READING NEHEMIAH: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF NEHEMIAH'S
COVENANT RENEWAL ACCOUNT AND ITS PLACE WITHIN THE BOOK OF
NEHEMIAH

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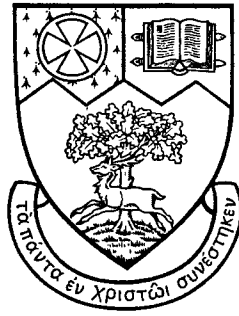2012

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ABSTRACT

"Reading Nehemiah: A Structural Analysis of Nehemiah's Covenant Renewal Account and Its Place within the Book of Nehemiah"

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Literary approaches to Ezra-Nehemiah studies are becoming more common. However, there is still a lack in the literary study of Ezra-Nehemiah of a structural analysis of Nehemiah's covenant renewal account that respects its particular fit within Nehemiah's story. The aim of this thesis is to explain how the covenant renewal account (commonly held to be Neh 8–10) is integral to the book of Nehemiah (Neh 1–13). Since narrative structural analysis is the study of the semantic structures that preside over a text's creation, this methodology is well suited to discerning whether or not the content found in the covenant renewal account fits within the broader story (and text) of Nehemiah. Accordingly, my structural analysis of the covenant renewal account reveals a deep, underlying structure that shows this account to be an integral piece of the book of Nehemiah.

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For Ruth (אשה חכמה ויפה), Ben, and Anna

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ABBREVIATIONS

BDB   Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford, 1907.

CBQ   *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

EM   Ezra Memoir

GBH   Joüon, P., and T. Muraoka. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. 2 vols. Subsidia Biblica, 14.1, 2. Rome: Biblical Institute, 1991.

IBHS   *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

IDB   G. A. Buttrick (ed.), *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*

IDBSup   Supplementary volume to *IDB*

JBL   *Journal of Biblical Literature*

JSOT   *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

JSOTSup   Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series

Neh   The book of Nehemiah

NM   Nehemiah Memoir

SBLDS   Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series

WBC   Word Biblical Commentary

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The covenant renewal of Nehemiah and Ezra found in the second half of Nehemiah's book (Neh 7–13) has been the subject of much, and vast, scholarly activity.[1] Yet consensus on whether or not the material found within this account is integral to the story told in the book of Nehemiah is yet to be reached. Is there an underlying structure that connects the Covenant Renewal Account to the broader story contained in Nehemiah or is the Covenant Renewal Account somehow separate from Nehemiah's story, yet still an intricate piece of the broader composition, Ezra-Nehemiah?

Quite naturally, the bulk of the scholarly activity on Nehemiah has been diachronic (with historical source criticism leading the pack), and, more often than not, this field of criticism has been concerned with the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah (both the men and the books), and their relation to the books and author(s) of Chronicles. Though the results of this research trajectory have been fascinating, they have tended to eclipse synchronic readings of this text. However, diachronic study has led scholars to explore new methodologies. Literary criticism has been applied to the text of the Covenant Renewal Account with the early results being acclaimed; yet a narrative structural analysis of the text, which has the potential to elucidate how the separate elements of the text are interwoven with one another (syntagmatically and paradigmatically) and the broader story of Nehemiah, has not yet been offered. This thesis provides such a structural analysis.

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[1] For an overview of scholarly opinion regarding the boundaries of the Covenant Renewal Account see Duggan, *Covenant*, 68–73, and Boda, "Redaction," 25–54.

Past Research

As noted above, literary approaches to Ezra-Nehemiah are gaining in interest; recently Tamara Eskenazi, Mark Throntveit and Michael Duggan have used the tools of literary criticism to interpret the Covenant Renewal Account in Neh 8–10.[2] The following section provides a brief summary and critique of the structure each of these scholars apply to the Covenant Renewal Account, as well as a consideration of how the perceived structure joins with the broader narrative context.

Tamara Eskenazi

Eskenazi was the first scholar to utilize a strictly literary approach to Ezra-Nehemiah in her book, *In an Age of Prose.*[3] Based on the unity inherent to Ezra-Nehemiah, its preservation among the Masoretes, and early circulation, she treats Ezra-Nehemiah as one story and provides readers with fascinating characterizations and a rich thematic approach to the book, which views each sequence of the text through the lenses of "the people," "the house of God," and the "documents."[4] As well, she has explored, in-depth, the unique contribution documents make within this text.

Eskenazi's analysis of Neh 8:1—13:31 begins with her defining it as a unit comprising the "success" portion of her overarching literary structure for Ezra-Nehemiah, which she has framed according to the work of structuralist Claude Bremond.[5] An outline of Eskenazi's structure for Ezra-Nehemiah is most helpful:

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[2] For a review of literary analyses of the Covenant Renewal Account see Duggan, *Covenant*, 38–57. For a survey of significant literary works on Ezra-Nehemiah see Childs, *Introduction*, 624–38; Japhet, "Biblical Historiography," 176–88; Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," 357–64; Torrey, *Composition*, 277–340; and Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 275–340. For an interesting exploration of a possible tale structure of Nehemiah, which is based on the works of Herodotus, see Cohen, "Leave Nehemiah Alone," 55–74.

[3] Eskenazi, *Prose*, 1–9.

[4] Eskenazi, *Prose*, 45.

[5] Eskenazi, *Prose*, 38.

1) Potentiality (objective defined): decree to the community to build the house of God (Ezra 1:1–4)

2) Process of actualization: the community builds the house of God according to the decree (Ezra 1:5—Neh 7:72)

A. Introduction: proleptic summary (Ezra 1:5–6)

B. First movement (Ezra 1:7—6:22)

C. Second movement (Ezra 7:1—10:44)

D. Third movement (Neh 1:1—7:5)

E. Recapitulation: the list of returnees (Neh 7:6–72)

3) Success (objective reached): the community celebrates the completion of the house of God according to Torah (Neh 8:1—13:31)[6]

Eskenazi, therefore, separates the list of returnees from the suggestion of success.

However, she does not do so lightly since she sees distinct value in the many lists found in Ezra-Nehemiah. Regarding the aforementioned list of returnees, she creatively articulates the importance of this list by naming it a recapitulation and saying, "Like a funnel through which sand flows, so does Nehemiah 7 channel persons and events from Ezra 2 through Nehemiah 7 into the final celebration which comes next to conclude the book."[7] She reasons that this list (when combined with its doppelganger in Ezra 2) forms the back end of a narrative inclusion containing all of the steps taken to achieve the building of the house of God. As such, she considers these two lists of returnees (Ezra 2, Neh 7) to be an example of the literary convention of repetition.

