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HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE OF NEHEMIAH 9:6-31
AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------------|---|
| <i>BHQ</i> | <i>BIBLIA HEBRAICA QUINTA</i> |
| <i>BHS</i> | <i>BIBLICA HEBRAICA STUTTGARTENSIA</i> |
| <i>BR</i> | <i>BIBLE REVIEW</i> |
| <i>BSI</i> | <i>THE BIBLE SOCIETY OF INDIA</i> |
| <i>CBQ</i> | <i>THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL QUARTERLY</i> |
| <i>EN</i> | <i>EZRA NEHEMIAH</i> |
| <i>HUCA</i> | <i>HEBREW UNION COLLEGE ANNUAL</i> |
| <i>IBC</i> | <i>INTERNATIONAL BIBLICAL COMMENTARY</i> |
| <i>IBCTP</i> | <i>INTERNATIONAL BIBLICAL COMMENTARY FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING</i> |
| <i>JBL</i> | <i>JOURNAL OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE</i> |
| <i>JLAS</i> | <i>JEWISH LAW OF ANNUAL STUDIES</i> |
| <i>JSP</i> | <i>JOURNAL FOR STUDY OF PSEUDEPIGRAPHA</i> |
| <i>MT</i> | <i>MASSORETIC TEXT</i> |
| <i>NCBC</i> | <i>THE NEW CENTURY BIBLE COMMENTARY</i> |
| <i>OT</i> | <i>OLD TESTAMENT</i> |
| <i>SBL</i> | <i>SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE</i> |
| <i>STR</i> | <i>SOUTH EASTERN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW</i> |
| <i>TPI</i> | <i>THEOLOGICAL PUBLICATIONS OF INDIA</i> |
| <i>VE</i> | <i>VERBUM ET ECCLESIA</i> |
| <i>VT</i> | <i>VETUS TESTAMENTUM</i> |
| <i>WBC</i> | <i>WORLD BIBLICAL COMMENTARY</i> |
| <i>ZAW</i> | <i>ZEITSCHRIFT FUR DIE ATTESTAMENTLICHE WISSENSCHAFT</i> |

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

| | |
|---------|----------------|
| Cfr/cfr | confer |
| Ch. | chapter |
| e.g | for example |
| i.e. | that is to say |
| ed. | edited |
| v./vv. | Verse/verses |
| vol. | volume/s |

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Research on Nehemiah is vibrant and produces great contributions that reflect the fragmentation of methods also noticeable in the larger context of biblical studies. While traditional diachronic concerns for sources and editorial activities are still pursued, a trend toward synchronic readings of the text and an appreciation for the literary artistry seems to characterize the majority of recent commentaries and monographs.

The book of Nehemiah is about starting over again. The book deals with a crucial period in the history of the Old Testament people. Without the efforts here never have been taken place the reorientation of the community. In the stories and events and other matters of the book we may view many essential elements that shape and form the community. Nehemiah, one of Israel's great leaders, tells firsthand the powerful story of the rebuilding of ancient Jerusalem's walls after the exile. The rebuilding represented the people's renewal of faith, their overcoming of national shame and the reforming of their conduct. In this context lies the importance of the detailed study of Nehemiah 9:6-31.

We will explore carefully the importance of the central place of this in the book of Nehemiah as well as in the history of the people of God. The community is seen as people who had long been guided by God (YHWH). Though Judeans such as Daniel, Esther and Mordecai have survived under Persian rule, how the faith of the community as the people of God is thrived in this time is narrated through the book of Nehemiah.

Along with the reconstruction of the wall, worship permeates the fabric of the book of Nehemiah. Worship is regarded as a holy activity for God's holy people. The worship and the festivals in Nehemiah are characterized by the construction of booths and the study of the scripture (Neh 8:1-18). "The book of Nehemiah is the first biblical

text to explicitly connect reading and exposition of God's word with corporate worship".¹

In the second part of the book of Nehemiah (7-13)², there lies a special occasion to the penitential activities of the people in the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month. Along with this as a response to the call of Levites, 9:6-31 is added. This prayer is one of the most important prayers in Scripture. This is the longest prayer.³

Goal of the Study

A careful study is needed to understand the meaning and context of these verses. There are many questions to be answered. What is the role of a long prayer in the penitential service of community? Does the prayer have a penitential form and structure? How this came to be the part of book of Nehemiah? Whether from real author or from a redactor? What type of historicity can this prayer provide to the last (in the present order) historical book of the Old Testament? These questions grabbed my interest to dig deeper into the text and its theology. What is the true message of the text in the context of the book of Nehemiah as well in the context of the entire books of the Old Testament?

Methods and Procedure

This study adopts historical- critical method. The text is read in its historical setting. Delimitation of the text is done to fix the boundaries of the pericope. The textual criticism will help us to understand the different variant of the text and fix the original text. By form criticism, we analyse and study what is the form of the text- whether it is poem or prose. The internal coherence and the arrangements of the verses in the pericope are made clear using syntactical analysis. The study of the division and arrangements of the pericope into strophe describes the structure of the pericope. The detailed analysis of the structure will help to expose the central theme of the pericope.

¹ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Ezra- Nehemiah*, Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2010, 82.

² Cfr Steinmann, 77.

³ Cfr Steinmann, 90.

The study then proceeds to the analysis of the historical background of the text in order to obtain the contextual relation of the pericope to the book of Nehemiah. The diachronic method is used to get this result as well as the uniqueness of the pericope is brought out in this section of historical analysis.

Once the interpreter has established a solid textual base, it is time to look at the interpretation of the text. By the exegetical analysis, the theology of the given text is formulated. Each strophe is studied in its relation to the structure found in the first chapter.

STATUS QUAESTIONIS

Book of Nehemiah

A key issue in dealing with exile and identity is represented by narratives about the return from exile. The biblical account in Ezra-Nehemiah is therefore an essential stopover in our intellectual adventure, since it is the only ‘internal source’ we have. The interpretation of that account and of its key features have been quite different along the centuries”.⁴

The book of Nehemiah is a beautiful testimony to the faithfulness of God to care for his people amidst difficulty. Nehemiah is a comparatively short book that chronicles a major event in the history of Israel that took place over the span of approximately twelve years, from 445 to 433 BC.

This book, like so many others in the Old Testament, received its title from its principal character. The Septuagint (Greek) translation also had the same title, as does the Hebrew Bible. The Jews kept Ezra and Nehemiah together for many years. The reason was the historical continuity that flows from Ezra through Nehemiah. This fact illustrates the close relationship that exists between these two books. A single story begins in Ezra and ends in Nehemiah. For many years, believers regarded Ezra and Nehemiah as twin books. They called them 1 and 2 Ezra (or *Esdra*s, the Greek

⁴ Roberto Piani, “The return from the exile in Ezra-Nehemiah: A Second Exodus, A Re-Conquest or A Re-Establishment of the Status Quo Ante?”, (SBL, 2012), 1.

transliteration of Ezra). Jerome, who lived in the fourth century A.D., gave Second Ezra, the name 'Nehemiah'.

The years of history the book covers are 445-431 B.C., or perhaps a few years after that. In 445 B.C. (the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign, Neh 1:1), Nehemiah learned the conditions of the people in Jerusalem that led him to request permission to return to Judah (Neh 2:5). He arrived in Jerusalem in 444 B.C. and within 52 days had completed the rebuilding of the city walls (Neh 6:15). In 432 B.C. Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes (Neh13:6). He came back to Jerusalem after that, probably in a year or so. The record of his reforms following that return is in the last chapter of this book. Apparently, Nehemiah completed all of them in just a few weeks or months. Even though the book spans about 15 years, most of the activity recorded in the book of Nehemiah took place in 445-444 B.C. (chs.1—12) and in 432-431 B.C. (ch.13). Together, Ezra and Nehemiah record about 110 years of Israel's history (538- 430 B.C.). Nehemiah carries us to the end of the Old Testament chronologically.

Text of Study

Nehemiah 9:1-38 records the prayer that the priests and Levites offered unto the Lord. The Jews had been rehearsing the Law for a month, so this prayer may focus on what the Jews had been learning during the past month of assemblies. It was becoming instilled into their hearts. Therefore, the lengthy prayer of this chapter reflects the enormous number of Traditions that were in their hearts. In this prayer, these Jews seem to summarize the history of Israel.

Fathers of the Church Quotes

The Pastor of Hermes, refers Nehemiah 9,17 as though the text has a variant reading of the name Lord for God in Vatican codex.⁵ Tertullian explains the gracious ways of feeding of Israel in wilderness is explained by quoting Nehemiah 9,21.⁶ Cyprian while explaining the reason for the failure of Jews as their forsaking the law

⁵ cfr Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D.325*, Vol. II, WM. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1967, 10.

⁶ cfr Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D.325*, Vol. III, WM. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1967, 155.

of God quotes the words of Ezra in Nehemiah 9,26, “They have fallen away from Thee, and have cast Thy law behind their backs, and have killed Thy prophets which testified against them that they should return to Thee” (Neh.9:26).⁷ Lactantius quotes the same verse while referring to the cause of Incarnation. The noteworthy point in that in the latter section the editors tell that “The Book of Nehemiah is called by the Greek writers the Second book of Ezra. The words quoted are spoken by Levites”.⁸

Previous Studies

In his article Leon J. Liebreich gives a liturgical background for the pericope. He argues that the prayer given in Nehemiah 9:5-37 is under the circumstances of the Jewish liturgical services. How the prayer is connected with the liturgical conditions of the Hebrew people.⁹ The author does not give any studies on the text in a critical way, as many scholars suggest that the part is an addition by the redactor to the text.

Richard J. Bautch, in his article studies the verses 7- 8 in parallel to Genesis 15, and gives importance to covenant relations. Mark J. Boda. He does a textual study of the verses 33-34¹⁰, but skips a large portion, that is verses 9-31. It is because he takes only covenant and Abraham’s role in the post-exilic period.

Hava Shalom-Guy examines the intertwined roles of Abraham and the promise of the land in Neh. 9:6–37. Author argues that Israel’s ownership of the land is the thematic axis that binds the two parts of the prayer in Nehemiah 9: the historical survey (vv. 6–31) and the description of the current generation (vv. 32–37). The discussion of this confessional prayer underscores the strong connection between Abraham and the land and shows how its author rewrites history in order to create a continuous connection between the people and the land. Although Abraham is central in other exilic- and restoration-generation texts, and in the dispute over the land

⁸ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D.325*, Vol. VII, 177.

⁹ Leon J. Liebreich, “The impact of Nehemiah 9:5-37 on the liturgy of the synagogue”, (*HUCA*, New York, 1961), 227-237.

¹⁰ Richard J. Bautch, “An Appraisal of Abraham's Role in Postexilic Covenants”, (*CBQ*, 71, 2009), 43-63. He tells, “Specifically, the sequence of actions in 9:8 indicates that first Abraham is found to be faithful, and then God makes a covenant with him. The syntax suggests a succession of distinct acts, the first of which is inflected while the second is added simply in the infinitive absolute.”⁴⁸ In its formulation, the verse appears to lay emphasis on the first action, Abraham's faithfulness, with the making of the covenant a clear corollary”.

between the locals and the returnees, his role in Nehemiah 9 differs. There Abraham represents the aspiration of a circle among the returnees for restored hegemony over the land, in opposition to the prevailing ideology of Ezra-Nehemiah, which supported the Persian regime.¹¹

Four Abraham-related elements are singled out in Neh. 9:7–8: the divine choice of Abram, his being taken out of Ur of the Chaldeans, the name change to Abraham, and the making of a covenant with him, whose primary element is the granting of the land to his descendants.¹² She explains this four elements point by point in cross reference to that of Genesis. She even finds that the Land promise in Nehemiah 9:7 is not the recollection of Gen.15:7, but of Gen.15:18. The change is done deliberately by the author. Here comes the question, whether it is the author or redactor makes this difference. No evidence is given for this deliberate omission and reception of the second one.

Hava Shalom-Guy in the second part of her argument analyses the prayer from vv. 9ff. She tells that even the name of Moses is given in the text it is a later addition¹³.

¹¹ Hava Shalom-Guy, “Undercurrents in Restoration Literature: Abraham and the Promise of the Land in Nehemiah 9:6–37”, (*CBQ*, 84, 2002), (39-60). www.atla.com. “Abraham’s appearance here, as well as in other exilic and restoration-period biblical texts (Isa 41:8; 51:2 [with Sarah]; 63:16; Jer.33:26; Ezek. 33:24; Ps 105:7–11, 42–44; Neh. 9:7–8; 1 Chr. 1:27; 16:15–18; 2 Chr. 20:7), exemplifies the centrality of this figure for members of the exilic and restoration generations in Jerusalem and Babylonia.2 Consideration of these texts evidences a number of shared Abraham-related elements; note, however, that not all of these features appear in each text. Divine choice of Abraham (Neh. 9:7; Isa 51:2). Being brought from Ur of the Chaldeans (Neh. 9:7; Gen 15:7; cf. Josh 24:2–3: “from beyond the Euphrates”). Name change to Abraham (Neh. 9:7; 1 Chr. 1:27 [cf. Gen 17:5]) • Multiple descendants (not mentioned explicitly in Neh. 9:7–8, but appearing later in v. 23; Isa 51:2; cf. the many promises in Genesis: 15:5; 22:17; 26:4, among others). Abraham’s love of God (Isa 41:8; 2 Chr.20:7 in the wake of Isa 41:8). Abraham’s loyalty to God (Neh. 9:8; cf. Gen 15:6–7, and also 18:19; 22:12, 18; 26:5), which forms the basis for the divine promise with its granting of the land. The divine covenant with Abraham (Neh. 9:8; 1 Chr. 16:15–16; cf. Gen 15:6–7), or the divine oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ps 105:9–11, 42–44; 1 Chr.16:15–18), lends force to this promise”. An association between Abraham and the promise of the land and the granting of the land to Abraham himself (Ezek. 33:24; Ps 105:9, 11; Gen 13:17; 15:7), his descendants (Neh. 9:8; 2 Chr. 20:7 [cf. Gen 12:7; 15:18; 24:7; 26:4]), or to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 13:15; 17:8)”.

¹² Shalom-Guy, “Undercurrents in Restoration Literature:”, 40.

¹³ “The only covenant mentioned explicitly in this survey is the Abrahamic one, which again highlights Abraham’s centrality. Moreover, it appears that the sole mention of Moses in the survey, in the context of the tradition of the giving of the Torah by Moses (v. 14ב: וחקים ומצוות עבדך משה ביד להם: “ציינת ותורה”, You ordained for them laws, commandments and Teaching, through Moses Your servant”) is a secondary addition, that aimed to introduce the tradition of Moses giving the Torah into the survey in line with the central status that the Torah had achieved in Jewish society during the restoration period”. Shalom-Guy, “Undercurrents in Restoration Literature:”, 48.

After giving the detailed study of the covenant of Abraham as the core element in the prayer of Nehemiah 9 Hava explains the date of its writing. She gives various opinion of the time period by different authors.¹⁴ She agrees with the time prior to the return from Persian exile, but give no reason.

Analysing the same theme Ari Mermelstein studies Nehemiah 9 to teach his lessons on Abraham and covenant relations. He argues that it was not simply accidental, but “they recounted a version of Israel's history up to their own day in which the formation of the Abrahamic covenant played a pivotal role. The authors of these texts forged a link between their present and the Abrahamic covenant in order to demonstrate that the story of Israel's past was not complete”.¹⁵ Rather than focus on Abraham's escape from a sinful world, Nehemiah 9 mentioned his departure from his native country and the divine gift of the land of Israel as a result of Abraham's loyalty. Here he analyses the prayer given in Nehemiah 9 as the example of the use of stories of the patriarchs in the exilic period as self-identifying and status making source.¹⁶

What is recounted is not just any arbitrarily chosen history, it is the most significant founding events in to the eyes of the community; their myth-symbol is complex. Thus, the recitation of ethnic history cements a common story and identity. It is a self-definitional interpretation of the past and present. Author tries to tell that the prayer is an ethnic identification of the Israel, in terms of Torah. It was a creation of new people constituted on Torah. This he explains through the position¹⁷ of

¹⁴ “The earliest studies ascribe this prayer to the eighth century B.C.E or to the period preceding the Babylonian exile. The most recent studies ascribe it to the end of the late fourth/early third century B.C.E. Most scholars and commentators, however, assign the composition of the prayer to the period between the destruction of Jerusalem and Ezra and Nehemiah’s day. One proposal attributes the composition of the prayer to the period of the Babylonian exile, viewing it as reflecting the attitude of those who remained in Judea. Another assigns the prayer to the early Persian period, before Ezra and Nehemiah’s arrival in Jerusalem, understanding it as reflecting the perspective of the returnees”. Shalom-Guy, “Undercurrents in Restoration Literature:”, 60.

¹⁵ Ari Mermelstein, “When History Repeats Itself: The Theological Significance of the Abrahamic Covenant in Early Jewish Writings”, (JSP, uploaded on 27-2-2017), 113-142, <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/JournalsPermissions.nav>, accessed on 12-10-2021.

¹⁶ Mermelstein, “When History Repeats Itself”, 140.

¹⁷ The opponents of the people of Israel are listed: “the figure Abraham is listed as having been brought out of a foreign land and having been promised a land for his descendants currently in the hands of Israel’s archetypal enemies (in this case, the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Gergashites are listed; 9:8)”. Katherine E. Southwood, “But now ...do not let all this hardship seem in significant before you’: Ethnic History and Nehemiah 9”, (*SEA*, 79, 2014), 14.

Abraham just after the creation account. “the figure of Abraham can be interpreted as having a powerful function within the narration of Israel’s ethnic history. Placed at the starting point in the history, immediately after creation...”¹⁸

The purpose of presenting history in this manner is explained as follows: “Therefore, while the ethnic history presented is not a heroic history, it is nevertheless a history which is fitted to the needs of the present community. The source of continuity in the past has been Yahweh’s unchanging continued fidelity towards Israel, despite the failure of the forefathers to take the land”.¹⁹

Katherine, though tells details about the ethnicity in the given chapter and details about the ethnicity in the literary world with different examples, she does not try to study the text or analyses the text morphologically or syntactically. She does not study the context and relevance of the text. Though she gives more reasons for this ethnic character the Theology of the present text is not extracted from this noble prayer.

Fredrick c. Holmgren, suggests that the long prayer has a good chiastic structure. The term “amana” is used for covenant here in a special way. In all other parts of the Old Testament, berith is used for covenant. But the use of the word ‘amana’ is a special purpose. It makes an inclusion of the text to be studied. He also picturizes a general chiastic structure of Nehemiah 9:6-10:1.²⁰ He refers that Sinaitic covenant is only referred in the text, but he does not provide any argument in detail, why the author of the book does not give much importance to Sinaitic covenant. The setting of the text and position in the entire book is not studied. The drawback of this article lays in the fact that it immersed only to Abrahamic presence in detail.

V. Ndikhokele N. Mtshiselwa explains that not only did the remembrance of the story of Israel confer an authoritative status to Nehemiah 9:6–37, it also served the purpose of casting a hopeful and prophetic imagination of a liberated community in Yehud. Secondly, it is argued that the prayer of Nehemiah 9:6–37 shaped the identity

¹⁸ Southwood, “But now ...do not let all this hardship seem in significant before you”, 12.

¹⁹ Southwood, “But now ...do not let all this hardship seem in significant before you”, 18.

²⁰ Fredrick c. Holmgren, “Faithful Abraham and the, ’amànâ Covenant Nehemiah 9:6 -10:1”, *Mitteilungen*, 249-254, www.atla.com., accessed on 12-11-2022.

of the Jews in Yehud amidst socio-economic injustices. This identity was linked to the patriarch Abraham (cf. Neh 9:7–8), to the liberation of the Jews from Pharaoh under the leadership of Moses (cf. Neh 9:9–15, 21), to the possession of the Promised Land (cf. Neh 9:22–25), to the caution about the consequence of disobedience to Yahweh – the exile (cf. Neh 9:16–21, 26–30)- and to the demise of the kingdom in the Babylonian exile (cf. Neh 9:31–37). On the whole, it is argued in this paper that the prayer of Nehemiah 9:6–37 was composed and transmitted with the view to remember and construct the identity of the Jews in postexilic Yehud.²¹

Mark J. Boda suggests a Deuteronomistic origin of the prayer of Nehemiah.²² He suggests Ezekelian model in the wilderness passages. Different traditions are connected together to guide the reader from creation to the fall of nation.

By analyzing the former studies on the passage Nehemiah 9:6-37, we can make certain conclusions. They are:

1. Understanding of the Pre-existence of Pentateuch or other books: Almost all the writers work with pre- supposition that the author of this passage was aware of or well versed in the book of Pentateuch and other historical books.
2. Some of them only claim to the preexilic -composition of the prayer but no solid arguments are not given.
3. The skipping passages such as Genesis 3-11 and the delimitation of Moses and absence of the name of Judges are not mentioned or not studied in detail.
4. The authorship of the prayer is questioned due to the in appropriate position, but the real place is not shown.
5. No one has studied the text from a reverse order.

²¹ V. Ndikhokele N. Mtshiselwa “Remembering and constructing Israelite identity in postexilic Yehud: Some remarks on the penitential prayer of Nehemiah 9:6–37”, (*VE*, 37, 2016), 46.

²² “A traditio-historical evaluation of this Gattung revealed that Priestly/Ezekielian circles supplemented and superseded a Deuteronomistic foundation. Although there was ample evidence of Deuteronomistic vocabulary and concepts, there was a substantial number of Priestly/Ezekielian elements”. Mark J. Boda “Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9” (*ZAW* 277, Berlin - New York), 1999, 26.

With this note our study begins. The question is: can the prayer (history) mentioned in Nehemiah 9:6-37 be a starting point to the entire Old Testament?

CHAPTER ONE

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF NEHEMIAH 9:6-31

Introduction

In this chapter, we analyze the text of Nehemiah 9:6-31. Primarily we delimit the text based on literary and narrative parameters. Delimitation is followed by textual analysis, where we address the textual variants and, along with that a proposed text is presented. Then we make the syntactical analysis of the text and translation of the text. Finally, a structural division of the pericope along with the form of the text.

1.1. Delimitation of the Text

This selected text, though connected with its nearby passages, must be able to convey an idea in itself. Delimitation²³ could be done based on the narration style, structural pattern, various grammatical usages, differences in the themes explained etc. There are as many suggestions of delimitation as the number of the studies on the passages. Each one takes their own process of delimitation in order to substantiate their views and as a help for their studies.²⁴ The text is delimited in the following way.

1.1.1 *The Structure of the book of Nehemiah*

If we take the first prayer of Nehemiah (1:4-11), it is kind of synonym to the last words of the author expressed in 13:31. There are some concluding passages which deal with the reformation activities by Nehemiah. All these are out lined by the phrase “Remember O my God...” (Neh 13:14.22.28.31). This is the last words of the author. This can be taken as bracketing the whole text of Nehemiah. The author uses the imperative form of verbs, “let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to

²³ First step in analyzing a biblical passage is to delimit the text. Delimitation is the process in which we limit our text of study to the smallest possible pericope. An investigation is carried out to distinguish clearly the boundary marks of the literary unit.

