2-1-2012

Presenting Himself as an Approved Worker: The Narratological Function of the Prayers in the Book of Nehemiah

Philip Penhallegon
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, penhallegonp@csl.edu

PRESENTING HIMSELF AS AN APPROVED WORKER: THE NARRATOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF THE PRAYERS IN THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Biblical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Philip Werth Penhallegon
February 2012

Approved by _____
Dr. Andrew H. Bartelt Advisor

_____
Dr. R. Reed Lessing Reader

_____
Dr. David R. Schmitt Reader

To Gretchen, my עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדִּי of 20 years, without whose partnership and support this dissertation would not have come to completion.

זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהַי וְחוּסָה עָלַי כְּרֹב חַסְדֶּךָ

Nehemiah 13:22b

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the end of a project such as this, it is humbling to realize how many others took part and how much is owed to them. I can hardly begin to name them all or give proper credit where it is due.

From an academic standpoint I must recognize Dr. Andy Bartelt, my mentor and advisor of many years, who bravely agreed to journey with me into the worlds of Hebrew Prayer, narrative analysis, and Nehemiah. Dr. Reed Lessing served as a careful reader while also helping me navigate my way through some of the rocks and shoals that can sink a dissertation. Dr. Jeff Gibbs served on my proposal committee and has been another long time mentor and friend. Dr. David Schmitt improved this work greatly by pushing me to further my understanding and expression of narratology. His depth of insight is inspiring. Dr. Andy Steinmann's fine commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah was of great help to me, and his willingness to read and interact with my proposal is greatly appreciated. Finally, a debt of gratitude is owed to Dr. Bruce Schuchard (and his family) for hours of conversation and for a home away from home on a variety of occasions.

From a technical standpoint, four people deserve special mention. Ruth Boeder, a former student and assistant librarian at Concordia University Ann Arbor, repeatedly helped me locate and obtain resources. Steve Perrault assisted me through the quagmire of creating and inserting illustrations. Deaconess Ruth McDonnell in the Advanced Studies Department at Concordia Seminary has been instrumental in the end stages of my work, and Krista Whittenberg, formerly the Assistant for Advanced Studies, whose precision and clarity is greatly appreciated and who patiently endured many a question along the way.

No less important and far greater in number are those whose support I have received on a personal level, whether by prayer, encouragement, financial support, or a combination thereof. These include the people of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Glencoe, MN, and of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Milan, MI; the kids and staff of St. Paul Lutheran Church and School in Ann Arbor, MI; the members of our Christ Care Bible study group; my students and colleagues at CUAA, especially Drs. Kevin Brandon, Richard Shuta, and Carl Rockrohr as well as my longtime friend and colleague, Prof. Charles Schulz. The support and understanding of various administrators has also been invaluable and very much appreciated. These include Drs. Tom Ahlersmeyer, Mark Looker, Dennis Genig, Rusty Nichols, Ross Stueber, Mr. Randy Luecke and Director Suzy Siegle.

Finally, there are those who are closest and whose lives have been affected the most. Thanks to my parents, Richard and Karen Penhallegon, and my sister, Richelle Schultz, who have always believed in me, supporting and encouraging me in everything I have ever tried. Thanks also to my father in law, Dr. Len Bassett, my good friend, Dr. Barry Pyle, both of whom "have been there" and helped me keep perspective along the way, and Rev. Ron Mudge who has been in the race with me and will finish soon. Loving thanks to my children, Benjamin, Micah, Gabriel, and Abigail, gifts of God who have never known me without a dissertation on my mind and who have shown me incredible love and support in the process. And finally, my unending love and thanks to Gretchen, my wife and partner in this and all things.

To God alone be the glory, and may He remember all of these people (and those whom I have failed to mention) for good.

COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Penhallegon, Philip W. "Presenting Himself as an Approved Worker: The Narratological Function of the Prayers in the Book of Nehemiah." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2012. 240 pp.

Prayer can serve as a key feature with important functions in a narrative text. The abundant prayers in Nehemiah and the lack of scholarly attention to their function within the narrative suggest the need for fresh research into this question. This dissertation addresses the question, "Given the prominence of prayers in the book of Nehemiah, how do the various prayers function in the narrative?"

The exploration of that question has resulted in the following thesis: Attention to the narratological function of the prayers in the book of Nehemiah reveals that the book is Nehemiah's *apologia*—his appeal to God in which he argues that he should be remembered as a faithful servant. This attention to the prayers improves upon former narrative readings of Nehemiah by recognizing the apologetic nature of the book and demonstrating a greater coherence than has been recognized formerly. It also helps distinguish the book from Ezra with which it is often combined.

Chapter 1 demonstrates the need for this study and sets it into its scholarly context. Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of narrative analysis as well as preliminary application to the book of Nehemiah. Chapter 3 provides a detailed exegetical treatment of each prayer in the book of Nehemiah in narrative order and then classifies the prayers as recorded, reported, and interjected. Chapter 4 gives a narrative reading of Nehemiah, giving special attention to the function of the prayers and their effect upon the narrative whole. The prayers are found to be an integral part of the compositional and narrative strategy. Some of the prayers are important to the story being told while a distinctive subset, the remember prayers, provide the interpretive key to the entire narrative. This reading demonstrates that the book of Nehemiah can be read and understood as Nehemiah's apologia to God to be remembered as a faithful servant. In so doing it shows that Nehemiah has coherence of its own, apart from Ezra and Chronicles. Finally, chapter 5 summarizes the outcomes of this study and expounds on some of the scholarly implications resulting from this dissertation's work.

INTRODUCTION AND THESIS

As one reads through the book of Nehemiah, even the casual reader notices the pervasive presence of prayer in the narrative. In 13 chapters there are 13 instances of prayer of various types and lengths, including one of the longest prayers of the Old Testament, the penitential prayer of Neh 9. Another lengthy and carefully constructed penitential prayer is recorded in Neh 1. Most memorable, perhaps, are the six prayers (5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31) that interrupt the flow of the story, calling out for remembrance. Four of these (13:14, 22, 29, 31) are in the last chapter; one of which concludes the book. Two other prayers (3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5] and 6:9) are similar but have been debated and will require some special attention. There are also three occasions (1:4, 2:4, and 4:3 [ET 4:9]) in which the act of prayer is reported without recording the words. Noticing these prayers in all of their variety, the attentive reader will go on to ask how the various prayers function in the narrative.

The Precedent for Studying the Function of Prayers in Narrative

The topic of the narratological function of prayer in Hebrew narrative has been addressed ably in the work of Sabine van den Eynde,[1] inspired by the work of both Patrick D. Miller[2] and

[1] Sabine van den Eynde, "Crying to God: Prayer and Plot in the Book of Judith," *Biblica* 85 (2004): 217–31; idem "Prayer as Part of Characterization and Plot: An Analysis of Its Narrative Function in Tobit 3," in *Analyse narrative et Bible* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2005): 527–36. According to n. 3 on p. 217 of "Crying to God," Eynde was Postdoctoral Fellow of the Fund of Scientific Research Flanders at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium).

[2] Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

Samuel E. Balentine.[3] Eynde's 2004 and 2005 post doctoral writings on the apocryphal books of Judith and Tobit are important to this dissertation in terms of both precedent and method.

Earlier work has suggested the connection of prayers to plot and characterization. In his 1994 form critical work on the prayers of the HB, Miller stated, "Almost any address to God functions as prayer . . . virtually every such address is perceived as receiving either an explicit or implicit response from God."[4] With that in mind Eynde responds, "This statement is a challenge for the narrative analysis of biblical texts. At least it implies that prayers and praying have a function as regards the plot of a story."[5]

In regard to characterization, in a 1983 lecture, Moshe Greenberg wrote, "Study of the narrative art of the Scriptures has something to gain from attention to the embedded prose prayers. Because the embedded prayers are tailored to their circumstances they can serve to delineate character."[6] Building on this suggestion of Greenberg, Balentine has suggested that scholars have not paid enough attention to the prayers in the prose narratives.[7] After referencing this statement of Greenberg, Balentine furthers it by saying, "Although [Greenberg] does not particularly press the observation in this direction, one could logically extend Greenberg's comments on characterization to include the possibility that prayers serve also as literary vehicles for portraying God."[8] He then includes two lengthy chapters on prayer and

---

[3] Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

[4] Miller, *They Cried*, 33.

[5] Eynde, "Crying to God," 217.

[6] Moshe Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Prayer: As a Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel* (The Taubman Lectures in Jewish Studies. Sixth Series; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 46.

[7] Balentine, *Prayer in Hebrew Bible,* 18.

[8] Ibid., 25.

characterization in his work on prayer in the HB.[9] With reference to Balentine's work, Eynde agrees that "prayers colour the characterization of both the people praying and of God."[10]

Taking from Miller the idea that prayers affect plot and from Balentine the notion that prayers affect characterization, Eynde proceeds to apply these concepts to the apocryphal books of Judith and Tobit. In Tobit, Eynde limits herself to Tob 3 which includes two prose prayers comparable in length to the prayer found in Neh 1. On the other hand, in her treatment of Judith, Eynde treats all twenty-one instances of prayer, which, like the prayers in Nehemiah, are of a variety of types and lengths.[11]

Eynde's methodology offers a helpful starting point for this dissertation's work with the prayers in Nehemiah. She begins by identifying and classifying the prayers. In Tob 3 there are just the two prayers, the first by Tobit and the second by Sarah, both requesting to die. In Judith, however, the prayers are more varied and occur throughout the book. Eynde divides the prayers into four categories that will serve her analysis of plot and characterization.[12]

In her work in Tobit, Eynde begins her analysis of each prayer by giving the narrative context so that the supplications will be understood in context instead of in isolation as so often happens in form-critical studies. She then pays attention to the terminology, content and argumentation in each prayer to observe how it characterizes either Tobit or Sarah, respectively.[13]

---

[9] See Balentine, *Prayer in Hebrew Bible*, 48–117.

[10] Eynde, "Prayer in Tobit 3," 527, referring to Balentine, *Prayer in Hebrew Bible,* 48–117.

[11] Eynde, "Crying to God," 218, gives a chart that shows that the prayers essentially are of three types: prayers that are mentioned but do not include the content, prayers quoted in direct speech, and prayers that give the content in indirect speech. The prayers in Neh include the first two types but not the third. In addition, in Neh there are prayers that are not introduced. See the discussion in ch. 3.

[12] Ibid., 219–24. Her categories include, "The prayers of the people and their leaders in Jdt 4–8," "The prayer of Judith (Jdt 9; 10,1)," "Judith's prayers in the hostile camp (Jdt 11–13)," and "Prayers of blessing and praise (Jdt 13,17; Jdt 16)." It works out nicely for Eynde that similar prayers are found in relatively close proximity and can be treated in groups. This is not the case in the book of Neh.

[13] With regard to the characterization of Tobit on the basis of his prayer, Eynde, "Prayer in Tobit 3," 529–30,

This characterization is also compared and contrasted with the characterization of Tobit and Sarah outside of the prayers in the narrative context.[14] Following the characterization of each person who prays, each supplication is examined again to determine what it says or implies about God, that is, how each characterizes God.[15] Finally, after demonstrating the contribution of the prayers to the characterization of Tobit, Sarah, and God, Eynde once again works through the petitions, describing their influence on the plot of the narrative.[16]

Eynde's work with Judith is very similar to her work in Tobit, though she deals with plot first and characterization second, showing that no particular order is necessary. More importantly, she adds a section demonstrating that the prayers in Judith affect more than just the plot and characterization. She shows that the various prayers contribute to the theme of the book, namely, that God, not Nebuchadnezzar, is the true God.

---

writes, "In this prayer, Tobit comes to the fore as pious, theologically skilled, and as a representative of his (sinful) people. Tobit's piety is obvious since he relies upon his god in a situation of personal distress. He is theologically skilled, since he follows a common theological reasoning of divine retribution. The exile . . . is explained as the divine punishment for not having obeyed the commandments of YHWH. Tobit identifies himself with his forefathers, and consequently comes to the fore as a representative of his people. He identifies himself with his ancestors as regards sin and especially concerning the consequences of divine punishment. To his ancestors (and since he identifies himself with them, in a certain sense also to himself) death was a divine punishment (v. 4). Yet, Tobit personally welcomes death as a delivery from distress (v. 6)."

[14] On the basis of the narrative context surrounding Tobit's prayer, Eynde, Ibid., 530, states that "the readers will take Tobit's admission of guilt [in the prayer] as rather rhetorical. For Tobit's self-presentation emphasized his loyalty, without mentioning one mistake (though mentioning those of others)." Also, based on the context the reader "may question the ground for his request to die."

[15] Concerning the characterization of God through Sarah's prayer, Eynde, Ibid., 533, writes, "From Sarah's perspective, God is a God worthy of blessing, not only by herself, but by all his creation, not only now, but always. God's name is holy and honorable. In a certain sense, this is linked with Sarah's self-portrait: she claims not to have disgraced her name, so implicitly she claims for herself an honorable name." Eynde continues, "God has the power to take her away in death. At the same time, God may also offer her respect, pity and not reproaches. Throughout this request, God is characterized as a deity that has both the willingness and the power to grant what is asked, as well as the insight and power to decide what the best option is."

[16] Eynde, Ibid., 536, summarizes the influence of the prayers on the plot. She writes, "Both prayers influence the plot, though in two different ways. Tobit's prayer affects the plot since he builds his actions on his conviction that his prayer will be heard indeed. Sarah, on the other hand, left open the possibility that God would chose another way to solve her problem. This is what indeed happens. God turns out to have a deeper insight in the real problem and sends Rafael to heal both and to arrange a marriage between Sarah and Tobias. From this point on, two story lines ironically interfere: that of Tobit, making of the journey a quest for money, and that of God, which turns the same journey into a wedding party and a healing."

Eynde's work on Judith and Tobit puts into practice the concepts supplied by Miller and Balentine that prayers can play a part in characterization and plot development in a narrative. In her work on Judith, she goes beyond that to demonstrate that the prayers also contribute to the main theme or theological line of the book. In this way she sets the precedent for similar work in other narratives such as the book of Nehemiah. Having observed the effect of the prayers on characterization, plot, and theme, it seems quite logical to extend the analysis of the prayers to other narrative elements such as their effect on time and their contribution to point of view. All of this helps the reader to understand the overall contribution of the prayers to the narrative.

Following the precedent, and to some extent the methodology,[17] of Eynde, this dissertation analyzes the numerous prayers of the book of Nehemiah in an effort to discern their contribution to the narrative. As with the prayers in Tobit and Judith, it is found that the prayers in Nehemiah are an integral part of the compositional and narrative strategy. The distinctions among them suggest a sophisticated use of different categories of prayer for different purposes. Some are important to the story being told within the narrative while the distinctive subset mentioned above provides the interpretive key to the entire narrative.

The Thesis

The work of various scholars, most notably Eynde, demonstrates that prayer can serve as a key feature with important functions in a narrative text. The abundant prayers in Nehemiah and the lack of scholarly attention to their function within the narrative suggests the need for fresh research into this question. In sum, the work of this dissertation addresses the question, "Given

[17] See the treatment of the prayers in ch. 3. As each prayer is observed, first the narrative context is considered. After careful translation and analysis, preliminary observations are made about the way the prayer functions in the story or greater narrative. By the end of the ch., the prayers are classified into groups. In ch 4, the functions of the prayers are explored in more depth.

the prominence of prayers in the book of Nehemiah, how do the various prayers function in the narrative?"

The exploration of that question has resulted in the following thesis: Attention to the narratological function of the prayers in the book of Nehemiah reveals that the book is Nehemiah's *apologia*[18]—his appeal to God in which he argues that he should be remembered as a faithful servant. This attention to the prayers improves upon former narrative readings of the book by recognizing the apologetic nature of the book and demonstrating a greater coherence than has been recognized formerly. It also helps to distinguish the book from Ezra with which it is often combined.

Outline of the Study

Chapter 1 demonstrates the need for this study and sets it into its scholarly context. Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of the methodological procedure followed—that of narrative analysis—as well as preliminary application of the method to the book of Nehemiah. Chapter 3 provides a detailed exegetical treatment of each prayer in the book of Nehemiah in narrative order. For each prayer, the narrative context is considered. Translation and analysis follow. Structure is taken into consideration where appropriate, and preliminary observations are made regarding the contribution of the prayer to the story and to the narrative whole. Finally, the prayers are classified into three categories, useful for the argumentation of chapter 4. Chapter 4 provides a narrative reading of the book of Nehemiah, giving special attention to the function of the prayers

[18] *Apologia* is not used here in the technical sense of a genre with specified characteristics as in the Greek and Latin works contemporaneous and somewhat later than Neh. According to Sharon D. Downey, "The Evolution of the Rhetorical Genre of Apologia," *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (Winter 1993): 48, apologia in the Classical Period (1200–1201 BC) was "an obligatory speech of self-defense, in which one sought acquittal of formal accusations through logically constructed, vindictive strategies." Rather, the word is used here as a shorthand way of referring to Nehemiah's appeal to God to be remembered. No formal charges are imagined, though some have argued that with regard to the supposed Nehemiah Memoir which will be discussed below.

and their effect upon the narrative whole. This reading demonstrates that the book of Nehemiah can be read and understood as Nehemiah's apologia to God to be remembered as a faithful servant. In so doing it shows that Nehemiah has coherence of its own, apart from Ezra and Chronicles. Finally, chapter 5 serves to summarize the outcomes of this study and to expound on some of the implications resulting from this dissertation's work.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE QUESTION

Introduction and Overview

As a contribution to the study of Nehemiah, this dissertation pays careful attention to the narratological function of the various prayers found within the book of Nehemiah when it is studied as an independent literary work. No scholar has approached Nehemiah with this focus on the prayers, yet the work of this dissertation certainly responds to and builds upon a great deal of other scholarship.

First, it must be recognized that setting the parameters of a literary study is essential to the study and to its outcomes. The parameters of Nehemiah have been debated for some time. Most often, Nehemiah has been analyzed in conjunction with Ezra, Chronicles, or both. Treating Nehemiah independently as a distinct literary unit has rarely been done and is not the consensus of current scholarship; however, some have argued that it can and should be done. To locate this dissertation within this debate, an overview of how Nehemiah has been understood in relation to Ezra and to Chronicles will be undertaken, demonstrating that it is legitimate to argue for the literary coherence and integrity, and thus independence, of Nehemiah as argued here.

Second, in the past and continuing to the present, much of the work on Nehemiah has been done using traditional critical approaches such as source-, form-, and redaction-criticism. These approaches have fragmented the text, searched for original meanings of individual parts, and sought to comprehend or explain how and why the text has come to its present state. These are not the concerns of a narrative approach as taken in this dissertation; however, this body of work

cannot be ignored, and, in fact, makes several suggestive contributions that will be built upon in the current narrative reading of Nehemiah.

One such contribution is the study of the so-called Nehemiah Memoir. The extent, composition, and purpose of the memoir continue to be matters of discussion and debate. Most importantly, some have attributed to the memoir an apologetic function, a view that this dissertation asserts about the whole book of Nehemiah rather than about an hypothetically delineated portion of the text. Thus, an overview of the scholarship on the memoir will be given, setting this dissertation in the context of that former work.

Another area of contribution is the work that has been done on the various prayers in the book of Nehemiah. While none of these studies are specifically related to the narratological function of the prayers, a few of them have noted important aspects or themes of the prayers. These will be highlighted in this chapter and will provide the foundation of, or evidence for, arguments made in later chapters.

Finally, and of greatest significance to this narratological study, a few scholars have attempted narrative treatments of Nehemiah, whether alone or combined with Ezra. The work of these scholars will be examined and evaluated, especially how each understands the function of the prayers in the narrative.

Parameters—Nehemiah in Relation to Chronicles and Ezra

When a reader turns to Neh 1:1, it is natural to assume that this begins a new book. It is not apparent that the ancient texts behind a modern version bear witness to a tradition which

combined Nehemiah with the book of Ezra to form one book, called Ezra, with verse one of Nehemiah directly following Ezra 10:44.[1]

According to D. J. Clines, the earliest attestation of a division between the two books comes in the 2nd–3rd century AD work of Origen.[2] H. G. M. Williamson adds that this division was further attested by Jerome's 4th century AD Vulgate in which the books were called *I Esdras* and *II Esdras*.[3] Clines goes on to say, "Only as late as AD 1448, and under the influence of the Vulgate division, did Hebrew Bibles begin to appear with Ezra and Nehemiah distinguished."[4] Apparently it was Martin Luther who broke with the Vulgate tradition of naming the books *I* and *II Esdras*, renaming *II Esdras* as Nehemiah, probably following the Masoretic marginal note in the Hebrew text.[5] Making the entire matter more confusing is the apocryphal book labeled 1 Esdras in the Septuagint. Table 1.1, below, gives a visual overview of this nomenclature and how it changed through time and translation.[6]

---

[1] Andrew E. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Concordia Commentary; Saint Louis: Concordia, 2010), 12n6, summarizes, "The Masoretic Text considers Ezra-Nehemiah to be one book. There is no Final Masorah at the end of Ezra. The Final Masorah at the end of Nehemiah counts the total of 685 verses in Ezra-Nehemiah and states that the midpoint of 'the scroll' (the middle verse of the combined book) is Neh 3:32, as also noted by the Marginal Masorah on that verse." He also points out that "the oldest surviving LXX manuscripts treat Ezra and Nehemiah as one book." See pp. 12–14 for these and other arguments typically made for the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah.

[2] D. J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), 2, refers to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.2. There Eusebius quotes Origen's catalog of the Scriptures in which Origen lists "Esdras, First and Second in one." Arthur Cushman McGiffert, "The Church History of Eusebius," in *Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine* (ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace; vol. 1 of *NPNF*^{2}; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 272n10, comments, "The first and second books of Esdras here referred to are not the apocryphal books known by that name, but Ezra and Nehemiah, which in the Hebrew canon formed but one book, as Origen says here, but which in the LXX were separated."

[3] H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985), xxi. Williamson notes that while Jerome separated the two books, he acknowledged their unity in the Hebrew tradition.

[4] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 2.

[5] Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1979), 597–98.

[6] Table 1.1 is based, in part, on fig. 11 in Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 111.

Table 1.1. The parameters and labeling of the material in Ezra and Nehemiah

	Ezra	Nehemiah	Paraphrase of Ezra Plus Other Material
Hebrew Prior to 1448	Ezra (with Masoretic note at the beginning of the Nehemiah material)		Not Included
Septuagint	2 Esdras		1 Esdras
Origen	Esdras, First and Second in One (recognizing two books within one for the sake of keeping the Hebrew canon at 22 books)		Not Included[7]
Vulgate	1 Esdras	2 Esdras	3 Esdras
Luther	Ezra	Nehemiah	Not Included
English	Ezra	Nehemiah	1 Esdras

With the rise of critical scholarship came increased attention to the authorship and composition of many biblical books. In the early-to-mid 19th century, L. Zunz and others contended that Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah "were originally part of a single work composed by the Chronicler."[8] Conservative scholars like C. F. Keil challenged this view early on;[9] however, it became the prevailing view for at least a century. This idea was taken up, modified, and advocated by a number of scholars and is still the view of several scholars today.[10]

[7] It is possible that the content of Origen's one book of Esdras included both Ezra and Neh and the LXX 1 Esd. Because of the repetition in the material, it seems more likely that it only included Ezra and Neh as Esdras, first and second in one. See Andrew E. Steinmann, *The Oracles of God: The Old Testament Canon* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 151–56.

[8] Israel Peter Loken, "A Literary Analysis of Nehemiah" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001), 16n2, gives bibliographic information for Zunz's work. Steve L. Reynolds, "A Literary Analysis of Nehemiah (Ph.D. diss., Bob Jones University, 1994), 59, lists an 1834 work of F. C. Movers as carrying on this proposition. C. F. Keil *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (vol. 4 of *Commentary on the Old Testament;* eds. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; trans. Sophia Taylor; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866–1891; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 5, lists Ewald and Bertheau in addition to Zunz.

[9] Keil, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther,* enumerates the arguments of those who held this position on pp. 5–6 and then gives his arguments against on pp. 6–10.

[10] Loken, "Literary Analysis," 16n1, says that Albright argued that the author of all three was Ezra himself while Cross and In der Smitten "held that the books are the result of a group of editors called the chronistic school rather than the work of a single editor." In n. 3 on p. 16 he lists Myers, Archer, Clines, Haran, Fenshem, Cross and In der Smitten. I have observed that Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther,* and F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1982), hold to the Chronicler while Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-*

In the mid-to-late 20th century, common authorship of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah came to be challenged by a variety of scholars, most notably Sarah Japhat and H. G. M. Williamson, arguing that Ezra-Nehemiah was a separate work, distinct from Chronicles.[11] This has come to be the prevailing understanding of how Ezra and Nehemiah should be read and studied.[12]

Nehemiah: A Commentary (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 48, lectures the reader on misconceptions about ancient authorship. He believes that it was common for communities to author documents over expanded periods of time. Thus he would not speak a single chronicler, but he would certainly say that Chr and Ezra-Nehemiah come from the same school of thought.

[11] Sarah Japhat's 1968 article, "The Supposed Common Authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah Investigated Anew," *VT* 18 (1968): 330–71, was the first serious challenge, arguing from what she saw as linguistic differences between the works. Following Japhat's lead in analyzing linguistic and stylistic features, H. G. M. Williamson continued the challenge in his 1977 book, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 5–70, and his 1982 commentary on 1–2 Chr (NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 4–11. His 1983 article, "The Composition of Ezra i–vi," *JTS* 33, (1983): 1–30, argued that Ezra 1–6 was the last piece of Ezra-Nehemiah to be composed. Williamson's 1986 commentary, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, assumes his prior work disputing the connection of Ezra-Nehemiah with Chr. In 1987, in response to Menahem Haran's article, "Explaining the Identical Lines at the end of Chronicles and the Beginning of Ezra," *Bible Review* 2.3 (Fall 1986): 18–20, he wrote yet another defense of separate authorship in an article titled, "Did the Author of Chronicles Also Write the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah?" *Bible Review* 3.1 (Spring 1987): 56–59. In addition to the work of Japhet and Williamson, David Howard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 237n21, mentions two works of Roddy Braun, "Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah: Theology and Literary History," *SVT* 30 (1979): 52–64, and *1 Chronicles* (WBC 14; Waco, Tex: Word, 1986), xix–xxi, that contribute to the argument for a separate Ezra-Nehemiah. Mark Throntveit has also contributed to the arguments against common authorship in his article, "A Linguistic Analysis and the Question of Authorship in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah" *VT* 32 (1982): 201–16, which was a response to Robert Polzin's work, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), the first response to Japhet's initial challenge.

For a summary review of the arguments involved, see Loken, "Literary Analysis," 15–39.

[12] The work of Williamson is representative of scholars who hold to a united Ezra-Nehemiah. In his influential 1985 commentary, he enumerates "six strands of evidence that favor the unity of the two books in antiquity" which he has found in the 1897 commentary of H. E. Ryle titled *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897). He then adds a seventh strand of his own. Williamson, xxi, writes,

> (1) in order to make sense of Josephus' enumeration of the biblical books (*Contra Apionem* §40), it must be assumed that he counted Ezra and Nehemiah as one. (2) Melito, bishop of Sardis, quotes Jewish sources in Palestine which speak of the whole work as "Ezra"; cf. Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 4.26.14. (3) The Talmud includes the activities of Nehemiah in the book of Ezra and even asks, "Why, then, was the book not called by his name?" (*Bab. Sanh.* 93b; cf. *B. Bat.* 14b, where only Ezra is listed). (4) The Masoretes clearly regard the books as one because they count Neh 3.22 as the middle verse and add their annotations for the whole only at the end of Nehemiah. (5) The medieval Jewish commentators move directly from Ezra to Nehemiah without interruption; cf. the commentaries of Ibn Ezra and Rashi *ad loc.* in any Rabbinic Bible, e.g. *Biblia Rabbinica* (Jerusalem: Makor, 1972). (6) In the earliest Hebrew manuscripts the books are not divided. To this list we should add that (7) in the earliest manuscripts of the LXX the two books are treated as one.

Most literary studies of Nehemiah also take this combined approach to the book.[13] Prominent in this regard is Tamara Cohn Eskenazi whose intent was to study the book "as it has been preserved in the Masoretic tradition."[14] Setting the parameters in this way, Eskenazi finds that "the complexity of Ezra-Nehemiah gains coherence when one looks at the book's distinctive structure and discerns its major themes."[15] Other recent scholars, however, have contested her understanding of the structure and themes.[16]

The current understanding of the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah has returned to the ancient witness of the manuscripts which treated Ezra and Nehemiah as one work; although, this position has not gone unchallenged. Already in the 19th century, when Keil challenged the authorship of the Chronicler for Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah, he also argued that Ezra and Nehemiah should be considered separate works.[17] A century later R. K. Harrison, in his 1969 *Introduction to the Old Testament,* also argued that Ezra and Nehemiah should be treated as separate works.[18] Horace

---

[13] Most notable are the studies of Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) and Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1992). Shorter studies have also been done by Shemaryahu Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1987), 357–64, and Douglas Green, "Ezra-Nehemiah" in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Leland Rykan and Tremper Longman III; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993).

[14] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose,* 2.

[15] Ibid., 37. With regard to structure and themes, she asserts, "The major repetition of the list of returnees (Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7) is the clue to the structure. The opening verses of the book, i.e., the edict of Cyrus and the response to it (Ezra 1:1–6), encapsulate the major themes. Ezra 6:14 is a key verse summarizing the book by stating that the house of God was finished in accordance with the decree of God and the decree of three Persian kings."

[16] For arguments against Eskenazi's understanding of the structure, see Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 70n17; James, C. VanderKam, "Ezra-Nehemiah or Ezra and Nehemiah?" in *Priests, Prophets and Scribes: Essays on the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp* (ed. Eugene Ulrich et al.; JSOTSup 149; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 68 and 74–75; Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 16–17; and Lester L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah.* (Old Testament Readings; New York: Routledge, 1998), 97. Against her understanding that the house of God extends beyond the temple to include the whole city and its people, see VanderKam, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 69–75; Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 17–18; and David Kraemer, "On the relationship of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah" *JSOT* 59 (1993): 75.

[17] Keil, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther,* 5–10 and 91–97.

[18] R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 1136. Harrison puts forth two arguments that Ezra and Neh should be considered separate works. First he argues from the repeated list found in ch. 2 of Ezra and ch. 7 of Neh. He states, "Had the work been a unified composition, there would have

Hummel has also suggested that these two books were individual compositions before being combined.[19]

Some of these scholars who argue for the original independence of Ezra and Nehemiah would concede that both books were reworked "slightly, after they were essentially completed by Ezra and Nehemiah, respectively;"[20] however, there are other scholars who argue for the original and continued independence of the books. James C. VanderKam argues this position on the basis of language, use of sources, and themes, concluding that each of these bases leads to reading Ezra and Nehemiah separately rather than together.[21] David Kraemer is another who has argued

---

been absolutely no need whatever to repeat a lengthy list of Hebrew names." Second, he suggests reasons other than authorship that the two books might have been combined. "Nevertheless it is a fact that from a very early period the two books were recognized as one, and this may have occurred because Nehemiah continued the narrative history of Ezra, or alternatively, as Young has suggested, because of a desire to make the total number of canonical books agree with the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet." Here, Harrison footnotes p. 378 of E. J. Young's *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1960).

[19] Hummel, *Word Becoming Flesh*, 597–98. Like Harrison, Hummel cites Young's alphabetic argument as well as the lists in Ezra 2 and Neh 7. To these arguments he adds the superscription in Neh 1:1 and the marginal note of the Masoretes as evidence that these books were originally independent.

[20] Howard, *Old Testament Historical Books,* 277. He footnotes Harrison, *Introduction*, 1149–50, and Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra-Nehemiah" in *1 Kings–Job* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1988), 579–80.

[21]VanderKam, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 55–75. Ironically, VanderKam writes his essay for the independence of Ezra and Neh in a festschrift for Joseph Blenkinsopp who holds a modified version of the unified Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah position. With regard to language, VanderKam evaluates attempts that have been made to show the unity of the books on the basis of language and concludes that the evidence points to areas of both agreement and disagreement. He proceeds to show (pp. 64–65) that "there are also some rather startling differences which have not always been properly appreciated by scholars" including different names for the temple, different ways of referring to the Persian kings, the use of אלהי ישראל in Ezra but not in Neh, and others. With regard to sources, VanderKam makes two points. First, he argues (p. 66) that "Ezra quotes extensively from the official, apparently largely authentic Aramaic documents (and one Hebrew proclamation in 1.2–4) which provide imperial sanction for the restoration project," while "Nehemiah makes a few allusions to official royal documents" but "never quotes one in support of his hero's efforts at restoring the wall of Jerusalem, even though he encounters the same sort of local opposition as befell the builder and restorers in Ezra (e.g. Neh. 6.1–9)." VanderKam's second point (p. 67) about the use of sources in the two books revolves around the repeated list in Ezra 2 and Neh 7. The list of returnees is similar but not quite identical in the two instances; however, it is put to two different uses. Finally, VanderKam's third and most important piece of evidence as to the distinct authorship of Ezra and Neh has to do with the themes of Ezra. VanderKam's argument (pp. 69–70) is that "Ezra in its entirety focuses on the restoration of temple and people, while Nehemiah centers more on rewalling and repopulating Jerusalem." He especially takes to task Eskanazi who argues that Ezra-Nehemiah is about the restoration of the house of God which, for her argument, includes the city and the people. In response VanderKam, (p. 73), states, "There are many objections that could be lodged against Eskenazi's forced attempt to include Nehemiah within the scope of Ezra's themes. One of the more telling ones is that the writer of Nehemiah seems not to have been privy to this feature of his book because he continues to distinguish clearly between the house of God and the city of Jerusalem." VanderKam then goes on to enumerate at

for the separation of Ezra and Nehemiah.[22] His argument is ideological, claiming that when one reads the two books as distinct literary units, one finds that Ezra is purely a priestly book while Nehemiah is written from a scribal, pro-Torah ideology. Rather than being complementary books about the historical time period, Kraemer contends that Ezra and Nehemiah "are two competing, perhaps even contradictory (but *not* complementary) accounts of the same history."[23] Bob Becking's primary focus is Ezra, but he, too, argues for separate authorship.[24] Most recently Margaret Cohen has argued that, based on "similarities in structure and style between Nehemiah and his contemporary [5th century BCE] historiographers," especially Herodotus, Nehemiah can and should "stand alone within the canon as a characteristic example of this sort of writing."[25]

To these examples of scholars who argue for Nehemiah's independence two unpublished dissertations can be added, both of which are literary studies of Nehemiah.[26] Building on the work of VanderKam and Kraemer, and adding arguments of their own, Steve L. Reynolds and Israel Peter Loken both conclude that Nehemiah has a unity of its own and should be read and studied apart from Ezra.

---

least 18 instances where he sees this distinction in Neh.

[22] Kraemer, "Relationship," 73–92.

[23] Ibid., 91–92. Emphasis his.

[24] Bob Becking, "Continuity and Community: The Belief System of the Book of Ezra," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times.* (ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpe; *OtSt* 42; Boston: Brill, 1999), 259–60.

[25] Margaret Cohen, "Leave Nehemiah Alone: Nehemiah's 'Tales' and Fifth-Century BCE Historiography," in *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader*. (ed. Mark J Boda and Paul L. Reditt; Hebrew Bible Monographs 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 56. Cohen sorts the material in Neh into "Story Telling" Tales and "Document" Tales, thereby accounting for the various materials in the book. Curiously, she thinks the Sanballat materials with the opposition refrain ויהי כאשר שמע סנבלט is a later editorial addition. Disappointing for the purpose of this dissertation is that she does not deal specifically with the various *remember* passages and how they fit into fifth c. historiography. See Steinmann's review of this entire book and specifically his concerns with Cohen's article in his RBL review of the book. Review of Mark J. Boda and Paul L. Reditt, eds., *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader, Review of Biblical Literature* (February 2009): n.p. [cited February 2009]. Online: http//www.bookreview.org/pdf/6677_7240.pdf.

[26] See Loken, "Literary Analysis," 15–50, and Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 59–77.

Limited response has been given to these scholars especially in the recent work devoted to this topic. In *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader,* nearly every article mentions or interacts with VanderKam and Kraemer's arguments for the independence of Ezra and Nehemiah. Only Cohen's article, mentioned above, argues for independence while the other 13 articles argue for the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah or Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The three response articles also are in favor of some sort of unity. As Steinmann notes in his review of the book, "It would have been helpful to have more views from those who view the two books as intended to be read as distinct works and perhaps a response from one of the leading proponents of reading the books separately, such as James VanderKam or David Kraemer."[27]

In contrast to those who argue for unity and those who argue for independence, Steinmann claims to be agnostic on the topic,[28] asserting that there is no conclusive evidence to point either way at this time. However, he does tentatively conclude that the opening of Nehemiah and the lists in Ezra 2 and Neh 7 "tip the balance in favor of Ezra and Nehemiah being separate compositions."[29]

Currently, there is no absolute consensus on how to read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The old consensus was that they were to be read as part of the larger unit consisting of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. That consensus has broken down and is now a minority view. The new majority view is that Ezra and Nehemiah are to be read together as a unit apart from the book of Chronicles, but this current majority view is by no means unchallenged. We have seen

[27] Steinmann, review of Boda and Reditt, n.p.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 21.

above that a variety of authors for a variety of reasons believe that Ezra and Nehemiah are to be read as distinct works. A visual overview of this discussion can be seen in table 1.2, below.

Table 1.2. Post-Enlightenment views on the parameters for studying Nehemiah

	Former Majority View	**Current Majority View**	**Minority View**
Approximate Dates	Mid 19th Century through Mid 20th Century	Mid 20th Century to the Present	Throughout
Parameters	Chr—Ezra—Neh	Ezra—Nehemiah	Ezra Alone Nehemiah Alone
Examples of Proponents Past and Present	Zunz Movers Ewald Berthau Albright Bright Meyers Clines Fensham Blenkinsopp	Japhat Williamson Eskenazi Throntveit Talmon Green Holmgren Grabbe Schoville Longman	Keil Harrison Hummel VanderKam Kraemer Becking Reynolds Loken Cohen (Steinmann)

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is enough to recognize the possibility that Ezra and Nehemiah were written as separate works and can legitimately be treated that way; therefore, this dissertation proceeds on those grounds, reading Nehemiah as a self-standing literary work. In so doing, one of the results is to show how the book of Nehemiah makes sense as an independent literary unit with its own unity and coherence.[30]

[30] The inevitable circularity in this process must be acknowledged. If the parameters of inquiry are set at the book of Neh alone, any coherence and unity found will support setting the parameters at the book of Neh alone. However, this is no less the case for those who decide to treat the book of Neh with the book of Ezra or with both Ezra and Chr. In addition, small portions of larger works are often chosen for literary inquiry, so even if someone disagrees that Neh should stand alone, there should be no objection to studying this smaller portion of the supposed larger work. The words of Neh 1:1 certainly indicate a new section, even if one believes the books should be studied together in the end.

Traditional Critical Issues and Contributions

The Nehemiah Memoir

Much of the discussion about the books of Ezra and Nehemiah has had to do with the identification of the sources that are assumed to underlie these books, the original purpose and meaning of those sources, and the way that these sources were supposedly used by editors or redactors in the composition of the books. On the basis of the first-person accounts and the *remember* prayers in the book of Nehemiah, scholars have proposed a *Nehemiah Memoir* (NM) or *Denkschrift* as one of the various sources used in the composition of the canonical book of Nehemiah.[31]

Various attempts have been made to identify the form and purpose of the supposed memoir in relation to other ancient Near Eastern writings. Derek Kidner[32] and H. G. M. Williamson[33] have given helpful overviews of these attempts, but the most helpful and complete is that of Clines.[34] He writes,

---

[31] The extent of the *Nehemiah Memoir* (NM) and how it came to be is a significant part of the discussion. In general, the NM is assumed to include all of the first person accounts in the book of Neh, though there is disagreement concerning certain verses. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah,* xxiv, summarizes, "Broadly speaking, this material is found in Neh 1–7; parts of 12:27–43, and 13:4–31. There is dispute about whether or not the lists in chaps. 3 and 7 (both of which have an independent origin) were included by Nehemiah; whether 11:1–2 is based on his account; about the relationship between chap. 13 and the remainder; and about the degree to which later additions may be detected elsewhere." Others have asked if the complete NM is contained in the book of Neh, or if what is there is only an excerpt. Also contested is the history of the memoir's formation. In an attempt to account for what he understands to be two different strata within the NM, Williamson has proposed a two stage development of the NM before its inclusion in the canonical book. See pp. xxvii–xxviii in his *Ezra, Nehemiah*. More recently, Jacob L. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and its Earliest Readers.* (BZAW 348; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), has suggested a much more complicated seven step process for the NM and the book as a whole. The debate continues. See, for example, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Judaism: The First Phase: The Place of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Origins of Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), especially p. 90 where he reports other possibilities.

[32] Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah.* (TOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 167–69.

[33] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxiv–xxviii; idem, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (OTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 15–20.

[34] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 4–6.

> S. Mowinckel compared the form and style of the Nehemiah source with ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions on which are narrated the king's deeds in first-person form, followed by a wish for good fortune and remembrance. . . . E. Sellin and others have been reminded, especially by the 'remember'-formula, of votive inscriptions (e.g. the inscription of Yehawmilk of Byblos, *ANET,* p. 502, . . .), while G. von Rad has seen an analogy to biographical tomb-inscriptions from Egypt. . . . Others have attributed a more legal character to the document, W. Erbt, for example, describing it as a document submitted for the defense in a lawsuit at the royal court, . . . and M. Haller as a report made by Nehemiah to Artaxerxes to safeguard himself from possible recriminations by his opponents.[35]

No agreement has been reached about the form or final purpose of the purported memoir. As Clines has said, "That one or more of the literary forms mentioned above may have been Nehemiah's prototype is quite probable, but it has not yet been clearly shown what the formal purpose of Nehemiah's memoirs was."[36]

Most helpful for the purpose of this dissertation is the work of Blenkinsopp, who follows Gerhard von Rad[37] in saying that the NM most closely resembles "late Egyptian autobiographical votive texts addressed to a deity and deposited in a temple. These are clearly apologetic and deal with the difficulties encountered and overcome in the pursuit of the author's political and religious goals."[38] In an article titled "The Mission of Udjahorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemiah," [39] Blenkinsopp notes two formal parallels between the Udjahorresnet inscription and

---

[35] Ibid., 4–5. For ease of reading, I have omitted from the quote the bibliographic information that Clines included in the text. Also helpful is Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 19–20 , where he lists English works in which one can find "English translations of ancient texts with which the NM has been compared." It is unfortunate that no one, to my knowledge, has laid out all of these comparisons in one place.

[36] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 5. Note again that all of these scholars are finding parallels to the hypothetical source called the Nehemiah Memoir and not the canonical book of Nehemiah.

[37] Gerhard von Rad, "Die Nehemia-Denkschrift," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 176–87.

[38] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 46–47.

[39] Blenkinsopp, "The Mission of Udjahorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemiah," *JBL* 106 (1987): 409–21.

the NM. First, both are autobiographical, and second, "both are punctuated by direct address to the deity with an appeal to remember the author—what von Rad called the *Gedachtnismotiv*."[40]

Blenkinsopp works through many other parallels, yet he recognizes that not all of the materials of the NM are explained by the Udjahorresnet account. "The narrative dealing with the rebuilding of the wall, with its dominant theme of opposition, has no counterpart in the Udjahorresnet inscription even though the latter is transparently apologetic."[41] The imprecatory prayers also find no parallel in the Egyptian materials. In his commentary, Blenkinsopp calls them a new development stating,

> Of these short supplications which punctuate, irregularly, the first-person narrative (3:36–37 [4:4–5]; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31) three (3:36–37 [4:4–5]; 6:14; 13:29) are directed against enemies and consist in an appeal to God to remember their evil deeds and treat them accordingly. Since this kind of appeal is not represented in the late Egyptian votive inscriptions (e.g., that of Udjahorresnet from the time of Darius), it probably results from a contamination of that form with the kind of imprecation psalm alluded to.[42]

The question of the so-called NM is a complex one. The efforts of scholars have shown the possible parallels with other ancient writings of a variety of types. Some of the parallels are closer than others; none of them is exact. Most scholars attempt to address the remember prayers, and, as Blenkinsopp has noted, the imprecatory examples of the remember prayers make that even more difficult.

As previously noted, critical scholarship has provided some beneficial insights for the study of Nehemiah and the work of this dissertation. The primary benefit of the scholarship that has been done on the so-called NM is that various scholars have recognized the apologetic nature of

---

[40] Ibid., 414–15.

[41] Ibid., 417.

[42] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 244–45. Earlier in the paragraph on p. 244, Blenkinsopp gives as examples Pss. 35; 58:7–10 [ET 6–9]; 69:23–29 [ET 22–28]; 109:6–19.

the material. Kidner notes "that Nehemiah was one of the best organized and most godly administrators to be found in Scripture," and goes on to say, "As such, it would seem to be well in character that he should keep a record of what he did, and that he should do so in the form of a report to his divine Master."[43] Williamson asserts that Nehemiah reworked his material in "a votive style" making it "into an appeal to God" rather than to humans.[44] Clines says that memoir is a misnomer, "for Nehemiah is not simply recording his reminiscences; the several appeals to God to 'remember' him (5:19; 13:14, 22, 31; cf. 6:9, 14) make it plain that the document is in some sense addressed to God."[45] Blenkinsopp, too, refers to the work of Nehemiah as an *apologia*.[46] Of course all of these scholars are referring *only* to the hypothetical memoir which served as a source document for the canonical form of the book.

This dissertation approaches the book of Nehemiah synchronically as a unified literary work. Whether or not the NM was ever a separate composition, it is now embedded into the larger book as a part of the whole. As such, the debate over the extent and composition of the NM along with the debate over its purported original form and original purpose is of no real consequence. However, the contribution of these scholars is extremely significant in their recognition that the remember prayers suggest that the work of Nehemiah is addressed to God and has an apologetic function. While they would apply that only to the supposed NM, chapter 4 of this dissertation argues that it applies to the work as a whole.

---

[43] Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 169.

[44] Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 19.

[45] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther,* 4.

[46] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 221 and 225.

Prior Study of the Prayers in Nehemiah

As Eskenazi has noted, most of the work done on the book of Nehemiah has been excavative or source-oriented.[47] For the most part, the work on the prayers has been no exception. For the purposes of this review, the prayers in the book of Nehemiah can be divided into two categories, the long prose prayers in Neh 1 and 9, and the six short remember prayers that occur in 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22b, 29, and 31.[48]

The Long Prose Prayers. The two longest prayers in the book, Neh 1:5–11a and Neh 9:5b–37 have been called *formal prayers* by Jack W. Corvin, by which he meant "consciously composed literary creations" inserted into the text by theological editors.[49] This is the standard perception of these prayers both within the commentaries and in scholarly articles. Miller classifies them as "late prose prayers," a subcategory of "prayers of confession and penitence,"[50] while Balentine calls them "prayers of penitence" in which "the theme of penitence attains clarity by being contrasted to a governing emphasis on God's sovereignty, mercy, and justice."[51]

---

[47] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 5, quoting Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 16, and Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (The Indiana Literary Biblical Series; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), n.p.

[48] The instances of reporting prayer without recording the prayer have not received separate treatment. Neither have the two remaining instances of recorded prayer in 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5]and 6:9.

[49] Jack Corvin, "A Stylistic and Functional Study of the Prose Prayers in the Historical Narrative of the Old Testament" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1974), 204.

[50] See ch. 7 of Miller, *They Cried.*

[51] Balentine, *Prayer in Hebrew Bible*, 104. See pp. 103–17 for his treatment of these prayers including an analysis of Neh 9. Interestingly, while he analyzes Neh 9 with a view to characterization, he has essentially fallen into the old camp of grouping like prayers into a genre and analyzing them as such rather than focusing on them in their narrative context.

Neh 1:5–11a

While the prayer of the Levites in Neh 9 has been treated abundantly, the shorter prayer of Nehemiah in Neh 1 has received far less attention outside of the commentaries.[52] Within the commentaries this discussion is primarily source- or form-critical and often revolves around the question of authenticity or interpolation. Even Miller and Balentine have essentially bypassed this prayer, preferring to work with the longer prayers of Dan 9, Ezra 9, and Neh 9 with which it is typically classified.[53]

Klaus Baltzer's article, "Moses Servant of God and the Servants: Text and Tradition in the Prayer of Nehemiah (Neh 1:5–11),"[54] while not about the narrative function of Nehemiah's prayer in Neh 1, is helpful for this dissertation in a number of ways. First of all, as his title suggests, Baltzer pays attention to the servant language in Nehemiah's prayer. He argues that "three levels of 'servant of God' can be distinguished in the text,"[55] that of Moses, Nehemiah, and the Israelites. The point that he is making is that in Nehemiah's prayer the people come to be called God's servants whereas in earlier texts, such as 1 Kgs 8, that terminology was reserved for the king. According to Baltzer, in the Persian period in which there is no king in Judea, this "points to an equality before God—and before the law of 'Moses, servant of God.'"[56]

---

[52] I have found only two journal articles on this prayer. See Klaus Baltzer, "Moses Servant of God and the Servants: Text and Tradition in the Prayer of Nehemiah (Neh 1:5–11)" in *The Future of Early Christianity* (ed. Birger A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 121–30, discussed below, and Epp Talstra, "The Discourse of Praying: Reading Nehemiah 1" in *Psalms and Prayers: Papers Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society of Old Testament Study and Het Oudtestamenisch Werkgezelshap in Nederland en België, Apeldorn August 2006.* (ed. Bob Becking and Eric Peels; Boston: Brill, 2007), 219–36.

[53] Henning Graf Reventlow, *Gebet im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986), 277, also gives it little attention.

[54] Baltzer, "Moses," 121–30.

[55] Ibid., 128.

[56] Ibid., 130.

Baltzer's attention to the servant theme is beneficial, yet his conclusion is only partially true. It is true that in Nehemiah's prayer Moses, Nehemiah, and the people are all called servants of God, yet portions of the book undercut the notion of equality, or at least of the ability to function as such a servant. This dissertation argues that in Neh 1 the people are called God's servants, yet Neh 5 and 13, as well as the prayer in Neh 9, show that the people fall short and need a faithful servant, Nehemiah, to restore them.

Especially beneficial are Baltzer's observations about Nehemiah as a servant throughout the book of Nehemiah. These observations are useful for the argument that Nehemiah portrays himself as a faithful servant like Moses. Baltzer writes,

> Nehemiah, Servant of God (vv. 6 and 11 [twice]). Nehemiah assumes the authority of Moses. He speaks for the Israelites (בני ישׂראל[v. 6]) on behalf of the people of God (עמך [v.10]) in prayer before God (cf. 3:36). He acts in God's name (2:20). He proclaims that "God will fight for us" (4:14), and he admonishes them to walk in the "fear of God" (5:9; cf. 13:27). In particular he sees to it that the law given through Moses is again put into effect (Nehemiah 10), and he secures its recognition at a practical level (Nehemiah 5: the redemption of slaves; 13: cleansing of the temple, organization of the cult, honoring the Sabbath).[57]

A second way Baltzer's article is helpful is that, in his "conclusions and further questions" section, he writes, "To a greater degree than is normally acknowledged, the book of Nehemiah is a literary unity, including the prayers in chapters 1 and 9."[58] The purpose of his article is not to expound that unity, yet it can be seen throughout his discussion that he understands the prayer in Neh 1 to undergird much of that unity. According to Balzer, the prayer introduces the themes of fear of Yahweh and dread before the nations, exodus and redemption, the election of Israel and their relation to the land, servanthood, repentance, and a place for Yahweh's name, all themes within the book of Nehemiah. It would have been beneficial if Baltzer had followed up on his

[57] Ibid., 128.

[58] Ibid., 129.

own suggestion and had written about this unity. This dissertation will do that to some extent as it shows the importance of the prayers for understanding the narrative.

Finally, Baltzer's work is helpful in that he defends the prayer against those who would claim it to be, on the one hand, a redaction, whether by the Deuteronomist or the Chronicler, or on the other hand, simply the "stereotypical language of prayer."[59] Instead, as he observes the language of the prayer in relation to past texts like Deut 7 and 30 and 1 Kgs 8, he demonstrates how words and phrases were intentionally adopted and adapted to fit Nehemiah's purposes.

Neh 9:5b–37

In contrast to the paucity of treatment of Nehemiah's prayer in Neh 1, the prayer of the Levites in Neh 9 has received extensive treatment. In his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, Andrew E. Steinmann has called this prayer "one of the most important prayers in Scripture" and lists twenty-two books and articles dealing with this prayer, to which more could be added.[60] The articles range from the origin and formation of the prayer, to the use of tradition in the prayer, to what Judith Newman calls the scripturalization of prayer, to the development of penitential prayer in second temple Judaism. These studies are helpful for understanding many aspects of this prayer including its structure and its relation to other portions of Scripture; however, little attention is given to the narrative context and function of the prayer.

---

[59] Ibid., 122. As an example of how many exegetes view the prayer, Baltzer (p.121n1) quotes Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (ICC 12; New York: Scribner, 1913) 188, "But it is difficult to believe that we have in vv. 5–10 the words of [Nehemiah] used. There are favourite words of the Chr[onicler] like מעל, v. 8, and the whole prayer is made up of passages and phrases from Dt. It is true that in Christian praying there is an unhappy tendency to use stock and hackneyed expressions, and so the resemblance of this prayer to others in the OT may not justify suspicion. But Neh. was a common man, and would be unlikely to use such phrases."

[60] See Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah,* 90n255. In its pre-publication form, this footnote included 30 items (note 224, pp. 157–58) showing that more information is available.

Balentine has begun this process in his treatment of the prayer, observing how the prayer characterizes God as sovereign while also being gracious and merciful.[61] His treatment, however, does not observe how the prayer characterizes the people, how it functions in the plot, or its effect on any other narrative concerns. In addition, no one has interacted with Balentine's conclusions or made further observations about the contribution of Neh 9 to the narrative whole. Building on the work of Balentine and these others, this dissertation fills that void in current scholarship.

The Remember Prayers. Six short prayers in the book of Nehemiah begin with the imperative of זכר, "remember," addressed to God.[62] These prayers share other vocabulary and have other similarities as well.[63] They have been the object of much discussion, not so much as prayers but primarily in relation to the form and function of the hypothetical NM or *Denkschrift*, as discussed above. Only Fredrick C. Holmgren has addressed this group of prayers outside of that discussion.[64]

While acknowledging that the remember prayers occur within the NM, Holmgren does not base his understanding of the prayers on that fact. In fact, with regard to the work done comparing the NM and the prayers to other ancient examples, he states that "it seems unlikely that these inscriptions by themselves give a full understanding of these remarkable passages, as Gerhard von Rad also suggests."[65]

---

[61] Balentine, *Prayer in Hebrew Bible*, 109–15.

[62] Neh 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22b, 29, 31.

[63] See fig. A1.1 and the careful analysis of these prayers in ch. 3 and in Appendix One. See also Willy Schotroff, *'Gedenken' im alten Orient und im Alten Testament: Die Wurzel ZĀKAR im semitischen Sprachreis.* (WMANT 15; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1964), 218–22.

[64] Fredrick C. Holmgren, "Remember Me; Remember Them" in *Scripture and Prayer: A Celebration for Carroll Stuhlmeyer, CP.* (ed. Carolyn Oseik and Donald Senior; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 33–45.

[65] Ibid., 36. Holmgren refers to Von Rad's "Nehemia-Denkschrift."

Instead of focusing on comparable literature outside of the HB, Holmgren focuses on the term זכר, "remember," especially as it relates to the covenant relationship. He asserts that "the covenant is a reciprocal relationship. In this relationship God expects to be remembered; however, *it also means that God has the responsibility to remember his covenant partner.*"[66] Holmgren proceeds to give examples of God's people calling on him to remember them on the basis of the covenant. Jeremiah, too, called on God to remember him as he faithfully served God amidst persecution and hardship.[67] Comparing and contrasting Jeremiah and Nehemiah, Holmgren notes that while Nehemiah's call for remembrance is somewhat different from that of Jeremiah, or, for that matter, those of the people throughout their history, the basis of the call is the same—the covenant relationship.[68] Concluding his article Holmgren writes,

> Understanding the four passages in which Nehemiah pleads with God to remember him is difficult because we stand now at a great distance from the time of Nehemiah and the situation out of which he is speaking. However, the words recorded in Neh 13:22 should be given a full hearing when one seeks to interpret these passages: "Remember this also in my favor, O God, and spare me according to the greatness of thy steadfast love (Heb. *hesed*)." Werner Kessler catches the spirit of this passage when he says that Nehemiah is not presenting himself before God as a "spotless servant who could boast about his good deeds (als makelloser Knecht der auf seine guten Taten pochen konnte)." However, Nehemiah *is* bold enough to ask God to remember him, to give thought to who he is and what he has done. But Nehemiah knows well that he is praying to the God who has maintained the covenant relationship out of a going-beyond-loyalty. His own "good deed" that is, "loyal acts"

[66] Holmgren, "Remember," 37. Emphasis his.