In her analysis of the story uniting Ezra and Nehemiah, Eskenazi is intent on bridging the two works together; thus she broadens the semantic value of the term "the house of God" to include the entire city of Jerusalem, instead of allowing this term to simply refer to the temple artifice. She is thus able to connect Ezra 1:1–4 to Neh 8:1 by

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[6] Eskenazi, *Prose*, 38. For a detailed structure of Eskenazi's sub-units see her third chapter, pp. 37–126.
[7] Eskenazi, *Prose*, 95.

reasoning that the actions of the covenant renewal and the dedication of the city walls

constitute the successful completion of the command issued to Cyrus in Ezra 1:2: "to

build Him (the LORD God) a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah." While there are

certainly grounds for this intriguing thought, this destabilization of the term, "the house

of God," to include the city of Jerusalem stretches the term beyond its normal meaning.

One synchronic argument against her argument is that there are many uses of this term in

Nehemiah that firmly establish its meaning as "the temple."[8] Moreover, Duggan has

observed that of the fifty-seven references to the term "the house of God" in Ezra-

Nehemiah, not one of them refers directly to the city or people.[9] Thus, Eskenazi's

proposed broadening of the term to include everything within the city, while it is a

necessary means to her structural ends, does not deal adequately with the semantic value

of this term within Nehemiah.[10]

Eskenazi understands the climax of Ezra-Nehemiah to be the Covenant Renewal

Account. Within the success category of her outline, Eskenazi names the Covenant

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[8] See Neh 8:16 (ref. to the courts of "the house God"); 10:32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39 (all refs. to provisions for "the house of God" and the sacrifices of this house); 11:11 (Seraiah the priest as leader of "the house of God"), 16 (the Levites as reaching beyond "the house of God" in their business dealings), 22; 12:40; 13:4, 9 (the articles of "the house of God"), 11, and 14. The only ref. in Nehemiah that might be construed to reinforce this semantic re-evaluation is 6:10, where Shemaiah says to Nehemiah, "Let us meet together in 'the house of God,' in the midst of the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple...." However, this is not a strong argument favoring a destabilization of this fixed term; rather, its usage in this location seems to emphasize how secretive the proposed place of meeting was.

[9] Duggan, *Covenant*, 56.

[10] Eskenazi must stretch the term "the house of God" to fit Ezra-Nehemiah into Bremond's structure. She relates that according to Bremond, the three formal features of a story are Potentiality (objective defined), Process of actualization (steps taken), and Success (objective reached). One critique of this structure is its simplicity. There are three sections that resemble the beginning, middle, and end of a story. This structure could be applied to the book of Ezra, the book of Nehemiah, or a number of significant portions of text within these works such as the Covenant Renewal Account. These analyses would produce significantly different results than the analysis she offers in her book. For instance, applying this structure to Ezra 1–6 alone would isolate the building of the temple as the objective. This would be actualized through the building efforts of the community and reached in the dedication ceremony for the temple that concludes Ezra 6.

Renewal Account, "Consolidation According to Torah (Neh 8:1—10:40)," and structures it the following way:

> 1) First reading and implementation of Torah (Neh 8:1–12)
>
> 2) Second reading and implementation of Torah (Neh 8:13–18)
>
> 3) Third reading and implementation of Torah (Neh 9:1–37)
>
> 4) The result: a *written* pledge to Torah and house of God by community (Neh 10:1–40).[11]

And inside this structure, she sees the following pattern within the three readings: Assembly, Reading of Torah, and Implementation. The pattern is drawn from the three assemblies in the text marked by the repetition of the verb אסף "gather" in Neh 8:1, 13, and 9:1. As such, אסף begins each unit where the reading of Torah takes place.[12] Accordingly, the paradigmatic structuring around the verb אסף gives strength to Eskenazi's proposed structure, whereas not having a discernable method behind her choice of what constitutes an "implementation of Torah" is a weakness. Here, she seems to pick at will what fits an implementation of Torah. It is more likely that the penitential prayer offered by the people in 9:6–37 serves the narrative function of informing readers of the *logic* for the actions already observed in the behavior of the Israelites (humility, confession of sin, and separation from foreigners), as well as serving as a recitation of Israelite traditions that function to engender hope within the audience and reception of grace from God.[13]

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[11] Eskenazi, *Prose*, 96–7.

[12] Eskenazi, *Prose*, 96–7.

[13] Boda, *Praying*, 196. Boda's work provides an in-depth study of the theological and traditio-historical content of the Levites prayer.

As such, this prayer is a bridge between the actions of the day that have already come to light and forthcoming events, that is, the covenant renewal and subsequent commitment to Torah as a way of life. Though the prayer is a theological masterpiece (Eskenazi says it is the most important speech in Ezra-Nehemiah[14]) naming it an implementation of Torah seems a poor choice, and placing it within a separate pattern from that of the covenant renewal that follows (10:1 [ET 9:38]) tends to weaken the narrative momentum generated by the prayer. Eskenazi's final scene, "The result: A written pledge to Torah and house of God by community," also feels contrived, since it includes none of the patterned elements characteristic of her first three scenes.

Despite these comments about her structure, Eskenazi has provided a new interpretation of Ezra-Nehemiah through the lens of story and even though her structure is semantically forced in places, her fresh treatment of Ezra-Nehemiah is groundbreaking, well written and researched, and has opened the door—widely—for further synchronic studies on Ezra-Nehemiah.

Mark Throntveit

Another fine example of literary criticism on Ezra-Nehemiah is that offered by Mark Throntveit.[15] Throntveit begins his commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah by explaining that Ezra-Nehemiah is to be understood as a retelling of the story of the return, which was intended to help Israel find hope and encouragement in the midst of restoration.[16] This practical and theological summary of Ezra-Nehemiah is a clear indication of Throntveit's

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[14] Eskenazi, "Nehemiah 9–10," 7.
[15] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 4–9. Throntveit notes that his commentary moves through large pericopes of text, which is the result of careful study of observable literary markers in the text's surface structure.
[16] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 11.

willingness to stay true to the format of the Interpretation series, which in essence is to create theological commentaries accessible for preaching and teaching within the community of faith. In crafting this style of commentary, Throntveit chose to move through the text of Ezra-Nehemiah one section at a time, showing how each section is connected to the overarching message of Ezra-Nehemiah. Accordingly, he spends a good deal of time exploring the theological difficulties faced by the post-exilic community, and in so doing develops an extensive array of macro and micro literary structures that he believes shape the narrative.

Throntveit is mostly consistent in his attempt to treat Ezra-Nehemiah as a final form literary product; however, and despite noting that a repositioning of Neh 8–10 to a place following Ezra 8 or 10 fails to "take adequate account of the clear structuring of the received text,"[17] he, himself, dislodges Neh 5 from its present position in the text and relocates it after the supposed coda (Neh 12:44—13:31).[18] For Throntveit, it seems the "obtrusive" Neh 5—alone—constitutes a necessary scholarly displacement.[19] His treatment of Neh 5 is intriguing but, alas, does not take adequate account of the received text.