²⁴ Scholars more or less agree that Nehemiah 7:72b–10:40 forms an autonomous unit in the present text. Eskenazi sees the unit as the beginning of the third section of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative dealing with ‘Success (Objective Reached). The Community Celebrates the Completion of the House of God According to the Torah’. Throntveit, takes it to be the middle section of the second major division of Ezra-Nehemiah that ‘describes Ezra’s renewal of the congregation’s covenant relationship with God’. Williamson (1998) refers to the ‘very widest spectrum of opinions’ on the structure due to Ezra’s sudden move into the foreground while Nehemiah’s first-person account is suspended. Cfr Tamara C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1988, 93.

hear the prayer of your servant” in 1:6. In v.8 he prays to God to “remember the word which you commanded to your servant Moses”. This makes an inclusion of all other things in the text.

The word ‘remember’ is used as bracketing the book of Nehemiah as a whole. In these two usages of ‘remember-formula’ lies the whole text of Nehemiah. This story has two main problems, and we are told what they are straight away in v.3. “The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire” (Neh. 1:3). The first half of the book (Neh 1:4-6:15) deals with the second problem (the wall and city gates), and the second half of the book (Neh 6:16-13:31) talks about the first problem (the problem of the people).

Immediately after the introduction to the book (1:1-3), we find words (When I heard or when they heard) that is repeated throughout the book (Neh 1:4, 2:10, 2:19, 4:1, 4:9, 6:1, 6:16, 13:3) in order to mark new beginnings in the story.²⁵ The author repeats this verb to hear as a marker of each new section of the story.

1.1.2. Wider Context

The text of study falls in the in the larger context of Neh 6:16- 13:3. In this we see an inclusion of the text (7:72b-10:40) with word וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ which means ‘they settled’. This can be taken as the wider context in which 7:72b-10:40 stands as the bracketed passage, which deal with the inhabitants of the town of Jerusalem. The second part (the Problem with the people) is dealt by delaying the dedication of the wall from 6:15 to 12:27. The dedication of the completed wall is delayed from 6:15 to 12: 27ff by interpolating the matter of Tobiah in 6:17, where it is said that “for many in Judah were bound by oath to him” (6:18). There seems to be need of a new oath, which exhibits that the people of the exile- community stand with God and keeps the commandments.

²⁵ 1:4 When I heard... (וַיִּשְׁמַעַי), 2:10 When Sanballat and Tobiah heard...(וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ), 2:19 When Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem heard...(וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ סַנְבַלְטַת הַחֹרֶזִי וְטַבְיָה), 4:1 When Sanballat heard...(וַיִּשְׁמָע סַנְבַלְטַת הַחֹרֶזִי וְטַבְיָה), 4:9 When our enemies heard... (וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ כָּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע), 6:1 When word came to Sanballat... (וַיִּשְׁמָע סַנְבַלְטַת כָּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע לְסַנְבַּלְטַת), 6:16 When all our enemies heard... (וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ כָּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעוּ), 13:3 When the people heard the law... (וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ כָּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעוּ).

This is evident from the appointment of Hananiah, the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem. In contrast to the narration in 6:18, (for many in Judah were bound by oath to him) he is drawn as the one “more faithful and God-fearing than many” (7:2). Hananiah is presented as a faithful person in comparison to the many in Judah who were bound by oath to Tobiah. It opens the ground for discussion on the words used for oath in 6:18 and covenant in 10:1. The two lists, 7:6-73 and 10:1-26 can be taken as bracketing factor to these. That the people of land take God experience as their moving force and center of life.

Some disparities can be found in 7:3 and 7:4. In 7:3e we read, “Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each to his station and each opposite his own house”. But 7:4 contradicts this by saying “no houses had been built”. 7:4 can be seen as an editorial work to have the two lists. שְׁבוּעָה is the word used in 6:18 for oath. And כְּרִיתִים אֶמְנָה are the words used in 10:1 to denote the covenant that the people signed after 9:6-37.

According to 10:1-40 people signed the covenant as result number of people who lived in Jerusalem increased (11:1). Thus, inner bracketing between 7:72b-11:1 becomes more relevant. In both places we get the message of the people who live in the land. Along with the list of the inhabitants, chapters 8 and 9 deals with the content which hold the keys to unlock the theological setting and meaning.

There are grave reasons for acknowledging Neh 9: 6-31 to be out of place where it stands and serious difficulties in finding a better position for it, it seems wise to examine it and its contents by themselves.

1.1.2.1. Previous Pericopes (7:1-72)

The Preceding pericope is Neh 7:1-72. It begins with a Macro-syntactic sign²⁶ (וַיְהִי Neh 7:1). וַיְהִי is a marker of the narrative foreground.²⁷

²⁶ The Function of Macro-syntactic sign is to collocate the clauses they introduce in a specific text -linguistic environment by indicating the linguistic position of the following text segment in relation to the preceding one. “Macro-syntactic signs are forms, whose main function is to collocate the clause(s) they introduce in a specific text-linguistic environment”. Cfr Gregor Geiger, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Draft version, 2016, 8.

²⁷ According to Gregor Geiger “in majority of cases the וַיְהִי construction introduces a new point of time. This new point of time can be expressed by a prepositional Phrase or an x-qatal

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר נִבְנְתָה הַחוֹמָה וְנֶאֱמַיִד הַדְּלֵתוֹת וַיִּפְקְדוּ הַשׁוֹעֲרִים וְהַמְּשָׁרְרִים וְהַלְוִיִּם

The text has וַיְהִי clause with a temporal subordinating conjunction כַּאֲשֶׁר and qatal form of the verb נִבְנְתָה in the antecedent and a main clause. All these elements point to a new beginning. Therefore, we take it as a new beginning.

The events dealt in this pericope are those what they have been done after finishing the wall (Neh 7:1-72). The appointment of Hananiah as the commander of the citadel (7:2), appointment of the gatekeepers (7:3) and the description of the city and its security (7:3-4) are narrated.

After having said this, the narration continues to present the list of names in the book of genealogy. It begins אֵלֶּהוּ בְּנֵי הַמְּדִינָה (Neh. 7:6) and continues to give a long list by בְּנֵי . This list ends in Neh 7:72a

Nehemiah 7:72 includes, two parts. The first part serves as the conclusion of the pericope. The reasons are given below.

1. The names (הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם וְהַשׁוֹעֲרִים וְהַמְּשָׁרְרִים) in the verse are collective forms of the list given above (Neh 7:6-71)
2. The verb וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ stands as the closing form of the bracket in the writing style called inclusion.²⁸ In Neh 7:72a, the verb takes the names of the leaders in a collective form הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם וְהַשׁוֹעֲרִים וְהַמְּשָׁרְרִים וּמִן־הָעָם וְהַנְּתִינִים וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (the priests, the Levites, the gate keepers, the singers, some of the people and all Israel).
3. The grammatical reason is that, in the verb וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ the form of the verb stands as the conclusive statement as the rule given by Thomas O. Lambdin.²⁹

All these reasons tell us that the first part of v.72a is the conclusion of the pericope.

The passage is bracketed by the verb וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ (and they settled or lived). Whereas, in 11:1 the noun is changed as the heads of the people lived in the city. The names

construction whereby the element preceding the qatal is a subordinating conjunction, mainly כַּאֲשֶׁר or כִּי”.

²⁸ Inclusion is the technique made by the writers to insert a separate idea by using same word or group of words as borders of brackets.

²⁹ Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, Longman and Todd Ltd, Darton, 2003, 280.

“leaders of the people” which are listed in Neh 7:72a is not expanded in Neh 11:1. The term ‘living in the city’ make the form of an inclusion.

1.1.2.2. A New Beginning in Neh 7:72b

The semantic form of Neh 7:72b explicitly tells that it is a new beginning. This tells the new event. The temporal aspect is also important. These events take place shortly after the completion of the reconstruction of the walls. וַיָּגַע הַתְּקֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי (and when seventh month came 7:72b) is the mentioning of temporal aspect.

Neh 7:72b onwards, the passage deal with the matters of seventh month.³⁰ It is in contrast to 6:15 where the completion of wall has taken place in the twenty-fifth day of month of Elul.

וַתִּשְׁלַם הַחֹמָה בְּעֶשְׂרִים וַחֲמֵשָׁה לְאַלּוּל (so the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul (Neh. 6:15)).³¹

The unit of Nehemiah 7:72b–11:1 consists of many episodes: the reading of the Book of the Law by Ezra, the response of the people and the Succoth festivals (7:72b– 8:18); Israel’s confession in the form of a historical review and prayer (9:1– 37); and the agreement of the people to follow the Law of God (9:38–11:1). Three successive meetings take place, culminating in the ceremonial firm agreement in writing to keep to God’s laws.

1.1.3. The Pericope of Study

We limit the scope of our study to the Nehemiah 9,6-37. The reasons for the delimitation of the text are:

1.1.3.1. Twenty-fourth Day

In Neh 8:2,13,18 and 9:1 there are references to the days. 8:2 refers to the first day of the seventh month and in 8:9 it is said that, “This is holy to the Lord your God”.

³⁰ In Neh 6,15 the completion of the wall, is said to be in the month of Elul, which is the sixth month by the Nisan-based calendar. In Ezra 2,70 there is a seventh month assembly. Cfr Robert North S.J. “The Chronicler: 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah”, (NIBC ed. Raymond E. Brown), TPI, Bangalore, 2011, 387.

³¹ Elul (אַלּוּל): The sixth month of the Hebrew calendar, roughly corresponding to August and September. “Tishri,” September/October) is even more important, since this marks the beginning of the religious New Year with convocations, sacrifices, the day of Atonement and the Festival of Booths (Numbers 29). Tishri is said to be the month in which the year of prayer starts. Cfr Steinmann, *Ezra Nehemiah*, 62-63.

In 8:13- 18 speaks about the festival of Succoth. After the accomplishment of the decrees commanded by God, they celebrate the feasts, fasts and festivals.

But in Neh 9:1 it is said about the assembly and fasting take place in the twenty fourth day of the seventh month. This shows the uniqueness of the text. In the book of Leviticus, we read: “Speak to the people of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, for seven days, there shall be the festival of Succoth to the Lord. The first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. Seven days you shall present the Lord's offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a holy convocation and present the Lord's offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations” (Lev 23:34-36). When we count the days, they are 23. In Nehemiah 9,1 the author speaks about the twenty fourth day which is next day of the festival of the booth.

1.1.3.2. Shift from Third to Second Person

When we read the text, we find a real shift from the first-person narration to the third person. In Neh 7:1 and 3 the author himself narrates the events. “I gave my brother Hanani, charge over Jerusalem... And I said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem” (Neh 7:2-3). After the long list of names which is quoted from a book genealogy which the author found (Neh 7:5) there is an abrupt shift from first person to third person. In 8:9 we read: “And, Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe,”.

In Neh 9: 6 the text is given in the second person. The narration is in the second person until 9:32. This shift to second person shows that text which begins in Neh 9:6, is a discourse.

1.1.3.3. The Beginning of the Passage

The above-mentioned matters will lead us to Neh 9:6. Here we have a direct discourse, that begins with second person. In the LXX version it is given an additional explanation “And Ezra said”. It is the verse addresses God. 9:1-5 describes the circumstances and the actions of the people. They were gathered, they wore sack cloths, they wore mud and they confessed. All these are actions done by the people. In vv.3 and 4 we read they made confession and worshiped the God their God and they cried out in loud voice to the Lord. In verse 6-37, the verses are addressed to the God. It begins in v.6.

1.1.3.4. The End of the Passage

Neh 9:31 is considered to be the conclusion of the historical part of the prayer. In v. 31 we have the pronoun אַתָּה at the end. This is technique used by the author. The historical part of the long review of Israel's history that began in Neh 9:6 with the same second person pronoun אַתָּה. Author chose the same word at the beginning and the end. כִּי אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְרַחֵם אֶתָּה is the last phrase of this passage. כִּי אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְרַחֵם אֶתָּה describes the nature of God.

1.1.3.4.1. Present Situation

The term ועתה (and now), takes the discourse into the present context of the writings. Grammatically the term ועתה is a macro-syntactic sign. Therefore, the discourse takes change of time into the present situation. The nouns take the position of first person (we, our and us). The preposition ל can be used in an enumeration or list, and so it is attached to all of the different members of Israel in this list, even though they are not indirect objects, but direct objects that extrapolate on the direct object suffix on מְצַאֲתֵנוּ 'found us'. 9:32-37, the second section of the prayer, turns to the present situation with the word 'watah' ("w and now"), and uses the first person plural to refer to the sins of the current generation, our sins that have resulted, as 9:36-37 says, in the community's status as "slaves" in the very land given to the ancestors, "and its great wealth belongs to kings whom you set over us because of our sins, and they rule over our bodies and our livestock as they wish, and we are in great distress."

1.1.3.4.2. Concluding Remark

In Neh 10:1, we read a concluding remark as "because of all these we... (וּבְכָל־זֵאת אֲנִינֵנוּ). This makes an end to the pericope. The above-mentioned matters are being background to the agreement to be signed by the people who are mentioned in Neh 10:1- 40.

All these above said reasons help us to delimit the text of study as a special unit. It begins in Neh 9:6 and ends up in Neh 9:31. The study is limited to the historical part of the prayer.

1.2. Textual Differences Cited in the Masoretic Text

The Masoretic text (Hereafter MT) uses some different forms of verbs or phrases in connection with the variant reading that the LXX translates it accordingly.

Taking the following three reasons in consideration, the MT is considered to be the ancient reading.

1. *Lectio Antiquor*: When we take the date of formation of the book, the *Lectio antiquor* is preferable.
2. *Lectio difficilior*: The difficult text is taken as the ancient one.
3. *Lectio Bravior*: The shortest one will be taken into consideration.

These three elements, either together or one of them, have taken to fix the text of study. The variant forms given in the critical apparatus is studied below.

Neh 9:6b: According to Qumran manuscripts, אָז is replaced by אָתָּה. Though the words denote same meaning and the former is the longer form of the latter, we prefer the MT.³²

Neh 9:14a: in Codex Leningrad and other manuscripts the verb הוֹדָה is changed to masculine form

Neh 9:18a: The verb has changed to participle in multiple manuscripts. This change is given with reference to LXX.

Neh 9:18b: In a number of manuscripts the noun אֶרֶץ with *mem* is added before the name of the place מִצְרָיִם.

Neh 9:32a: ך is added before the word לְשֹׁרְיָנוּ in Codex Manuscripts Hebraicus versions.

Neh 9:34a: The object marker אֵת is changed to אֵפ which gets the meaning indeed.

Almost all the changes or variations are due to the influence of the LXX version of the text. In conclusion, the pericope we have taken from Masoretic Text is found to be the oldest, shortest, and most difficult one compared to the texts found in critical apparatus.

³² The superscript letters a, b are the indications given to the critical -apparatus in *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Cfr K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, BSI, Bangalore, 1997, 1446-1449.

1.3. Syntactical Analysis of the Text (Neh 9:6-31)

אתה-הוא יהוה לבדך

את עשית את-השמים שמי השמים וכל-צבאם

הארץ וכל-אשר עליה הימים וכל-אשר בהם

ואתה מתנה את-כלם וצבא השמים לך משפתתוים:

The text begins with a non-verbal sentence (אתה-הוא יהוה לבדך) in which אתה and יהוה are two nouns in the nominative case that are connected with copulative form (הוא). In discourse the non-verbal sentence functions as a new beginning.³³ This stands as the heading of the stanza. All other elements explain this heading. אתה is repeated thrice in the verse. את (short form of אתה) is used. עשית (qal-perfect) is common verb of 6b.6c and 6d. The objects the verb are השמים, הארץ, and הימים. וכל-צבאם is the apposition to השמים.

את עשית is omitted in 9:6c and 9:6d with the use of 'ellipsis'.³⁴ In fact actual form of the 9: 6c will be as follows את הארץ וכל-אשר עליה and v.6d will be הימים וכל- את עשית. The use of poetical technique ellipsis makes the את עשית absent in the 6c and 6d.

והוא יהוה לבדך and וכל-אשר בהם stand in parallel to וכל-צבאם as apposition to הארץ and הימים respectively. The last portion of v.6 stands as concluding statement of the staircase parallelism.³⁵ The verbs מתנה and משפתתוים are in the x-qatal form. The verbal forms עשית, מתנה, and משפתתוים are the explanation to the first statement אתה-הוא יהוה לבדך. These verbs explain two actions of God, namely creation and vivifying.

After a non-verbal sentence, if there is an x-qatal form of the verb, the normal verbal sentence will be foreground and the latter will serve as the background of the

³³ Geiger, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 72-73.

³⁴ Ellipsis is the omission of a particle, word or group of words with in a poetic or grammatical unit, where its presence is expected. In other words, ellipsis is the suppression of an element demanded by the context. Cfr W.H.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, London, T&T Clark Biblical Languages, 2006, 303.

³⁵ Staircase parallelism is a form of couplet which proceeds in steps. A sentence is started, after the interruption by a vocative or an epithet, it is resumed from the beginning again. Cfr Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 150.

sentence. In this verse 6b, 6c and 6d stands as the background of 6a and 6e goes along with 6a.

It can be made clear by reading as follows:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>You are alone God, (as) you made the heavens, the heavens of heaven and all their hosts, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and that is in it, you vivify all, therefore, heavenly hosts worship you.</p> | <p>ה־הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדּוֹ אֶת עֲשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ הַיָּמִים וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וְאַתָּה מְחַיֶּה אֶת־כָּל־ם וּצְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם לָךְ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים</p> |
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אֶת־ה־הוּא יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בְּתַרְתָּ בְּאֲבָרָם
וְהוֹצֵאתוּ מֵאוּר כְּשֹׁדִים וְשָׁמַת שָׁמוּ אֲבָרָהֶם:

The statement **אֶת־ה־הוּא יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים** is a non-verbal sentence stands as the foreground. The relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר** makes it parallel to the previous verse 6b

(**אֶת עֲשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם**)

The use of the relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר** makes the verse in parallel to v.6b where short form of personal pronoun is used. The antecedent word of the relative pronoun is “**אֶת־ה־**” of v.6b. The use of qal-perfect tense of the verb makes it clear. The verbs (**וְהוֹצֵאתוּ** and **וְשָׁמַת**) are in the waw-qatal (perfect) form. These verbs are conjugated in past tense second person singular. In Hebrew the verb implies the subject. Thus, there is an implied **אֶת־ה־** (you) **וּצְבָא** in the verb itself. Therefore, these are three consecutive

actions which can be translated with conjunction *waw*. The letter *waw* before the verbs is exegetically. That means the following verbs gives explanation to the verb בְּחַרְתָּ.

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| <p>You are God the Lord, (You) who chose in Abram (you) brought him out from Ur of Chaldeans (you) placed his name Abraham.</p> | <p>אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתָּ בְּאַבְרָם וְהוֹצֵאתוֹ מֵאוּר כַּשְׁדִּים וְשָׂמְתָּ שְׁמוֹ אַבְרָהָם</p> |
|---|--|

וּמִצָּאתָ אֶת־לִבְבוֹ נֶאֱמָן לְפָנָיו וְכָרוֹת עַמּוֹ הַבְּרִית
לְתֵת אֶת־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי הַחֹמֵי הָאֲמָרִי
וְהַפְרָזִי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהַגְרָגָשִׁי לְתֵת לְזַרְעוֹ
וְתָקַם אֶת־דְּבָרָיו כִּי צָדִיק אָתָּה:

The passage continues with *waw-qatal* (perfect) form of the verb (וּמִצָּאתָ). *Waw-qatal* form gives us the impression that there is another action (and you found) which is done by the same subject of the previous verse. The letter *waw* gets the same function of exegetical usage.

Then there is shift to *qal* infinite absolute (וְכָרוֹת) is the infinite form of the verb (כָּרִית). The infinite absolute form of the verb can be used in place of the finite verb.³⁶ There are repetition of the infinitive construct of וְתָקַם (לְתֵת). The repetition does not add anything except giving emphasis. Here the infinitive gives the meaning of purpose (in order to) or resultative (so that). Here it is taken as the purpose of the action.

³⁶ Steinmann, *Ezra- Nehemiah*, 525.

The statement continues with waw-qatal form. כִּי צִדִיק אַתָּה is a subordinate clause of explanation. It is causative as it can be translated with for or because.

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| <p>(you) found his heart is faithful before you</p> <p>And (you) cut with him the covenant</p> <p>In order to give the land of Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorites</p> <p>The Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Gergashite, to give to his descendants</p> <p>thus (you) fulfilled your word,</p> <p>for you are righteous.</p> | <p>וּמְצָאתָ אֶת־לִבּוֹ נֹאמָן לְפָנָיִךָ</p> <p>וְכָרֹת עִמּוֹ הַבְּרִית</p> <p>לְתַת אֶת־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי הַחִתִּי הָאֱמֹרִי</p> <p>וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהַגְּרָגָשִׁי לְתַת לְזַרְעוֹ</p> <p>וּתְלַקַּח אֶת־דְּבָרְיִךָ</p> <p>כִּי צִדִיק אַתָּה</p> |
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וַתֵּרָא אֶת־עֲנִי אַבְתִּינִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־זַעֲקוֹתָם שָׁמַעְתָּ עַל־יַם־סוּף:

וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָם וּמִפְתָּיִם בְּפִרְעֹה וּבְכָל־עַבְדָּיו וּבְכָל־עַם אֶרֶץ־

כִּי יִזְעַתָּ כִּי הִזִּידוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וַתַּעַשׂ־לָךְ שֵׁם כְּהִיּוֹם הַהוּא:

Verses 9 and 10 are taken together as both these verses begin with wayyiqtol form of the verbs. The wayyiqtol form of the verb takes the continuation of the preceding foreground form. Same use of tense continues here. The last part of the previous verse is a non-verbal statement. It, though functions as the conclusion of that verse, the wayyiqtol form help us to see this non-verbal statement as the part of the verses 9 and 10. Therefore, seeing the affliction and doing wonderful signs are seen as the part of the cutting the covenant (וְכָרֹת עִמּוֹ הַבְּרִית) of v.8b.

In these verses we see background narration by the x-qatal use of the verb. Thus first clauses 9a and 10a (wayyiqtol - וַתֵּרָא and וַתִּתֵּן) becomes the foreground and 9b and 10b (x-qatal - שָׁמַעְתָּ and יִזְעַתָּ) becomes the background or reason for the foreground. There is also causative and relative subordinate clauses in verse 10. על־יַם־סוּף tells the event in Egypt. This is used in parallel to the name Egypt in 9a.

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| <p>(you) saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt</p> <p>While (you) heard their cry over the sea of reeds.</p> | <p>וַתֵּרָא אֶת־עַנְי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־זַעֲקָתָם שְׁמַעְתָּ עַל־יַם־סוּף</p> |
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| <p>(you) gave signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land</p> <p>Because (you) knew that they acted insolently against them</p> <p>And (you) made your name as (it is) this day.</p> | <p>וַתַּמַּן אֱלֹהִים וּמִפְתֵּימַיִם בְּפִרְעֹה וּבְכָל־עַבְדָּיו וּבְכָל־עַם אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם כִּי יָדַעְתָּ כִּי הִזְדוּוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וַתַּעַשׂ־לָךְ שֵׁם כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה</p> |
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וְהָיָה בְּקַעֲתָ לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲבְרוּ בְּתוֹדֵי־הַיָּם בַּיַּבְיָעָה

וְאֶת־רִדְפֵיהֶם הִשְׁלַכְתָּ בְּמִצְרַיִם כְּמוֹ־אֶבֶן בְּמַיִם עֲזוּיִם:

The verb in verse 11 is in the x-qatal form. Wayyiqtol chain is broken and as a result here begins a new segment which is another episode different from the previous one. But the conjugation of the verb in the second person singular leads to the antecedent subject in v.7 (אָתָּה).