[67] Ibid., 41. Holmgren gives Jer 15:15 as an example.

[68] Ibid., 40–41. Holmgren writes, "Jeremiah's prayer differs from those of Nehemiah in that he appears to be pleading with God to deliver him from a desperate situation; Nehemiah, on the other hand, seems to be calling upon God to preserve memory of him. He does not want his deed to disappear unremembered into the shadows of history (cf. Qoh 9:1–15!). It may be, as is often suggested, that Nehemiah's pleas to be remembered has in mind the image of a divine book into which his name is to be entered. Nehemiah 13:14 may contain such a reference: see e.g., "wipe not out [or "erase not"; Heb. māhâ] my good deeds" (cf. Dan 7:10; Isa 65:6). Although this special character marks Nehemiah's prayer, still both Nehemiah and Jeremiah expect that their Covenant Partner should respond to their cry. In addition, both share in the community guilt, a fact that is freely confessed by Nehemiah (Neh 1:6–7), but both hope that God will take account of what they have done for him. The ground of that hope is the covenant relationship."

(Neh 13:14; Heb. *hesed*) are modeled upon the astonishing loyalty of this God who has chosen Israel and who sticks with her in spite of her rebellion.[69]

In contrast to those like Eskanazi who speak poorly of Nehemiah and his prayers for remembrance,[70] Holmgren understands them positively as based in the covenant relationship. He points out that Nehemiah is relying on God's חֶסֶד, "steadfast love," and not on his own goodness. Finally, Nehemiah's חֶסֶד is really only a reflection of God's.

Holmgren's analysis is quite helpful for the argument of this dissertation, that through the telling of his story, Nehemiah is portraying himself as a faithful servant. The narrative reading in chapter 4 makes much the same conclusion. Nehemiah does call on God to remember his faithful servitude, but in the end, he relies on God's compassion.

Nehemiah as a Narrative

As was stated above, the idea of treating Nehemiah as a narrative is not new to this dissertation. Six scholars have made notable contributions to the literary analysis of the book of Nehemiah in the past 30 years.

The studies of Eskenazi[71] and Mark A. Throntveit[72] are major works that treat Nehemiah as part of the unified Ezra-Nehemiah, while Shemaryahu Talmon[73] and Douglas Green[74] have each done a short study of Ezra-Nehemiah. Because this dissertation reads Nehemiah apart from Ezra, these works are treated only briefly here, highlighting the most important aspects of each as they relate to the current study.

---

[69] Ibid., 44–45.

[70] See the discussion of Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, below.

[71] Eskanazi, *Age of Prose*.

[72] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*.

[73] Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," 357–64.

[74] Green, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 206–15.

Two more recent works, the dissertations of Reynolds[75] and Loken,[76] have treated the book of Nehemiah as a distinct literary unit, just as this dissertation strives to do. For that reason, these two works receive a more extensive summary and analysis.

While each of these studies makes a contribution to the study of Nehemiah, each also has shortcomings, most important of which is their failure to adequately appreciate and account for the function of the various prayers, especially the *interjected* prayers,[77] in the Nehemiah narrative. A review of these studies will not only provide some helpful background and insight, but it will also demonstrate the need for the current study.

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi

Eskenazi was one of the first to apply the tools of literary analysis to Ezra-Nehemiah.[78] While this dissertation will agree with little that she has to say, her work must be acknowledged for its groundbreaking role and because it has become influential through its popularization in such a work as Dillard and Longman's *An Introduction to the Old Testament.*[79]

One key to her understanding of the book is her contention that the repeated list in Ezra 2 and Neh 7 is an intentional structuring device. She asserts that the repetition of the list forms an

---

[75] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis."

[76] Loken, "Literary Analysis."

[77] The *interjected* prayers include the remember prayers, discussed above, as well as a few others. The distinction, which is crucial for a proper reading of the narrative, is established in ch. 3 while its significance is shown in the work of ch, 4.

[78] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose.* Her 1988 book in the SBL monograph series is a revision of her 1986 dissertation. Shemaryahu Talmon's short literary analysis "Ezra and Nehemiah" came out a year later in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1987). Talmon's earlier work, "Ezra and Nehemiah (Books and Men)" in *IDBSup* (ed. Keith Crim et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 317–29, was used by Eskenazi as indicated in her bibliography, but he had not yet written his literary analysis when she wrote hers. She does acknowledge Brevard Childs' work as a step in the right direction, but his discussion is brief, and, while there may be some overlap, her concerns are literary while Childs' are canonical.

[79] Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 185.

inclusio containing the long *Process of Actualization* section.[80] However, this has been shown to be untenable by such scholars as Reynolds,[81] VanderKam,[82] and Steinmann.[83] VanderKam also disputes her enumeration of the three movements within the supposed inclusio.[84] This refutation of her structural analysis in turn undermines much of her work.

Another key to Eskenzi's work is her understanding of Ezra, Nehemiah, and the people. In her treatment of characterization, the prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah play a prominent role. As she characterizes Ezra as "a self-effacing community servant who does not impose himself and does not meddle,"[85] she uses Ezra's prayer to contrast him with Nehemiah. She writes,

> Ezra, shocked by the news [of mixed marriages], goes into mourning and prayer. The prayer (Ezra 9:6–15) is an example of his subtle, nonautocratic manner of operation. As Williamson observes, "Ezra's handling of the problem of mixed marriages is noteworthy in that, quite unlike Nehemiah (cf. Neh 13:23–27), he used no direct coercion, but rather encouraged the people to see the problem for themselves and to

[80] Applying the work of structuralist Claude Bremond to Ezra-Nehemiah, Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 38, citing Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (New Accents; New York: Routledge, 1983), 22, treats the book in three parts—"Potentiality (objective defined), Process of actualization (steps taken), Success (objective reached)." These parts equate to Ezra 1:1–4; Ezra 1:5–Neh 7:2; and Neh 8:1–13:31, respectively. In the first section, the main character—the people—is introduced as is the main event—the building of the house of God (p.39). The *Process of Actualization* itself contains three movements, each with its own three part structure of potentiality, process, and success. In the final section, Eskenazi, (p. 40) believes that "the objective has been reached and the community rejoices."

[81] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 74, points out that the lists are not identical which is hard to understand if one author or redactor is responsible for including both lists.

[82] VanderKam, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 68, claims that "Eskenazi's conclusion arises, as nearly as one can tell, from no clear indication in the text, but more from what contemporary literary criticism leads one to believe that *inclusios* achieve." He goes on to point out that the assumption behind calling the two lists an inclusio is that Ezra and Neh are actually one work.

[83] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*,16–17, calls Eskenazi's reasoning circular and goes on to say, "Furthermore, the supposed inclusio does not begin the second major section. Instead, it follows Ezra 1:5–11 which contains a narrative about the preparations to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5–8) and an inventory of the temple vessels returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:9–11), neither of which appears in Nehemiah, calling into question whether there is a purposely designed inclusio in the united Ezra-Nehemiah. This is especially troubling in light of fact that one of Eskenazi's major themes for the united book is the house of God. If the house of God is an important theme in Nehemiah, why is the inventory of temple vessels omitted in the supposed inclusio in Nehemiah?"

[84] VanderKam, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 74–75, agrees that there are three movements, but he contends that all three movements occur within the book of Ezra. In contrast to Eskenazi, he says that the three movements were those of Sheshbazar, Zerubbabel, and Ezra. Within these three movements, the themes of Ezra are concluded; the movement in Neh is similar, but, according to VanderKam, does not fit the themes of Ezra.

[85] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 139.

> formulate their own response." Ezra scorns no one, attacks no one. He does not threaten with penalties (which he is clearly authorized to impose on the basis of Ezra 7:12–26) nor does he command. He subjects only himself to repentance, fasting, and mourning. His example stirs the community's conscience and prompts the people to act.[86]

In contrast, she notes about Nehemiah,

> Whereas Ezra is always asked by others and never asks for anything, especially for himself, Nehemiah is always demanding – of God and of men. His first appearance is cluttered with demands – and these continue. He asks God's support (Neh 1:5–11; note the repetition of the imperative, "let thy ear be attentive," תהי נא אזנך קשבת, in 1:6 and 1:11) and the king's authorization (Neh 2:5). Requests typify him. His most ardent request – that he be remembered – punctuates the book (Neh 1:8, 5:19, 13:14, 22, 31). All of Nehemiah's requests keep him at the center. Even when concern for his people motivates him to journey to Jerusalem his own vested interests where not neglected.
>
> Nehemiah's prayer sets the tone for much of Nehemiah's posture: he casts himself in the line of the worthies—the true servant of God. In sharp contrast to Ezra, who throws himself upon God's mercies as one of the undeserving community, Nehemiah speaks from the perspective of one who belongs to the circle of those who love God and keep God's commandments and is therefore deserving of God's attention and support (see Neh 1:5–11, esp. v 11). The premise of his prayer is the righteousness of the one who now approaches God.[87]

By applying "reinforcement by analogy,"[88] Eskenazi concludes, "Whereas Ezra is the exemplar, Nehemiah is the foil."[89] Ezra is shown to be the "self effacing teacher of Torah,"[90] while Nehemiah is shown to be the "self-glorifying entrepreneur."[91]

In contrast to these leaders, Eskenazi places critical importance on the people in the book as they fulfill the decree of God in accordance with written documents. This emphasis on the

---

[86] Ibid., 139–40, quoting Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 133.

[87] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 145.

[88] Eskenazi, Ibid., 129, uses terminology and concepts drawn from Rimmon-Kenan, 67–70.

[89] Ibid., 144.

[90] Ibid., quoting Whedbee, "Ezra and Nehemiah: A Tale of Torah and City, of Piety and Politics," 1.

[91] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 154.

people also contrasts with past heroic leadership such as that of Moses and David. According to Eskenazi, great men do arise in Ezra-Nehemiah, but they never remain the focus.

This contention only works, however, if one follows Eskenazi in reading Ezra-Nehemiah together, denigrating Nehemiah as the self-glorifying entrepreneur who is the foil to Ezra the self effacing teacher of Torah, and relegating Neh 13, with its emphasis on Nehemiah's faithfulness and the failure of the people, to the status of a coda with no interpretive bearing on the rest of the book. Even if Ezra-Nehemiah is considered one book, Eskenazi's view of Ezra and Nehemiah can be challenged, but when the books are considered separately, as this dissertation does, Nehemiah is seen to be the focus of his work, even retaining a prominent position in the chapters narrated in the third person, while the people are shown unable to remain faithful without the influence of an important leader.

Eskenazi has helpfully advanced the study of Nehemiah by applying literary tools to the book rather than continuing the typical source- and form-critical studies prevalent before and after her work. Yet, by analyzing Ezra and Nehemiah together and not accounting for all of the narrative material in the book, she has missed the unique nature of the book of Nehemiah and the function of the prayers in that book. Even so, a number of her observations about Nehemiah based on his prayers are helpful. Though she casts Nehemiah and his prayers in a negative light as she contrasts Nehemiah to Ezra, chapter 4 will demonstrate that such a view is not necessary.

Mark A. Throntveit

Throntveit wrote his 1992 commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah in the Interpretation series, which stresses reading books more holistically and less as a verse by verse exposition.[92] While

[92] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*. One would expect Throntveit to interact somewhat with Esekenazi's work since she preceded him in approaching Ezra-Nehemiah in literary fashion; however, her work does not even appear in his bibliography. In a review of Throntveit's work in *Word & World* 13 (Winter 1993): 92–94, Raymond B. Dillard

well aware of the many historical- and source-critical challenges involved with Ezra and Nehemiah, his goal was to read Ezra-Nehemiah as a narrative. He states that his intent is a theological reading "that takes account of its character as narrative, as story, and concentrates on the final form of the text."[93] In this regard, along with Eskenazi, he has advanced the research in a helpful direction.

Structure is of great importance to Throntveit, and he has been praised for his skillful analysis of the structural devices in the book. Raymond Dillard, for example, states, "Much that used to be regarded as the grist for diachronic analysis of sources and compositional history becomes in his approach evidence of a finely contrived story."[94] This focus on structure, specifically concentric patterns and chiasm, is also a weakness of his approach. While some of his analysis is quite helpful, at other times it is rather forced. Especially problematic is that, on the basis of both historical and literary reasons, he feels compelled to move Neh 5 from its place in the final form of the text to the end of Neh 13.[95] By so doing, Throntveit has compromised the validity of the very narrative analysis that seeks to understand the text holistically. Instead of observing the text as it stands, he has reconstructed the text to what he believes to be a more original form.

---

claims that Throntveit's commentary went to press before Eskenazi's work appeared, but this cannot be correct. Eskenazi's work is the 1988 reworking of her 1986 dissertation. Throntveit includes materials as late as 1990 in his bibliography.

[93] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 3. As will be discussed in the critique below, it is necessary to realize that Throntveit's greatest weakness is that he does not hold to a reading of the text in its final form. He moves Neh 5 to follow Neh 13, arguing that it belongs there "in terms of both a historical and a literary reading of the text."

[94] Dillard, review of Mark A. Throntveit, 94.

[95] See Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 61 and 120–26 for his argumentation. Significantly, one of his reasons for moving Neh 5 is that it disrupts what he believes to be an otherwise clear concentric pattern structuring Neh 1:1–7:3. Rather than rethinking his concentric pattern or trying to understand why, if the concentric structure is valid, an author would interrupt the pattern with a full 19 verses, Throntveit simply asserts that the material does not belong. Rather, he believes it belongs with the material of Neh 13, and by moving it there he is able to construct yet one more chiastic structure. The removal of these 19 verses then calls into question the rest of his analysis of Neh 1:1–7:3 as well as his analysis of the ending of the book which he has reconstructed.

More so than Eskenazi, Throntveit pays significant attention to the prayers in Ezra-Nehemiah, especially in the Nehemiah portion where the prayers are plentiful. He does make a few insightful comments relating to the narrative functions of some of the prayers. For example, he notes that the final petition of Neh 1:5–11a "looks forward to the events of 2:1–8."[96] He also notes that the prayer in Neh 2:4 "reminds the reader of the presence of a third party, who will remain behind the scenes through the narrative."[97] Yet, his attention to the prayers is typically more theological[98] and structural[99] than narratalogical.

It is the short prayers that begin with the imperative of זכר, "remember," that are most important for Throntveit's understanding of the book. On the basis of the "the stylized remembrance formula,"[100] he believes that all of Neh 5 belongs after Neh 13 as mentioned above. It is puzzling, though, that he does not argue for Neh 6 to be relocated when it, too, contains such a prayer.

While Throntveit does give significant attention to the prayers, unfortunately, he does not explore adequately the differences between the various types of prayer in the narrative and the significance of that for the narrative. This oversight, perhaps, stems from his belief that the prayers are all redacted from various sources, having been incorporated as they were found. Yet,

---

[96] Ibid., 65.

[97] Ibid., 68.

[98] For example, on pp. 80–82, Throntveit takes up the issue of the imprecatory prayers prayed by Nehemiah at three points in the narrative. With regard to the one at Neh 3:36–37 (4:4–5 in English, which is how Throntveit refers to it), he concludes that the prayer was understandable in Nehemiah's day and context but that it should not be seen as acceptable today though it may serve to help Christians recognize their own sinful anger and their need for forgiveness.

[99] Throntveit believes the structure of both long prose prayers to be concentric with their most important points in the center, a position that will be contested in the analysis of the prayers in ch. 3. He also uses the various prayers to find or create concentric structures in his understanding of the overall structure of the book. As noted above, at times this is forced.

[100] Ibid., 123.

a straightforward narrative reading ought to pay attention to such details and explore their narrative significance, the very thing this dissertation is doing.

Shemaryahu Talmon

Writing in *The Literary Guide to the Bible,* edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, Talmon addresses Ezra and Nehemiah as a unified work.[101] Unlike the work of Eskanazi and Throntveit, Talmon's work is not an attempt at a full narrative reading. Instead, he focuses on such things as composition, structural devices, Biblical historiography, and historical scope, repeatedly reminding his reader of the composite nature of the book and that redaction has taken place.

Of most significance for the current discussion is his treatment of the prayers. Talmon's first mention of the prayers comes as he outlines the composition of the book. He sees three narrative units, each with a central character, and he claims that these three units "display a similar structure and, with one exception, are composed of the same four subunits."[102] Talmon's fourth subunit is that of "passages of a cultic or devotional nature."[103] He mentions as especially significant to this subunit Ezra's prayer of Ezra 9, Nehemiah's prayer of Neh 1, and the Levites' prayer of Neh 9 (relocated to the Ezra materials). So, for Talmon, these prayers are significant as indicators of subunits in the compositional structuring of the literary work.

Perhaps more importantly, Talmon pays brief attention to the remember prayers in his remarks on structural devices. He states, "In Nehemiah's Memoirs, for example, the end of a

[101] While dealing with Ezra-Nehemiah as a unified work, Talmon does note various arguments for originally independent authorship. See Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," 357–58.

[102] Ibid., 358. It should be noted that Talmon's four subunits only work when he removes Neh 8–9 to his Ezra Memoirs unit, leaving the NM unit as Neh 1–7 and 10–13. Also, unless I misunderstand what Talmon means by "with one exception," Talmon actually has two exceptions out of four subunits. Neither the first nor the second applies to all three of his narrative units. The fourth only applies to all three units when one moves Neh 8–9.

topical unit is recurrently marked by the *closing invocation*, 'Remember me/them, O my God' (13:22, 29; 5:19, 6:14), which is also used to close the book as a whole (13:31)."[104]

Because the current dissertation does not read Ezra and Nehemiah together, Talmon's proposal that the longer prayers mark subunits is not helpful. Yet, even if Ezra-Nehemiah were to be read as a single work, rearranging the text to a supposedly more original form does not help one read the text as it stands today. The prayer of the Levites in Neh 9 does not stand with the other materials labeled by Talmon as Ezra's Memoirs.

Talmon's point about the remember prayers functioning as "closing invocations" is helpful as far as it goes. It is true that these prayers regularly come at the end of a unit of material, but is their function solely structural? Talmon mentions that the entire book ends with one of these "closing invocations," but he fails to discuss what effect these calls for God to remember have on the work as a whole. This dissertation makes these same two observations, the significance of which is seen in chapter 4.

Douglas Green

Douglas Green, writing in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible,* edited by Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III, also treats Ezra-Nehemiah as a unified whole.[105] In his work, the influence of Eskenazi is evident throughout, especially in his belief that the people are the most important character in the book and that the "house of God" is the entire city of Jerusalem, not simply the temple.[106]

---

[103] Ibid., 359.

[104] Ibid., 359. Talmon has left Neh 13:14 out of the list but gives no reason for the omission.

[105] Green, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 206–15.

[106] Green treats the characters on pp. 210–12. With regard to the house of God, see p. 208 where he directly references Eskenazi.

An important part of Green's work has to do with characterization. Here he goes beyond Eskenazi and contends that Ezra and Nehemiah are actually flat characters with one characteristic each. It is the people who are multi-faceted and unpredictable. He writes, "They are the only actors with the potential for complex reactions to situations."[107]

That the people play an important role cannot be contested; however, following the lead of Eskenazi, Green overstates the case. Green contends that the vacillation of the people between faithfulness and apostasy gives them credibility as the main character. It could just as easily be argued that the vacillation of the people is the counter-point that allows Nehemiah to make his case to be remembered. The people are not able to fulfill their vows and need a faithful leader to call them to repentance and lead them. Green calls Nehemiah's consistent behavior "flat," but if one understands the book to be Nehemiah's argument to God that he is a faithful servant, that "flat," consistent behavior makes perfect sense, even if it does not fit Green's conception of what a round character should be like.

Another important facet of Green's work is his contention that in both halves of the book, as he envisions it, the author includes a subversion of the apparent success achieved.[108] He contends that the subversion of success leaves the reader "wondering how permanent that success will be."[109] To Green, this is the author's attempt to challenge "the original readers to

---

[107] Ibid., 212.

[108] According to Green, Ibid., 207, "Ezra-Nehemiah is a story about the building of two walls: 'Nehemiah's wall' and 'Ezra's wall.' The former is a visible wall that physically separates the 'house of God' and its inhabitants from the unclean world of the Gentiles. The latter is the invisible, spiritual wall of obedience to the Law, by which Israel was to 'separate themselves' from the unclean Gentiles." These themes of the two walls are seen again in the way he understands the arrangement of the book. Green (pp. 212–13) proposes "two distinct movements or 'chapters'", the first of which includes Ezra 1:1–Neh 6:19 and focuses on the building of Nehemiah's wall "with the people's spiritual condition as a secondary motif." He goes on to say, "The second 'chapter' (Neh. 7:1–13:31) flows out from this secondary motif to narrate the quest for a Law-observing people who will occupy the rebuilt 'house of God.'" Each of the these chapters, he claims, moves through parallel stages including an introduction in which God moves the heart of a character to action, two steps, a climax crowned by apparent success, and a final subversion of the success.

[109] Ibid., 214. Green (pp. 214–15) summarizes, "We noted at the outset that Ezra-Nehemiah is a story about

make their own story a sequel in which they rise to the occasion and remove all doubts about the security and permanence of the house of God."[110] Yet as one reads the end of the book, the focus is not on the people. Their failure is certainly recognized, but their failure and rebellion serve to highlight the actions of Nehemiah, who repeatedly calls upon God to remember him. If the ending points in any direction beyond the remembrance of Nehemiah, it begs the question of who will lead these rebellious people after Nehemiah, thereby focusing on the leader, not the people.

Most importantly for the purpose of this dissertation, Green makes absolutely no reference to the many prayers in Nehemiah, or, as he treats it, the combined work of Ezra-Nehemiah. Granted, Green's work is a short essay and cannot possibly comment on every aspect of the work, but this dissertation argues that the prayers are vital to a correct understanding of the work.

Steve Reynolds

Having reviewed the work of those who treat Ezra and Nehemiah together, we now turn to the two dissertations that treat Nehemiah alone. Because this dissertation will also treat Nehemiah independently, these two dissertations are given a more thorough summary and evaluation in the pages below.

Summary. Reynolds' 1994 dissertation titled "A Literary Analysis of Nehemiah" was the first scholarly work to attempt a narrative treatment of the book of Nehemiah as a literary unit

---

two walls. In the end both walls have been reconstructed. The boundaries that defined the people of God over against the wickedness of the Gentiles are finally in place. But the author's 'subversive' arrangement of his sources raises doubts about the quality and permanence of what the postexilic community has achieved. He leaves us with more questions than answers. Are these boundaries secure? Will the two worlds remain separate? It is as if 'To be continued' has been written at the end of the work, challenging the original readers to make their own story a sequel in which they rise to the occasion and remove all doubts about the security and permanence of the house of God."

[110] Ibid., 215.

independent of Ezra. He acknowledges the prior literary work of Throntveit and Eskenazi; however, he takes issue with each.[111]

Writing in 1994, Reynolds also argued that the then current implementation of the literary method of reading biblical texts was inconsistent and confused. His first two chapters, therefore, strive to "propose certain guidelines to clarify the legitimate nature of literary analysis from a conservative standpoint" and to "establish the proper method for conducting literary analysis."[112] The result is a very carefully defined process, described by Reynolds as "a layered approach that is a synthesis of the methodologies promoted by other literary scholars such as Shimon Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art in the Bible*) and Meir Sternberg (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*)."[113]

In this *layered approach*, the foundational first step is to identify the compositional structuring of the text. He concludes that chiasm is the basic structure, organizing the book into three parts with many subordinate chiasms. He outlines the three part structure as 1:1–7:4 which deals with the "external restoration of the city," 7:5–13:3 which deals with "the internal restoration of the people," and a "concluding section" consisting of 13:4–31.[114]

Next, Reynolds deals with temporal structuring,[115] arguing that a careful analysis and understanding of the temporal clues in the book shows the book to be the careful composition of a single author. According to Reynolds, in the early part of the book, temporal structuring creates interest and increases the attention the reader must pay to the text. In other places, like Neh 3 and

---

[111] Reynolds approves of Throntveit's analysis of compositional techniques but rightly criticizes him for shifting Neh 5 to the end of the text. His initial critique of Eskenazi is primarily theological, criticizing her low view of inspiration; however, he offers a more disciplined and substantive critique of her work as he interacts with it throughout his own.

[112] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 10–11.

[113] Steve L. Reynolds, "A Literary Analysis of Nehemiah," *Biblical Viewpoint* 28 (1994): 75.

[114] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis of Nehemiah," 77. The subordinate chiasms are analyzed in detail in ch. 4 of his dissertation.

[115] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 38.

5, temporal structuring creates foreshadowing of the success of the project even in the midst of opposition. Later in the narrative, temporal ambiguity and changes "create a large amount of interest in what could have been an uninteresting segment."[116] Further discussing the various effects of temporal structuring, Reynolds lists emphasis, suspense, curiosity, and even surprise.[117]

Next, Reynolds treats scenic structuring which "concentrates on *what* the author wrote to divide the narrative into scenes," rather than "*how* the composer arranged his material in patterns."[118] As criteria for dividing scenes, Reynolds lists change of time, change of location, change of characters, change of theme, occurrence of repetition, occurrence of chiasm, and occurrence of summary.[119] Using these criteria, Reynolds identifies twenty eight scenes, each of which is explicated in detail in the rest of his sixth chapter.[120]

Reynolds then moves to character structuring, dealing with both characterization and point of view. According to Reynolds there are four main characters in the book: Nehemiah, Ezra, the people, and the enemies. Dealing with point of view, he demonstrates that the point of view of Nehemiah as both character and narrator is shown to be determinative within the first two scenes, especially through the prayers prayed there.

In his summary of his work, Reynolds points to the themes of the entire work discovered through the foregoing analysis. The main theme of the book is restoration, both physical and spiritual, corresponding to the two main sections of the book. This restoration is related to both

---

[116] Ibid., 120.

[117] Ibid., 121–30.

[118] Ibid., 131. Note that Reynolds calls the units of text scenes. Strictly speaking, a scene occurs when narrative time and narration time are about equal, often because dialogue is taking place; however, Reynolds is simply following the example of many scholars before him who have not always kept clear the types of narration that take place in a narrative. Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible: Understanding the Bible and Its World* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004), a leading scholar on analyzing OT narrative, slips back and forth between talking of events and scenes.

[119] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 132–36.

external influences and internal institutions.[121]A second major theme he labels "The Second Entrance into Canaan,"[122] asserting a number of similarities between the post-exodus wandering and entrance into the land with the post-exilic return and restoration as found in the book of Nehemiah.[123]

Finally, Reynolds concludes that his work informs the study of Old Testament theology as well as Old Testament higher criticism. With regard to Old Testament theology, he contends that this literary study of Nehemiah shows that the people in Nehemiah's day were still operating under the old covenant which they were unable to keep. This points to the need for the new covenant promised in Jeremiah. Parallel to that, the book shows that the people need a new leader. Nehemiah did his best but was ultimately unsuccessful in keeping the people faithful. "To solve their problems, the people needed a different kind of leader who could combine the offices of prophet, priest, and king. The people needed their Messiah."[124] With regard to Old Testament criticism, Reynolds offers a final parting shot at scholars who read biblical books in fragmentary fashion. He summarizes how a literary analysis demonstrates the integrity of the work as a whole.

---

[120] Ibid., 131–71.

[121] On pp. 212–16, Reynolds describes six reversals of external influences including reversals in: leadership, relationship with the dominant foreign power, political position, the power of local opposition, the affinities of the people, and in the relationship with God. On pp. 216–18, Reynolds describes the restoration of internal institutions including the following: the people are back among the faithful, they renew the ancient ritual of assembling to hear the reading of God's law, they start to observe the feasts again, they restore the practice of national prayer, they renew their spiritual relationship with God, they allow God to decide who will inhabit Jerusalem, they reinstate the legitimate priests and Levites, they rededicate the temple, and they renew their conduct.

[122] Ibid., 218.

[123] Reynolds does this under the following headings: the presence of a gap in time between deliverance and conquest, the presence of a leader with specific skills, the establishment of a religious relationship, the presence of certified religious leadership, the remembrance of God's actions in the past, the presence of help in conquering the land, the presence of full involvement by the people, the unity of the people in the land, the presence of fulfilled prophecy. See pp. 218–25.

[124] Ibid., 230.

Reading the book of Nehemiah as a narrative whole, Reynolds has a fair amount to say about the prayers in the book. Instead of viewing the prayers as evidence for varying sources and redaction, he sees "a thematic unity that uses the long sections of lists and prayers to prove a point."[125] As Reynolds discusses the compositional structuring of the book, the prayers are a prominent part of the discussion. Throughout he uses the prayers in the chiastic structures that he observes. He also claims that both the prayers of Neh 1 and Neh 9 are themselves structured by means of chiasm, with important points in the center. Finally, the prayers are also structurally important in Reynolds' third section, 13:4–31, where he sees three parallel units, each "beginning with a time reference and ending with a prayer by Nehemiah asking God to remember him."[126]

As was mentioned above, Reynold's deals with characterization and point of view together under the topic of character structuring. He finds the prayers important for both the characterization of Nehemiah and for establishing Nehemiah's point of view as normative.

Finally, in his treatment of the themes of the book, Reynolds asserts that the prayers in 1:5–11 and in Neh 9 play a role in establishing the theme of the second entrance into Canaan. He writes,

> The prayer [1:5–11] is a major factor in establishing the correspondence between the first entrance into Canaan and the restoration. The Deuteronomic language that permeates the prayer forces the reader's attention back to the earlier episode. Nehemiah admits the sin of the people in failing to obey God's commands before he

[125] Ibid., 4.

[126] Ibid., 109. Reynolds notes in n. 20, "Most commentators will divide the first unit into two separate parts, 13:4–9, 10–14. Fensham, Slotki and Throntveit make this separation, but the structural use of a time reference followed by one of Nehemiah's short prayers gives an objective basis for dividing the chapter." What Reynolds fails to mention is another remember prayer in 13:29. He fails to account for it here and does not treat it adequately anywhere in his dissertation.

> ends with the declaration that God has gathered the people from the lands and redeemed them by his great power and strong hand.[127]

He goes on to say, "The prayer in Nehemiah 9 likewise sets up a comparison between how God had acted to both generations."[128]

Evaluation. The work of Reynolds contains much that is to be commended. There is no doubt that he has worked carefully and at length with the text of Nehemiah and has interacted with the scholarship current at the time of his writing. He accurately points out that most scholarship has dissected the book rather than reading it holistically. His evaluation of the few literary readings that had been attempted before his is essentially correct as well.

Less certain is Reynolds' claim to have established the only proper method for conducting literary analysis. His layered approach is refreshingly prescriptive, yet it is open to criticism.[129] In the end, Reynolds' confession that the Bible is inerrant and inspired drives him to look for a completely objective and foolproof way to analyze texts. Unfortunately the communication process is not so neat and tidy.

Reynolds' analysis of compositional structuring, the foundation of his analysis of the entire book, is also questionable. As noted above, Reynolds believes the main structuring device of the book of Nehemiah to be chiasm. As one observes the chiasms that Reynolds claims to have found, however, one can notice a number of the errors listed by Mark Boda calling into question Reynolds' analysis of compositional structuring in Nehemiah.[130]

---

[127] Ibid., 218–19.

[128] Ibid., 219.

[129] His progression is based upon his conception of how an author writes, first with a structural outline and so forth; however, the reader does not work as the author. The reader begins with the finished product and works backwards to isolate the various components. One could just as easily begin by looking at the temporal arrangement of a work as starting by identifying the compositional structuring. In the process of analyzing the temporal structuring, one will discover compositional markers. The same can be said for character analysis, etc.

[130] Mark J. Boda, "Chiasmus in Ubiquity: Symmetrical Mirages in Nehemiah 9," *JSOT* 71 (September 1996):

In his summary, Reynolds points to the themes of restoration and a second entrance into Canaan. Both of these observations are helpful. That one of the themes of the book is concerned with restoration is certainly established in Neh 1, especially in the prayer there. His observations about the second entrance into Canaan are somewhat helpful, especially a few of the parallels that he draws between Moses and Nehemiah.[131]

This last observation leads to an important criticism of his work. Reynolds fails to recognize the apologetic nature of the work as a whole, especially as it is evidenced in the brief remember prayers and in the units in which these occur. Already in the prayer of Neh 1, Nehemiah describes himself as God's servant, like Moses. Progressively through the work, he shows himself to be that servant. By the end, the remember prayers of Neh 13 repeatedly focus the attention on Nehemiah and his accomplishments on behalf of the people who could not remain faithful on their own. As chapter 4 of this dissertation demonstrates, while the theme of restoration is certainly present, the main theme is that of Nehemiah as God's faithful servant.

Perhaps most helpful, in his discussion of temporal structuring, Reynolds notices that the "surprise ending" in Neh 13 causes the reader to reconsider what has been read. He writes,

---

56. Boda contends that scholars are committing various errors as they find—or perhaps better stated, create—chiasms in the Hebrew Bible. A portion of the article is dedicated to listing "the most frequent errors of rhetorical analysts who have claimed chiastic structures in Hebrew compositions." As I have analyzed Reynolds' work, I have noted "lopsided design," "presupposition that centre is important," and "arbitrary labeling," just to name a few.

At this point it is should be pointed out that Throntveit and Reynolds, who both work with chiasm as a key structural device, do not agree on the chiasms in the book of Neh. If chiasm is so easily recognizable and essential, as Reynolds contends, one must ask why these two scholars have significantly different ideas about the chiasms in the book.

[131] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 219–21, notes that both are called "servant" in the prayer in Neh 1:5–11. He then goes on to list and explain seven parallels between Moses and Nehemiah including the following: (1) Both men were high ranking officials in the foreign government that controlled Israel; (2) Both men successfully interceded with the king in behalf of Israel; (3) Both men interceded with God in behalf of the people; (4) Both men faced internal and external opposition to the accomplishment of their mission; (5) Both men had an assistant who led in spiritual matters; (6) Both men still had to deal with spiritual lapses by the people while trying to maintain internal unity; and (7) Both men were leaders when Israel formally established a new relationship with God.

> The reader in no way expects what he finds in chapter 13. Instead of success, Nehemiah records the spiritual failures of the people. The recitation catches the reader by surprise. The surprise raises questions, and the reader must once again reexamine the book. Did the physical reconstruction of the city comprise the main theme of the book? If the reconstruction was not the main theme, what was? The questions force the reader to see the insufficiencies of the restoration and recognize the need for the new covenant and the new leader that Nehemiah is weaving into his narrative. The final surprise is an essential part of the shaping of the book.[132]

The point that the ending causes the reader to reexamine the whole book is most helpful. The fact that a Christian reader could easily jump from the people's failure and continual need for a strong leader to the failure of Christians and their need for the greatest leader is also true. Yet, the text as it stands, with its emphasis on Nehemiah at the end, challenges the reader to reexamine the text in terms of Nehemiah, not in terms of the Messiah, at least not at first.

Finally, a few words should be said about Reynolds' use and understanding of the prayers in Nehemiah. As has been shown above, Reynolds pays significant attention to some of the prayers in the book, most often as he deals with the compositional structuring of the book. It has also been noted, though, that his compositional structuring is often flawed. That fact calls into question the claims he makes about the various prayers. While it would be wonderful to see some of the prayers as the all important center of various chiasms, such may not be the case.

On the other hand, Reynolds' work with the prayers in relation to characterization, both positively with regard to the characterization of Nehemiah and negatively as he critiques the work of Eskenazi, is very beneficiall. His analysis of the prayers' contribution in Neh 1–2 to establishing Nehemiah's point of view as normative is also well received as are his comments regarding the contribution of the prayers to the themes of the book.

---

[132] Ibid., 127–28.

Israel Peter Loken

Summary. In his 2001 dissertation titled "A Literary Analysis of Nehemiah," Loken joined Reynolds as one who treats Nehemiah as a literary whole, independent of Ezra or Chronicles.[133] While acknowledging the prior work of Reynolds, he felt another study of Nehemiah was necessary for three reasons:

> First, the Book of Nehemiah has frequently been misunderstood because the book has often been considered to be a literary unit with the Book of Ezra. This ill-advised choice has forced interpreters to interpret the Book of Nehemiah in light of the Book of Ezra. A conclusion which jettisons a correct interpretation. Second, there is a new awareness of the role of literary techniques in historical narrative, techniques which have yet to be properly applied to the Book of Nehemiah to sufficient depth by a conservative analyst. These literary techniques have shown great promise for understanding the original purpose and intent of the author. Third, a proper literary analysis of the Book of Nehemiah reveals specific themes and a definitive message statement for the narrative. These themes have largely been overlooked in the contemporary church's exposition of the book.[134]

In this statement is an implicit condemnation of both Eskenazi's work on Ezra-Nehemiah as well as Reynolds' earlier literary analysis of Nehemiah alone.[135]

As he states in his own words, the goal of his work is "to demonstrate that the Book of Nehemiah stands as a unified independent literary work with specific themes and a definitive message," with a secondary goal "to inform the reader as to the key themes and messages of the book so that the expositor may more accurately communicate that message in their exposition of the narrative."[136] He concludes that "the message of the book is the restoration of the remnant,"[137]

---

[133] Loken, "Literary Analysis," 7, criticizes Reynolds discussion of the matter as too brief. Loken's second ch. is devoted entirely to establishing the literary independence of the book of Neh.

[134] Ibid., 11–12.

[135] On p. 6, Loken does acknowledge the work of both as having "made great strides in the literary analysis of the Book of Nehemiah" but goes on to claim "that they are deficient in a few key areas." He outlines the deficiencies on pp. 6–8 and then continues to interact with the work of both scholars throughout his own work.

[136] Ibid., 12.

[137] Ibid., 191.

and that "the key subthemes of the book included the shift of leadership from a primarily political individual to a religious group, the shift in the nation's relationship with the dominant foreign power, the shift in the nation's relationship with foreigners, and the shift in the nation's feelings of solidarity."[138] He also claims that "the examination of the style of Nehemiah reveal[s] the structural unity of the historical account."[139]

To reach his goal and make his conclusions, Loken makes use of literary analysis. Like Reynolds, he notes that there is "a great deal of disagreement among scholars as to the exact nature of literary analysis, what it is, what it can do, what it cannot do."[140] Unlike Reynolds, however, Loken does not set out to create a new or better approach. Instead he relies on the standards in the field, among whom he lists Shimon Bar-Efrat, Meir Sternberg, and Robert Alter. While he takes special note of the work of Sternberg, Loken's approach is a modified version of that put forth by Bar-Efrat and includes analyzing setting, characterization, plot, point of view, and style.[141]

More than any other writer, Loken pays attention to the literary impact of the prayers in the book. He observes the various prayers as he deals with the characterization of Nehemiah and of God and says that "Nehemiah is, above all a man of prayer"[142] whose "relationship with God can be characterized as one of servitude."[143] With reference to the characterization of God Loken

---

[138] Ibid., 191–92.

[139] Ibid., 192.

[140] Ibid., 51.

[141] Ibid., 53. In n. 6 on p. 53, Loken notes, "This listing is adapted from the list provided by Bar-Efrat. Bar-Efrat's categories are narrator, characters, plot, time and space, and style. Bar-Efrat's category of narrator is synonymous with this author's category of point of view while his category of time and space is closely related to this author's category of setting."

[142] Ibid., 108.

[143] Ibid., 107. In the next sentence, on the basis of vv. 6 and 11 in the prayer of Neh 1, Loken goes on to say, "Nehemiah clearly recognizes that he is God's servant."

writes, "The portrait of God is most easily seen through an analysis of the prayers offered to Him."[144] He then enumerates a variety of things learned about God through the prayers.[145] Loken also agrees with Reynolds that the prayers help to establish Nehemiah's point of view as normative.[146] When discussing the style of Nehemiah, Loken discusses repetition as "a technique utilized by Nehemiah to provide a sense of unity for his narrative."[147] With regard to the prayers he states, "One of the most obvious elements repeated in the account is the author's inclusion of his prayers."[148] He then concludes, "The consistent use of prayers throughout the account serves to demonstrate the unity of the narrative."[149] Discussing the use of inclusio, Loken notes that the book begins with a prayer containing the word *remember* and then ends with four *remember* prayers in a row. He asserts, "The reader of the narrative would immediately be reminded of the beginning of the story and realize that God's faithfulness was evidenced throughout the account. This inclusio serves to bring unity to the narrative."[150]

Evaluation. Loken's narrative analysis of the book of Nehemiah has much to commend it. His argument for reading Nehemiah as an independent literary work is helpful. His critique of Eskenazi's work throughout his own is appreciated, as is his critique of the work of Reynolds, though at times he fails to acknowledge his indebtedness to Reynolds for some of his thoughts and even phrases.

---

[144] Ibid., 113.

[145] Ibid., 113–15.

[146] Ibid., 155–56.

[147] Ibid., 171.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid., 172.

[150] Ibid., 183.

Also to be appreciated in his work is the attention that Loken gives to the prayers. As already noted, he recognizes the characterization of Nehemiah as God's servant. He recognizes the prayers as important for the characterization of God. He recognizes the importance of the prayers for establishing Nehemiah's point of view as normative, and he demonstrates how the prayers help to unify the narrative.

This appreciation of Loken's work must be qualified, however, because his work with the prayers also constitutes a grave weakness in his overall understanding of Nehemiah. Most importantly, like Reynolds before him, Loken fails to note that the prayers are not all the same, that they do not all occur within the story being told by the narrator. Thus, like Reynolds, Loken fails to ascertain fully the important effect that the prayers have on the narrative. In chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation, what is good in Loken's work will be built upon while a corrective will be offered with regard to his treatment of the prayers.

Conclusion

Eskenazi is a pioneer in the literary treatment of Nehemiah, though she reads it together with Ezra. Her work has been shown to be flawed in a number of ways by various scholars. Most importantly for the topic at hand, she gives very little attention to the important feature of the prayers in the book. Throntveit's treatment is not a true literary treatment since he rearranges the text. While he gives significant attention to the prayers, much of that attention is structural or theological rather than specifically narratological. In the end, he too fails to elucidate the function of the prayers, especially the interjected prayers. Talmon pays attention to the prayers, but only as structural markers. Green's idea of the how the ending subverts the text is helpful, yet he fails to deal with the prayers at all. Reynolds treats Nehemiah alone but overemphasizes the chiastic structuring and misses the literary function of the interjected prayers. Loken, too, treats

Nehemiah alone and pays significant attention to the prayers. Even so, he fails to observe the narratological function of the interjected prayers.

All of these scholars understand the book of Nehemiah, whether alone or combined with Ezra, to be about restoration. Because of their failure to understand the function of prayers, especially the interjected prayers, they fail to recognize that restoration is a major theme of the story told within the narrative, but it is not the main point of the narrative. The book is not about the restoration brought about through the people as they rebuild the "house of God" in accordance with written documents, learning to live in a prosaic rather than poetic era.[151] It is not a Hellenistic work connecting the people with the past and assuring the people that their institutions are legitimate means of passing on the promise in a new context.[152] It is not "biblical historiography," combined with Ezra to be "our main sources on the period of the return from the Babylonian Exile."[153] It is not about the restoration of two walls, one physical and one spiritual, the subversion of which challenges "the original readers to make their own story a sequel in which they rise to the occasion and remove all doubts about the security and permanence of the house of God."[154] It is not about a restoration, both physical and spiritual, which failed in the end, despite the efforts of Nehemiah, pointing to a need for "a different kind of leader who could combine the offices of prophet, priest, and king"—namely the Messiah.[155] It is not about an initial restoration of the remnant, with shifts in leadership, relationship with foreigners, and the nation's feeling of solidarity, typifying "the future restoration of the nation during the millennial

[151] The position of Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*.

[152] The position of Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah.*

[153] Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," 361 and 357.

[154] Green, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 214.

[155] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 230.

kingdom."[156] Instead, as is demonstrated in chapter 4, the theme of restoration in the story is used by the narrator to support Nehemiah's appeal to God to be remembered as a faithful servant.

Chapter Conclusion

The overview above demonstrates that there remains a need for yet another literary treatment of Nehemiah, one that pays specific attention to the narratological function of the prayers. By following the lead of Eynde and paying specific attention to the narratological function of the prayers in the book of Nehemiah, the remainder of this dissertation fills a void which, in turn, provides a corrective in a number of ways:

First, it fills the void of narratological study with regard to the prayers in the book of Nehemiah. As shown above, Eynde has studied the narratological function of the prayers in Tobit and Judith, and a number of narrative studies have been done dealing with the book of Nehemiah; however, none of these studies has paid sufficient attention to the narratological function of the prayers within the book of Nehemiah.

Second, this attention to the narratological function of the prayers leads to a new and better understanding of the book of Nehemiah, providing a corrective to the way Nehemiah has been read. Instead of being primarily a narrative about restoration, attention to the prayers leads to the recognition that the book of Nehemiah, as a whole, is Nehemiah's apologia or appeal to God to be remembered as a faithful servant. To be sure, the story told by the narrator within the narrative is a one of restoration, and the prayers contribute to that story, but it is told in support of Nehemiah's appeal to be remembered, not for its own sake. This has not been recognized prior to this study.

[156] Loken, "Literary Analysis," 194.

Third, as one reads Nehemiah is in this way, it becomes apparent that the book does not have to be read together with Ezra or with Ezra and Chronicles to make sense. Neither does one need to break the book down into sources and hypothesize the original form or function of the supposed Nehemiah Memoir. Instead, Nehemiah's coherence as an independent literary unit becomes clear.

The following chapter begins that reading process by introducing narratology and making preliminary application to the book of Nehemiah. After the careful exegetical work on the prayers in chapter 3, chapter 4 puts the two together, reading the narrative on the basis of the prayers.

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATOLOGY AND PRELIMINARY APPLICATION TO NEHEMIAH

Introduction

The work of this dissertation involves two main components. Because the focus of the dissertation is on the prayers and their effect on the narrative whole, one major component is the translation, analysis, and classification of the prayers themselves. Such work is performed in chapter 3 where the prayers are treated in their narrative contexts and initial observations are made regarding their various contributions to the narrative. This anticipates chapter 4 and the focused attention given there to the narratological functions of the prayers in Nehemiah.[1]

Before giving attention to the prayers, however, it is helpful to introduce the other main component of the dissertation, namely, narratology and the narrative analysis of the book of Nehemiah. The present chapter provides an overview of various elements of narratology and makes initial application to the book of Nehemiah. This provides the necessary background and terminology for the narratological observations in chapter 3. It also provides the foundation for the more focused reading of Nehemiah, undertaken in chapter 4. On the basis of chapters 2 and 3, chapter 4 demonstrates that, on the basis of the prayers, Nehemiah should be read as an apologia—Nehemiah's argument before God that he should be remembered as a faithful servant.

[1] One could treat the prayers first, but the analysis of the prayers in ch. 3 depends somewhat upon the concepts and terminology introduced and illustrated in the present ch. It is preferable, therefore, first to treat narratology and then the prayers in the book of Neh.

Narrative Analysis—Story and Discourse in Nehemiah

Since the 1980s narrative criticism has become a recognized and popular approach to the narratives within the Bible. Scholars such as Meir Sternberg, Shimon Bar-Efrat, Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Leland Ryken, Tremper Longman III, Marc Allen Powell, and various others have taken up this methodology, described it, and applied it to the Biblical narratives.[2] Following the work of these leaders in the field, a plethora of narrative studies have appeared treating the many and varied narratives of the Hebrew Bible, the Greek New Testament, as well as the narratives within the apocryphal literature.[3]

Simply stated, narratology is the practice of making sense of a narrative text and describing it to others. As Marc Allen Powell has stated it, "The goal of narrative criticism is to read the text as the implied reader.[4] In order to do this, attention is given to the *what* and the *how*, or, in the

---

[2] See the bibliography for the various works of each of these authors. The strengths and weaknesses of this approach are summarized by Marc Allen Powell, in his ch. titled "Scripture as Story," pp. 85–101 in *What is Narrative Criticism?* (GBS; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

[3] A few examples of each include: George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (FOTL 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34* (JSOTSup 22; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983); Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and* Joash (JSOTSup 209; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996); Weston W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative* (JSOTSup 231; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997); Eric S Christianson, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup 280; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); Philip Francis Esler, *Sex, Wives, and Warriors: Reading Old Testament Narrative with its Ancient Audience* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2011); Norman R. Peterson, "'Point of View' in Mark's Narrative," *Semeia* 12 (1978): 97–121; David M. Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (2 vols.; Philadelphia and Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986 and 1990); Irene Nowell, "The Book of Tobit: Narrative Technique and Theology" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1983); Whitney Shiner, "'Follow Me!': Narrative and Rhetorical Functions of the Disciples in the Gospel of Mark, Greek Philosophical biographies, and the 'Wisdom of Ben Sira'" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1992); Marti J. Steussy, *Gardens in Babylon: Narrative and Faith in the Greek Legends of Daniel* (SBLDS 141; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

[4] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 20. See pp. 20–21 for his understanding of the implied reader and a defense of this understanding over against reader-response critics who might object. See also Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2000), 15–22, where he deals with this in his text and notes. Also dealing with the implied reader and the Gospel of Matthew, Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2d ed. rev. and enl.: Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 38, writes, "The term 'implied reader' denotes no flesh-and-blood person of any century. Instead it refers to an imaginary person who is to be envisaged, in perusing Matthew's story, as responding to the text at every point with whatever emotion, understanding, or knowledge the text ideally calls for. Or to put it differently, the implied reader is that imaginary person in whom the intention of the text is to be thought of as always reaching its fulfillment."

terms of Seymour Chatman, it means paying attention to both the *story* and the *discourse*.[5] In fact it means paying attention to the "story as discoursed."[6] Powell has described it this way:

> Narratives have two aspects: story and discourse. *Story* refers to the content of the narrative, what it is about. A story consists of such elements as events, characters, and settings, and the interaction of these elements comprises what we call the plot. *Discourse* refers to the rhetoric of the narrative, how the story is told.[7]

Jack Dean Kingsbury has further described discourse as "the means the author uses to put the story across."[8] Powell refines Kingsbury's statement into the question, "How does the implied author guide the implied reader in understanding the text?"[9] This can include such things as point of view, the devices of the narrator and narratee, and the distinctions between real and

---

[5] See Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell, 1978), 15–42.

[6] Ibid., 3.

[7] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 23. Theorists use a wide array of terminology with often confusing and sometimes conflicting definitions. According to Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 3, Genette made the distinction between *histoire, récit,* and *narration.* In the English translation of Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (trans. Jane E. Lewin; Ithaca: Cornell, 1980), 27, these became "*story* for the signified or narrative content . . . *narrative* for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, and . . . *narrating* for the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that actions takes place." Rimmon-Kenan essentially borrows these distinctions but prefers to talk in terms of story, text, and narration. Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical analysis of Narrative Fiction* (New Accents; New York: Routledge), 53, use only the labels "story" and "narration," disputing Chatman's use of the term "discourse" in n. 1 on p. 179. In that same note, they review Mieke Bal's terminology which follows that of the Russian formalists. Quoting from p. 5 of Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2nd rev. ed. trans. Christine van Boheemen; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), the 1985 translation of her 1980 Dutch work, they write, "She divides narrative into fabula, 'a series of logically and chronologically related events'; story, 'a fabula that is presented in a certain manner'; and text, 'a finite, structured whole composed of language signs . . . in which an agent relates a narrative.'"

Essentially, Genette's *histoire*, Rimmon-Kenan's story, and Bal's fabula are all the same abstraction. All three refer to the events as they would occur ideally temporally and logically and the characters who would perform them. This distinction allows one to recognize that the same story can be told in a variety of ways with different emphases and outcomes. While the characters and events remain the same, the presentation can differ, for example, in terms of order or point of view. This in turn points to the importance of paying attention to the presentation.

In the case of a written text, the text contains both the story and its telling; therefore, the crucial element is the text, the narrative itself in final form. A narrative analyst observes *how* the *content* is presented in order to understand the narrative whole and describe it.

For Chatman, Cohan and Shires, and most Biblical scholars like Powell and Kingsbury, story is used to refer to events and characters, not in abstraction, but as they are found in the text, that is, in narrated form.

[8] Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 30.

[9] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 23.

implied author, and real and implied reader.[10] Also included are "recurrent structural devices and design features that are used to organize and present the story."[11]

In the pages that follow, narratology and the book of Nehemiah are discussed in terms of story and discourse. First, story elements are introduced. Each element is then illustrated from the story in the book of Nehemiah. Next, attention is given to discourse. Again, each topic is illustrated using examples from Nehemiah. Admittedly, this approach is fragmented, yet it allows the reader to observe particular aspects of the narrative in isolation before synthesizing the information in a final reading. Toward that goal of a final reading, the chapter ends with an overview of the reading process, the practice of making sense of the story as discoursed.

Story Elements and Nehemiah's Story

It was noted above that the story within a narrative consists of settings, characters, and events. These three things then make up the plot.

---

[10] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 147–51.

[11] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 32. On pp. 32–33, Powell reproduces a list of 15 "compositional relationships" as proposed by David Bauer. According to Powell, these relationships can apply to units as small as a sentence and as a large as an entire book. See also a list of techniques in Sternberg's *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 39.

Settings. For many people, setting may bring to mind primarily location. Location is certainly an important aspect of setting, yet there is more to the concept. As Kingsbury has noted, "A 'setting' is the *place* or *time* or *social circumstances* in which a character acts."[12] When analyzing setting, one must consider time and social circumstances in addition to location.

Location. Given the paucity of detail supplied in most biblical narratives, when locations are mentioned, they are often significant to the understanding of the narrative. Bar-Efrat comments, "Places in the narratives are not merely geographical facts, but are to be regarded as literary elements in which fundamental significance is embodied."

This significance can be seen in Nehemiah's narrative. The story begins in the citadel of Susa, one of the capitals of the Persian Empire. Men come to this capital city from Judah. More specifically, Jerusalem is mentioned, Judah's former capital that now lies in ruins. The story begins away from the promised land and with the reminder that things are not as they used to be. Persia is in control of God's people and the land that God had given to them. Both the land and the people are in distress.

The theological significance of this is made clear in the prayer prayed in Neh 1:5–11a. Place is emphasized as Nehemiah connects faithfulness to location. Unfaithfulness leads to being scattered among the nations, even to the end of the heavens. Repentance and obedience, on the other hand, lead to being gathered and returned to the place where Yahweh has chosen to make his name dwell.

The narrative begins among the nations, in Persia. But by Neh 2:11 the location changes to Judah and Jerusalem, the place where Yahweh has chosen to make his name dwell. The rest of

[12] Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 28, emphasis mine. Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 70, works with these same three categories. Both are following the definition given by M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, (4th ed.; New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981), 175.

the narrative takes place in this location as Nehemiah strives for the restoration of both the place and the people.

Ironically, the narrative modifies the importance of place. In Neh 9, the people recognize that even though they are in the right location, all is not well. Again in Neh 13, in the right place, the people prove unfaithful and must be restored repeatedly. Location is used in the narrative to guide the reader's expectations, but by the end, the reader is forced to reevaluate those very expectations and understandings. Place is not all that important if faithfulness is lacking.

Temporal Setting. Just as important as understanding where the story takes place is the comprehension of when it takes place. By giving a time reference, the story or event being related is placed into a temporal context for the reader. Based on these references, the reader will be able to supply information missing in the story and will make inferences which may prove correct or need modification.

In the case of Nehemiah, the first temporal reference is ambiguous. To say that it was the month of Kislev in the twentieth year locates the story within the year, but does not tell enough about the year itself. Helpfully, Neh 2 places the story in the 20th year of Artaxerxes. The overall temporal setting is established in Neh 5:14 and 13:6. In Neh 5:14, Nehemiah notes that his term as governor lasted from the 20th year of Artaxerxes until his 32nd year, a total of 12 years. Nehemiah 13:6 expands this 12 year period indefinitely. There, after relating that Nehemiah had returned to the king in his 32nd year, the text relates that "after some time," (וּלְקֵץ יָמִים)[13]

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem again, but no end point is given for this second trip. Armed with this temporal setting, the reader can locate the story as taking place during the post-exilic period when Judah was subject to the Persian Empire. Also, the reader can better

[13] See *HALOT*, s.v. קֵץ, 9.

understand the condition of Jerusalem, the distress of the people, the animosity between Nehemiah and the local leaders, as well as various other elements of the story.

Within the story, a temporal setting such as "at night" (Neh 2:13) lets the reader know that Nehemiah inspected the walls in the night rather than in the day. The reader then can speculate about why this might be so. The notice in Neh 6:25 about the wall being complete on the 25th day of Elul in a time span of 52 days allows one to marvel at the quick work of Nehemiah and the people. It also allows a reader to calculate back to when the work must have begun.