Throntveit's proposed methodology is based on concentricity, parallel panels, and repetitive resumption.[20] Like Eskenazi, Throntveit offers a structure that spans the entire

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[17] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 8.

[18] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 122–5.

[19] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 61.

[20] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 4. For a summary of concentricity, see pp. 4–6, parallel panels, see pp. 6–8, and repetitive resumption, see p. 8. In brief, concentricity elucidates concentric arrangements where a literary unit echoes members of the first half of a literary unit in a reversed order (i.e., A B…B' A'). Throntveit notes, if there are four members to an arrangement it is properly termed a "chiasmus." Exposing concentric arrangements helps readers determine the boundaries of literary units and reveals a structural significance for the perceived repetitions. Parallel panels function in a similar way and are employed when narrative momentum would be halted by a concentric arrangement. Instead of reversing the order of perceived echoes, these panels follow the same sequence (i.e., panel 1 ABCD, panel 2 A'B'C'D'). In

Ezra-Nehemiah corpus. He divides the Ezra-Nehemiah corpus into two main parts: 1)

Return and Reconstruction (Ezra 1:1—Neh 7:3) as accomplished by the returns of

Sheshbazzar/Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–6), Ezra (Ezra 7–10), and Nehemiah (Neh 1:1—7:3),

and 2) Renewal and Reform (Neh 7:4–12:43), which is similarly divided into three parts

that he calls theological moments: Community Renewal (Neh 7:4–73a), Covenant

Renewal (Neh 7:73b—10:39), and Joyous Dedication (Neh 11:1—12:43).

Interestingly, the above shows that Throntveit has identified the list of returnees

as the beginning of the second part of Ezra-Nehemiah. He argues that this list is most

likely in its original setting and functions as a census list for the repopulation of

Jerusalem.[21] Hence, he understands the list's placement to be a theologically motivated

choice that aides in establishing continuity with the community's past. As such, renewal

within Jerusalem (Throntveit's theme for this part of the book) is encouraged by an

infusion of Israelites who "have experienced God's grace in the second exodus of Ezra 1–

6."[22]

As he begins his section on the "Covenant Renewal," readers learn that Throntveit

is sympathetic to the diachronic concerns underlying Neh 7:73b—10:39. He notes,

"Whatever the actual historical situation, it is clear that these three chapters *stand apart*

from the surrounding context and concern themselves with another matter."[23] However,

in accordance with his literary aims, he sets out to discern the editorial reason for the

final placement of this material and, following Williamson,[24] Throntveit concludes that

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repetitive resumption the stream of an interrupted discourse is resumed with the repetition of the clause that preceded the interruption.

[21] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 93.

[22] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 93.

[23] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 94, italics mine.

[24] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 275. Specifically, a covenant account includes a threefold structure: proclamation of the Law, confession, and renewal of commitment to the covenant with stipulations.

the various units comprising these chapters have been arranged according to "the familiar theme of covenant renewal."[25] Therefore Throntveit treats the Covenant Renewal Account as a diachronic insertion into a distinctly separate narrative about the repopulation of Jerusalem.

Throntveit broadly uses concentricity and panels throughout his book, yet he observes, "the most significant use of parallel panels as a structuring device occurs in these chapters, Nehemiah 7:73b—10:39, where each of the three scenes that constitute the narrative (7:73b—8:12; 8:13-18; 9:1—10:39) follows the same sequence."[26] Accordingly, his structure of the account follows:

1) Scene 1 (7:73b—8:12)

2) Scene 2 (8:13-18)

3) Scene 3 (9:1—10:39)

Within this order, there is a pattern which follows an identical sequence: Time Reference, Assembly, Encounter with the Law, Application, and Response.[27] And in this pattern, he notes a number of repetitions that further unify these scenes. For instance, like Eskenazi, he sees the importance of אסף and the reading of the Law as spanning the three scenes. He also notes the repetition of "great rejoicing" in scenes one and two, "understanding" in scenes one and three, and "as it is written" in scenes one and three.

One weakness of his patterning is found in the dual time reference located in his second scene. Since he is using time reference as a literary marker signaling the beginning of units, it would be consistent to view the time reference in 8:18, "day by day, from the first day until the last day," as also denoting a literary unit (no matter how

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[25] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 109.
[26] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 7.
[27] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 95.

unlikely the reference appears). Yet, he creatively addresses this particular unit's second time reference explaining that there is a concentric arrangement sandwiching the scene.[28] Thus this scene is an example of a concentrically arranged parallel panel.

Overall, the strength of Throntveit's work is his many theological insights, and the detailed structuring that he confidently argues undergirds the text and, therefore, the shape of the message of the text. However, some weaknesses in Throntveit's study are his unwillingness to transcend diachronic problems surrounding the final syntagmatic order presented in Nehemiah, whether this is regarding the Covenant Renewal Account or the placement of Neh 5. As well, readers may sense there are many variations to his concentric arrangements and panels. In spite of these observations, Throntveit's detailed work with concentricity, parallel panels and repetitive resumption is not to be overlooked.

Michael Duggan

Duggan's synchronic analysis of Ezra-Nehemiah, which is a blend of textual criticism, literary analysis, lexical examination, and thematic summary, provides readers with the most comprehensive treatment of the Covenant Renewal Account to date.[29] He begins his treatment of the Covenant Renewal Account by explaining that it provides the climax to Ezra-Nehemiah because the central figures, Ezra and Nehemiah, come together in this account, which is the most defining moment in post-exilic Israelite history.[30]

Duggan's study is thorough and begins with a detailed review of past diachronic and synchronic research in the field of Ezra-Nehemiah studies. This introductory chapter also informs the reader of the historical and literary problems that continue to plague

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[28] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 98.
[29] Duggan, *Covenant*, 57.
[30] Duggan, *Covenant*, 67.

Ezra-Nehemiah study, such as the traditional attachment of Neh 8 to an Ezra source because Ezra is the subject of much of this material and since it seems to interrupt Nehemiah's story. In his second chapter, Duggan details the context and structure of the Covenant Renewal Account before moving into a detailed analysis of each unit comprising the account (chs. 3–6). His analysis of each section includes a translation of the text, brief discussion of textual criticism, literary analysis of narrative features inherent to the story, inter-textual and extra-textual analysis of the semantic terms within the account, and a thematic summary.