Semantically it can be as a new segment with the term הָיָה. The term הָיָה is used in contrast to the terms עַל־יַם־סוּף. Both these terms explain the change of place. The event of verses 9 and 10 takes place in Egypt or over the sea and verse 11 tells the event that in the sea.

The consecutive *waw* in the verb וַיַּעֲבְרוּ functions as a resultative conjunction translated as as a result. The participle functions as the noun as it is with object marker.

The image of stone is used as a metaphor in order to show the hardness destruction of the oppressors.

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| <p>And you divided the sea before them</p> <p>As a result, they went in the midst of the sea on the dry land</p> <p>since you their oppressors cast down in to the depths</p> <p>As stone into the mighty waters.</p> | <p>והַיָּם בְּקִעְתָּ לִפְנֵיהֶם</p> <p>וַיֵּעָבְרוּ בְּתוֹךְ-הַיָּם בִּיבֹשָׁה</p> <p>וְאֶת-רִדְפֵיהֶם הִשְׁלַכְתָּ בְּמַצּוֹלֹת</p> <p>כְּמוֹ-אֲבָן בְּמַיִם עֲזוּיִם:</p> |
|---|--|

וּבְעֵמֹד עֲנֹן הִנְחִיתָם יוֹמָם וּבְעֵמֹד אֵשׁ לַיְלָה
 לְהַאֲיר לָהֶם אֶת-הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ-בָהּ:

The x-qatal form (hiphil of נָתַתָּה) takes the verse to a new segment. The repeated constructed form of the עֵמֹד (pillar) with ב is in the same form before עֲנֹן and אֵש . The infinite construct is in the Hiphil. The Qal form of this verb has the intransitive meaning ‘to be light, shine’. The Hiphil has a transitive meaning to illuminate, shine light (on something). Its direct object is ‘the way’ (אֶת-הַדֶּרֶךְ). But in the verse v.12b the verb is not given. It is also an *ellipsis*. Thus words וּבְעֵמֹד עֲנֹן and וּבְעֵמֹד אֵשׁ and the same verb הִנְחִיתָם in both these parts makes the verse parallel to each other.

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| <p>You made them to rest by the pillar of the cloud in the day</p> <p>By the pillar of fire in night lightened to them the way</p> <p>In which they should go</p> | <p>וּבְעֵמֹד עֲנֹן הִנְחִיתָם יוֹמָם</p> <p>וּבְעֵמֹד אֵשׁ לַיְלָה לְהַאֲיר לָהֶם אֶת-הַדֶּרֶךְ</p> <p>אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ-בָהּ:</p> |
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וְעַל הַר-סִינַי יִרְדָּת וְדַבַּר עִמָּהֶם מִשְׁמַיִם

ותתן להם משפטים ישרים

ותורות אמת תקים ומצות טובים:

Here also x-qatal³⁷ form of the verb (יָרַדְתָּ) is used. In this sentence the word וְדַבֵּר infinitive absolute is used in place of a finite verb. The infinitive usage makes a subsequent action.

ותורות אמת This plural construct phrase literally means while teaching of truth. When it takes adjectival genitive, hence ‘true laws. The plural adjective ‘good’ is masculine, which agrees in gender with ‘statues’.³⁸ Since the adjective follows both nouns and two nouns ((ומצות and תקים) are joined by their ascents and the conjunction, the adjective modifies both nouns, “good statues and good commandments”.³⁹

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|---|--|
| And upon mount Sinai you came down | וְעַל הַר־סִינַי יָרַדְתָּ |
| While you speak with them from heaven | וְדַבֵּר עִמָּהֶם מִשָּׁמַיִם |
| And gave them the right ordinances | וְתַתֵּן לָהֶם מִשְׁפָּטִים יְשָׁרִים |
| and true laws and statutes and good commandments. | וְתוֹרוֹת אֱמֶת תְּקִים וּמִצְוֹת טוֹבִים: |

ואת־שִׁבְתָּ קְדוֹשׁ הוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם

ומצוות ותורה צנית להם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עֲבָדְךָ:

This verse is also part of the previous one as the location of the action is on the mount Sinai itself. The words, commandments (ומצוות), statutes (ותקים), and law (ותורה), are repeated without adjectives. The name Moses is placed along with Laws and Commandments. The name of Moses is so important. In the Neh 9:6-37, after

³⁷ As we have seen in verses 11 and 12 ‘x-qatal form of the verb, in the beginning of the verse, is taken as the new beginning which explains the foreground of the segment.

³⁸ When an adjective modifies several nouns of different genders, the adjective is normally masculine.

³⁹ Steinmann, *Ezra- Nehemiah*, 525.

Abraham the only name mentioned is that the Name of Moses. The term (עבדך) your servant is given apposition to the Noun Moses.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>And your holy sabbath you made to them And commandments, and statues, and law you made known them, by the hands of Moses, your servant.</p> | <p>וְאֶת־שַׁבַּת קִדְשְׁךָ הוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם וּמִצְוֹת וְחֻקִּים וְתוֹרָה צִוִּיתָ לָהֶם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדְּךָ:</p> |
|--|--|

וְלָחֶם מִשָּׁמַיִם נָתַתָּה לָהֶם לְרַעֲבָם
וּמַיִם מִסֶּלַע הוֹצַאתָ לָהֶם לְצַמְאַם
וּתְאִמְרָ לָהֶם לְבוֹא לְרִשֵּׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁאַתָּ אֶת־יָדְךָ לָתֵת לָהֶם:

The beginning of this verse is with x-qatal form of the verb. The sentence takes two parallel actions of giving bread from heaven and water from rock. מִשָּׁמַיִם and מִסֶּלַע are the two nouns joined with mem. ‘To go possess the land’ is given with two identical infinitive constructs. אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁאַתָּ אֶת־יָדְךָ לָתֵת לָהֶם is explained with אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁאַתָּ אֶת־יָדְךָ לָתֵת לָהֶם though it literally means ‘you raised your hand to give them, it is taken as an idiom which means you swore to give them’. The reference to the land and the command to possess it alludes to the verse 8 where the purpose of cutting the covenant with Abraham is in order to give the land to his (Abraham’s) descendants.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Bread from heaven you gave them for their hunger water from the rock you brought for them when they are thirst And you told them to go in to possess the land</p> | <p>וְלָחֶם מִשָּׁמַיִם נָתַתָּה לָהֶם לְרַעֲבָם וּמַיִם מִסֶּלַע הוֹצַאתָ לָהֶם לְצַמְאַם וּתְאִמְרָ לָהֶם לְבוֹא לְרִשֵּׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁאַתָּ אֶת־יָדְךָ לָתֵת לָהֶם:</p> |
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|---|--|
| Which you lifted up (by) your hand to give them | |
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והם נאבתינו הגידו ונקשו את-ערפם ולא שמעו אל-מצותיה:

The verb takes the continuation in the *x-qatal* form to take the text to new segment. The nature of the people towards the gift of God is said that they acted presumptuously. The verbs in 16b and 16c is part of the 16a (*x-qatal*) because *welo-qatal* form takes the function of *wayyiqtol*.

| | |
|---|---|
| They and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck And they did not obey your commandments. | והם נאבתינו הגידו ונקשו את-ערפם ולא שמעו אל-מצותיה |
|---|---|

וּמֵאַנּוּ לְשִׁמְעַ וְלֹא-זָכְרוּ נִפְלְאוֹתֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּהֶם
וַיִּקְשׁוּ אֶת-עַרְפָּם וַיִּתְנַוּ-רֹאשׁ לְשׁוֹב לַעֲבֹדְתֶם בְּמַרְיָם
וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהִים סְלִיחוֹת חֲנּוּן וְרַחֲמוֹם
אַרְבַּע-אַפָּיִם וְרַב-וַחֲסֵד וְלֹא עֲזַבְתֶּם:

The *wayyiqtol* form (וּמֵאַנּוּ) of the verb and the negation (וְלֹא-זָכְרוּ) takes the verse as the continuation of the previous verse הגידו (they acted presumptuously). In the first phase of this sentence the verbs וּמֵאַנּוּ and זָכְרוּ are plural, as it refers to the plural nouns in the previous verse. נִפְלְאוֹתֶיהָ the niphil feminine plural of פָּלָא means ‘be difficult, be miraculous’, can be rendered as miracles.

The second phase of the verse describes God with usual wordings אֱלֹהִים. סְלִיחוֹת, though the word is plural it goes with God. All other words of adjectives are in singular form.

The literal meaning of the idiom אַרְבַּע-אַפָּיִם is to extend the face or nose. In idiomatic usage the phrase means slow to anger.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>And they refused to obey</p> <p>And did not remember the wonders which you made among them</p> <p>They stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their bondage in Egypt.</p> <p>But you are God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love did not forsake them.</p> | <p>וַיִּמְאָנוּ לְשִׁמְעַ</p> <p>וְלֹא־זָכְרוּ נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּהֶם</p> <p>וַיִּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עַרְפָּם וַיִּתְנַוּר־רֹאשׁ לְשׁוּב לְעַבְדֻתָם</p> <p>בְּמִרְיָם</p> <p>וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי סְלִיחוֹת חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם</p> <p>אֲרַךְ־אַפַּיִם וְרַב־יְחַסֵּד וְלֹא עֲזָבְתָם:</p> |
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אף כִּי־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֲגָל מִסֹּכָה וַיִּאמְרוּ זֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נְאֻצוֹת גְּדִלוֹת:

The verse is *protasis* of the double clause. The words ‘אף כִּי’ (even when) opens the clause. Though the verb is in x-qatal form, as it is part of the protasis it is not the main clause. All other verbs are in wayyiqtol form and this verse does not complete the full sentence. After וַיִּאמְרוּ the discourse starts. The discourse is a PNS and subordinate clause which explains the action of God.

Waw-imperfect verb וַיַּעֲשׂוּ continuous. נְאֻצוֹת גְּדִלוֹת can be translated as blasphemy.⁴⁰

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| <p>Even when they made for themselves a molten calf</p> <p>and said “this is your God who brought you from Egypt”</p> <p>and committed great blasphemies</p> | <p>אף כִּי־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֲגָל מִסֹּכָה וַיִּאמְרוּ זֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ</p> <p>אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם</p> <p>וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נְאֻצוֹת גְּדִלוֹת:</p> |
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⁴⁰ Steinmann, *Ezra- Nehemiah*, 527.

וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבֵּים לֹא עֲזַבְתָּם בַּמִּדְבָּר אֶת־עַמּוּד הָעָנָן לֹא־סָר מֵעֲלֵיהֶם בְּיוֹמָם לְהַנְחִיחָם בְּהַלְרֹד וְאֶת־
עַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ בְּלַיְלָה לְהָאִיר לָהֶם וְאֶת־הַדָּרָךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ־בָהּ:

The *apodosis* of the previous clause comes in v.19a. x-qatal form of the verb makes it new segment. It is an actual bracketing of the verse. The same thing is said in v.17c. the character of God being merciful is explained there and because of this character He did not forsake them. Thus v.17c and v.19a makes a bracketing. In between the uncompleted clause which refers to the sinful nature is mentioned.

The verse continues with x-qatal form of the verb to signify new segment. Though the explanation continues the event, grammatically it has to be taken as a new segment. The pillar of cloud and pillar of fire refers to v.12. The act of providence continues even after the sin and disobedience.

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| <p>In your great mercy you did not forsake them</p> <p>The pillar of cloud did not depart from them in the day</p> <p>Nor the pillar of fire, in the night, which lighted for them the way</p> <p>In which they should go.</p> | <p>וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבֵּים לֹא עֲזַבְתָּם בַּמִּדְבָּר אֶת־עַמּוּד הָעָנָן לֹא־סָר מֵעֲלֵיהֶם בְּיוֹמָם לְהַנְחִיחָם בְּהַלְרֹד וְאֶת־עַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ בְּלַיְלָה לְהָאִיר לָהֶם וְאֶת־הַדָּרָךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ־בָהּ:</p> |
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וְרוּחַ הַטּוֹבָה נְתַתָּ לְהַשְׂכִּילָם וּמַנְדֵּךְ לֹא־מִנְעֶתָ מִפִּיהֶם וּמַיִם נְתַתָּה לָהֶם לְצַמְאָם:

x-qatal form of the verb takes the verse into a new segment. The verbs (נְתַתָּ, מִנְעֶתָ) are in the second person. So, the actions are three separate ones. In the third phrase conjunction waw is given not with verb, but with noun (וּמַיִם) therefore this is referred to the previous noun (וּמַנְדֵּךְ).

The content in the verse the instruction and the Mannah and water refers to the providence of God given in verses 13-15.

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| <p>(In) your good spirit you gave instructions to them</p> <p>And the Mannah, you did not withhold from their mouth</p> <p>And the water you gave for their thirst.</p> | <p>וְרוּחְךָ הַטוֹבָה נָתַתָּ לְהַשְׁכִּילָם וּמַנְהֵךְ לֹא־מִנְעַתָּ מִפִּיהֶם וּמַיִם נָתַתָּה לָהֶם לְצַמְאָם:</p> |
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וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה כָּל־כַּלְתֶּם בַּמִּדְבָּר לֹא חָסְרוּ שְׁלֵמֹתֵיהֶם לֹא בָלוּ וְרַגְלֵיהֶם לֹא בָצָק

Verbs are in the x-qatal form and lo-qatal form respectively.⁴¹ The verbs are negated with לֹא and takes qal perfect form and three actions are presented in parallel to each other. The verb (כָּל־כַּלְתֶּם) is in the pilpel form.⁴²

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| <p>Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness</p> <p>They lacked (nothing)</p> <p>Their clothes did not wear out</p> <p>Their feet did not swell.</p> | <p>וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה כָּל־כַּלְתֶּם בַּמִּדְבָּר לֹא חָסְרוּ שְׁלֵמֹתֵיהֶם לֹא בָלוּ וְרַגְלֵיהֶם לֹא בָצָק</p> |
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וַתְּתֵן לָהֶם מִמְּלֶכֶת נְעֻמִים וַתַּחֲלֶקֶם לַפָּאָה וַיִּירָשׁוּ אֶת־אֶרֶץ סִיחֹן וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ מְלֹךְ הַשְּׁבֹן וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ עֹזַי מְלֹךְ־הַבְּשָׁן:

The verb in the wayyiqtol form continues the narration, the way God does provide the people. The names of the land are repeated in the way of verse 8 but here the names of the land changes with the names of the king.

⁴¹ *Lo-qatala* forms are usually negative. This form in discourse takes the role of wayyiqtol form to express the continuation of the foreground.

⁴² Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 254. In the dictionary the word in qal form has the meaning to measure out a liquid. Cfr Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Oxford, Hendrickson Publishers, 1994, 465.

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| <p>And you gave them kingdoms and peoples</p> <p>And allotted to them every corner</p> <p>So they took possession the land of Sihon</p> <p>And the land of king of Heshbon</p> <p>The land of Og, king of Bashan.</p> | <p>ותתן להם ממלכות ועממים ותחלקם לפאה ויירשו את-ארץ סיוון ואת-ארץ מלך חשבון ואת-ארץ עוג מלך-הבשן:</p> |
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ובניהם הרבית פכבבי השמים ותביאם אל-הארץ אשר-אמרת לאבותיהם לבוא לרשת:

The second person narration continues in this sentence also. Verb in the wayyiqtol form takes the action as part of the previous x-qatal verb (בכלתם) of v.21. The object the land (הארץ) makes it in relation to v.22, as well as the הארץ is explained with subordinate clause and it connects directly to v.14 with its infinitive (לבוא לרשת). Instead of the object marker את, here אל is used.

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| <p>You multiplied their descendants like stars of sky</p> <p>And you brought them into land</p> <p>Which you promised told their fathers</p> <p>To go and possess.</p> | <p>ובניהם הרבית פכבבי השמים ותביאם אל-הארץ אשר-אמרת לאבותיהם לבוא לרשת:</p> |
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ויבאו הבנים ויירשו את-הארץ ותכנע לפניהם את-ישיבי הארץ הפנעונים ותתנם בידם ואת-מלכיהם ואת-עממי הארץ לעשות בהם פרצונם:

The same wayyiqtol form takes the verse as continuation of verse 21. Though the subject interchanges from 2nd to 3rd person. The procession of the land is by the

‘sons’, whereas the subdued and given by God. The infinitive construct with *lamad* (לַעֲשׂוֹת) makes the purpose clause in the end of the verse.⁴³

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| <p>Thus, their descendants went in and possessed the land</p> <p>And you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land the Canaanites</p> <p>And gave them into their hands with their kings and people of the land</p> <p>So that they might do to them as they would</p> | <p>וַיָּבֹאוּ הַבְּנִיִּים וַיִּירְשׁוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ</p> <p>וַתִּכְנַע לִפְנֵיהֶם אֶת-יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ</p> <p>וַתִּתְּנֵם בְּיָדָם וְאֶת-מְלִכֵיהֶם וְאֶת-עַמְמֵי הָאָרֶץ</p> <p>לַעֲשׂוֹת בָּהֶם כְּרָצוֹנָם:</p> |
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וַיִּלְכְּדוּ עָרִים בְּצִרּוֹת וְאֲדָמָה שְׂמֹנֶה וַיִּירְשׁוּ בָתִּים מְלֵאִים-כָּל-טוֹב בְּרוֹת חֲצוּבִים כְּרָמִים וְזִיתִים וְעֵץ מֵאֲכָל לֶרֶב וַיִּאֲכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁבְּעוּ וַיִּשְׂמְיֵנוּ וַיִּתְּעַדְנוּ בְּטוֹבָה הַגְּדוֹל:

The *wayyiqtol* form of the verb leads us to relate the passage to the verb in verse 21 (כָּלְכַלְתֶּם). Each of the object is modified with adjectives. They are easily found from the number and genders. Cities (עָרִים) as a feminine plural noun takes feminine plural form of adjective (בְּצִרּוֹת). A land (אֲדָמָה) feminine singular noun takes the feminine singular adjective (שְׂמֹנֶה). This is true with the case of houses (בָּתִּים), cisterns (בְּרוֹת) and trees (עֵץ).

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| <p>Thus, they captured fortified cities and a rich land and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns hewn out, vineyards, olive orchards, and fruit trees in abundance.</p> | <p>וַיִּלְכְּדוּ עָרִים בְּצִרּוֹת וְאֲדָמָה שְׂמֹנֶה וַיִּירְשׁוּ בָתִּים מְלֵאִים-כָּל-טוֹב בְּרוֹת חֲצוּבִים כְּרָמִים וְזִיתִים וְעֵץ מֵאֲכָל לֶרֶב וַיִּאֲכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁבְּעוּ וַיִּשְׂמְיֵנוּ וַיִּתְּעַדְנוּ בְּטוֹבָה הַגְּדוֹל:</p> |
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⁴³ Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 129.

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| <p>So that they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves by your great goodness.</p> | |
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וַיִּמְרְדוּ וַיִּשְׂלְכוּ אֶת־תּוֹרַתְךָ אַחֲרֵי גִבְם וְאֶת־נְבִיאֶיךָ הֲרִגוּ אֲשֶׁר־הֵעִידוּ בָם לְהַשִּׁיבָם אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נְאֻצוֹת גְּדוֹלֹת:

The first verb takes hiphil form which is more forceful in meaning. *וַיִּמְרְדוּ* is pausal for “against you” (masculine singular). *וַיִּשְׂלְכוּ אֶת־תּוֹרַתְךָ אַחֲרֵי גִבְם* though literally means ‘and they threw your teaching behind their back’ this idiom is meant ‘they rejected your teaching’. *לְהַשִּׁיבָם* the suffixed hiphil infinitive construct with the preposition *ל* begins a purpose clause.⁴⁴ So, it can be translated as ‘in order to make them return to you’.

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| <p>But they were disobedient and rebelled against you and rejected your law</p> <p>And (even) killed your prophets who gave testimony in order they may turn to you</p> <p>While they committed great blasphemy.</p> | <p>וַיִּמְרְדוּ וַיִּשְׂלְכוּ אֶת־תּוֹרַתְךָ אַחֲרֵי גִבְם וְאֶת־נְבִיאֶיךָ הֲרִגוּ אֲשֶׁר־הֵעִידוּ בָם לְהַשִּׁיבָם אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נְאֻצוֹת גְּדוֹלֹת:</p> |
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וַתִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד צָרִיְהֶם וַיִּצְאוּ לָהֶם וּבָעֵת צָרְתֶם יִצְעֲקוּ אֵלַי וְאֵתֶּה מִשָּׁמַיִם תִּשְׁמָע וְכִרְחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבֵּים תִּתֵּן לָהֶם מוֹשִׁיעִים וַיִּוֹשִׁיעוּם מִיַּד צָרֵיהֶם:

⁴⁴ Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 129.

The *wayyiqtol* use of the verb takes a resultative function in this verse.⁴⁵ Therefore, the *waw* is translated as ‘as a result’. Thus, the suffering, that Israel endures, is because of the sin that they committed. The repetition of the word enemies (צָרִיָּהֶם) makes an enclosure to the episode in described in the verse.

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| <p>As a result, you gave them into the hands of their enemies</p> <p>Who made them to suffer</p> <p>And in the time of their suffering, they cried to you and you heard from heaven</p> <p>And according to your great mercies you gave them saviors</p> <p>who saved them from the hand of their enemies</p> | <p>וַתִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד צָרֵיהֶם וַיִּצְרוּ לָהֶם וַיַּעַת צָרָתָם יִצְעָקוּ אֵלַיָּה וְאַתָּה מִשְׁמַיִם תִּשְׁמָע וְכִרְחֹמַיָּה הַרְבִּיִם תִּתֶּן לָהֶם מְוֹשִׁיעִים וַיֹּשִׁיעוּם מִיַּד צָרֵיהֶם:</p> |
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וּכְנֻחַ לָהֶם יָשׁוּבוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רַע לְפָנֶיךָ וַתַּעֲזֹבֵם בְּיַד אֹיְבֵיהֶם וַיִּרְדּוּ בְּהֵם וַיִּשׁוּבוּ וַיִּזְעָקוּהָ וְאַתָּה מִשְׁמַיִם תִּשְׁמָע וַתַּצִּילֵם כְּרַחֲמֶיךָ רַבּוֹת עֲתִים: וַיֹּשִׁיעוּם מִיַּד צָרֵיהֶם:

וּכְנֻחַ - qal infinitive with כְּ begins a temporal clause. Without having a subject, the verb can be used impersonally.⁴⁶ If the preposition follows it, this can mean ‘as soon as...’ In this verse another word is used for enemies (אֹיְבֵיהֶם) in contrast the word used in previous verse (צָרֵיהֶם). Instead of the word saved (וַיֹּשִׁיעוּם) the synonym delivered (וַתַּצִּילֵם) is used. רַבּוֹת עֲתִים (רב) is the only adjective which precedes the noun (עֲתִים) and modifies it.