Further specific temporal settings are given up through the beginning of Neh 9. After that, however, the references are missing or are less precise. After the penitential prayer of Neh 9, no indication is given regarding how long it took to compose the agreement of Neh 10 or when it was sealed. The repopulation of Jerusalem in Neh 11 is also without a time reference. Surprisingly, no specific date is given for the dedication of the wall in Neh 12, the event to which the whole story seems to lead. Following the dedication of the wall the temporal settings are formulaic and general, consisting of such phrases as "on that day," (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא), "before this," (וְלִפְנֵי מִזֶּה), "in all this," (וּבְכָל־זֶה), "after some time," (וּלְקֵץ יָמִים), and "in those days," (הָהֵמָּה בַּיָּמִים).[14]

The lack of temporal specificity at the end of the story is a strong indication that the focus of the story is not the recording of history for the sake of recounting history. Two more temporal formulas might give a better clue about the focus of the story. Both Neh 12:26 and 47 speak of the "days of Nehemiah," (בִּימֵי נְחֶמְיָה), while recounting positive restoration that had taken place in his time. Nehemiah and his work are significant enough that one can refer to his governorship as *in his days*. In the case of 12:47, the days of Nehemiah are compared positively to the way

[14] See the commentaries for the various viewpoints and the extended discussion about how to understand these

things were in the days of David. Instead of being evidence of differing sources and poor redaction, these statements keep a discrete focus on Nehemiah, even in a section in which he plays a supporting role to the Torah.

Social Circumstances. Writing about social circumstances, or social settings as he calls them, Powell states, "These include the political institutions, class structures, economic systems, social customs, and general cultural context assumed to be operative in the work."[15] Knowledge of such social settings is important to the understanding of a narrative because the narrative assumes that the reader knows these things. It is possible, however, to understand a narrative without such knowledge. As Sternberg writes in his discussion of what he calls the Bible's foolproof composition, "Follow the biblical narrator . . . , and by no great exertion you will be making tolerable sense of the world you are in, the action that unfolds, the protagonists on stage, and the point of it all."[16] But with an understanding of the social settings, the reader will encounter greater depth of understanding.

By following the narrator of Nehemiah, one can make tolerable sense of the narrative. The narrative provides all that the reader must know, yet additional knowledge of the social forces at work can be helpful. The social dynamics of being a cupbearer in the Persian court helps the reader to understand that Nehemiah is no simple slave miraculously elevated to the office of governor. Understanding Nehemiah's Judahite ancestry and all that entails gives clarity to his desire to see the restoration of Jerusalem and its people. Knowledge of the antipathy between the Judahite remnant and the gentiles in the region gives depth to the opposition and animosity between Nehemiah and his opponents. Especially important for the focus of this dissertation are

---

temporal phrases.

[15] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 74.

the distinctions among the Judahites themselves. In a system in which the priests and Levites are responsible for spiritual matters, the concern of Nehemiah, a layman, and his work directly alongside Ezra and the Levites in the spiritual restoration of the people are highlighted.

Characters and Characterization. Characters are an essential part of any story. As Israel Peter Loken has written,

> It is the characters of the story that most attract the reader's attention as well. The reader often feels an emotional attachment with the main characters, whether positive or negative. The reader participates in the experiences and fortunes of the characters, feeling elation in their achievements and dismay in their misfortunes. The friends and enemies of the narrative's hero or heroine are quite likely to be the friends and enemies of the reader.[17]

What a reader knows about any given character is only that which the narrator selects to include and chooses to reveal. This is the process of characterization. Characterization takes place as the narrator provides information directly or indirectly, generally identified as *telling* and *showing*.[18] Direct characterization, or telling, occurs as the narrator directly describes or gives information about a character. The narrator could also choose to give this information through another character. In either case, direct characterization can involve physical description of a character, or it could involve a description or evaluation of a character's "inner personality."[19]

It is generally agreed that Biblical narrative employs an artful reticence when it comes to characterization, preferring showing to telling.[20] Indirect characterization takes place primarily

---

[16] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 51.

[17] Loken, "Literary Analysis," 56–57.

[18] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 52. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 47–92, uses the terms direct and indirect characterization as does Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59–67.

[19] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art,* 48–64.

[20] See Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 114–30.

through the speech and actions of a character. Through what a character does and says, the narrator builds a portrait of the character. Bar-Efrat notes,

> It is in the nature of the indirect method that characters are not defined comprehensively, but that their personalities emerge gradually from the totality of their appearances and actions during the course of the narrative. The indirect form cannot make it clear to us at the outset of the narrative what the character's nature is, and this will not be evident until the end, when we are able to review and combine all the relevant facts.[21]

Likewise, Powell states, "The technique of showing is less precise than that of telling but it is usually more interesting. The reader must work harder, collecting data from various sources and evaluating it in order to figure out the implied author's view of the characters."[22]

There are a variety of characters in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is the most prominent throughout the narrative.[23] Along with Nehemiah the people, as a group, constitute another character. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem could each be considered characters, but they should probably be considered together as the opposition group. A variety of Levites are mentioned by name, but again, together they can be considered a single character. Ezra, too, appears as a character, though a relatively minor one. Finally, God is a *character* in the story. To be sure, God never appears or speaks directly in the narrative, yet his presence is assumed throughout, especially as he is prayed to and is characterized in those prayers and in comments made about him.

The narrative of Nehemiah employs both direct and indirect characterization. On various occasions the narrator directly supplies information about Nehemiah or other characters;

---

[21] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art,* 89.

[22] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 52.

[23] Using the categories of E. M. Forster, Douglas Green, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 210–12, claims that Nehemiah is actually a flat character and that the people, as a group, is the only character displaying enough ambiguity and unpredictability to be considered round. However, if Nehemiah's goal is to show himself a faithful servant, as is the assertion of this dissertation, displaying that consistent trait would be exactly what would be expected rather than

however, as is typical of biblical narrative, most of the characterization is indirect. It is the developing portrait of the characters that is essential to the present reading of the book. Chapter 4 examines the characterization of Nehemiah in contrast to the people and the opponents. It also explores the characterization of God. As is demonstrated there, these characterizations form part of the argument of Nehemiah's apologia, his plea to be remembered.

Events. According to the definition of story given above, another of the basic elements is that of the events that comprise the story. Rimmon-Kenan writes, "An event is defined by the [Oxford English Dictionary] as a 'thing that happens'."[24] She adds, "One might add that when something happens, the situation usually changes. An event, then, may be said to be a change from one state of affairs to another."[25] She goes on to explain that events are typically classified as kernels and catalysts or satellites. Kernels "advance the action by opening an alternative" while catalysts or satellites "expand, amplify, maintain or delay" the kernels.[26] Chatman further points out that kernels are essential to the narrative logic while satellites are nonessential and have their function in "filling in, elaborating, completing the kernel; they form the flesh on the skeleton."[27]

Delimiting events can be difficult, and classifying them even more so. Rimmon-Kenan acknowledges,

> Just as any single event may be decomposed into a series of mini-events and intermediary states, so—conversely—a vast number of events may be subsumed under a single event label (e.g. 'The Fall of the Roman Empire'). This is why it may

---

showing the characteristics that Green claims make a character round.

[24] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 15.

[25] Ibid., 15.

[26] Ibid., 16.

[27] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 54.

be difficult at times to maintain an absolute distinction between the notion of 'event' and that of 'succession of events'.[28]

With regard to classifying events into kernels and satellites, Powell has noted that biblical scholars have not made much use of these concepts because of the lack of objective data to distinguish between them.[29] Rather than trying to identify individual events or to differentiate kernels and satellites, this dissertation follows the practice advocated by Ska and adopted by Reynolds and Loken of delineating scenes for analysis.[30] Ska lists the criteria for subdividing episodes into scenes as "change of time, change of locale, change of characters."[31] He continues, "The primary criterion, however, is 'action'. A simple change of time, of place, or of some characters does not automatically mean the passage from one scene to the following." He goes on to say, "The end of a scene often coincides with a 'pause', marked by an interval of time (ellipsis) or a change of rhythm (time-ratio of a 'summary' concluding a 'scene'; cf. pp. 12–14). In other cases the narrative tension drops because something new is needed to continue the action."[32]

Using these criteria, this dissertation divides the book of Nehemiah into 33 scenes for analysis. As with the determination of events and sequences of events, this division of scenes has

---

[28] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 15–16.

[29] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 36. Frank Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 233–53, has treated the Gospel of Matt by identifying the kernels and satellites; however, Powell disputes Matera's identifications. See Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 44–50.

[30] See Jean Louis Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Subsidia Biblica 13; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990), 33, Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 43–46 and 131–36, and Loken, "Literary Analysis," 63–69 . Technically, scene is a misnomer since a scene is usually defined as a portion of text in which story-time and text-time are identical; however, some unit label must be chosen for a sequence of events that logically work together. Scene makes some sense because of most people's exposure to theatre where scenes are divided.

[31] Ska, *Our Fathers*, 33.

[32] Ibid., 33. Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 131–36, lists change of time, location, characters, and theme, repetition, chiasm, and summary. In his discussion he refers regularly to Bar-Efrat's book, *Narrative Art*, as well as his article, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," *VT* 30 (April 1980): 154–73. Loken, "Literary Analysis," 66, lists change of time, location, characters, theme and style, as well as occurrence of

an element of subjectivity, also admitted by Reynolds and Loken.[33] This can be seen in the differing scenic divisions between Reynolds, Loken, and this dissertation, as illustrated in table 2.1, below. Loken deals with larger units while Reynolds and this dissertation find it more useful to deal with smaller units of material. More important is the fact that, while there is disagreement over the divisions between scenes, all three distinguish in the same way the three larger units formed by these scenes.

To say that all three distinguish the same three larger units does not mean that all three understand these three units in the same way. All three understand the first unit to be primarily about the restoration of the city.[34] The second unit is understood to be primarily about the restoration of the people.[35] It is the understanding of the third unit, Neh 13:4–31, that most clearly distinguishes this dissertation from the other two,[36] as will be made evident in chapter 4, below.

These three larger units are reflected by the horizontal lines in table 2.1. Moving from smaller scenes to larger units leads the discussion to the question of plot.

---

summary.

[33] See Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 131, and Loken, "Literary Analysis," 66 and 122n1.

[34] See Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 79, and Loken, "Literary Analysis," 122.

[35] Again see Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 79, and Loken, "Literary Analysis," 122 and 142.

[36] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 79, calls this a "concluding section" which contains "a final commentary on the first two sections." Elsewhere, (p. 171), he more helpfully recognizes that "the final scenes still portray a less than happy ending." Further, in his conclusion, (p. 225), he notes that this "surprise ending . . . is not the end of the story." Loken, "Literary Analysis," 149, on the other hand, calls it an "appendix" in which there is "a resolution of the spiritual conflict detailed in the second half of the book as well as a resolution to the physical conflict detailed in the first half of the book." This dissertation's understanding of the third section more closely resembles Reynolds, yet it is significantly distinct from Reynolds as ch. 4 demonstrates.

Table 2.1. Comparison of scenic divisions and larger units

Reynolds	Penhallegon	Loken
1:1–3	1:1a + 1b–3	1:1–11
1:4–11	1:4–11	
2:1–8	2:1–8	2:1–8
2:9–11	2:9–11	2:9–20
2:12–16	2:12–15	
2:17–20	2:16–18	
	2:19–20	
3:1–32	3:1–32	3:1–32
3:33–38 (ET 4:1–6)	3:33–38 (ET 4:1–6)	3:33–4:17 (ET 4:1–23)
4:1–8 (ET 4:7–14)	4:1–5 (ET 4:7–11)	
	4:6–8 (ET 4:12–14)	
4:9–17 (ET4:15–23)	4:9–17 (ET 4:15–23)	
5:1–13	5:1–13	5:1–19
5:14–19	5:14–19	
6:1–14, 17–19	6:1–9	6:1–14
	6:10–15	
6:15–16	6:16–19	6:15–7:3
7:1–4	7:1–3	
7:5–72a (ET 7:5–73a)	7:4–72a (ET 7:4–73a)	7:4–72a (ET 7:4–73a)
7:72b–8:12 (ET 7:73b–8:12)	7:72b–8:12 (ET73b–8:12)	7:72b–8:18(ET 7:73b–8:18)
8:13–18	8:13–18	
9:1–37	9:1–37	9:1–10:1 (ET 9:1–38)
10:1–40 (ET 9:38–10:39)	10:1–40 (ET 9:38–10:39)	10:2–39 (ET10:1–39)
11:1–36	11:1–36	11:1–36
12:1–26	12:1–26	12:1–26
12:27–43	12:27–43	12:27–13:3
12:44–47	12:44–47	
13:1–3	13:1–3	
13:4–14	13:4–14	13:4–14
13:15–22	13:15–22	13:15–22
13:23–31	13:23–29	13:23–31
	13:30–31	
28 scenes	33 scenes	18 scenes

Source: Compiled from Reynolds, “Literary Analysis,” 78–79, 137–70, and Loken, “Literary Analysis,” 122–53.

Plot. After reviewing the definitions of plot given by a variety of literary critics, Frank Matera summarizes, "Literary critics agree that plot has something to do with how discourse arranges events by time and causality in order to produce a particular affective or emotional response."[37] According to Bar-Efrat, Biblical narrative usually follows the classic pattern in which "the plot line ascends from a calm point of departure through the stage of involvement to the climax of conflict and tension, and from there rapidly to the finishing point and tranquility."[38] This classic pattern is often illustrated using Gustav Freytag's pyramid, as seen in figure 2.1, below.[39]

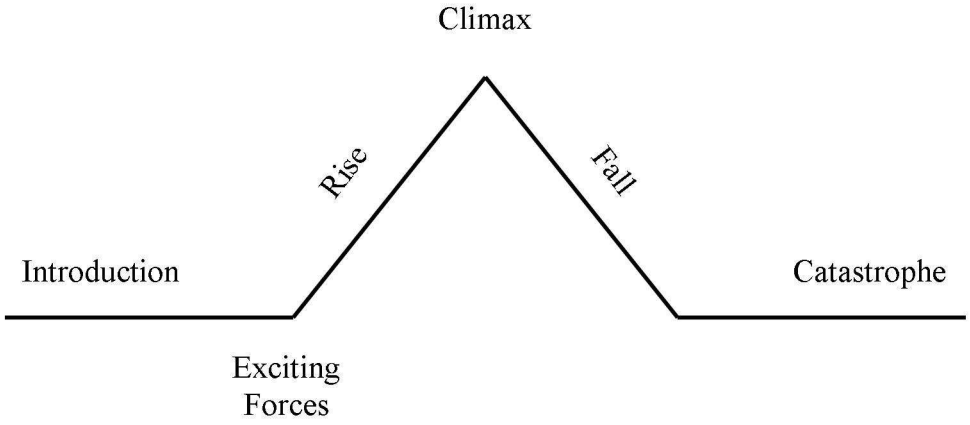

Figure 2.1. Gustav Freytag's pyramid

[37] Matera, "Plot," 236.

[38] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 121.

[39] Gustav Freytag, *Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art; An Authorized Translation from the Sixth German Edition* (trans. Elias J. MacEwan, 3rd ed. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1900), 114–15, describes it this way, "Through the two halves of the action which come closely together at one point, the drama possesses—if one may symbolize its arrangement by lines—a pyramidal structure. It rises from the *introduction* with the entrance of the exciting forces to the *climax*, and falls from here to the *catastrophe*. Between these three parts lie (the parts of) the *rise* and the *fall*."

Jean Louis Ska gives a helpful overview of the various *moments* of the typical plot.[40] The summary that follows depends heavily on his treatment. He lists the *moments* as "exposition, inciting moment, complication, turning point, falling action, resolution, last delay, denouement (conclusion)."[41] As one reads the explanations below, it will be helpful to refer to figure 2.2, which modifies Freytag's Pyramid to include Ska's moments of the plot.

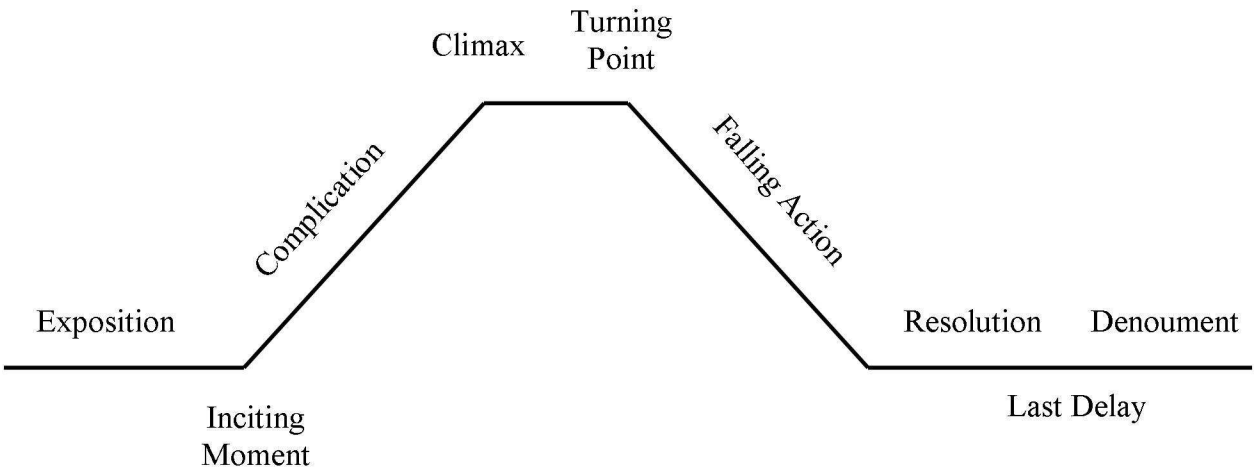

Figure 2.2. Ska's moments of the plot

The exposition is the portion of the narrative in which the reader is given the necessary background in terms of the setting and the main characters. In addition, "the exposition must give . . . a key to understanding the narrative, namely some indications about the contract between the narrator and the reader."[42] One would most naturally expect the exposition at the beginning of a narrative, yet Ska notes that it can be spread out or delayed. He gives Esth 1:1–9

[40] Ska, *Our Fathers*, 20–30.

[41] Ibid., 20–21.

[42] Ibid., 21.

as an example of exposition at the beginning and the book of Jonah as a narrative in which the exposition is "distributed piecemeal in the different episodes."[43]

Ska's treatment of the inciting moment is brief. He writes, "The inciting moment is the moment in which the conflict or the problem appears for the first time and arouses the interest of the reader. Often it is the 'what' of the exposition of the story. In many cases, it is difficult to distinguish it from the exposition or the beginning of the 'complication'."[44]

The complication consists of the bulk of the narrative in which "one usually finds the different attempts to solve the problem or the conflict, the various steps of the quest or the transformation."[45] Ska notes, "The Bible often uses a staircase construction (climactic construction) to build up the tension of the narrative and lead it to its resolution."[46] The steps of this staircase he calls "preparatory scenes." Such a scene "often prepares for a decisive meeting and creates the appropriate atmosphere of hope, fear, or curiosity."[47]

Like his treatment of the inciting moment, Ska's treatment of both the climax and the turning point are brief. Admitting that climax can be hard to define he writes, "It can be the moment of highest tension, the appearance of a decisive element or character, the final stage of a narrative progression."[48] Concerning the turning point he says that it "inaugurates the falling action." He continues, "At this point an element appears that will lead the movement of the

---

[43] Ibid., 25.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 25–26.

[46] Ibid., 26.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 27.

narrative to its conclusion. But it is not always easy to distinguish the turning point from the final resolution of the plot and they can coincide in certain cases."[49]

Concerning the resolution, Ska calls it "the solution of the initial problem."[50] Here he also notes that it is possible for a narrative to have a "double climax and resolution" in which "the narrative seems to have come to a conclusion when an element of surprise creates a new crisis."[51] Bar-Efrat calls this an "illusory conclusion."[52] This will be an important point to keep in mind with Nehemiah's narrative.

Finally, there is the conclusion or denoument. This portion of the narrative "contains the result and the sequel of the resolution, the final outcome of the events, the epilogue of the story."[53]

As a narrative, the book of Nehemiah includes these various moments. What follows is a brief description of the plot of Nehemiah in terms of these moments. It is important to keep in mind, as Ska notes, that "these 'moments of the plot' do not correspond exactly to well delimited sections of the narrative text."[54] Figure 2.3, below, illustrates the plot of the book of Nehemiah and should be consulted while reading the description. Comparing figure 2.3, below, with figure 2.2, above, helps one to see how Nehemiah's plot modifies the typical plot structure. Comparison with table 2.1, above, allows one to see how the scenes and larger units fit into the plot as it is understood here.

---

[49] Ibid., 27.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 28.

[52] Bar-Efrat, *Observations*, 124.

[53] Ska, *Our Fathers*, 28.

[54] Ibid., 21. Ska goes on to say, "They are rather the principal articulations of the dramatic action. In this sense, the analysis focuses here on the backbone of the plot."

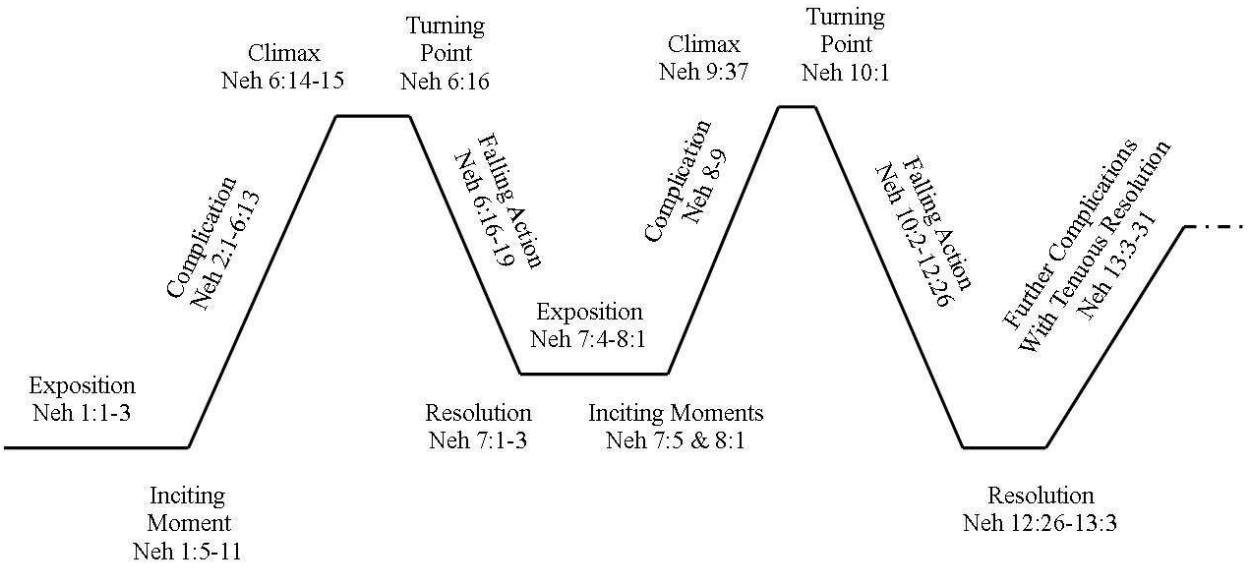

Figure 2.3. The plot of Nehemiah

The exposition in Nehemiah is found primarily in 1:1–3. There the reader meets the protagonist, Nehemiah, and finds out that he is in Susa. As mentioned above, the time reference given is incomplete and must be filled in later in the text. In these verses the reader also learns the problem that will be addressed in the story, namely, the people in Jerusalem are in distress and the city's wall is broken and its gates are burnt with fire.

Nehemiah's reaction to the distress of the people and the condition of the wall serves as the inciting moment of the narrative. He takes these problems upon himself and approaches God in a lengthy prayer (Neh 1:5–11a). In this prayer he calls on God to remember his past promises and to give him favor and success. This sets in motion the events that follow.

The first complication in Nehemiah consists of the series of events in Neh 2–6. This portion of the narrative focuses primarily on the physical restoration of the wall and its gates with only a brief portion in Neh 5 focusing on the distress and disgrace of the people. First Nehemiah must secure the approval and support of the earthly king, Artaxerxes. Then he must

secure the help of the people. The restoration progresses as Nehemiah, with the permission and support of Artaxerxes, leads the people in the repair work. Neh 5 gives evidence of internal problems that threaten the project, but Nehemiah resolves these issues, allowing the project to move forward. Throughout, opposition is given by Tobiah, Sanballat, Geshem, and others, who attempt to keep the wall from being built and who continually try to intimidate Nehemiah and the people.

The first climax is reached as the tension grows in Neh 6. Having failed to stop the building with their physical threats and intimidation, the opponents resort to attacks on Nehemiah, even hiring an insider, a prophet, to intimidate him and trick him into disgracing himself.

The turning point occurs as Nehemiah recognizes that the prophet is not from God and refuses to do as the prophet says. The enemies have failed in their attempt to keep the walls from being rebuilt. This is confirmed in 6:15–16 as the narrator reports that the wall was completed. He also reports that "all the peoples who were around us were afraid, and they fell much in their own eyes. They knew that the work was done because of our God" (Neh 6:16).

At this point, with the wall complete and the opponents disgraced, the reader expects the falling action leading into the resolution and denoument. The narrative, however, does not follow that simple, expected pattern. There is a falling action and resolution of sorts as Nehemiah provides a leader for Jerusalem and directions for the safety of the city, but further conflict is intimated in 6:17–19 as the opposition is still active and leaders among the Judahites are reported as having ties to the opposition. The wall and gates may be finished, but there is more to be done with regard to the people.

At Neh 7:4, a new phase of the story begins. In this portion of the narrative, the restoration of the people is primary, and the restoration of the city is in the background. The initial concern

expressed is the low population of Jerusalem. That, however, quickly gives way to the concern of the spiritual condition of the people, their distress and disgrace.

Nehemiah 8–9 relates a second rising action or complication. The people are confronted with the Torah which brings them to contrition and also to a celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. In Neh 9, the Levites lead the people in a long prayer of confession, reciting the great acts of God and the rebellions of the people throughout their history.

A second climax is reached as the Levites confess on behalf of the people and ask God to be compassionate to them as he has been in the past. The tension is high as they acknowledge that they are servants of foreign kings in the land that God had given to their forefathers. They are in distress.

A turning point leading into the falling action occurs as the people renew the covenant in Neh 10, pledging to live according to the Torah and not to neglect the house of God. This continues in Neh 11–12. The issue of repopulating Jerusalem, raised in Neh 7, is resolved in Neh 11, and lists of people are given as evidence. In Neh 12, focus turns to the priests and the Levites with the lists there demonstrating that restoration includes the spiritual leadership.

At Neh 12:27, the final resolution begins. Focus returns to the wall but brings together all of the other concerns of the story as well. The people, the priests, the Levites, along with Ezra and Nehemiah all participate in the dedication of the wall. A great celebration takes place, and the story seems to come to a close in the last verses of Neh 12 and the first verses of Neh 13 with more evidence of the restoration being lived out among the people.

But the narrative does not end there. In Neh 13:4–31, more conflict arises. The restoration of the people comes undone, and Nehemiah repeatedly has to redo what had already been done. Perhaps this could be considered a last delay, but there is no denouement to follow. Instead of ending in peaceful tranquility, the story ends in tension.

Discourse—How the Story is Told

Discourse consists of the way the story elements are combined to form the narrative, the story as discoursed. Important for this dissertation's analysis of Nehemiah are the issues of the narrator and narratee, the question of point of view, the use of time, and the primacy and recency effects.

Narrator and Narratee. For the argument of this dissertation, one of the most critical issues is that of the narrator and levels of narration as discussed by Gérard Genette.[55] Genette writes in terms of level and relationship. Ska summarizes,

> The narrator can be outside or inside the story ("level", French "niveau"). Genette calls these two levels "extradiegetic" and "intradiegetic." On the other hand, a narrator can tell his own story or the story of somebody else ("relationship", French "relation"). Genette calls these two possible "relationships" to the story "homodiegetic" and "heterodiegetic." [56]

Given these two possible levels and two possible relationships, there result four possible combinations of narration. Genette describes this with reference to secular literature:

> If in every narrative we define the narrator's status both by its narrative level (extra- or intradiegetic) and by its relationship (hetero- or homodiegetic), we can represent the four basic types of narrator's status as follows: (1) *extradiegetic-heterodiegetic*—paradigm: Homer, a narrator in the first degree who tells a story he is absent from; (2) *extradiegetic-homodiegetic*—paradigm: Gil Blas, a narrator in the first degree who tells his own story; (3) *intradiegetic-heterodiegetic*—paradigm: Scheherazade, a narrator in the second degree who tells stories she is on the whole absent from; (4) *intradiegetic-homodiegetic*—paradigm: Ulysses in Books IX–XII, a narrator in the second degree who tells his own story.[57]

---

[55] See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 212–62, and *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (trans. Jane E. Lewin; Ithaca: Cornell, 1988), 79–95.

[56] Ska, *Our Fathers*, 46. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 228n41, says that "*diegesis* (according to a now widespread usage) designates the universe of the first narrative" as opposed to the *metadiegesis* or the universe of a narrative within the narrative.

[57] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 248. In this quote, first degree refers to the primary narrator of a narrative while second degree refers to a narrator who, as a character within the primary narrative, narrates another story.

Table 2.2. Genette's examples of level and relationship

Level: / Relationship:	*Extradiegetic*	*Intradiegetic*
Heterodiegetic	Homer	Scheherazade
Homodiegetic	Gil Blas	Ulysses

Source: Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 248.

Ska supplies biblical examples for each of Genette's categories. He writes,

> In the Bible, the first case is very common (from Gen to 2 Kgs, for instance, or the Evangelists telling the story of Jesus). The second case is present in Nehemiah and Qohelet who tell their own stories in the first person (cf. also Ezra 7,27–9,15; Tob 1,3–3,6; Isa 6; Jer 1; Ez 1–3). However, the 'voice' recounting the events or pondering on them is not identical with the character present in the narrative. There is a distance in time separating them; the narration is never 'live transmission' . . . The third case is common to the parables. See Jdg 9,7–15 or 2 Sam 12,1–4, and the parables of the Gospels. Jotham, Nathan or Jesus tell stories from which they are generally absent. But as narrators, they are inside the narration (intradiegetic) and their narration is 'a tale within a tale'. The fourth case is found, for instance, in the Acts of the Apostles, when Paul himself, within the narration, tells his own story (Acts 22,1–21; 26,1–23).[58]

Table 2.3. Ska's Biblical examples of level and relationship

Level: / Relationship:	*Extradiegetic*	*Intradiegetic*
Heterodiegetic	Gen–2Kgs	Parables
Homodiegetic	Nehemiah, Qohelet	Paul in Acts 22

Source: Ska, *Our Fathers*, 47.

Using Genette's categories, with regard to level, the entire book of Nehemiah has an extradiegetic narrator. The narrator is not telling the story from within but is outside the story that he is telling. In fact, he is telling the story after the events of the story. As Ska has noted with

regard to Nehemiah and Qoheleth, "The 'voice' recounting the events or pondering on them is not identical with the character present in the narrative. There is a distance in time separating them; the narration is never 'live transmission'."[59] With regard to relationship, the narrator of most of the book of Nehemiah is homodiegetic, that is, the narrator is telling his own story in the first person.[60]

As an homodiegetic narrator, the narrator of the book of Nehemiah can be identified as Nehemiah. This is reinforced by the words of Neh 1:1, "The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah," (דִּבְרֵי נְחֶמְיָה בֶּן־חֲכַלְיָה), which, as part of the literary work, identify the voice telling the story, that is, the narrator (narrator-Neh). It is narrator-Neh, then, who tells the story about his former self (character-Neh) who was, at an earlier time, about the business of restoring the people and the city of Jerusalem.

This distinction between narrator-Neh and character-Neh has been noted briefly but then essentially disregarded by others who read Nehemiah as a narrative. Yet this distinction is one of the keys to reading the book. It is helpful and necessary for at least two reasons. First, it is possible for a homodiegetic narrator to be significantly different from his former self as that former self is portrayed in the story.[61] While a reader might assume that a narrator would portray himself in a positive light, the narrator could be critical of his earlier self and use the story to

---

[58] Ska, *Our Fathers,* 46–47.

[59] Ibid., 46.

[60] In a portion of the book, the relationship of the narrator switches from homodiegetic to heterodiegetic, that is, for a portion of the book the story is told from a third per. stance. Reynolds and Loken both explain this switch as a device used to emphasize the role of the people in this portion of the narrative. I suggest that this move emphasizes the role of the Torah in reforming God's people more than the role of the people themselves. This is discussed more thoroughly in ch. 4.

[61] Ska, *Our Fathers*, 46, gives as an example Adso, the narrator in *The Name of the Rose*, who "is an old monk and no longer the young novice of the narrative." Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 96, gives the example of Pip in *Great Expectations* who "tells a story in which a younger version of himself participated."

evaluate or ridicule his own former behavior.[62] The reader of the narrative must consider this possibility as he attempts to understand the narrative. The present dissertation takes up this question in the conclusion of chapter 4.

Second, this distinction between narrator-Neh, the extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator, and character-Neh, the protagonist of the story, becomes extremely important when the various prayers in the work are discussed. In Neh 1:5–11a, narrator-Neh clearly introduces the prayer and then reports the words prayed by character-Neh within the time of the story. In other instances, such as Neh 2:4, narrator-Neh simply reports that character-Neh prayed but does not report the words used. In yet other instances narrator-Neh records prayers that have not been introduced. This happens without question in each of the prayers that begin by calling on God to remember.[63] This dissertation contends that it happens in two other instances as well.[64] In this last category, the prayers that are not introduced, it is crucial to distinguish between narrator-Neh and character-Neh. Nehemiah the narrator, not the character, momentarily but repeatedly stops narrating and prays, not within the time of the story but at the time of narration.[65]

---

[62] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 252, writes, "As in any narrative in autobiographical form, the two *actants* that Spitzer called *erzählendes Ich* (the narrating I) and *erzähltes Ich* (the narrated I) are separated in the *Recherche* by a difference in age and experience that authorizes the former to treat the latter with a sort of condescending or ironic superiority, very noticeable for example in the scene of Marcel's missed introduction to Albertine, or that of the kiss denied." This is a possibility in the book of Jonah, though Jonah has an heterodiegetic narrator. While acknowledging that there can be no certainty as to the date and author of Jonah, R. Reed Lessing, *Jonah,* (Concordia Commentary; Saint Louis: Concordia, 2007), 18, states, "It is not impossible that the narrator was Jonah himself." He goes on to argue that the book is an "historical narrative" in which "the literary tone is satire with irony for a specific purpose." He understands (p. 26) that Jonah is portrayed by the narrator as a hypocrite who has "deviated in some ways from Yahweh, the God of Israel." Thus (p. 27), "The narrator's satire of Jonah is intended to lead the audience to recognize its own similar hypocrisy, repent of it, and return to Yahweh in renewed and sincere faith that confesses the enormity of his grace toward all people." If Jonah himself is the narrator of the narrative-prophetic book bearing his name, then this is an example of a Biblical narrator who is now different from and critical of his former self.

[63] Neh 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31.

[64] Neh 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5]and 6:9.

[65] See the more detailed discussion of this in ch. 4 under the heading, Ambiguity and Tension Due to the Interjected Prayers.

The final benefit of distinguishing between narrator-Neh and character-Neh is that it allows the reader to identify God as the narratee. Above, narrator-Neh is recognized as a homodiegetic-extradiegetic narrator. According to Genette, an extradiegetic narrator can aim only at an extradiegetic narratee.[66] The prayers of the narrator address God, indicating that the extradiegetic narratee of the book of Nehemiah is none other than God himself. The ramifications of this for the narrative are spelled out in chapter 4.

Thus, in Nehemiah, there are two levels that must be distinguished. There is the story being told by narrator-Neh, and there is the level of narration. This distinction makes it clear that some of the prayers in the book occur on the level of narration while others occur within the story being told. Those prayers prayed within the story affect the story in variety of ways, but those on the level of narration do not affect the story directly. Instead, they reveal the narratee as God, a revelation that impacts the reader's understanding of the narrative whole. By keeping the distinction between narrator-Neh and character Neh and the distinction between the levels always at hand, this dissertation does not fall into the trap of confusing the two and is able to describe more fully that which takes place within the story being told by the narrator and that which the narrator does in the telling of the story.

Point of View. There has been considerable discussion and confusion about the terms point of view and focalization. Point of view is generally acknowledged to be "one of the most troublesome of critical terms" as Chatman has stated.[67] Or, as Berlin has stated,

> The term 'point of view' is used rather broadly in literary criticism to designate the position or perspective from which a literary story is told. As interest in this subject grew, so did its complexity. There are now [in 1994] several different kinds, or levels,

[66] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 260.

[67] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 151.

of point of view that can be distinguished, and several different systems for doing this.[68]

The term focalization came about as Gérard Genette attempted to clarify what was being talked about when scholars mention point of view. He contended that scholars were using point of view to encompass too much, both "who sees" and "who speaks."[69] For him, "who speaks" is the narrator, but that narrator can narrate in such a way as to tell the story from a perspective not his own or give a variety of perspectives in the telling. He called this *focalization*.[70]

This was a watershed distinction and gave rise to a great deal of discussion and further theorizing. In the so called "post-Genettian" era, scholars like Mieke Bal and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan built on and, in their eyes, corrected Genette's work, talking of focalizers and the focalized.[71] They also tried to clarify all of the various relationships between the two, sometimes combining concepts from Genette with those of Boris Uspensky.[72]

Contemporaneous with Genette, Boris Uspensky was dealing with point of view in a different way, discussing four different aspects or levels of point of view, namely: ideology, phraseology, time and space, and psychology.[73] The ideological aspect has to do with the overall point of view of the work, or as Berlin states it, "the point of view according to which the events

---

[68] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 46.

[69] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 186.

[70] See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 161–211, especially 185–94. For his defense against his critics see also *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, 64–78.

[71] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 74, referencing Mieke Bal, *Narratologie: Essais sur la signification narrative dans quatre romans modernes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977), 29 and 33. She writes, "Narratives, however, are not only focalized *by* someone but also *on* someone or something. In other words, focalization has both a subject and an object. The subject (the 'focalizer') is the agent whose perception orients the presentation, whereas the object (the 'focalized') is what the focalizer perceives."

[72] See Rimmon-Kenan's discussion on pp. 77–82 of *Narrative Fiction*.

[73] Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form* (trans. Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973). Uspensky's name is spelled variably Uspenski (Genette), Uspenskij (Ska), and Uspensky. Since it is listed as Uspensky in the English translation from 1973, that is the spelling adopted here.

of the narrative are evaluated and judged."[74] The phraseology aspect of point of view deals with "the linguistic features in the discourse that indicate whose point of view is being expressed."[75] The spatial and temporal aspect deals primarily with "the location in time and space of the narrator in relation to the narrative."[76] Finally, the psychological aspect "refers to the viewpoint from which actions or behaviors are perceived or described."[77]

While all of the above is important for a narrative analysis, for the current discussion of Nehemiah two aspects of the point of view discussion prove most helpful. The first is the recognition that each character within a narrative espouses an "evaluative point of view,"[78] as does the narrator. It is this fact of multiple points of view that gives rise to conflict that carries narrative along.[79] Adele Berlin writes, "The Bible excels in the technique of presenting many points of view and it is this that, perhaps more than anything else, lends drama to its narratives and makes its characters come alive."[80]

These various ideological or evaluative viewpoints can be identified by paying attention to what Uspensky calls the phraseological level, "the linguistic features in the discourse that indicate whose point of view is being expressed."[81] Berlin has given a helpful overview of this

---

[74] Berlin, *Poetics*, 55.

[75] Ibid., 56.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid. Note that Genette, in *Narrative Discourse*, 189n47, seems to equate his concept of three focalizations—external, internal, and zero focalization—with Uspensky's discussion of the psychological aspect.

[78] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 53, writes, "We can also speak of the evaluative point of view of any given character or character group within the story. In this sense, the term refers to the norms, values, and general worldview that govern the way a character looks at things and renders judgments upon them." Berlin, *Poetics,* 55–56, following Uspensky, would call this a character's ideological viewpoint, to be distinguished from the ideological viewpoint of the whole work. Identifying that point of view can be done in a variety of ways as Adele Berlin outlines on pp. 55–82 of her *Poetics*.

[79] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 42.

[80] Berlin, *Poetics*, 70.

[81] Ibid., 56.

for both the narrator and the characters.[82] Essentially the narrator's point of view is established by listening to the narrator's voice whenever it occurs. The narrator is typically heard in introductions, summaries, and in evaluative comments. Berlin notes also that narrators are heard when they "step out of the frame,"[83] that is, when the narrator addresses the narratee directly, outside of the story. This frame breaking is especially important in Nehemiah with regard to what this dissertation calls the interjected prayers.[84]

With regard to character's point of view, Berlin notes that direct discourse is one way of indicating and recognizing a character's point of view—one hears a character's own words.[85] The words of the narrator can also help establish a character's point of view as the narrator uses proper names, describes relationships, tells what a character was thinking or feeling, and the like.[86]

The second important aspect of point of view is that of the overall evaluative point of view established as normative in a given narrative, sometimes called the ideological or conceptual point of view.[87] Marc Allen Powell writes,

> One way that the implied author influences the reader's apprehension of the text is by insisting that the reader adopt a point of view consistent with that of the narrative. . . . Here we are concerned with what scholars call the *evaluative point of view*, which governs the work in general. This refers to the norms, values, and general worldview that the implied author establishes as operative for the story. To put it another way, evaluative point of view may be defined as the standards of judgment by which

[82] Ibid., 55–82.

[83] Ibid., 59.

[84] See the classification of the prayers in ch. 3.

[85] Of course, one should recognize that those words are always mediated through the narrator.

[86] Berlin, *Poetics*, 59–73. Note how closely this relates to characterization. As one observes a character's point of view, one is really also dealing with characterization, which is exactly what Berlin was concerned with in this portion of her book.

[87] Chatman calls it conceptual, while Berlin, following Uspensky, calls it ideological.

> readers are led to evaluate the events, characters, and settings that comprise the story.[88]

He goes on to describe what this means for the reader:

> As readers we must accept the implied author's evaluative point of view even if it means suspending our own judgments during the act of reading. . . . Readers are free, of course, to critique the point of view a narrative espouses. An initial acceptance of that point of view, however, is essential as preliminary to such criticism, for without such acceptance the story can never be understood in the first place.[89]

It is often considered axiomatic in Biblical literature that the evaluative viewpoint of God is the evaluative point of view that is normative and that the narrator's evaluative point of view matches that of God.[90] Drawing on the work of J. M. Lotman, J. D. Kingsbury writes, "Characteristic of a gospel story like Matthew is that the many conflicting evaluative points of view expressed by the characters can fundamentally be reduced to two: the 'true' and the 'untrue'."[91] He goes on to say, "No effort is made in Matthew to carve out room for gray areas.

---

[88] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 23–24. See also Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 81–82. As has been seen above, Powell uses the term evaluative point of view for both the individual characters and for the overall, ideological or conceptual point of view. This is just one more example of the terminological confusion in the discussion of point of view.

[89] Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 24.

[90] This is certainly true if one approaches Biblical books from the standpoint that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim 3). With the exception of those who emphasize the subjectivity of the text, like David M. Gunn and Dana Nolan Fewell in their volume *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, (Oxford Bible Series; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), it is also the general assumption of those who analyze the Scriptures but do not necessarily hold to the inspiration of the Scriptures. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 131, talks about the "all-authoritative narrator" and goes on to say, "Where the general model of omniscience in literature dispenses with one of the basic perspectives by virtually equating the author with the narrator, the Bible's introduces a new perspective by disassociating God from the characters and aligning him with the narrator. (Within an inspirational framework, God himself even becomes the author of the book as well as of its plot, without forfeiting his agentlike status.)" Berlin, *Poetics*, 56, writes, "In the Bible, the ideological viewpoint is that of the narrator. It is he, according to his conceptual framework, who evaluates. Occasionally the ideological views of the characters are present, but in general these are subordinated to that of the narrator." Her note to this last statement (p. 148n28) goes on to say, "The one exception may be God, who is a character in the narratives and whose ideological view is presumably the same as the narrator's. I say this because I cannot think of any passage in which the narrator disagrees with God's evaluation or judgment. Petersen (107) finds that in Mark the narrator's ideological standpoint is identical with that of his central character, Jesus. I hesitate to make any assumptions for the many narratives in the Hebrew bible because in some God is absent altogether and in many he is a minor character. Nevertheless, one often gets the impression that the narrator is reflecting the way God would evaluate events if he had been the one telling the story."

[91] Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 34, referring to J. M. Lotman, "Point of View in a Text." *NLH* 6 (1975): 343.

The measuring rod for distinguishing truth from untruth is, as the passage 16:23 indicates, 'thinking the things of God' (as opposed to 'thinking the things of humans')."[92] This then amounts to thinking the things of the character Jesus and the narrator.

When one considers the book of Nehemiah, the issue of the overall evaluative point of view is not quite so simple. Unlike most other biblical literature, Nehemiah has a first-person narrator, telling his own story, as discussed above. With a first-person narrator, the assumption of objectivity is called into question as is the assumption that the narrator necessarily reflects the evaluative viewpoint of God. Rather than simply trusting the narrator to be God's representative in the telling of the story, the reader must evaluate, on the basis of the text, whether or not that is so. And the reader's conclusion will affect the final understanding of the narrative.

As this dissertation pays attention to point of view, it is shown that what Kingsbury states about Matthew does, in fact, apply to Nehemiah as well. Eskenazi and Reynolds both point out the prominent contrast between "good" and "bad/evil," (טוב and רע), in Nehemiah.[93] Also, in Nehemiah's narrative, it is God to whom Nehemiah, both as a character and as the narrator, continually appeals in prayer, further demonstrating that what God thinks is normative and that Nehemiah believes himself to be in line with God, as opposed to the other characters in the narrative.[94] When one reads the narrative from Nehemiah's point of view, one sees that

---

[92] Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 34.

[93] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 146. She comments on the "striking repetition of the words טוב and רע, 'good' and 'evil,'" which "echo throughout the Nehemiah story." In alignment with her view that Ezra is portrayed in a good light while Nehemiah is the foil, she goes on to say, "These indicate Nehemiah's polarized views of reality. Nehemiah sees the world in terms of good or evil, friend or foe, in contrast to an Ezra who interacts amicably with others." Analyzing Neh 2:1–8, Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 142, writes, "This scene also starts another contrast that will continue in successive scenes. The general word for 'good' (טוב) appears opposite the common word for 'bad' (רע or רעה)."

[94] Within Neh there are a variety of points of view expressed, each of which needs to be evaluated against the normative point of view of God. First and foremost there is the point of view of character-Neh, the protagonist. Other main viewpoints include the opposition group and the people in general. (Reynolds also lists King Artaxerxes.) Finally, there is the point of view of narrator-Neh, the voice through which all the others are portrayed.

Nehemiah's prayers in the past have been answered and that Nehemiah has accomplished all that he has according to the will of God. One then reads Nehemiah's prayers to be remembered, expecting that these too are in line with God's will, thus God will remember Nehemiah.

As stated above, one can decide to disagree with Nehemiah's point of view or to critique it. On the basis of evidence outside of the text, one may conclude that Nehemiah misunderstands God and presents him wrongly. But in a narrative analysis, for the sake of understanding the book on its own terms, one must at least initially accept Nehemiah's understanding of God and his claim to be thinking the things of God.

Time. When dealing with the concept of time in a narrative, there are two aspects that must be considered. First, there is the time within the world of the story. For example, upon hearing the report about the state of Jerusalem's walls and gates and the disgrace of the people, Nehemiah mourned and prayed *for days*. Often this is called narrative time or narrated time, but Rimmon-Kenan helpfully refers to it as story-time instead.[95]

In addition to story-time, there is text-time, often referred to as narration time, the time it takes to narrate the story. Again, it is Rimmon-Kenan following the lead of Genette who supplies the term text-time. She does this because narration time or text-time is measured most objectively not in time—the time it takes to speak or read the narrative—but in the space or number of lines in the text.[96]

It is not possible to evaluate these various points of view directly against the normative point of view of God, however, because God's point of view is expressed only indirectly, as it matches one of the characters. In the story told by narrator-Neh, it is character-Neh whose point of view is shown to be the same as that of God. This linking of character-Neh's point of view with God's point of view is suggested early in the narrative and is established, in part, by the prayers within the story as it is shown that Nehemiah's prayers are answered affirmatively.

[95] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 44–45.

[96] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 143–44, responds, "It might be claimed that the time required by different narrators to tell or by different readers to read a narrative varies, but these differences pale into insignificance alongside the immense disparities between narration time and narrated time." I agree with Bar-Efrat's point, but I like the terms

A further helpful distinction is made by Rimmon-Kenan, again on the basis of the work of Genette. She breaks the discussion of time into the categories of order, duration, and frequency. She writes,

> Statements about *order* would answer the question 'when?' in terms like: first, second, last; before, after, etc. Statements about *duration* would answer the question 'how long?' in terms like: an hour, a year; long, short, from x till y, etc. Statements about *frequency* would answer the question 'how often?' in terms like: x times a minute, a month, a page. It is under these headings that Genette sets out to examine the relations between story-time and text-time. Under *order* Genette discusses the relations between the succession of events in the story and their linear disposition in the text. Under *duration* he examines the relations between the time the events are supposed to have taken to occur and the amount of text devoted to their narration. Under *frequency* he looks at the relations between the number of times an event appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated in the text.[97]

The concept of order includes such things as prolepses and analepses, two types of dischronology, both of which are important in the analysis of Nehemiah. Prolepsis occurs when an event is related in the narrative ahead of its time in the story. This happens in Neh 3 when the narrator chooses to narrate the building of the wall, telling ahead of time who completed which sections, before the building is complete within the telling of the story. According to Rimmon-Kenan, "When [prolepses] occur, they replace the kind of suspense deriving from the question 'What will happen next?' by another kind of suspense, revolving around the question 'How is it going to happen?'"[98] Analepses occur when a narrator looks back, narrating an earlier event after having narrated later events. This happens in Neh 13:6 when narrator-Neh makes it known that there was a point, earlier in the story, when he had returned to Artaxerxes. Often these serve to

---

text-time and story-time because they are easily distinguished and not so easily confused as narration time and narrated time.

[97] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 46.

[98] Ibid., 48.

fill in a gap that had been left earlier, answering questions that may have arisen due to the missing information.

It is the concept of *duration* that will prove most useful as the prayers are considered in relation to the time of the narrative. As stated above, duration has to do with "the relations between the time the events are supposed to have taken to occur and the amount of text devoted to their narration."[99] Regarding these relations Bar-Efrat writes,

> Literary scholarship has made it clear that the examination of the relations between these two networks of time can be very fruitful. By studying the relation between narration time [text-time] and narrated time [story-time] the relative weight of the various sections of the narrative will be clarified, as will their proportions with regard to one another and the narrative as a whole, thereby disclosing the focal points of the narrative. By elucidating the relationship between the two time systems we will be able to see in how much detail matters are presented within the narrative, enabling us to draw conclusions about the meaning of the narrative, its central themes, etc.[100]

Rimmon-Kenan speaks of the relation between the two in terms of acceleration and deceleration. She writes, "The effect of acceleration is produced by devoting a short segment of the text to a long period of the story, relative to the 'norm' established for this text. The effect of deceleration is produced by the opposite procedure, namely, devoting a long segment of the text to a short period of the story."[101] Very similar to Bar-Efrat's comments quoted above, she goes on to say, that "acceleration and deceleration are often evaluated by the reader as indicators of importance and centrality. Ordinarily, the more important events or conversations are given in detail (i.e. decelerated), whereas the less important ones are compressed (i.e. accelerated)."[102] By taking note of deceleration, one can identify key parts of the text.

---

[99] Ibid., 46.

[100] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 143.

[101] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 52–53.

[102] Ibid., 56.

Both name other relations between the two times. Rimmon-Kenan lists "*ellipsis* (omission), where zero textual space corresponds to some story duration,"[103] "*descriptive pause*, where some segment of the text corresponds to zero story duration,"[104] "*summary*, the pace is accelerated through a textual 'condensation' or 'compression' of a given story-period into a relatively short statement of its main features,"[105] and "*scene*, . . . story-duration and text-duration are conventionally considered identical."[106] Bar-Efrat's list is essentially the same, but with somewhat different terminology.[107] He summarizes, once again emphasizing how these relations are important for interpretation, "Time gaps, bridgings, summary account, scenic representation and the narrator's interpretation, which involve successive slowing down of narrated time, may be considered to reflect an ascending order of importance, providing us with a means to determine the relative significance of narrative items."[108]

Applying these categories to Nehemiah, especially to the prayers, one can see the importance of the prayers for the narrative. While the prayers that are mentioned but not recorded would count as summary, and thus less significant, the prayers in Neh 1 and 9 are scenic, that is, "story-duration and text-duration are conventionally considered identical."[109] Deceleration of this sort often implies importance, highlighting the decelerated portion of the text. According to Bar-Efrat, such scenic representation is second only to the narrator's

[103] Ibid., 53.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid., 54.

[107] See Bar-Efrat's discussion in *Narrative Art*, 152–59.

[108] Ibid., 159.

[109] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 54.

interpretation when determining "the relative significance of narrative items."[110] These prayers, then, are marked as important features of the narrative, deserving close attention.

Finally, in terms of duration, the interjected prayers are descriptive pauses "where some segment of the text corresponds to zero story duration."[111] While Rimmon-Kenan's definition of descriptive pause fits the situation well, the nomenclature does not seem quite right. Bar-Efrat would call this narrator's interpretation, but that does not fit exactly either. In any case, these textual features are highlighted by the fact that there is text-time but absolutely no corresponding story-time. They stand outside of the story being told by the narrator. It is information directed directly to the narratee. Bar-Efrat orders this kind of information as being of the highest importance for interpretation![112] In order to understand the narrative, these interrupting interpretations or pauses must be taken into account, the very thing lacking in other narrative readings of Nehemiah.

As is demonstrated in chapter 4, the content of these pauses in the case of the book of Nehemiah does not add anything to the story. Instead, in the level of narration,[113] it gives the interpretive key or reason for the story. Nehemiah the narrator asks to be remembered. The story that he relates then serves as the grounds or basis for the request. Again, the piling up of these pauses near the end of the book and the fact that book ends with one is quite significant. One could say that the book ends with its interpretive key.[114]

---

[110] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art,* 159.

[111] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 53.

[112] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 159.

[113] See the section The Narrator and the Narratee, above.

[114] See the section Primacy and Recency Effects, below.

The Primacy and Recency Effects. The positioning of information in the linear flow of the text is an element of the shaping of the reader that is crucial to reaching the finalized hypothesis with regard to Nehemiah. Rimmon-Kenan notes, "The text can direct and control the reader's comprehension and attitudes by positioning certain items before others."[115] She continues, "Thus, information and attitudes presented at an early stage of the text tend to encourage the reader to interpret everything in their light. The reader is prone to preserve such meaning and attitudes for as long as possible."[116] This she calls the *primacy effect*. On the other hand, there is the *recency effect* which "encourages the reader to assimilate all previous information to the item presented last."[117] Between the beginning and the ending she notes that readers are continually in the process of making sense of the text, "forming hypotheses, reinforcing them, developing them, modifying them, and sometimes replacing them by others or dropping them altogether."[118]

These concepts are important as one considers Nehemiah's narrative, especially the effect of the interjected prayers on the narrative. Whereas the narrative begins with the narrator telling the story of Nehemiah's work to restore Jerusalem's walls and people, at 3:36–37 the narrator stops narrating and prays briefly. At 5:19 and 6:14 this happens again. The text forces the reader to consider what is happening as the story is interrupted by prayer for these brief moments. The reader is challenged to make sense of these prayers in light of how the text began—the primacy effect. In Neh 12 the reader reads the dedication of the walls and the ensuing celebration. It seems as though the story of restoration has come to its conclusion; however, the text continues.

---

[115] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 120. Emphasis hers. In her bibliography, she lists a number of works by Perry related to how readers make sense of texts on the basis of textual clues.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid., 121.

In Neh 13, the narrator relates the failures of the people, and four more prayers are prayed by the narrator in rather quick succession. As is shown in more detail in chapter 4, this last portion of the text causes the reader to look back over the rest in an attempt to assimilate it to the ending—the recency effect.[119]

The Reading Process—Reading the Story as Discoursed

The reading of a narrative text is a process of discovery and assimilation, a process of reading and rereading, a process of forming hypotheses and then revising them. This is due, in large part, to the linear nature of texts. While one can look at an entire painting or photograph at once and then choose where to focus one's attention, the experience is different with a text. As Rimmon-Kenan states, a text "imposes upon the reader a successive perception of bits of information."[120]

Normally, a reader begins at the beginning of the text and follows through to the end taking in the bits of information in the order in which they are presented. But the order in which the information is presented is not necessarily the order in which things happened. An event takes place in a definite sequence of actions, some of which may be simultaneous, others of which follow one to the next in a sequence of cause and effect or action and response. But when one undertakes to narrate the event in a text, one faces both limitations and possibilities. On the one hand, the teller of the story is limited to a linear progression of bits of information "even when these are meant to be understood as simultaneous in the story."[121] On the other hand, the storyteller can make artful use of that linear *limitation* to control how and in what order the

[119] Without labeling it, Reynolds has noted the same thing, though he draws somewhat different conclusions than this dissertation. See the review of Reynolds in ch. 1.

[120] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 119.