At the outset of his work, Duggan separates the Covenant Renewal Account from the census list preceding it based on the following reasons: 1) There is a poor connection between 7:4–5a and 11:1–2, 2) Nehemiah's plans to resolve the population problem by registering the people is not what happens in 11:1, which is a repopulation based on the casting of lots, 3) There is a difference between the designations of leaders in 7:5 and 11:1, and 4) The function of the list of returnees (7:6–72a) supports Nehemiah's concern for enrolment more than it connects to the following gathering (this counters a view of the list that sees its function as leading into the account because the list specifically names "all the people").[31] As well, Duggan advances two further arguments that favor separating the census list from the Covenant Renewal Account: first, that the transition from Nehemiah's first-person discourse (7:5) to the third person account of Ezra's reading of the Law (7:72b—8:18), which includes a reference to Nehemiah (8:9), reveals Nehemiah's discourse to end with the conclusion of the census list, and second, that there

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[31] Duggan, *Covenant*, 70.

is a lack of refinement in the flow of writing from the census list to the gathering in 8:1.[32]

But Duggan observes that the list of returnees is a narrative thread picked up in the

repopulation of the city (11:1)[33] and views the Covenant Renewal Account as a necessary

precursor to the events in ch. 11[34] and so structures the account and the material around it

chiastically, with the covenant renewal constituting the center:

> A The completion of the city walls (6:1—7:5a)
>
> > B The list of ancestral inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah (7:5b–72a)
> >
> > > C The covenant renewal (7:72b–10:40)
> >
> > B' The repopulation of Jerusalem (11:1—12:26)
>
> A' The dedication of the city walls (12:27–43).[35]

Thus, Duggan separates the list of returnees from the Covenant Renewal Account

paradigmatically but not syntagmatically. He sees the linear connectedness of the list, the

covenant renewal and the repopulation of Jerusalem, yet undervalues the paradigmatic

significance of this list to the preceding and subsequent elements in the text's

manifestation.

Duggan's structure of the Covenant Renewal Account (Neh 7:72b—10:40) is as

follows:

> 1) The first day: Ezra reads the Torah (7:72b–8:12)
>
> 2) The second day: The leaders study the Torah (8:13–18)
>
> 3) The twenty-fourth day (9:1—10:40)

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[32] Duggan, *Covenant*, 70. Duggan observes that the list in Ezra 2:1–70 joins more smoothly with the narrative of the laying of the temple foundations (Ezra 3:1–13) than the transition that occurs in 7:72b.
[33] Duggan, *Covenant*, 72.
[34] Duggan, *Covenant*, 73.
[35] Duggan, *Covenant*, 72.

He has provided this structure based on the following similarities that form a pattern between the units: Assembly, Reading the Torah, Exhortation, and Execution. These groupings are made manifest by repetitions of words, such as "the Israelites" (7:72b; 8:14; 9:1), which provides cohesion for the Covenant Renewal Account. As well, Duggan emphasizes particular words that link individual sections together, such as "gathering" (8:1–2, 13; 9:1) and "day," which provides a reference to the particular day of the seventh month, as well as words that highlight recurring themes, such as "all the people" (ten times in 7:72b—8:12), and terms that occur multiple times within sub-units, such as "the book" (7:72b—8:3; 8:4–6; 7–8, 9–12) in the first unit, "booths" (8:14, 15, 16, 17) in the second, and "your/their God" (9:3, 4, 5) in the third unit.[36]

However, he breaks away from the pattern noted above in his third unit, "The twenty-fourth day (9:1—10:40)," where he creates two larger sub-units. The first of these, "The people read the Torah (9:1–37)," contains the above-mentioned patterned sub-units (Assembly, Reading the Torah, Exhortation, and Execution), while the second, "The people express their commitment to the Torah (10:1–40)," contains three new sub-units: a) "The signatories of the pledge (10:1–28)," b) "The oath of commitment to the Torah (10:29–30)," and c) "The stipulations of the pledge (10:31–40)." Regarding this break from the pattern, he notes that the third assembly "differs from the previous two inasmuch as it does not conclude with mention of the people's simple compliance with the exhortation. Rather, this gathering on the twenty-fourth day culminates uniquely in the people's swearing an oath of commitment to observance of the Torah (10:1–40)."[37] As a result, he expands his pattern to account for this lack of cohesiveness.

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[36] Duggan, *Covenant*, 293–4.
[37] Duggan, *Covenant*, 75.

Duggan's analysis concludes that the Covenant Renewal Account is sophisticated literature, and this is nowhere more evident than in his observations regarding the narrative shift in voice from third-person narration (7:72b—9:5) to first-person narration (9:6—10:40). He suggests this shift serves the following three purposes: 1) it unites the decision of the people to respond positively to the Law with their actual actions, 2) it aligns with the shift from the first-person memoir of Nehemiah to the third-person narration of Ezra's activities, and 3) it provides a means for the reformed people to speak to the book's audience. These insightful observations reveal a hint of the ideology behind the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah. Moreover, Duggan's insights into three categories— the people and the Torah; the growth of democracy, unity and autonomy; and changes in leadership—reveal the breadth of his work.

Overall, Duggan's attention to details in the Covenant Renewal Account and thorough summary of past research of this account is impressive. Yet, from a narrative structuralist perspective he disappointingly chooses to view the Covenant Renewal Account as being an editorial insertion paradigmatically distinct from Nehemiah's first-person narrative and discovered list of returnees that precedes it (Neh 7). On the whole, however, Duggan's work is exhaustive and rich and there is no doubt that it is essential reading for future Ezra-Nehemiah studies.

Summary

Each of the above scholars furnishes an excellent example of the benefits literary criticism has to offer detailed study of a text. Admittedly, both Ezkenazi and Throntveit have attempted reconstructions covering the entire Ezra-Nehemiah corpus—a vastly

difficult task—whereas Duggan has offered an indepth synchronic analysis of only the

Covenant Renewal Account. The works of the above three scholars have furnished

biblical studies on Ezra-Nehemiah with new knowledge and many significant literary

insights. However, there is still a lack of a discernable underlying structure for this

account that connects it to the broader story of Nehemiah, which does not stretch the

semantic terms inherent to Nehemiah beyond that which they can bear (contra Eskenazi's

reinterpretation of the 'house of God') and combines the *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic*

dimensions of the account with the surrounding text in a cohesive way (contra Throntveit

and Duggan respectively). The aim of this thesis, then, is to provide readers with a fresh

structural analysis of the Covenant Renewal Account that discerns its underlying deep

structure and shows how this structure is joined to the story (and text) surrounding it.