⁴⁵ Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 281.

⁴⁶ Steinmann, *Ezra- Nehemiah*, 529.

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| <p>As soon as they had rest, they did evil before you</p> <p>And you abandoned them to the hands of their enemies; So that, they had dominion over them.</p> <p>When they had turned and cried to you</p> <p>You heard from heaven and you delivered them many times according to your mercies</p> | <p>וּכְנֻחַ לָהֶם יִשְׁוּבוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע לְפָנֶיךָ וּתְעַזְבֵם בְּיַד אֹיְבֵיהֶם וַיִּרְדּוּ בָהֶם וַיִּשְׁוּבוּ וַיִּזְעָקוּךָ וְאַתָּה מִשְׁמַיִם תִּשְׁמַע וּתְצִילֵם בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ רַבּוֹת עַתִּים:</p> |
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וּתְעַד בָּהֶם לְהַשִּׁיבֵם אֶל־תּוֹרָתְךָ וְהִלְמָה הַזִּידוּ וְלֹא־שָׁמְעוּ לְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וּבְמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ חָטְאוּ־כֶם אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה אֲדָם וְחָגָה בָהֶם וַיִּתְּנוּ כְתֹף סוֹרְרִת וְעָרְפָם הַקָּשׁוּ וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ:

Wayyiqtol form of the verb takes the continuous action. In v.29b waw + personal pronoun takes the clause circumstantial situation and in v.29c the relative pronoun explains the purpose of the ordinances and the laws. אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה אֲדָם וְחָגָה the antecedent of the relative pronoun is God’s judgement in the previous one.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law</p> <p>whenever they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments.</p> <p>Even then they sinned against your ordinances which a man should do and live by them.</p> <p>They gave a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck as they would not obey.</p> | <p>וּתְעַד בָּהֶם לְהַשִּׁיבֵם אֶל־תּוֹרָתְךָ וְהִלְמָה הַזִּידוּ וְלֹא־ שָׁמְעוּ לְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וּבְמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ חָטְאוּ־כֶם אֲשֶׁר־ יַעֲשֶׂה אֲדָם וְחָגָה בָהֶם וַיִּתְּנוּ כְתֹף סוֹרְרִת וְעָרְפָם הַקָּשׁוּ וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ:</p> |
|--|--|

ותמַשְׁדָּה עֲלֵיהֶם שָׁנִים רַבּוֹת וַתַּעַד בָּם בְּרוּחַךְ בְּיַד-נְבִיאֶיךָ וְלֹא הֶאֱזִינוּ וַתִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד עַמֵּי הָאָרְצוֹת:
waw+ imperfect is to be taken as the causal resultative clauses.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Though you bear with them many years you warned them by your spirit through hands of your prophets, they would not give ear.</p> <p>As a result, you gave them to the hands of the peoples of the lands.</p> | <p>ותמַשְׁדָּה עֲלֵיהֶם שָׁנִים רַבּוֹת וַתַּעַד בָּם בְּרוּחַךְ בְּיַד-נְבִיאֶיךָ וְלֹא הֶאֱזִינוּ וַתִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד עַמֵּי הָאָרְצוֹת:</p> |
|---|---|

וּבְרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים לֹא-עָשִׂיתָם כְּלָה וְלֹא עֲזַבְתָּם כִּי אֶל-חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַתָּה:

waw in the beginning of the verse is taken to be resultative function. The last part of the verse makes as a concluding part of the segment.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make end all them nor forsake them</p> <p>Because you are gracious and merciful God</p> | <p>וּבְרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים לֹא-עָשִׂיתָם כְּלָה וְלֹא עֲזַבְתָּם כִּי אֶל-חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַתָּה</p> |
|--|--|

1.4. Textual Variants

1.4.1. Septuagint (LXX)

| Verse | LXX ⁴⁷ | Difference | Hebrew |
|-------|---|--|--|
| 9:6 | καὶ εἶπεν Εσδρας Σὺ εἶ αὐτὸς κύριος μόνος· σὺ ἐποίησας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ πᾶσαν | καὶ εἶπεν Εσδρας is added as the explanation. It is probably an addition supplied by the Greek | הֲהוּא יְהוָה לְבַדָּךְ אֶתְ עֲשִׂיתָ אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל- צָבָאָם |

⁴⁷ Rahlfs Alfred, *Septuaginta, ElkhniKh Biblikh*, Nordlingen, 2004.

| | | | |
|------|---|--|---|
| | <p>τὴν στάσιν αὐτῶν, τὴν γῆν καὶ πάντα, ὅσα ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῇ, τὰς θαλάσσας καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐταῖς, καὶ σὺ Ζωοποιεῖς τὰ πάντα.</p> | <p>translator. This addition leads to refer the action of Ezra in 8:5.</p> | <p>הָאָרְצַי וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר עָלֵיהֶּן הַיַּמִּים וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וְאַתָּה מַחְיֶה אֶת-כָּל־עַמְּךָ הַשָּׂמַיִם לְךָ וְיִצְבְּאָ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים</p> |
| 9:8 | <p>καὶ εὗρες τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ πιστὴν ἐνώπιόν σου καὶ διέθου πρὸς αὐτὸν διαθήκην δοῦναι αὐτῷ τὴν γῆν τῶν Χαναναίων καὶ Χετταίων καὶ Αμορραίων καὶ Φερεζαίων καὶ Ιεβουσαίων καὶ Γεργεσαίων καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἔστησας τοὺς λόγους σου, ὅτι δίκαιος σὺ.</p> | <p>Before the infinitives connected with αὐτῷ and καὶ and the second infinitive is removed.</p> | <p>וּמִצְאָתָא אֶת-לִבְבוֹ נֶאֱמַר לְפָנָי וְכָרוֹת עֲמֹוּ הַבְּרִית לְתַת אֶת-אֶרְצִי הַכְּנַעֲנִי הַחִתִּי הָאֲמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהַגְּרָגְשִׁי לְתַת לְזַרְעֹו</p> |
| 9:10 | <p>σημεῖα ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἐν Φαραῶ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς παισὶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ λαῷ τῆς γῆς αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἔγνωσ ὅτι ὑπερηφάνησαν.</p> | <p>by adding ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ (in Egypt) the place is explained.</p> | <p>וַתִּמַּן אֶתְּת וּמִקְתָּיִם בְּפָרְעֹה וּבְכָל-עַבְדָּיו וּבְכָל-עַמְּ אֲרָצֹו כִּי יָדַעְתָּ כִּי הִזְדַּו עָלֵיְכֶם וַתַּעַשׂ-לְךָ שֵׁם כְּהִזְדַּו הַזֶּה</p> |
| 9:17 | <p>σαι καὶ οὐκ ἐμνήσθησαν τῶν θαυμασίων σου, ὧν ἐποίησας μετ' αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐσκλήρυναν τὸν τράχηλον αὐτῶν καὶ ἔδωκαν ἀρχὴν ἐπιστρέψαι εἰς δουλείαν αὐτῶν ἐν</p> | <p>adding of Αἰγύπτῳ (Egypt) makes it explicitly clear that the verse is referred to Num 14:4.</p> | <p>אִם כִּי-עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֲגָל מִסֹּכָה נִיאֲמָרוּ וְזֶה אֱלֹהֵי אֲשֶׁר הָעִלָּה מִמִּצְרָיִם נֶאֱצְוֹת גְּדֻלוֹת: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ</p> |

| | | | |
|------|--|---|---|
| | Αἰγύπτῳ. καὶ σὺ θεὸς ἐλεήμων καὶ οἰκτίρμων, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος, καὶ οὐκ ἐγκατέλιπες αὐτούς. | | |
| 9:22 | ἔδωκας αὐτοῖς βασιλείας καὶ λαοὺς καὶ διεμέρισας αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐκληρονόμησαν τὴν γῆν Σηων βασιλέως Εσεβων καὶ τὴν γῆν Ωγ βασιλέως τοῦ Βασαν. | many words and phrases are lacking. | וַיִּלְכְּדוּ עָרִים בְּצָרוֹתַי וַאֲדָמָה שְׁמֹנֶה נְיִירָשׁוּ בְּתֵמִים מְלֵאִים-כֶּל־טוֹב בְּרוֹת תְּצַוְבִים כְּרָמִים וְזִיתִים וְעֵץ מֵאֲבָל לְרֹב וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׂבְּעוּ וַיִּשְׁמְיֵנו וַיִּתְעַדְנוּ בְּטוֹבָה הַגְּדוֹל: |
| 9:23 | ἀστέρας τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ εἰσήγαγες αὐτούς εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἣν εἶπας τοῖς πατράσιν αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐκληρονόμησαν αὐτήν. | Greek text shorten the phrase וַיִּבְאוּ הַכְּנָנִים וַיִּירָשׁוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ into καὶ ἐκληρονόμησαν αὐτήν. | וַיִּמְרוּ וַיִּמְרְדוּ בָהֶם וַיִּשְׁלַכוּ אֶת-תּוֹרֵתָהּ אֲחֵרֵי גֹן־עַם אֶת-נְבִיאֶיךָ הַרְגוּ אֲשֶׁר-הִעֵדוּ בְּכֶם לְהַשִּׁיבֶם אֵלַיךָ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נִצְזוֹת גְּדוֹלֹת: |
| 9:26 | καὶ ἤλλαξαν καὶ ἀπέστησαν ἀπὸ σοῦ καὶ ἔρριψαν τὸν νόμον σου ὀπίσω σώματος αὐτῶν καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας σου | The <i>waw</i> imperfect verb (וַיִּמְרוּ) is changed to participle ἤλλαξαν. | וַיִּכְנֹחַ לְהֵם יִשׁוּבוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רַע לְפָנַי וַתַּעֲזָבֶם בְּיַד אֲיָבִיהֶם וַיִּרְדּוּ בְּהֵם וַיִּשׁוּבוּ וַיִּזְעָקוּ וְאֵתָה מִשְׁמִים תִּשְׁמַע וַתִּצְיֵלֶם בְּרַחֲמַי רַבּוֹת עֲתִים: |
| 9:28 | καὶ ὡς ἀνεπαύσαντο, ἐπέστρεψαν ποιῆσαι τὸ πονηρὸν ἐνώπιόν σου· καὶ ἐγκατέλιπες αὐτούς εἰς χεῖρας ἐχθρῶν αὐτῶν, καὶ | The phrase רַבּוֹת עֲתִים (many times) is translated to πολλοῖς. | וַתִּמְשָׁךְ עַל־הֵם שָׁנִים רַבּוֹת וַתַּעַד בְּכֶם בְּרוֹחַ בְּיַד- נְבִיאֶיךָ וְלֹא הִאֲזַנְנוּ |

| | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|
| | | the word waters is used. | |
| | <p> אלהים מים אלה ויחבבם לאדם. ופעלם - מן אדם; ויחבבם. ומעלה מים אדם. </p> | <p> In this verse the placed the name in Hebrew is transferred to changed his name. </p> | <p> אֲתָהּ-הוּא יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בְּתַרְתָּ בְּאֲבָרָם וְהוֹצֵאתוּ מֵאוּר כְּשָׂדִים וְשַׁמְתָּ שְׁמוֹ אֲבָרָהֶם </p> |
| 9:8 | <p> וְהַמִּטָּה לְבָבִים וְטָהוֹרִים. מִטָּה לֵב מִתְהַלָּל. לְבָבִים לֵב אִוְחָ וְטָהוֹרִים וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם. וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְיִשְׁתַּלֵּם. אֵל </p> | <p> In v.8 there are many changes to be noted. 1. The word faithful heart is changed to pure heart which is a special usage of the Syriac fathers. 2. In making of the covenant there is a preposition with suffix word (ܡܢܘܢ) added in Syriac. </p> | <p> וּמִצֵּאתָ אֶת-לִבְבוֹ נְאֻמוֹ לְפָנָי וְכָרַזְתָּ עִמּוֹ הַבְּרִית לְתֵת אֶת-אֶרְצִי הַנְּעֻנִי הַחַתִּי הָאֲמָרִי וְהַפְרֵנִי וְהִבּוֹטִי וְהַגְרָגְשִׁי לְתֵת לְזַרְעוֹ </p> |

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1.5. Structure of the Pericope

1.5.1. Structure in General

In general, the pericope can be divided into two unequal parts.

- 1) A Description of God's creation (9:6).
- 2) A history of God's dealings with his chosen people (9:7-31). both parts are prefaced by the statement, "you are Yahweh" (אֲתָהּ-הוּא יְהוָה).

The passage can be divided into seven segments according to the events described.

| | Event | Passages from Nehemiah 9,6-31 |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Creation | 9:6 |
| 2 | Patriarchs | 9:7-8 |
| 3 | Exodus | 9:9-12 |
| 4 | Wilderness | 9:13-21 |
| 5 | Conquest of the land | 9:22-25 |
| 6 | Occupation of the land | 9:26-30b |
| 7 | Captivity and Conclusion | 9:31 |

1.5.2. *Chiastic Structure*

Detailed and thorough study of the text will lead us to a chiastic structure of which vv.16b-19a become the center. The Structure is given below. vv.16b- 19a explains that God did not forsake his people even when they sinned against him and A v.6 God Creates Everything

B v.7 Abraham, being faithful, gets the promise

C v. 8-9 Narration of the Kingdoms, Ancestors, and Descendants

D v. 10-11 Deliverance from Egypt

E v. 12-15 Cloud, Fire, Law, Food, and Drink

F v. 16 – 19a Molten Calf and God’s Forgiveness

E1 vv. 19b -21 Cloud, Fire, Law, Food, and Drink

D1 vv. 22 Possession of the Promised Land

C1 vv. 23-25 Names of the Kingdoms, Ancestors, and Descendants

B1 vv. 26-30 Stiff-necked people get punished

A1 v. 31 God is Merciful and people disobeyed Him.

Two ends of the structure are well bracketed with similar or contrary events.

In both ends A and A1 describe the greatness of God. V.6 describes the creative activity of God, whereas v.31 describes that God is merciful in abundance. The same

verb (תָּשַׁבַּ) is used in both verses. Verse 6 tells that God created and verse 31 it tells that he did not make an end to them. Thus, both the verses in the two polls explain the providence of God.

The units of B (v.7) and B1 (vv.26-30) stand in contrast to each other. Verse 7 tells that Abram whose name is changed by God to Abraham was faithful to God so that he gets the promise of the land. In contrast to this the people, when they dare disloyal to the commandments given by God, they are getting deprived of the provisions. They have been abandoned at the hands of the enemies.

C and C1 clearly talk about the promise of the land and its occupation. The reference to the descendants and ancestors is very clear and even the names of the places are repeated.

The 4th unit D and D1 describes the deliverance from Egypt and the giving of the land. In both places the action is done by God not by the people. God saves His People from Egypt and He gives the land to the people.

E and E1 (vv.12-16a) narrate the way of leading through the desert within the shield of clouds and by the light of pillar of fire. The showering of Mannah and the act of giving water from the rock are said as the way of God's providence. In verses 19b-21 the same thing is repeated as if they have been continued even after the great sin said in verse 18 of unit F which is part of central portion of this chiasmic structure.

Above mentioned evidences show that vv.16b-19a are the central point of the passage.

1.6. Form of the Pericope

1.6.1. Poem or Prose

The difference between verse and prose⁴⁹ or speech is not that verse has rhythm and prose and speech have not, but that in verse a rhythmical unit, the line, is superimposed upon the grammatical unit of all discourse, the sentence. This statement applies to Hebrew poetry, of course, but it cannot be used as a test because the

⁴⁹ The external criteria by which, we can tell whether a passage is a poetry or not, is the way how the material is presented to us. "In other words, if a passage is printed out as prose, we automatically assume it to be prose". Cfr Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 43-44.

oral/aural element is lacking: there are no native speakers who can supply the relevant information. We are, therefore, forced to turn to external criteria such as parallelism, structural patterning, the presence of archaic vocabulary and the like in order to assess the nature of a text”.⁵⁰

The text we study in detail (Neh 9:6-31), though part of the passage it is written in poetic style. The structure of the text itself makes a shift to a poetic style of line⁵¹ and verse from narrative style of v.4.

1.6.1.1. *Enveloping Figure*

v.6 begins with the word אָתָּה and the v.31 ends with the same word. The word is used in the same form. This is stated because in other verses the word is used either in the short form אָתָּה or with waw conjunction. The word “אָתָּה” envelop or cover the whole passage as a bracket.

1.6.1.2. *Parallelism*

Parallelism is universally recognized as the characteristic feature of Biblical Hebrew poetry.⁵²

1.6.1.3. *Ellipsis and Grapping*

This characteristic of the poem in fact outweighs any other criterion. In the given text (Neh 9:6-37), *ellipsis*⁵³ is made by the author in v.6. The word " אָתָּה עָשִׂיתָ " is omitted in 6c and 6d, where it is demanded by the context. Here, the reader has to post the subject and verb from the previous clause (6b) in order to complete the meaning of the text. Similarly in v.7 the pronoun " אָתָּה " is replaced by the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר which is omitted in 7c and 7d, leads us to the poetical style of *grapping*.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Cfr Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 46.

⁵¹ If a text contains established line-forms then it is verse”. Cfr Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 47.

⁵² Cfr Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 150-153.

⁵³ “Ellipsis is the omission of a particle, word or group of words with in a poetic or grammatical unit, where its presence is expected. In other words, ellipsis is the suppression of an element demanded by the context”. Cfr Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 303.

⁵⁴ Grapping is one form of ellipsis. Grapping is the omission of a word in a second clause when it is identical to a word used in the first. Cfr Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 48.

Conclusion

Here the author narrates the entire story of the Israelites from creation. It is expressed as the action by the Almighty God. The phrase “אַתָּה־יְהוָה” (You are the Lord) is repeated in vs.6 and 7. This shows the two parts of the narration. V.6 talks about the creation and vs. 7-31 tells the deeds of God from calling of Abraham. The first section of the prayer, 9:6-31, refers to God’s interactions with the ancestors in the past, a negative portrayal of the earlier generations that consistently uses the third person plural to refer to their sins and apostasies, to the gifts of law and land they receive, and to their punishments at the hands of foreign peoples for their sins.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF NEH 9:6-31

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we identified the text and delimited our study to Neh 9:6-37. This chapter deals how the pericope (Neh. 9:6-31) becomes unique. After discussing the need for this study, we give small glance to the twin books (Ezra and Nehemiah). Identifying the difference and peculiar position of the book of Nehemiah, the study exclusively switches to the book of Nehemiah. The hostile treatment of the ‘*am haretz*’ (people of the land) leads to the growth of the identity of the exile-community. There the uniqueness of Neh 9:6-31 which helps to have the basis for this identity. Though it was originated previously than the book of Nehemiah, this creed becomes the center and climax of the book as whole.

2.1. Why Historical Analysis is Needed?

One of the most puzzling aspects of the text of Neh 9:6-37 is its uncomfortable fit within Nehemiah as a whole. There are different opinions about the pericope and its position in the text. On the one hand the authors hold that it is from the author itself and the position of the pericope is at the right place⁵⁵. On the other hand, scholars provide evidences for carrying the passage from another place of origin⁵⁶ in order to meet the purpose of the redactor. Nehemiah 9 originated “a litany written for the worship of Northern Israel on the occasion of a day of fasting, confession, and prayer”⁵⁷. There is change in style and language compared to the other parts of the book of Nehemiah.⁵⁸ Commentators often suggest that the final section of the prayer

⁵⁵ cfr D. J. A. Clines, “Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther”, (NCBC, Grand Rapids, Mich. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 6.

⁵⁶ H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Sheffield Academia Press, London, 1987, 26.

⁵⁷ A. C. Welch, “The Source of Nehemiah IX”, (ZAW, 1929), 130-137.

⁵⁸ “The passage also demonstrates linguistic and historical signs that suggest it does not belong to this group or the same date. On the basis of the disparity between the prayer and its introduction, an analysis of its content, linguistic elements, and the features stressed in the historical review, it can be assumed that the prayer belongs not to the Second Temple period but to the days prior to the Babylonian exile, when the people were under bondage to foreign kings in their own land”. Gili Kugler, “Present Affliction Affects the Representation of the Past: An Alternative Dating of the Levitical Prayer in Nehemiah 9”, (VT, 63(4), 2013), 605.

(Neh 9:32-37), especially its final two verses (36-37), do not fit to the overall picture of the text of Nehemiah.⁵⁹

There are different opinions about the purpose of the prayer. Though the prayer portrayed in Neh 9:6-37 is called penitential prayer by most of the scholars,⁶⁰ it is articulated actually in another manner⁶¹.

“The absence of any tie between the confession and cultic ceremonies in the latter texts suggests that the idea of confession underwent various stages of development, most likely turning from a ritual act into a practice whose central element was prayer—the form in which it became prevalent during the Second Temple period”.⁶²

Two elements such as the admission of guilt on the part of the speaker⁶³ and request for divine deliverance and redemption⁶⁴ seemingly appear faint and obscure

⁵⁹ This is because the negative portrayal of the imperial monarchy here contrasts with the positive portrait of the Persian kings everywhere else in the book. The anti-imperial nature of words would seem to fit more easily in the context of works of early Persian period. These works include prophecies announcing a great divine overthrow of the existing imperial order, such as Hag 2:21-23 and Zech 2:1-4 (1:18-21), 10-17 (2:6-13).

There are opinions about this. Everyone within the Persian period assembly was not content with the community’s colonized status. The early post-exilic prophecies attest to this fact, and it is hardly outside the realm of possibility that anti-imperial sentiment continued to live on, even if there was almost no clear representation of this kind of view in later extant Persian period literature. The final verses of the text (32-37) use language which Persian period readers would recognize as reflecting Achaemenid imperial ideology, language that both points to Judah’s status as a colonized people and that contains an implicit warning of grievous punishment for those subjects of the empire who choose rebellion. Moreover, while the final verses of Nehemiah 9 acknowledge the presence of pro-independence sentiment within the community. Cfr. David Jansen, “Yahwistic Appropriation of Achaemenid Ideology and the Function of Nehemiah 9 in Ezra- Nehemiah”, (*JBL*, 136/4, 2017), 839-856.

⁶⁰ “The Levites’ prayer found in Nehemiah 9 is customarily regarded as one of a group of confessional prayers that include Daniel’s (Dan 9:5-19), (Ezra’s (Ezra 9:6-15), and Nehemiah’s (Neh 1:5-11). These are all dated to the Second Temple period and occur in a narrative context, being spoken by known/identifiable figures”. Kugler, “Present Affliction Affects the Representation of the Past”, 607.

⁶¹ Kugler, “Present Affliction Affects the Representation of the Past”, 608.

⁶² Kugler, “Present Affliction Affects the Representation of the Past”, 607.

⁶³ Dan. 9:5-6, “we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land” 8-11 “Open shame, O Lord, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you, To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So, the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you”

⁶⁴ Dan 9:1719- ;Ezra 9:8; Neh 1:8-1

in Neh 9:6-37. The text (Neh 9:6-37) does not do anything with penitential aspects such as explained in Neh 9:2 (and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers) as the immediate context of the text.