[121] Ibid, 120.

reader receives the information, possibly rearranging the chronological sequence for a particular purpose or effect.

In addition, the writing of a text implies selection and omission, since not all things about any given event can be recorded. Some bits of information are included in the linear report while others are not. Again this is a limitation and an opportunity. On the one hand, not everything can be included. On the other hand, it is at the discretion of the storyteller to select certain bits of information and purposefully to omit others, momentarily or altogether.

It is assumed that everything selected for inclusion is important to the story being told, though the importance may be lesser or greater.[122] Robert Alter comments,

> There are virtually no "free motifs" in biblical narrative. The ancient Hebrew writer will never tell us, say, that a character lazily stretched out both arms, simply out of an author's sheer mimetic pleasure in rendering a familiar human gesture, but he does report that the dying Jacob crossed his hands when he reached out to bless Joseph's two sons, because that is a gesture fraught with significance in effecting a transfer of privilege (the blessing of the right hand) from the elder to the younger son. Whatever is reported, then, can be assumed to be essential to the story.[123]

On the other hand, omissions might or might not be important, since omission must take place due to time and space constraints. Sternberg calls necessary and unimportant omissions "blanks."[124] These "may be disregarded without loss, indeed [they] must be disregarded to keep the narrative in focus."[125] In contrast, omissions that are significant, those that "demand closure" because what is missing is necessary for the understanding of the narrative, he calls "gaps."[126] In turn, these gaps can be temporary, in which "what happened in the action emerges in the

---

[122] Recall the discussion of duration, above.

[123] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 79–80. In n. 8 on p. 79, Alter implies that free motifs are material that can be "deleted without essentially altering the plot."

[124] Meir Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 236.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

narration later,"[127] or permanent, a gap which the narrative never closes by revealing the necessary information.

The linear nature of the text with its dischronologies and interplay between inclusion and gapping creates ambiguity in the text. It creates questions that must be answered in order to make sense of the text. A real reader, in the attempt to become the implied reader, must work to make sense of the bits of information as they are presented. The reader must try to answer the questions raised by the text by putting it back into chronological order or by filling the gaps.

Making sense of the bits of information does not happen all at once. Instead, it is a slow process that involves the creation and testing of hypotheses again and again in the reading experience as the reader progresses through the linear text, experiencing ambiguity regularly along the way. As Rimmon-Kenan states,

> The reader . . . does not wait until the end to understand the text. Although texts provide information only gradually, they encourage the reader to start integrating data from the very beginning (Perry, 1979, p. 47). From this perspective, reading can be seen as a continuous process of forming hypotheses, reinforcing them, developing them, modifying them, and sometimes replacing them by others or dropping them altogether.[128]

Regarding the biblical text and its reading, Sternberg states,

> The Bible exploits the fact that literature is a time-art, in which the textual continuum is apprehended on a temporal continuum and things unfold sequentially rather than simultaneously. In its withholding and gapping of information, the text makes use of the reader's reluctance or inability to wait until the end for closures that may never come. Instead, he endeavors at each stage to pattern the materials already presented as logically and completely as possible, even to anticipate what the future holds, constantly attempting to infer from the given to the hidden.[129]

---

[127] Ibid., 237.

[128] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 121.

[129] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 198–99.

Through this process of hypothesizing, testing, and revising to resolve the ambiguities of the text, the reader is shaped by the text or trained to read it correctly. Rimmon-Kenan asserts that "in the course of reading, [the text] develops in the reader a specific competence needed to come to grips with it, often inducing him to change his previous conceptions and modify his outlook."[130] Thus, "by the end of the reading process, the reader usually will have reached a 'finalized hypothesis,' an overall meaning which makes sense of the text as a whole."[131]

The reading of the text of Nehemiah is no different from the reading process described above. The text is presented in linear fashion with dischronologies and gaps that create ambiguity and questions that the reader must struggle to resolve. Hypotheses must be formed along the way and developed, modified, or even discarded and replaced. This can be illustrated easily in the first chapter of Nehemiah. The paragraphs that follow use Neh 1 to demonstrate the reading process. Further, chapter 4 will pay attention specifically to the role of the prayers and the effects that they have on the process and on the finalized hypothesis.

As the reader begins reading Neh1, he or she is given the information that what follows is "the words of Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah." The reader then encounters information that gives the setting for the story. It is the month of Kislev in the 20th year. But already there is an omission. It is the 20th year, but the question arises, "The 20th year of what?" Already in the very beginning of the narrative, the reader must pause to ponder the question and decide if this is an important omission, a gap in need of filling, or a blank, an omission of non-necessary information. No answer is provided in the immediate context, thus the reader will move forward in the linear text, experiencing new bits of information and seeking resolution to this initial omission in the text.

[130] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 118.

Moving forward in the text, however, simply gives rise to more questions. The reader learns that Nehemiah is in Susa but is not told why. The reader hears that Nehemiah has a brother named Hanani along with other brothers, but there is no indication of how many brothers or of their names. Some other men accompanied Hanani from Judah, but they, too, remain uncounted and nameless. A reader also may ask why Nehemiah's brother was in Judah while Nehemiah was in Susa.

Within two verses of text, multiple questions have arisen due to omissions in the text. Some of these omissions are simply blanks, but others may be gaps, missing information that will be crucial to the understanding of the text. The reader must struggle to decided which are which, perhaps dismissing an omission as a blank only to find later that the missing information really is important.

In continuing, the reader learns about the troubles of the people and the condition of the city of Jerusalem. More questions arise. Why are the people in distress and disgrace? Why is the wall of Jerusalem broken down and its gates burnt with fire? And why does Nehemiah ask about these things? And then, Nehemiah's reaction to the report raises new questions. Why does Nehemiah sit, weep, mourn, fast, and pray for days? And how many days? And who is the God of the Heavens? Is that the god in Susa, or is it a name used for another god? And what does Nehemiah say when he prays?

A few answers finally come, accompanied by more questions, as the reader reads the information presented in the prayer in verses five through eleven. Immediately one learns that the God of the Heavens is Yahweh. One learns what Nehemiah believes about this Yahweh and

---

[131] Ibid., 121.

about the people. The reader hears Nehemiah confessing his sins and the sins of the people, which might cause one to wonder, "Who is Nehemiah to be confessing the sins of the nation?"

Continuing to read through the prayer, the reader might think that now he or she has the answer to the question about what Nehemiah said when he prayed for days, but then the reader encounters verse 11. There, as Nehemiah makes his request for success, the reader finds the word "today." Now the reader must back up and realize that this whole prayer is a prayer on a specific day, not the prayer that Nehemiah prayed for days, though it very well could be like what he prayed during the unknown number of days.

Reaching verse 11 also gives rise to another question. Nehemiah asks for success and favor before "this man." Who is "this man?" The only other man mentioned by name who might be present is Hanani, but that does not seem to make much sense. Hanani does not seem all that important, and "today" is "days" after Hanani's arrival, so one cannot know if he is even present. And why does Nehemiah need success and favor before whoever it is? What does he have in mind to do?

Reading the rest of verse 11 allows the reader partially to fill the gap about the identity of "this man." It also allows the reader to hypothesize about the earlier question concerning why Nehemiah is in Susa. The reader finds out that Nehemiah is cupbearer to the king. As helpful as that information is, it gives rise to yet another question, namely, "What king?"

Thankfully, the answer to that comes quite soon, in the very next verse. The reader finds out that the king is none other than Artaxerxes. Now the reader knows who "this man" is and what Nehemiah is doing in Susa. And another time reference is given, the month of Nisan in the 20th year of Artaxerxes. Now the reader has to decide if this answers the earlier question raised in verse one about the 20th year. And the reader still has no idea what Nehemiah has in mind to do.

And so the reading process continues, structured and delimited by the overall parameters of the narrative itself. The reader encounters bits of information given in linear fashion. Questions are raised. Hypotheses are formed and then revised as more information is given. Some questions are answered easily or soon after they have been raised. Other questions take more effort, more information, and more time. Some may even be left unresolved. And, often, the resolution of one question gives rise to yet another.

Some texts even end in unresolved ambiguity. Rimmon-Kenan gives Henry James' "The Figure in the Carpet" as an example of such a text,[132] while Sternberg cites James' *The Turn of the Screw*.[133] In both examples, the text remains ambiguous because there are at least two plausible hypotheses and no definite way to determine which is correct. For a biblical example, Sternberg gives an extended and sophisticated treatment of the David and Bathsheba account in 2 Sam 11,[134] a subsection of the larger David narrative. Working through the unit, Sternberg comes to the question of whether or not Uriah knows of David's adultery and Bathsheba's unfaithfulness. He writes,

> The surprising "did not go down to his house" opens a gap at another focal point. The question why Uriah fails to make a beeline for home links up with a more central enigma: *Does Uriah know of his wife's adultery and pregnancy?* The text does not permit any univocal answer: both affirmative and negative hypotheses arise with legitimate claim to gap-filling. Each of these hypotheses is indicated and reinforced by a good number of arguments, while other arguments draw attention to its flaws and support the rival answer. And each hypothesis sheds a different light on details in the text and organizes them into a different plot. The narrative deliberately creates this impossibility of deciding between the two alternative systems of gap-filling. It

[132] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 121, writes, "Thus at the end . . . the reader cannot decide between hypothesis (1) 'there is a figure in Vereker's carpet' and hypothesis (2) 'there is not figure in Vereker's carpet'. Instead of closure there is a perpetual oscillation between two possibilities."

[133] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 223, writes, "Since 1924, this narrative puzzle has given rise to endless argument over the question of ambiguity and establishment of a single valid hypothesis to resolve it." He concludes (pp. 224–25) that "the regulating principle of *The Turn of the Screw* is the impossibility of choosing between the alternate readings."

[134] Ibid, 190–222.

> demands that both be maintained simultaneously, and thus profits from their tense interaction.[135]

In the examples from Henry James, the mutually exclusive hypotheses apply to the whole work. In Sternberg's example, the problem is limited to this subsection of the David story. Interestingly, in this example, while there are mutually exclusive hypotheses for resolving the ambiguity of Uriah's knowledge, either resolution makes the same contribution to the larger narrative—David stands condemned.

As is shown in the discussion of plot, above, and more fully in chapter 4, rather than coming to a tidy conclusion with all of the questions answered and ambiguities resolved, the book of Nehemiah ends with an implicit question in need of resolution, namely, "Will Nehemiah be remembered for good?" The task of the reader is to determine an answer or conclude that no answer can be given due to competing hypotheses between which one cannot choose. This dissertation contends that the final question in Nehemiah's narrative is answerable and that the text "develops in the reader a specific competence needed to come to grips with it."[136] By paying careful attention to the narrative and the prayers within it, the dissertation "will have reached a 'finalized hypothesis,' an overall meaning which makes sense of the text as a whole."[137]

Before moving to that finalized hypothesis, attention must be given to the prayers in the book. This is the subject of the next chapter. Afterward, on the basis of the analysis and classification of the prayers in chapter 3, chapter 4 goes on to demonstrate that understanding the prayers is essential to the finalized hypothesis which makes sense of the text as a whole.

---

[135] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 201–2.

[136] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 118.

[137] Ibid., 121.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRAYERS IN NEHEMIAH—ANALYSIS AND CLASSIFICATION

Introductory Comments

As noted in the introductory paragraph of this project, the prayers are a pervasive feature of the book of Nehemiah. Nearly all who comment on this book, whether on a devotional, popular, or scholarly level, comment on the prayers that abound within it. Unfortunately, while all seem to notice these prayers, the distinctions among them and the narrative significance of those distinctions are often overlooked or mistaken. Most commentators have recognized that the prayers are not all the same—sometimes the act of praying is reported without the corresponding words being recorded; at other times the very words of the prayer are given; and in other instances, while the words are recorded, no introduction is given to prepare the reader for a prayer—yet no one has undertaken the task of focusing on the prayers and adequately explaining the differences and how those differences affect the narrative whole. Those who read the book as a composite work typically attribute the differences to interpolation and to the nature of the sources from which the prayers purportedly were taken.[1] On the other hand, those who have attempted narrative readings have been able to give a more holistic reading of the book, but they too have glossed over the differences in the prayers rather than exploring them and explaining them as they function within the narrative.[2] This dissertation hopes to improve upon the prior

[1] See the discussion of the NM and the discussion of the prayers in ch. 1.

[2] See, for example, the reviews of Reynolds and Loken in ch. 1.

readings by paying attention to the overlooked factor of the prayers and the distinctions among them.

The thesis of this dissertation asserts that attention to the narratological function of the prayers in the book of Nehemiah reveals that the book is Nehemiah's apologia. Among other things, chapter 1 demonstrated that it is possible and even beneficial to read Nehemiah as a self contained narrative. Chapter 2 introduced narratology and made preliminary application to the book of Nehemiah. Now, in chapter 3, because the thesis of the dissertation focuses on the prayers, the prayers themselves are analyzed in detail, including attention to the fundamental issues of translation and exegesis. This detailed exegetical work contributes to the overall scholarly discussion of prayer in the HB and in Nehemiah in particular.[3] Even more critical for the topic at hand, the exegetical work along with the classification of the prayers prepares the way for chapter 4 and the analysis of the narrative on the basis of the prayers. Finally, by providing this analysis and classification in a separate chapter, the demonstration and argumentation in chapter 4 can flow with minimal interruption.

Analysis of the Prayers

In this chapter, a focused exegetical study of each of the prayers in the book of Nehemiah is offered. The prayers are studied in the order in which they are found in the narrative, allowing the reader to experience the sequence of the prayers in the flow of the narrative. For each prayer, the narrative context is given in order to situate the translation and analysis. This careful translation and analysis is then offered, much in the style of a commentary, noting key words and themes, translational difficulties, and the like. The translations are not intended to read smoothly like a modern English Bible. Instead, the word order and flow of the Hebrew text have been

[3] See especially the discussions of the structures of the prayers in Neh 1:5–11a, 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5], 9:5b–37.

retained to a large extent in order to assist the reader in seeing patterns that would otherwise be lost. Where it is helpful (Neh 1:5–11a, 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5], 9:5b–37) an analysis of the structure is also included.[4] Finally, each prayer will be discussed in light of its relation to and function within the larger narrative into which it is embedded and in which it plays a role toward the overall understanding of the book.

Neh 1:4

Narrative Context. Following the prophet-like announcement דִּבְרֵי נְחֶמְיָה בֶּן־חֲכַלְיָה, "The words of Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah," the book begins with narrator-Neh setting the stage for what is to come. He mentions that it was the month of Chislev in the 20th year, though he does not tell the 20th year of what at this point, forcing the reader to keep reading to find out more. He tells us that character-Neh was in Susa. There, one of his brothers and some others from Judah came to him. He inquired of them with regard to the Judahites and the city of Jerusalem. Those from Judah replied by describing the distress and disgrace of the people, the broken condition of the wall of Jerusalem, and the burned condition of the gates. To this report Nehemiah responds by sitting, weeping and mourning. In addition he fasts and prays before the God of the heavens.

Neh 1:4—Text, Translation, and Notes

וַיְהִי כְּשָׁמְעִי אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה יָשַׁבְתִּי וָאֶבְכֶּה וָאֶתְאַבְּלָה יָמִים

וָאֲהִי צָם וּמִתְפַּלֵּל לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם

When I heard[5] these words, I sat down, and I wept and mourned[6] for days.[7] And I was fasting[8] and praying[9] before the God of the Heavens.[10]

[4] See also Appendix One.

[5] The Hebrew root שמע is an important word in the narrative, occurring 28 times. This is the first occurrence of

the root. Here it is an inf. const. with the prefixed prep. and a pron. suf. following the impf. *waw* consec. of היה, forming a temporal clause. This same construction occurs in Neh 13:3. It occurs in 8:9 without היה. More commonly in Nehemiah, שׁמע is used temporally by placing the pf. of שׁמע after כאשׁר. This occurs in 3:33; 4:1, 9; 5:6; 6:1 and 16. Two vv., 2:10 and 19, begin with the Qal impf. *waw* consec. third sg. m. of שׁמע but are typically translated as temporal clauses. This is legitimate according to GKC, § 111 d. See also Williams, 177n635, for Joüon and *IBHS* references. Given the context of these two instances and the eight temporal instances of the inf. of שׁמע, a temporal translation of these verbs is reasonable and likely. As one reads the narrative, one recognizes that much of the action in Neh takes place when someone has heard something. The root שׁמע is also important in the prayers. In 1:6 שׁמע is used to call upon God to listen to the prayer of his servant. In 3:36 the impv. form is used to entreat God to hear and to act. In the long prayer of Neh 9, the root occurs seven times, but there it is used in a historical sense, reporting that the Israelites refused to hear while God repeatedly heard their cries. See the treatments of these prayers for more information.

[6] יָשַׁבְתִּי וָאֶבְכֶּה וָאֶתְאַבְּלָה—Sitting, weeping, and mourning are often found together, along with fasting and praying, in various combinations. Other words that are commonly found in combination with these are sackcloth, ashes, and earth as in Neh 9:1. This is the only example of this particular combination in the HB. Here, character-Neh engages in penitential actions common in the OT. In Ezra 9, Ezra engages in similar actions as he tears his garments, pulls out his hair and beard, sits appalled, arises, falls to his knees, spreads his hands and prays. In Dan 9, Daniel, too, engages in similar activities, seeking God by prayer, fasting, donning sackcloth and ashes, praying and making confession. בכה and אבל occur together again in Neh 8:9, but there character-Neh, Ezra, and the Levites exhorted the people not to mourn and weep.

[7] יָמִים is an acc. with a temporal sense. *HALOT*, s.v. יוֹם, 5, citing Neh 1:4, calls it a temporal acc. and gives the definition as "a few days, for some time." This particular example answers the question "how long" rather than "when," thus Williams, § 56 a, labels it a "Temporal-duration accusative." In this context it indicates that character-Neh sat, wept, and mourned for an extended period of time rather than just once. The following impf. *waw* consec. of היה combined with the ptcs. of צום and פלל continues this durative sense, indicating that the fasting and praying also took place over the extended period of time. This portrays character-Neh as a pious man, repeatedly or continually praying.

[8] צָם—The root צום occurs twice in Nehemiah (1:4 and 9:1), both times in the context of prayer. Here in 1:4 the fasting and the praying are parallel actions while in Neh 9, the fasting is a penitential precursor to the long Levitical prayer. צום occurs elsewhere in connection to prayer. See, for example Ps 35:14 and Dan 9:3 where the noun תְּפִלָּה is used in the context of fasting. See also 2 Sam 12:16, Ezra 8:21 and 23, and Joel 1:14 where fasting is connected to the prayer term בקשׁ in the sense of "seeking the Lord." In other instances prayer is not mentioned but is implicit. See, for example, Esth 4:16 and Jer 14:12.

[9] וּמִתְפַּלֵּל—The Hebrew verb פלל, "to pray," occurs only four times in Nehemiah (1:4, 6; 2:4, and 4:3 [ET 4:9]). Here in Neh 1:4 there is the Hitpael ptc. in a periphrastic construction describing character-Neh's ongoing actions. Again in Neh 1:6 there is an Hitpael ptc., but this time it is part of the prayer as character-Neh asks God to listen to the prayer he is praying. Neh 2:4 is like 1:4 in that it describes character-Neh's action, though instead of a ptc. the form is an Hitpael impf. *waw* consec. reporting the completed action that took place at the moment. Finally, Neh 4:3 is an Hitpael impf. *waw* consec. 1 pl. common describing the action of character-Neh and the builders in the face of opposition and threat. In Neh 1:4, 2:4, and 4:3, the root פלל is used to report that prayer took place, but no content is given.

[10] אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם—This const. phrase occurs nine times in the HB (Gen 24:3, 7; 2 Chr 36:23; Ezra 1:2; Neh 1:4, 5, 2:4, 20; and Jonah 1:9). As can be seen, four of the nine occur in Neh. The *massorah* at Neh 1:5 says that six of these occurrences follow the proper name Yahweh (Gen 24:3,7; 2Chr 36:23; Ezra 1:2; Neh 1:5; and Jonah 1:9). Only in Neh, in three out of four occasions, does it occur without specifying Yahweh first. Nehemiah 1:4 tells to whom Nehemiah is praying, without specifying that the God of the Heavens is Yahweh. Nehemiah 1:5 is Nehemiah's address to Yahweh, God of the Heavens, the only time the combination occurs in Neh. Nehemiah 2:4 again specifies to whom Nehemiah prayed without naming the God of the Heavens as Yahweh. Nehemiah 2:20 is different in that it is not in a prayer or in reference to prayer. When the opponents charge Nehemiah and the builders with sedition against the king, Nehemiah retorts that it is the God of the Heavens who will prosper them, for they are

Summary Observations. In response to what he has heard, character-Neh engages in penitential actions, including prayer. In this instance, no words of supplication are recorded. Narrator-Neh simply reports the prayer as a continuous event. Yet the importance of this report of prayer cannot be overlooked in an analysis of the prayers in the book of Nehemiah. This is the first of numerous prayers and reports of prayer, each one adding to the pervasive presence of prayer in the narrative.

The penitential manner in which character-Neh prays is portrayed clearly here. This prayer, with its durative יָמִים, "for days," and durative participles, demonstrates that prayer was an ongoing activity in the life of character-Neh. This contributes to the portrait or characterization of character-Neh being developed by the narrator.

Finally, God is introduced into the narrative for the first time here, the recipient of character-Neh's prayers. Arousing curiosity in the reader, the term for God is a generic one, one that could easily refer to a Persian deity rather than to the single God of the Judahites. This begins the characterization of God. As is demonstrated in chapter 4, the characterization of God is extremely important as one tries to resolve the final tension of the narrative. Here the mention of the God of the Heavens leads to ambiguity, leading the reader to ask which god character-Neh considers to be the God of the Heavens. This ambiguity raises the question, "As a Judahite in Persia, has Nehemiah capitulated to the foreign gods, or is he still faithful to Yahweh?" The reader will move on, in part looking to resolve this question.

---

his servants.

Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 12, asserts that this phrase was "quite common among Israel's neighbors in the pre-exilic period, [and] evidently became acceptable in Jewish circles too." Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 75, notes "The title 'God of heaven' with reference to YHVH is used in official documents ([Ezra] 7:12, 21, 23) and when Jews are dealing with Gentiles ([Ezra] 5:12; Jonah 1:9; cf. [*Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*] 30:2, 15, 27–28)." He goes on to say that this title "corresponds to the title of the Zoroastrian deity Ahura Mazda." Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 390, comments, "As a Persian official, Nehemiah adopted that customary title for God (Neh. 1:4–5; 2:4, 20), but he does not use it in a generic sense; he explicitly identifies 'the God of heaven' with Yahweh,

Neh 1:5–11a

Narrative Context. As noted above in the discussion of the context of Neh 1:4, character-Neh is distraught by the report concerning the conditions of the city of Jerusalem and of the people. Narrator-Neh reports that character-Neh was fasting and praying before the God of the heavens. He then introduces and records the supplication of character-Neh. Directly following the prayer is the announcement that he was the cupbearer of the king which leads into the next scene before the king. As mentioned in chapter 2, this prayer serves as the inciting moment of the plot, as character-Neh takes upon himself responsibility for the necessary restoration, beseeching Yahweh for success.[11]

There has been debate about whether or not this prayer is original. Williamson enumerates Holscher, Mowinckel, Noth, and Schneider as those who have considered the prayer to be a "later insertion."[12] To this could be added the more recent work of Blenkinsopp who claims "that it is not indigenous to its present context, with which, in fact, it does not make a good fit."[13] Williamson, on the other hand, readily addresses the main arguments of those who think the prayer must be an interpolation, showing that it can be considered authentic.[14] Reading Nehemiah as a narrative whole, this dissertation approaches the prayer as an intentional and integral part of the text. Williamson's arguments demonstrating the plausibility of its authenticity lend support to this reading.

Israel's God, the one true and triune God (Neh 1:5)."

[11] See the discussion of plot and fig. 2.3 in ch. 2 as well as fig. 3.10, below.

[12] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 166–67.

[13] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 208.

[14] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 167–68.

Neh 1:5–11a—Text, Translation, and Notes

Translation	Verse	BHS Text
And I said,[15]	1:5	וָאֹמַר
"I beseech You,[16] O Yahweh, God of the Heavens,[17]		אָנָּא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם
the great and feared God,[18]		הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא

[15] Narrative prayers often follow an introductory word. In ch. 2 of his book, *They Cried to the Lord*, Patrick Miller observes the terminology of prayer in the HB. He discusses general words such as אמר, בקשׁ, דרשׁ, and שׁאל, more technical terms such as פלל, עתר, and חנן, and "general terms that become virtual technical terms for prayer for God's help" such as קרא, צעק, and זעק. In the reported prayers, analyzed above, forms of the root פלל were used to report that prayer had taken place. In this instance of recorded prayer, the prayer is introduced with the general term אמר while the technical words תְּפִלָּה and מִתְפַּלֵּל occur within the prayer itself. The Levitical prayer in Neh 9 uses both זעק and אמר to introduce the prayer. Significantly, the prayers labeled in this dissertation as interjected are not introduced at all.

[16] אָנָּא—*HALOT* says it means "please" before an impv. or, as in this prayer, before a request. Holladay glosses it as "oh, please, I pray," while BDB calls it a strong particle of entreaty and translates it "ah now!" or "I beseech thee!" אָנָּא occurs 13 times in the OT, twice in one v. In 11 instances אָנָּא is followed by either יְהוָה (nine times) or אֲדֹנָי(two times). Genesis 50:17 and Ex 32:31 are the only instances in the Pentateuch and are the only two instances not followed by יְהוָה or אֲדֹנָי. Genesis 50:17 is the only instance that is not a prayer. Rather, it is the entreaty of Joseph's brothers that Joseph spare them after Jacob's death. That אָנָּא is so intimately connected to prayer makes Joseph's comment, "Am I in the place of God?" all the more interesting.

[17] אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם— See note on אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם in 1:4, above.

[18] הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא—This exact phrase occurs elsewhere only in the prayer of Dan 9:4. In fact, following the introductory words in each, Dan 9:4 and Neh 1:5 are identical with this exception, where Neh has the longer expression יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, Dan 9:4 simply has אֲדֹנָי. The phrase הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל, "the God, the great one," also occurs in Jer 32:18 which is also a prayer, but there הַגִּבּוֹר is added. In addition to describing God, the combination of הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא is used of the wilderness in Deut and of the coming day of Yahweh in Joel and Mal.

וְהַנּוֹרָא—The Niphal ptc. of ירא is used often to describe Yahweh, his name, and his deeds, often combined with other adjectives. In Neh, it is used again at 4:8 and 9:32 in descriptions of Yahweh. In 4:8 it is identical to the phrase used here, הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא. In 9:32, as in Deut 10:17, הַגִּבּוֹר is inserted between הַגָּדוֹל and הַנּוֹרָא.

who keeps the covenant and steadfast love[19]		שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וָחֶסֶד
for those who love him and for those who keep his commandments.[20]		לְאֹהֲבָיו וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָיו
Let your ear be attentive and your eyes be open[21]	1:6	תִּהְיֶ֨ינָא אָזְנְךָ֤ קַשֻּׁבָת֙ וְעֵינֶ֣יךָ פְתֻחוֹת֔

[19] שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וָחֶסֶד —This participial phrase occurs six times in the HB (Deut 7:9; 1 Kgs 8:23 // 2 Chr 6:14; Neh 1:5; 9:32; Dan 9:4). With the exception of Deut 7, each of these occurrences is in a prayer. As seen in the previous footnote, Neh 1:5 and Dan 9:4 are almost identical to each other and are a slight rewording of Deut 7:9. First Kings 8 and its parallel in 2 Chr 6 quote the ptc. phrase from Deut 7:9 and then paraphrase what follows. Nehemiah 9 uses only the ptc. phrase.

בְּרִית—"covenant," occurs four times in Nehemiah, all in prayer. In 1:5 and 9:32 it is paired with חֶסֶד. In 9:8 it is used in conjunction with Abraham, and in 13:29 it is used to mention the covenant of the priesthood.

חֶסֶד—"steadfast love," occurs five times in Nehemiah, all within prayers (1:5; 9:17, 32; 13:14, 22). As noted above, twice it is paired with בְּרִית. In 9:17 the word is used in the saying about God being gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (cf., Exod 34.6; Num 14:18; Pss 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3). In 13:14, חֶסֶד is what Nehemiah is claiming to have done. In 13:22 it is again attributed to God. Regarding חֶסֶד, Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 390–91, writes, "The word חֶסֶד, here translated as 'faithfulness,' refers to God's favor, love, and mercy, which he faithfully showered upon his people to fulfill his gracious promises even though they did not deserve it (see Deut 7:7–9). This word denotes a special attitude or act toward someone that exceeds the normal, expected attitude or action. The Scriptures repeatedly declare that Yahweh's חֶסֶד, 'faithfulness, mercy, love' endures forever. Thus חֶסֶד often points to God's grace, his forgiving disposition and loving attitude toward humans, who cannot by their own merit expect his mercy or kindness. It is to this grace of God the Nehemiah appeals in his prayer, since he knows that because of their sin, he and his people did not deserve God's grace (Neh 1:6–7)." See also the notes on 9:17 and 13:14, below.

[20] לְאֹהֲבָיו וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָיו—Again, Neh 1:5 is identical to Dan 9:4 and nearly so to Deut 7:9. This wording originates with Yahweh himself. See, for example, Exod 20:6 and Deut 5:10 where Yahweh describes himself with these words. Of course, when Yahweh speaks, the pronominal suffixes are first per. rather than third.

מִצְוָה—מִצְוֹת occurs 14 times in Neh, nine times in the plural, referring to God's commandments, and four times in the const. sg. dealing with commands of others like David. Eight of the pl. occurrences referencing God's commandments appear in the prayers of Neh 1 and 9. In both, the emphasis is on what God has commanded and on the failure of the people to do it, necessitating the penitential prayers. In these prayers, מִצְוֹת is found in combination with other words such as הַחֻקִּים, הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים, and תּוֹרוֹת. See the discussion of 1:7 below.

[21] תִּהְיֶ֨ינָא אָזְנְךָ֤ קַשֻּׁבָת֙ וְעֵינֶ֣יךָ פְתֻחוֹת֔—"Let your ear be attentive and your eyes be open." The first half of this clause occurs two times in this prayer (1:6 and 1:11). In each instance the juss. entreaty is introduced by אָנָּא followed by a voc. In 1:6 אָנָּא is separated from the juss. by a lengthy description of Yahweh. In 1:11 that lengthy description is shortened to אֲדֹנָי. In 1:6 a second phrase is added, וְעֵינֶיךָ פְתֻחוֹת, "let your eyes be open." What follows is not exactly identical in each instance, though each involves תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ,"the prayer of your servant." Whereas the previous portion of the prayer is related to Exod, Deut, and a few prophets, this clause resembles Solomon's Temple prayer, especially as it is recorded in 2 Chr 6:40 where a similar clause appears but with the order of אָזְנְךָ and עֵינֶיךָ reversed. Steinmann also notes this. See Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 391–92, for more analysis. The language of this prayer is drawn from or resembles quite a variety of earlier passages and prayers. See ch. 4 for a discussion of how this connection with Solomon's prayer affects the characterization of Nehemiah.

to listen[22] to the prayer of your servant,[23]	לִשְׁמֹעַ אֶל־תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ
which I am praying before you today, day and night, concerning the sons of Israel, your servants, and confessing[24] the sins[25] of the sons of Israel	אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מִתְפַּלֵּל לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֶיךָ וּמִתְוַדֶּה עַל־חַטֹּאות בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל

[22] לִשְׁמֹעַ—The inf. here expresses purpose. In the parallel expression in v. 11, this inf. is gapped.

[23] אֶל־תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ—This prep. phrase is found again in v. 11, though there it is expanded.

תְּפִלַּת—Within the book of Neh, full of prayers and praying, this technical term for prayer occurs only here and twice in v. 11.

עַבְדְּךָ—עֶבֶד is a key word in the prayers recorded in Neh 1 and 9. It occurs eight times in this prayer in Neh 1 and four times in Neh 9 along with an instance of the verb of the same root. The form עַבְדְּךָ occurs six times in Neh, always referring to either Nehemiah or Moses as God's servant, five of the six in prayer, four of them in the prayer in Neh 1. As has been also noticed by others, the interplay of Moses and Nehemiah as servant in this prayer leads one to conclude that Nehemiah is positioning himself as a servant like Moses. See the discussion of the characterization of Nehemiah in ch. 4, as well as the notes there. The only occasion of עַבְדְּךָ outside of prayer is in 2:5 when Nehemiah calls himself the servant of the king. This, too, is significant since in the previous chapter he has clearly identified himself as a servant of Yahweh, one like Moses. Again, see the discussion of the characterization of Nehemiah in ch. 4. The plural, עֲבָדֶיךָ, occurs three times, always in reference to God's people, all three in this prayer (1:6, 10, 11). In this prayer the people are considered servants of Yahweh. That gets reversed in the prayer in Neh 9 where it is acknowledged that the people did not serve Yahweh (9:35). In 9:36 the people are referred to as servants, but servants in the sense of slaves to foreign kings rather than servants of Yahweh. Again see the discussion of the characterization of Nehemiah in ch. 4. While the structure of the prayer is not chiastic (see the discussion of the sstructure of this prayer, below), the eight occurrences of עֶבֶד in this prayer occur in a somewhat lopsided concentric pattern. Nehemiah, the people, and Moses are called עֶבֶד in the following order: Nehemiah, the people, Moses, Moses, the people, Nehemiah and the people, Nehemiah. See fig. 4.1 in ch. 4 and the discussion there.

[24] מִתְפַּלֵּל . . . וּמִתְוַדֶּה—Both ptcs. are Hitpael sg. m., "praying . . . and confessing." These parallel ptcs. are part of a relative clause that describes character-Neh's prayer in more detail. He is both praying on behalf of the sons of Israel and confessing their sins. For more information on פלל in Neh, see the note on וּמִתְפַּלֵּל in 1:4, above.

מִתְוַדֶּה—According to *HALOT*, the Hitpael of ידה means "to confess" and is used that way 11 times distributed throughout Lev, Num, Dan, Ezra, Neh, and 2 Chr. The occurrences in Ezra, Neh, and Dan all occur within the context of prayer with Dan 9:4 and 20 and Ezra 10:1 paralleling the two terms as is done here in Neh 1:6. In Neh 9:2–3, ידה in the Hitpael occurs in the context of prayer, but without the parallel term פלל. Confession of sin is an important aspect of Israelite faith as can be seen in the use of this term in Lev and Num, but in the exilic and post-exilic books, the act of confession is connected with prayer rather than with sacrifice. This connection of confession to prayer in these books has been noted and discussed in Miller, *They Cried,* 255–59, and Balentine, *Prayer in Hebrew Bible,* 103–17.

[25] חַטֹּאות—Of five occurrences of this word in Neh, four of them are related to prayer. Three times it is found within a prayer (1:6; 3:37 [ET 4:5]; 9:37), and once introducing prayer (9:2). Three times (1:6; 9:2, 37) it refers to the sins of God's people while in 3:37 [ET 4:5] it refers to the sins of the opponents.

which we have sinned[26] against you.		אֲשֶׁר חָטָאנוּ לָךְ
Even I and the house of my father have sinned.		וַאֲנִי וּבֵית־אָבִי חָטָאנוּ
Surely we have acted corruptly[27] against you, and we have not kept	1:7	חָבֹל חָבַלְנוּ לָךְ וְלֹא־שָׁמַרְנוּ
the commands, the statutes, and the judgments[28]		אֶת־הַמִּצְוֹת וְאֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים
which you commanded[29] Moses[30] your servant.		אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָ אֶת־מֹשֶׁה עַבְדֶּךָ

---

[26] חָטָאנוּ—This verb is used three times in the prayers of Neh 1 and 9 (twice in 1:6 and once in 9:29) and three other times as well (6:13 and twice in 13:26). These uses of both the noun (see the previous note) and the verb show Nehemiah's concern about sin. They demonstrate his belief that the current situation is because of their sin (Neh 1:6 and 9:29) and that continued sin is a problem (6:13 and 13:26). The occurrence of this verb both here in the first ch. and again in the last ch. also highlights Nehemiah's concern regarding the problems that sin brings about. The first per. pl. form of this verb indicates Nehemiah's inclusion of himself among the people and their sin, as the following vv. indicate also.

[27] חָבֹל חָבַלְנוּ—*HALOT* lists Neh 1:7 under both חבל II, "to impound," and under חבל III, "To act corruptly . . . with ל against." The parallelism with חָטָאנוּ before and וְלֹא־שָׁמַרְנוּ after makes the meaning of חבל III more likely. The inf. const. is unusual here. One would expect an inf. abs., but Joüon § 123 q and GKC § 113 x list other examples where the inf. const. is found in place of the inf. abs. Determining the force of this inf. can be difficult. As Joüon, § 123 d, note 6, notes, "It is only from the context that the nuance added by the inf. can be deduced in each case." Both Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 381, and Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 166, have translated this as "We have acted very corruptly." Yet, according to Joüon, § 123 j, this perfective or "intensity of action" sense is rare. The translation above reflects the simple affirmative sense of the inf. abs.

[28] אֶת־הַמִּצְוֹת וְאֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים—For a discussion of מִצְוֹת, see the note on 1:5, above. חֻקִּים occurs four times in Neh, three in the recorded prayers (1:7; 9:13, 14) and once in the agreement of Neh 10 (10:30). מִשְׁפָּטִים occurs five times in Neh while the singular מִשְׁפָּט occurs once. The plural occurrences are in the recorded prayers (1:7; 9:13, 29) and in the solemn agreement of Neh 10 (10:30). This language in Neh 1 shows how the people have sinned and acted corruptly. Not only are they in physical danger because of the condition of the wall and the gates, but they are guilty and in need of spiritual restoration. This is reflected again in the prayer of Neh 9. The language occurs again in Neh 10 as the people pledge to do these things.

[29] צִוִּיתָ—The verb צוה occurs seven times in three forms in Neh. Three occurrences are in prayers (1:7, 8; 9:14). Nehemiah 1:7 and 1:8 have identical phrases about Yahweh commanding Moses his servant. Nehemiah 8:1, 14, and 9:14 refer to the Torah which Yahweh commanded.

[30] מֹשֶׁה—Moses is mentioned seven times in Neh (1:7, 8; 8:1,14; 9:14; 10:30; 13:1). Three times in the recorded prayers (1:7, 8; 9:14) Moses is called God's servant (מֹשֶׁה עַבְדֶּךָ). See the discussion in the note on Neh 1:6, above, regarding Moses and the term עֶבֶד. In all of these references, Moses is tightly connected to what Yahweh has commanded for his people, the very thing Nehemiah is concerned about in the restoration of the people.

Remember[31] the word	1:8	זְכָר־נָא אֶת־הַדָּבָר
which you commanded Moses your servant saying,		אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָ אֶת־מֹשֶׁה עַבְדֶּךָ לֵאמֹר
"As for you,[32] if[33] you act unfaithfully,[34] I myself will scatter you among the peoples.[35]		אַתֶּם תִּמְעֲלוּ אֲנִי אָפִיץ אֶתְכֶם בָּעַמִּים
But if[36] you return to me and guard/keep my commands and do them,	1:9	וְשַׁבְתֶּם אֵלַי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם מִצְוֹתַי וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם
even though[37] your banished one is in the end of the heavens,		אִם־יִהְיֶה נִדַּחֲכֶם בִּקְצֵה הַשָּׁמָיִם

---

[31] זְכָר־נָא—The root זכר occurs nine times in Neh, eight in prayer and once (4:8) in exhortation of the people to remember the great and fearsome Lord and to fight. Seven of the prayer occurrences are impvs.—four times "remember me" prayed by Neh (5:19, 13:14, 22, 31), twice Nehemiah calls on God to remember his enemies (6:14, 13:29), once Nehemiah calls on God to remember his [God's] word which he commanded Moses (1:8). The final occurrence in a prayer is a recollection of how the people had not remembered God (9:17). As Loken, "Narrative Analysis," 182–83, has also noted, the occurrence here in Neh 1 and in the last v. of the book form an inclusio. The book begins and ends with Nehemiah calling on God to remember. Throntveit and others see this impv. in 1:8 as the center of the chiastic structure of the prayer. While it is agreed that this is an important term in the prayer and in the book, this dissertation argues against a chiastic structure for this prayer. See the discussion under Structure, below. On the term זכר in prayer, see Miller, *They Cried,* 93–95.

[32] אֲנִי . . . אַתֶּם—These independent per. prons. are redundant and thus, as Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 384, notes, "are emphatic and heighten the relationship between the two parties of the covenant."

[33] There is nothing to mark the condition as it is translated here. The textual apparatus indicates that one medieval manuscript inserts אִם which would make it more clearly conditional. As is noted in Joüon, § 167 a, "The conditional relation can be expressed in a light and elegant fashion by means of a simple *Waw*, or in a more precise fashion by the particles אִם and לוּ . . . Furthermore, the conditional relationship can be indicated through simple juxtaposition of the two constituent clauses." In § 167 a 1, Neh 1:8 is given as an example of such a juxtaposition of two clauses.

[34] תִּמְעֲלוּ—This condition or "word" (הַדָּבָר) is not recorded as having been given through Moses in this exact form, using מעל, though the sense of it is certainly present in the curses of Lev 26:14–46 and Deut 28:15–68. In Neh, the word is used here and in 13:27 as Nehemiah reprimands the people for intermarriage, comparing their actions to those of Solomon. In this prayer at the beginning of the book, Nehemiah addresses the unfaithfulness of the people. At the end of the book, he is still dealing with it.

[35] אָפִיץ אֶתְכֶם בָּעַמִּים—This, too, is not a direct quote of the Pentateuch, but it does have close similarities to Deut 4:27, 28:64, and 30:3.

[36] וְשַׁבְתֶּם—Again, the conditional is not marked by אִם, but by a simple *waw*, as is noted in Joüon, § 167 d (referring to 167 b 3).

[37] אִם—Joüon, § 167 c 4, says that "the most common way of expressing a condition consists in using in the protasis a conditional particle, most frequently אִם . . . for a supposition considered real." It works to translate אִם as "if" in this instance, and that is how Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 381, translates it. However, אִם can also be used concessively. See Joüon, § 171 d. Rather than paralleling or imbedding yet another condition, it is possible to understand this as a concessive clause that shows the extent of Yahweh's grace and power. Even though the banished one is at the ends of the earth, if they repent, he will gather them. This seems to be how Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 165, understands it as he translates אִם with "even if." In Deut 30:4, of which this seems to be a quote, the אִם is conditional, but in this context the אִם appears concessive.

from there I will gather them[38] and return[39] them		מִשָּׁם אֲקַבְּצֵם וַהֲבִיאוֹתִים
to the place where I have chosen to make my name[40] dwell."[41]		אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתִּי לְשַׁכֵּן אֶת־שְׁמִי שָׁם
Now,[42] they are your servants, your people[43]	1:10	וְהֵם עֲבָדֶיךָ וְעַמֶּךָ
whom you have redeemed with your great strength and with your strong arm.[44]		אֲשֶׁר פָּדִיתָ בְּכֹחֲךָ הַגָּדוֹל וּבְיָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה
I beseech You,[45] Lord of all,[46]	1:11	אָנָּא אֲדֹנָי
let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant[47]		תְּהִי נָא אָזְנְךָ־קַשֻּׁבָת אֶל־תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ
and to the prayer of your servants[48] who delight to fear[49] your name,		וְאֶל־תְּפִלַּת עֲבָדֶיךָ הַחֲפֵצִים לְיִרְאָה אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ

[38] This whole אם clause is nearly identical to Deut 30:4. In Deut it is in third per. rather than first per., and the pron. sufs. are second per. sg. rather than pl.

[39] Reading the Qere, וַהֲבִיאוֹתִים. See Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 384–85, for an explanation of the form of the Kethib.

[40] שְׁמִי—With reference to God, שֵׁם only appears in Neh in the longer prayers in Neh 1 and 9 (1:9, 11; 9:5, 11).

[41] אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתִּי לְשַׁכֵּן אֶת־שְׁמִי שָׁם—Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 385, notes the verbal parallels to Deut 12:5, 11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2.

[42] וְהֵם—This conj. *waw* + independent per. pron. is disjunctive, used in an explanatory sense, further defining or clarifying that those whom Yahweh has gathered are his servants, even his people. See Joüon, § 39.2.3 c.

[43] עֲבָדֶיךָ וְעַמֶּךָ—While the *waw* on וְהֵם is disjunctive and explanatory on a clausal level, this *waw* can be understood as explanatory or epexegetical on the phrasal level, giving the translation "your servants, that is your people," rather than a simple coordination, "your servants and your people." See *IBHS*, § 38.2.1 b. See also 1 Kgs 8:36 and its parallel in 2 Chr 6:27 where a similar construction is found and is typically translated this way by English translations.

[44] פָּדִיתָ בְּכֹחֲךָ הַגָּדוֹל וּבְיָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה—The language here is language used with reference to God's creative work (Jer 32:17) and especially his saving work in the exodus (Exod 13:9; Deut 7:8; 9:26, 29; 11:2; Josh 4:24). It is also used in Solomon's prayer (1 Kgs 8:42 // 2 Chr 6:32), creating yet another link between this prayer and Solomon's. See the characterization of Nehemiah in ch. 4. Here Nehemiah uses the language of the exodus, connecting it to the return from exile and restoration of the people.

[45] See the note on אָנָּא in 1:5, above. This repetition of אָנָּא begins a second, parallel portion of the prayer in which the parallel members are much shorter than in the first portion, making this potion more terse and to the point. See the discussion of the structure of the prayer, following the translation.

[46] אֲדֹנָי—The lengthy vocative address and description of God in the first portion of the prayer is shortened to simply אֲדֹנָי, "Lord of all." On translating אֲדֹנָי as "Lord of all," see *IBHS*, § 7.4.3 e.

[47] תְּהִי נָא אָזְנְךָ־קַשֻּׁבָת אֶל־תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ—Again, the juss. petition has been shortened, omitting וְעֵינֶיךָ פְּתֻחוֹת, "and your eyes be open."

[48] וְאֶל־תְּפִלַּת עֲבָדֶיךָ—In contrast to the shortening that has taken place, here an addition is made. It is not only character-Neh's prayer, but also the prayer of those whom Yahweh has redeemed, his servant people who are described as delighting to fear his name.

and make your servant successful[50] today	וְהַצְלִיחָה־נָּא לְעַבְדְּךָ הַיּוֹם
and give him compassion[51] before this man."	וּתְּנֵהוּ לְרַחֲמִים לִפְנֵי הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה

Structure. Throntveit, Reynolds, and Loken all understand this prayer to be chiastic in structure with the imperative of זכר at the center. The structures advocated by Throntveit and Reynolds can be seen in figure 3.1, and figure 3.2, respectively.

A Invocation (5–6a)
  B Confession: Israel's sin (6b–7)
    X Appeal to covenantal promise of return (8–9)
  B' Confession: God's redemption (10)
A' Invocation with supplication (11a)

Figure 3.1. Throntveit's chiastic structure of Neh 1:5–11a[52]

---

[49] לְיִרְאָה אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ—This form of the Qal inf. const. of ירא with the prefixed prep. ל, acting as a complimentary inf., is common in Deut. See, for example, Deut 4:10, 5:29, 10:12, 14:23, 17:19, and 31:13, where the fear of Yahweh is established as the proper relationship to him. Elsewhere, see for example Deut 28:58; Ps 86:11, 102:16 [ET 102:15], 111:9; and Isa 59:19, this is expressed, as it is here, with שֵׁם as the obj.

Here, early in the book, Nehemiah's prayer speaks of the people as those who delight "to fear," (לְיִרְאָה),Yahweh's name. Yahweh has already been described as "fearsome," (הַנּוֹרָא). The root ירא continues to be used in the narrative 10 more times. These occurrences are significant in the development of the story and are discussed in the characterization of Nehemiah in ch. 4.

[50] וְהַצְלִיחָה־נָּא לְעַבְדְּךָ—The Hiphil of צלח can mean "to be successful" or "to make something a success." For this latter sense, *HALOT*, s.v. צלח, Hiphil 2 b, gives Neh 1:11 as an example of צלח followed by "לְ of the person," resulting in the translation, "Make your servant successful."

[51] וּתְּנֵהוּ לְרַחֲמִים—*HALOT*, s.v. נתן, Qal 13, describes this construction as having two accusatives and translates, "to let someone find compassion," giving 1 Kgs 8:50, Ps 106:46, and Dan 1:9 as other examples. The word רַחֲמִים, "compassion," is also an important part of the prayer in Neh 9, repeatedly emphasizing the saving action of God according to his compassion. See the note on Neh 9:19, below.

[52] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 64, writes, "The prayer begins and ends with an invocation similar to that found in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (I Kings 8:29, 52; II Chron. 6:40), 'let your ear be attentive . . . to hear the prayer of your servant' (6a,11a). Two confessions, one neg., regarding Israel's sin (B), and one positive, regarding Israel's redemption (B'), frame the heart of the prayer (X). This centerpiece consists of Nehemiah's appeal to God to remember the covenantal promise of return on the basis of Deuteronomy 30:1–5. The strengthened particle of entreaty with the vocative, 'O LORD' (5, 11a), provide an inclusio for the entire prayer."

Ba Appeal for aid in behalf of Israel (1:5–6a)
Bb Recognition of Israel's past sin (1:6b–7)
Bc Foundation and focus for the prayer (1:8–9)
Bb' Recognition of God's past help (1:10)
Ba' Appeal for aid in behalf of Nehemiah (1:11)

Figure 3.2. Reynolds' chiastic structure of Neh 1:5–11a[53]

Rather than presenting his own diagram of the structure, Loken simply interacts with the other two and gives his own correction. He writes, "In light of the difficulty in correlating the b and b' segments of these chiasms, it seems best to combine these segments with segment c [in Throntveit this would be X] and view the prayer as an inclusio, which is a very simple form of a chiasm."[54]

On the other hand, Steinmann explains the prayer as consisting of three parallel petitions.[55] In this outline, seen in figure 3.3, the זכר petition is again at the center, though Steinmann does not stress this fact as do the others.

1. A plea that God would hear his prayer, accompanied by confession of sins (Neh 1:5–7)
2. A plea that God would remember his promises to restore Israel to its land (Neh 1:8–10)
3. Another plea the God would hear his prayer with a request for success and mercy before the king (Neh 1:11).

Figure 3.3. Steinmann's structure of Neh 1:5–11

[53] Reynolds, "Narrative Analysis," 87–88, explains, "Both units Ba and Ba' have a rare form אנא at the beginning followed by the jussive form of היה and נא. In section Ba, Nehemiah inserts a long descriptive title of God between these components, but the structure is still the same. These sections illustrate the fact that the opposite elements in a chiasm may not always have the same length, but they will correspond thematically. The scholar who looks for similarity in length will fail to identify some chiastic elements correctly. The repetition of 'servant' holds Bb section together. Bb' starts out with the same emphasis on Israel being God's servant. At the same time, the units contrast the unfaithful actions of the servants in Bb with the magnanimous actions of God, who redeemed his people in Bb'. 'Remember now' sets off section Bc. God's promises to Israel become both the basis and the goal of the prayer as well as the rest of the book. God had already answered part of the prayer by bringing a remnant back to the land, but the book of Nehemiah goes on to show that the people needed something more from God before full restoration could occur."

[54] Loken, "Narrative Analysis," 126–27n15.

[55] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 390.

While these analyses of the prayer are intriguing, they suffer from a number of flaws. Loken has noted the difficulty in correlating the b and b' segments of Throntveit and Reynolds, though he does not elaborate. In the case of Throntveit, B and B' are both labeled *confession*, but Throntveit himself acknowledges that they are two different kinds of confession. B is a confession of guilt while B' is a confession of who the people are on the basis of what God has done for them. B has the Hebrew term ידה, "to confess,"[56] within it, but B' gives no indication that it is to be thought of as a confession. The parallel is in the English label chosen, an example of the error that Boda calls "arbitrary labeling."[57] One might wonder if Throntveit would have recognized and labeled these both as confessions if he were not trying to work out a chiastic structure for the prayer. Whereas Throntveit at least took his term *confession* from the text, Reynolds labels Bb and Bb' with the term *recognition*, which is not at all textual. Again, the parallel is in the English label given and not in the content of the prayer.

The labeling of the A sections of the supposed chiasm is also problematic. Reynolds labels both as *Appeals for Aid*. What he fails to recognize is that the Ba' appeal has an additional petition beyond the Ba appeal. On the other hand, Throntviet recognizes the last petition and simply appends it to his generalized title for A and A', adding *supplication* to his label of *Invocation*, bringing into question the parallel nature of A and A' and treating the petition as an afterthought. Labeling can be difficult, but in this instance the petition is a key part of the structure of the prayer and must be acknowledged on its own.

---

[56] Most often ידה appears in the Hiphil and has to do with praise, but, according to *HALOT*, in the Hitpael conjugation it has the meaning "to confess" in the sense of confessing sin, not making a statement of belief.

[57] Boda, "Chiasmus," 57, says that the error of arbitrary labeling occurs when "items are labeled arbitrarily in order to fit into a chiastic pattern."

Like Throntveit, Loken recognizes the final petition, but he, too, treats it as an afterthought. He writes, "Nehemiah closes his prayer by asking the Lord one more request,"[58] yet that request disrupts the clean inclusio structure that Loken suggests.

In contrast to these others, this dissertation understands the prayer as consisting of two parallel panels, each consisting of three parts. This structure is based on both the grammar and the content of the prayer and treats the last petition as an important part of the prayer rather than as a dangling afterthought.

Figure 3.4 gives a synopsis of the structure of this prayer, while figure 3.5 graphically portrays the structure of the prayer in side-by-side Hebrew and English. It will be helpful to refer to these figures while reading the description below.

Introduction
A Entreaty + Lengthy Vocative Address Neh 1:5
B Lengthy Jussive Request to hear prayer Neh 1:6–7
C Single Imperative Petition with lengthy description Neh 1:8–10
A' Entreaty + Brief Vocative Address Neh 1:11a
B' Brief Jussive Request to hear prayer Neh 1:11b
C' Brief Double Imperative Petition Neh 1:11c

Figure 3.4. A descriptive synopsis of the structure of Neh 1:5–11

[58] Loken, "Narrative Analysis," 128.

וָאֹמַר	1:5	Intro		And I said,
אָנָּא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל			A	"I beseech You, O Yahweh, God of the heavens, the great and feared God,
שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וְחֶסֶד לְאֹהֲבָיו וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָיו				who keeps the covenant and steadfast love for those who love him and keep his commandments.
תִּהְיֶינָא אָזְנְךָ קַשֻּׁבֶת וְעֵינֶיךָ פְּתֻחוֹת	1:6	B		Let your ear be attentive and your eyes be open
לִשְׁמֹעַ אֶל־תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ				to listen to the prayer of your servant,
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מִתְפַּלֵּל לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה				which I am praying before you today, day and night,
עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֶיךָ				concerning the sons of Israel, your servants,
וּמִתְוַדֶּה עַל־חַטֹּאות בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר חָטָאנוּ לָךְ				and confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against you.
וְאָנִי וּבֵית־אָבִי חָטָאנוּ				Even I and the house of my father have sinned.
חָבַל חָבַלְנוּ לָךְ	1:7			Surely we have acted corruptly against you,
וְלֹא־שָׁמַרְנוּ אֶת־הַמִּצְוֹת וְאֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים				and we have not kept the commands, the statutes, and the judgments
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָ אֶת־מֹשֶׁה עַבְדֶּךָ				which you commanded Moses, your servant.
זָכֹר נָא אֶת־הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָ אֶת־מֹשֶׁה עַבְדְּךָ לֵאמֹר	1:8	C		Remember the word which you commanded Moses your servant saying,
אַתֶּם מָעַלְתֶּם אֲנִי אָפִיץ אֶתְכֶם בָּעַמִּים				'As for you, if you act unfaithfully, I myself will scatter you among the peoples.
וְשַׁבְתֶּם אֵלַי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם מִצְוֹתַי וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם	1:9			But if you return to me and guard my commands and do them,
אִם־יִהְיֶה נִדַּחֲכֶם בִּקְצֵה הַשָּׁמָיִם				even though your banished one is in the end of the heavens,
מִשָּׁם אֲקַבְּצֵם וְהֵבֵאתִים				from there I will gather them and return them
אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתִּי לְשַׁכֵּן אֶת־שְׁמִי שָׁם				to the place where I have chosen to make my name dwell.'
וְהֵם עֲבָדֶיךָ וְעַמֶּךָ	1:10			Now, they are your servants and your people
אֲשֶׁר פָּדִיתָ בְּכֹחֲךָ הַגָּדוֹל וּבְיָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה				whom You have redeemed with your great strength and with your strong arm.
אֲדֹנָי אָנָּא	1:11	A'		I beseech You, my Lord,
תְּהִי נָא אָזְנְךָ־קַשֻּׁבֶת אֶל־תְּפִלַּת עַבְדֶּךָ		B'		let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant
וְאֶל־תְּפִלַּת עֲבָדֶיךָ הַחֲפֵצִים לְיִרְאָה אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ				and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name,
וְהַצְלִיחָה־נָּא לְעַבְדְּךָ הַיּוֹם		C'		and make your servant successful today,
וְתֶנְהוּ לְרַחֲמִים לִפְנֵי הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה				and give him compassion before this man.