Methodology

While Structuralism is increasing in popularity within biblical studies,[38] it is

sometimes applied differently from one scholar to the next, creating some methodological

confusion. Regarding this, Dan O. Via has observed that "Biblical scholarship often uses

the term *structure* when discussing a text, and those who speak about articulating the

structure of a passage have typically meant exhibiting the pattern, texture, arrangement,

or sequence of words in the unit."[39] He adds to this by noting that "structure properly

speaking is the hidden or underlying configuration that can offer some explanation for the

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[38] Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 105–6, writes that there are two main reasons why biblical scholarship is adopting a posture of embrace toward the structuralist approach. The first reason is a growing sense of displeasure with the traditional historical-critical approaches. The second reason is an increasingly pervasive knowledge among biblical scholars that the dominant methods of inquiry in biblical study were beginning to fade into the background of modern literary criticism. Barton, however, did not warrant an uncritical acceptance of these methods; rather, he cautioned scholars against chasing the latest literary fads in acceptance of these methods.

[39] Via, *Kerygma*, 7.

more or less visible or obvious pattern in the text."[40] Since structuralism is sometimes

misunderstood in Biblical studies, a concise summary of the structuralist method

precedes my overview of the methodology used in this thesis—narrative structuralism.

What is Structuralism?

Structuralism[41] is an intellectual movement spanning many fields of study which

is concerned to discover the meanings behind that which is spoken and written.

Greenwood notes that structuralism "is based on the principle that every concept in a

given system is determined by all other concepts of that system and has no significance

by itself alone."[42] In all fields of structuralist inquiry, whether literary criticism,

sociology, philosophy, or anthropology, et al., it is this concept of a discoverable

meaning-making *system* that undergirds structuralist thinking.

The Advent of Structuralism

The origins of structuralism can be traced to the theories of the Swiss linguist

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913).[43] Saussure posited the arbitrary nature of the sign.

Therefore, a sign's value (whether it is a term or concept) is determined by its relation of

signification to all other signs in the *system*. Thus, difference forms the sign's value.

Saussure also conceived that structuralism is concerned with the difference between

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[40] Via, *Kerygma*, 7.
[41] For a concise overview of the structuralist enterprise see Robertson, "Structuralism," 345–6. For an indepth analysis of the development of structuralism see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 154–89. If easing into structuralism without some of its exclusive language is desired see Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 11–19; 104–38.
[42] Greenwood, *Structuralism*, 2.
[43] Saussure's posthumous *Course in General Linguistics* (French orig., 1916; ET, 1959) became his most significant contribution to the field of linguistics.

"syntagm" and "paradigm"[44] and between synchrony and diachrony (thus separation of

the historical from study that is structural).[45] For Saussure "context is everything,"[46] and

his concept of binary organization underlies all structuralist meaning-making systems.

Saussure's original linguistic insights were picked up and developed by many followers,

who spread over many fields of study.

A. J. Greimas and Narrative Structuralism

Narrative structuralism is a particular strand of structuralism well-suited for

discerning the underlying deep structure of a text.[47] The beginnings of narrative

structuralism may be traced to the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp (1895–1970) and

his *Morphology of a Folktale*.[48] A. J. Greimas (1917–1992) formalized Propp's method[49]

into an actantial model capable of discovering an underlying semantic structure.[50]

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[44] Daniel Patte, in his book, *What is Structural Exegesis*, notes that a syntagmatic system seeks to find "the linear, chain-like order of the manifestation" (25). Here, the whole text is "viewed as a *syntagm* in which each element receives its *value* through its relationship with what precedes and what follows" (25). Readers essentially perceive the elements within the text as being a part of an overall textual manifestation (final product); syntagmatic structural analysts, however, seek to uncover how these elements are linked together, which is, essentially, a search for the deep, underlying structure of the text. Conversantly, a paradigmatic system "gathers together the elements which manifest in the text of a given structure," (26) yet makes no attempt to show how these elements are ordered within the text.

[45] Saussure tended to see two kinds of relationship created by signs in a system: the syntagmatic, which reflects a horizontal, linear relationship where value comes from what proceeds and follows the element (sign) of a text, and the paradigmatic, which reflects a vertical relationship where value comes from other elements with which we associate it.

[46] Jameson, *Prison-House*, 17.

[47] Patte (*Structural Exegesis*, 24) writes that deep structures are in the unconscious of man *qua* man. They are transhistorical and may be apprehended in the synchrony of specific historical points. A text is meaningful only when it calls to mind these deep structures, which presided over a text's creation and preside over a text's reader.

[48] *Morphology of a Folktale* was first published in Russian in 1928. It was not published in French until 1965. Russian Formalism was concerned with the literary quality of a story. As such, the Formalists were dedicated to sifting through elements of a plot, discovering the relations between dominant elements, and showing the particular text studied is distinct from other texts. Propp analyzed Russian folktales and reduced their motifs to a series of functions, chain like events that manifested a plot.

[49] Note that French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1909–2009) also reworked Propp's method and utilized binary oppositions in an attempt to understand myth and narrative.

[50] Greimas's actantial model includes the following six actants that are held in opposition: Subject versus Object, Sender versus Receiver, and Helper versus Opponent.

Greimas developed this actantial model in conjunction with his acceptance of Saussure's concepts of binary opposition and relation of signification.[51] In wedding these ideas together, Greimas was able to create a semantic paradigm capable of revealing the *meaningful whole* of a text by discerning oppositions between basic terms and actors, and by showing how they are woven together in a meaning-making system.

Nehemiah, because of its many lists, reports, and memoir has often been analyzed as a kind of historical report using traditional methodologies. However, Nehemiah is among the latest works in the canon of Hebrew Scripture, and these works reveal the "literary genius of the age."[52] As well, Nehemiah bears features that are found in heroic narratives and epics.[53] Most recently, Margaret Cohen has treated Nehemiah as a series of short stories, "tales," which are based on Greek narratives of that time, specifically those of Herodotus.[54] Peter Bedford treats the men Nehemiah and Ezra as "types of Diaspora hero,"[55] and Lee Humphreys reasons that "tales of courtiers and court life and intrigue were popular"[56] during the time of Nehemiah, a royal courtier in the service of a foreign

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[51] Greenwood, *Structuralism*, 64. Greenwood observes that Greimas argued for a meaning effect that comes to us through the presence of oppositions that exist between basic semantic terms and values. For instance, Greimas reasons that "dark" is fundamentally understood in our minds as being opposite to "light," and "up" is defined in our minds by its relation of opposition to "down." Furthermore, Greenwood explicates that Greimas not only worked from the understanding that narrativity has a transhistorical quality, but also saw narrativity as being the manifestation of a transhistorical shaping of semantic values that are related in classes of signification. Consequently, analysis of two terms in a text and the relationship articulated between these is a means of discerning underlying structural levels of signification (67).

[52] Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," 357. Talmon notes that authors of this age were innovative in their use of literature, could access a variety of literary techniques and traditions developed in the community, and could use their writings to shape their community. As well, he reasons that Ezra-Nehemiah comes from a period that may have used narrative (aggadic) midrash to interpret Scripture.