Therefore, the historical context of the text (Neh 9:6-37) needs an attentive study to point out the cognitive environment to place the scripture in the world they were spoken into.

2.2. The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah⁶⁵ together with the two books of Chronicles⁶⁶—also just one book really—are an attempt at a complete history of the Jews from Adam to the time it was written, seemingly the fifth century BC. Ezra-Nehemiah⁶⁷ illustrates the highly selective nature of the biblical narrative. In terms of temporal proportioning, its story covers more than a century⁶⁸, but only a handful of years are treated in any detail.

“The narrative account of Ezra-Nehemiah is a tale of triumph. Judah returns from exile and the temple, the city, and the walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt. As it records the final events of Israel’s history found in the Hebrew Scriptures, this concluding chronological account portrays a momentous occasion. The darkness of exile had finally given way to the light of Cyrus’s decree and the fulfillment of prophetic promises about the return to the land and the restoration of the people. A possible interpretation of these events might fly a “Mission Accomplished” banner over this sequence of events”⁶⁹.

The original material comprising it was written in the Persian period, but it was edited after the end of the 200 years of Persian rule rather than near its beginning

⁶⁵ These two books were recorded by one author and unified on a single scroll in the Hebrew Bible, which suggests that the two books should be read in tandem, at least with one another if not in light of all Scripture. Cfr Danny Chua, “A Biblical-Theological Approach to Ezra- Nehemiah”, www.accademia.edu, accessed on 23-01-2022.

⁶⁶ 2 Chronicles ends with the same verses as the beginning of Ezra seemingly showing that they were part of the same work. They certainly seem to have been redacted by people with a similar outlook, but the connection by repeating verses seems an obvious trick, so there might be no link other than through a school of editors”. Meneham Haren, “Explaining the Identical Lines at the end of Chronicles and the end of Ezra”, (*BR*, 1986), 34.

⁶⁷ “The book of Nehemiah is not a stand-alone book but it should be together with the book of Ezra since it is the sequel to Ezra. Ezra is the story of the first and second groups of Exiles returning from Persia to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. In Ezra we hear about the temple being rebuilt by the Exiles. The temple is finished; however, the city walls still lay in ruins”. Ched Spellman, “Nehemiah’s New Shadow: Reading and Rereading the Ezra-Nehemiah Narrative”, (*STR* 9.1, 2018), 8.

⁶⁸ As a story, it covers many years, from the first year of Cyrus’s reign in 539 BC. (Ezra 1:1) down to some point beyond than the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes I (Neh 13:6).

⁶⁹ Spellman, “Nehemiah’s New Shadow: Reading and Rereading” 3–22.

as it pretends. One the tensions in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah is that the books narrate the growth of the identity among the people. This is made in contrast to the people who lived in the land. One of the factors that prompted this study was that the returned Judean exiles claimed exclusively ‘people of God’, while others were not (cf. Ezr 4:1-3; 9:1-2; Neh 2:20; 9:1-3⁷⁰; 13:1-3).

“When one reads Ezra-Nehemiah, one immediately detects a contestation between the returned exiles and the *am Haaretz* (people of the land). By the returned exiles here we are referring to all the Jews who were taken into exile by the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., and returned back home with the assistance of the Persian King Cyrus in 539 B.C. The *am haaretz* (people of the land) are those Jews who did not go into Babylonian exile but stayed in Palestine”⁷¹.

Accordingly, the non-exiles and other peoples of the land were treated as those who did not belong to God and were alien to the land. This exclusive position also appears to be held by some of the figures during the early post-exilic period. These leading figures are Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and some of their associates. The feeling is that the far-reaching religious, social, and cultural reforms narrated in Nehemiah (as well as in Ezra) were motivated or driven largely by those who adhered to this exclusive position concerning other people. These issues include the reconstruction of structural projects (like the orders from Artaxerxes about the reconstruction of the walls and city of Jerusalem) and religious and social reforms conducted by Nehemiah and the elders of the returned Jewish community.

2.2.1. Book of Ezra

The book of Ezra depicts a series of mixed experiences between the newly returned exiles and those who surrounded them concerning the reconstruction of the temple. On the one hand, the exclusive perspective seems to report that the returning Judean exiles commenced work on the rebuilding of the temple, but they encountered opposition from various enemies, individuals, groups, kings, or foreigners (Cf. Ezr 4:1-24). On the other hand, the argument from the inclusive viewpoint is that despite the alleged opposition to the work of the rebuilding of the temple, some people from foreign nations contributed positively to the reconstruction of the temple (Cf. Ezr 3:7;

⁷⁰ “Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners.....” (Neh 9:2)

⁷¹ Isaac Kalimi, *New Perspective on Ezra Nehemiah*, Eisenbrauns Inc., Winona Lake, Indiana, 2012, 53.

6:8, 13-14). And the author of the book of Ezra includes the celebration of the pass over including the gentiles (Cf. Ezr 6:21).

Whereas the book of Nehemiah puts forward exclusive thinking towards the exile community and develops a hostility towards *am haaretz* (people of the land). Therefore, the study is limited in the premises of the book of Nehemiah alone.

“The books of Ezra and Nehemiah differ in their definition of the repatriates from Babylon, the boundaries of the in-group, the appellations of God, the celebration of the Sukkot festival, the status of the priests, the prestige bestowed on Ezra, and the attitude toward the foreign Yahwistic singers (Ezrahites) who took part in musical worship at the Jerusalem temple. The intersection of all these differences reveals the contrasting ideological backgrounds of these two books. In Ezra, the returnees from Babylon and their religious elite (priests, Levites, and prophets) constitute the nucleus preserved by YHWH from destruction from which Israel as a whole is expected to regenerate. Both this view of the repatriates as the sole legitimate remnant and its ideological consequences are challenged in Nehemiah. These differences are perceptible not only when the first-person narrative sections in Ezra and Nehemiah are compared (the so-called Ezra and Nehemiah memoirs) but also in the third-person narration segments. These positions are consistent throughout Ezra and Nehemiah, leading to the conclusion that the two books were composed and/or edited by two distinct authors who expressed contrasting views on the theological importance of the Babylonian exile”⁷².

2.2.2. Book of Nehemiah

In this narrative plot (Cf. Neh 1:1-11), Nehemiah hears a disturbing report about the returning exiles and the city of Jerusalem⁷³. He is deeply moved by the plight of those who have returned from exile to Jerusalem. This narrative plot depicts an exclusive theological standpoint. The story focused on describing the deplorable plight of the *golah* community and the city of Jerusalem. The living conditions of those who had remained in the land during the exile period appear to have been ignored. Rather the people who remained in the land together with the so-called foreigners are portrayed in a bad spotlight (Cf. Neh 2:10, 19-20; 4:1- 23; 6:1-19). Nehemiah, therefore, plans to rebuild the city wall in order to ease the plight of the people who had returned from exile to Jerusalem (Cf. Neh 2:5). He is determined to

⁷² Nissim Amzallag, “The Authorship of Ezra and Nehemiah in Light of Differences in Their Ideological Background”, (*JBL* 137/2, 2018), 286.

⁷³ In Ezra 4:12⁷³ and 4:23-4 we read the walls are built along with house of God and king Artaxerxes stops it by a decree. With the decree of Darius (Ezra 5:3ff) and the words of the prophets (Ezra 4:1-2) Haggai and Zechariah) the restoration of the temple resumed (Ezra 6:7)⁷³, the restoration of the wall remained untouched. This makes the book of Nehemiah as the continuation of the book of Ezra. After the dedication of the temple the concern was fallen on the community building.

uplift the status of the *golah* community from shame and disgrace to honor and dignity (Cf. Neh 2:17).⁷⁴

The peoples of the land are described either as enemies to the cause of Nehemiah. Foreigners supposedly expressed bad sentiments toward the plan which would improve the conditions of the returned exiles (Cf. Neh 2:10, 19).

2.2.2.1. *Work on the City wall*

The events related to the building of the wall around the city of Jerusalem constitute major part of the book of Nehemiah.⁷⁵ The opening chapter itself announces the destroyed state of the wall, and need of its restoration (Neh 1:3; 2:8). In the Nehemiah narrative plots (Cf. Neh 2:10; 19-20; 4:1-23; 6:1-7:3), non-exiles attempted to derail Yahweh's work which Nehemiah had come to accomplish. Some of the alleged enemies (i.e., Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem Cf. Neh 2:10; 19-20) expressed their negative sentiments about the prospect of the returned exiles. As result, they began to try to sabotage the work. This narrative depicts an exclusive theological point of view concerning 'God's people' and concerning other nations or foreigners. As the story in Nehemiah progresses, these three figures are portrayed in the darkest possible way. They are regarded as enemies to the cause of Yahweh and his people. Every move on the part of the alleged enemies is viewed in the text as an attempt to derail God's cause for his people the "*Golah*" community. (Cf. 2:19).

⁷⁴ "There are striking similarities between the narrative plot of Nehemiah 2:1-9 and the plot in Ezra 1:1-11. First, in both instances, it is a foreign king who provides orders for a project to be carried out in Judah. King Cyrus gave the orders to reconstruct the temple (cf Ezr 1:1-4), while king Artaxerxes gave the orders for the city wall to be rebuilt (cf Neh 2:8). Second, in both cases, Yahweh is reported to have worked in specific individuals to accomplish the desired purposes for the *golah* community. For example, in Ezra 1:1, Yahweh stirred up the heart of king Cyrus to provide the orders to free the exiles and to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. In Nehemiah 2:8, 18, God hears Nehemiah's prayers and places his good hand upon Nehemiah in order that the requests he had made to king Artaxerxes were answered in his favour. A third similarity is that Nehemiah received letters from a foreign king, Artaxerxes, who ordered the governors and leaders of Trans-Euphrates to support his cause (cf Neh 2:7-9) just as Ezra did (cf Ezr 7:11-28)". Kalimi, *New Perspective on Ezra Nehemiah*, Eisenbrauns Inc., Winona Lake, Indiana, 2012, 13.

⁷⁵ Nehemiah's narration, with the two general divisions (1:4 – 6:15 The problem with the wall and 6:16 – 13:31 The problem with the people) takes forward the history. The first section of the book (1:1-6:15) gives a detailed description of the wall building. Neh 6:15 we read the wall was completed in fifty-two days on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul. But the narration dedication of the wall, given in 12:27ff.

The narrative takes its climax point when Nehemiah makes the statement that “you (alleged enemies) have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem” and “God of heaven would grant success to his servants who rebuilt the wall” (Cf. Neh 2:20). In the perspective of Nehemiah, those who had the right to worship God in Jerusalem were only the returned exiles.

As the work on reconstructing the wall progressed, the narrator from an exclusive theological standpoint, wasted no time in letting the reader know that foreigners constituted a major anti-Jewish force in their attempt to halt Yahweh’s work (Cf. Neh 4:1-23 & 6:1-19). Nehemiah was not scared, rather he prayed to his God and organized his people to face this threat. Finally, the mission was accomplished. Foreigners were led to admit that the work was possible through the hand of God (Cf. Neh 6:16).

2.2.2.2. *Religious Community*

The occasion for the confession of sins is narrated in Nehemiah 9:1-38⁷⁶. This story is portrayed from an exclusive theological point of view. Those who returned from exile had gathered in order to confess their sins in the process following the celebration of the feast of Booths. The text made it obvious that those who participated in the religious assembly had separated from foreigners (Cf. Neh 9:2). This incident logically excluded all people of foreign descent from participating in the religious assembly.

⁷⁶ The second part (the Problem with the people) is dealt by delaying the dedication of the wall from 6:15 to 12:27. The dedication of the completed wall is delayed from 6:15 to 12: 27ff by interpolating the matter of Tobiah in 6:17, where it is said that “for many in Judah were bound by oath to him” (6:18). There seems to be need of a new oath, which exhibits that the people of stand with God and keeps the commandments.

This is evident from the appointment of Hananiah, the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem. In contrast to the narration in 6:18, (“for many in Judah were bound by oath to him”) he is drawn as the one “more faithful and God-fearing than many” (7:2). Hananiah is presented as a faithful person in comparison to the many in Judah who were bound by oath to Tobiah. It opens the ground for discussion on the words used for oath in 6:18 and covenant in 10:1. The two lists, 7:6-73 and 10:1-26 can be taken as bracketing factor to these. That the people of land take God experience as their moving force and center of life.

This leads to the fact that those who have signed the agreement to observe the law of God is also the ones who were separated themselves from the people of the land (Cf. Neh10:28). The community now used the same criterion that was employed for participation in the penitential assembly (Cf. Neh 9:2) for the signing of agreement (Cf. Neh 10:28).

It was necessary for the new community to separate themselves from foreigners in order that they might maintain the distinctive beliefs and ethical principles of the community. The emphasis of Nehemiah (10:28) is on the purity of those who pledged allegiance to the agreement. The consciousness of the golah community about their separate historical and racial identity also was expanded to include distinctive religious and social identity.

The text is argued to be the part of tradition of a community. “We see a community praying the tradition and in so doing revealing their commitment to that tradition as Scripture. This commitment to the tradition does not mean tradition has become static. The Persian Jewish community continued to reshape the tradition into an effective tool for gaining the ear of their God.”⁷⁷ It raises the opinion that the text (Neh 9:6-31) is not simply a literary unit, but rather part of the tradition of the community.

2.3. Uniqueness of Neh 9:6-37

It is argued that the remembrance of the story of Israel confers an authoritative status to Neh 9:6–37. Secondly, it is argued that the prayer of Neh 9:6–37 formed the identity of the Jews in post-exilic times among many injustices. It will be argued that Neh 9:6–37 was composed and transmitted with the view to remember and construct the identity of the Jews in the post-exilic period. The following features explain these.

2.3.1. It is the Center of the Passage from 7:72b-10:40.

It is in the seventh month the people came to their land after the exile (Ezra 3:1). On the twenty-fourth day, they dedicated the temple (Hag 2:18)⁷⁸. The author of the book of Nehemiah combines both these events in 9:1. According to 2 Chronicles

⁷⁷ Bodha, “Praying the Tradition”, 9.

⁷⁸ Consider from this day on, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider” (Hag. 2:18).

7 the first temple was dedicated in the seventh month. There were celebrations and festivals similar to that described in Nehemiah 8:1-18. The chronicler goes beyond with narration of the twenty-third day, in which people are sent back home.⁷⁹ In Neh 9:1 it is said about the assembly and fasting on the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month. This shows the uniqueness of the text. The twenty-fourth day of the seventh month refers to many things both historical (dedication of the first temple) and the time of the author.

In order to understand why they meet at this time, we may compare the reference to the twenty-fourth day with Hag 1:15, 2:10, 18, 20, Zech 1:7 and Dan 10:1-4. All of these portray visions and prophecies being received on twenty-fourth day of the month. Most analogous is Dan 10:1-4, where Daniel mourns for “three full weeks” in the first month and sees a vision on the twenty-fourth day. In Neh 8:9, the people are discouraged from mourning on the first day of the month and return to their homes. It seems that this notes in 8:1-12 inspired the author of 9:1ff. to resume the theme of mourning, depicting a delay of the time of confession until the twenty-fourth day. Taken the unit (Neh 7:72b-10:1(40)) as one form it seems that the pericope 9:6-37 is an axis on which the passages 8:1-9:5 and 10:1-40 are molded.

2.3.2. It is the Culmination Point of the Book of Nehemiah.

A development in the aspect of the Torah can be found from 8:1-9:5. Ezra reads the Torah on the first day (8:2). On the second day, he assists the leaders of the community in reading the Torah (8:13). And finally, “the children of Israel” read the Torah on the twenty-fourth day – without Ezra or the community leaders (9:3). This was the second duty assigned to Ezra by the king Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:25).

From this perspective, Neh 9:6-37 stands as the culmination of teaching of Torah. The narrative Ezra- Nehemiah begins with the remembrance of Jeremiah (Ezra 1:1), who proclaimed the ceasing of the exile and coming back of people to the land. In Jeremiah 31:34 we read, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the

⁷⁹ “On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their homes, joyful and in good spirits because of the goodness that the Lord had shown to David and to Solomon and to his people Israel.” (2 Chr. 7:10).

least of them to the greatest, says the Lord.” This seems to be fulfilled in the narration of 9:1ff.

2.3.3. It can be the Basis for the Whole Book.⁸⁰

The community in Yehud repeatedly experiences renewal by virtue of initiatives undertaken by Judeans residing in other lands. Indeed, given the portrayal of opposition toward the “children of the exile” shown by the “peoples of the land”, the community of the returnees paradoxically appears as a kind of colony in its own land. The pattern of successful initiatives undertaken by members of the Eastern Diaspora (the enigmatic Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, Ezra, Nehemiah) in the mother country, as presented in Ezra-Nehemiah, raises some interesting issues about developing notions of Judean ethnicity and community identity in the international context of the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods.

Between an introductory call to worship (9:5) and a concluding request for help with confession (9:32-37), the prayer presents successive traditions guiding the reader from the creation of the world to the fall of the state.⁸¹ Although it is intended to be read as a single account, clear boundaries could be discerned between the traditions. These boundaries had been accepted universally for the traditions of creation (6), Abraham (7-8), and exodus (9-11). The investigation concluded that the wilderness tradition includes 9:12-23 with the Sinai and ‘forty-year’ traditions integrated into this tradition complex. The conquest tradition is considered in the introduction to the larger tradition complex- life in the land (24-31).

The prayer is an ethnic history, is intended as a description of content rather than genre. The history presented within the interpolated prayer of Neh 9:6-31

⁸⁰ “Theories about the emergence of the Pentateuch increasingly emphasize the decisive role of the postexilic community, and EN, with all its complexities, remains the most detailed, explicit biblical source for understanding the postexilic community. The ability to perceive decisive editorial choices that shape the book’s content and structure, therefore, holds important clues for detecting postexilic ideas and values. Consequently, fuller insights into the structure and meaning of Nehemiah 9 are a big step toward gaining a greater comprehension of EN’s agenda as well as postexilic dynamics that influenced the communities responsible for the formation of the Pentateuch”. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, “Nehemiah 9-10, Structure and Significance”, *Perspective on Hebrew Scriptures 1-4, ed.*, Ehud Ben Zvi, Georgias Press, 2006, 14.

⁸¹ Bodha, “Praying the Tradition”, 8.

comprises of a mosaic of allusions to material found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible' with only one direct quotation (9:17b-18: Ex 34:6; 32:32b).

There are grave reasons for acknowledging Neh 9:6-31 to be out of place where it stands and serious difficulties in finding a better position for it, it seems wise to examine it and its contents by themselves. The prayer in Nehemiah 9 is suggestive of this tension. Though scholarship has proffered different possibilities for the compositional origins of this work, there are compelling reasons to view the prayer as composed during the exilic period or the earliest decades of the Persian period specifically by homeland Levites.⁸²

Conclusion

This chapter was discussing the historical analysis of Neh 9:6-31. After discussing the need for historical analysis, we study the two teachings about the pericope and found that the teaching which suggests that the prayer is not a penitential one. It gets more weight. As the book of Ezra has two-dimensional view regarding the growth of the identity the study is limited to the book of Nehemiah alone. The structure of the book deals two problems, namely the problem of the people and the problem of the wall (1:3). The problem of the people (6:17-13:3) contains the wider context of our study (7:72b-11:1). There can be a gradual growth of the identity among the exile- community as the people of God and owners of the land. Nehemiah 9:6-31 (historical narration), thus becomes the center of the book. This is, infact, the climax of the book as it gives the basis for the identity to the community as people of God.

⁸² Bodha, "Praying the Tradition", 190.

CHAPTER THREE

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF NEH 9:6-31

Introduction

The exhortational character of Nehemiah 9:6-31 is very clear. The author felt his solidarity with the history of the unfaithfulness of his forerunners. True to their history the Jews repaid the mercy and good acts of the Lord with ingratitude on every occasion. After they were punished by the Lord, they would be faithful for a while, but as soon as they were prosperous, they became again unfaithful to the Lord. This theme, which is the base of the overall Old Testament, is presented by the author in Neh 9:6-31. This is developed through the structural presentation of the prayer. The chapter analyses the prayer and brings out this message.

The prayers offer a review of the way God has gone with the people of Israel. “It reviews the whole history of Israel, a history that sees YHWH granting the most extra ordinary favors and the people neglecting their God and transgressing the Torah”.⁸³ The composition of this hymn is as follows: The praising of God as Creator (v. 6), the covenant with Abraham (vv. 7-8), the great and wonderful acts of God in Egypt (vv. 9-11), the care of God in the desert (v. 12), event at Mount Sinai and the desert wandering (vv. 13-21), the conquering of the Holy Land (vv. 22-25), the unfaithfulness of Israel and God's patience in the Holy Land (vv. 26-31).

3.1. The Praising of God as Creator (V.6)

אֱתֵהּ-הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדּוֹ אֶת עֲשֵׂיֹת אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל-צְבָאֵם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל-
אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ הַיַּמִּים וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וְאֵתָה מְחַיֶּה אֶת-כָּלָם וְצָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם לְךָ
מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים

This strophe illustrates that YHWH is God and He is alone God. He creates everything and he is the life giver and glorified by the heavenly army.

⁸³ Giuseppe Bettenzoli, “Ezra-Nehemiah”, (*IBC* ed., William R. Farmer, TPI, Bangalore, 1998), 736.

3.1.1. *You are alone YHWH* (אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדָּךְ)

The text begins with a non-verbal sentence which stands as the heading of the strophe. All other elements explain this heading. One of the central motifs of the first strophe is the heading itself i.e., אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדָּךְ. Biblical literature pivots around the relationship between YHWH and Israel. The name YHWH⁸⁴ (Yahweh) is mostly identified with the official God of Israel, both in the Northern Kingdom and in Judah. YHWH particularizes Israel as the nation of YHWH.

The Prayer in Neh 9:6-31 is a response to the call to worship (לְיוֹמוֹ בָּרַכְוּ אֶת־יְהוָה) (אַל־הִיָּכֶם) in Neh. 9:5. What immediately follows is apparently intended as a response to the call to prayer. “Blessed be your glorious name, that is exalted above all blessing and praise from everlasting to everlasting (מִן־הָעוֹלָם עַד־הָעוֹלָם וַיִּבְרַכְוּ שְׁמֶךָ כְּבוֹדְךָ וּמְרוֹמְךָ עַל־) (כָּל־בְּרָכָה וּתְהִלָּה: (Neh 9:5b). At this point, the proper prayer commences with a declaration of God, namely, (אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדָּךְ) followed by praise of God for His creative acts.

Following the invocation to prayer and the response, the recital of the Shema with its accompanying benedictions are given in Deut 6:4-9, Deut 11:13-21, and Num 15:37-41. These benedictions have their counterparts in the evening service, of which, an integral part is the recital of the Shema.⁸⁵ The declaration of the uniqueness of God as expressed in Deut. 6:4 occupies a central position in the unit of service. This recitation of the Shema verse (Deut. 6:4) is basic to Jewish worship and it was set by the prayer which opens with אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדָּךְ

The statement, ‘You alone are God’, suggests the monotheistic ideology of the Israelite people. The almost similar wording of this can be seen in 2 Kings 19:15⁸⁶ and 19 where Hezekiah makes the prayer and in Isaiah 37:16. The covenant people make their uncompromising confession, ‘you alone are Lord’. They affirm their

⁸⁴ The importance of the name YHWH in the Old Testament can best be illustrated by its numerous occurrences in the text of the Old Testament. The name appears at least 6,007 times. The pronunciation of the name ‘Yahweh’ was specifically prohibited in compliance with the regulation from Leviticus 24:16 which states, “Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death”.