Figure 3.5. Hebrew-English side-by-side synopsis of the structure of Neh 1:5–11

The prayer is introduced by one of the standard prayer introductions, וָאֹמַר, "And I said." Following that, both A and A' begin with the strong particle of entreaty, אָנָּא, " I beseech You," (1:5 and 11). In addition to אָנָּא there is the vocative of the one being addressed. In 1:5, יְהוָה, "Yahweh," is named and then described in some detail. In 1:11, there is the simple vocative אֲדֹנָי, "my Lord."

B and B' both contain the jussive request תְּהִי נָא אָזְנְךָ־קַשֶּׁבֶת, "Let your ear be attentive." Both also include אֶל־תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ, "to the prayer of your servant." However, as A is longer than A', so B is longer than B'. In B, verse six includes וְעֵינֶיךָ פְּתֻחוֹת לִשְׁמֹעַ, "and your eyes be open to listen." Verses six and seven then go on to describe the prayer, mentioning that Nehemiah is praying and confessing concerning the sons of Israel, Yahweh's servants, who have sinned. On the other hand, in B', the phrase וְעֵינֶיךָ פְּתֻחוֹת לִשְׁמֹעַ, "and your eyes be open to listen to," is left out. Neither is there the lengthy confession of sin. Rather, in addition to אֶל־תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ, "to the prayer of your servant," verse 11 adds וְאֶל־תְּפִלַּת עֲבָדֶיךָ, "and to the prayer of your servants," and then goes on to describe briefly those servants.

Finally, in C and C', each section reaches an imperative plus the suffixed particle of entreaty addressed to Yahweh. In C, verse eight, Yahweh is petitioned to remember his former interaction with his servant Moses and the curses and blessings, finishing with a reminder of how Yahweh had redeemed these servant people with his great strength and strong arm. In C', verse 11, there is a double imperative. Even so, C' is much shorter than C. The first imperative requests that Yahweh make his servant, Nehemiah, successful. The second imperative asks Yahweh to give him compassion before this man, whom the reader will learn to be the king, Artaxerxes.

The analysis of the structure of this prayer is important to its understanding, especially as it functions in the narrative. If one understands the prayer as chiastic with the center of the chiasm

as the most important piece,[59] then one concludes that the call on God to remember is the most important point in this prayer. Given the importance of the word זכר, "to remember," in the prayers that follow this one, it would be wonderful to see that word highlighted in the center of a chiastic prayer, yet such analysis misses the real point in this instance. Even those who view the prayer as a chiasm must, in the end, acknowledge the second request in verse 11.[60] When one understands the prayer as outlined above, following the grammar and content to see the two panel structure, one recognizes that the call on God to remember is preparatory and serves as the ground for the real request, the double request in verse 11 that God would make Nehemiah successful and give him compassion before the king. The God who remembers and redeems will make Nehemiah successful in his efforts to restore the place where Yahweh's name dwells as well as his servant people who delight to fear his name.

Understood in this way, the prayer is seen to lead directly into what follows in the narrative. Having asked Yahweh to remember his word, Nehemiah asks for success and compassion in what he is about to do, namely, ask permission from his earthly king.

Summary Observations. Unlike Neh 1:4 where no words of prayer are recorded, here in 1:5–11a a lengthy prayer of character-Neh is recounted. In contrast to the position that this

---

[59] Boda, "Chiasmus," 58, discusses the error labeled "Presupposition that Centre is Important." He asserts that "this assumption has been fostered by such chiastic experts as Welch . . ., Radday . . ., and Watson . . . However, this presupposition is challenged by Clines . . .: 'it would be unwise in our present state of knowledge about Hebrew poetry to conclude that the centre of the strophic structure is also the centre of the thought of the poem.'"

[60] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 65–66, writes, "His final petition, however, looks forward to the events of 2:1–8. Here, realizing that he will be God's instrument, he prays for success with his capricious master (1:11a)." Loken, "Narrative Analysis," 128, writes, "Nehemiah closes his prayer by asking the Lord to grant one more request. He asks that he might have a favorable response from 'this man' as he approaches him with a request." Reynolds, "Narrative Analysis," 140, does not directly comment on 1:11a, but he does seem to acknowledge that 1:11a relies on 1:8–9 when he writes, "Nehemiah had already joined himself with the people in confessing their corporate guilt, but in the end, Nehemiah's corporate prayer becomes a personal appeal for help in accomplishing his particular task. The restored remnant may not deserve God's help, but Nehemiah bases his request on the promises of God and acts accordingly. God will clearly be the force at work if Nehemiah and the people accomplish anything." All three acknowledge the final petition, but all three argue for a chiastic structure emphasizing זכר in the center position, relegating to an afterthought the final petition that drives the narrative forward.

prayer is an interpolation,[61] the structure and the content of the prayer reveal it to be an integral part of the narrative of Nehemiah. As discussed above, the two panel structure of the prayer emphasizes Nehemiah's request for success and compassion before the king, and thus in his mission to restore the city and the people. This request functions as the inciting moment of the plot as character-Neh takes upon himself the problems of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. On the basis of God's remembrance (1:8), character-Neh desires to be God's servant for the purpose of restoration. The prayer, then, leads directly into the next scene where character-Neh must make supplication again, this time before his earthly sovereign, to secure permission to leave Susa and do the work in Jerusalem.

With regard to content, the prayer introduces various topics and themes that are important throughout the rest of the narrative.[62] Nehemiah's understanding of God is elaborated in his address to him in this prayer. Formerly he had referred to God simply as the God of the Heavens (אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם), creating a sense of ambiguity. In this prayer he specifies that for him the God of the Heavens is none other than Yahweh, the covenant God of old. Yahweh, the God of the Heavens, is great and feared and keeps the covenant and steadfast love. He is also a God who remembers. This understanding and characterization of God is of critical importance to the appeal of this particular prayer, but it is also critical to the other appeals scattered throughout the book and concentrated at the end as will be made clear in chapter 4.

Also arising in this prayer is character-Neh's understanding of himself as God's servant. As will be argued more fully in chapter 4, by the invocation of Moses' name as the servant of

---

[61] See n. 59 in ch. 1.

[62] Baltzer, "Moses," also sees this prayer as critical for supplying themes for the rest of the narrative. See the review of Baltzer in ch. 1.

Yahweh and by the reuse of past prayers, character-Neh is cast as a new servant of Yahweh in the line of Moses, David, and Solomon.

Finally, the importance of covenant and covenant faithfulness is emphasized. These issues arise again and again throughout the narrative but especially in the second half. In addition, the importance of Yahweh's compassion is brought to the forefront in this prayer and becomes especially significant in the prayers in Neh 9 and 13:22. Also introduced are the concepts of proper fear and remembrance. These are examined more fully, where appropriate, in the work of chapter 4.

Neh 2:4

Narrative Context. Again, still early in the narrative, there is another report of character-Neh praying to the God of the Heavens. As in Neh 1:4, no words of the supplication are recorded. This particular instance occurs in the scene that directly follows character-Neh's lengthy prayer in 1:5–11a and is part of the complication or rising action of the narrative.[63] The scene is set primarily before King Artaxerxes in the month of Nisan in the 20th year of his reign. Nehemiah is serving as cupbearer. Artaxerxes notices character-Neh's distress and inquires, noting that it can be nothing other than sadness of heart. Narrator-Neh records character-Neh's great fear and his appropriate response that the king live forever. He goes on to explain, through the use of a question, that his sadness is due to the condition of "the city of the house of the graves of my fathers," (הָעִיר בֵּית־קִבְרוֹת אֲבֹתַי).[64] The king asks what Nehemiah is seeking. Before responding, character-Neh prays to the God of the Heavens. After the prayer, he deferentially requests to be sent to "the city of the graves of my fathers" in order to rebuild it. The king gives

[63] See fig. 3.10.

[64] Neh 2:3. Apparently Nehemiah uses this circumlocution for Jerusalem because Artaxerxes had previously ordered that the walls of the city should not be rebuilt. See Ezra 4:21.

character-Neh what he asks for, and narrator-Neh explains that it was "because the good hand of my God was upon me,' (כְּיַד־אֱלֹהַי הַטּוֹבָה עָלָי).[65]

Neh 2:4—Text, Translation, and Notes

וַיֹּאמֶר לִי הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל־מַה־זֶּה אַתָּה מְבַקֵּשׁ וָאֶתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם

And the king said to me, "What, then,[66] are you seeking?" Then I prayed[67] to the God of the Heavens.[68]

Summary Observations. As in 1:4, no words of the prayer are recorded, but the content of the prayer can easily be assumed to be an abbreviated form of the prayers reported in 1:4 and recorded in 1:5–11a,[69] seeking Yahweh's help in making "this man," (הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה), agreeable to his request. One knows that the prayer is addressed to Yahweh due to the equation of Yahweh and the God of the Heavens in the previous prayer (1:5).

Furthering the characterization of character-Neh already begun in 1:4 and 1:5–11a, this report of prayer continues to demonstrate character-Neh's reliance upon Yahweh in his time of need. Like the prayer report in 1:4, it does so without interrupting the flow and pace of the scene with quoted words.

---

[65] Neh 2:8.

[66] עַל־מַה־זֶּה—*HALOT*, c.v. מַה, B, says that מַה־זֶּה can mean "but how," "why," or "why then." *HALOT,* D 5, notes that עַל־מַה can mean "on what account," or " why." *HALOT*, s.v. זֶה, 15, says that זֶה strengthens the interrogative giving a sense like "how then," or "what then." None of the entries deal with the three together. The combination עַל־מַה occurs 18 times. מַה־זֶּה occurs nine times in eight vv. The combination of all three occurs only here in Neh 2:4. This grouping of words is challenging, yet the commentators do not bother to explain it. The context implies that the king's question is, "What, then, are you seeking?"

[67] וָאֶתְפַּלֵּל—See the n. on וּמִתְפַּלֵּל in 1:4, above.

[68] אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם—See the n. on אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם in 1:4, above.

[69] Williamson *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 179, agrees. He writes, "Nehemiah gathers up in a flash his prayers of the past months (note the link by way of the title 'the God of heaven' with 1:4 and 5) and simultaneously (the division between vv. 4 and 5 is unfortunate) presents his petition to his earthly lord."

Like Neh 1:4, this report also adds to the presence of prayer in the narrative. Already in the first two chapters of Nehemiah, there have been two reports of prayer and one long prayer, the words of which were recorded.

Neh 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5]

Narrative Context. The immediate context of this prayer is a short section, 3:33–38 [ET 4:1–6]. Leading up to this, character-Neh has traveled to Jerusalem, inspected the walls, recruited the people for the restoration project, and verbally sparred with the opponents who were ridiculing, mocking, and accusing the builders of rebellion against the king. In 3:1–32 narrator-Neh reports in proleptic fashion who repaired what portions of the wall. Nehemiah 3:33 [ET 4:1] begins a new scene with the characteristic formula, "When Sanballat heard…"[70] The reader is informed of Sanballat's great anger as he ridicules the Judahites and mocks them with a variety of taunts. Tobiah joins in, claiming that a fox on the top of the wall would break it down. The prayer follows the taunts, interjected between the taunts and the summary report in verse 38 [ET 4:6] that the wall was joined together, built to half height, and the people were working willingly.[71]

Neh 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5]—Text, Translation, and Notes.[72]

Translation	**Verse**		**BHS Text**
Hear,[73] O our God,	3:36	A	שְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵינוּ

[70] See the n. on the Hebrew root שמע in 1:4, above.

[71] See fig. 3.10.

[72] The lineation of the Hebrew text and English translation is explained in the section on structure, below.

[73] שְׁמַע—The Qal impv. of שמע, "to hear," is used regularly to call upon God in prayer in the HB. See, for example, Pss 4:2; 17:6; 27:7; 28:2; 30:11; 54:4; 64:2; 143:1; 2 Kgs 19:16 // Isa 37:17; Jer 18:19; Dan 9:17, 18. See also Miller, *They Cried,* 87–88. For the use of שמע in Neh, see the n. on 1:4, above.

for we have become an object of contempt.[74]		B	כִּי־הָיינוּ בוּזָה
(And) Return their scorn[75] to their head,		A’	וְהָשֵׁב חֶרְפָּתָם אֶל־רֹאשָׁם
and give them as booty[76] in a land of captivity.			וּתְנֵם לְבִזָּה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁבְיָה
(And) Do not cover their guilt,	3:37		וְאַל־תְּכַס עַל־עֲוֹנָם
and their sin from before you, let it not be wiped away,			וְחַטָּאתָם מִלְּפָנֶיךָ אַל־תִּמָּחֶה
for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.[77]		B’	כִּי הִכְעִיסוּ לְנֶגֶד הַבּוֹנִים

Structure.[78] This prayer consists of an opening imperative followed by an explanatory **כִּי** clause. Four more volitives follow, two positive and two negative.[79] The prayer then ends with a

---

[74] בּוּזָה—Used only here in the HB, *HALOT* says that this is the f. form of the m. noun בּוּז, meaning “contempt.” In this v. it creates a sound pair with לְבִזָּה.

[75] חֶרְפָּתָם—The noun חֶרְפָּה occurs four times in Neh (1:3, 2:17, 3:36 [ET 4:4], 5:9). In the first two instances it has to do with the disgrace of the people in Jerusalem, connected with the condition of the wall. In 1:3 he uses חֶרְפָּה to describe the condition of the people. In 2:17 he exhorts them to rebuild in order to remove the חֶרְפָּה. In 5:9 and here in 3:36 [ET 4:4] it is connected with the enemies and has the sense “scorn,” or “taunts” received from the enemies. In 5:9 character-Neh uses the חֶרְפַּת הַגּוֹיִם, “scorn of the gentiles,” to motivate the people to the walk in the fear of Yahweh. Here in 3:36 [ET 4:4], he prays that the חֶרְפָּה of the enemies will be turned back upon them by God. The reversal of this חֶרְפָּה is one of the themes of the first half of the story being told by the narrator.

[76] לְבִזָּה—As noted above, this noun creates a sound pair with בּוּזָה that is hard to replicate in English.

[77] הִכְעִיסוּ לְנֶגֶד הַבּוֹנִים—This clause is difficult to construe in English because the Hiphil of the verb כעס, “to provoke,” requires an obj. but has no obj. expressed. The English translations do various things, some taking the builders as those who are provoked while others supply “you,” in reference to God. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 214n37a, offers a reasonable solution: “Most modern translations take ‘the builders’ as the dir obj of the verb, but לנגד ‘in front of’ seems to stand as an insuperable difficulty for this view; it can hardly be understood adverbially, as NEB implies: ‘they have openly provoked the builders.’ הכעיס ‘to provoke’ can, however, be used without the object expressed of provoking God to anger; cf. 1 Kgs 21:22; 2 Kgs 21:6; 23:19; Hos 12:15 (14); Ps 106:29 (it is unlikely that textual corr has affected all these passages, though it has independently been held responsible for them all by various commentators). This gives a suitable meaning in the context …, and allows לנגד to have its usual meaning.” Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 437, agrees and supplies “your anger” as the obj. of the verb.

[78] The two panel structure described here is reflected in the arrangement of the Hebrew text and the English translation above.

[79] The first two are impv. in form. The third is technically the neg. particle אַל plus the second sg. m. juss. of כסה, creating a neg. impv. The fourth volitive is a negated third sg. m. juss. of the root מחה, in the Niphal. While it would have been possible to end with another negated act. impv., “Do not blot their sin from before you,” this switch to a pass. juss. gives variety and brings the prayer to an end.

second כִּי clause. In this way, the prayer is structured in two panels, following an A B A' B' pattern.

Part A is the general call for God to hear which implies action by God on behalf of the one praying. This call for God to hear is given its basis in part B, the first כִּי clause.

Paralleling the imperative of A are four imperatives in A', further specifying what it means for God to hear. These are the actions that the one praying desires and feels are appropriate. Like B, B' gives the grounds for the specific actions listed by the verbs of A'. Helping to tie the two blocks together is the sound pair בּוּזָה and לְבִזָּה in B and A', respectively.

Within A', more structure can be discerned. First, there are two positive imperatives in first position. The syntax of these two clauses is not parallel any further than that, but each does consist of four Hebrew words. On the other hand, the clauses containing the two negated imperatives create a concentric pattern. In first and last position, the outer ring of the concentric pattern, are the negated imperatives. The second ring consists of prepositions. The center ring consists of nouns, both with the third plural masculine pronominal suffix. These nouns are semantically related, dealing with guilt and sin.

While he does not comment on the two panel structure of the whole prayer, Steinmann has also noted this concentric structure.[80] He demonstrates the structure as shown in figure 3.6, below.

[80] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 435, calls it a chiasm according to popular use of that term. More properly it is a concentric structure since a chiasm is made of only four members. For a discussion of the terminology, see the treatment of literary conventions in Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 4–8.

A Do not cover [וְאַל־תְּכַס]
  B over [-עַל]
    C their iniquity [עֲוֹנָם]
    C' and their sin [וְחַטָּאתָם]
  B from before you [מִלְּפָנֶיךָ]
A' may it not be blotted out [אַל־תִּמָּחֶה].

Figure 3.6. The concentric structure of the first two clauses of Neh 9:37 [ET 4:5] [81]

Summary Observations. Like 1:5–11a, this occasion of prayer in the narrative includes the recording of the words; however, this supplication is not introduced as a prayer. In fact, it occurs rather abruptly, interrupting the flow of the narrative. Yet the content of the prayer fits its context very well. This has given rise to debate among commentators regarding how it relates to the story being told by the narrator. Without an introduction it seems to be an interjection, not belonging to the story being told. On the other hand, the prayer fits the story quite well, even if it is awkward. The reader is forced to make a decision on how to deal with this prayer, a decision that may have to be modified later.

Typically, this prayer is assigned to the conjectured NM. On the other hand, because of its contextual nature, this prayer is often believed to be a part of the story. Representative of such thinking, Clines notes, "Other prayers of Nehemiah that lack a time setting (like 1:4f) belong to the time of the writing of his memoirs (e.g. 5:19), but here presumably we have his prayer upon hearing of Sanballat's taunt."[82] In contrast, Derek Kidner entertains more fully the possibility that this prayer is prayed as a part of the narration, even while acknowledging its contextual nature. He writes,

[81] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 437. See also his prose description and comments (p. 445), especially concerning how this prayer relates to Jer 18:23.

[82] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 160.

> This sudden prayer, quite unannounced . . ., transports the reader back to the very moment of dismay, as if this were an extract from the day's record, simply copied as it stood. Even if it is a more distant recollection, Nehemiah is immersed again in the experience as he writes.[83]

If this prayer stood as the only prayer of this sort in the book, it might be reasonable to assume that it is part of the story and lacks introduction for the sake of effect, awkward as that may be. Further reading of Nehemiah shows that this prayer is not alone, however. The many other similar prayers in the book make it more likely that this prayer is prayed by narrator-Neh at the time of telling the story. This is discussed more fully in chapter 4.

Neh 4:3 [ET 4:9]

Narrative Context. This report of prayer occurs in a scene that begins with the temporal opposition report וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע, "when he heard."[84] Sanballat and Tobiah, by this point in the narrative familiar names of the opponents, are now joined by the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites. Narrator-Neh reports that when the opposition heard that the walls were being restored and that the breaches were being stopped up, they became very angry and conspired together to wage war on Jerusalem and to throw it into confusion. In response, character-Neh and the people prayed to their God and set up an around-the-clock guard against the enemies.

Neh 4:3 [ET 4:9]—Text, Translation, and Notes

וַנִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַנַּעֲמִיד מִשְׁמָר עֲלֵיהֶם יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה מִפְּנֵיהֶם

Then we prayed[85] to our God,[86] and we set up a guard over them day and night because of them.[87]

---

[83] Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 91.

[84] See the n. on שמע in 1:4, above.

[85] וַנִּתְפַּלֵּל—See the n. on וּמִתְפַּלֵּל in 1:4, above.

Summary Observations. As at 1:4 and 2:4, no words of the prayer are recorded. Instead, only the act of prayer is recorded with the content implied by the context. However, as at 1:4 and 2:4, the reader can easily infer the content.

This is the third and final prayer of this type in Nehemiah,[88] and, for the first time in the narrative, character-Neh is not alone in his praying. Working together, he and the rest of the builders pray to the God whom they have in common. Together they pray, entrusting their work and their safety into God's hands while also taking the logical human steps to protect themselves.

This reference to "our God,"(אֱלֹהֵינוּ), is important as the narrative moves forward. Nehemiah's reforms of the people are based on the instruction and expectations of this God whom they share. The content of the prayer in 1:5–11a has already outlined those expectations. They consist of returning to Yahweh and keeping his commands which were given through

---

[86] אֱלֹהֵינוּ, "our God," occurs 19 times in the narrative of Neh. Ten of these occur in the const. chain בֵּית־אֱלֹהֵינוּ, "the house of our God," referring to the temple. Nine of these 10 occur in Neh 10 as the people make their agreement not to "neglect the house of our God." The tenth occurrence is in 13:4 where narrator-Neh relates the failure of the people to keep the agreement. Neh 10:35 has a related use of אֱלֹהֵינוּ in the const. chain יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל־מִזְבַּח, "upon the altar of Yahweh our God." Of the eight remaining occurrences of אֱלֹהֵינוּ in Neh., two are in prayers. אֱלֹהֵינוּ is a voc. in narrator-Neh's prayer of 3:36 [ET 4:4]and also in 9:32, the turning point in the prayer prayed by Levites. A third instance, 4:3, is in the context of prayer; narrator-Neh announces to whom character-Neh and the people prayed. Two more instances of אֱלֹהֵינוּ (6:16 and 13:2) are used by narrator-Neh as he describes the fear of the enemies and also prior actions of God. Finally, three instances of אֱלֹהֵינוּ are on the lips of character-Neh as he encourages (4:14), exhorts (5:9), and rebukes the people (13:18). Apart from the 11 instances referring to the temple or altar, the rest of the occurrences of אֱלֹהֵינוּ come from Nehemiah, either the character or the narrator. As is discussed below in relation to the remember prayers, narrator-Neh often uses the term אֱלֹהַי, "my God." In contrast, these occurrences of אֱלֹהֵינוּ show that Nehemiah considered himself a part of the larger group of God's people, even as he worked to reform and restore them. While he is a part of the people, he also contrasts himself with the people. See the discussion of characterization in ch. 4.

[87] וַנַּעֲמִיד מִשְׁמָר עֲלֵיהֶם יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה מִפְּנֵיהֶם—The translation of this sentence is difficult because of the ambiguity of the pron. sufs. on עֲלֵיהֶם and מִפְּנֵיהֶם. English translations tend to understand the referent of these sufs. to be the enemies. They then omit מִפְּנֵיהֶם in their rendering of the Hebrew as redundant. The translation above follows Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 438, in understanding עֲלֵיהֶם as referring to the builders and מִפְּנֵיהֶם as referring to the enemies. He writes, "The first suffix, on עֲלֵיהֶם, refers to the builders, so the guard was set 'over them' to protect them. Then the second suffix, on מִפְּנֵיהֶם, refers to the enemies. Since the preposition מִן with פָּנִים often has a causative meaning, מִפְּנֵיהֶם is translated as 'because of them' (see BDB, s.v., פָּנֶה, II 6 a), that is, the guard was needed because of the threatening enemies and the conspiracy. The prepositional phrase has the same meaning in Neh 4:8 (ET 4:14): תִּירְאוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם, 'be afraid (because) of them."

[88] See fig. 3.10, below.

Moses. As will be shown, this becomes especially important in the latter half of the narrative with its focus on the restoration of the people.

Neh 5:19

Narrative Context. In Neh 5 there is a temporary shift in the focus of the narrative. Pausing the recounting of the progress on the wall and the opposition of the enemies, Neh 5 relates various internal problems among the Judahites. Following the recounting of these troubles, narrator-Neh includes another unit that is temporally out of place but related thematically to what precedes it. In this unit, he proleptically summarizes character-Neh's actions during his entire 12 years as governor. Unlike the previous governors who burdened the people, out of the fear of God he and his servants did not eat the governor's food. He and they worked upon the wall and did not acquire any fields. At great cost to himself he also fed the officials and the official visitors. He did this because the people were already burdened. The unit ends with this prayer to God that he be remembered for the good he has done for the people.[89]

Neh 5:19—Text, Translation, and Notes

זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהַי לְטוֹבָה כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי עַל־הָעָם הַזֶּה

Remember[90] me, O my God, for good,[91] all that I have done with regard to this people.

---

[89] See fig. 3.10.

[90] זָכְרָה—This is the Qal impv. sg. m. + paragogic ה. This form is used in this prayer and five more like it that follow in the narrative. See the excursus at the end of this chapter. For a discussion of the root זכר in Neh, see the n. on 1:8, above. See also, Miller, *They Cried,* 93–95.

[91] לְטוֹבָה— The question arises, does לְטוֹבָה refer to the good that Nehemiah has done as outlined in the preceding vv., or does it refer to a benefit or blessing that Nehemiah hopes to receive as a result of his God's act of remembering him? If one understands לְטוֹבָה as Nehemiah's good work, then the rest of the v. becomes epexegetical, specifying what that good is. If one understands לְטוֹבָה as referring to a benefit or blessing that Neh hopes to receive, then one must decide how the last part of the v. is to be understood and supply an appropriate word where there is none in the Hebrew. For example, "all that I have done for this people" could be further clarifying "me," giving the translation, "Remember me (that is, all that I've done for this people) for my benefit." This is the option preferred by Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 232. Or perhaps the relationship is one of grounds – "Remember

Summary Observations. Here again the reader encounters a prayer that is not introduced as such. Like the petition at 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5], this one interrupts the story being told by the narrator while reflecting the content of the context, highlighting the good Nehemiah has done for the people. As at 3:36–37, the reader has to make a decision on how to deal with this piece of text, incorporating it into one's understanding of the story, or treating it as outside of the story, breaking the narrative frame. Again, depending on the decision made, it may have to be modified later in the reading.

Neh 6:9

Narrative Context. After the proleptic self defense in Neh 5, the story picks up again with the temporal opposition formula in Neh 6:1. When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the rest of the enemies heard that character-Neh had completed the wall and it was without a breach, they took a new approach. Sanballat and Geshem deceptively invited him to meet together outside of the city. Recognizing their plot to do him harm, he responded that he was about the business of doing a great work. Why should that work stop in order for him to come to them? Narrator-Neh reports that they invited character-Neh four times, and each time he responded the same. Then Sanballat took a more threatening and personal approach, sending an open letter accusing

---

me for my benefit on account of all that I've done for this people." Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 451, supplies "considering."

There are 15 instances of the prep. phrase לְטוֹבָה in the HB. *HALOT*, s.v. טוֹבָה, 1, says that טוֹבָה can mean the good that one does, or, definition 2, the good that comes to one in the form of prosperity or salvation. With the prep. ל prefixed, only one of the 15 instances seems to demand the understanding of "good work," namely Neh 2:18, where the builders "strengthen their hands for the good," namely the task of building the wall. But there the definite art. is present. The other instances (not including Neh 5:19 and 13.31) are understood most easily understanding לְטוֹבָה to refer to a benefit to come to the person or people. With 12 of 15 instances, one ought to start with the second meaning, that of benefit; however, given the translation of Neh 2:18 and given the context of Neh 5 of 13:31, one cannot dismiss immediately the possibility that לְטוֹבָה in Neh 5.19 or 13:31 refers to the good that Nehemiah has done.

The possible ambiguity is tantalizing, and perhaps it is intentional. Nehemiah has done much "good," (טוֹבָה) yet he also seeks "good," (טוֹבָה) from God. In the end, this dissertation understands טוֹבָה to be referring to the good that Nehemiah seeks from God.

character-Neh and the Judahites of building the wall because they were considering rebelling against the king. He even accused character-Neh of aspirations to kingship, saying that Nehemiah had established prophets to proclaim him king. He threatened that the king would hear and then exhorted character-Neh, on the basis of such threats, to meet together. Character-Neh responded, saying that such accusations were made up in Sanballat's mind. Narrator-Neh then explains in summary fashion that all the enemies were trying to frighten character-Neh and the workers by saying, "Their hands will sink down from the work, and it will not be done." The unit comes to an end with this prayer.[92]

Neh 6:9—Text, Translation, and Notes.

וְעַתָּה חַזֵּק אֶת־יָדָי

But now, strengthen[93] my hands.

---

[92] See fig. 3.10.

[93] חַזֵּק—This form could be parsed as a Piel impv. sg. m., a Piel inf. abs., or a Piel inf. const. How one understands the clause in relation to the context will determine how one parses and translates the verb. The *BHS* textual apparatus calls it an inf. abs. while noting that the ancient versions read it as a first per. sg. common pf., which would read, "I have strengthened my hands." The translation presented above understands the clause as a prayer, thus translating חַזֵּק as a Piel impv., "strengthen." See the Observations section in the main text for further treatment of this issue.

The verbal root חזק is used frequently in Neh, some 42 times, and in a variety of senses. Most frequently it appears in Neh 3—34 times in the Hiphil and once in the Piel—all with the meaning, "repair" (*HALOT*, Hiphil 3, and Piel 2). In 2:18, חזק is used with יד, "hand," as the people "strengthen their hands for the work" (*HALOT*, Piel 1). In Neh 4, the Hiphil ptc. of חזק is used three times with the sense of taking hold of something, namely, their weapons (*HALOT*, Hiphil 2). In Neh 5:16, *HALOT*, Hiphil 1, says that the Hiphil pf. means "to apply oneself." Finally, in 10:30, *HALOT*, Hiphil 4,gives the meaning "to join with" for the Hiphil ptc.

Summary Observations. This short clause has given rise to a good deal of comment. Fensham calls it enigmatic.[94] Like 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5], it fits its context nicely, even repeating the word יָד, "hand," used just prior to the prayer; like 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5] and 5:19, it is not introduced as a prayer. However, whereas the debate about Neh 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5] centers on the time at which the prayer took place, here the debate concerns whether or not these four Hebrew words even constitute a prayer.

Scholars such as Fensham, Blenkinsopp, and Williamson argue against this being a prayer at all. Blenkinsopp translates it, "But I strengthened my resolve all the more."[95] In his translation notes he acknowledges that the Hebrew reads "and now strengthen my hands," and notes that this "suggests another short ejaculatory prayer addressed to God."[96] Even so, he concludes that the text should not be understood as a prayer.[97]

Williamson argues along similar lines. In addition, he gives three reasons why these words should not be taken as a prayer. He writes,

> (i) It was not so understood by the ancient Vrs. When they present a united tradition of interpretation, they should be considered carefully. (ii) Nowhere else is God the subject of "to strengthen the hands." For Nehemiah's use of the phrase, cf. 2:18 (Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 7, 197). (iii) While it is true that sometimes Nehemiah does include in his memoir the prayers that he must have offered in the historical setting rather than as he wrote (cf. 3:36–37…), they are clearly marked by the inclusion of the vocative "O my God." Without some such indication, there is nothing to mark this as a prayer at all. [98]

---

[94] Fensham, *Book of Ezra, Nehemiah*, 203.

[95] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 266.

[96] Ibid., 267 note e.

[97] Ibid., He writes, "On the other hand, the verb is never used with God as the subject, and the other prayers of this kind in the book always invoke God explicitly. In spite of the unusual [וְעַתָּה], therefore, the verb should be read as infinitive absolute or emended to [חַזַּקְתִּי] following LXX, Syr., and Vulg."

[98] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 249n9b.

Thus, Williamson concludes that "חזק 'strengthen' is to be construed as an inf abs doing service for a finite verb."[99] Following GKC § 113y–gg, he sees this as demonstrating "hurried or otherwise excited style."[100]

Clines disagrees, primarily on the basis of the word וְעַתָּה, "and now," in the text. Against those who would keep it from being a prayer by translating the verb in an indicative sense, Clines writes,

> The last clause [of verse 9] is made a prayer in most modern versions by the conjectural addition of **O God;** this would be an ejaculatory prayer on the occasion (like 4.4f) since it does not suit the time of composition. *NEB*, following LXX, has 'I applied myself to it with greater energy', but 'attah', 'now' cannot refer to the past.[101]

Finally, Throntveit argues from a compositional viewpoint rather than a grammatical one, While acknowledging Williamson's arguments against this being a prayer, he notes "the structural similarity with 6:10–14, which concludes with an undisputed petition." [102] For Throntveit, this similarity is enough to conclude that these words are another prayer.

The ambiguity of the form of חַזֵּק does open the possibility that this is a statement rather than a prayer. The arguments put forth by Williamson (and Blenkinsopp) certainly have merit, but the use of וְעַתָּה would seem to militate against such a reading. As Clines has pointed out, "'attah', 'now' cannot refer to the past."[103] Throntveit's compositional observation is also helpful. Sections of narrative in the book of Nehemiah regularly end with an interjected prayer making it likely that this is an interjected prayer concluding this particular section.

---

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 174.

[102] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 85.

[103] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 174.

Given that 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5] and 5:19 have a similar interjected nature, as do other prayers that will be seen below, the simplest answer is to understand this as yet another prayer. But if this is a prayer, it gives rise to the same questions raised by 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5] and 5:19. How does it fit the story? Or is it prayed in the process of narration rather than at the time of the events? Clines avers that it does not fit the time of composition, but if one understands both 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5] and this prayer as arising in the vivid retelling and reliving of the events, there is really no great difficulty understanding the prayer even though it comes after the events. The reader is faced again with a decision.

Neh 6:14

Narrative Context. Having refused to leave the city to meet with Sanballat and Geshem and having responded to their accusations with defiance, character-Neh finds himself facing yet another trap. He goes to the house of Shemaiah who encourages him to take refuge in the temple because they are coming to kill him. Character-Neh responds with rhetorical questions to the effect that he does not belong in the temple and would not flee there to save his life. Then he reports that he recognized that Shemaiah had been hired by Tobiah and Sanballat in order to frighten him into sinning, besmirching his name and giving them the opportunity to reproach him. At this moment of high tension, the first climax in the narrative,[104] a prayer is included asking that God remember these schemers.[105]

Neh 6:14—Text, Translation, and Notes

זָכְרָה אֱלֹהַי לְטוֹבִיָּה וּלְסַנְבַלַּט כְּמַעֲשָׂיו אֵלֶּה

וְגַם לְנוֹעַדְיָה הַנְּבִיאָה וּלְיֶתֶר הַנְּבִיאִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מְיָרְאִים אוֹתִי

[104] See the overview of the plot in ch. 2 and figs. 2.3 and 3.10.

Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these[106] deeds of theirs,[107] and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were[108] trying to frighten me.

Summary Observations. This is the second example of a prayer beginning with the call for God to "remember," (זָכְרָה).[109] The first instance was at the end of Neh 5 as Nehemiah called on God to remember him. In this instance, God is called upon to remember the enemies. In this way, the prayer is similar to 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5], though that prayer asks God to "hear," (שְׁמַע) rather than to remember.[110]

Like the prayers at 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5], 5:19, and 6:9, this prayer seems to interrupt the flow of the story rather than being a part of it. The words of the prayer are fitting given what has happened in the story, yet the prayer does not fit into the story. For a fourth time in the narrative, the reader is challenged to make sense of this. Chapter 4 will take this up in detail.

Neh 9:5b–37

Narrative Context. Considering the frequency of prayer in Neh 1–6, a relatively long break from prayer occurs, extending from 6:15 to 9:5a. In this break, the narrative has reached its

---

[105] See fig. 3.10.

[106] אֵלֶּה—One would expect the definite art. on this attributive position demonstrative; however, GKC, § 126 y, states, "Thus the article is sometimes omitted with demonstratives, since they are already to a certain extent determined by their meaning."

[107] כְּמַעֲשָׂיו—The third sg. m. suf. would normally be translated "his," but the compound obj. of Tobiah and Sanballat demands a pl. translation in English.

[108] הָיוּ מְיָרְאִים—Understanding the prayer to be referring to a past event, the translation above renders these two words in the past progressive as is natural for a pf. followed by a ptc. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 460, agrees. Because he believes this prayer to be a part of Nehemiah's memoir, written down in the midst of the trouble, Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 247, renders this "who have been trying to intimidate me." Here is a good example of how one's translation can be affected by one's assumptions.

[109] See the analysis of these remember prayers, in Appendix One.

[110] See table 3.1.

first resolution and moved into a second complication, heading for a second climax.[111] The walls are rebuilt; the gates are in place. Physically, restoration has taken place. Now the need for spiritual restoration has come to the fore.

This long prayer in Neh 9 is prayed by the Levites on behalf of the people and serves as the second climax in the plot as a moment of crisis is reached. The restoration of the wall has been completed, though it has not yet been dedicated. The people have heard the Torah as read by Ezra and have observed the Feast of Tabernacles. They have gathered again to hear the law and have responded in confession and repentance. The Levites express this confession and repentance for the assembly in this prayer, beseeching Yahweh to act with compassion as he has done so often in the past. This then leads into the solemn agreement of Neh 10.

Neh 9:5b–37—Text, Translation, and Notes

Translation	**Verse**	**BHS Text**
Arise! Bless Yahweh your[112] God	9:5b	קוּמוּ בָּרֲכוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

[111] See the plot description and fig. 2.3 in ch. 2 as well as fig. 3.10, below.

[112] The opening of the prayer is a bit awkward as the Levites begin by exhorting the people to arise and bless "Yahweh your God" and then move to addressing Yahweh himself. At this point the LXX reflects a first per. pl. suf. rather than the second per. suf. found in the Hebrew text, giving the reading, "Yahweh our God." This need not be adopted since "your God" makes good sense as the Levites address the people. The whole prayer has a rather sermonic feel to it, and this suf. contributes to that sensation.

who is from everlasting to everlasting.[113]		מִן־הָעוֹלָם עַד־הָעוֹלָם
And may your glorious name be blessed[114]		וִיבָרְכוּ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדֶךָ
and be exalted over every blessing and praise.		וּמְרוֹמַם עַל־כָּל־בְּרָכָה וּתְהִלָּה
You are Yahweh[115]—you alone.	9:6[116]	אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדֶּךָ
You yourself[117] made the heavens,		אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם
the highest heavens and all their host,		שְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם
the earth and all that is upon it,		הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ
the seas and all that is in them.		הַיַּמִּים וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם
And You preserve all of them.		וְאַתָּה מְחַיֶּה אֶת־כֻּלָּם
And the host of the heavens bows down to you.		וּצְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם לְךָ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים
You are Yahweh,	9:7	אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה

[113] As Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 524, notes, "Some scholars allege that מִן־הָעוֹלָם עַד־הָעוֹלָם, 'from everlasting until everlasting' seems out of place" since there would be no one, let alone the present Judahites, to offer praise "from everlasting." Various attempts have been made to solve this perceived problem. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 303–304, following C. C. Torey, *Ezra Studies*, (Chicago: University Press, 1910), 280–82, suggests that there has been an omission of the phrase ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו, "blessed are you, O Lord our God." In contrast, Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 523–24, gives two possible ways to understand the phrase without need for emendation. First, the solution adopted here and by Steinmann, is to understand the phrase as adjectival, describing Yahweh. This necessitates the insertion of "who is" in English to reflect the adjectival relationship. A second possibility is to take the phrase as adverbial which results in the understanding that God is blessed by others from everlasting to everlasting. Steinmann writes, "God alone is eternal, and before his creation of the world, no people existed who could bless him, which may make the adjectival rendering preferable. Yet it is true that angels and his people bless him now and will continue to bless him throughout eternity. His believers on earth together with those he has already received into heavenly glory bless him now, and after he bodily raises all believers to everlasting life on the Last Day, they will continue to sing hymns of blessing and praise forever."

[114] וִיבָרְכוּ—The translation takes this as an example of the third per. pl. used in an impersonal, pass. sense. See Williams, 66, § 160.

[115] אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה—This nominal sentence occurs again at the beginning of v. 7.

[116] The LXX reads, "And Ezra said," (καὶ ϵἶπϵν Εσδρας), at the beginning of v. 6, attributing the remainder of the prayer to Ezra. While the RSV and NRSV adopt this reading, most other English translations and commentators reject it in favor of the Hebrew text.

[117] This translation reflects the fact that the second sg. m. independent per. pron. precedes the verb which is already inflected as second sg. m. The pron. places emphasis on the fact that creation is Yahweh's activity. This parallels the emphatic לְבַדֶּךָ, "you alone," just prior in the text.

the God who chose Abram,		הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתָּ בְּאַבְרָם
who brought him out from Ur of the Chaldeans, and who made his name Abraham.[118]		וְהוֹצֵאתוֹ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים וְשַׂמְתָּ שְׁמוֹ אַבְרָהָם
You found his heart faithful before you	9:8	וּמָצָאתָ אֶת־לְבָבוֹ נֶאֱמָן לְפָנֶיךָ
and made[119] with him the covenant		וְכָרוֹת עִמּוֹ הַבְּרִית
to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites to his descendants.[120]		לָתֵת אֶת־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי הַחִתִּי הָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהַגִּרְגָּשִׁי לָתֵת לְזַרְעוֹ
And you established your words,		וַתָּקֶם אֶת־דְּבָרֶיךָ
for righteous are you.[121]		כִּי צַדִּיק אָתָּה
And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and their outcry you heard at the Red Sea.	9:9	וַתֵּרֶא אֶת־עֳנִי אֲבֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרָיִם וְאֶת־זַעֲקָתָם שָׁמַעְתָּ עַל־יַם־סוּף
And you gave signs and wonders against[122] Pharaoh and against all his servants and against all the people of his land, because you knew that they had acted presumptuously against them.[123]	9:10	וַתִּתֵּן אֹתֹת וּמֹפְתִים בְּפַרְעֹה וּבְכָל־עֲבָדָיו וּבְכָל־עַם אַרְצוֹ כִּי יָדַעְתָּ כִּי הֵזִידוּ עֲלֵיהֶם

---

[118] בָּחַרְתָּ and וְהוֹצֵאתוֹ and וְשַׂמְתָּ are all second sg. m. pf. verbs, but following אֲשֶׁר, "who," they have been rendered as if they were third per.

[119] וְכָרוֹת—The inf. abs. is used in place of another pf. See GKC, § 113 z and Joüon, § 123 x. Here, כרת is used with בְּרִית in the common phrase "to make a covenant."

[120] The Hebrew text repeats the inf. const. לָתֵת, "to give," before לְזַרְעוֹ, "to his descendants." This repetition resumes the outcome of the covenant after the list of people groups. It is redundant and need not appear a second time in an English translation.

[121] The translation "righteous are you" is, admittedly, a bit awkward; however, it helps one see that the section of the prayer reporting God's actions with Abraham begins and ends with אָתָּה, "you," keeping the emphasis on Yahweh and his actions.

[122] Joüon, § 133 c, states that the prep. ב "has the (frequent) meaning of *against* (= על)." It is used in that sense here in combination with the verb נתן, "to give." *HALOT*, s.v. נתן, Qal 12, gives the meaning "to set against" for נתן followed by the prep. ב.

[123] הֵזִידוּ עֲלֵיהֶם—The third per. pl. common subj., "they," refers to the Egyptians while the obj. of the prep.,

And you made for yourself a name, as it is today.[124]		וַתַּעַשׂ־לְךָ שֵׁם כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
And the sea you split before them,	9:11	וְהַיָּם בָּקַעְתָּ לִפְנֵיהֶם
and they crossed over in the midst of the sea on the dry ground.		וַיַּעַבְרוּ בְתוֹךְ־הַיָּם בַּיַּבָּשָׁה
And those pursuing them you cast down in the depths,		וְאֶת־רֹדְפֵיהֶם הִשְׁלַכְתָּ בִמְצוֹלֹת
like a stone in the mighty waters.		כְּמוֹ־אֶבֶן בְּמַיִם עַזִּים
In[125] a pillar of cloud, you guided them by day,	9:12	וּבְעַמּוּד עָנָן הִנְחִיתָם יוֹמָם
and in a pillar of fire at night,		וּבְעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לַיְלָה
to illuminate for them the way in which they should go.		לְהָאִיר לָהֶם אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ־בָהּ
And upon Mount Sinai you descended	9:13	וְעַל הַר־סִינַי יָרַדְתָּ
and spoke[126] with them from the heavens.		וַתְּדַבֵּר עִמָּהֶם מִשָּׁמָיִם
And you gave to them upright judgments		וַתִּתֵּן לָהֶם מִשְׁפָּטִים יְשָׁרִים
and reliable instructions,[127] good statutes and commandments.[128]		וְתוֹרוֹת אֱמֶת חֻקִּים וּמִצְוֹת טוֹבִים
And your holy Sabbath[129] you made known to them,	9:14	וְאֶת־שַׁבַּת קָדְשְׁךָ הוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם

"them," refers to the Israelites. This verb is used again in vv. 16 and 29. See the text notes there.

[124] כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה—Occasionally the definite art. remains after a prep. when one would expect it to be syncopated. See Joüon, § 35 e. That is the case with כְּהַיּוֹם in this v. *HALOT*, s.v. יוֹם 10 c ii, gives Deut 6:24, Jer 44:22, Ezra 9:7 and 15 as examples of this same phrase with the ה and translates it as "as is now the case," distinguishing it from the phrase כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה without the ה which is translated "today, now." BDB, 6 h translates both as "as it is this day." Joüon, § 35 e, also translates both as "as (it still is) today."

[125] The prep. ב, prefixed to עַמּוּד, "pillar," could easily be taken as instrumental and be translated, "with." This translation follows Steinmann's suggestion, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 525, that "Yahweh himself was in this theophany."

[126] וַתְּדַבֵּר—Here the Piel inf. abs. is used as a finite verb. See the n. on כרת in 9:8, above.

[127] וְתוֹרוֹת אֱמֶת—Literally "instructions of reliability." Here the abs. noun אֱמֶת functions as an attributive gen., giving the quality of the instructions, "reliable instructions." See Joüon, § 129 f.

[128] חֻקִּים וּמִצְוֹת טוֹבִים —The m. pl. adj. טוֹבִים qualifies both nouns, even though מִצְוֹת is f. As Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 525, notes, "When an adjective modifies several nouns of different genders, the adjective normally is masculine (GKC, § 132 d; Joüon, § 148 a; Waltke-O'Connor, § 14.2d, example 18)."

[129] שַׁבַּת קָדְשְׁךָ—Another attributive gen. See Joüon, § 129 f.

and commandments and statutes and instruction you commanded them by the hand of Moses, your servant.[130]		וּמִצְוֹת וְחֻקִּים וְתוֹרָה צִוִּיתָ לָהֶם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדֶּךָ
And food from heaven you gave to them for their hunger,	9:15	וְלֶחֶם מִשָּׁמַיִם נָתַתָּה לָהֶם לִרְעָבָם
and water from a rock you brought forth for them for their thirst.		וּמַיִם מִסֶּלַע הוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם לִצְמָאָם
And you told them to enter in order to possess the land		וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לָבוֹא לָרֶשֶׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
which you swore[131] to give to them.		אֲשֶׁר־נָשָׂאתָ אֶת־יָדְךָ לָתֵת לָהֶם
But they,[132] our fathers,[133] acted presumptuously.[134]	9:16	וְהֵם וַאֲבֹתֵינוּ הֵזִידוּ
And they stiffened their neck		וַיַּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עָרְפָּם
and did not listen to your commandments.		וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתֶיךָ
They refused to listen,	9:17	וַיְמָאֲנוּ לִשְׁמֹעַ
and they did not remember[135] your wonders which you had done with them.		וְלֹא־זָכְרוּ נִפְלְאֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּהֶם
And they stiffened their neck		וַיַּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עָרְפָּם

[130] מֹשֶׁה עַבְדֶּךָ —See the notes in the discussion of Neh 1:6 and 7, above.

[131] נָשָׂאתָ אֶת־יָדְךָ—Literally, "You lifted your hand." As Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 525, notes, "The idiom that God raises his hand denotes that he swears an oath." He lists numerous examples of this idiom. See Andrew E. Steinmann, *Intermediate Biblical Hebrew: A Reference Grammar with Charts and Exercises* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2009), § 64, 179–83, for further discussion of oath formulas.

[132] וְהֵם—Here the disjunctive *waw* with the independent per. pron. serves to switch subjects. See Joüon, § 172 a. The emphasis to this point has been on the gracious actions of Yahweh. What follows alternates between the rebellion of the people and Yahweh's continuing gracious nature and action.

[133] וַאֲבֹתֵינוּ—This *waw*, prefixed to אֲבֹתֵינוּ, "our fathers," is probably epexegetical, clarifying the pron. הֵם, "they." See GKC, § 154 a, note 1b, where this is called the *wāw explicativum*. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 304n16a agrees with this translation and explanation.

[134] הֵזִידוּ—This verb was used in 9:10, referring to the Egyptians and their treatment of the Israelites. Now it refers to the Israelites and their action toward Yahweh who rescued them from the Egyptians. It is used again in 9:29, again in reference to the Israelites' insolent actions toward Yahweh.

[135] See the n. on 1:8, above, for the uses and importance of זכר, "remember," in Neh. Whereas elsewhere character-Neh exhorts Yahweh to remember his covenant and the people to remember Yahweh, here the Levites acknowledge that the people did not remember, which led to rebellious acts.

and appointed a leader[136] to return to their servitude in their rebellion.[137]		וַיִּתְּנוּ־רֹאשׁ לָשׁוּב לְעַבְדָתָם בְּמִרְיָם
But you[138] are an extremely forgiving God,[139] gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.[140]		וְאַתָּה אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אֶרֶךְ־אַפַּיִם וְרַב־וְחֶסֶד
And you did not forsake them.		וְלֹא עֲזַבְתָּם
Furthermore, they made for themselves a calf of cast metal, and they said, "This is your god who brought you up from Egypt."	9:18	אַף כִּי־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל מַסֵּכָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלְךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם

---

[136] וַיִּתְּנוּ־רֹאשׁ—For this expression followed by ל plus the inf., *HALOT*, s.v. נתן, Qal 11, suggests "to take it into one's head to" do something and gives Neh 9:17 as an example. Without the ל and inf., *HALOT* suggests the meaning "to submit oneself to a leader" and gives Numbers 14:4 as an example. This distinction is reflected in Fensham, *Book of Ezra, Nehemiah*, 231, where he argues for a translation of "determined" or "set their minds on it." So also Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra (and) Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB 14; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 160. Against this, Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 305n17a, writes, "Several commentators think that נתן ראשׁ is an idiom for 'to determine.' However, this passage is clearly based on Num 14:4, where exactly the same phrase must mean 'to appoint a leader.'" Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 301 note g, agrees with this assessment.

[137] בְּמִרְיָם—The *BHS* text reads, "In their rebellion." On the basis of a few medieval manuscripts, the LXX, and Num 14:4, the *BHS* editor suggests reading בְּמִצְרַיִם, "in Egypt." Many commentators and English translations follow this suggestion. While it could be correct, the text of the *BHS* is intelligible as it stands, and, in fact, reinforces the rebellion recorded in these vv. In addition, the Masoretes noted that this form occurs only once but did not supply a Qere to suggest that the correct reading should more closely match Num 14:4. For these reasons, this translation reads the text as it stands.

[138] וְאַתָּה—As at the beginning of 9:16, the disjunctive *waw* with the independent per. pron. serves to switch subjects. See the n. on וְהֵם in 9:16, above. Here the subj. switches back to Yahweh. This occurs again in 9:19.

[139] אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת—This const. chain is another attributive gen. in which the abs. noun describes a quality of the const. noun, giving the reading, "A forgiving God." See Joüon, § 129 f. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 305n17c, calls this pl. form the "[plural] of amplification," referencing GKC, § 124 e. Incorporating this into the translation results in the reading, "An extremely forgiving God." As discussed in the following note, this const. phrase is part of a larger confession about Yahweh, repeated in various forms in various places in the HB. This phrase is unique to Neh and is fitting as it emphasizes God's abundant forgiveness even as the rebelliousness of the people is confessed.

[140] וְרַב־וחֶסֶד—As Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 526–27, notes, "The marginal Masoretic note יתיר ו, meaning 'superfluous ו,' indicates that the unvocalized *waw* on וחֶסֶד should be ignored and that the const. phrase should be read וְרַב־חֶסֶד, 'and abounding in steadfast love/faithfulness,' as in Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Pss 86:5, 15; 103:8." This confession is based on Yahweh's self revelation in Exod 34:6 and is similar to these other passages noted by Steinmann. For a treatment of these passages, see Lessing, *Jonah*, 353–55, 367–70 and the literature he cites there.

And they committed great blasphemies.[141]		וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נְאָצוֹת גְּדֹלוֹת
But you, in your abundant compassions,[142]	9:19	וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים
did not forsake them in the wilderness.		לֹא עֲזַבְתָּם בַּמִּדְבָּר
The pillar of cloud[143] did not turn aside from over them by day		אֶת־עַמּוּד הֶעָנָן לֹא־סָר מֵעֲלֵיהֶם בְּיוֹמָם
to guide them in the way,[144]		לְהַנְחֹתָם בְּהַדֶּרֶךְ
and the pillar of fire by night		וְאֶת־עַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ בַּלַּיְלָה
to illuminate for them the way[145] in which they should go.		לְהָאִיר לָהֶם וְאֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ־בָהּ
And your good Spirit you gave to instruct them,	9:20	וְרוּחֲךָ הַטּוֹבָה נָתַתָּ לְהַשְׂכִּילָם
and your manna you did not withhold from their mouths.		וּמָנְךָ לֹא־מָנַעְתָּ מִפִּיהֶם
And water you gave to them for their thirst.		וּמַיִם נָתַתָּה לָהֶם לִצְמָאָם
And for forty years you sustained[146] them.	9:21	וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה כִּלְכַּלְתָּם

---

[141] וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נְאָצוֹת גְּדֹלוֹת—This same clause occurs again in 9:26. Here it refers to the worship of the golden calf. In 9:26 it could refer to the calves at Dan and Bethel, but more likely if refers to the many ways the people rebelled against Yahweh.

[142] בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ—This pl. noun could be considered an abstract pl. and be translated "mercy" or "compassion." In Neh 9, however, Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 527, argues that the pl. is intended, reflecting God's "many acts of mercy over a long period of Israelite history." It is unfortunate, then, that he does not remain consistent in the way he translates this in 9:27, 28, and 31 where he uses the gloss "compassion."

[143] אֶת־עַמּוּד הֶעָנָן . . . וְאֶת־עַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ—Both the pillar of cloud and of fire appear to be marked with the marker of the definite direct obj., yet each functions as the subj. in its clause. Joüon, § 125 j, and *IBHS*, § 10.3.2, both assert that אֵת has uses other than marking the definite direct obj. One such use is that found here, as a marker of the subj. of the clause. See their discussions wherein both cite this v. as an example. This happens again at Neh 9:34, cited by both as well.

[144] With regard to the unsyncopated ה following the prep., see the n. on כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה in 9:10, above, as well as the references there.

[145] וְאֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ—The *waw* here is difficult. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 305n19b, comments, "MT is represented by RV: 'to show them light, and the way wherein they should go.' However, this demands that להאיר 'to give light to' or 'to light up' be understood intransitively in the first clause but transitively in the second, which is extremely harsh. The present text may have arisen under the influence of ואת earlier in the verse." With Williamson, a few medieval MSS, the LXX, the Syr., and the Vg., this translation omits the *waw*.

[146] כִּלְכַּלְתָּם—This form is Pilpel pf. second sg. m. of the root כול, plus a third pl. m. obj. suf. *HALOT*, Pilpel 2, gives "sustain" as an appropriate translation in Neh 9:21.

In the wilderness[147] they did not do without.		בַּמִּדְבָּר לֹא חָסֵרוּ
Their garments did not wear out,		שַׂלְמֹתֵיהֶם לֹא בָלוּ
and their feet did not swell.		וְרַגְלֵיהֶם לֹא בָצֵקוּ
And you gave to them kingdoms and peoples,	9:22	וַתִּתֵּן לָהֶם מַמְלָכוֹת וַעֲמָמִים
and you distributed them to an edge.[148]		וַתַּחְלְקֵם לִפְאָה
And they possessed the land of Sihon, that is[149] the land of the king of Heshbon,		וַיִּירְשׁוּ אֶת־אֶרֶץ סִיחוֹן וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ מֶלֶךְ חֶשְׁבּוֹן
and the land of Og, king of Bashan.		וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ עוֹג מֶלֶךְ־הַבָּשָׁן
And their sons you multiplied like the stars of the heavens,	9:23	וּבְנֵיהֶם הִרְבִּיתָ כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם
and you brought them to the land		וַתְּבִיאֵם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ
which you told their fathers to enter in order to possess [it].		אֲשֶׁר־אָמַרְתָּ לַאֲבֹתֵיהֶם לָבוֹא לָרֶשֶׁת
And their sons entered and possessed the land.	9:24	וַיָּבֹאוּ הַבָּנִים וַיִּירְשׁוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
And you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites.		וַתַּכְנַע לִפְנֵיהֶם אֶת־יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִים
And you gave them into their hand, even their kings and the peoples of the land,		וַתִּתֵּן בְּיָדָם וְאֶת־מַלְכֵיהֶם וְאֶת־עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ

[147] בַּמִּדְבָּר—It is not clear which verb this prep. phrase is modifying. It could modify what precedes it, which is how most commentators and translations take it. To do so, however, they must subordinate the following clause. This translation suggests taking בַּמִּדְבָּר with the following clause, לֹא חָסֵרוּ, on the basis of the penchant in this and the preceding v. to put something other than the verb in first position in the clause. Another argument for not subordinating לֹא חָסֵרוּ is that it is followed by two more clauses ending in negated pf. third pl. common verbs giving three parallel examples of how Yahweh "sustained them" (כִּלְכַּלְתָּם).