[53] For a brief overview of heroic narrative and epic see Klein et al., *Introduction*, 329–32. A heroic narrative comprises a number of scenes that focus on the life and exploits of a remembered hero. An epic is a long heroic narrative that tells the heroic deeds of a virtuous hero. This genre of writing manifests a strong nationalistic interest with the hero being formative to the nation's history. Nehemiah is a hero whose life and exploits are remembered and who acts on behalf of the nation. His actions are both nationalistic and admirable; as such the book of Nehemiah has these features in common with these genres.

[54] Cohen, "Leave Nehemiah Alone," 55–74.

[55] Bedford, "Homeland," 165.

[56] Humphreys, "Life-style," 213.

monarch, who was "one of the outstanding figures in the history of the emerging

Judaism."[57] The above reveals there is sufficient reason and scholarly thought to

legitimate a treatment of Nehemiah's story as a form of heroic tale. Moreover, since

Nehemiah's values and actions evoke in readers values, judgments, and feelings much the

same way folktale stories do applying Greimas's method, which he developed from a

revision of Propp's categories for folktale, to Nehemiah, as well as his focus on binarism,

actants, and semantics, seems a timely enterprise.[58]

The Methodology Utilized in This Thesis

Daniel Patte has brought clarity to Greimas's semantic model in his book *What is*

Structural Exegesis?[59] My form of narrative structural analysis is based on his summary

of Greimas's method. Since the concept of binary opposition underlies Greimas's

structure of signification and actantial model,[60] my structural analysis will begin with a

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[57] Humphreys, "Life-style," 212.

[58] Greenwood, *Structuralism*, 107–10. Greenwood, on the other hand, argues that Propp's goal was to describe Russian folktales not biblical stories. He notes several disadvantages to applying Propp's method to scripture. 1) Propp's corpus was initially one hundred Russian folktales that he discerned have a succession of identical functions. It is difficult to discern what may be called a folktale in the Bible, so the same kind of corpus is not available to biblical scholars. 2) Propp built his morphology on his perception of the constant functions of characters in a model and the variations of these, but this principle is not accurate for biblical folktales when they are treated as a group. 3) The uncertain nature of what is a biblical folktale i.e., Samson is commonly held to be a folktale, but what about Jonah? 4) Propp's functions are not universal in their application i.e., Propp himself admitted that the Grimm and Anderson tales were not well suited to his enterprise. 5) Russian folktales and biblical folktales were crafted for different spectators and with distinct purposes in mind. While these arguments are noteworthy they do not reflect Greimas's revision of Propp, which is undertaken to establish an underlying structure common to all forms of discourse, nor do these arguments rule out *a priori* the benefits of applying Propp's analysis of a folktale to a single biblical story, such as the book of Nehemiah, which bears folktale-like similarities.

[59] Patte's work is most helpful. Greimas's works are technical and thick, reflecting his desire to create a scientific methodology. Patte summarizes Greimas's model of six hierarchically distinct elements as sequence, syntagm, statement, actantial model, function, and actant.

[60] Seung, *Structuralism*, 127. Seung challenges the concept of binary opposition wondering if it is too simplistic. His thought echoes a perception that reductionism is inherent to the structuralist enterprise. This is a valid critique of structuralism; however, complicated texts (like Nehemiah) can benefit through the reduction of its narrative to its basic elements and functions. This is an effective means of deconstructing the meaning effect of a text, which is often blurred by other methodologies. As such, structural analysis is

search for verbs of function and semantic values capable of forming binary oppositions.

Discovery of these will aid in establishing the boundaries of the Covenant Renewal

Account and isolate a possible over-arching theme that spans the account. Following this,

my analysis will simultaneously proceed by identifying canonical narrative functions[61]

and actants,[62] and explicating syntagms (ordered narrative units) that form narrative

sequences.[63] These are discussed successively.

Canonical Narrative Functions

Jean Calloud's list of canonical narrative functions will be utilized to bring clarity

to this search. [64] Calloud's list may be summarized as follows: Arrival vs. Departure

(functions that identify movement and presence/absence), Conjunction vs. Disjunction

(functions that track the meeting of characters with other characters, as well as their

departures), Mandating vs. Acceptance/Refusal (functions that reveal proposed courses of

action to actors, who either accept or refuse the same), Confrontation (two actors

confront each other exactly in symmetric positions, which can be a binary opposition

based on the category Exclusion vs. Integration), Domination vs. Submission (functions

that reveal the result of the function confrontation), Communication vs. Reception

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most effective when it is done with an eye to all possible coherent readings of a text and when it is combined with other methodologies that resist the possibility of oversimplification.

[61] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 40. Canonical functions are elements of the narrative structure as opposed to functions at the level of the textual manifestation. These elements often present as binary oppositions and possess a rich semantic investment.

[62] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 40–42. An actant is one of the two basic elements of a narrative structure (the other being "functions"). Greimas proposes six actants that are structural constants: sender, object, receiver, helper, subject, and opponent. These are personages that relate to other personages or things in set spheres of action or actantial roles.

[63] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 24. A syntagm is a complete textual unit. In this unit, the value of each element is received through its relationship to what precedes it and what follows it. Accordingly, textual units are called syntagms because they are composed of a chain-like series of smaller narrative elements (39).

[64] Calloud, *Structural Analysis*, 17–18.

(functions that show the transmission of objects), and Attribution vs. Deprivation (the negative expression of the preceding function). Calloud notes that this list acts as a "grid" that reduces processes and classifies them.

Actantial Roles and Actants

Through a process of reduction Greimas settled on six structural constants of the text. These structural elements are labelled "actantial roles" and are separate from the actors of the manifestation of the text.[65] Each actant (the personage or thing occupying the actantial sphere of action) is bound in relationship with, and defined by, the other actants in the system. Greimas identified the following actantial roles (each grouped with their binary counterpart): Subject vs. Object, Sender vs. Receiver, and Helper vs. Opponent.[66] These form the actantial model:

SENDER	$\longrightarrow$	OBJECT	$\longrightarrow$	RECEIVER(S)
		$\uparrow$		
HELPER(S)	$\longrightarrow$	SUBJECT	$\longleftarrow$	OPPONENT(S)
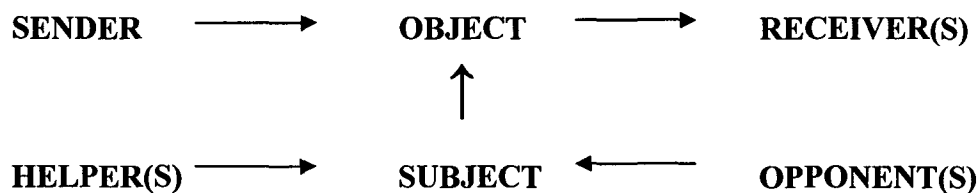
Table 1: Greimas's actantial model

Within this model there are three axes on which the actants exist: the axis of Communication (Sender, Object, Receiver—along this axis lie all the phenomena of communication, transference, transmission, and virtual or real perception), the axis of Volition (Subject, Object—this is the axis of plot and will), and the axis of Power (Helper, Subject, Opponent—upon this axis the Subject is further defined in terms of

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[65] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 41–2.
[66] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 42.

power needed to pass from volition to action). This model works in conjunction with syntagms, which are discussed next.