⁸⁵ Cfr Leon J. Liebreich, “The Impact of Nehemiah 9:5-37 on the Liturgy of the Synagogue”, (HUCA Vol. 32, 1961), 230.

⁸⁶ אַתָּה־הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים לְבַדָּךְ (2 Kings 19:15)

obedience. The testimony to God's uniqueness became the prayer of faithful Jews, expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one".⁸⁷ The harder moments of the prayer's confession reminded them of the golden calf in the wilderness and the blasphemous actions. The faithful confession is in contrast to such disloyalty.⁸⁸

The prayer (Neh 9:6-31) structurally acknowledges this affirmation. The very center portion of the prayer explains God as gracious, forgiving, compassionate, and slow to anger (Neh.9:17). This becomes the anchor and axis of the prayer as a whole. The last words of the historical part of the prayer also say that God is Gracious (Neh 9:31). The historical part of the prayer begins and ends with the second person pronoun "you". This suggests that the entire matter is under the gracious providence of God.

The preface of 'you are YHWH- you alone' to the description of creation emphasizes that Yahweh alone created the heavens and the earth. Therefore, the prayer rejects all pagan creation myths and their polytheism. The prayer begins with a profound adoration of God. God's supreme majesty and omnipotence are acknowledged in the creation, preservation, and government of all. They acknowledged the God and worshipped to be the supreme Sovereign, the Lord over all, who had created all things whatsoever, who preserved them by his providence and therefore had a sovereign dominion over all.

3.1.2. *You made* (תַּשַּׁעַ תָּאַ)

The verb 'תַּשַּׁעַ' is the derivated form of the root word תַּשַּׁעַ which has a variety of meaning as made, manufactured, effected etc. the second person pronoun תָּאַ gives emphasis to the subject implied in the verb and it denotes to the antecedent noun הַיְהוָה in v.6a.

The selection of the verb seems to correspond Genesis 2 where the creation account is narrated in a different manner from that of the Gen 1:1-2:4a. instead of

⁸⁷ Reymond Brown, *The Message of Ezra Nehemiah*, Inter- Varsity Press, Leister, England, 1998,156.

⁸⁸ Reymond Brown, *The Message of Ezra Nehemiah*, 156

taking the account of Gen 1:1-2:4a, author prefer the second account.⁸⁹ The verbs in Gen 1:1– 2:3, where God is the subject, are “make” (עָשָׂה) and “create” (בָּרָא), whereas in Gen 2:4–25 they are “fashioning”, a word that is used for potters and craftsmen, and concrete agricultural verbs of planting and watering and causing to grow. The impression in Gen 1:1–2:3 is that God brings things into existence by divine fiat, by his spoken word, but in Gen 2:4–25 he is a “hands on” creator. In Gen 1:1–2:3 the “say” verbs express divine commands, whereas in Gen 2:4–25 the “say” verb reveals God’s inner thinking: “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’” (Gen 2:18). In Gen 1:1–2:3 God is transcendental to the creation, whereas in Gen 2:4–25 God is immanent to and intimate with the creation⁹⁰.

In Gen 2:4–3:24 the use of בָּרָא ‘create’ and עָשָׂה ‘make, do’ is not stylized. But in the only instance of בָּרָא in Gen 2:4 the verb is passive (nifal) and the actor is omitted. Where עָשָׂה is used in Gen 2:4 the actor is stated as YHWH Elohim. So, בָּרָא and עָשָׂה do not have the same actor in this creation account. Gen 2:4, in fact, serves to indicate that Elohim, the transcendent creator God in Gen 1 is the same God (YHWH). In the first creation account, the sole actor for בָּרָא and עָשָׂה is Elohim who enters into covenant with his people in order to be actively present with them (in Eden). Gen 2:4 also uses בָּרָא and עָשָׂה to switch from the transcendent “creating” of Elohim to the immanent “making” of YHWH Elohim.⁹¹

⁸⁹ “There are different opinions among scholars regarding the creation account. Some say that these are (Gen 1:1-2:4a and Gen 2:4b-3:24) two different accounts. While others hold the view that these are one account in different style of narration. For the sake of convenience in the communication I stand with the former position, without any criticism to the latter as I study only the verbs here”. Catherine C. McDowell, *From the Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, Penstate Univeristy Press, Pennsylvania, 2015, 143.

⁹⁰ John R. Roberts, “A Comparison of Two Creation Account”, 12-11-2018, <https://sil.academia.edu>, accessed on 25-01-2023, 32.

⁹¹ John R. Roberts, *A Comparison of Two Creation Account*, 51.

The creation accounts in Genesis though different in many matters, it holds the Ancient near Eastern ideology in the creation of man and other beings. This seems to be, because the author takes the prayer from an anthropological point of view.

3.1.3. *The Heavens... The Earth.... The Sea*

אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמַיִם הַשָּׁמַיִם הַיָּמִים וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ
וְכָל־צְבָאָם

God's creation is mentioned in three realms: heaven, earth, and the seas, each with its own inhabitants. "The heavens and the earth" for the ancient readers of Genesis are everything there is out there. By this the author makes a clear connection between first and second creation accounts. The heavens (הַשָּׁמַיִם) and the earth (הָאָרֶץ) refer to the totality of the universe and not necessarily to an organized, fully functional, and complete universe. The way God goes from chaos (disorganized) to cosmos (organized) in Gen 1:2–31 is primarily through the process of separation. Light is separated from darkness in Gen 1:3–5 to create day and night, the waters above are separated from the waters below in Gen 1:6–8 to create the source of rain in the heavens, and in Gen 1:9–10 the dry ground (הַיַּבֵּשָׁה) is separated from the waters below to provide the earth (הָאָרֶץ) as a place to live and food plants (Gen 1:11–12⁹²). Though the narration about the sea is an addition by the author it is in connection with Gen 1:20⁹³.

The reference to creation is a further affirmation of faith. It is a close paraphrase of Deut 10:14 "Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord, the earth with all that is in it." "The heavens and the earth are also introduced into the story with a definite article and are thus marked throughout the story, whereas all other entities are introduced without a definite article and are optionally marked

⁹² And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind" (Gen 1:11-12).

⁹³ And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures...(Gen 1:20).

with a definite article with further mentions in the story”⁹⁴. The host of heavens refers either to the stars or to the angels, but quite probably to the stars.

3.1.4. *You give life to all* (וְאַתָּה מְחַיֶּה אֶת־כָּל־לֵבָב) (וְאַתָּה מְחַיֶּה אֶת־כָּל־לֵבָב)

“And you give life to them all” (וְאַתָּה מְחַיֶּה אֶת־כָּל־לֵבָב). This clause cited asserts that God continually supports the existence of, and so is not absent from, the world that God has created. God is immanent. This claim is expressed by the writer's choice of (מְחַיֶּה) in piel, which is used exclusively in the context of God preserving God's creatures. It also refers to the act of God in creating man from the mud and giving him life. “He breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of the man and the man became a living being.

3.1.5. *The Host of Heaven worships you* (וַיִּצְבֹּא הַשָּׁמַיִם לְךָ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים)

The creation account in Gen 1:1–2:3 results in the creation of a sacred (seventh) day in which Elohim takes his rest. God invites the people of God to participate in this day of rest or Sabbath (Exo 16:23, 25, 29). The spacio-temporal goal of Gen 1:1–2:3 is achieved. Elohim creates the heavens and the earth and enters into his rest on the seventh day.

The creation theme is used as an introduction. The overall history is under the guidance and providence of God. Attributing creation to God alone (לכל) has a decisive effect. The greatness of God as the one responsible for the created order is clearly emphasized in the first verse of the prayer.⁹⁵

3.2. The Covenant with Abraham (Vv. 7-8)

אֶת־הַיְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתָּ בְּאַבְרָם וְהוֹצֵאתוֹ מֵאֹר כַּשְׂדִּים וְשָׁמַתְּ שְׁמוֹ
 אַבְרָהָם וּמִצָּאתָ אֶת־לְבָבוֹ נֹאמֵן לְפָנָיו וְכָרוֹת עֲמוֹ הַבְּרִית לְתַת אֶת־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי הַחֹתִי
 הָאֲמָרִי וְהַפְּרֹזִי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהַגְּרָגְשִׁי לְתַת לְזֶרְעוֹ וּתְקַם אֶת־דְּבָרֶיךָ כִּי צִדִּיק אָתָּה

⁹⁴ John R. Roberts, A Comparison of Two Creation Account, 36.

⁹⁵ Judith H. Newman, “Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism”, (SBLEJL 14, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 66.

The Patriarch Abraham is chosen and as he is being faithful the covenant, that the land will be given to him and his descendants, is made. The verbs (שָׁמַרְתָּ וּמְצַאֲתָ בְּחַרְתָּ) (וְכָרְוֹת) are related syntactically.

3.2.1. *You are Lord God* (אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה הַאֱלֹהִים)

The non-verbal sentence is repeated as the heading of the strophe. But there is a change in the name of God. Instead of אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה of the previous strophe here אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה הַאֱלֹהִים is used. It denotes a direct connection to the second creation account given in Gen 2:4bff. The absence of the mention of the creation of man (Gen 1:26-27 and Gen 2:10) is answered through the call of Abraham. As the intention of the author seems to be the identity of Israel, the people of God with Abraham as the ancestor and not the creation of man.

3.2.2. *You chose Abram* (בְּחַרְתָּ בְּאַבְרָם)

The second part of the historical review also begins with “you are Yahweh” (אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה), but this time it is followed by “the God who chose Abram” (הַאֱלֹהִים הַבְּחָר בְּאַבְרָם). This emphasizes Israel's gracious election by God, who called this nation to be his people. The word used is בָּחַר which more often denotes the selection of the nation as a special one to God.⁹⁶ The verb בָּחַר is used in Deuteronomy with three aspects, people (Deut 4:37), place (Deut 12:5), and king (Deut 17:15). God is the subject of every verb in this section, emphasizing that the basis of Israel's relationship to God is God's own action and righteousness, not those of Abram or his descendants⁹⁷.

⁹⁶ Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6; 7:7; 10:15; 12:5; 12:11; 12:14; 12:18; 12:26; 14:2; 14:23.

⁹⁷ During the exilic period, the covenant with Abraham was a theological datum of ever-increasing importance. This trend accelerated in the post-exilic period. The Priestly writer drew attention to the centrality of the covenant in the Israelite religion, and in a special way to the Abrahamic pact as a key point of reference for covenantal thinking in this period. At this time, Jews in large numbers sought an enduring framework within which to explore God's relationship with humanity, specifically with Israel. Their search was occasioned by their own exile, an experience that, on the basis of the exilic (Deut 4:23-28) may be attributed to the people's forgetting God and God's laws. Fittingly, there are texts written after the exile reporting that God “remembered” the covenant with Abraham (Lev 26:42), a divine act tantamount to reaffirming the exiles and assuring them that they will fare better in the future than they have in the recent past. Cfr Richard J. Bautch, “An Appraisal of Abraham's Role in Postexilic Covenants”, (CBQ, 71/1, 2009), 42-63.

This text draws directly to Gen 15:18-21 to show that the basis of the people's trust is "in God's personal obligation to his people, his ancient promise to bless them and to give them peace in the land." According to these authors, the basis is univocal⁹⁸. The first event from Abram's life that is mentioned is God bringing him from the Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen 11:28, 31)⁹⁹.

3.2.3. *The Change of Name* (פְּשָׁדִים וְשִׁמְתָה שְׁמוֹ אַבְרָהָם)

God's act of renaming him Abraham is recounted in Gen 17:5¹⁰⁰. According to the Ancient Near Eastern tradition, the giving of a name to someone would show that the person who gave the name had control or power over the one who was named. It is therefore argued that a similar perception supposedly undergirded the Adamic authority in naming the rest of the other creatures which Yahweh had made (cfr Gn 2:19-20). Adam also named his wife, אֵשֶׁת (cfr Gn 2:23), probably as an indication of her closeness to him but also as suggestive of his headship over his female partner. From the above understanding of the importance of naming, it could be argued that when Yahweh changed Abram to become Abraham (Gn 17:5, 15), it denoted that Yahweh had control and authority over the course of his life and destinies henceforth.

In Hebrew, the name *Abram* (אַבְרָם) means exalted father and *Abraham* (אַבְרָהָם) means father of a multitude. Both names represent what was possible for Abraham to become because of the covenant. The new name confirmed God's control and marked a stage in the patriarch's career. A complete creed has been integrated" into the penitential prayer, with a key aspect of that creed being the partnership between Israel and its God.

3.2.4. *Abraham is found Righteous* (וַיִּמְצָא אֶת־לִבּוֹ נֹאמָן לְפָנָיִךָ)

The statement that "(God) found his heart faithful (נֹאמָן)", is explained in Genesis 15:6 where we read "he believed in YHWH, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness". The same verb is used in the passive form in Neh 9:8 and the active

⁹⁸ Bautch, "An Appraisal of Abraham's Role in Postexilic Covenants", 62.

⁹⁹ Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there (Gen. 11:31). Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess (cfr Gen. 15:7).

¹⁰⁰ No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. (Gen. 17:5)

form in Genesis 15:6. The sequence of actions in 9:8 indicates that first Abraham is found to be faithful, and then God makes a covenant with him. The syntax suggests a succession of distinct acts, the first of which is inflected (וּמְצָאָה) while the second (בְּרֵית) is added simply in the infinitive absolute. In its formulation, the verse appears to lay emphasis on the first action, Abraham's faithfulness, with the making of the covenant a clear corollary. The verse operates with something of a bilateral understanding of the covenant God and Abraham both have active roles. According to Mark J. Bodha, the words used in relation to the covenant is deuteronomical covenant.¹⁰¹

Before this, the people confess the iniquities of their ancestors. That is, v. 33 redefines the relationship between the terms righteous and wicked, רָשָׁע and צַדִּיק, that had been established the prayer (v.8). Whereas in w. 7-8 God is called righteous in light of Abram's faithfulness, in v. 33 the people's wickedness is used as the foil to God's righteousness. In the later verse, the faithfulness once attributed to Abram has slipped from the human realm and now refers exclusively to God (v. 33b).

3.2.5. *The Covenant* (וּכְרִיתָ עִמּוֹ הַבְּרִית)

There are several connections between the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the covenant promises that Yahweh had made to Abraham and his descendants. The strength of the relationship between the book of Nehemiah and the Abrahamic covenant promises is shown by the appeal that Nehemiah has made to Yahweh's covenant promises to Abraham.¹⁰² Nehemiah 9:7-8 is situated in the context of the Israelites' confession concerning their disobedience and intermarriage with the people of the land. In the passage, it is more compelling to argue that the returned exiles intended to demonstrate their legitimacy to the land of Judah during the early post-exilic period by appealing to the Abrahamic covenant promises as their basis. The newly returned exiles appear to assert that the election of Abram, his name change,

¹⁰¹ "Results from the fact that the "covenant [was] made on the basis of the faithfulness of Abraham's heart", a faithfulness expressed in terminology that is arguably Deuteronomistic: "found" (וּמְצָאָה), "his heart" (לִבּוֹ), "faithful" (נֹאמָנִי). These terms remind the reader that Deuteronomistic language. Abraham's Role.

¹⁰² "You art the Lord God, who chose Abram and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham. And You did find his heart faithful before you, and didst make a covenant with him to give him the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite, to give it to his descendants. And you have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous" (Neh 9: 7-8).

and the covenant Yahweh had made to him and his descendants defined the status of the post-exilic Judean community with respect to land usage, marriage custom, worship, and structural projects such as rebuilding the temple and the city wall.

The returned Jewish exiles saw themselves as inseparably tied to the previous Israelite community and to their land, worship, marriage custom, and other functions through the covenant promise Yahweh had made to Abraham. These Judean exiles understood themselves as the legitimate descendants of Abraham, who ought to reap the benefits of the covenant blessing Yahweh had promised to Abraham. The covenant promises between Yahweh, Abraham and his descendants were so central in deciding the status of the early post-exilic Jewish community concerning the ownership of the land, worship, marriage, and other functions, the same principle should be seen to be in operation through the covenantal role of this early post-exilic Jewish community toward other nations.

The covenant promises determine who should own the land of Judah, who should worship or who should be their marriage partners. The entire history of Israel and their role to the nations was constituted and shaped by God's covenant promises. The events from Abram's life are not recounted in the exact chronological order recorded in Genesis, since his renaming in Neh 9:7 (recalling Gen 17:4-5) precedes the promise of the land and the imputation of God's righteousness in Neh 9:8 (recalling Genesis 15).¹⁰³

“In Genesis 14 Abram proves to be superior to four kings and saves Lot but renounces any claim on the land beyond the Jordan which he leaves for his relative Lot and the people of Sodom, so keeping his own exclusive relations to Melchizedek king of Salem and Priest of the Most High God. This narrative has been written with a view to the addition of chapter 15, which deals with the Israelite settlement in the land in the days of Joshua and its problematization after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The promises of Gen 15 thus appear as a reward for Abram's generosity against Lot and the people of Sodom, and they are localized in the area around of Jerusalem”¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰³ Chapter 15 is an account of the initial covenant activity between God and Abraham, while chapter 17 recounts its renewal.

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin Zeimer, “Abram - Abraham. *Kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Gen 14, 15 und 17*”, 18-4-2019 <https://www.academia.edu/11529368/Publications>, accessed on 18, January 2023.

The masterly narrative of the covenant between the pieces, Gen 15:7–21, contributed essentially to the correlation between the two main traditions of the roots of Israel – in the ancestors and in the exodus. In consequence, the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became a leading theme for the whole Pentateuch. It is interesting to note how the faithfulness of Abraham in v. 8a is balanced with the righteousness of the Lord at the end of this verse (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אַבְרָהָם אֶל-יְהוָה and וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם). It shows that Abraham was faithful and had faith in the Lord; he had set a fine example for his descendants¹⁰⁵.

Nehemiah 9:7-8 is situated in the context of the Israelites' historical addressing concerning their disobedience and intermarriage with the people of the land. In the passage, it is more compelling to argue that the returned exiles intended to demonstrate their legitimacy to the land of Judah during the early post-exilic period by appealing to the Abrahamic covenant promises as their basis. The newly returned exiles appear to assert that the election of Abram, his name change, and the covenant/promises God had made to him and his descendants defined the status of the post-exilic Judean. Nehemiah appealed to the Abrahamic covenant as the basis on which the returned Judean exiles assumed the exclusive right to own the land of Judah.¹⁰⁶ But this is a one-sided perception of the Abrahamic covenant. It is evidenced in their harsh attitude toward other people living in and around Judah during the early post-exilic period regarding intermarriage, worship, structural projects and communal life.¹⁰⁷

“Every event that has transpired through Abraham and his descendants including the history of the world should not be considered as a haphazard or accidental happening. Rather, all the events that had happened in the life of Abraham, his descendants and in the life of other nations should be understood as moving toward Yahweh's ultimate goal for the establishment of covenant relationship with humankind via Abraham and his descendants. Thus, the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history

¹⁰⁵ Yahweh, the God of Israel made a covenant with the patriarch Abraham and his descendants and has been reported in Gn 15:1-19; 17:1-27, cf Gn 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14, et cetera.

¹⁰⁶ Emmanuel, *Theological Perspectives on the Concept of 'Yahweh's People' in Ezra and Nehemiah During the Early Post- Exilic Period (539-350 B.C.)*, uploaded on 2006-11-09, <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/29334>, accessed on 12-12-2022.

¹⁰⁷ Cfr Ezr 4:1-3; 9:1-10:44; Neh 2::20; 4:1-23; 6:1-7:3; 10:30; 13:1-31.

(Dt - 2 Ki) are a narration of the advancement of or derailment to the fulfillment of the covenant promises that Yahweh had made to Abraham and his descendants.”¹⁰⁸

3.2.6. *The Narration of the Kingdoms and Promise*

God deemed Abram to be justified through faith alone to the promise that Abraham’s descendants would inherit the land then occupied by pagan nations, a promise that follows Abram being reckoned righteous (Gen 15:17-21).

“The second named period is that of the exodus of Abraham’s descendants and their wandering in the wilderness. It is indicated by the divided she-goat, characterized by great possessions, and connected with the donation of the land by the Kenizzites. The third named period is that of the patriarchs themselves. It is indicated by the divided ram, characterized by Abraham’s death in peace, and connected with the donation of the land by the Kadmonites. The last period is that of the return of the descendants and is explicitly counted as the fourth period. Its distinctiveness is indicated by the undivided turtle dove and pigeon and characterized by the final return to the land promised to Abraham. Its nature is the actual donation of the land to the Israelites, clarified by the well-known enumeration of the Hittites, the Perizzites, (the Rephaim,) the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites”.¹⁰⁹

The six pagan nations listed in Neh 9:8 appear to be an abbreviation of the ten nations in Gen 15:19-21¹¹⁰, omitting several of the more minor peoples (Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites) All six mentioned here in Nehemiah occur also in Ezra 9:1.

3.2.7. *You are Righteous* (כִּי צַדִּיק אַתָּה)

This different order allows the prayer to emphasize the final point of this section: the gift of the land (Neh 9:8) and God's righteousness in keeping his promise to give it to Abraham's descendants. God's trustworthiness in always fulfilling his promises is a recurring theme in this prayer (Neh 9:15, 22-24, 35), and it emphasizes God's attributes of righteousness, faithfulness, patience, and mercy. Yet the righteousness of God also resulted in hardships for the Judeans in the land because of their wickedness despite God's own "faithfulness" (, Neh 9:33). "Thus, Israel's life in the land is an experience of God’s righteousness from the beginning until the present moment (9:33).

¹⁰⁸ Emmanuel, *Theological Perspective*, 104.

¹⁰⁹ Zeimer, “Abram - Abraham. *Kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Gen 14, 15 und 17*”, 14.

¹¹⁰ The land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites. (Gen. 15:19-21)

3.2.8. Abrahamic Covenant in Neh 9

Evidences from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah suggest that the land belonged to the exile community who had returned from Babylon to Judah.¹¹¹ There is a concern between the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ and ‘other nations’, ‘foreigners’ or ‘non-exiles’.¹¹²

“When one reads Ezra-Nehemiah, one immediately detects a contestation between the returned exiles and the “*am Haaretz*”. By the returned exiles here we are referring to all the Jews who were taken into exile by the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., and returned back home with the assistance of the Persian King Cyrus in 539 B.C. The *am haaretz* are those Jews who did not go into Babylonian exile but stayed in Palestine”.¹¹³

The people who returned from exile looked at non-exiles and the peoples of the land (*am ha'arets*) as ‘foreigners’ or aliens; and primarily as people who did not belong to Yahweh.