[148] וַתַּחְלְקֵם לִפְאָה—*HALOT*, s.v. פֵּאָה 1, defines פֵּאָה as a "side" or "edge" of something. In the Qal, חלק means "to divide," (*HALOT*, 1), or "to apportion," (*HALOT*, 2). The translation depends on the referent of the suf. on וַתַּחְלְקֵם. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 299, and Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 302, understand "them" to be the kingdoms and peoples, resulting in the translation, "And assigned them as a boundary." That makes good sense, but in 9:22 and 23,the third pl. m. suf. occurs five times. The other four all clearly refer to the Israelites, making it likely that this also refers to the Israelites. If so, Yahweh apportioned the Israelites "to an edge." The clause could be translated, "You apportioned them to an edge," in the sense that he distributed them to the boundaries or extremities of the land. See the discussion in Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 527–28, for yet another possibility and more explanation. In any case, the sense is that Yahweh established his people in the land and set the boundaries.

[149] וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ מֶלֶךְ חֶשְׁבּוֹן—Understanding Sihon to be the king of Heshbon, this translation takes the *waw* here as epexegetical. See GKC, § 154 a, note 1b.

to do with them according to their pleasure.[150]		לַעֲשׂוֹת בָּהֶם כִּרְצוֹנָם
And they captured fortified cities and fertile land	9:25	וַיִּלְכְּדוּ עָרִים בְּצֻרוֹת וַאֲדָמָה שְׁמֵנָה
and houses full of every good thing,		וַיִּירְשׁוּ בָּתִּים מְלֵאִים־כָּל־טוּב
hewn cisterns, vineyards and olive trees,		בֹּרוֹת חֲצוּבִים כְּרָמִים וְזֵיתִים
and fruit trees in abundance.[151]		וְעֵץ מַאֲכָל לָרֹב
And they ate and were satiated and grew fat.		וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׂבְּעוּ וַיַּשְׁמִינוּ
And they luxuriated in your great goodness.		וַיִּתְעַדְּנוּ בְּטוּבְךָ הַגָּדוֹל
Then they behaved rebelliously and revolted against you	9:26	וַיַּמְרוּ וַיִּמְרְדוּ בָךְ
and cast your Torah behind their back.		וַיַּשְׁלִכוּ אֶת־תּוֹרָתְךָ אַחֲרֵי גַוָּם
And your prophets they slew,		וְאֶת־נְבִיאֶיךָ הָרָגוּ
who testified against them to return them to you.		אֲשֶׁר־הֵעִידוּ בָם לַהֲשִׁיבָם אֵלֶיךָ
And they committed great blasphemies.[152]		וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נְאָצוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת
And you gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they harassed them.	9:27	וַתִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד צָרֵיהֶם וַיָּצֵרוּ לָהֶם
And in the time of their distress, they would[153] cry out to you,		וּבְעֵת צָרָתָם יִצְעֲקוּ אֵלֶיךָ
and you would hear from heaven.		וְאַתָּה מִשָּׁמַיִם תִּשְׁמָע
And according to your abundant compassions[154]		וּכְרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים

[150] כִּרְצוֹנָם—"According to their pleasure." This same phrase is used again in 9:37, but there it is an ironic contrast to this occurrence. Here the Israelites enjoy God's favor and do their pleasure unto the Canaanites. In 9:37, the people are subject to the Persians and their pleasure.

[151] וְעֵץ מַאֲכָל לָרֹב—Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 528, writes, "The construct phrase עֵץ מַאֲכָל, literally, 'a tree of food,' means 'fruit tree(s)' . . . The noun רֹב, 'abundance,' often has the preposition לְ, and the combination is used adverbially, 'in abundance, abundantly' (see BDB, s.v. רֹב, 1, under the root רבב I)."

[152] וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נְאָצוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת—See the n. on this same statement in 9:18, above.

[153] In this v. and in 9:28, the Hebrew report switches to the impf. The use of "would" in the translation reflects the repeated nature of these actions rather than a simple past tense. See Joüon, § 113 e 1.

you would give to them saviors,		תִּתֵּן לָהֶם מוֹשִׁיעִים
and they would save them from the hand of their adversaries.		וְיוֹשִׁיעוּם מִיַּד צָרֵיהֶם
And as soon as they had rest,[155] they would return to doing evil before you.	9:28	וּכְנוֹחַ לָהֶם יָשׁוּבוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רַע לְפָנֶיךָ
And you forsook them into the hand of their enemies,		וַתַּעַזְבֵם בְּיַד אוֹיְבֵיהֶם
and they ruled over them. Then they repented and cried out to you.		וַיִּרְדּוּ בָהֶם וַיָּשׁוּבוּ וַיִּזְעָקוּךָ
And you would hear from heaven		וְאַתָּה מִשָּׁמַיִם תִּשְׁמַע
and would rescue them according to your compassions many times.		וְתַצִּילֵם כְּרַחֲמֶיךָ רַבּוֹת עִתִּים
And you testified against them many times in order to return them to your Torah,	9:29	וַתָּעַד בָּהֶם לַהֲשִׁיבָם אֶל־תּוֹרָתֶךָ
but they acted presumptuously[156] and did not listen to your commandments.		וְהֵמָּה הֵזִידוּ וְלֹא־שָׁמְעוּ לְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ
And against your judgments they sinned [against them],		וּבְמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ חָטְאוּ־בָם
by which, if a man will do [them], he will live.[157]		אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם וְחָיָה בָהֶם
And they gave a rebellious shoulder,		וַיִּתְּנוּ כָתֵף סוֹרֶרֶת
and their neck they stiffened, and they did not listen.		וְעָרְפָּם הִקְשׁוּ וְלֹא שָׁמֵעוּ
And you were patient[158] with them many years,	9:30	וַתִּמְשֹׁךְ עֲלֵיהֶם שָׁנִים רַבּוֹת
and you testified against them by your Spirit, by the hand of your prophets,		וַתָּעַד בָּם בְּרוּחֲךָ בְּיַד־נְבִיאֶיךָ

---

[154] וּכְרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים—See the n. regarding בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ in 9:19 above.

[155] וּכְנוֹחַ לָהֶם—The prep. כ prefixed to the inf. const. is understood temporally and has an instantaneous sense, translated here "as soon as." See Joüon, § 166 m. The ל functions to indicate possession resulting in the translation, "As soon as they had rest."

[156] הֵזִידוּ—Cf. 9:10 and 16, above, and the notes there.

[157] אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם וְחָיָה בָהֶם—The resumptive prep. and suf., בָהֶם, give the relative pron. the sense "by which." The impf. introduces the protasis of a condition, followed by the pf. with *waw* consec. for the apodosis. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 529, calls this "a textbook case where an imperfect verb . . ., which has a conditional force . . . is continued by a perfect verb with *waw* consecutive . . . which conveys subsequent result."

[158] וַתִּמְשֹׁךְ—*HALOT*, Qal 3, gives "keep patience with" as a translation in this particular context.

but they did not give ear.		וְלֹא הֶאֱזִינוּ
And you gave them into the hands of the peoples of the lands.		וַתִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד עַמֵּי הָאֲרָצוֹת
But in your abundant compassions you did not make an end of them,	9:31	וּבְרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים לֹא־עָשִׂיתָם כָּלָה
and you did not forsake them,		וְלֹא עֲזַבְתָּם
for a gracious and compassionate God are you.[159]		כִּי אֵל־חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אָתָּה
But now,[160] O our God,	9:32	וְעַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
the great, mighty, and fearsome God,[161]		הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא
who keeps the covenant and steadfast love,[162]		שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וְהַחֶסֶד
let not be little before you		אַל־יִמְעַט לְפָנֶיךָ
all the hardship[163] which has found us,		אֵת כָּל־הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר־מְצָאַתְנוּ
[namely] our kings,[164] our princes, and our priests		לְמַלְכֵינוּ לְשָׂרֵינוּ וּלְכֹהֲנֵינוּ
and our prophets and our fathers, and all your people,		וְלִנְבִיאֵנוּ וְלַאֲבֹתֵינוּ וּלְכָל־עַמֶּךָ
from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day.		מִימֵי מַלְכֵי אַשּׁוּר עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
And you are righteous with regard to all that is coming upon us,	9:33	וְאַתָּה צַדִּיק עַל כָּל־הַבָּא עָלֵינוּ

[159] אָתָּה—The historical overview ends in the same way it began, with the pron. אָתָּה, "you."

[160] וְעַתָּה—Balentine, *Prayer in Hebrew Bible*, 94, calls this "a rhetorical formula frequent in prayers indicating the important transition point from preliminary overtures to God to specific petitions." See his n. 21, p. 58, where he gives an overview of the literature on this topic.

[161] הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא—See the n. on Neh 1:5, above.

[162] שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וָחֶסֶד —See the n. on Neh 1:5, above.

[163] Here again, the Hebrew text introduces the subj. with אֵת. See the n. regarding עַמּוּד הֶעָנָן . . . וְאֵת־עַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ־אֵת, in 9:19, above.

[164] לְמַלְכֵינוּ—This is literally, "To our kings"; however, according to Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 530, the prefixed ל "can be used in an enumeration or list." I have not been able to verify this in any grammar. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 305n32b, compares this use of ל to the use of לכל in Ezra 1:5, claiming it has a resumptive force, "even." See also his n. 5a, on p. 5.

for reliably[165] you have acted, but, as for us, we have acted wickedly.		כִּי־אֱמֶת עָשִׂיתָ וַאֲנַחְנוּ הִרְשָׁעְנוּ
And our kings,[166] princes, priests, and fathers	9:34	וְאֶת־מְלָכֵינוּ שָׂרֵינוּ כֹהֲנֵינוּ וַאֲבֹתֵינוּ
have not carried out your Torah,		לֹא עָשׂוּ תוֹרָתֶךָ
and they have not paid attention to your commandments and to your testimonies which you testified against them.		וְלֹא הִקְשִׁיבוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתֶיךָ וּלְעֵדְוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הַעִידֹתָ בָּהֶם
And they in their kingdom	9:35	וְהֵם בְּמַלְכוּתָם
and in the abundant goodness which you have given to them		וּבְטוּבְךָ הָרָב אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתָּ לָהֶם
and in the broad and fertile land which you gave before them		וּבָאָרֶץ הָרְחָבָה וְהַשְּׁמֵנָה אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתָּ לִפְנֵיהֶם
have not served[167] you and have not turned from their wicked deeds.		לֹא עָבָדוּךָ וְלֹא־שָׁבוּ מִמַּעַלְלֵיהֶם הָרָעִים
Behold, we today are servants,[168]	9:36	הִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ הַיּוֹם עֲבָדִים
and the land which you gave to our fathers,		וְהָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתָּה לַאֲבֹתֵינוּ
to eat its fruit and its goodness,		לֶאֱכֹל אֶת־פִּרְיָהּ וְאֶת־טוּבָהּ
behold, we are servants upon it.		הִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ עֲבָדִים עָלֶיהָ

[165] אֱמֶת עָשִׂיתָ—Literally this is, "Truth you have done," but in the translation above אֱמֶת is rendered adverbially.

[166] As in 9:19 and 32, the Hebrew text introduces the subj. with אֶת. See the n. on 9:19, above.

[167] The importance of the noun עֶבֶד, "servant," has been discussed in the notes for Neh 1:5–11a. Here the verb עבד, "to serve," is used, pointing out that the people have not served God. This will be emphasized again in the following two vv., with the acknowledgment of their servitude to the foreign rulers. See ch. 4 where the importance of this is treated in the characterization of Nehemiah.

[168] הִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ הַיּוֹם עֲבָדִים—The staccato nature of this nominal clause is quite dramatic and sets it apart from the preceding, drawing attention to this conclusion. Literally it is, "Behold, we, today, servants." The use of the root עבד, "to serve," once in the previous v. and twice in this v. is significant at this point in the narrative. In 9:36 they admit that they have not served God, a reversal of Nehemiah's assertion in his prayer of Neh 1that they are Yahweh's servants. What is more, they are "servants," (עֲבָדִים), but as they admit, servants upon the land, serving other kings (v. 37). While many translations and commentators translate עֲבָדִים as "slaves," this translation uses "servants" to help the reader make the connection to v. 35, לֹא עָבָדוּךָ, "they did not serve you," to v. 14, מֹשֶׁה עַבְדֶּךָ, "Moses, your servant," and to the various uses of עֶבֶד, "servant," in the prayer in Neh 1.

And its produce yields generously[169]	9:37	וּתְבוּאָתָהּ מַרְבָּה
for the kings whom you have put over us because of our sins.		לַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתָּה עָלֵינוּ בְּחַטֹּאותֵינוּ
And over our bodies they are ruling and over our animals,		וְעַל גְּוִיֹּתֵינוּ מֹשְׁלִים וּבִבְהֶמְתֵּנוּ
according to their pleasure.[170]		כִּרְצוֹנָם
Indeed, in great distress are we.[171]		וּבְצָרָה גְדוֹלָה אֲנָחְנוּ

---

[169] וּתְבוּאָתָהּ מַרְבָּה—Contra Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 530, this translation takes תְּבוּאָה, "produce," as the subj. of the Hiphil ptc. מַרְבָּה.

[170] כִּרְצוֹנָם—Cf. 9:24 where this same phrase referred to the conquest by Israel. See the n. on this phrase in 9:24, above.

[171] אֲנָחְנוּ—Whereas the historical overview began and ended with the pron. אַתָּה, "you," the prayer ends with the pron. אֲנָחְנוּ, "we." Throughout, Yahweh has been shown to be gracious and compassionate, while the people have been shown to be rebellious. After the transitional וְעַתָּה in 9:32, אֲנָחְנוּ occurs four times, all in a neg. sense. In this last portion of the prayer, the rebellion and guilt of the current generation is emphasized. Having begun with "you," it ends with "we," the rebellious ones who are in great distress.

Nearly all commentators consider 9:37 to be the end of the prayer. The ch. and v. system of *BHS* support this as well. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 550–51, however, argues that the prayer ends with 10:1 [ET 9:38] and the declaration of the solemn agreement. He notes, "Since the flow of the narrative is nearly seamless from the end of the prayer to the list of leaders who place their seal on the solemn agreement, there is no sharp break between these two chapters. However, the English chapter division recognizes that the pledge to make a solemn agreement is part of the end of the prayer and contains the implicit plea for deliverance that would otherwise be strangely missing from the prayer." Against Steinmann, one could easily argue that the plea is already expressed in 9:32–37. Yet the syntax of 10:1 could be argued on Steinmann's side if one understands the ptc. of כרת, "to cut," as a pres. progressive verb, paralleling and continuing the pres. progressive sense of 9:37.

Against the position that sees 10:1 as a continuation of 9:37, Michael Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal in Ezra-Nehemiah (Neh 7:72b–10:40): An Exegetical, Literary, and Theological Study* (SBLDS 164; Atlanta: SBL, 2001), 238–39, argues that the voice changes from the Levites in 9:37 to the people in 10:1. He writes, "Granted that the covenant commitment (10:1–40) takes the form of first-person discourse, the question remains: Who is the speaker—the Levites or the people? The continuity with the first-person from the psalm (9:6–37) immediately suggests the Levites. However, the content of the commitment decides the issue in favor of the people. The Levites would not speak of 'our Levites (לוינו, 10:1) in the opening line. Moreover, the people rather than the Levites must declare their commitment to bring offerings and tithes to the priests and Levites (Neh 10:36–39). Thus, the content of Neh 10 indicates that it is the people who recount the signing of the document (10:1, 2–28) and also announce the stipulations (10:29–40)."

Reading Nehemiah as a narrative presents another possibility that no one has proposed. The *waw* that begins 10:1 can easily be understood as disjunctive, marking a break with what came before it. It is possible that the first per. narrator breaks in here with a transitional summary statement to move from the prayer to the list of signatories. This makes good narrative sense and provides a transition between the voice of the Levites and that of the people, a transition that Duggan's analysis is lacking. If this is the case, the ptc. has to be understood as a past progressive, rendered, "In all of this, we *were* making a solemn agreement." Joüon, § 121 f, notes that the past sense of a ptc. "can only be deduced from the context." If these are the words of the narrator, he is certainly speaking about the past.

Structure. Throntveit has aptly noted that there is "wide divergence among scholars on the elusive structure of this passage."[172] Some, like Loren F. Bliese and Steve Reynolds see a chiastic structure.[173] Others, such as Mark Boda, argue strongly against such an understanding.[174] As has been dealt with in the translation notes, the beginning and ending are both a bit awkward and contribute to the need for discussion about the prayer.[175] Yet a general consensus is perhaps reflected in the work of Judith Newman and Andrew Steinmann who give essentially the same outline for the prayer.[176] Figure 3.7 gives Steinmann's outline, modified to reflect the understanding that the prayer ends at 9:37 rather than 10:1 [ET 9:38].

9:5b A General Statement of Praise
6–31 Yahweh's Great Works in the Past
- 6 Creation
- 7–8 Yahweh's Mercy to Abram
- 9–12 The Exodus
- 13–14 At Mount Sinai
- 15–21 In the Wilderness
- 22–25 The Conquest of the Promised Land
- 26–31 Patience with a Disobedient People: The Period of the Judges and Kings

9:32–37 A Request for God's Mercy in the Present
- 32–35 Call for God's Mercy Despite Israel's Unfaithfulness
- 36–37 Call for God to See the Present Misery of His People

Figure 3.7. The outline of the prayer in Neh 9:5b–37 as compiled and adapted from Steinmann's text headers, pages 532–50.

[172] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 103. Throntveit's comment applies specifically to vv. 6–31, yet it is appropriate for the whole prayer, as well.

[173] Loren F. Bliese, "Chiastic Structures, Peaks and Cohesion in Nehemiah 9:6–37" *Bible Translator* 39 (1988): 208–15; Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 104–7.

[174] Boda, "Chiasmus in Ubiquity," 58–68.

[175] See the translation notes on 9:5 and 9:37, above.

[176] They differ in two ways. First, Newman includes 9:5 in the historical retrospect whereas Steinmann labels it as "A General Statement of Praise" and begins the historical retrospect with 9:6. Second, Steinmann includes 10:1 [ET 9:38] as part of the prayer whereas Newman ends the prayer at 9:37. See the n. on 9:37, above.

Another helpful way to view the prayer is to pay less attention to the historical events and more to the types of action and the actors. In 9:6–15 all of the action is done by Yawheh. It is all gracious and beneficial. Beginning in 9:16 a new element is introduced. First in verse 16 and again in verse 18, the rebellion of the people is recorded, but in verse 17b and in 9:19–25 the graciousness of Yahweh is again made plain and dominates the section. In verse 26 the action is again the rebellion of the people which leads to a new action in verse 27—Yahweh gives them into the hands of their enemies. In 9:26–31, the cycle of sin, judgment, repentance, and compassion repeats itself, ending once again with an emphasis on God's gracious and compassionate nature. This leads to the call of the people in 9:32–37 for God to be merciful. This call begins by extolling God's faithfulness and quickly moves to recognizing their past and present sinfulness and ends recognizing their present distress.

Clines has taken a similar approach to the prayer when he outlines it as seen in figure 3.8 below.

6–15 Divine Blessing
16–25 Blessing Continued in Spite of Rebellion
26–31 Rebellion in Spite of Blessing
32–27 Appeal for Deliverance

Figure 3.8. Clines' outline of Neh 9 as compiled from *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 192

A combination and adaption of the outlines of Steinmann and Clines gives a more helpful and complete view of the structure of the prayer, reflecting both the history and the action/actors. The three part structure is retained from Steinmann, keeping 9:6–31 together as unit. While there is a definite break at verse 25, as Clines' outline shows, verses 6–31 need to be recognized as a unit that focuses primarily on Yahweh and his actions, beginning and ending with the word אַתָּה, "You." The rebellion and guilt of the people is certainly present, yet it serves primarily to highlight the compassion of Yahweh to which the people appeal in the next section. The word

וְעַתָּה, a possible sound play with the last word of verse 31, אַתָּה, begins a new section containing the people's request (9:32–37). The request begins by once again extolling Yahweh's attributes, leading into the meek request that their trouble not be little before him. This leads to more acknowledgement of the righteousness of Yahweh's judgment, for they are guilty. Finally, in verses 36–37, they draw attention to their servitude. Yahweh has brought them back to the land, but rather than flourishing, they are servants, and others enjoy its benefits. The prayer ends with the acknowledgment that they are in great distress, ending with the word אֲנָחְנוּ, "we," in sharp contrast to 9:16–31 which began and ended with אַתָּה, "You." This combined outline can be seen in figure 3.9.

9:5b A General Statement of Praise
6–31 Yahweh's Great Works in the Past
  6–15 Yahweh's Work of Blessing
    6 Creation
    7–8 Yahweh's Mercy to Abram
    9–12 The Exodus
    13–14 At Mount Sinai
  16–25 Yahweh Continues to Bless Despite People's Rebellion
    15–21 In the Wilderness
    22–25 The Conquest of the Promised Land
  26–31 Yahweh Repeatedly Judges the People's Repeated Rebellion but Repeatedly Has Compassion -- The Period of the Judges and Kings
9:32–37 People Request God's Mercy in the Present
  32–35 People Rely on God's Steadfast Love Despite Their Unfaithfulness
  36–37 People Point Out Their Present Servitude and Distress

Figure 3.9. A new outline of Neh 9:5b–37

Summary Observations. This long confessional prayer is prayed by the Levites on behalf of the people. It flows out the recognition by the people that they and their fathers have sinned against Yahweh, continually rebelling against him and his Torah. The prayer extols the many blessings of Yahweh throughout their history, beginning with creation. As the prayer progresses through their history, the rebellion of the people is confessed more and more thoroughly. The

graciousness and compassion of Yahweh are continually highlighted in contrast to the people's rebellion. The prayer then turns to the request that their present hardships not go unnoticed by Yahweh. The prayer ends with the acknowledgment of their servitude to foreign kings in the land that Yahweh had given to them as a blessing. This servitude to foreign kings is in ironic contrast to the assertion of Nehemiah in Neh 1 that the people are Yahweh's servants. The contrast between the people and Nehemiah is highlighted here as well. Whereas Nehemiah serves both God and king (Neh 1–2), collectively, the people have failed in service to God and are subject to the king in a purely negative sense. Indeed, they are in great distress.This prayer is part of the climax of the second part of the plot. A point of great tension has arrived, leading into an apparent solution and resolution. The stage is set for the next action of the people, their solemn agreement. Having confessed their rebellion and requested God's attention, they pledge themselves to his Torah once again. This will be developed within the discussion of the plot in chapter 4.

Neh 13:14

Narrative Context. By Neh 13, the wall has been restored, the people have pledged to do better, and the wall has been dedicated with great joy. But all is not well. Chapter 13 relates how poorly the people are able and willing to do what they have pledged. While Nehemiah was back in Babylon attending the king, Eliashib the priest had given a store room in the Temple to Tobiah, his relative, as living quarters. Upon returning to Jerusalem, Nehemiah saw what had been done and threw out Tobiah and his belongings, restoring the room to its intended use. Nehemiah also noticed that the Levites and temple workers and singers had been neglected to the point of returning to their own fields, so he took the issue to the leaders. The tithe was restored, and Nehemiah set up faithful overseers of the Temple provisions. After reading about these things, the reader encounters this prayer.[177]

Neh 13:14—Text, Translation, and Notes

זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהַי עַל־זֹאת וְאַל־תֶּמַח חַסְדֵי אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּבֵית אֱלֹהַי וּבְמִשְׁמָרָיו

Remember me, O my God, with regard to this, and do not wipe out[178] my faithful acts[179] which I have done for[180] the house of my God and its observances.

---

[177] See fig. 3.10.

[178] תֶּמַח—וְאַל־תֶּמַח is the second, sg. m. Hiphil juss. of מחה, segholised because of the apocopation of the III-ה and with a *patakh* in the second syllable because of the guttural. On the segholisation, see Joüon, § 79 i. Here the juss. is used with the neg. particle אַל to create a neg. impv. requesting that God not blot out Nehemiah's deeds. In Neh 3:37 [ET 4:5], this same root is used in the Niphal juss., again negated with אַל, requesting that God not blot out the sin of the enemies. There, the form is not apocopated as one might expect, though Joüon, § 79 m, points out that this is a frequent phenomenon.

[179] חַסְדֵי—As Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 608, notes, "The noun חֶסֶד . . . often refers to faithfulness and loyalty. Frequently it appears in descriptions of God himself, who is faithful and merciful despite his people's unfaithfulness." When the word חֶסֶד is in a gen. relationship, whether in a const. chain or with a pron. suf. as here, the question arises whether the gen. is subjective or objective. In this v., the relative clause makes it clear that this is subjective, that the faithful deeds have been done by Nehemiah rather than Nehemiah being the recipient of God's faithful actions. H. G. M. Williamson, "'The Sure Mercies of David': Subjective or Objective Genitive," *JSS* 23 (1978), 36, also recognizes this expression in Neh 13 as subjective while arguing that the const. chain חַסְדֵי דָוִד in

Summary Observations. After a lengthy break from this type of prayer, the last one occurring in 6:14, another prayer for remembrance is encountered here. This is the third prayer beginning with the imperative זָכְרָה, "remember." Like the prayer in 5:19, the one praying asks to be remembered. This contrasts with the prayer in 6:14 where the one praying asked that God remember his enemies. Like those other prayers, the request is easily related to what has just been narrated, even though it interrupts the story. With the lengthy break from 6:14 to 13:14, the reader may have forgotten the uneasiness these prayers induce, but here the issue is raised again regarding how one should deal with them and what role they are playing in the narrative.

Neh 13:22

Narrative Context. Just as character-Neh had observed the problems with the Temple and its attendants, so also he recognizes problems with the observance of the Sabbath. Sellers were bringing their goods to the market on the Sabbath. The implication is that people were ready and willing to buy. Character-Neh took issue with the leaders, reminding them that their fathers had also been unfaithful, which was the reason for their present plight and the condition of the city. He accused them of adding further anger against Israel because of their defilement of the Sabbath. He then took charge of the gates on the Sabbath. Sellers remained at the gates overnight a few times, but he warned them that he would act forcibly against them, and they did not return. Then character-Neh set up the Levites as gatekeepers in order to keep the Sabbath holy. Following this report of character-Neh's faithful deeds, another prayer is recorded. [181]

Isa 55:3 and II Chr 6:42 is objective. Williamson (p. 36n2) goes on to note that only two other instances of חֶסֶד plus a human gen. are to be construed as subjective, namely 2 Chr 32:32 and 35:26 where Hezekiah and Josiah are said to have done faithful deeds. He further states, "Here again, however, the context makes the general meaning quite clear." Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 608, also lists these two examples of men doing faithful deeds.

[180] The prep. ב following the verb עשׂה can have the meaning "for." See *HALOT*, s.v. עשׂה, Qal 14.

[181] See fig. 3.10.

Neh 13:22—Text, Translation, and Notes.

גַּם־זֹאת זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהַי וְחוּסָה עָלַי כְּרֹב חַסְדֶּךָ

Also with regard to this,[182] remember me, O my God, and look compassionately upon me according to the abundance of your steadfast love.[183]

Summary Observations. Here is a fourth prayer pleading for remembrance using זָכְרָה "remember," though here the imperative is in second position. This is another instance where the one praying asks for remembrance for himself. This prayer also points to what has just been narrated as its basis, but this time the one praying asks for compassion on the basis of "Your [Yawheh's] "steadfast love," (חַסְדֶּךָ) in contrast to "my faithful acts," (חֲסָדַי) in 13:14.

Like the prayer only a few verses prior to this one, this prayer interrupts the flow of the narrative. By this time, after having experienced these interrupting prayers numerous times, the reader knows he must find a solution to the reading of these prayers as part of the narrative.

---

[182] גַּם־זֹאת—The translation above adds "with regard to" giving a parallel sense to 13:14 where עַל־זֹאת occurs. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 598, explains both instances as the obj. of the verb, citing Joüon, § 125 b, where Joüon implies that the verb זכר can take an obj. directly or mediated through a prep., giving Neh 13:14 and 22 as the examples. It does not seem right, however, to call זֹאת the obj. of the verb, especially following the prep. עַל. In Neh 13:14 and 22, זֹאת points back to the evidence given as the grounds for remembrance. The obj. in each of these prayers is marked with ל. See *HALOT*, s.v. זכר, Qal 2 c.

[183] חַסְדֶּךָ—On חֶסֶד in Neh, see the notes on 1:5 and 13:14, above. Whereas in 13:14 narrator-Neh draws attention to his own faithful deeds, this v. shows that he is actually relying on God's חֶסֶד which is abundant.

Neh 13:29

Narrative Context. In addition to Temple and Sabbath problems, narrator-Neh reports that the problem of intermarriage with foreigners is still an issue. He reports character-Neh's actions to rectify the problem, both physical and verbal, appealing to the downfall of Solomon as good reason to abandon such practices. He also mentions that this problem infected even the priesthood since the son of Eliashib the high priest was a son-in-law to Sanballat, the enemy. So, character-Neh chased him away. Having reported these actions of character-Neh, narrator-Neh closes this unit with another prayer.[184]

Neh 13:29—Text, Translation, and Notes.

זָכְרָה לָהֶם אֱלֹהַי עַל גְּאֻלֵּי הַכְּהֻנָּה וּבְרִית הַכְּהֻנָּה וְהַלְוִיִּם

Remember them, O my God, with regard to the defilement[185] of the priesthood and of the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

Summary Observations. Soon after the last one, another prayer is recorded asking God to remember. Unlike the two prior prayers, this one is like 6:14, asking God to remember others in a negative sense. Like the rest, this one is closely related to what has just been narrated, yet it interrupts the story. Here, at the end of the narrative, these prayers are piling up, occurring in rapid succession. This is quite dramatic after the long break between 6:14 and 13:14.

---

[184] See fig. 3.10.

[185] גְּאֻלֵּי—This noun is found only here in the HB. *HALOT* lists this as the const. pl. of the conjectured noun גֹּאַל, "a ritual defilement."

Neh 13:31

Narrative Context. In the final unit of the narrative, narrator-Neh reiterates that character-Neh has set things right. He then closes the whole narrative with one last prayer.[186]

Neh 13:31—Text, Translation, and Notes

זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהַי לְטוֹבָה

Remember me, O my God, for good.[187]

Summary Observations. For a fourth time in quick succession, a sixth time overall, yet another prayer calling for remembrance is recorded. This one returns to the call for the one praying to be remembered. Unlike the others, it does not relate specifically to what was just narrated. Instead, it is very general. And with this general plea for remembrance the narrative closes.

These prayers that frequently interrupt the narrative must have significance for the understanding of the narrative whole. It remains to be discovered what that significance is. As has been stated before, chapter 4 addresses this topic in depth.

Classification of the Various Prayers in the Book of Nehemiah

In her work on the apocryphal book of Judith, Eynde has shown that it is beneficial to classify the various kinds of prayer found in a narrative. She divides the 21 prayers in Judith into three categories: "references to praying without mentioning specific content," "prayers quoted in direct speech (God addressed in second person, with introductory formula)," and "prayers with

[186] See fig. 3.10. The dotted line in the figure that leads away from this closing interjection is there to symbolize the unresolved tension with which the narrative ends.

[187] לְטוֹבָה—See the text note on this same construction in 5:19, above.

the content quoted in indirect speech (with introductory formula)."[188] In her first category, no words of prayer are recorded, yet she defends the inclusion of this category, writing,

> For our investigation of plot, characterization and theme, the mere fact *that* people pray is important. If the prayer is quoted in direct speech, or abbreviated in indirect speech, the readers can deduce clearly what is expected from God. Yet, a sentence as 'they cried out to God' may have an effect on the plot as well since this prayer may evoke a reaction of God. Moreover, the fact that someone prays, is part of his/her characterization and may build up a narrative-theological theme.[189]

As has been seen in this chapter, Nehemiah, too, includes various kinds of prayer, some of which correspond to Eynde's classifications. In the narrative of Nehemiah there are essentially two kinds of prayers. First there are those prayers that are reported in the narration, Eynde's first category. As the narrator speaks he mentions that a prayer takes place, but the words of the prayer are not recorded in the text. The prayer is reported by the narrator as an event, but the content of the prayer is not given. Such a report emphasizes the occurrence of the prayer and not its content. To be sure, there is a gap left in the text that a reader will naturally strive to fill in on the basis of contextual clues. This involvement of the reader draws the reader in and makes him a partner in the telling of the story, supplying that which the narrator left out. At the same time, the story is allowed to flow forward without the interruption of unnecessary dialog. The reader is aware that prayer has taken place. God has been invoked and involved. The story is no longer simply in the realm of the human participants. The reader will keep that in mind as he reads what follows. As Eynde notes, such a prayer "may have an effect on the plot as well since this prayer may evoke a reaction of God. Moreover, the fact that someone prays is part of his/her characterization and may build up a narrative-theological theme." [190]

---

[188] Eynde, "Crying to God," 218.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Ibid.

Second, there are those prayers that are recorded in the text as dialogue, that is, the words of the prayer as spoken by a particular individual or group are included to be read. The inclusion of the words slows the rate of narration and puts emphasis on the words themselves, the content of the prayer. The prayer becomes truly scenic in the sense that text time and story time become equal. In this way, the reader is given the clue to pay attention to the words and their import for the story. In contrast to the reported prayer where the focus was on the event, here the primary focus is on content.

This second type of prayer can be further subdivided on the basis of contextualization or explicit connection to an event in the story. On the one hand, the narrator can introduce the prayer, telling who prayed the words that are recorded in the text, Eynde's second classification. This type of prayer flows out of the events that the narrator has just narrated and leads to what the narrator narrates next. In this way, it fits neatly into the context of the story being told by the narrator. This connection of speech and event can be important for discerning more clearly the plot of the story in which the prayer takes place.[191] The words of the prayer can also characterize both the character who is praying and the one to whom the prayer is addressed.[192] As with the report of prayer, this sort of contextualized recorded prayer invokes God and involves him in the story. The reader must keep that in mind as the story progresses.

On the other hand, the narrator can record a prayer that is not contextualized.[193] That is, the narrator does not reveal who is praying the prayer. The dialogue of the prayer may reflect the events or characters in the context, but it is not attributed to any of the characters nor is it treated

[191] See Eynde, " Crying to God," and "Prayer in Tobit 3," where she analyzes the effects of the prayers on the plots of Jdt and of Tob.

[192] Again, see Eynde, "Crying to God," and "Prayer in Tobit 3," as well as Balentine, *Prayer in Hebrew Bible*, 48–117.

[193] Eynde does not deal with this sort of prayer since it does not occur in Jdt or in Tob 3.

as an event in the flow of the story being narrated. In these prayers, an unidentified voice is heard praying to God at an unspecified time and place. In this case, the flow of the story is halted, placing even greater emphasis on these words than on the words of the recorded prayers. The fact that these words of prayer are not contextualized forces the reader to wrestle with how they fit into the story, if at all, and how they function within the narrative as a whole. This type of prayer also invokes God, but not in the realm of the story. Rather, God is invoked by the narrator, the unidentified voice, in the process of the narration. A reader will have to account for this in the final understanding of the narrative whole.

Moving forward in this dissertation, it would be helpful to have some short hand terminology with which to refer to these various types of prayer. Situations where there is a prayer event without dialogue will be called *reported prayers* because the event is simply reported. In Nehemiah this includes 1:4, 2:4, and 4:3 [ET 4:9]. Situations where the text of the prayer is recorded and where that dialogue is contextualized will be referred to as *recorded prayers*. In Nehemiah these occur at 1:5–11a and 9:5b–37. Situations where there is dialogue but where that dialogue is not contextualized will be referred to as *interjected prayers* because they are interjected into or interrupt the flow of the story. These occur at 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5]; 5:19; 6:9 and 14; 13:14, 22, 29, and 31. This can be seen more easily in table 3.1 below.

Finally, the prayers in the book of Nehemiah can also be considered according to content. The reported prayers, of course, have no content of their own since there is no prayer recorded. Where these prayers are reported, the reader must infer what was prayed from the context. The context of all three reported prayers in Nehemiah reveals them to be prayers for God's compassionate help in times of trouble or danger.

The two recorded prayers have as their content the words prayed by character-Neh on the day he stood before Artaxerxes (1:5–11a) and the words of the Levites on the day they made

confession before God on behalf of the people (9:5b–37). These prayers, while they involve various elements, are both, in the end, requests. In Neh 1, character-Neh requests to be made successful and to be given compassion before King Artaxerxes so that he can be granted permission to carry out the mission of restoration that he has in mind and that God has put upon his heart (cf. 7:5). In Neh 9, the Levites request that God not disregard all the hardships of the people. Implied is their request that, as he has saved and restored them in the past, he will do so again in his great compassion.

The interjected prayers are all short requests and again break down into two categories, namely, three prayers against the opponents and five prayers for Nehemiah's benefit. Crossing the boundaries of these two content categories are six of the eight interjected prayers which are *remember prayers*, that is, prayers that use the imperative of זכר, "to remember," in their call to God. These distinctions among the interjected prayers are reflected in the right-hand columns in table 3.1, below.

Table 3.1 gives an overview of the prayers in Nehemiah, classified as reported, recorded, and interjected with the interjected prayers also distinguished by content. Bringing together the content of chapter 2 and of the current chapter, figure 3.10 shows by type where all of the prayers occur along the plot line of the narrative. These two visual aids should be helpful as summaries of what has been discussed above while also providing a map of the prayers that can be referenced during the argumentation of chapter 4.

Table 3.1. Classification of the prayers in Nehemiah by type and content

Type of Prayer			Content of Interjection		
Reported (no dialog)	Recorded (contextualized dialog)	Interjected (non-contextualized dialog)	Against Enemies	For Neh.	Remember זָכַר
1:4	1:5–11a	3:36–37 [4:4–5]	X		
2:4	9:5b–37	5:19		X	X
4:3 [ET 4:9]		6:9		X	
		6:14	X		X
		13:14		X	X
		13:22		X	X
		13:29	X		X
		13:31		X	X

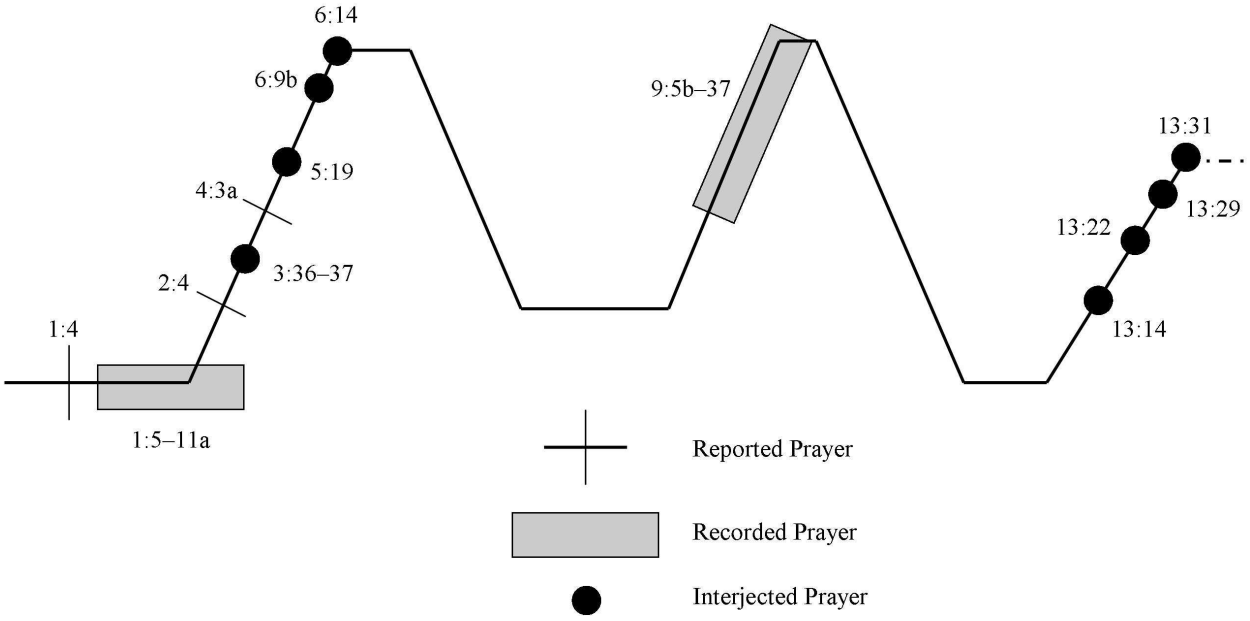

Figure 3.10. Prayers on the plot line of Nehemiah

Conclusion

This chapter has given attention to all of the various prayers in the narrative of Nehemiah, and has resulted in classifying them as reported, recorded, and interjected. Along the way, the

context of each prayer has been noted. A translation and translation notes have been given, and observations have been made. In addition, Neh 1:5–11a, 3:36–37, and 9:5b–37 have been analyzed with regard to their structure.[194]

It has been noted that the reported prayers are not extant prayers, but rather reports of prayer that contribute to the pervasive presence of prayer in the narrative. All three of them occur quite early in the narrative, as can be seen in figure 3.10. The content of these prayers is easily imagined based on the context, but the narrative is not interrupted or slowed down by the recording of the actual words of the prayers. At the same time, the gaps created by the missing words of the prayers involve the reader in the story as he or she tries to imagine what was said. These prayer reports are also important to such narrative elements as characterization and point of view, as will be seen in chapter 4.

The recorded prayers, as defined in this dissertation, take place within the story being told by the narrator. As pictured in figure 3.10, the first of these, Neh 1:5–11a, occurs early in the story and sets the stage for much of what is to follow, providing key words and themes for what follows in the story and in the narrative as a whole and driving the story forward from the exposition and inciting moment into the complication and, thus, toward the resolution. The second recorded prayer, Neh 9:5b–37, comes at the second climax in the story being told. This, too, can be seen in figure 3.10. The people have been confronted with the Torah. They have recognized their guilt and their need for Yahweh's compassion if they are to continue as his people. The prayer expresses the people's confession and their reliance on Yahweh's compassion, recognizing that they are not what they should be. Instead of being blessed as

[194] The interjected prayers that include the impv. זכר, "remember," are analyzed as a group in Appendix One.

Yahweh's servants in the land given to them by Yahweh, they are servants of foreign kings, producing the fruits of the land for others. This then leads forward into the solemn agreement.

The interjected prayers, as noted in this exploration, are not part of the story being told by the narrator. As can be seen in figure 3.10, they repeatedly interrupt the story as the narrative tension rises. They are contextual in that their requests are related to the immediate context, yet they are not contextualized. That is, they are not connected to the story or to a particular character by any introductory word. Neither do they affect the plot. These prayers stand within the narrative but outside of the story being told by the narrator.

Chapter 2 explored the interpretive method of narratology and made initial application to the book of Nehemiah. There it was noted that the book ends in tension and that a finalized hypothesis needs to be reached regarding the resolution of that tension. It was also asserted that proper attention to the prayers in the book is essential to that finalized hypothesis. This chapter has given the necessary attention to the prayers, in narrative order. Having undertaken this exploration of the prayers themselves, it remains to be seen in the following chapter precisely how each of these prayers functions within the greater narrative and what affect the prayers have on the narrative whole. Chapter 4 applies what was learned in chapters 2 and 3, demonstrating how the text, with its many prayers, has developed in the reader the necessary competence needed to read it rightly, answering the question of whether or not Nehemiah will be remembered.

CHAPTER FOUR

READING NEHEMIAH AS AN APOLOGIA ON THE BASIS OF THE PRAYERS

The thesis of this dissertation is that attention to the narratological function of the prayers in the book of Nehemiah reveals that the book is Nehemiah's apologia—his appeal to God in which he argues that he should be remembered as a faithful servant. This thesis involves two claims. First, it claims that adequate attention needs to be given to the prayers and their function in the narrative. As was demonstrated in chapter 1, literary treatments of Nehemiah have not comprehended fully the importance of the prayers for the interpretation of the narrative. The biggest problem has been the lack of attention to the distinctions among the prayers. Chapter 3 classified the prayers in the book of Nehemiah as three different types, namely, reported, recorded, and interjected. It was suggested in chapter 3 and is shown more fully in the present chapter that the reported and recorded prayers function within the story being told by the narrator, contributing to such things as plot, characterization, point of view, ambiguity, theme, and so forth, the kinds of functions Eynde notes about the prayers in Judith and Tobit. On the other hand, the interjected prayers are prayed as part of the narration, outside of the story being told. It is argued in this chapter that these prayers provide the interpretive key necessary for reading Nehemiah's narrative.

It is the proper understanding of these interjected prayers that gives rise to the second claim of the thesis, namely, that the narrative is really Nehemiah's apologia and not primarily a historical text or a text primarily about restoration, both of which have been the conclusions of

other literary studies of Nehemiah.[1] That is not to say that it is does not contain historical material. Nehemiah's narrative does contain a great deal of historical information, but its purpose is not to convey the history of the Persian period. Likewise, while containing a story of restoration, the narrative whole is not understood rightly if its meaning is limited to that story within the narrative. Instead, the narrative whole, including its historical information and its story of restoration, is really Nehemiah's argument to God that he should be remembered as a faithful servant.

This chapter addresses both of these claims of the thesis. First, attention is given to the function of the interjected prayers, demonstrating how they function as the interpretive key of the narrative whole. This is followed by an analysis of the story and the function of the prayers that are found therein. The conclusion of the chapter, then, pulls together the results of these various observations, demonstrating that proper attention to the prayers leads one to read the book of Nehemiah as Nehemiah's apologia in which he argues to be remembered as a faithful servant.

The Interjected Prayers and Their Function in the Narrative

Having recognized the various types of prayers, it has been noted in chapter 3 that the interjected prayers amount to non-contextualized dialog, that is, they do not fit easily into the story being told. Now it remains to be asked how these interjected prayers are functioning with regard to the story and within the narrative as a whole. As was mentioned above and is demonstrated in the following paragraphs, the claim of this dissertation is that it is the interjected prayers that provide the interpretive key for understanding the narrative whole. Outside of the story being told, they give rise to a conflict on the level of the narration, a conflict that is the

[1] See the conclusion to the discussion of Neh as a narrative in ch. 1.

reason for the telling of the story in the first place, a conflict that is not resolved at the end, but a conflict whose resolution is expected on the basis of the story told.

Ambiguity and Tension Due to the Interjected Prayers

An important factor in understanding the book of Nehemiah as a narrative is the process of discovery that takes place during the reading of the text.[2] This process of discovery is due in large part to the use of ambiguity, and the ambiguity in Nehemiah is created, to a great extent, by the interjected prayers and their "use of dialog that is not accommodated in the story by narration that contextualizes it."[3] In other words, as the reader encounters the interjected prayers, he or she encounters dialog that has not been introduced as dialog and that is not explicitly connected to the events before or after. Encountering such dialog, the reader must make decisions about how that dialog relates to the story and to the narrative whole.

This ambiguity brought about by the interjected prayers has already been recognized in chapter 3 as each of the interjected prayers was treated. For example, upon reading the interjected prayer in 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5], the reader is left somewhat off balance, wondering how the prayer fits in. The narrator has just reported the opposing actions of Sanballat and has recorded Sanballat's and Tobiah's threatening speech in dialog that is properly introduced with phrases such as "he said," and "Tobiah . . . said." Directly following Tobiah's dialog comes more dialog, "Hear us, O our God . . ."

The invocation of God makes this dialog a prayer. But whose prayer is it? No switch in speaker has been indicated by the narrator. Is this a continuation of Tobiah's dialog? The

[2] See the discussion of the reading process in ch. 2.

[3] This helpful and precise phraseology comes from David Schmitt in a personal phone conversation, June 24, 2011. See also the discussion of the interjected prayers in ch 3.

beginning of the prayer could be read that way. Tobiah could be complaining that he and the others have become an object of contempt by not being allowed to be a part of the project. But with the inclusion of the word "scorn," the reader begins to recognize that the speaker probably is not Tobiah since Sanballat and Tobiah were the ones doing the ridiculing. Finally, the ending of the prayer makes it clear that the one praying is not Tobiah. The reason given for calling upon God is that "*they* have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders." The problem is not the builders. *They* are Tobiah and Sanballat.

The person praying is not Tobiah, but if not Tobiah, then who? With this prayer, the narrative has moved from dialog that is accommodated in the story by narration that contextualizes it to dialog that is not accommodated in the story. This creates an ambiguous moment for the reader that needs a resolution for the narrative to make sense. Here the primacy effect takes hold.[4] Because the narration to this point has been in the first person, using the personal pronoun "I" to refer to character-Neh, the most reasonable thing to assume is that the switch to "our" means that the prayer is that of character-Neh, praying for himself and those who have partnered with him in the building of the wall, all of whom have been ridiculed by Sanballat and Tobiah. The reader then supplies an introductory phrase such as, "Then I prayed." In this way the ambiguity is resolved and the prayer is made a part of the story.

The interjected prayer in Neh 6:9 creates a similar ambiguous moment for the reader. In 6:1–11, narrator-Neh relates the reaction of Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the rest of the enemies to the news that the wall was finished without any gaps. In these verses, dialog between Sanballat, Geshem, and character-Neh is recorded, all of it contextualized by introductory

[4] See the discussion of the primacy effect in ch. 2.

phrases by the narrator. In 6:9, narrator-Neh summarizes the action by saying, “For all of them were trying to frighten us.” Introducing the dialog with the word לֵאמֹר, “saying,” he then records the words or thoughts of the enemies, “Their hands will sink down from the work, and it will not be done.” Immediately following are the words, “But now, strengthen my hands.”[5]

This last sentence makes no sense as a continuation of the words of the enemies. The recorded dialog of the enemies was spoken by all of the enemies and was either directed to character-Neh and the builders—אוֹתָנוּ, “us,”—or more likely was internal conversation among the enemies, the things they were saying to one another in the process of trying to frighten character-Neh and the builders. In the last portion of the dialog, the second-person singular masculine imperative חַזֵּק, “strengthen,” certainly changes the tone of the dialog. Most telling, the first-person singular pronominal suffix on יָדָי, “my hands,” shows the switch to a first-person singular speaker for this portion of the dialog.

Without contextualization by the narrator, the speaker has switched for the second portion of dialog. Again, there is ambiguity that must be resolved by the reader. Who is speaking? As in Neh 3:36–37 [ET4:4–5], the reader will most likely assume the speaker to be character-Neh, primarily because of the first-person pronominal suffix and also because of the context. Character-Neh is the one who has been verbally sparring with the enemies. Apparently he now turns his attention from them to God. So the reader, like the NIV, will supply the words, “And I prayed,” in order to make this sentence fit the story being told.[6]

---

[5] See the translation and discussion of this prayer in ch. 3, including the debate about whether or not it should be considered a prayer.

[6] The NIV fully contextualizes the words by adding the introductory words. Other translations such as the KJV, the ESV, and the NAS make the prayer explicit by adding the voc. “O God” without adding the introductory narration.

In Neh 5:19 there is another situation of ambiguity involving non-contextualized dialog. As noted above, the chapter begins with the narrator recounting how character-Neh had resolved some internal problems among those living in Judah and Jerusalem. This account included plentiful dialog between character-Neh and the people. In the second half of the chapter, beginning at 5:14, narrator-Neh describes the sacrificial nature of his governorship. For a full five verses there is no dialog, until suddenly, in verse 19, without introduction, a voice cries out, "Remember me, O my God, for good, all that I have done with regard to this people."[7]

This unexpected dialog is obviously a prayer. The vocative address clearly marks it as such. The content of the prayer is fitting to the context in that it draws attention to the actions of character-Neh that have just been described, yet the lack of introduction make this prayer awkward. Here again, the reader may choose to supply the appropriate narration to contextualize the prayer, but that does not solve all of the problems raised by the prayer. The request of the prayer is also awkward. Whereas the request for judgment on the enemies in 3:36–37 [ET4:4–5] and the request for strong hands in 6:9 are appropriate to the story being told and the conflict therein, the request for remembrance does not fit in so well. If this is character-Neh praying, why is he praying for remembrance when the story up to this point has been about the restoration of the walls and the people? That he should be remembered introduces a new thought. The reader must struggle to make sense of it. In fact, at this point the story would flow more smoothly if this prayer were not here. The same could be said for 3:36–37 [ET4:4–5] and 6:9 because of the effort required of the reader to contextualize them.

[7] See ch. 3 for translation notes and analysis of this prayer.

A similar problem occurs in 6:14 where a second interjected remember prayer is encountered. Like the others, this one is contextual in the sense that its content relates well to what has just been told in the story. In this case, the prayer asks that God remember various enemies who have caused problems for the one praying the prayer. The reader can chose to contextualize the prayer, supplying the necessary narration, in which case this prayer becomes the prayer of character-Neh, prayed after the enemies tried to discredit him. That solution makes the prayer fit the story to some extent, but by now the reader is wondering why one must continually contextualize the prayers for oneself. It has been possible in each case, but it has become more and more awkward. The reader might begin to ask if there is another way to handle these prayers.

Shortly after the prayer in 6:14 there is a switch in narration from first to third person, causing even more ambiguity in the narrative.[8] The third-person or heterodiegetic narration continues until about half way through Neh 12 where, in verse 31, the first-person narration picks up again with the pronoun "I." It is interesting to note that in this whole heterodiegetic section, there are no instances of interjected prayers, or said differently, no instances of dialog that has not been contextualized through narration. In this section, the reader does not have to struggle with this particular ambiguity, though he or she is struggling with the ambiguity of the switch in narration.

It is with the resumption of the homodiegetic narration that the reader again encounters non-contextualized dialog. After relating what seems to be the end of the story about

[8] This switch is quite subtle. Narrator-Neh continues the homodiegetic narration through 7:5 where he includes a long list. The narration of Neh 8 does not use the first per. pron., but the switch in narration only becomes certain in 8:10 where Nehemiah is referred to by name. This switch in narration is discussed more fully below.

restoration—the dedication of the wall and the rejoicing of the people—narrator-Neh continues narrating.[9] He goes on in Neh 13:4–30 to tell of the undoing of the restoration as the people are unable to keep the agreement they had made previously.[10] In rapid succession, at the end of the book, four more instances of non-contextualized dialog occur, each one coming after a short section describing the efforts of character-Neh to restore the people once again.

As was found with the earlier examples, each of these is a prayer addressed to God. Like 5:19 and 6:14, each calls on "my God," (אֱלֹהַי). Each calls on God to remember. The first, second, and fourth call on God to "remember me," (זָכְרָה־לִּי), while the third is similar to 3:36–37 [4:4–5] and 6:14, calling on God against the enemies, calling on God to "remember them" (לָהֶם זָכְרָה).[11]

Also like the earlier examples, the first three of these four prayers are contextual in the sense that the content of the prayer relates to what has just been narrated. Nehemiah 13:4–13 speaks of the house of God. The prayer in 13:14 asks to be remembered for what has been done for the house of God. Nehemiah 13:15–22 relate Sabbath transgressions. The prayer in verse 22b does not specifically mention the Sabbath, but it points back with the phrase "also for this," (זֹאת־גַּם), referring to what has been done about the Sabbath transgressions. Nehemiah 13:23–28 relates the problem of intermarriage culminating with this problem affecting even the family of

[9] See the discussion of this under Plot, below.

[10] The correlation between Neh 10 and 13 is noticed by a variety of scholars. See for example, Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 109, Fensham, *Book of Ezra, Nehemiah*, 266–8, Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 366, Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 239–49, and Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 388. Steinmann's treatment, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 600–602, is the most helpful. He illustrates it well in fig. 29 on p. 601. On p. 602 he states, "Nehemiah in chapter 13 *works backward in order through the same concerns in the solemn agreement.*"

[11] See table 3.10 and Appendix One regarding the remember prayers.

the high priest. The prayer of 13:29 relates to the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood.

As has been the case with each of these prayers earlier in the narrative, each of these last three could also be contextualized by the reader. One could simply supply, "And I prayed," before each prayer, and the prayer becomes the prayer of character-Neh. But this has become increasingly awkward, occurring so many times in the narrative.

