforts are described in Ezra 4:7-16.

[30] Quoted in Bermant, *Cousinhood*, 345).

[31] Neh. 13:25.

[32] Wasserstein, “Herbert Samuel,” 774.