First two chapters of Nehemiah might create mixed feelings in the reader about the role of foreigners in Israel or particularly for the exiled community. On the one hand, foreigners, such as king Artaxerxes and his wife showed a favorable attitude toward Yahweh’s cause. They supported it by providing written orders to the leaders of the region to assist with the project. On the other hand, other foreigners supposedly expressed bad sentiments toward the plan which would improve the conditions of the returned exiles. Nehemiah narrative depicts an exclusive theological point of view concerning ‘Yahweh’s people’ and concerning other nations or foreigners. Sanballat¹¹⁴ the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem¹¹⁵ the Arab are not portrayed as part of Yahweh’s people even though some of them seemed to be Yahweh worshippers. As the story in Nehemiah progresses, these three figures are

¹¹¹ cfr Ezr 2:1, 70-3:1; 4:3; 9:1-2; 10:10-11, 19; Neh 2:20; 9:2; 10:28-30; 13:1-3)

¹¹² cfr Ezr 2:59-63; 4:1-3; 9:1-5; Neh 2:20; 10:28-39; 13:1-9, 15-29.

¹¹³ Emmanuel, *Theological Perspective*,189.

¹¹⁴ Sanballat’s place of origin-Horonite is reported from Scripture and from other sources variously (cfr Blenkinsopp 1989:216-217) as one of the regions surrounding the land of Judah namely, 1. Hauran (cfr Ezk 47:16, 18) east of the Sea of Galilee; 2. Horonaim, in Moab (cfr Jr 48:34); or 3. Upper/Lower Beth Horon, two key cities 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem (cfr Jos 10:10; 16:3, 5; 1 Macc 3:16; 7:39). Sanballat was the leading political opponent of Nehemiah (cfr Neh 2:19; 4:1, 7; 6:1-2, 5, 12, 14; 13:28). He also held a position as the governor of Samaria (cfr Neh 4:1-2).

¹¹⁵ Geshem is thought to have been in charge of North Arabian confederacy which covers northeast Egypt to North Arabia and southern Palestine (cfr footnotes in *NIV Study Bible* 1995, 688-689).

portrayed in the darkest possible way. They are regarded as enemies to the cause of Yahweh and his people.

“Nehemiah unveils the plan to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls to the returned exiles (cf Neh 2:17-19). When their neighbors or alleged enemies heard the plan, they began to oppose the whole mission. What was their motive for their opposition? Grabbe (1998b:161) has suggested that, the fundamental motivation to this opposition was the exercise of political authority over the Judean region. Prior to Nehemiah’s coming, the state of Samaria exercised some form of temporary authority over the affairs of the Judean region. But this situation was later discontinued”.¹¹⁶

Nehemiah was convinced that the God of heaven would grant success to his servants who rebuilt the wall (cf Neh 2:20). But he made a statement from the last part of the verse which seems to have no prior reference. He argued that these alleged enemies (i.e., Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem) had no share in Jerusalem or in any claim or historical right to Jerusalem.

As the work on reconstructing the wall progressed, the narrator from an exclusive theological standpoint, wasted no time in letting the reader know that foreigners constituted a major anti-Jewish force in their attempt to halt Yahweh’s work (cf Neh 4:1-23 & 6:1-19). Nehemiah was not scared, rather he prayed to his God and organized his people to face this threat. Finally, the mission was accomplished. Foreigners were led to admit that the work was possible through the hand of God (cf Neh 6:16).

The text made it obvious that those who participated in the religious assembly had separated from foreigners (cf Neh 9:2). This incident logically excluded all people of foreign descent from participating in the religious assembly. Foreigners were objects of separation from in order to qualify to participate in the penitential assembly. It was a voluntary renunciation of the connections with foreigners and of their practices. The masterly narrative of Nehemiah 9:6-31 contributed essentially to the correlation between the two main traditions of the roots of Israel – in the ancestors and in the exodus.

¹¹⁶ Emmanuel, *Theological Perspective*, 124.

3.3. Deliverance from Egypt (Vv. 10-11)

וּתְרָא אֶת־עַגְלֵי אֲבֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־זַעֲקָתָם שְׁמַעְתָּ עַל־יַם־סוּף וַתַּתֵּן אֱלֹהִים וּמִפְתָּיִם בְּפָרְעֹה וּבְכָל־עַבְדָּיו
וּבְכָל־עַם אֲרָצוֹ

כִּי יָדַעְתָּ כִּי הִזִּידוּ עָלֶיךָ וַתַּעַשׂ־לָךְ שָׁם פְּתוּזִים הֵנָּה וְהַיִּם בְּקַעַתָּה לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲבְרוּ בְּתוֹךְ־הַיָּם בַּיַּבְשָׁה
וְאֶת־רִדְפֵיהֶם הִשְׁלַכְתָּ בַּמַּצּוֹלֹת כְּמוֹ־אֲבָבוּ בְּמַיִם עֲזִים:

Exodus event which is narrated in detail in the book of exodus 1-15 is described.

3.3.1. The Relation between the Events

3.3.1.1. Syntactical Connection

A strong connection is drawn between the assembly in Jerusalem and the slaves whom God liberated from Egypt. In this strophe, we find the history connected. It is explained through the characters in the strophe. “You heard the cry and you saw the affliction (וּתְרָא אֶת־עַגְלֵי)” and “you gave the signs and wonders....”(v.10). It is the same God who created the world and made a covenant with Abraham moves to salvation of the people in Egypt. The term ‘our fathers’ (אֲבֹתֵינוּ) is the term given to the people in Egypt. This makes a direct connection between the exile community in Egypt and the people who makes the prayer.

3.3.1.2. Exegetical Connection

As the prayer in Neh 9:6-31 narrates the important events in the history of the people of Israel, this strophe begins a new episode, that happened in the land of Egypt. What is narrated in Exodus chapters 1- 15 is given in two verses. In the prayer that Nehemiah makes in chapter 1 he uses the same words תְּרָא and שְׁמַע (v.6) to describe the plight of the survivors who escaped from the captivity. The people of the captivity are described as “your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand” (Neh 1:10).

revelation of God’s name in subsequent prayers¹²⁴. God uses his dominion over all things to defeat evil, including the oppressors of his people, and to save all who trust in Him. This divine name¹²⁵ was revealed by his signs and wonders in Egypt as well as the last great wonder of the exodus: the crossing of the Red Sea (Neh 9:11).

3.3.4. *Splitting the Sea* (בְּקַעַתָּהּ)

In stating “you split (בְּקַעַתָּהּ) the sea” (Neh 9:11), the prayer makes explicit what is implicit in Ex 14:16, 21.25. God first commanded Moses to extend his staff in his hand over the sea and ordered Moses to “split it” (Ex 14:16). Then as Moses complied, God caused a fierce wind to blow all night so that the waters “were split” (Ex 14:21). Moses was merely the agent through whom God worked. But, in this prayer in Neh 9:11, Moses is not mentioned¹²⁶, and the miracle of splitting the sea is attributed directly to God himself, since it was, He, not Moses, who made a name for himself with this saving miracle. The absence of the name of Moses in this great miracle is notable.

3.3.5. *Dry ground* (יַבֵּשָׁה)

The prayer also notes that Israel passed through the sea on “dry ground” (Neh 9:11). This word occurs fourteen times in the OT. Half of these are in various descriptions of God's act of separating the seas from the land in the creation (Gen 1:9-10; Jonah 1:9), a miraculous sign by Moses (Ex 4:9), the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Is 44:3), and the peril and deliverance of Jonah (Jonah 1:13; 2:11). However, the other seven, including Neh 9:11, are in references to Israel passing through the Red Sea (Ex 14:16.22.29; 15:19; Ps 66:6) or the miraculous splitting of the Jordan so Israel could cross (Josh 4:22), which was a recapitulation of the Red Sea crossing but on a smaller scale.

¹²⁴ 2 Sam 7:23; Is 63:12, 14; Jer 32:20; Ps 106:8; Dan 9:15

¹²⁵ Occasionally the definite art. remains after a prep. when one would expect it to be syncopated. That is the case with in this verse. V. 10, gives Deut 6:24, Jer 44:22, Ezra 9:7 and 15 as examples of this same phrase with the and translates it as “as is now the case,” distinguishing it from the phrase without the which is translated “today, now translates both as “as it is this day., also translates both as “as (it still is) today”. Philip Penhalegon, “Presenting Himself as an Approved Worker: The Narratological Function of the Prayers in the Book of Nehemiah”, Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, 2012, <https://scholar.csl.edu/phd>, 73.

¹²⁶ as also in Ps 74:12-14 (cf. Ps 89:9-11).

The prayer in Nehemiah 9 uses this word to emphasize God's power in delivering his people. The same God who had created and then separated the seas and the “dry ground” (Gen 1:9-10) is able to redeem his people by splitting the sea and leading his people to victory on “dry ground” (Ex 14:16, 22, 29; 15:19). “Dry ground” (יַבֵּשָׁה), is an important term in the original description of the Red Sea crossing, since it occurs three times in the exodus account (Ex 14:16, 22, 29)¹²⁷ and once again in Moses' Song of the Sea (Ex 15:19), sung after the crossing as Israel's worshipful response. This salvation event is the background when the next generation of Israel crossed the Jordan on “dry ground” to conquer the promised land (Josh 4:22).

The final line of Neh 9:11, "you threw their pursuers into the depths like a stone in mighty waters (בְּמַצּוֹלֹת כְּמוֹ-אֶבֶן בְּמַיִם עֲזִיִּים) combines the exact wording of Ex 15:5, "they went down into the depths like a stone". This is the only place the water, in which the Egyptians sink is qualified as ‘mighty’. No other historical books qualify the water as mighty. In Exodus 15:5 the synonym of the word lordly is used.

3.3.6. Signs and Wonders

The acts of the Lord in Egypt were regarded as one of the most important saving events in the history of Israel. It was thus a common theme in the poetical description of Israel's history. If we compare these verses with the descriptions in the Pentateuch (Signs and miracles cfr Ex 7:3. For v. 11 cfr Ex 15:4.5.19; For v. 12 cfr Ex 13:21ff), it is obvious that there are certain expressions, used commonly. In fact, these expressions are base for outlining a short, compact history of those events he has deemed important for his arguments. The significance of the saving event is emphasized at the end of v. 10 with the phrase you made a name for yourself up to this day. The great and wonderful acts of God were still remembered in the days of the author. It is important for people in affliction to remember the power of their Lord over a mighty enemy like the Egyptians in times when they need salvation themselves.

¹²⁷ But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. (Exod. 14:16) and when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground (Exod. 15:19)

Whatever the concrete means for securing the escape of a relatively small group of people in Egypt, an event that remains unrecorded in Egyptian chronicles, the Israelites understood their liberation to have been an extraordinary gift by the God of Moses who had answered their cries because of the care and covenant given to Abraham, their distant forefather. Israel understands her very existence as having its source in liberation from Egypt.

3.4. Cloud, Fire, Law, Food and Drink (Vv. 12-15)

וּבַעֲמוּד עָנָן הִנְחִיתָם יוֹמָם וּבַעֲמוּד אֵשׁ לַלַּיְלָה לְהָאִיר לָהֶם אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ־בָהּ: וְעַל־הַר־סִינַי יָרְדָה וַדְּבַר עֲמֻמָּה מִשְׁמָיִם וַתִּתֵּן לָהֶם מִשְׁפָּטִים וְיִשְׂרִיב וַתּוֹרֹת אֲמַת חֻקִּים וּמִצְוֹת טוֹבִים: וְאֶת־שִׁבְת קִדְשֶׁךָ הוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם וּמִצְוֹת וְחֻקִּים וַתּוֹרֶה צִוִּיתָ לָהֶם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדְּךָ: וְלָחֶם מִשְׁמָיִם נָתַתָּה לָהֶם לֶרְעֻבָם וּמַיִם מִסֶּלַע הוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם לְצִמְאֻם וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לְבוֹא לִרְשֵׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָשָׂאתָ אֶת־יְדֶיךָ לְתֵת לָהֶם:

The journey through the wilderness after the miraculous experience of crossing the sea. Everything is provided by God.

3.4.1. *Smoke and Fire*

The column of smoke and fire (Neh 9:12) provides a movement after the events at Red Sea towards Mount Sinai since Yahweh's theophany at Sinai also was by smoke and fire (Ex 19:9, 16, 18; 24:15-18; Deut 4:11-15; 5:22-26)¹²⁸. The wording of Neh 9:12 and Ex 13:21 is largely the same verbatim expression, with adjustments made in syntax and verb forms.¹²⁹ But the chronological arrangements of the events are not equal. The column of smoke and fire is given prior to the crossing sea in Exodus, whereas the prayer in Nehemiah relates the crossing of the sea with the exodus from Egypt.

¹²⁸ The motif of the column of smoke and fire, when it is mentioned in OT reviews of Israel's history, always signals the transition from the exodus to Sinai and the wilderness. Cfr Steinmann, 540.

¹²⁹ וַיְהִינָה הַלֶּךְ לַפְּנִימָה יוֹמָם בַּעֲמוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וְלַלַּיְלָה בַּעֲמוּד אֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לָהֶם וְיָהוָה הוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם וּבַעֲמוּד עָנָן הִנְחִיתָם יוֹמָם וּבַעֲמוּד אֵשׁ לַלַּיְלָה לְהָאִיר לָהֶם אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ (Ex 13:21) וְעַל־הַר־סִינַי יָרְדָה וַדְּבַר עֲמֻמָּה מִשְׁמָיִם וַתִּתֵּן לָהֶם מִשְׁפָּטִים וְיִשְׂרִיב וַתּוֹרֹת אֲמַת חֻקִּים וּמִצְוֹת טוֹבִים: וְאֶת־שִׁבְת קִדְשֶׁךָ הוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם וּמִצְוֹת וְחֻקִּים וַתּוֹרֶה צִוִּיתָ לָהֶם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדְּךָ: וְלָחֶם מִשְׁמָיִם נָתַתָּה לָהֶם לֶרְעֻבָם וּמַיִם מִסֶּלַע הוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם לְצִמְאֻם וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לְבוֹא לִרְשֵׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָשָׂאתָ אֶת־יְדֶיךָ לְתֵת לָהֶם: (Neh 9:12).

3.4.2. *Terms of the Covenant*

The first part of Neh 9:13 is closely parallel to Ex 19:11, 20: על-... יהוה ירד יהוה ... על-... יהוה ירד יהוה על-הר סיני (Ex 19:11) יהוה ירד יהוה על-הר סיני יהוה ירד יהוה על-הר סיני (Ex 19:20) ועל הר סיני ירדתה You came down on Mount Sinai (Neh 9:13). The word for “covenant” (ברית), meaning “a legally binding relationship contracted between two parties,” first appears in the Bible with reference to God’s covenant with Noah (Gen 6:18). Later Lord established major covenants with Abraham (Gen 15: 17) and then the Israelite nation at Sinai (Ex 19-31). “The Sinai tradition is thus very important, because the sense.

The movement in this section is from God speaking directly to the people (“you ... spoke with them from heaven” Neh 9:13) to giving his commands through Moses as the covenant mediator (Neh 9:14), thereby resembling Ex 20:18-20¹³⁰. Though the Sinaitic covenant, is mentioned, it is described in its minimum form. Any details of the narration given in the book of Exodus are avoided in Neh 9:13-15. There are many elements added to the book of Exodus in the Sinaitic pericope. The call for a priestly nation and the purifying rituals are not given in the book of Nehemiah along with the description of the Sinaitic covenant.

The description of God's judgments, laws, statutes, and commands as “upright”, “true”, and “good” all in one verse (Neh 9:13) is without exact parallel anywhere in the OT. In contrast to this verse, the next one, Neh 9:14, does not have any adjectival modifiers to describe God’s Law.

The difference may reflect that in Neh 9:13 God spoke directly to the people, but in Neh 9:14 he spoke through Moses. The use of the whole list of legal terminology as we have it here is typical of Deuteronomy (cfr Deut 30:10)¹³¹. The

¹³⁰ At Sinai the Israelites asked Moses to be God’s intermediary since they were afraid to see or hear God themselves, signaling a portentous note in their relationship with Yahweh, who had come down on the mountain to give them instruction so that they might not sin (Ex 20:20).

¹³¹ Judgments (מִשְׁפָּטִים) may refer to customary law sanctioned by the Lord at Sinai. Customary law might have developed from verdicts given by local judges in the city gates. Only the judgments which are just were sanctioned by the Lord. Laws (תּוֹרָה). This term has a large variety of meanings in the semantic field in which it is used in the OT. It refers quite probably to the written part of the law of God that expresses his will. Statutes (חֻקִּים) are not only the obligations that God has given

parallel use of statutes and judgments occurs frequently in Deuteronomy (Deut 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 7:11, etc.), while the same is true of parallel use of statutes and commandments (Deut 6:2; 8:10; 10:13, etc.) The whole catalog signifies the legal prescriptions in their entirety.

3.4.3. Relation between two Covenants

Just as the Abrahamic covenant of promise was preceded by a short history of call, so too is the mosaic covenant of law preceded by a history of a call - the calling out of Egypt. The story of the exodus is the foundational experience of Israel that issues a binding relationship of the people to their God who has so graciously and with so much power delivered them from oppression. The covenant at Sinai then cannot be understood apart from the exodus events. The establishment of a covenant presumes a prior relationship that issues clarification, a response, and a recognition of the major aspects and responsibilities of the relationship.

3.4.4. Sabbath

The emphasis of the treatment of the events at Mount Sinai is the giving of the commandments, including that for the “holy Sabbath” (Neh 9:14). It features the only time Moses is named in the entire prayer. Moses is depicted as the agent of God who delivered the “commandments and statutes and Teaching” (Neh 9:14).

The only specific command mentioned is the Sabbath¹³² ordinance, traditionally numbered the Third Commandment. It enjoined Israel to sanctify the Sabbath, both because God rested on the seventh day of the original creation (Ex 20:8-11) and because God redeemed his people from bondage in Egypt (Deut 5:12-15). Thus, the Sabbath recalls both the goodness of God the Creator and the grace of God the Savior, who accomplished the exodus.¹³³

The inclusion of the Sabbath observance in the prayer signaled a renewed commitment to God and his Word. From the time that God gave the command to

to his people but are also closely connected to the promise. Commandments (תְּצַו) are the direct commandments of the Lord.

¹³² The Hebrew word *Shabbat* is easily seen to be cognate both to the Akkadian *sabatu* and to the Hebrew *shevet*, and means cease, desist, rest. Elisha Ancelvotis, “Second Temple Phronetic Jewish Law”, (*JLAS*, 16), <https://www.academia.edu>, accessed on 23-01-2023.

¹³³ cfr Steinmann, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 542.

observe the Sabbath, this perpetual day of worship and meditation on God's Word should have drawn Israel back to God at the end of every week. Yet Israel defiled the Sabbath, thereby severing its relationship with God and leading to rebellion against God (Ezek 20:13).

The only other passage to use the phrase “holy Sabbath” is Ex 16:23, which is in the middle of the account of the giving of manna from heaven (cfr Ex 31:14-15; 35:2). Thus “your holy Sabbath” in Neh 9:14 connects the Sinai events summarized in Neh 9:13-14 to God's provision of the bread from heaven in Neh 9:15.

For v. 13 cf. Ex 19 and for v. 14 Ex 31:13-17. In v. 13 the giving of the law is accentuated. It is of interest that the covenant is only mentioned in connection with Abraham. The patriarchal covenant is accentuated because of its promissory character (cfr v. 8). In both vv. 13 and 14 nothing is said of the Sinai covenant, but the stipulations are emphasized.

3.5. Molten calf and God’s Forgiveness (Vv.16- 19a)

וְהָם וְאַבְתְּיָנוּ הִגִּידוּ וַיִּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עֲרֹפֹם וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתָיִךָ וַיִּמְאַנּוּ לִשְׁמֹעַ וְלֹא־זָכְרוּ נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּהֶם וַיִּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עֲרֹפֹם וַיִּתְּנוּ־רֹאשׁ לְשׁוֹב לַעֲבֹדְתָם בְּמַרְגִּים וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהִים סְלִיחוֹת חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אֲרֹד־אֶפְיִם וְרַב־וְחֶסֶד וְלֹא עֲזַבְתָּם: אַף כִּי־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל מִסֹּכָה וַיִּאֲמְרוּ זֶה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלָה מִמִּצְרָיִם וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נִאֲצוֹת גְּדֹלוֹת:

In this verse, the main theme of the prayer is developed. The prayer describes alternatively the great acts of God and the disobedience of his people. Even after their salvation from Egypt and in spite of the fact that the Lord provided food and water the Israelites grew insolent and stubborn. Their gravest sin is also described, namely, the making of the molten calf.

3.5.1. Rebellion of People

The description of Israel’s rebellion is characterized by the accusation that they “acted arrogantly” in Neh 9:16; also Neh 9:29, which earlier described the Egyptians does toward God (Neh 9:10). The rebellion made Israel no better than the pagan Egyptians and Israel did not remember the miracles that punished the Egyptians (“they did not remember your wonders” Neh 9:17). This lack of memory is coupled with refusing to listen to God (Neh 9:16-17). And they appointed a head/leader in

order to return to their slavery in Egypt.¹³⁴ The telling of the golden calf incident contains the only words of human speech in the entire prayer (Neh 9:18). It is quoted in Ex 32:4. 8¹³⁵ (cfr 1 Ki 12:28). The only significant change in wording is that the plural “these are your gods” in Ex 32:4. 8 is changed to the singular “this is your god” in the prayer. These actions of apostasy and idolatry are unequivocally termed “great blasphemies” a charge that will be leveled again in Neh 9:26.

3.5.2. Golden Calf

The golden calf¹³⁶ narrative serves as one of the most shocking examples of idolatry¹³⁷ in the Scriptures. The Bible is filled with prohibitions against worshiping or serving other gods¹³⁸. The people of Israel believed in Yahweh and worshiped other

¹³⁴ The rebels' appointing of a leader is drawn from Num 14:4: *נִתְּנָה רֹאשׁ וְנִשְׁוֹבָה מִצְרַיִם*: Let us appoint a head/leader and return to Egypt. (Num 14:4) [*בְּמִצְרַיִם*] *וְנִתְּנָה רֹאשׁ לְשׁוֹבֵי לְעַבְדְּתָם בְּמִצְרַיִם* (Neh 9:17)

¹³⁵ He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (Exod. 32:4) they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt (Exod. 32:8)

¹³⁶ The Golden Calf represents the Egyptian bull god Apis. The fact is, as Joshua said, many Israelites worshiped other gods in Egypt. When Joshua renewed the covenant with a new generation of Israelites, he told them: “Now, therefore, revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:14). The gods that the ancestors served in Egypt probably included Apis, the bull god.

¹³⁷ There is no evidence in the Pentateuch that the patriarchs worshiped any of the gods of the land of Canaan. However, Jacob’s wives and members of his household worshiped other gods: “Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that are among you’” (Gen. 35:2).

¹³⁸ Some references out of almost one hundred references found in the Hebrew Bible forbidding the worship of pagan gods: “Do not invoke the names of other gods” (Exod. 23:13), “Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you” (Deut. 6:14). “If you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God . . . and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you” (Josh. 23:16). “The people of Israel] lusted after other gods and bowed down to them” (Judg. 2:17). “They (the people of Israel) have forsaken the Lord their God . . . and embraced other gods, worshiping them and serving them” (1 Kings 9:9).

gods in addition to the God of Israel.¹³⁹ The golden calf story in Neh 9:16-21 finds a parallel in Exodus 32 and Deut 9:7–10:11.¹⁴⁰

The story in Exodus up to this point has stressed divine deliverance, visibility, and guidance as well as the importance of exclusive worship. God has delivered the people from Egypt and visibly led them through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud and fire. While it is clear that the people are seeking a replacement for Moses as guide, they are attempting to replace YHWH as God.