And then one considers the final occurrence in 13:31. Again there is non-contextualized dialog. And in this instance, it does not connect well to the prior context. The context speaks briefly of priestly and sacrificial concerns. The prayer, on the other hand, simply says, "Remember me, O my God, for good."[12] And with this prayer the narrative ends.

The preponderance of these interjected prayers at the end of the book, and the fact the whole narrative ends with one emphasizes them and gives the reader reason to ponder them more closely, considering again how they fit in the story being told and in the entire narrative. At the beginning of the narrative, the reader will likely contextualize these prayers as much as possible, but as the narrative progresses, that becomes more and more questionable. The last four, especially the very last one that closes the book, cause the reader to wonder if these prayers are meant to be contextualized as part of the story itself, or if there is something else happening altogether.

Reassessing the various instances of non-contextualized dialog, the astute reader recognizes that in each case the voice speaking the dialog can easily be attributed to the narrator rather than to a character within the story. It is narrator-Neh, in the act of telling of the story, who

[12] See the translation notes and analysis in ch. 3.

calls on God to hear his various prayers. This alleviates the necessity of supplying narration in order to contextualize the prayers.

While narrating and remembering the taunts and ridicule of Sanballat and Tobiah, it is narrator-Neh who calls on God to punish these enemies (3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5]). Having recalled how character-Neh dealt with the internal strife among God's people and how he sacrificed so that the people would not be burdened further, narrator-Neh prays to be remembered (5:19). Recalling the challenges and threats of the enemies, narrator-Neh prays for strength (6:9). Recalling the attempts of external and internal enemies to discredit him, narrator-Neh entrusts their behavior into God's hands, asking that God remember them (6:14). After relating the joyous dedication of the walls and his return from an unspecified amount of time away from Jerusalem, narrator-Neh calls on God twice to remember him for his efforts to restore the people who had fallen away again (13:14, 22). One last time, having noted the troubles caused once again by the people and their interrelation with Sanballat, narrator-Neh entrusts them into God's hands by calling on God to remember them (13:29). And finally, at the end of the entire narrative, narrator-Neh entrusts himself one more time into God's hands, calling out, "Remember me, O my God, for good" (13:31).

The non-contextualized dialog creates ambiguity in the reading of the text. The resolution of that ambiguity comes in the recognition that the one praying is the narrator. That recognition calls for a rereading of the entire narrative—the recency effect.[13] The narrative must be reread,

[13] See ch. 2 for discussion of the recency effect. Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 127–28, also notes this need to "reexamine the book," but for him it is because of the "surprise ending" in Neh 13, not because of the prayers. See the discussion below under the subheading Plot.

now taking note of the interplay between the story being told and the prayers being prayed by narrator-Neh in the level of narration.

The Focusing Function of the Interjected Prayers

One factor reinforcing the importance of these interjected prayers and giving a clue to their function is an analysis of duration, that is, the relationship between story-time and text-time.[14] As has been noted in chapter 2, with the recorded prayers story-time and text-time are identical, giving the recorded prayers a scenic quality. As one first encounters the interjected prayers and tries to contextualize their dialog, one causes them to be scenic. But with the eventual realization that these prayers are not to be contextualized, one also realizes that with the interjected prayers story-time ceases while text-time continues on. Rimmon-Kenan calls this phenomenon a descriptive pause while Bar-Efrat labels it narrator's interpretation.[15] Within the hierarchy of relationships between story-time and text-time, Bar-Efrat says that this relationship is the most important for interpretation. The narrator speaks while the story is paused. In this case, narrator-Neh pauses the story and prays, interrupting the story that he is telling. In this way these interjected prayers themselves are highlighted as is their significance for understanding the narrative whole.

As each of the interjected prayers pauses the story, the pause combined with the content of the prayers cause the reader and the narratee to dwell on what has just been stated previously, thereby highlighting that material. In Neh 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5] narrator-Neh calls on God to hear and to appropriately punish the opponents who were insulting and mocking those who were

[14] See ch. 2 for a discussion of duration.

[15] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction,* 53 and Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 146 and 159.

faithfully building the wall. The depravity of the opposition is thereby highlighted. In Neh 5:19, narrator-Neh calls on God to remember him for all that he had done for the people. This prayer highlights for the narratee all of the positive actions of character-Neh that narrator-Neh has just outlined. Without the interjected prayer pausing the narrative, one would simply move on, but with the interjected prayer, attention is focused back on character-Neh's acts of resolving the conflict among God's people as well as his self-sacrificing provision at the governor's table so as not to burden the people as other governors had done. The depravity of the opponents is again highlighted by the interjected prayer of Neh 6:14 where narrator-Neh entrusts into God's judgment Tobiah, Sanballat, and the prophetess Noadiah who had been opposing him and trying to intimidate him. The final four interjected prayers, all remember prayers,[16] occur in Neh 13. The third of these highlights the unfaithfulness of the people in league with the opponent Sanballat, calling on God to remember them for their defilement of the priestly office which had just been narrated. The first two call on God to remember narrator-Neh for his deeds in restoring the people. The final prayer is more general, not relating specifically to what directly preceded it; instead, it relates to all that has come before, all that character-Neh has done. In this way the interjected prayers pause the story and focus the attention of the narratee and the reader on what is of great importance to narrator-Neh—character-Neh's overarching faithful service and the contrast between character-Neh's faithful actions, the baseness of his opponents, and the unfaithfulness of the people.[17]

[16] See table 3.1 and the analysis of the remember prayers in ch. 3.

[17] This effect of the interjected prayers is also important for the characterization that takes place in the story, as is discussed under the subheading Characterization of Nehemiah, below.

The Interjected Prayers Point to God as Narratee

Closely related to understanding the interjected prayers as descriptive pause or narrator's interpretation is the issue of the narratee or recipient of these prayers. By definition, in descriptive pause or narrator's interpretation, the narrator ceases to tell the story and addresses the narratee directly. In these prayer pauses in Nehemiah, the vocative address to God not only marks them as prayers but identifies the narratee as none other than God himself. Narrator-Neh addresses himself directly to God when he makes these repeated requests in the interjected prayers.

This point may seem obvious, yet it is crucial for a proper understanding of the narrative. To read the narrative correctly, one tries to read as the implied reader, "the one in whom the intention of the text achieves its realization."[18] When reading Nehemiah, attempting to be the implied reader, the real reader easily slips also into the role of narratee as the story begins. He hears of Nehemiah's attempts to deal with the troubles of Jerusalem and of the people. It is as if the narrator were speaking directly to him, telling him the story. The ease of playing the role of narratee is disturbed, however, as one encounters the interjected prayer in 3:36–37 [ET 4:4–5]. Suddenly, narrator-Neh's words bypass the reader who has taken on the role of narratee.

[18] Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia,* 17, quoting Jack Dean Kingsbury, "Reflections on 'The Reader' of Matthew's Gospel" *NTS* 34 (1988): 456. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 150, describes the implied reader as "the audience presupposed by the narrative itself." Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 38, furthers the definition by stating, "The term 'implied reader' denotes no flesh-and-blood person of any century. Instead it refers to an imaginary person who is to be envisaged . . . as responding to the text at every point with whatever emotion, understanding, or knowledge the text ideally calls for. Or to put it differently, the implied reader is that imaginary person in whom the intention of the text is to be thought of as always reaching its fulfillment." Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 20, agrees and writes, "The goal of narrative criticism is to read the text as the implied reader . . . The implied reader, furthermore, is not necessarily to be thought of as a first-time reader. In some instances the narrative text apparently assumes the reader will come to an understanding only after multiple readings." This last point is important in the reading of Nehemiah's narrative. The reader picks up clues the first time through, but the interjected prayers and the ending of the book force a reader to reconsider the entire work. These effects are described more fully in the rest of this ch.

Addressed to God, the prayer is obviously not meant for a human narratee or reader. As mentioned above, the primacy effect may come into play. The reader may decide to continue on, finding a way to make the prayer fit what has come before. Yet, in continuing, the reader encounters more interjected prayers. The more one encounters the interjected prayers, the more difficult it becomes to explain them and to fulfill the role of narratee. Time and time again, narrator-Neh's words bypass the reader who is attempting to be the narratee. By the end of the narrative, after encountering all of the interjected prayers, one comes to recognize that the narratee is God.

If God is the narratee, then the story being told by narrator-Neh is also addressed to God, not to the real reader who is trying to be the implied reader. As one attempts to become the implied reader, one must take this into account and try to hear the story as a story told to God, the one who is also repeatedly addressed in the interjected prayers. The interjected prayers have pointed out that God is the narratee and that the story is intended for him.

Understood in this way, the interjected prayers are vital to the understanding of the story and the narrative whole. Instead of remnants carelessly retained from an earlier memoir source, when read as part of the narrative whole they become the interpretive key of that narrative. Repeatedly, narrator-Neh pauses his story to pray. In each instance, his prayer is a request. On one hand he requests that his enemies—the enemies of God, as he understands the situation—be treated and remembered in accordance with their actions.[19] More often the requests are for

[19] Neh 3:36–37, 6:14, and 13:29.

himself, that he be strengthened for his tasks[20] and be remembered for good, according to his faithful actions[21] and according to the abundant faithfulness of God.[22]

The interjected prayers reveal that the narrative whole is primarily about remembrance rather than a recording of history or a story of restoration. The narrative pointedly ends with such a cry for remembrance, a cry that is left hanging with no response. In fact, there has been no response to any of these interjected cries to God.

There is no final resolution—these requests are never answered in the narrative. As one would expect, the story within the narrative involves a conflict and its resolution—the restoration of the walls, gates and people—but the unanswered interjected prayers reveal another conflict within the narrative, one on the level of the narration. Though the narrative ends with the walls rebuilt, the gates in place, and the people restored, however tentatively, it also ends with this unresolved tension, a conflict or tension between narrator-Neh and God. Will God respond to these requests, and if so, what will the response be? Will Nehemiah be remembered for good? It is by rereading the story within the narrative that the reader is enabled to answer these questions.

Summary

To summarize, the interjected prayers are outside of the story being told by narrator-Neh. They reveal another layer of conflict or tension in the narrative, a tension that is not resolved at the end of the narrative as is evidenced by the final request of the narrative, "Remember me, O my God, for good." While these interjected prayers are not part of the story told within the narrative, they are essential to the narrative whole. They show that the story itself is intended for

[20] Neh 6:9.

[21] Neh 5:19, 13:14, 13:22a, 13:31.

God. Based on the relationship of story time and text time, they count as narrator's interpretation, helping the reader to identify the significance and intent of the narrative, focusing the reader's attention on Nehemiah's faithful service in contrast to the opposition of the enemies and the faithlessness of the people. In addition, the piling up of these interjected prayers at the end of the narrative gives cause for the reader to reread and understand the whole narrative in light of them. The interjected prayers with their call for remembrance encourage the reader to reconsider the story and to use what has been told as a means to answering the question of whether or not Nehemiah will be remembered by God for good.

The Story with Its Reported and Recorded Prayers

It has been demonstrated that the interjected prayers reveal the narrative to be more than the story told by narrator-Neh. The interjected prayers make the narrative whole into a quest for remembrance. As a reader first reads the narrative, the interjected prayers appear to stick out of the story, to interrupt it, to be, in some sense, secondary or superfluous. Yet such is not the case. After reading the whole narrative, one recognizes that these prayers are the main point of the narrative whole and that the story told by narrator-Neh supplies the ground or reason for the prayers and the basis upon which narrator-Neh hopes that God will choose to remember. The story with its reported and recorded prayers is Nehemiah's evidence in his apologia.

Plot in the Story with Its Reported and Recorded Prayers[23]

The story being told by narrator-Neh supplies the grounds upon which God should remember and the means by which the reader will resolve the tension in the narration. Essential

---

[22] Neh 13:22b.

[23] As the various prayers are referred to in what follows, it may be helpful to refer back to fig. 3.10.

to that story is its plot, its "arrangement of events by time and causality to produce a particular affective or emotional response."[24] The story of Nehemiah is arranged in such a way that one responds by giving thanks for Nehemiah and remembering him as a faithful servant who has triumphed over his and God's enemies and has brought about the restoration of the city and the people.[25] This response is due especially to the surprise ending which highlights the work and faithfulness of Nehemiah in contrast to the people and the opponents.

The narrative begins by presenting the problem as the condition of Jerusalem's walls and gates and her people.[26] The reader thus assumes that this is the conflict around which the plot will center and the narration will revolve. With his reaction to this news and by his prayer in Neh 1:5–11a, character-Neh makes this problem his own. The reader might originally assume that this prayer is simply an example of the prayers that character-Neh prayed for days. It certainly reads that way at first, but by the end of the prayer, one recognizes that this prayer has moved forward to a specific day at the end of the period of fasting, mourning and praying. This prayer is character-Neh's prayer on the day when he expects to make his request of Artaxerxes the king. Confessing the sins of the people, of his family, and even of himself, and calling on God to remember the covenant made through Moses (1:8), character-Neh asks that God grant him

---

[24] Matera, "Plot," 236. See the brief overview of the moments of the plot in ch. 2, above, as well as fig. 2.3 which gives a graphic illustration of the plot.

[25] The other possible response is to react as does Eskenazi , *Age of Prose,* 154, calling him "the self-glorifying entrepreneur," that is, to understand the story as one of unjustified self-aggrandizement. Eskenazi does this on the basis of analogy to Ezra, reading Ezra and Neh together. But when one reads Neh as in independent narrative, nothing in the narrative supports this response. Instead, only preconceived notions about talking about oneself lead people today to be offended by this presentation of himself as an approved workman.

[26] In Neh 1:3, the people are described as being "in great distress and disgrace," (בְּרָעָה גְדֹלָה וּבְחֶרְפָּה). At this point in the story, one cannot tell if the distress and disgrace are simply due to the condition of the wall and the gates, or if there is more to it. A strong hint is given in Neh 5 that there is more to their distress and disgrace than just the walls and gates. Nehemiah 8–9 confirms this, showing that the people are in need of spiritual restoration, the prayer in Neh 9 connecting the physical condition of the people to the spiritual. Their distress is due to their rebellion against their God.

success and compassion before King Artaxerxes as he takes on the responsibility of resolving the problem, the task of restoring Jerusalem and God's people.

Within the overarching problem of restoration, a number of conflicts arise, all involving Nehemiah. Already in the second chapter, a conflict arises as character-Neh must ask for permission from his earthly king to do the restoration that is on his mind. The story moves forward as Artaxerxes grants him permission as well as supplies. Throughout the rest of Neh 2–6 there is continuous conflict with opponents who wish to impede and halt the restoration. When character-Neh first arrives to begin the work, Sanballat and Tobiah are disturbed but take no immediate action (1:10). As soon as character-Neh has the people enlisted in the project, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem verbally assault character-Neh and the builders, even accusing them of rebellion.[27] As the wall is being built, Sanballat and Tobiah continue to ridicule the effort (3:33–35 [ET 4:1–3]). When the wall reached half height and the gaps were being closed, Sanballat, Tobiah, and others plotted to interrupt the building by force (4:1–2 [ET 4:7–8]). When the wall was complete but the gates were not yet in place Sanballat and Geshem tried to trick Nehemiah into leaving the city (6:1–4). Then Sanballat accused Nehemiah of sedition (6:5–7). Soon afterward Tobiah and Sanballat hired false prophets to frighten and discredit him (6:10–13). Yet in every instance of this conflict, Nehemiah demonstrates his faithful service to his king and his God. He will not be deterred, intimidated, or stopped.

[27] In this particular instance, character-Neh responds that the opponents have no חֵלֶק, "portion," צְדָקָה, "right," or זִכָּרוֹן, "remembrance, memorial," in Jerusalem. This last word, זִכָּרוֹן, "remembrance" is based on the root זכר and brings to mind the other occurrences of this root in the narrative. Within the story, character-Neh exhorts God to remember his covenant (1:8). He exhorts the people to remember their God (4:8 [ET 4:14]). The people confess their failure to remember (9:17). Within the narration, narrator-Neh repeatedly exhorts God to remember him for good while calling on God to remember the opponents appropriately. While the opponents have no remembrance in Jerusalem, they will have a remembrance, just not a desirable one.

In Neh 5 there is also a conflict with the people. On the surface, this is a conflict between the rich and poor among God's people, revealing that the great distress and disgrace of the people reported in 1:8 is not due to the wall and the gates only. Instead, it is due also to the people's failure to treat one another according to the Torah and to walk in the fear of God. Revealed here is a conflict not just among the people, but a conflict between the people and God. A spiritual restoration is in order, hinted at here but addressed more fully in Neh 8–11. Once again, Nehemiah, as the servant sent by Artaxerxes and God, has to sort out this problem as well, bringing a resolution to the infighting while working to restore the walls.

By chapter 6, the wall is restored and the gates are hung. A problem among the people has been addressed and solved. It would appear to the reader that a climax and resolution have been reached. All that should remain is a conclusion or denoument. But the story does not end there. The restoration is not complete. The reader finds that one must read on.

Nehemiah 7 revives the problem of physical restoration and moves the story onward, relating that the city still lacks sufficient inhabitants. This turns the focus of the story to the people. The direct resolution of this newly raised concern for the population of the city is delayed, however, until Neh 11. First another conflict must be resolved; a spiritual restoration must take place. There is a conflict between God and his unfaithful people. The people have abandoned the Torah of God.

Once again the reader is off balance with this switch in topics. Accompanying the switch in topics is a more difficult switch, a switch in narration. Everything up to this point has been first-

person homodiegetic narration. In Neh 8 the switch is made to third-person, apparently heterodiegetic, narration.[28]

This switch in narration is typically understood as evidence for different sources and poor editing. A narrative reading of the text, however, must understand the switch as an intentional device. Reynolds understands the switch as a device used "to focus the attention in this section on God and the reaction of the people as a whole."[29] Loken believes the shift occurs in order "to emphasize the leadership of the priesthood and the unity of the remnant."[30] Both of these observations are helpful as far as they go. There is certainly an emphasis on God, the leadership, and the people in this section of the narrative. An additional factor to consider is the Torah.[31]

While character-Neh remains visible and active in this section, the Torah and those responsible for it, Ezra and the Levites, come to the foreground. The people are confronted with the Torah as Ezra reads it and the Levites explain it. Their first response is to weep, but then at the exhortation of character-Neh, Ezra, and the Levites, they celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in accord with the Torah.

The Torah again brings the people to repentance at another assembly later that month. Moved by the Torah, the Levites pray the long prayer of Neh 9. In this prayer a second climax or

---

[28] While the switch to third per. appears to be heterodiegetic, that is, it appears to be a narrator other than Nehemiah, this dissertation contends that the switch in voice from first to third per. does not necessitate a different narrator. Rather, narrator-Neh switches voice on purpose to achieve a desired effect, as noted in the text above.

[29] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 201n23.

[30] Loken, "Literary Analysis," 160.

[31] The word תּוֹרָה, "Torah," does not occur in Neh 1–7, but in Neh 8–13 it occurs 21 times. In Neh 8 and the first part of Neh 9, where Ezra and the Levites—along with Nehemiah—lead and instruct the people, it occurs 10 times. The Torah is central to the restoration that takes place in this section. In the long prayer of Neh 9 it occurs five times, twice reminding the people of God's gift of his Torah and three times rebuking them for not following it. The agreement made in Neh 10 is made in accordance with God's Torah with the word occurring four times. Finally, it is found twice in the last part of Neh 12 and first part of Neh 13 where the restoration is still being detailed and the people are doing things in accord with the Torah.

turning point is reached. The people confess and ask God not to let their present hardship be little before him. Their great distress and disgrace can only be removed as God acts in covenant faithfulness and has compassion on them, just as he has had on the rebellious generations of their fathers before them. Trusting that God will act in compassion, resolution comes in the following chapters as the people commit themselves to covenant faithfulness in their agreement, repopulate Jerusalem, and restore the priests.

The conflict between God and his people is apparently resolved. Spiritual restoration has taken place which has led to further physical restoration in the repopulation of Jerusalem and the restoration of the priesthood. And with that, the narration switches back to first-person homodiegetic narration. Through the narrative device of distantiation, narrator-Neh has allowed the people and the Torah to come to the fore in this portion of the narrative. This has highlighted the importance of the Torah as well as the efforts of the people, both of which had also been highlighted in character-Neh's prayer in 1:5–11a, all the while allowing character-Neh to remain visible and active. After giving the people and the Torah their due, narrator-Neh steps back into the foreground as the focus shifts back to his leadership and his further acts of restoring the people. Rather than evidence for sources or poor editing, the switch can be understood as an intentional and effective narrative device.

In Neh 12, character-Neh is prominent again in what appears to be the conclusion to the overarching problem of restoration. The wall is complete. The gates are in place. The people's great distress and disgrace, both physical and spiritual, has been removed. Character-Neh leads the people in a grand celebration and dedication of the walls. For a second time, the story appears to be done, and the reader expects a simple denouement.

But this is an illusory conclusion leading to what Reynolds calls a "final surprise."[32] The problem seems resolved, yet the story continues on once again.[33] In Neh 13 problems arise again. The former opponents, so prominent in Neh 1–6, reappear, and the people return to their distress and disgrace as they show themselves unable or unwilling to keep the promises of their former agreement. Physical restoration has taken place, but once again, character-Neh must act to restore the people.

If the story had ended with the dedication and celebration in Neh 12, the response brought about through the plot would have been a pleasant sigh of relief or a shout of joy with the Israelites. Restoration has been achieved. But the surprise ending gives rise to a different response. It is unsettling that the story has continued and that the people have so quickly fallen away. Instead of a sigh of relief or a cry of joy, one is saddened by the continuing disgrace and distress of the people who are unable or refuse to live by the Torah of God. Seeing the faithful efforts of Nehemiah, in the midst of the people's failure, one gives thanks that Nehemiah remained faithful and steadfast, once again overcoming the opponents and restoring the people.

The surprise ending of the story focuses ones attention on Nehemiah and his efforts. The three *remember me* prayers reinforce that focus, calling on the reader not only to be thankful for Nehemiah, but also to remember him. The combination of the surprise ending and the remember

---

[32] Reynolds, "Narrative Analysis," 128.

[33] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 120, notes this quite pointedly. He writes, "That Ezra-Nehemiah reaches its narrative and theological climax with the joyful dedication of the walls recounted in Nehemiah 12:27–43 can hardly be denied. The gathering of loose threads, the echoes of prominent events in the previous narrative, the attempt to link the separate work of the two reformers, and the decided emphasis on the joy that permeated the celebration, all contribute to the unmistakable sense of closure readers familiar with contemporary novels experience at this point. It is therefore somewhat disconcerting that the narrative, seemingly oblivious to its own conclusion, marches on with nary a pause for thirty-five additional verses."

prayers challenges the reader to reassesses the entire story and to recognize more clearly the focus throughout on Nehemiah as a faithful servant whom Yahweh will remember.

Nehemiah—The Faithful Servant

With God as his narratee, narrator-Neh uses the story with its reported and recorded prayers to characterize himself as a faithful servant, worthy of remembrance. One could even say that he characterizes himself as a faithful servant similar to, yet significantly different from, such important figures as Moses, David, and Solomon.[34]

As the narrative begins, narrator-Neh introduces character-Neh as one who is concerned for God's city and God's people. Living in Susa, character-Neh hears from his brother Hanani about the broken walls and burnt gates of the city as well as the distress of the people. His reaction is to weep, mourn, fast, and pray to the God of the Heavens for days. Character-Neh expresses his concern and his piety in the typical fashion of his ancestors as is portrayed elsewhere throughout the HB.[35]

On a particular day, a day on which he hopes to have an audience with the king whom he serves as cupbearer, character-Neh prays a lengthy prayer, one that likely typifies the prayers prayed throughout his days of fasting and praying. The double petition structure of this recorded

[34] Though she does not mean it positively, Eskanazi, *Age of Prose*, 145, also notes that Nehemiah portrays himself in the line of OT "worthies." Regarding the prayer in 1:5–11 she writes, "Nehemiah's prayer sets the tone for much of Nehemiah's posture: he casts himself in the line of the worthies—the true servant of God." Loken, "Narrative Analysis," 107, also recognizes that Nehemiah is characterized as a servant, though he does not focus on the analogy to Moses or other OT figures. Reynolds understands one of the main themes of Neh to be the second entrance into the promised land. Developing this theme, he compares Nehemiah and Moses. See the analysis of Reynolds in ch. 1. Klaus Baltzer also recognizes Nehemiah as a servant, even a servant like Moses. Again, see the analysis in ch. 1.

[35] See Gen 37:34 where Jacob mourns the loss of Joseph, and 2 Sam 19:1–2 [ET 18:33–19:1] where David mourns the death of Absalom. Even wicked King Ahab responded in the this way in 1 Kgs 21:27 upon hearing the judgment of Yahweh. See also Jer 6:26, Esth 4:3, Dan 9:1–3, and Ezra 10:1.

prayer is important to the flow and plot of the story,[36] but the prayer is also of utmost importance for its characterization of Nehemiah.

The words of the prayer that flow from character-Neh's mouth show that he is an astute lay theologian, one who knows the commands and promises of God, the history of his people, and the prayers that have been recorded from the past.[37] Significantly, as character-Neh petitions God, he does so using the words of God's servant Solomon who also prayed to God on behalf of the people as he led them in his own day.

King Solomon's prayer was prayed at a time of great joy and celebration, namely, the dedication of the temple. In that prayer he is concerned that God will hear and answer the prayers of those who call on him. Specifically, in 1 Chr 6:30–39, he calls on God to hear the prayers of his exiled people when they repent and turn to him.

The layman, character-Neh, echoes these thoughts as he prays about God hearing the prayers of his exiled people and returning them to the place where he has chosen to make his name dwell. More specifically, character-Neh uses two phrases that quote Solomon's prayer of 1 Kgs 8 and 2 Chr 6. In both Neh 1:6 and 11, character-Neh petitions God with the phrase תְּהִי נָא אָזְנְךָ־קַשֻּׁבָה, "let your ear be attentive."[38] In the longer petition in Neh 1:6, character-Neh adds, וְעֵינֶיךָ פְּתֻחוֹת, "and your eyes be open."[39] This combination of phrases is found elsewhere in the

[36] See the discussion of this prayer in ch. 3 and in the discussion of Plot, above.

[37] See the analysis of this prayer in ch. 3 where many of the parallels to earlier literature are mentioned as well as references to others who have detailed these parallels.

[38] Similar phrases are found only in 2 Chr 6:40 where Solomon prays to God, in 2 Chr 7:15 where God answers Solomon, and in Ps 130:2, where the Psalmist requests that God be attentive to his pleas for mercy. In these instances, "ears," (אָזְנֶיךָ) is pl. rather than the sg. in Neh 1:6 and 11.

[39] This Hebrew phrase is found also in 1 Kgs 8:52, 2 Chr 6:20, and Jer 32:19, all in prayer. None of these follows the juss. request format of Neh 1:6, however.

HB only in Solomon's request in 2 Chr 6:40 as well as God's response in 2 Chr 7:15, though in both the order of petitions is reversed. Similarly, Nehemiah uses the phrase יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה, "day and night," as a part of this longer petition in Neh 1:6, a phrase found in prayer elsewhere only on the lips of Solomon in 2 Chr 6:20, in a petition also beseeching God to have open eyes.[40] By using Solomon's words, character-Neh shows his familiarity with past prayers and invokes the memory of Solomon, God's past servant.

Further, like Solomon and David before him, character-Neh refers to himself using servant language, referring to himself as God's עֶבֶד, "servant," three times in this prayer. David had referred to himself as God's servant numerous times in his prayer of thanksgiving after receiving the messianic promise in 2 Sam 7.[41] In his prayer at the dedication of the temple, Solomon also had referred to David as God's servant and then proceeded to refer to himself repeatedly as God's servant. In the HB, prior to Nehemiah's time, such important figures as Abraham,[42] Moses,[43] David,[44] Job,[45] Isaiah,[46] and even Nebuchadnezzar[47] have been identified as יְהוָה־עֶבֶד,"the servant of Yahweh," or by Yahweh himself as עַבְדִּי, "my servant." Joshua seems to have had to earn the title "servant of Yahweh."[48] In light of this it seems a bit audacious for a

---

[40] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 392, notes this fact as well. See my translation notes in ch. 3 as well as Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 391–92 regarding Nehemiah's use of Solomon's prayer.

[41] In 2 Sam 7:18–29, David refers to himself as God's servant nine times.

[42] Gen 26:24.

[43] Deut 34:5 and many times throughout the HB.

[44] 2 Sam 3 and many times throughout the HB.

[45] Job 2:3 and 42:8.

[46] Isa 20:3.

[47] Jer 25:9 and elsewhere.

[48] At the beginning of the book of Josh, Moses is repeatedly referred to as "Moses, the servant of Yahweh," (מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד יְהוָה), but Joshua begins as "the aid of Moses," (מְשָׁרֵת מֹשֶׁה). Finally at the end of the book, Joshua, too,

layman such as character-Neh to claim to be God's servant. Yet, in this prayer, he does just that. Character-Neh classifies himself among these past figures, claiming that he, too, is God's servant.[49]

Having brought to mind servants like Solomon and David through the use of Solomon's phraseology, character-Neh also specifically draws a parallel between himself and God's servant Moses. While the overall structure of character-Neh's prayer is not a chiasm,[50] within the prayer he does include a slightly uneven concentric pattern based on the term עֶבֶד, "servant." This pattern can be seen in figure 4.1, below.

Nehemiah - עַבְדֶּךָ, "your servant" (1:6a)

People - בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֶיךָ, "the sons of Israel, your servants" (1:6b)

Moses - מֹשֶׁה עַבְדֶּךָ, "Moses your servant" (1:7)

Moses - מֹשֶׁה עַבְדֶּךָ, "Moses your servant" (1:8)

People - עֲבָדֶיךָ וְעַמֶּךָ, "your servants and your people" (1:10)

Nehemiah and People - עַבְדֶּךָ . . . עֲבָדֶיךָ , "your servant and . . . your servants" (1:11)

Nehemiah - עַבְדֶּךָ, "your servant" (1:11)

Figure 4.1. The concentric pattern of servants in Neh 1:5–11a

First, character-Neh refers to himself as God's servant as he petitions God to have attentive ears and open eyes. Next he refers to the people as God's servants as he confesses their sins. Third, Moses is mentioned as God's servant, the servant to whom God commanded the

---

is called "Joshua, son of Nun, servant of Yahweh" (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בִּן־נוּן עֶבֶד יְהוָה).

[49] Isaiah and Haggai point forward to another servant, understood by Christians as the Messiah, Jesus. There is nothing in Neh to indicate that he has aspirations to be seen in this light, though as the faithful servant-restorer of God's people, a Christian can certainly see a type of Jesus in character-Neh as he is portrayed in the narrative.

[50] See the structural analysis of this prayer in ch. 3.

commands, statutes, and judgments which have not been kept. Then character-Neh again mentions Moses as God's servant as he calls on God to remember the word commanded through Moses. In verse 10, character-Neh reminds God again that his people are his servants. In what should be the last part of the concentric pattern, character-Neh again calls himself God's servant as he petitions once again for God to hear his prayer. But this time he says that the prayer is not just his own but is also the prayer of God's servants, the people, who delight to fear his name.[51] Finally there is one more mention of servant. The last petition of the prayer is that God would make his servant successful and give him compassion before the king. This servant is character-Neh, the one praying the prayer. While all of God's people are his servants, among the people, Nehemiah singles himself out as a servant, just as Moses was a servant.

Here at the beginning of the story, through prayer, character-Neh has associated himself with some of the greatest servants of God from the past. As heads of the theocratic nation, Moses, David, and Solomon were subject to none other than Yahweh himself as they led his people. Even so, each struggled to be a faithful servant at times.[52] Ironically, even as character-Neh invokes the memory of these past leaders an important difference is made known. As the story moves from dialog to narration in 1:11b, the reader is informed that character-Neh is the cupbearer of the king. Not only is he a simple layman in comparison to Moses, David, and Solomon, he is also subject to a foreign king. No longer living in the theocratic nation, character-

[51] This pairing of a specific servant along with the people is also a pattern seen in Solomon's prayer. See 1 Kgs 8:30, 52, and 59. In each of these instances, however, the people are not referred to as God's servants. Solomon refers to himself as עַבְדְּךָ, "your servant," but simply calls the people עַמְּךָ, "your people."

[52] Moses rebelled in the wilderness and was not allowed to enter the promised land. David was guilty of adultery and murder. Solomon's many wives led him to idolatry.

Neh embodies the struggle of being a faithful servant to Yahweh while being subject to another authority.

In Neh 2 the servant theme continues, making the irony of 1:11b more explicit. As character-Neh appears before King Artaxerxes and addresses him with his request, he again refers to himself as "your servant," (עַבְדֶּךָ). Character-Neh has called himself God's servant, but here he acknowledges himself as servant of Artaxerxes as well. There is a potential conflict here as one man seeks to serve two kings, one human the other divine. It is telling, however, that while he serves the human king Artaxerxes, even in the midst of dialog with that king, character-Neh calls upon the God of the Heavens in prayer, as is reported in Neh 2:4. As character-Neh serves his earthly king, he entrusts that service to the will of his heavenly king. In this way, character-Neh models what faithful service to Yahweh looks like even while serving a foreign king.

Thus, early in the story, character-Neh is portrayed as a man of prayer, a man who prays for days, a man who prays day and night, a man who prays briefly before answering his earthly sovereign. He has been portrayed as a layman whose prayer demonstrates how one can be a faithful servant of Yahweh while also serving in the earthly realm.

Also early in the story, the people are labeled as servants of God. And just as character-Neh bears the label of servant of Artaxerxes, the people, too, are implicitly his servants as subjects of his realm. As the story continues, one sees how each carries out their servitude, and a contrast is made between character-Neh and the people.[53]

[53] Taking Ezra-Nehemiah as a single work, Eskenazi characterizes Nehemiah by analogy to Ezra. When Neh is read independently, Ezra is too minor of a figure for this type of analogy. Rather, it is the people with whom Nehemiah is contrasted when Neh is read alone.

Initially these servants, character-Neh and the people, work together. Character-Neh rallies the people to the work on the wall, and narrator-Neh portrays them as eager participants. In Neh 2:20, when the opponents have mocked them and even charged rebellion against Artaxerxes, character-Neh continues to refer to himself and the people as God's servants. Neh 3, with its long list of builders would seem to reinforce that.

The first sign of trouble comes in Neh 4. Again the opponents are causing problems, plotting to come against Jerusalem. Narrator-Neh reports that character-Neh and the people prayed and posted a guard. They are together in prayer, but the next thing that narrator-Neh reports is that the people began to be discouraged.[54] He interprets this as if the servants who delight to fear Yahweh's name (1:11) have forgotten to do just that. Instead they fear the enemy. So he calls on them not to be afraid of them but rather to remember the Lord, great and fearsome, just as he had done when he was afraid before the king in 2:4. Narrator-Neh then goes on to report all that character-Neh had to do to encourage and equip the people to successfully restore the wall.

Nehemiah 5 also gives evidence of the distinction between character-Neh and the people. It is difficult to know when the events recorded took place chronologically,[55] but in terms of the narrative, it is significant that narrator-Neh relates them here. The weakness and fear of the

[54] Neh 4:4–6 [ET 4:10–12]

[55] While English translations typically insert the word "now" at the beginning of Neh 5 to set it off from the end of Neh 4, the chapter simply begins with an impf. *waw* consec. verb. There is no time indication given to suggest that it does not directly follow the events of Neh 4, but the content of the first portion of Neh 5 does not relate directly to the building of the wall or the challenge of the opponents. Instead, it deals with internal problems among the Judahites, problems that could have occurred at any point before, during, or after the building process. Later in Neh 5, narrator-Neh gives a proleptic description of what went on during his whole 12 years as governor. This proleptic description does not help locate the preceding events in the chronology of the story. Throntveit would move this entire section to the end Neh 13, but that destroys the narrative as it has been received and invalidates his narrative reading. A better narrative explanation is given in this ch.

people in the face of the opposition has just been demonstrated. Now narrator-Neh relates problems among the people themselves. These servants of God, as they were described in the prayer of Neh 1, are mistreating one another. Character-Neh must intervene. As mentioned above, in his prayer in Neh 1, he labeled them as servants "who delight to fear [God's] name," (הַחֲפֵצִים לְיִרְאָה אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ). Now, in Neh 5:9, he has to remind them yet again and reprimand them saying, "Should you not walk in the fear of our God?" (הֲלוֹא בְיִרְאַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ תֵּלֵכוּ). Whereas the people are floundering and failing in their servant status, fearing men but not properly fearing God, character-Neh, as servant, remains steadfast and faithful and is about the business of restoring God's people.

The rest of Neh 5 also shows character-Neh's concern for God's people and his faithful servant nature. Narrator-Neh relates character-Neh's devotion to completing the wall and his unselfish nature during his term as governor, contrasting him with former governors who had not paid heed to the heavy demands on the people. At great expense to himself, "because of the fear of God," (מִפְּנֵי יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים), to which he had just exhorted the people, character-Neh refused the food allotted to the governor and supplied food for the officials himself.

The positive characterization of Nehemiah continues in Neh 6. Narrator-Neh reports various events of opposition and intimidation directed primarily against character-Neh. He shows character-Neh to be steadfast and firm in the face of it all and records the completion of the wall. Here again, a distinction between character-Neh and the people is made. Even after reporting the highlight that the wall was complete, narrator-Neh goes on to relate that the nobles of Judah, those who should have been supporting character-Neh in his efforts, were instead fraternizing with the opposition.

Nehemiah 7 begins with character-Neh's continued faithful work at restoration. The walls are built, but the city is lacking in people and housing. To solve this problem, character-Neh appoints men who fear God, assembles the people, and consults the record of those who had first returned to Judah.

As was mentioned in the analysis of the plot, above, the narrative shifts at Neh 8 as narrator-Neh switches from first-person, homodiegetic narration to third-person, apparently heterodiegetic narration, but the positive characterization of Nehemiah continues nonetheless. The focus becomes the restoration of the people according to the Torah of God. Ezra and the Levites are fronted as is proper when dealing with the instruction of the people in the Torah, but narrator-Neh does not allow character-Neh to be forgotten or overshadowed. In Neh 8:9–10, character-Neh is portrayed as active even in this aspect of the restoration of the people, working alongside Ezra the priest and scribe.[56]

The long prayer of the Levites in Neh 9 provides another important contrast between the people and character-Neh with regard to being a servant of God. In this long prayer with its historical recitation, the grace of God is portrayed again and again, not only in his creative acts and choosing of his people, but especially in his repeated forgiveness of their rebellion. The people are portrayed as those who continually disobeyed and turned their backs on their God, even when God graciously sent deliverers among them to save them.

[56] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 132–35, understands this section to be narrated by a third per. omniscient narrator other than narrator-Neh. This narrator allows Ezra and Nehemiah their own voice in the first per. portions of Ezra-Nehemiah but gives a more proper interpretation of events in the third per. sections, elevating Ezra as reliable and revealing Nehemiah as "the self-glorifying entrepreneur" (p. 154). But when reading Neh apart from Ezra, one loses the majority of the third per. narration and all of the first per. narration by Ezra. The third per. narration in Neh is encased by first per. narration and does not give the impression of judging the first per. narration. Surely it brings Ezra, the people, the Levites, and the Torah into the foreground, but it makes no negative judgment on Nehemiah. In fact, he is seen in a very positive light, taking a positive leadership role in the spiritual restoration of the people. If third per. narration is considered more reliable than first, the third per. narration gives further support to the claims

The servant theme arises again in this prayer. Moses is called God's servant in Neh 9:14, but more significant is the negative servant theme in verses 35–37. Through the Levites, the people confess that even when God had given them the kingdom, their kings, princes, priests, and fathers did not serve him. Verse 36 continues, "Behold, we, today, are servants, and the land which you have given our fathers, to eat its fruit and its goodness, behold we are servants upon it."[57] The long Levitical prayer reinforces the rebellious character of the people and ends with their own admission—they are servants, but their servanthood is to foreign kings, not to their God! Unlike character-Neh, who serves both his earthly king and Yahweh, the people do not.

The agreement of Neh 10 and the repopulation of Neh 11 return to portraying both character-Neh and the people as servants of God. After recognizing their sin and calling on God in the prayer of Neh 9, the people make their "agreement," (אֱמָנָה), to right various wrongs. Character-Neh's servant leadership is highlighted by the fact that he is the first signatory on the agreement. In Neh 11, Jerusalem is repopulated, and in the first part of Neh 12 the list of priests indicates the restoration of priestly service. This portion of the narrative portrays these things as the result of the reading of the Torah, yet the mention of Nehemiah's name in Neh 8:10, 10:1 and 12:26 keeps character-Neh in focus. As he was responsible for the restoration in Neh 1–7, so, it is implied, he plays an important role here.

The joyous dedication of the wall in Neh 12 continues the positive portrayal of both the people and character-Neh. He is once again in the forefront, bringing the restoration to completion. The people cooperate and rejoice.

---

made in the first per. narration.

[57] See ch. 3 for translation notes and analysis.

Nehemiah 13, however, solidifies the contrast between character-Neh and the people. In Neh 13, the promises and reforms of Neh 10–12 are reversed by the actions of the people.[58] Though they promised, they were unable or unwilling to remain faithful. In each instance of unfaithfulness recorded in Neh 13, narrator-Neh describes how character-Neh had to take action to restore the people once again.

Above it was noted that the interjected prayers reveal the main point of the narrative, narrator-Neh seeking remembrance, and that the story within the narrative provides the reason that he should be remembered. It was also stated that these prayers are not part of the story being told. They could be removed and the story about character-Neh restoring the city and the people would remain. Yet, their inclusion in the narrative, interrupting the story, affects the characterization of character-Neh. Prayed by narrator-Neh, they cannot contribute directly to the characterization of character-Neh; however, by pausing the story and focusing the narratee's attention on certain material in the story, they accentuate the characterization of character-Neh by drawing attention to his deeds and the contrasting deeds of others as has been demonstrated in the discussion of these prayers above.[59]

The reader has no doubt, at the end of the book, who the faithful servant is. Narrator-Neh has shown character-Neh to be a faithful servant to King Artaxerxes in that he faithfully fulfilled his role as governor. Through contrast, narrator-Neh has shown character-Neh to be a faithful servant of God, even when the people could not be. Throughout the book, character-Neh is depicted clearly and consistently as the faithful servant of Yahweh, the God of the Heavens.

---

[58] See n. 10, above, in the discussion of the Interjected Prayers of Neh 13.

[59] See the discussion of the Interjected Prayers, above.

The God upon whom Nehemiah Calls

As narrator-Neh presents his argument for remembrance, portraying character-Neh as a faithful servant, he also "characterizes" God through the prayers that are offered within the story. One must recognize that God is not a proper character in that God never appears, acts, or says anything directly in the story, yet his character is assumed by the offering to him of the various prayers and by the statements made about him.[60] It is important for the reader to recognize this characterization of God in the story because, through it, narrator-Neh reveals his understanding of God, an understanding that is essential to his appeal to be remembered.[61] Otherwise stated, this understanding is essential for the reader to be able to resolve the tension raised by the interjected prayers at the end of the book, the question of Nehemiah's remembrance for good.

First and foremost, narrator-Neh characterizes God as one upon whom one can call in times of trouble or distress. This is the only type of prayer offered in the story that narrator-Neh tells. Character-Neh prays for days when he hears of the problems in Jerusalem (1:4). Preparing to intercede before Artaxerxes he prays (1:5–11). At the crucial moment of intercession, he prays

[60] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 68, recognizes this in his comment, "Nehemiah's reaction, 'So I prayed to the God of heaven' (v. 4b), reminds the reader of the presence of a third party, who will remain behind the scenes throughout the narrative." Reynolds, "Narrative Analysis," 203, does not consider God a character; however, in the conclusion of his ch. on characterization he speaks about God as if he were a character. He writes, "Characterization also points out more clearly the role of God in the narrative. God works behind the scenes in and through those who have the proper relationship with Him. God defeats the plans of those who oppose Him and strengthens the hands of those who depend on Him. The united perspectives in the second major section certify God as the only one who can accomplish spiritual revival." Loken, "Narrative Analysis," on the other hand, treats God as one of the main characters of the narrative without recognizing that he is not properly a character. On p. 103 he calls God one of the helpers of Nehemiah as well as an archetypal character. On p. 113 he writes, "As an archetypal character . . . it can be assumed that God is the one who governs all of the action that takes place in the narrative . . . who chose Nehemiah to be the agent through whom He will restore the remnant . . . who has elevated Nehemiah to be in a position to govern His people . . . who has placed King Artaxerxes on the throne of Persia[sic] and has granted him a heart sympathetic to the plight of the Jews . . . and . . . who will work to overcome those who oppose His will. In short, it is God who is the true hero of the story." On pp. 113–15, Loken goes on to list many attributes of God, the helper of Nehemiah, based primarily on the prayers.

[61] It is possible that narrator-Neh characterizes God improperly, though there is nothing in the narrative to indicate that. If, in the end, narrator-Neh is wrong about God, his appeal to be remembered could be in jeopardy.

(2:4). In the face of danger from the enemies while building the wall, character-Neh and the people pray (4:3). In hardship and recognizing their rebellion and sin, on behalf of the people, the Levites pray (9:5b–37).

The reported prayers simply demonstrate that in times of trouble or distress character-Neh and the people believe that they can call on God and will be heard. The dialog of the recorded prayers, on the other hand, supply concrete reasons for that belief as God is characterized through the words spoken to and about him in Neh 1 and 9. To begin with, both prayers acclaim God as Yahweh. He is not just the generic, Persian, God of the Heavens. Instead, he is Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, the God with whom they have a special relationship.

Nehemiah 9 goes on to describe that relationship by reciting many of his other attributes and acts throughout history. He is creator and preserver. He chose Abraham and delivered his people from Egypt with wonders and signs. He guided them in the wilderness and gave his judgments, instructions, commandments, and statutes through Moses. He gave food and water in the wilderness and eventually brought them to the land of their own. He raised up various leaders to deliver them time and again.

Even more important for the current argument is the fact that both of these recorded prayers portray two important aspects of God's character. First, both show his concern that his people keep his covenant, commands, statutes, and laws.[62] Those who disregard them are exiled or given over to adversaries, but those who keep them or return to them are blessed. Second, there is an emphasis on God's faithfulness and compassion. Both prayers speak of him as one

---

That is part of the tension in the narrative whole that the reader must resolve.

[62] In Neh 1 this is seen primarily in v. 5 and vv. 7–9. In Neh 9, this concern permeates much of the prayer, beginning in vv. 13 and 14 with the events at Sinai and continuing with various examples from the rebellious history of the people.

"who keeps the covenant and steadfast love."[63] Nehemiah 9 further states that he is forgiving and that he is "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."[64] Again and again, the theme of his abundant compassion arises,[65] especially when his people cry out to him. With this understanding of God, character-Neh and the people cry out to God in their times of trouble and distress. These attributes also become important as the reader hears narrator-Neh call for remembrance on the basis of his covenant faithfulness (13:14) and God's abundant compassion (13:22).

God is also portrayed for the reader as a God who answers prayer. Character-Neh prayed for success before the king,[66] and the king granted his requests. Character-Neh and the people prayed in the face of danger,[67] and they were not harmed by their enemies and completed the wall. Recalling how God had heard the cries of his people in the past, the people prayed that God would not treat lightly all their distress.[68] They then were able to make their agreement, repopulate Jerusalem, restore the priesthood, and celebrate the dedication of the wall. In each of these instances, the implication is that God heard and answered the prayers. Through the progression of these requests and outcomes, the reader is challenged and led to recognize the result as coming from God who has answered the prayers.

---

[63] Neh 1:5 and 9:32.

[64] Neh 9:17. Neh 9:31 repeats that he is gracious and compassionate without including the rest of the confession. For more information on this confession, see the n. on 9:17 in ch. 3.

[65] Neh 9:19, 27, 28, and 31.

[66] This is character-Neh's final petition in 1:11a. It is certainly his prayer in 2:4, though the words are not supplied. It is also most likely part of his prayers mentioned in 1:4.

[67] Neh 4:3.

[68] Neh 9:32.

Making this more explicit are other words of narrator-Neh. In Neh 2:8, narrator-Neh claims that his request before Artaxerxes was successful because "the gracious hand of God was upon [character-Neh]." In Neh 2:12 and 7:5, narrator-Neh claims that it was God who put the work of restoration upon character-Neh's heart. In Neh 4:14, he claims that it was God who frustrated the plans of the opponents. In this way God is characterized as the being in control and in favor of, even the author of, character-Neh's restoration efforts.[69]

Through narrator-Neh's work to characterize God, the reader comes to understand God as one to whom one can appeal in times of distress or need. He is a God who answers prayer. He is concerned with the keeping of his commands, threatening punishment and promising blessing. At the same time he keeps the covenant and steadfast love. He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He has abundant compassion. And he is in control, instigating and bringing to pass the restoration. These are the attributes that narrator-Neh is counting on as he makes his appeal to God to remember him for good. These are the attributes that the reader will consider as he strives to resolve the tension at the end of the book regarding whether or not Nehemiah will be remembered as a faithful servant.

Thinking the Things of God

Furthering his argument to be remembered as a faithful servant of God, narrator-Neh takes care throughout the story, but especially early on, to demonstrate that character-Neh has in mind the things of God,[70] that is, that character-Neh's evaluative point of view is in line with that of God.[71] Once again, the reported and recorded prayers in the story are important in this endeavor.

---

[69] See Thinking the Things of God, below, where this is developed more fully from the angle of point of view.

[70] This phrase is from Mt 16:23. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 34, uses this phrase to describe the situation when a character has the same evaluative point of view as God. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 25, also uses

When character-Neh hears of the trouble in Jerusalem, he quickly approaches the God of the Heavens in prayer. He prays for days, and though his words for those days of prayer are not recorded, it can be assumed that they resemble the words used in the prayer recorded at the end of those days, the day character-Neh has the opportunity to speak with Artaxerxes.

In that prayer, Neh 1:5–11a, the words of character-Neh are recorded and the evaluative point of view of character-Neh begins to be revealed. He recognizes God as great and fearful as well as one who keeps his covenant and steadfast love for his followers. He recognizes the sinful condition of God's people, including his family and himself, when evaluated in light of God's commands, statutes, and judgments. And he calls on God to remember his former words of blessing for those who return to him. With such words, narrator-Neh begins to show that character-Neh has in mind the things of God.

After showing in the first portions of his prayer that character-Neh has in mind the things of God, narrator-Neh records the request made by character-Neh in verse 11. In accord with the recognition of who God is and the repentance and return of the people, character-Neh requests success and compassion before the king. Character-Neh knows what he has in mind to do, yet he requests God's blessing, submitting to the point of view of God.

As character-Neh has audience with his earthly sovereign, King Artaxerxes, character-Neh again prays before responding to Artaxerxes' query about what is troubling him. The assumption is that character-Neh once again calls upon his God for success and compassion as he asks

---

the phrase, but in his note he attributes it to Norman Peterson.

[71] See the discussion of point of view in ch. 2. A reader could claim that narrator-Neh misunderstands or misrepresents the evaluative point of view of God, but that does not change the fact that his story strives to equate character-Neh's evaluative point of view with that of God as he portrays God. The reader who submits to the text, will be led to see the equation and understand it as yet more evidence that character-Neh truly is a faithful servant.

permission to rebuild the city of his father's graves, Jerusalem. Again he submits to the point of view of God entrusting Artaxerxes' response to God's direction.

Narrator-Neh records that the king granted the request, and he provides an interpretation of why permission was given. It was due to the gracious hand of God which was upon character-Neh.[72] In this way, through the prayers of character-Neh and the statement by the narrator, the evaluative point of view of character-Neh and the evaluative point of view of God are shown to be one and the same at this point in the story.

This is reinforced as character-Neh continues to act, speak, and pray. Again in Neh 2:12, narrator-Neh makes the claim that the evaluative points of view of God and of character-Neh are one and the same by claiming that God himself had put the work of restoration in character-Neh's heart. And again, in 2:18, when convincing the residents of Jerusalem to build, character-Neh tells them about the gracious hand of God that was upon him when he had asked permission of the king.

The correlation between character-Neh's evaluative point of view and God's evaluative point of view is shown again in Neh 4. In the face of opposition, character-Neh and the people pray to God and post a guard. Though the enemies were planning to come against them forcibly to keep them from building, the work went on and was eventually completed. The implication is that once again, as with the prayers of chapters one and two, God had given success in response to prayer. His point of view is that of character-Neh and the people led by him.

One more time, narrator-Neh makes the claim that the restoration was really God's own idea. In Neh 7:5, he once again records that it was God who put it into character-Neh's heart to

[72] Neh 2:8.

assemble the people for registration which leads into the second half of the book, the restoration of the people through the Torah and the final dedication of the wall.

Even the surprise ending of the story demonstrates that character-Neh's evaluative point of view is that of God. In contrast to those who continually rebelled and were unable to remain faithful, character-Neh was steadfast and restored the fallen people to what had been acknowledged to be the way of God in the agreement of Neh 10.

In these ways, the reader is led to see the close correlation, even an equation, between the evaluative point of view of character-Neh and that of God. The story told by narrator-Neh makes the claim that character-Neh is doing the work of God with the approval of God. This claim is crucial to narrator-Neh's apologia—his argument that he should be remembered as a faithful servant for good. The narratee, God, and the reader are led to see that character-Neh, as the one doing the work of God with the approval of God, should be remembered for good.

Conclusion

The thesis of this dissertation makes two claims, that the narrative is Nehemiah's apologia to God that he should be remembered as a faithful servant, and that it is the prayers that reveal this. The treatment of the prayers in chapter 3 demonstrates the different types of prayer in the narrative as reported, recorded, and interjected. It is the interjected prayers, those that occur outside of the story being told by narrator-Neh, that reveal that God is the narratee and that the narrative whole is a plea for remembrance. It is the interjected prayers, also, that involve the reader by raising the unresolved question, "Will Nehemiah be remembered for good?" thereby forcing the reader to reread the story in an attempt to resolve the question.

The recorded and the reported prayers function within the story, informing various aspects of the story such as plot, characterization, and point of view, and it is the story that serves as the

grounds upon which narrator-Neh believes he should be remembered as a faithful servant. The plot, especially the surprise ending, focuses attention on the actions of character-Nehemiah to bring about the needed restoration. Within the story, character-Neh is shown to be a faithful servant, in contrast to his opponents and to the people as a whole. Narrator-Neh is also careful within the story to demonstrate that character-Neh has in mind the things of God, that is, he shares God's point of view. Though not a proper character in the story, God, too, is characterized. He is acclaimed to be one who can be prayed to, who answers prayer, who cares about the keeping of his Torah, who is forgiving and abundantly gracious, and who is in control, having incited Nehemiah to his work of restoration.

In hopes of being remembered as a faithful servant, narrator-Neh tells this story to his narratee—God. Narrator-Neh is an extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator. He tells his story of restoration in the first person but not as the events are taking place. Instead, he narrates after the fact, telling the story of a former self.[73] It is certainly possible for a homodiegetic narrator to be significantly different from his former self as portrayed in the character about whom he narrates.[74] The narrator could be critical of his earlier self and use the story to evaluate or ridicule his own former behavior.[75] While that is possible, there is nothing in the narrative of Nehemiah that suggests that narrator-Neh is different from character-Neh or that he has a negative judgment about anything character-Neh has done. Instead, he has consistently portrayed character-Neh as the faithful servant of the God of the Heavens who shares God's point of view. In the past, the

[73] As Ska, *Our Fathers*, 46, has noted, "The 'voice' recounting the events or pondering on them is not identical with the character present in the narrative. There is a distance in time separating them; the narration is never a 'live transmission.'"

[74] See n. 61 in ch. 2.

[75] See n. 62 in ch. 2.

time of the story, Nehemiah has acted faithfully, calling on God in prayer before acting and submitting his will to God's. He recognizes that God has answered his prayers and given him every success. God has allowed him to return to Jerusalem as governor, to rebuild its walls and gates and restore the people to the Torah. As a homodiegetic narrator who in no way distances himself from character-Neh, narrator-Neh is really telling this story about himself, claiming that he is the faithful servant who has the point of view of God. All of the faithful acts in the story are his own. The support shown by God to character-Neh was shown to him.

In the same way that narrator-Neh equates himself with character-Neh, so also, narrator-Neh is assuming that there is no difference between God as characterized in the story and narratee-God to whom he repeatedly prays with the interjected prayers. Thus narratee-God would also be one to whom one can pray, one who answers prayer, one who cares about the keeping of the Torah, one who is forgiving and abundantly gracious, and the one whose gracious hand was upon Nehemiah and who put it into his heart to enact the restoration.

The reader, recognizing these characteristics of God and recognizing that narrator-Neh has told the story about himself is now equipped to resolve the tension in the narrative frame. Narrator-Neh's repeated prayers will be answered, and, based on narrator-Neh's faithfulness[76] and the abundant graciousness and steadfast love of God,[77] the reader concludes that God will remember Nehemiah as a faithful servant, for good. The reader, too, will remember Nehemiah and be thankful for his model of faithful servanthood.