Syntagms of a Sequence

Narratives are composed of sequences. According to Greimas, each sequence in a narrative is made out of a string of three narrative syntagms, which are in "predetermined relations."[67] These syntagms are: the contract syntagm, which establishes the contract, actantial positions, and sets the narrative program; the disjunction/conjunction syntagm, which conveys the movement of the subject actant who receives the contract; and the performance syntagm, which expresses the attempts to carry out the contract. Each syntagm has a statement(s), which includes an actant(s) and function(s). The following list shows how these elements are interrelated in a sequence:

The Contract Syntagm
     CS 1 Mandating vs. Acceptance statement
     CS 2 Communication vs. Reception statement
The Disjunction/Conjunction Syntagm
The Performance Syntagm
     PS 1 Function: Confrontation statement
     PS 2 Domination vs. Submission statement
     PS 3 Function: Attribution statement.[68]

In this thesis, binary oppositions, canonical functions, and a dominant theme for the Covenant Renewal Account are discovered in the following chapter, "A Structural Analysis of the Covenant Renewal Account." Also in this chapter, actantial roles and narrative syntagms of the Covenant Renewal Account are discerned and analyzed. The above elements combine to form the sequence—the Covenant Renewal Account—that will be analyzed to establish its place within the broader book of Nehemiah in my third

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[67] Calloud, *Structural*, 25.
[68] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 43–50. Patte helpfully describes each of these elements.

chapter, "A Proposed Narrative Structure for Nehemiah." This third chapter provides an

in-depth analysis of the narrative sequences that structure the book of Nehemiah.

Overview

This thesis is a synchronic, narrative structural analysis of the content in

Nehemiah commonly referred to as the Covenant Renewal Account. Since the

composition of the canonical book Ezra-Nehemiah most certainly reflects a diachronic

process which merged Ezra and Nehemiah content and theological concerns, and since

Nehemiah is a readily perceived narrative distinct from the narratives contained in Ezra,

Ezra 1–10 has been kept separate from my structural analysis. My decision to separate

Ezra from Nehemiah for the purpose of this particular study reflects my standpoint that

canonical Ezra-Nehemiah bears a final compositional joining of distinct narrative units.

In Nehemiah this viewpoint is founded on Neh 1:1 signalling the beginning of a clearly

defined story with Nehemiah—the hero of the story—established as this story's author.[69]

Since the book of Nehemiah ends (ch. 13) with Nehemiah recollecting his deeds that

relate to both his construction of the city (chs. 2–6) and his endeavors to purify the city

(chs. 7–12), I am viewing the overarching story of Neh 1–13 as a separate narrative from

those contained in Ezra 1–6 and Ezra 7–10.

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[69] Cohen, "Leave Nehemiah Alone," 56. Margaret Cohen reasons that this announcement of authorship establishes this text as a self-conscious text. For further scholarly opinion supporting the separate authorship of Nehemiah see VanderKam, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 55–75; and Kraemer, "On the Relationship," 73–92. The position that Ezra and Nehemiah are separate works is countered by Grabbe (*Ezra–Nehemiah*, 203–4) who, argues that Ezra-Nehemiah is one book based on its form in the MT and LXX, yet who interestingly observes that the transition from Ezra to Nehemiah is not smooth and could reveal an omitted connective narrative. For other scholars who consider Nehemiah to be separate from Ezra, see VanderKam, "Ezra–Nehemiah," 55–75; Kraemer, "On the Relationship," 73–92; and Boda, "Prayer as Rhetoric," 279–96. Boda reasons that Nehemiah may be related to Ezra through redaction but notes that the book has an inner rhetorical logic that shapes it as a separate narrative.

Accordingly, I treat only Nehemiah and specifically chapters 7–12, yet always with an eye to the broader composition of Nehemiah.[70] My structural analysis reveals that Nehemiah is the hero of the book of Nehemiah who undertakes a mission to rebuild Jerusalem. Within this *locus* Nehemiah receives a mission from God to help restore national purity to the Israelite people. Consequently, the Covenant Renewal Account is realized to be vital to Nehemiah's mission, since it reveals the progression of the people from a place of impurity to purity. Therefore, I will undertake to prove there is an underlying structure for the Covenant Renewal Account that is established in Neh 6–7, where the impurity of certain members of the community is focused upon and a quest for the purity of the Israelite people is mandated and understood to be the unifying level of coherence that dominates the second half of the book of Nehemiah (chs. 7–13).

This thesis proceeds along the following lines. In the next chapter, I provide a narrative structural analysis of the Covenant Renewal Account. This analysis is followed by a third chapter showing how this account fits within its broader context—the book of Nehemiah. In the fourth and final chapter, I summarize my findings and explore the implications of these findings for Ezra-Nehemiah study.

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[70] Two observations about this study should be made. 1) Since my analysis is completed on the final form of Nehemiah, my results necessarily reflect editorial activity; however, while it is likely that redaction happened at the level of the text's manifestation, it is less likely that it happened at the deep levels of sequence and syntagm. 2) The goal of this thesis is not to reproduce an original author's plan (structure) of Nehemiah; rather, it is to reveal a plausible structure for the Covenant Renewal Account and to show how this account relates to its context.

Chapter 2: A Structural Analysis of the Covenant Renewal Account

Having considered some recent literary approaches to the Covenant Renewal

Account and having shown there is yet to be a scholarly treatment of this account

revealing an underlying structure that aligns with the manifestation of the book of

Nehemiah, the next step in this study is to provide a fresh narrative structural analysis of

the Covenant Renewal Account. My analysis begins with a search for binary oppositions

and canonical functions.

I. Discovering Binary Oppositions and Canonical Functions

Exploring Neh 7:72b—8:12 [71]

Nehemiah 7:72b—8:12 begins with the Israelites gathering from their towns into

the square before the Water Gate.[72] In the second verse we learn this happened ביום אחד

לחדש השביעי, "on the first day of the seventh month." These two literary markers, one

spatial and the other temporal, serve as this textual unit's date reference. Ezra is then

introduced to the reader. Of the few major biblical figures associated with Torah, Ezra is

second only to Moses.[73] His introduction in our present text certainly reflects this—he is

described as ועזרא הכהן הספר, "Ezra the priest and the scribe." It is noteworthy that the

title "the priest and the scribe" appears just two other times in the Old Testament, both

referring to Ezra. The first time we encounter it is in Ezra 7:11, in the letter from King

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[71] The commonly accepted unit divisions of the Covenant Renewal Account are unit 1) Neh 8:1 (or 7:72b) – 8:12, unit 2) 8:13–18, and unit 3) 9:1—10:40 (ET 39) or 9:1–37 (ET 38) plus a fourth unit encompassing 10:1–40 (ET 39). As per Eskenazi, *Prose*, 96–7; Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 7; and Duggan, *Covenant*, 293–4. See also Dillard and Longman III, *Introduction*, 179.