There are many differences between the narration in Exodus 32 and Neh 9:18. In Exodus 32 Gods¹⁴¹ are accompanied by plural verb forms and pronouns. In turn,

¹³⁹ “For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem” (1 Kings 11:5-7). Solomon, the king who built God’s magnificent temple in Jerusalem, “followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians.” He also built temples for Chemosh and for Molech, gods to whom human sacrifices were made. Solomon died in 962 BC. Three hundred years later, in 622 BC, those temples were still on the mountain east of Jerusalem. Josiah, during his religious reform, destroyed the high places Solomon had built: “The king [Josiah] defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the Mount of Destruction, which King Solomon of Israel had built for Astarte the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites” (2 Kings 23:13). Many people in Israel worshiped at these pagan temples. During the time of Elijah, Jezebel built a temple for Baal in Samaria and brought “four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah” to serve in Baal’s temple (1 Kings 18:19). These prophets gained so many converts for their faith that Elijah believed that he was the only prophet left in Israel (1 Kings 19:10). Yahweh told Elijah that he was not alone: “I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). In a nation that had hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, only seven thousand had not bowed to Baal and had not kissed the idol representing Baal. During the time of Ezekiel, God took him to Jerusalem to see the abomination of the people. There, in the temple, Ezekiel saw all kinds of creeping things and loathsome animals portrayed on the walls of the temple. He saw women sitting at the entrance of the north gate of the house of the Lord weeping for Tammuz. He saw twenty-five men at the entrance of the temple, between the porch and the altar, with their backs to the temple of God and their faces toward the east, prostrating themselves to the sun (Ezek. 8:10-16). All these pagan forms of worship were practiced in the temple of the Lord”. Cfr. Claude Mariottini, “Monotheism and Faith in Israel”, <https://claudemariottini.com>, accessed on 10-02-2023.

¹⁴⁰ Interpretations vary on the relative chronologies of Exodus 32, 1 Kings 12, and Deuteronomy 9. Traditionally, Exodus was judged to be the oldest, but recently scholars have increasingly identified it as the most recent.

¹⁴¹ When Moses received the Ten Commandments from God, God expected the people of Israel to worship only him: “Do not have other gods besides Me” (Exod. 20:3). This commandment is a basic statement in the formation of the faith of Israel. However, the first commandment does not deny the existence of other gods. The commandment teaches that YHWH was the only God whom the Israelites should worship. The biblical text clearly shows that many people in Israel worshiped pagan gods alongside YHWH. Although there were many efforts to promote the worship of YHWH alone in Israel, it is not until the exile (Deutero-Isaiah) that the faith of Israel began

grammatically, it reads most naturally as the plural “gods”. Granted, there are scattered examples in which the abstract plural God takes plural modifiers even though it functions as singular verbs, adjectives, and participles. Nonetheless, uses of the abstract plural God with plural verbs are rare, and nowhere else is Elohim modified by a plural pronoun. Neh 9:18 uses the plural to the singular: “This is your god who brought you up from Egypt”. Some commentators argue that the grammatically plural phrase in Exodus is borrowed from the Jeroboam episode (1 Kings 12:26-30), where two golden bulls are in view, and with polemical intent. The book of Exodus chapter 32:30ff describes the events after the Golden calf incidents. Moses intercedes on behalf of the people and Lord says that there will be punishment (Cf. Ex 32:34). A plague was sent on the people (Cf. 32:35), whereas, Nehemiah 9:16b-19a repeatedly speaks of God as a merciful one. The book of Exodus seems to be more elaborated one of the Sinaitic covenant and the golden calf incident.

But the existence of another God is not as clear in Nehemiah 9:6-31, except in the first two strophes. In other strophes, God is the same and unique. The specialty of Nehemiah is that the idolatry in 9:17-18 is placed in the covering image of God’s nature of forgiving and graciousness.

3.5.3. God’s Nature

The placing of God’s disclosure of his merciful nature between two accounts of rebellion, all in the middle of the account of Israel’s wilderness wanderings, highlights his grace. The confession of God is one with forgiveness, gracious, compassionate (סְלִיחוֹת תַּנּוּן וְרַחוּם) draws on God’s own revelations about his nature in Ex 34:6-7¹⁴² and Num 14:18. In addition, it sets the tone for speaking about God’s compassion on sinners throughout the rest of the prayer (Neh 9:19, 27-28, 31). The

to reject belief in other gods and proclaim that YHWH alone was the only God, Lord, and Creator and besides him, there was no other god.

¹⁴² The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” (Exod. 34:6-7). The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation. (Num. 14:18).

conclusion from these attributes of God is short and to the point: “so you did not abandon them” (Neh 9:17), a statement resumed in Neh 9:19 (cfr Deut 31:6, 8).

The term you did not forsake them (לֹא עֲזַבְתֶּם) is placed as the bracketing to the act of casting the molten calf. The gracious nature of God covers the sin of humankind. This is, in fact, the climatic moment of the structure of the prayer.

“God exercised His compassion in order to ensure the people’s survival despite their sin: the wandering in the wilderness and the settlement of the land. The former is striking for the disparity between the people’s rebellious behavior and God’s mercies. Though God guides them in the wilderness by means of the column of cloud and fire, gives them His statutes and ordinances and feeds them with manna, brings water out of the rock (vv. 12-15), the people keep rebelling against Him as indicated by the double reference (יִקְשׁוּ אֶת־עַרְפָּתְכֶם) to this defiance in w. 16-18. Despite this behavior, God maintains a compassionate attitude towards them” (vv. 17-18). It thus asserts that God’s mercies preserved the people in the wilderness and prevented God from destroying them: “But You, being a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, long-suffering and abounding in faithfulness” (v. 17).

3.6. Cloud, Fire, Law, Food and Drinks (vv. 19b-21)

אֶת־עַמּוּד הָעָנָן לֹא־סָר מֵעֲלֵיכֶם בְּיוֹמָם לְהַנְחִיחֶם בְּהַדְרָה וְאֶת־עַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ בְּלַיְלָה לְהָאִיר לָהֶם וְאֶת־הַדְרָה
 אֲשֶׁר יִלְכוּ־בָהּ: וְרוּחַ הַטּוֹבָה נָתַתָּ לְהַשְׁפִּילָם וּמַנְהִיגָם לֹא־מִנְעֶת מִפִּיָּהֶם וַיְמִים נִתְּתָה לָהֶם לְצַמְאָם: וְאֶרְבָּעִים
 שָׁנָה כָּל־כַּלְתֶּם בַּמִּדְבָּר לֹא חָסְרוּ שְׁלֵמֹתֵיכֶם לֹא בָלוּ וְרַגְלֵיכֶם לֹא בָצַק

The chiasmic structure of the prayer prompts us to see the repetition of the providence of God as the downward step toward the climax of the central theme. The column of fire and cloud and the provision of food and the instruction with good spirit continue with the same wording. There are differences. The differences are because the story goes forward.

The verses return to God's mercy, recounting specific ways in which he “did not abandon” Israel (Neh 9:19, repeated from Neh 9:17). He continued to guide them with the column of smoke and fire (as in Neh 9:12). He gave them his good Spirit (וְרוּחַ הַטּוֹבָה) as spoken again in Num 11:16-25 and Deut 34:9). By giving this, the

prayer takes history to the time of Joshua and Judges. He continued to give them manna and water (as in Neh 9:15). He sustained them for forty years (a reference to Deut 8:4; 29:4). These four specific acts summarize the patience and graciousness of God toward his people during their wilderness wanderings.

The giving of the bread was continued for forty years (Ex 16:35), as long as they traveled through the wilderness until they reached the human-inhabited land. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell (Deut.8:4) refers to the way that God led them. In Deuteronomy 32:10 we read as He sustained him in a desert land, in a howling wilderness waste; he shielded him, cared for him, and guarded him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young; it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions. the LORD alone guided him (Deut. 32:10-12).

3.6.1. Summary of the Exodus Journey

From v.9 to v. 21 we see a progression on behalf of the book of Exodus. In other words, these are the summary of the Exodus journey. From the slavery of Egypt God called the people and through the wilderness journey, He brought them to the land that He promised to Abraham and his descendants. Exodus 15:17 states the same event, “You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your possession, the place, O Lord, that you made your abode,”. The accusative form of the pronoun ‘them’ refers to the people who were redeemed (Cf. Ex15:13) from Egypt (Cf. Ex. 15:4-10).

3.7. Possession of the Land (v. 22)

וּבְנֵיהֶם הָרְבִיתָ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וַתְּבִיאֵם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־אָמַרְתָּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְכוּא לְרִשְׁתָּ:

Here we have a description of the conquest of the Holy Land. The author emphasizes that the Lord gave them the land. Nothing is said of the valor and guile of Joshua. This is typical tradition. The account of the conquest begins with the events of Num 21:21-35 and Deut 2:24-3:22, which narrate the capture of the land east of the Jordan River¹⁴³. The promise to Abraham that God would multiply their descendants like the stars of heaven (Gen 15:5; 22:17; 26:4) was already partially fulfilled before

¹⁴³ Steinmann, *Ezra- Nehemiah*, 543.

Israel entered the land. Therefore, it was appropriate for the author to mention that promise as they recounted how Israel was brought to the land in fulfillment of the land promised to the ancestors (Neh 9:23; cf. Neh 9:8).

Every corner (לְפֶאֱהָ) refers that the land conquered in totality. Battle after battle God gave them victory as they conquer the land from south (Josh 9–10) to north (Josh 11). Even though much of the land still is to be conquered (Josh 13:1–6; 18:3; 23:4–5), God has been faithful in fighting alongside Israel and giving them possession of every land, they set to conquer up to that point (Josh 21:44–45; 23:3–4,9–10,14). The allotment of the land is done according to His commands and each tribe receives a lot.

God also gives Israel blessings. As soon as they get into Canaan, the Lord stops the provision of manna as they can now eat the produce of the land because of the richness of the soil and abundance of food in the land (Josh 5:11–12; 24:13). God also blesses them with a time of peace so they can rest and enjoy their newly possessed land after a long journey and many battles (Josh 11:23). God specifically blesses Joshua with success and fame (Josh 6:27).

3.8. Stiff-necked People get Punished (Vv.26-30)

וַיִּמְרְדוּ בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַכּוּ אֶת־תּוֹרַת־יְהוָה אַחֲרֵי גִבָּם וְאֶת־נְבִיאָיו הָרְגוּ אֲשֶׁר־הֶעִידוּ בָּם לֵהֲשִׁיבָם אֵלָיו וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נֶאֱצוּת גְּדוֹלָה: וַתִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד צָרִיכֵם וַיִּצְרוּ לָהֶם וּבָעֵת צָרְתֶם יִצְעֲקוּ אֵלָיו וְאַתֶּה מִשְׁמַיִם תִּשְׁמָע וְקִרְחָמֶיךָ הִרְבִּים תִּתֵּן לָהֶם מוֹשִׁיעִים וְכִנּוּחַ לָהֶם יֵשׁוּבוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע לְפָנֶיךָ וַתַּעֲזֹבֵם בְּיַד אֹיְבֵיהֶם וַיִּרְדּוּ בְּהֵם וַיִּשׁוּבוּ וַיִּזְעָקוּ וְאַתָּה מִשְׁמַיִם תִּשְׁמָע וַתַּצִּילֵם בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ רַבּוֹת עֲתִים: וַתַּעַד בְּהֵם לֵהֲשִׁיבָם אֶל־תּוֹרָתְךָ וְהִלְמָה הַזִּידוּ וְלֹא־שָׁמְעוּ לְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וּבְמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ חָטְאוּ־בָּם אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה אֲתָם וְחַנּוּהַ בְּהֵם וַיִּתְּנוּ כַתֵּף סוֹרְרֹת וְעָרְפֹם הִקְשׂוּ וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ: וַתִּמְשָׁךְ עָלֵיהֶם שָׁנִים רַבּוֹת וַתַּעַד בָּם בְּרוּחַ בְּיַד־נְבִיאָיו וְלֹא הֶאֱזִינוּ וַתִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד עַמֵּי הָאֲרָצוֹת:

Unfaithful nature of the people of Israel is described. It is the contrast to the faithful heart of Abraham in v. 7-8. We have here general references to the attitude of his people,¹⁴⁴ and their reaction to the warnings of the Lord issued throughout the history of Israel. It is a history of disobedience and total neglect of the commandments of the Lord (v. 29). The book of Judges narrates the history of this period. During this

¹⁴⁴ Cfr 1 K. 18:4, 13; 19:10, 14; 2 Chr. 24:21.

time frame, the Israelites are going through the repeated phases of rebellion against God.

The children of Israel, when conquering their allotted land failed to obey God's command to exterminate every person on their way (Deut 20:16). Many inhabitants of the pagan nations still live amongst them (Judg 1:19, 21, 27–35) and progressively lead their hearts away from God (Judg 2:2–3). Moreover, the new generation doesn't know God's precepts (Judg 2:10) and have chosen to bow to foreign gods and forsake Yahweh (Judg 2:11–13). Furthermore, their disobedience is also caused by them not listening to the warnings and teachings of the judges (Judg 2:16–19). Yahweh does not leave sin unpunished but makes the ones rebelling against Him bear the consequences of their acts. The verbs, they rebelled (וַיִּמְרְדוּ), were disobedient (וַיִּמְרְוּ) , doing evil (לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע), sinned (חָטְאוּ) are some of the examples of the nature of the people.

As the children of Israel gain consciousness of their bondage under the oppressor, they cry out to God for help (Neh 9: 27. 29; Judg 2:18; 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:7; 10:10). They repent and plead for God's mercy, recognizing that He only can provide a way for them to get out of the situation they find themselves in. God has to intervene to free His children. And God each time provides a deliverer, in the person of a judge, to free His people from enslavement. Israel's recurring rebellion underlines God's compassion and faithfulness in saving His people.

Neh 9:26-28 recounts a cycle of unfaithfulness, repentance, and restoration which is explained in details in the book of Judges (Judg 2:10-19). Neh 9:29¹⁴⁵ says that God admonished the Israelites to return to his Teaching, which is a way of restating what was said earlier about Israel, who had rejected Yahweh's Teaching, murdering the prophets who had admonished them to return to Yahweh (Neh 9:26). However, the Israelites acted arrogantly (the verb as in Neh 9:16) and refused to listen. Earlier this verb described the Egyptians' arrogance toward God (Neh 9:10), so its

¹⁴⁵ “And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your ordinances, by the observance of which a person shall live. They turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey” (Neh. 9:29).

repetition in Neh 9:16, 29 characterizes Israel as no better than the pagan Egyptians who had enslaved them.

God's judgments are those "which when a man does (them), he will live by them" (Neh 9:29). The OT contains similar promises of life. The wording here most closely resembles Lev 18:5¹⁴⁶. This verse can be read in connection with vv. 8 and 9. Abraham's faithfulness (v.8) and God's nature of fulfilling promise (v.9) is described. And vv.9-25 explained how God fulfilled the promise (word - אֶת־דְּבַר־יְיָ) given to Abraham. The covenant refers primarily to that which is made to Abraham as it was the basic one. The covenant at Sinai is the way of response from the part of the people towards the covenant made by God with Abraham and his descendants. Therefore, v.29 is given in relation to v.8 where Abraham was faithful and get the promise done. Torah and, by extension, the Sinai covenant provide the structure for the divine-human partnership introduced into this prayer through the figure of Abraham.

3.9. God is Merciful (v. 31)

וּבְרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבֵּים לֹא־עָשִׂיתָם כְּלָה וְלֹא עֲזַבְתָּם כִּי אֶל־חַנּוּן וְרַחֲוּם אַתָּה

The Babylonian captivity is the subject of Neh 9:30, and it brings to a close the historical review. While God punished Israel by giving them into the hand of "the peoples of the lands" the review ends with God's compassion in not abandoning the Judeans (as also in Neh 9:17, 19), implying that he brought them back to the land.

Thus, the prayer completes the circle of the chiasmatic structure. The prayer began with the blessing of God אֶת־הָיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ and now it closes with כִּי אֶל־חַנּוּן וְרַחֲוּם אַתָּה. The pronoun אַתָּה is placed at the beginning and at the end of the prayer. The specialty of the Semitic language especially of Hebrew, concerning the word order helps the author of the prayer to keep this rhythmic style. In v. 6 God is described as the creator of the universe. But in v.31 He is explained as gracious and merciful (חַנּוּן וְרַחֲוּם). This is the growth of understanding in the revelation of God.

¹⁴⁶ You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the Lord. (Lev. 18:5)

Neh 9:16-25 Focus on God’s character as generous and patient.

The history retold in this section covers the wandering in the wilderness and the conquering of the promised land. The key phrase in this section in vs 17: **“But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.”** The striking grammatical feature is the repetition is the alternation of “they” and “you”. Our actions and God’s are set up in sharp contrast.

Neh 9:26-31 Focus on God’s warning, disciplining and rescuing his people.

The history retold in this section covers the judges, the monarchy and the exile. The key verse is verse is 9:28 “But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion, you delivered them time after time.” This cycle is repeated throughout this section. They were disobedient, you handed them over to their enemies, they cried out to you, and you rescued them. Then they turned around and started the rebellion all over again. Concluding with verse 9:31: “But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God”.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned details clearly explain that Neh 9:6-31 (the historical review) explains the theological basis on the historical review. The blasphemous sin of the molten calf and the benevolent grace of God is the center of the entire history. The covenant with Abraham stands as the basis for all the events. The covenant with Abraham is done as he is found faithful by God. Faithfulness to God and his word is always a question to the people of God, faithful or not. People fail, but God endures with his covenant. God, the creator, and sustainer is merciful is the covering image of the entire history. The structure, through which the history is told in a way that OT history is based on this historical narration.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The study 'Historical Precedence of Nehemiah 9:6-31' which is an exegetical study focusses on the theological meaning of the pericope (Neh 9:6-31) and its historical precedence to the other books of the Old Testament. The study is divided into three chapters.

In the first chapter the pericope is identified and located as Nehemiah 9:6-31 with clear boundaries with the help of process of delimitation using historical method. The change of grammatical person (third person to second person), the additional name of Ezra in LXX in the beginning and the macro syntactic sign in the Neh 9:31 in the end are noticeable. Textual study of the variants such as LXX, Peshitta (Syriac) was helpful to fix the text from BHS is reliable. The analysis of the form the pericope explains that the pericope seems to portrait the characteristics of the poem than that of prose. The study of the structure of the pericope and the arrangements of the strophe leads to find that the pericope has a chiastic structure with main motif at the central strophe (E)¹⁴⁷. God's grace and forgiveness leads the history nevertheless the sin of man is the central theme (Neh 9:16b-19a) of the pericope.

The second chapter analyses the placement of the pericope in the entire book of Nehemiah. The need for this historical study is given as the background for the chapter. The differences in the twin book Ezra Nehemiah in their attentiveness to the exile-community is expounded in the background of Neh 9:2. The special attention given by the author or redactor of Nehemiah to the exile-community is studied in detail. As a result, we find that the book of Nehemiah as a whole gives special preferences to the *golah* community in contrast to the people of the land. The pericope Neh 9:6-31 stands as the culmination of this tension in the book of Nehemiah. The exile gets identified as the covenant community and the owners of the land. There lies the uniqueness of the pericope in three points, such as, center of the Neh 7:72-11:1, culmination of the book of Nehemiah and this pericope (Neh 9:6-31) has relation to

¹⁴⁷ The structure of the pericope is demonstrated on 29th page of this thesis.

other books. Though the pericope is in the form of prayer, it narrates the history of the people of Israel.

In third chapter different strophes are studied on the basis of its relation to the chiasmic structure drawn in first chapter. It conveys the result of the research that the pericope (Neh 9:6-31) has historical precedence to the other books. The creation, God's gracious selection of the people of Israel, the exodus event, the Sinaitic covenant and the providence in the wilderness are being explained. The sin of molten calf and God's graciousness are the central motifs of the pericope. The pericope covers a history from Genesis to the time of Judges.

Overview of the Discussion

The history which is retold in this section covers the period from creation to the time prior to the Babylonian exile, when the people were under bondage to foreign kings in their own land. The passage also demonstrating linguistic and historical signs that suggest it does not belong to this group or the same date of the author of the book of Nehemiah. On the basis of the disparity between the prayer and its introduction, an analysis of its content, linguistic elements, and the features stressed in the historical review, this paper proposes that the prayer belongs not to the Second Temple period. Instead of having the formula of prayer the pericope provides a long historical review, from creation to the conquest of the land. Nowhere in the chiasmic structure the author raises a voice of the request. Thus, it may not be regarded even as the prayer.

The matter discussed in the pericope does not correspond to the circumstance to which it is introduced. The circumstance of the pericope is the assembly of the exile community (Neh 9:1-3). The structure, words and contents of the pericope suggests that this has been taken from a prior source already existed in its final form as we have in the text. This pericope does not come from the author of other parts of the book. It is evident from the prominence given to the Abrahamic covenant. In Neh 1: 9 the author prays referring the promise given to Moses, whereas the pericope keeps a notable silence regarding Moses, unless suggested once.

There is certain gap of details in this historical review. In the creation account there is no mention of the creation of man (Gen 1:26-27, 2:1-14). If the author was familiar with the stories of Genesis, he would not have avoided the creation of man in

the image of God Himself. The greatest sin described by the author is that of the creation of molten calf (Neh 9:17) and not the sins in Genesis 3, 4 or anything of the Genesis account.

The covenant and promise (to) with Abraham is taken as the base for every relation of God towards humanity. Though there are mentions of Sinai covenant, the details of this event are avoided. We read from the book of Exodus that God reveals to Moses as God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 3:6). This revelation is not mentioned. We noticed that the pericope was used as the foundation for the Israelite identity.¹⁴⁸ The omitting of the story of Jacob who is named Israel (Gen 32: 28) helps us to think of the precedence of the pericope Genesis.

The precedents from the wilderness indicate that during their periods of trial and tribulation, when the people “acted presumptuously” and “stiffened their neck” God nonetheless refused to entertain any idea of destroying or forsaking them.

The historical review in Nehemiah 9 also omits Moses’ intercession on behalf of the people. The name of Moses is mentioned only as the mediator to give the law. This seems that the Exodus stories (not the exodus event) are colorful addition to the strong faith experience of the people about the deliverance from Egypt. The simple wording of the laws and statues given in Sinai suggest that the covenant with Abraham still stands more based to the author. And the promise of the land is more important than the tabernacle and the sacrifices related to it. The author presents a general historical survey, without reference to any concrete events, reminiscent of the historiographical framework of the book of Judges. The absence of the names of the prominent kings of Israel as well as Judah is noteworthy. It suggests that the legends of the selection of the kings (Saul in 1 Sam 9 and David in 1 Sam 16) and their victorious stories were not at all interested to the author.

All the above-mentioned evidences suggest that the pericope Neh 9:6-31 seems to have historical precedence to the other historical book of the Old Testament.

¹⁴⁸ Chapter Two (Historical Analysis) concluded with this argument.

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