---

[76] The whole story shows character-Neh's faithfulness. Narrator-Neh claims these as his own before God in his prayer in 13:14 where he uses the term חַסְדָי, "my faithful acts."

[77] The prayers in Neh 1 and Neh 9 emphasize these attributes of God. Narrator-Neh also calls on them specifically in his prayer in Neh 13:22 with the words כְּרֹב חַסְדֶּךָ, "according to the abundance of your steadfast love." While Nehemiah claims to have done חֶסֶד, "faithful acts," ultimately it is on God's חֶסֶד, "steadfast love," that he relies.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The dissertation began by exploring and establishing the precedent for observing the narratological functions of prayers in narrative texts. Such work has been suggested by the writings of Greenberg, Miller, and Balentine, but it has been demonstrated most ably by Eynde who analyzed the prayers in the apocryphal books of Judith and Tobit.

Following the lead of Eynde, this dissertation set forth to address the question of how the various prayers in Nehemiah function in the narrative. The result was the thesis that the prayers reveal the book of Nehemiah to be Nehemiah's apologia, that is, his appeal to God in which he argues that he should be remembered as a faithful servant.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation laid the foundation for understanding the book of Nehemiah as Nehemiah's apologia to be remembered as a faithful servant. It was demonstrated that, while Nehemiah has been read with Chronicles and Ezra or with Ezra alone, it is possible and beneficial to read Nehemiah as an independent work. Various theories about the supposed composite nature of the book were also reviewed. The contribution of the apologetic nature of the NM was acknowledged, and it was suggested that this apologetic nature applies to the whole book rather than only to the hypothetical source. It was noted that this dissertation, as a narrative study, strives to understand the book of Nehemiah as a complete literary unit, rather than focusing on how any piece of that unit might have functioned apart from the present whole. Scholarly treatments of the prayers in Nehemiah were examined briefly in order to glean anything that might help in understanding their narratological function. Finally, a variety of

literary treatments of Nehemiah were reviewed and evaluated. The majority of these deal with Nehemiah combined with Ezra, thus they are of limited value for this dissertation. The most helpful literary studies are the dissertations by Reynolds and Loken—the only two that treat Nehemiah as an independent work. It was found that even these two leave room for more work due to their lack of attention to the prayers, especially the distinctions among the prayers, in the narrative.

Chapter 2 covered the first of two main components of the work of the dissertation. It gave an introduction to narratology, especially in terms of story and discourse. As the various aspects of narratology were introduced, preliminary application was made to the book of Nehemiah. An overview was given of story elements such as settings, characters, and events. This led to an overview of plot and its various moments as defined by Ska. The settings, characters, and events of Nehemiah were then outlined and the plot of Nehemiah was traced both verbally and graphically. The double complication and resolution were noted, as was the unresolved tension at the end of the narrative.

The chapter then covered various aspects of discourse including the narrator and narratee, point of view, time, and the primacy and recency effects. Each of these, in turn, was illustrated with regard to Nehemiah's narrative. Perhaps of greatest importance among these, the distinction was made between Nehemiah, the extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator, and Nehemiah the character in the story being told by the narrator. This distinction is crucial to the understanding that Nehemiah the narrator prays within the narrative but outside of the story and that his prayers are directed to God, the narratee, not God as a character within the story.

Finally, the chapter discussed the reading process, noting the challenges faced by the reader as he encounters the story as discoursed. This, too, was illustrated with the narrative of Nehemiah, demonstrating the ambiguities found therein and the fact that the narrative ends with

an unresolved tension. Nehemiah concludes with a prayer that gives rise to the question, "Will Nehemiah be remembered for good?" The importance of reaching a finalized hypothesis about whether or not Nehemiah will be remembered was acknowledged, and it was asserted that the text trains the reader to answer that question.

Chapter 3 introduced the other main component of the work of the dissertation, namely, the analysis and classification of the many and varied prayers in the book of Nehemiah. Each prayer in the book was addressed in the order found in the narrative. First the narrative context was given, placing the understanding of the prayer within its context. Next careful translation and analysis was offered, paying attention to the details of the text. For three of the prayers (1:5–11a, 3:36–37 [ET4:4–5], and 9:5b–37), an analysis of the structure of the prayer was also given. In the case of 1:5–11a, this was especially important, demonstrating a new understanding of the structure of the prayer, one that better reflects the grammar and content of the prayer while also better demonstrating how it fits the narrative flow. Finally, for each prayer, summary observations were made, commenting on such things as themes and key words while also commenting on how the prayer related to the story and to the narrative whole.

From this careful exegetical work, three categories of prayers were suggested based on the relationship of the prayers to the story being told. The categories consisted of reported, recorded, and interjected prayers. It was observed that the reported and recorded prayers are a part of the story and function within the story being told while the interjected prayers actually function on the level of narration, interrupting the telling of the story. Equipped with these observations and classifications, more analysis of the narrative was called for, especially with regard to the ways the prayers function within the narrative.

Chapter 4 began with the interjected prayers and demonstrated that they create ambiguity throughout the narrative as they interrupt the story, creating the unresolved tension at the end of

the narrative. This tension is encapsulated in the final request, "Remember me, O God, for good." It was also demonstrated that the interjected prayers have a focusing function. Several of the prayers focus negative attention on the enemies, but the majority focus positive attention on the things that Nehemiah has done in the past, giving evidence that he should be remembered. In addition, the interjected prayers reveal that God is the narratee and that the story being told functions as the evidence upon which Nehemiah desires to be remembered.

Within the story being told by the narrator, the reported and recorded prayers occur. It was demonstrated that the plot of the narrative, with the reported and recorded prayers, leads one to give thanks for Nehemiah, remembering him as a faithful servant. Closely related to this observation about the plot, it was shown that the reported and recorded prayers also contribute to the characterization of Nehemiah and the God to whom he prays. Nehemiah is shown to be God's faithful servant, worthy of remembrance while God is shown to be one who hears and answers prayer; who is concerned with the keeping of his commands; who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love; and who is in control, even instigating and bringing about the restoration. Finally, these prayers within the story were shown to be important in the demonstration that Nehemiah's point of view was that of God, leading to the conclusion that his requests for remembrance would be granted.

The interjected prayers reveal that the narrative whole is Nehemiah's apologia—his request to be remembered as a faithful servant. The story with its reported and recorded prayers trains the reader to conclude that God will, indeed, remember Nehemiah as a faithful servant.

Scholarly Ramifications of This Narratological Reading of Nehemiah

This understanding of the book of Nehemiah has certain ramifications for the current scholarly study of Nehemiah. It challenges a number of common conceptions including the nature of the book and the parameters of the book. Among those readings that treat Nehemiah

alone, it provides a better reading by taking into account the prayers and the distinctions among them.

Nehemiah—Composite Work or Narrative Whole?

As was recognized in chapter 1, scholars tend to understand Nehemiah as a composite work in which a redactor has brought together different sources by different authors. In one sense, the book of Nehemiah surely is a composite work. Much of the information in the book was most likely drawn from existing sources. The lists in the book are a good example of this, especially the list in Neh 7 that is nearly, though not entirely, identical to the list in Ezra 2. But to say that some of the material in the book was not originally composed for the book is not to say that it does not belong in the book or that it indicates a rough patchwork of disparate sources poorly joined together—a common enough conclusion about Nehemiah. Other factors also lead some to posit multiple sources. The combination of the interjected prayers and the first-person narration has caused many to find or posit an earlier memoir source. The switch in narration then marks yet another source.

The evidence, however, does not have to be understood in this way. As has been demonstrated in the chapters above, each of these can be understood as an intentional narrative device incorporated by the author or narrator. The first-person narration is certainly uncommon in the HB, but it is not without precedent.[1] In addition, it actually makes good sense if this is an apologia presented to God. One needs neither posit a memoir source nor argue how much of the memoir is included if the entire work is an apologia with a memoir-like story told as the basis for remembrance.

[1] See, for example, Ezra 7:27–28 and 8:15–9:15. At times the narration between oracles in the prophet Jer also is cast in the first per. See, for example, Jer 1:4–14; 3:6, 11; 4:10, and elsewhere throughout Jer. See also the prophet Ezek and portions of Dan.

More difficult is the switch to third-person narration for a portion of the book. However, it was demonstrated above that this can be understood as a device that allows the Torah its rightful place of prominence in the spiritual restoration of the people. While the Torah and the Levites come to the foreground, Nehemiah recedes, though he remains visible and active in relation to the Torah even though he is a layman without such responsibilities. That he acts in concert with Ezra and the Levites with regard to the Torah in this portion of the narrative serves to elevate or enhance Nehemiah's overall importance rather than diminishing it.

The lists in the book are the most difficult to explain, especially if one expects ancient literature to reflect modern, western conceptions. Present day readers are likely to skip or skim all lists and genealogies, yet Biblical literature is replete with them. The challenge, then, is to imagine or discern how such a device, foreign as it is to the modern reader, might have functioned in the ancient world and, specifically, in ancient literature. The list in Neh 3 has been shown to be proleptic, demonstrating ahead of time that the wall was completed, dispelling early in the book the mystery of whether the physical restoration would succeed. It also shows that Nehemiah was not entirely alone in the project. While he argues for his remembrance, he gives credit where it is due. He is the leader and instigator, not the sole workman.

The list in Neh 7 serves a rather different purpose. It connects those who had originally returned to Judah with the concern for the registration of the inhabitants and the repopulation of the city, an essential part of the restoration for which Nehemiah had come. The lists in Neh 11–12 then mirror this concern, showing the result of the restoration, naming the people who actually took part and the result of Nehemiah's work. A possible area of future research in Nehemiah would be to give further attention the narratological function of these lists.

Nehemiah—Part of a Larger Work or Standalone Narrative?

As was discussed in chapter 1, there has been an ongoing debate about Nehemiah's relationship to the books of Chronicles and Ezra. At one point, the majority view was that Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah belonged together as one large work. More recently the consensus has moved toward seeing Ezra and Nehemiah together but apart from Chronicles. This has also been reflected among those who have read Nehemiah from a literary standpoint. The two full length treatments of Ezra-Nehemiah from this perspective are those of Eskenazi and Throntveit. As was noted in chapter 1, Throntveit's work essentially fails as a narrative reading of the text as we have it due to the fact that he rearranges the text into a supposedly more original order. Eskenazi's treatment, however, is a more true literary reading.

Eskenazi chooses to read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah together because her focus is "on the intention of the text as it has been preserved in the Masoretic tradition."[2] Given this intent, she readily admits, "Since the present study is based on the MT of Ezra-Nehemiah, it already presupposes, hence cannot also claim to prove, the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah and its separation from Chronicles."[3] She then proceeds to argue that her reading does add to the argument for separation by showing that the themes of Ezra-Nehemiah "are neither similar to nor compatible with those of Chronicles."[4]

The argument of this dissertation is similar but with a different presupposition, namely, it presupposes the separation of Ezra and Nehemiah. Thus it cannot claim to prove that the two should be read separately. It can show, and has shown, however, that Nehemiah can be read coherently and cohesively apart from Ezra. A similar naratological analysis of Ezra, a project

[2] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 2.

[3] Ibid., 178.

[4] Ibid., 179.

beyond the boundaries of the present study, would then allow the comparison of the two when read individually. In fact, this has been attempted. According to A. Philip Brown II, whose dissertation seeks to present just such a literary analysis of Ezra, the narrative of Ezra has the purpose of answering the question, "Is there hope for Israel?"[5] This is very different from the question posed at the end of Nehemiah, namely, "Will Nehemiah be remembered?" Indeed, even a brief glance at Ezra reveals that when it is read alone it does not share the apologetic nature of Nehemiah. The different questions help us read each narrative independently, but they also help us see them together; each has a different focus within the same context of the biblical story.

Nehemiah Alone—A Better Reading in Light of the Prayers

This dissertation is not unique in reading Nehemiah as a standalone narrative. As reviewed in chapter 1, Reynolds and Loken have each contributed a literary analysis of the book of Nehemiah. Yet it was pointed out in chapter 1 that both are flawed because of their failure to make the distinction between the various types of prayer found in the narrative and the respective functions of those prayers, especially the prayers that this dissertation refers to as interjected.

Reynolds holds that the prayers in the narrative are important and are a part of what other scholars "hurry past," thereby missing the point of the book.[6] Yet he himself hurries past the interjected prayers, treating them no differently than any of the other prayers in the book. While he does acknowledge that Nehemiah is both narrator and character, he does not apply that distinction to the prayers in order to recognize that some of the prayers are prayed by the character while others come from the narrator. Failing to make that distinction he can say, "The most significant type of speech that Nehemiah engages in from a personal viewpoint is prayer.

[5] Brown, A. Philip, "A Literary and Theological Analysis of the Book of Ezra," (Ph.D. diss., Bob Jones University, 2002), 265.

[6] Reynolds, "Literary Analysis," 2.

The book characterizes Nehemiah as a man of prayer, because he does it so often: the text records at least twelve occasions when Nehemiah prayed himself (Neh 1:4, 5–11; 2:4; 4:4–5, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31)."[7] But a narrative reading necessarily recognizes that these 12 occasions are not prayed by a generic Nehemiah. Some are prayed by the character in the story while the majority are prayed by the narrator in the process of narration.

Loken, too, understands the prayers to be an important part of the narrative. And like Reynolds before him, he recognizes that Nehemiah is both character and narrator. Yet he also fails to distinguish between the prayers of the character and the prayers of the narrator. Like Reynolds, he comments, "Nehemiah is, above all, a man of prayer."[8] In a footnote, he then lists the same 12 examples that Reynolds enumerates, demonstrating his lack of attention to the distinction between character and narrator, and thus the distinction between the prayers.[9]

As a result, Reynolds concludes that Nehemiah is a story about restoration, both physical and spiritual, but a restoration that ultimately fails, pointing to the need for a leader greater than Nehemiah—ultimately the Messiah. Loken's conclusion is similarly forward looking. He believes the narrative to be about an initial restoration that typifies "the future restoration of the nation during the millennial kingdom."[10]

Instead, when one recognizes the distinctions among the prayers and differentiates between the levels of story and narration, one achieves a better understanding of the narrative whole. On the one hand, one clearly sees character-Neh praying within the story told by narrator-Neh. On the other hand, one clearly recognizes narrator-Neh praying and that, in so doing, he interrupts

[7] Ibid., 181.

[8] Loken, "Literary Analysis," 108.

[9] Ibid., 108n15.

[10] Ibid., 194.

the very telling of the story. Repeatedly narrator-Neh interrupts himself to address God, imploring Yahweh, the God of the Heavens, to remember him. From this one recognizes the apologetic nature of the book and recognizes the story as the evidence provided for remembrance. One sees the immediate focus on Nehemiah himself and not beyond him to the Messiah or the millennial kingdom.

Interpreting the text Christologically, one can, perhaps, understand Nehemiah as a type of Christ. In his faithful and sacrificial service and in his devotion to the Torah, Nehemiah can be seen as a latter day Moses or David, pointing ahead to the greater One yet to come. But that is not the primary emphasis of the text as it stands. First it should be understood as Nehemiah's appeal to be remembered as a faithful servant.

Conclusion

In 2 Tim 2:15 Paul exhorts young Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (ESV). This dissertation contends that Nehemiah was doing just that in written form, about 500 years before Paul wrote to Timothy.[11] Nehemiah wrote his narrative as an apologia, an appeal to God to be remembered. In that appeal he presented himself as a faithful servant in contrast to the people and the opponents. On the basis of his presentation, this story told to God, he expected to be remembered for good. This expectation was founded in part on his own faithful actions, but primarily and ultimately on the basis of God's faithfulness and compassion.

[11] See Appendix Two regarding Nehemiah as the author of the book bearing his name.

APPENDIX ONE

THE REMEMBER PRAYERS

There are six interjected prayers that occur in the book of Nehemiah that call on God to "remember," (זָכְרָה). As has been noted in the discussion above and can be seen in table 3.1, four (5:19; 13:14, 22, 31) call on God to remember Nehemiah, while two (6:14, 13:29) call on God to remember the enemies. Because of their similarity and their importance to the narrative whole, these remember prayers are treated as a group in order to observe the similarities in vocabulary, syntax, and context.[1]

Similarities in Structure, Vocabulary, and Syntax

When observed as a group, the prayers display significant similarities in structure, vocabulary and syntax. While reading the description in the pages that follow, it will be helpful to refer to figure A1.1.

As can be seen in figure A1.1, five of the six begin with זָכְרָה, the singular masculine Qal imperative of the root זכר, "to remember," plus the paragogic ה. The one prayer that does not begin this way (13:22) has the same imperative + paragogic ה, but it is in second position rather than being placed first.

[1] *Remember* prayers are not unique to Neh. There are both positive and imprecatory remember prayers elsewhere in the HB. What makes Nehemiah's unique is how they function in the narrative, as will be analyzed in ch. 4.

Neh 5:19
זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהַי לְטוֹבָה כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי עַל־הָעָם הַזֶּה

Neh 6:14
זָכְרָה אֱלֹהַי לִטוֹבְיָה וּלְסַנְבַלַּט כְּמַעֲשָׂיו אֵלֶּה וְגַם לְנוֹעַדְיָה הַנְּבִיאָה וּלְיֶתֶר הַנְּבִיאִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מְיָרְאִים אוֹתִי

Neh 13:14
זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהַי עַל־זֹאת וְאַל־תֶּמַח חֲסָדַי אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּבֵית אֱלֹהַי וּבְמִשְׁמָרָיו

Neh 13:22
גַּם־זֹאת זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהַי וְחוּסָה עָלַי כְּרֹב חַסְדֶּךָ

Neh 13:29
זָכְרָה לָהֶם אֱלֹהַי עַל גְּאֻלֵי הַכְּהֻנָּה וּבְרִית הַכְּהֻנָּה וְהַלְוִיִּם

Neh 13:31
זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהַי לְטוֹבָה

Figure A1.1. The remember prayers

In five out of six prayers, the first element following the imperative is the preposition ל with an object suffix. This marks the object of the verb זכר, and in each case the object is a person or group of people. In 6:14, the same ל construction is used to mark the object, but there are four objects, three of which are personal names and one construct chain indicating a group of people. In this one instance, the objects do not follow the imperative directly. Instead they are separated by one word, coming after the vocative address to God. The length of the list of direct objects might explain this change.

In five out of six prayers, the vocative address to God directly follows the object marked with ל. Again, 6:14 is the only exception where these two elements are switched.

Two prayers, 5:19 and 13:31, share a fourth element. Following the vocative address to God is the prepositional phrase לְטוֹבָה, "for good." Neh 13:31 ends with that phrase while 5:19 adds a noun and a relative clause after it.

Two prayers, 13:14 and 13:29, give the grounds or basis for remembrance, introduced by the preposition עַל. Two other prayers, 5:19 and 13:22, have portions that appear to function in this same way but without the preposition. In 5:19 the noun plus the relative clause could be understood to provide the grounds for remembrance. In 13:22, the first element, גַּם־זֹאת, "also this," is most easily understood as the grounds for the prayer that follows. In this way it would parallel the עַל־זֹאת in 13:14 in function though not in position.

Two prayers, 13:14 and 13:22, have a second imperative, furthering the prayer. In both, the word חֶסֶד is found in the portion following the second imperative. In 13:14 the imperative and what follows point again to חַסְדַי, "my faithful deeds," that Nehemiah has done. In 13:22 the imperative and what follows focus on God's compassion "according to the abundance of your steadfast love" (כְּרֹב חַסְדֶּךָ).

Finally, two of the prayers, 6:14 and 13:22, use the preposition כ in the sense of "according to." What follows the כ gives the norm by which or in accordance with which God should remember the enemies (6:14) or have compassion on Nehemiah (13:22).

In summary, these prayers have essentially the same structure in the first three elements, namely the call for remembrance, the specification of the object of remembrance, and the invocation of God. With the exception of 13:22, each one begins with the Qal imperative of זכר + paragogic ה. Nehemiah 13:22 puts this in second position. The element following the imperative is the object marked by ל plus object suffix, naming the person or persons to be remembered. The exception is 6:14 where the addressee precedes the objects. Finally, following the object comes the vocative address אֱלֹהַי, "my God." Again the exception is 6:14.

After these first three elements, the prayers are less homogonous as a group but still show similarities with one another. Two add לְטוֹבָה directly after the vocative address to God. Two

others use עַל to give the grounds or basis for remembrance. Two others give the grounds without using עַל. Two have a second imperative followed by a form of the noun חֶסֶד. Finally, using the preposition כ, two give the norm in accordance with which God is called upon to act.

Similarities in Context

Unlike the recorded prayers in Neh 1 and 9 that are introduced as prayers and are part of the story being told by the narrator, these interjected prayers are not introduced and are not part of the story. Their dialog could be removed, and the story told by the narrator would not change. Though they are not part of the story proper, it is interesting to note that they interrupt the story in sections of the narrative where tension is rising. This can be seen graphically in figure 3.10.

Each of these six prayers follows words of the narrator in which he describes a particular action of character-Neh or of an enemy or enemies. While the prayer is not part of the story being told, it is appropriate to the story in that the words of the narrator just prior to the prayer provide the context for the request for remembrance. The narrator's request to be remembered in 5:19 follows his description of character-Neh's sacrifices on behalf of the beleaguered people. The narrator's request in 6:14 that the enemies be remembered follows the narrator's description of various attempts by the enemies to entrap character-Neh. The request in 13:29 that the enemies be remembered follows the narrator's description of the unfaithfulness of the Judahites in conjunction with the enemies. Finally, the prayers to be remembered in 13:14, 22, and 31 each follow the narrator's description of various actions that character-Neh had taken to restore proper worship and reverence.

APPENDIX TWO

NEHEMIAH AS AUTHOR

The authorship of Nehemiah is a much contested issue, as has been addressed in chapter 1. From a purely literary standpoint, it makes no difference who the author of Nehemiah was. The narrative should be interpreted on its own terms without consideration for authorship. The understanding put forth in this dissertation does not depend on determining who the author was. Yet, this dissertation understands the book of Nehemiah to be an apologia cast in the form of a narrative. An apologia written in the first person begs the question of authorship and referentiality. While it is possible that another author or redactor could have cast the book of Nehemiah into this apologetic form, it would make the most sense if Nehemiah did this himself.

Most present day scholars, however, would insist that Nehemiah only wrote the materials contained in the so called NM.[1] Debate ensues, then, about who put the book into final form and why. Even Steinmann, a conservative Lutheran scholar who is "agnostic" on whether Ezra and Neh belong together or apart,[2] with a tentative conclusion for reading them separately,[3] says that it is unlikely if not impossible that the historical Nehemiah is the final author of the work bearing his name.[4]

---

[1] According to Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 20, this amounts to 7% of the book.

[2] Steinmann, review of Boda and Reditt, n.p.

[3] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 21.

[4] This position is implied in his commentary but is made more explicit in a personal email communication, November 9, 2010.

The argumentation on this point is rather complex and revolves around the list of names found in Neh12:10–11 and a similar list in 12:22. In 12:10–11 there is a list of six names that begins with Jeshua and ends with Jaddua. The list in 12:22 includes only four names, beginning with Eliashib and ending with Jaddua, but one of two the names in between is different from the list in 12:10–11. In addition, the list in 12:22 ends with reference to Darius the Persian. This could be either Darius II (423–405 BC) or Darius III (335–331 BC).[5] On the basis of evidence from Josephus, who says that Jaddua was high priest in the time of Darius III and the conquest by Alexander,[6] Steinmann and others understand this list to be a complete list of the high priests from the time of the return until the time of Alexander the Great.[7]

In order to mention Darius, Nehemiah must have been alive in the time of Darius. If the Darius of 12:22 is Darius III, and if one assumes that Nehemiah was at least 30 years old in 445 BC when he was sent to Judah, and if Nehemiah wrote the book in the first year of Darius III, namely 335 BC, then Nehemiah would have been at least 140 years old. This is believed to be unreasonably old. Steinmann claims that many men did not live even to 70 in the Persian era.[8]

Steinmann's argumentation is certainly carefully reasoned and plausible,[9] yet the argument is far from conclusive. First, the list in 12:10 is not labeled as a list of high priests. It is a list of the descendants of Jeshua. Granted, most probably this is the high priestly family. Jeshua is the high priest mentioned often in Ezra. In addition, the list includes Eliashib, and an Eliashib is referred to as high priest in Neh 3:2 and 13:28. Also, in 13:28, Joiada is named as Eliashib's son,

---

[5] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 51.

[6] Ibid., citing Josephus, *Antiquities*, 11.302–29.

[7] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 51.

[8] Steinmann, e-mail message to author, November 9, 2010.

[9] For his complete argument, see Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 51–58

just as the list in 12:10 recounts. But of these names, only Eliashib is ever called high priest in Nehemiah. As Keil has suggested, this could simply be a list of those in the family of the high priesthood or of those who would one day become high priest instead of a list of those who have already served in that role.[10]

Another problem is that the names in 12:10–11 do not match exactly the names listed in 12:22. In 12:11 Jonathan is listed as the son of Joiada, whereas in 12:22 the name listed after Joiada is Johanan. In two Aramaic papyri from Egypt, yet a third name, Jehohanan, is evidenced.[11] This apparent discrepancy has caused a great deal of debate. Some, like Steinmann, conclude that these are variants of the same name or a scribal mistake.[12] Others, like Kidner, disagree claiming, "These two names [Jonathan and Johanan] are quite distinct," while Jehohanan and Johanan are variants of the same name.[13] Reading 12:10–11 as the line of Jeshua and 12:22 as the list of priests, Kidner concludes, "Taking the biblical data to be correct, we see Eliashib with two sons, Joiada (Ne. 12:10) and Johanan (Ezr. 10:6, Ne. 12:23). Joiada was evidently succeeded not by his son Jonathan but by his brother Johanan (Ne. 12:22)."[14] In the end, there is too much confusion here to be certain how the names relate to one another or that

---

[10] Keil, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 91–92. Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 154n2, concludes that Jonathan, in the list at 12:11 is never high priest thus supporting the contention that this is a family list and not a list of high priests.

[11] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 51n178.

[12] Ibid., 51. Steinmann, 51n179 and 56n207, also takes the name Jehohanan in the Elephantine papyri as yet another variant of the same name. In Ezra 10:6, Jehohanan is the son of Eliashib, not the son of Joiada, but this would seem to be another set of people entirely or would put the date of Ezra at about 398 BC, making the problem even more complex. See Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah,* 354.

[13] Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 154. Just prior to this comment Kidner has pointed out that the two names are based on different Hebrew verbs, נתן and חנן, respectively.

[14] Ibid., 154n2. On the problem of equating Jehohanan in Ezra 10:6 with Johanan in Neh 12:22–23, again see Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 354.

either 12:10–11 or 12:22 are meant to trace the high priesthood, let alone to trace it up to the end of the Persian period.

Another point of contention is the identity of Darius the Persian in 12:23. As noted above, Steinmann relies on Josephus, connecting Jaddua and Darius III at the end of the Persian period. Yet Steinmann himself questions the reliability of Josephus. Arguing against Frank Moore Cross' theory that some names are missing in the list of priests, Steinmann writes, "Josephus' history of this period is at times tendentious and of questionable accuracy."[15] He goes on to say, "Arguments based on Josephus are, therefore, inconclusive."[16] Kidner, too, following Williamson, claims that "Josephus betrays elsewhere some misunderstandings of the Persian period."[17] Kidner concludes that Josephus' Jaddua is not the same Jaddua as the one listed in Neh 12:11 and 22, thus the Darius of Neh 12:11 is Darius II.[18]

If this is so, given the dates of 423–405 BC for Darius II, and assuming Nehemiah was at least 30 when he was sent to Judah in 445 BC, his age of writing would range from 52 to at least 70. This is much more plausible than 140.[19]

All of these points show the tenuous nature of the assertion that Nehemiah could not have been composed by the Nehemiah who, according to the text, was sent to Jerusalem in the 20th

---

[15] Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 52.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 145, noting H. G. M. Williamson, "The Historical Value of Josephus' Jewish Antiquities XI.297–301', in JTS (NS) 28 (1977), 49–66.

[18] Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 123–24.

[19] Steinmann still does not like this possibility. He believes 70 is probably too old of an age for Nehemiah to have attained. This would also mean that "we would be ignorant of the high priests (even to the extent of not knowing their names!) in the Persian period after Darius II—a period of some 70 years or more." (Steinmann, e-mail message to author, November 9, 2010.) Our possible ignorance, however, is not evidence that these names in fact cover the high priesthood until the end of the Persian period.

year of Artaxerxes, typically identified as 445 BC. It is at least possible for one to conclude that Nehemiah himself composed the book of Nehemiah as an apologia, a first person argument to God to be remembered.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* 4th ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981.

Aejmelaeus, Anneli, and Ludwig Schmidt. *The Traditional Prayer in the Psalms.* New York: De Gruyter, 1986.

Albertz, Rainer. *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion: Religionsinterner pluralismus in Israel und Babylon.* Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1978.

———. *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period.* The Old Testament Library. Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1994.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative.* New York: Basic Books, 1981.

———. *On Biblical Narrative.* Eugene, Oreg.: University of Oregon Books, 2000.

———. *The World of Biblical Literature.* New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Alter, Robert, and Frank Kermode. *The Literary Guide to the Bible.* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987.

Anderson, Stanley Edwin. *Nehemiah the Executive.* Wheaton, Ill.: Van Kampen Press, 1954.

Anderson, Carl Roy. "The Formation of the Levitical Prayer of Nehemiah 9." Th.D. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1987.

Ap-Thomas, Dafydd R. "Notes on Some Terms Relating to Prayer." *Vetus Testamentum* 6 (1956): 225–41.

———. "Some Notes on the Old Testament Attitude to Prayer." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 9 (1956): 422–29.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.* New York: Doubleday, 1953.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.* 2d rev. ed. Translated by Christine van Boheemen. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

———.*Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.* 3d ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Balentine, Samuel E. "Jeremiah, Prophet of Prayer." *Review & Expositor* 78 (1981): 331–44.

———. “My Servant Job Shall Pray for You.” *Theology Today* 58 (2002): 502–18.

———. *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue.* Overtures to Biblical Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.

———. “Prayer in the Wilderness Traditions: In Pursuit of Divine Justice.” *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985): 53–74.

———. “The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 161–73.

———. “You Can’t Pray a Lie: Truth and Fiction in the Prayers of Chronicles.” Pages 246–67 in *The Chronicler as Historian.* Edited by M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth G. Hoglund, and Steven L. McKenzie. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997.

Baltzer, Klaus. “Moses Servant of God and the Servants: Text and Tradition in the Prayer of Nehemiah (Neh 1:5–11).” Pages 121–30 in *The Future of Early Christianity.* Edited by Birger A. Pearson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991.

Barber, Cyril J. *Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership.* Rev. ed. Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1991.

Bar-Efrat, Shimon. *Narrative Art in the Bible: Understanding the Bible and Its World.* Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004.

———. “Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative.” *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (April 1980): 154–73.

Bartelt, Andrew H. *The Book Around Immanuel: Style and Structure in Isaiah 2–12.* Biblical and Judaic Studies 4. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996.

Barry, A. L. and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Office of the President. *Let Us Pray: A Study of Prayer and the Devotional Life.* St. Louis: Office of the President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1998.

Batten , Loring W. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.* International Critical Commentary 12. New York: Scribner, 1913.

Bautch, Richard J. *Developments in Genre between Post-Exilic Penitential Prayers and the Psalms of Communal Lament.* Academia Biblica 7. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.

Becking, Bob. “Continuity and Community: The Belief System of the Book of Ezra.” Pages 256–75 in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times.* Edited by Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel. Oudtestamentische Studiën 42. Boston: Brill, 1999.

Berlin, Adele. “Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David’s Wives.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (1982): 69–85.

———. “On the Bible as Literature.” *Prooftexts* 2 (1982): 323–27.

———. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative.* Bible and Literature Series. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983.

Blank, Sheldon H. “The Confessions of Jeremiah and the Meaning of Prayer.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 21 (1948): 331–54.

———. “Men against God: The Promethean Element in Biblical Prayer.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72 (1953): 1–13.

———. “Some Observations Concerning Biblical Prayer.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961): 75–90.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary.* The Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988.

———. *Judaism, The First Phase: The Place of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Origins of Judaism.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009.

———. “The Mission of Udjahorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemiah.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 409–21.

———. “The Nehemiah Autobiographical Memoir.” Pages 199–212 in *Language, Theology, and The Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr.* Edited by Samuel E. Balentine and John Barton. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Bliese, Loren F. “Chiastic Structures, Peaks and Cohesion in Nehemiah 9:6–37.” *Bible Translator* 39 (1988): 208–15.

Boda, Mark J. “Chiasmus in Ubiquity: Symmetrical Mirages in Nehemiah 9.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 71 (September 1996): 55–70.

———. “Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 179–82.

———. *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9.* Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 277. Berlin: Gruyter, 1999.

Boda, Mark J., Daniel K. Falk, and Rodney Alan Werline, eds. *Seeking the Favor of God.* Early Judaism and Its Literature. Boston: Brill, 2006.

Boda, Mark J. and Paul L. Redditt, eds. *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric and Reader.* Hebrew Bible Monographs 17. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Boyce, Richard Nelson. *The Cry to God in the Old Testament*. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 103. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

Braun, Roddy. "Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah: Theology and Literary History." Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 30 (1979): 52–64.

———. *1 Chronicles.* Word Biblical Commentary 14, Waco, Tex: Word, 1986.

Breland, Don Carral. "The Argument of the Book of Nehemiah." Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1964.

Brenner, Athalya. "Job the Pious: The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (1989): 37–52.

Brongers, H. A. "Bermerkungen zum Gebrauch des adverbialen *w^{e}a^{c}atah* im Alten Testament." *Vetus testamentum* 15 (1965): 289–99.

Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1979.

Brown, Raymond. *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change.* The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998.

Campbell, William Sanger. *The "We" Passages in the Acts of the Apostles: The Narrator as Narrative Character.* Studies in Biblical Literature 14. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2007.

Carson, D. A., and World Evangelical Fellowship. *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World.* Exeter, U.K.: Paternoster, 1990.

Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film.* Ithaca: Cornell, 1978.

Christianson, Eric S. *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 280.Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988.

Clements, R. E. *In Spirit and Truth: Insights from Biblical Prayers.* Atlanta: Knox, 1985.

Clines, D. J. A. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.* New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984.

Coats, George W. *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature*. Forms of the Old Testament Literature 1. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983.

Cohan, Steven and Linda M. Shires. *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction.* New Accents. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Cohen, Margaret. “Leave Nehemiah Alone: Nehemiah’s ‘Tales’ and Fifth-Century BCE Historiography.” Pages 55–74 in *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader*. Edited by Mark J. Boda and Paul L. Reditt. Hebrew Bible Monographs 17. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008.

Constable, Thomas L., and Warren W. Wiersbe. *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995.

Cooke, G. A. *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions: Moabite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Nabataean, Jewish.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903. Authorized facsimile, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1981.

Corvin, Jack W. “A Stylistic and Functional Study of the Prose Prayers in the Historical Narrative of the Old Testament.” Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1974.

Culley, Robert C. *Perspectives on Old Testament Narrative.* Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979.

———. *Themes and Variations: A Study of Action in Biblical Narrative.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.

Davies, Gordon F., David W. Cotter, Jerome T. Walsh, and Chris Franke. *Ezra and Nehemiah.* Berit Olam. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990.

Davies, Philip R. *First Person: Essays in Biblical Autobiography.* The Biblical Seminar. New York: Sheffield, 2002.

Dillard, Raymond B. Review of Mark A. Throntviet, *Ezra-Nehemiah. Word & World* 13, (Winter 1993): 92–94.

Dillard, Raymond B., and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994.

Dorsey, David A. *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis through Malachi.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1999.

Downey, Sharon D. “The Evolution of the Rhetorical Genre of Apologia,” *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (Winter 1993): 42–64.

Duggan, Michael W. *The Covenant Renewal in Ezra-Nehemiah (Neh 7:72b–10:40): An Exegetical, Literary, and Theological Study*. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 164. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001.

Duke, Barrett I. “The Functions of Direct Speech in Ezra-Nehemiah.” Ph.D. diss., Illif School of Theology and the University of Denver (Colorado Seminary), 1999.

Dutcher-Walls, Patricia. *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and* Joash. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 209. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996.

Emerton, J. A. Review of U. Kellermann *Quellen, Überlieferung und Geschichte. Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972): 171–85.

Eskanazi, Tamara Cohn. *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah.* Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 36. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

———. "Current Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah and the Persian Period." *Currents in Research* 1 (1993): 59–86.

Esler, Philip Francis. *Sex, Wives, and Warriors: Reading Old Testament Narrative with its Ancient Audience.* Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2011

Eynde, Sabine van den. "Crying to God: Prayer and Plot in the Book of Judith." *Biblica* 85 (2004): 217–31.

———. "Prayer as Part of Characterization and Plot: An Analysis of Its Narrative Function in Tobit 3." Pages 527–36 in *Analyse narrative et Bible*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2005.

Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible.* 2d. ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993.

Fenshem, F. Charles. *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982.

———. "He Gave Thanks: An Introduction to the Eucharistic Prayer." *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 9 (1981): 161.

———. "Neh 9 and Pss 105, 106, 135 and 136: Post-Exilic Historical Traditions in Poetic Form." *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 9 (1981): 35–51.

Fields, Weston W. *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 231. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997.

Fishbane, Michael A. *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts.* New York: Schocken Books, 1979.

Fraine, Jean de. *Praying with the Bible: The Biblical Bases of Great Christian Prayers.* Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1966.

———. *Prier avec la Bible: Les antecedents bibliques de grandes priers Chretiennes.* Bruges, Belgium: Beyaert, 1961.

Frei, Hans W. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Freytag, Gustav. *Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art; An Authorized Translation from the Sixth German Edition.* Translated by Elias J. MacEwan. 3d ed. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1900.

Fuerst, Wesley J. "Moses as Intercessor." Pages 5–19 in *Scripture and Prayer: A Celebration for Carroll Stuhlmeyer, CP.* Edited by Carolyn Oseik and Donald Senior. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988.

Gabel, John B., Charles B. Wheeler, and Anthony Delano York. *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction.* 3d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Foreword by Jonathan Culler. Ithaca: Cornell, 1980.

———. *Narrative Discourse Revisited.* Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell, 1988.

Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar.* Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d ed. Revised in accordance with the 28th German ed. (1909). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910.

Gibbs, Jeffrey A. *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel.* St. Louis: Concordia, 2000.

Gilbert, Maurice. "La place de la Loi dans la prière de Néhémie 9." Pages 307–16 in *De la Tôrah au Messie: Études d'exégèse et d'herméneutique bibliques offertes á Henri Cazelles pour ses 25 années d'enseignement à l'insitut Catholique de Paris.* Edited by Joseph Dore and Pierre Grelot Maurice Carrez. Paris: Desclée, 1981.

Grabbe, Lester L. *Ezra-Nehemiah.* Old Testament Readings. New York: Routledge, 1998.

———. "Israel's Historical Reality after the Exile." Pages 9–32 in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times.* Edited by Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel. Oudtestamentische Studiën 42. Boston: Brill, 1999.

———. "'Mind the Gaps': Ezra, Nehemiah and the Judean Restoration." Pages 83–104 in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives.* Edited by James M. Scott. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 72. Boston: Brill, 2001.

Green, Douglas. "Ezra-Nehemiah." Pages 206–15 in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible.* Edited by Leland Rykan and Tremper Longman III. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993.

Greenberg, Moshe. *Biblical Prose Prayer: As a Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel.* The Taubman Lectures in Jewish Studies. Sixth Series. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

———. “On the Refinement of the Conception of Prayer in Hebrew Scripture.” *Association for Jewish Studies* 1 (1976): 64–74.

Grol, Harm van. “‘Indeed, Servants We Are’: Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9 and 2 Chronicles 12 Compared.” Pages 209–27 in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times.* Edited by Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel. Oudtestamentische Studiën 42.Boston: Brill, 1999.

Gunn, David M. “New Directions in the Study of Biblical Hebrew Narrative.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (1987): 65–75.

Gunn, David M. and Danna Nolan Fewell. *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible.* Oxford Bible Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Gunneweg, Antonius H. J. *Nehemiah* Kommentar zum Alten Testament 19. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1987.

Hallesby, Ole. *Prayer.* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994.

Haran, Menahem. “Cult and Prayer.” Pages 87–92 in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry.* Edited by Ann Kort and Scott Morschauser. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985.

Harrison, R. K. *Introduction to the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969.

Haworth, Keith R. “The Life and Times of Nehemiah.” Thesis, Marion College, Marion, Ind., 1981.

Heiler, Friedrich, Samuel McComb, and John Edgar Park. *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1932.

Hempel, Johannes. *Gebet und Frömmigkeit im Alten Testament.* Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922.

Holmgren, Fredrick Carlson. “Faithful Abraham and the *ᶜamanâ* Covenant: Nehemiah 9,6–10,1.” Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 104 (1992): 249–54.

———. *Israel Alive Again: A Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.* International Theological Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987.

———. “Remember Me; Remember Them.” Pages 33–45 in *Scripture and Prayer: A Celebration for Carroll Stuhlmeyer, CP.* Edited by Carolyn Oseik and Donald Senior. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988.

Hornig, Barbara. *Das Prosagebet der nachexilischen Zeit.* Ph.D. diss., Karl-Marx-Universität, Leipzig, 1957.

Howard, David, Jr. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books.* Chicago: Moody Press, 1993.

Hummel, Horace D. *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament.* Saint Louis: Concordia, 1979.

Hunt, John B. "An Exposition of the Prayers in Nehemiah." ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Jacob, E. "Prophetes et Intercesseurs." Pages 312–24 in *De la Tôrah au Messie: Études d'exégèse et d'herméneutique bibliques offertes á Henri Cazelles pour ses 25 années d'enseignement à l'insitut Catholique de Paris.* Edited by Joseph Dore and Pierre Grelot Maurice Carrez. Paris: Desclée, 1981.

Japhet, Sara. "Exile and Restoration in the Book of Chronicles." Pages 33–44 in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times.* Edited by Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel. Oudtestamentische Studiën 42. Boston: Brill, 1999.

Jeansonne, Sharon Pace. "The Characterization of Lot in Genesis." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 18 (1988): 123–29.

Johnson, Norman B. *Prayers in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: A Study of the Jewish Concept of God.* Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1948.

Joüon, Paul. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew.* Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. 2 vols. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Biblico, 1996.

Kearley, Furman. "Difficult Texts from Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther." Pages 288–300 in *Difficult Texts of the Old Testament Explained: The Fifth Annual Fort Worth Lectures.* Edited by Wendell Winkler. Hurst, Tex.: Winkler Publications, 1982.

Keil, C. F. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.* Vol. 4 of *Commentary on the Old Testament.* Edited by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch. Translated by Sophia Taylor. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866–91. Repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996.

Kidner, Derek. *Ezra and Nehemiah.* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979.

Kingsbury, Jack Dean. *Matthew as Story.* 2d ed. Rev. and enl. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

———. "Reflections on 'The Reader' of Matthew's Gospel." *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 442–60.

Klein, Ralph W. “Ezra and Nehemiah in Recent Studies.” Pages 361–76 in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright.* Edited by Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke and Patrick D. Miller. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976.

Koehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner. and J. J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000.

Kraemer, David. “On the Relationship of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.” Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 59 (1993): 73–92.

Krinetzki, Leo. *Israels Gebet im Alten Testament.* Aschaffenburg, Germany: Pattloch, 1965.

Lacocque, Andre. “The Liturgical Prayer in Daniel 9.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 47 (1976): 119–42.

Lanser, Susan Snaider. *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Levering, Matthew. *Ezra and Nehemiah*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2007.

Lessing, R. Reed. *Interpreting Discontinuity: Isaiah’s Tyre Oracle.* Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004.

_____. *Jonah*. Concordia Commentary. Saint Louis: Concordia, 2007.

_____.“Pastor, Does God Really Respond to My Prayers?” *Concordia Journal* 32 (2006): 265–73.

Lichtheim, Miriam. *The Late Period.* Vol. 3 of *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings.* Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2006.

Loken, Israel Peter. “A Literary Analysis of Nehemiah.” Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001.

Loloir, Louis. “Que nous dit la Bible de la prière.” *Studia Missionalia* 25 (1976): 217–53.

Longman, Tremper III. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation.* Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1987.

———. “Literary Approaches to Old Testament Study.” Pages 97–115 in *The Face of Old Testament Studies.* Edited by David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1990.

Longnecker, Richard N. *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament.* McMaster New Testament Studies. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001.

Lotman, J. M. “Point of View in a Text.” *New Literary History* 6 (1975): 339–52.

Maier, Walter A. III. “Does God ‘Repent’ or Change His Mind?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004): 127–43.

Matera, Frank J. “The Plot of Matthew’s Gospel.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 233–53.

McGiffert, Arthur Cushman. “The Church History of Eusebius.” Pages vii–403 in *Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine.* Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Vol. 1 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890. Repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.

Meyers, Jacob Martin. *Ezra (and) Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes.* The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1965.

Miller, J. Hillis. ed. *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.

Miller, Patrick D. “Prayer as Persuasion: The Rhetoric and Intention of Prayer.” *Word and World* 13 (1993): 356–62.

———. *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.

Miscall, Peter D. *The Workings of Old Testament Narrative.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.

Moberly, R. W. L. *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 22. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983.

Momigliano, Arnaldo. *The Development of Greek Biography: Four Lectures.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971.

———. “Second Thoughts on Greek Biography.” Pages 245–57 in *Mededelingen der koninklijke nederlandse Akademie van Wetenshappen.* Nieuwe Reeks 34, London: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1971.

Muilenburg, James. “Form Criticism and Beyond.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (March 1969): 1–18.

Myers, Jacob M. *Ezra (and) Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes.* Anchor Bible 14. Garden City: Doubleday, 1965.

Nelson, Craig W. “Confession and Repentance in Nehemiah 9.” Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1984.

Newman, Judith H. “Nehemiah 9 and the Scripturalization of Prayer in the Second Temple Period.” Pages 112–23 in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition.* Edited by Craig Evens and James A. Sanders. Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield, 1998.

———. *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism.* Society of Biblical Literature. Early Judaism and Its Literature 14. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.

Nicholson, Ernest. “Story and History in the Old Testament.” Pages 135–50 in *Language, Theology, and The Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr.* Edited by Samuel E. Balentine and John Barton. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Nowell, Irene. “The Book of Tobit: Narrative Technique and Theology.” Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1983.

Osterfield, G. Thomas. “Ezra and Nehemiah in the First Person.” Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2001.

Perdue, Leo G. “Is There Anyone Left of the House of Saul: Ambiguity and the Characterization of David in the Succession Narrative.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (1984): 67–84.

Petersen, Norman R. “‘Point of View’ in Mark’s Narrative.” *Semeia* 12 (1978): 97–121.

Pichon, Christophe. “La prohibition des mariages mixtes par Néhémie (Xii 23–31).” *Vetus Testamentum* 47 (1997): 168–99.

Powell, Mark Allen. *What is Narrative Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.

Pritchard, James B., ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* 3d ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

Rad, Gerhard von. “Die Nehemia-Denkschrift.” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 76 (1964): 176–87.

———. *Studies in Deuteronomy.* Studies in Biblical Theology. Translated by David Stalker. London: SCM Press, 1953.

Reardon, Patrick Henry. “Prayer, Piety and Providence: The Book of Tobit.” *Epiphany* 16 (1996): 27–39.

Redpath, Alan. *Victorious Christian Service: Studies in the Book of Nehemiah.* Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1958.

Rendsburg, Gary A. “The Northern Origin of Nehemiah 9.” *Biblica* 72 (1991): 348–66.

Reventlow, Henning Graf. *Gebet im Alten Testament.* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986.

Reynolds, Steve L. “A Literary Analysis of Nehemiah.” Ph.D. diss., Bob Jones University, 1994.

———. “A Literary Analysis of Nehemiah.” *Biblical Viewpoint* 28 (1994): 75–87.

Rhoads, David M. and Donald Michie. *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics.* New Accents. New York: Routledge, 1983.

Ryken, Leland. *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible.* 2d ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992.

Ryken, Leland, and Tremper Longman III. *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1993.

Savran, George W. “The Character as Narrator in Biblical Literature.” *Prooftexts* 5 (1985): 1–17.

———.*Telling and Retelling: Quotation in Biblical Narrative.* Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Sawyer, John F. A. “Types of Prayer in the Old Testament: Some Semantic Observations on *Hitpallel*, *Hithannen*, Etc.” *Semitics* 7 (1980): 131–43.

Scholes, Robert and Robert Kellog. *The Nature of Narrative.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Schottroff, Willy. *‚Gedenken' im alten Orient und im Alten Testament: Die Wurzel ZĀKAR im semitischen Sprachreis.* Wissenschaftlische Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1964.

Schoville, Keith N. *Ezra-Nehemiah.* The College Press NIV Commentary. Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 2001.

Selden, Raman. *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory.* 2d ed. Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1989.

Shiner, Whitney. “‘Follow Me!’: Narrative and Rhetorical Functions of the Disciples in the Gospel of Mark, Greek Philosophical biographies, and the ‘Wisdom of Ben Sira.’” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1992.

Simon, Uriel. “Minor Characters in Biblical Narrative.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (1990): 11–19.

Ska, Jean Louis. *Our Fathers Have Told Us: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives.* Subsidia Biblica 13. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990.

Speiser, E. A. “The Stem *Pll* in Hebrew.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 301–6.

Sponheim, Paul R., and Terence E. Fretheim. *A Primer on Prayer.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

Staudt, Edwin E. "Prayer and the People in the Deuteronomist." Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1980.

Steinmann, Andrew E. *Daniel.* Concordia Commentary. Saint Louis: Concordia, 2008.

———. *Ezra and Nehemiah.* Concordia Commentary. Saint Louis: Concordia, 2010.

———. *Intermediate Biblical Hebrew: A Reference Grammar with Charts and Exercises.* Saint Louis: Concordia, 2009.

———. *Is God Listening? Making Prayer a Part of Your Life.* Saint Louis: Concordia, 2004.

———. Review of Mark J. Boda and Paul L. Reditt, eds., *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader. Review of Biblical Literature* (February 2009): No pages. Cited February 2009. Online: http//www.bookreview.org/pdf/6677_7240.pdf.

———. *The Oracles of God: The Old Testament Canon*. Saint Louis: Concordia, 1999.

Sternberg, Meir. *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978.

———. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. The Indiana Literary Biblical Series. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Steussy, Marti J. *Gardens in Babylon: Narrative and Faith in the Greek Legends of Daniel.* Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 141. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993.

Talmon, Shemaryahu. "The Emergence of Institutionalized Prayer in Israel in the Light of the Qumran Literature." Pages 265–84 in *Qumrân: sa piété, sa theologie et son milieu.* Edited by M. Delcor. Paris: Duculot, 1978.

_____. "Ezra and Nehemiah." Pages 357–64 in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1987.

_____. "Ezra and Nehemiah." Pages 317–28 in the Supplementary Volume of *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Edited by Keith Crim, Lloyd Richard Baily, Sr., Victor Paul Furnish, and Emory Stevens Bucke. Nashville: Abingdon, 1976.

Talstra, Eep. "The Discourse of Praying: Reading Nehemiah 1." Pages 219–36 in *Psalms and Prayers: Papers Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society of Old Testament Study and Het Oudtestamenisch Werkgezelshap in Nederland en België, Apeldorn August 2006.* Edited by Bob Becking and Eric Peels. Boston: Brill, 2007.

Tannehill, Robert. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation.* 2 vols. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986 and 1990.

Throntveit, Mark A. *Ezra-Nehemiah.* Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1992.

———. *When Kings Speak: Royal Speech and Royal Prayer in Chronicles.* Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 93. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987.

Tollefson, Kenneth D., and H. G. M. Williamson. "Nehemiah as Cultural Revitalization: An Anthropological Perspective." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (1992): 41–68.

Tompkins, Jane P. ed. *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Trible, Phyllis. *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah.* Guides to Biblical Scholarship. Old Testament Series. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.

Uspensky, Boris. *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form.* Translated by Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973.

VanderKam, James C. "Ezra-Nehemiah or Ezra and Nehemiah?" Pages 55–75 in *Priests, Prophets, and Scribes: Essays on the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp.* Edited by Eugene Ulrich et al. JSOT Supplement Series 149. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992.

Vawter, Bruce. "Postexilic Prayer and Hope." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975): 460–70.

Veijola, Timo. "Das Klagegebet in Literatur und Leben der Exilsgeneration am Beispiel eineger Prosatexte." Pages 286–307 in *Congress Volume: Salamanca, 1983.* Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 36. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1985.

Voelz, James W. *What Does This Mean?: Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World.* St. Louis: Concordia, 1995.

Waddell, James Alan. *The Struggle to Reclaim the Liturgy in the Lutheran Church: Adiaphora in Historical, Theological, and Practical Perspective.* Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2005.

Waltke, Bruce K., and Michael O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Wambacq, B. N. "Les prièrs de Baruch 1:15–2:19 et de Daniel 9:5–19." *Biblica* 40 (1959): 463–75.

Weinfeld, Moshe. *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1972.

Wendel, Adolf. *Das freie Laiengebet im vorexilischen Israel.* Ex Oriente Lux. Leipzig: Pfeiffer, 1931.

Werline, Rodney Alan. *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution.* Early Judaism and Its Literature. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.

———. *Pray Like This: Understanding Prayer in the Bible.* New York: T. & T. Clark, 2007.

Westermann, Claus. "Anthropologische und theologische Aspekte des Gebets in den Psalmen (1973)." Pages 452–68 in *Zur neueren Psalmenforshung.* Edited by Peter H. A. Neumann. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976.

———. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms.* Atlanta: Knox, 1981.

Wheeler, Samuel Billings. "Prayer and Temple in the Dedication Speech of Solomon: 1 Kings 8:14–61." Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1977.

Whiting, Arthur Bernard. "The Biblical Doctrine of Prayer." Th.D. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1942.

Williams, Ronald J. *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*. 3d ed. Revised and expanded by John C. Beckman. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

Williamson, H. G. M. "The Belief System of the Book of Nehemiah." Pages 276–87 in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times.* Edited by Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel. Oudtestamentische Studiën 42. Boston: Brill, 1999.

———. "Did the Author of Chronicles also Write the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah." *Bible Review* 3 (1987): 56–59.

———. "Exile and After: Historical Study." Pages 236–65 in *The Face of Old Testament Studies.* Edited by David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1999.

———. *Ezra, Nehemiah*. Word Biblical Commentary 16. Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985.

———. *Ezra and Nehemiah.* Old Testament Guides. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic,1987.

———. "Ezra and Nehemiah in the Light of the Texts from Persepolis." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991): 41–61.

———. "Laments at the Destroyed Temple: Excavating the Biblical Text Reveals Ancient Jewish Prayers." *Bible Review* 6 (1990): 12–17, 44.

———. "Nehemiah's Walls Revisited." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 116 (1984): 81–88.

———. "Structure and Historiography in Nehemiah 9." Pages 117–31 in *Proceedings of the 9th World Congress of Jewish Studies: Panel Sessions: Biblical Studies and Ancient Near East.* Proceedings of the Word Congress of Jewish Studies. Edited by Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988.

———. "'The Sure Mercies of David': Subjective or Objective Genitive?" *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 (1978): 31–49.

Wright, Jacob L. *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and its Earliest Readers.* Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 348. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004.

Yamauchi, Edwin M. "Archaeological Backgrounds of the Exilic and Postexilic Era, Pt 3: The Archaeological Background of Ezra." *Bibliotheca sacra* 137 (1980): 195–211.

———. "Archaeological Backgrounds of the Exilic and Postexilic Era, Pt 4: The Archaeological Background of Nehemiah." *Bibliotheca sacra* 137 (1980): 291–309.

———. "Ezra-Nehemiah." Pages 563–771 in *1 Kings–Job.* Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein. Vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988.

———. "Nehemiah, a Model Leader." Pages 171–80 in *Spectrum of Thought: Essays in Honor of Dennis F. Kinlaw.* Edited by Michael L. Peterson. Wilmore, Ky.: Francis Asbury, 1982.

———. *Persia and the Bible.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996.

———. "Two Reformers Compared: Solon of Athens and Nehemiah of Jerusalem." Pages 269–92 in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*. Edited by Gary Rendsburg, Ruth Adler, Milton Arfa, and Nathan H. Winter. New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc. and The Institute of Culture and Education of New York University, 1980.

———. "Was Nehemiah the Cupbearer a Eunuch?" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92 (1980): 132–42.

Young, E. J. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1960.

VITA

Philip Werth Penhallegon

April 15, 1969

Kalamazoo, Michigan

Collegiate Institutions Attended

The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, no degree, 1987–1989
Concordia College, Ann Arbor, Michigan, B.A. Communication, 1991

Graduate Institutions Attended

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, M.Div., 1998
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, Ph.D., 2012

Previous Theses and Publications

Esther: For Such a Time as This. God's Word for Today. St. Louis: Concordia, 2008.

Current Memberships in Academic Societies

Society of Biblical Literature
Society of Concordia Theological Faculties
Society of Creation