[72] Knowles, "Pilgrimage," 13. Knowles observes that Jerusalem, besides being a place for pilgrimage and religious festivals, was also a place where the people of Judah gathered for assemblies dealing with non-cultic matters. She notes in Ezra 10:6–44 that all the people of Judah assembled to deal with the issue of intermarriage with foreigners within three days of being summoned.

[73] Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," 357. Talmon explains that early Jewish sages viewed Ezra as a second Moses.

Artaxerxes introducing Ezra and his mission. Then it appears in the present narrative, Neh 8:9, as well as a final time in the conclusion of the Covenant Renewal Account, Neh 12:26. Accordingly, "Ezra the priest and scribe" is the title ascribed by Artaxerxes. It is also the title Nehemiah chooses to apply to Ezra at the beginning and end of the Covenant Renewal Account. It would appear this is Ezra's official title relating to his magisterial work.

The first verb of function observed in this textual unit is אסף "to gather."[74] Here, then, is a verb "to gather," the binary opposite of which is to separate, part ways. The corresponding canonical function is Arrival vs. Departure. Looking ahead in the text, it is noteworthy that 9:2 contains the verb בדל "to divide," translated with its subject "And the seed of Israel separated." Within these two verbs of opposition is a possible binary opposition and narrative trajectory. This is an especially intriguing thought when combined with the observation of the repetitive use of the verb אסף and the proximity of אסף to בדל, in Neh 9. However, this story's initial sequence of gathering clearly terminates with a correlated sequence of departing (v. 12)—long before we encounter בדל in Neh 9 or the written agreement in Neh 10 that defines this account—and so the possibility of אסף being a binary verb capable of joining Neh 7:72b—8:12 with the textual units that follow is dismissed. אסף and בדל are narrative oppositions; however, they do not function as a canonical narrative opposition that spans the Covenant Renewal

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[74] Min, *Levitical Authorship*, 109, observes that the structuring of the gatherings around אסף, which is used for each of the gatherings comprising the Covenant Renewal Account (8:1–12, 13–18, and 9:1—10:39), emphasizes the role of the people in the gatherings. He notes that use of the Niphal form in each of these instances allows the following reflexive meaning, 'they gathered themselves together.' See also Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 287, who affirms that the people had the initiative for gathering. Both Min and Williamson use the above observation to support interpreting these gatherings as being spontaneous; however, it is also possible to interpret these gatherings as pertaining to an over-arching assembly, which was called for by Nehemiah, and not necessarily as spontaneous in-gatherings of the people.

Account. The question for this analysis, then, became whether there is a binary

opposition in the beginning of this textual unit that is capable of binding it to the

following units.

Noticeably the verses in Neh 7:72b—8:12 contain a rich clustering of the seme

(semantic term), the Law, which is related to the people, and their ability to hear and

understand, Ezra, and the Levites.[75] This clustering of semes forms a classeme (theme)

about hearing and understanding the Law. A quick overview of the remainder of the text

reveals that a sequence could begin with a contract (Mandating vs. Acceptance) where

the Israelites, as SENDER,[76] mandate a contract to Ezra, the SUBJECT, to bring the Law

of God to the Israelites, who would also occupy the position of RECEIVERS (8:1).[77]

However, a completed performance syntagm also presents itself in this textual unit: there

is an apparent lack,[78] *understanding of the Law*, which is confronted by Ezra and the

HELPER personages (vv. 7–9), dominated by the hierarchal instruction (v. 9), and

attributed to the people, who "understood the words that were made known to them" (v.

12b).[79]

This whole sequence forms a complete narrative structure. Reflecting upon this,

the initial opening sequence would be 7:72b: "When the seventh month arrived, the

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[75] Polaski, "What Mean These Stones," 47–8. Polaski notes that this account accentuates the priority of the people being able to understand the content of the Law. He also observes that the record explaining that the people rose to their feet (8:5) suggests they were responding to the text as text. His study of Persian period texts reveals textuality to be an important social practice.

[76] To avoid confusion with other terms, I follow Patte (*Structural Exegesis*, 42) in capitalizing terms that designate structural actants.

[77] Grabbe, "The Law of Moses," 111–12. Grabbe argues that the Law book Ezra brought to the people was mostly a codification of traditions that were long established and practiced. He hypothesizes that since the Ezra tradition makes Ezra the "lawgiver par excellence" there may be some embellishment happening around Ezra's importance to the Law in the book of Ezra.

[78] Greenwood, *Structuralism*, 32. Regarding the idea of a situation of lack, Greenwood observes that "a structuralist reading of any narrative presupposes a need to transform an initial situation; i.e., there is a *lack* which must be overcome."

[79] Unless otherwise noted all translations are mine and are prepared from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS).

Israelites were in their cities." This initial sequence is only partially actualized, so a fuller

narrative background would be presupposed by the remaining narrative. The topical

sequence would be the communication of the Law of God to the people, which enabled

the situation of lack to be overcome. The final sequence is rounded out with the departure

of the people in v. 12a: "Then all the people departed to eat and drink and to send

portions and make great rejoicing." Nehemiah 7:72b—8:12, therefore, forms a complete

narrative unit, a story.

Exploring Neh 8:13–18

The following textual unit, Neh 8:13–18, has a number of features that link it to

the preceding unit.[80] First, this unit is connected to the previous unit by its date, which is

introduced by a disjunctive clause that marks a new sequence, וביום השני "Now on the

second day" (presumably of the seventh month indicated in 8:2). Secondly, the reader

encounters people coming to Ezra for instruction in the Law; this time, however, it is "the

heads of the fathers of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, [who] were

gathered to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law" (8:13). In 8:14, the

aforementioned leaders discover that the people of Israel should dwell in booths, and in v.

15 they make known this finding in all of the towns and in Jerusalem. This is followed by

the people constructing booths and living in them for a prescribed time (vv. 16–17). The

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[80] Duggan, *Covenant*, 125. Duggan reasons that the opening verses of this textual unit maintain narrative continuity with the preceding unit. He interprets the observance of the Festival of Booths as being prompted by Ezra's reading of the Law and notes that "study of the words of the Law" reveals a continued concern for proper understanding of the Law, which was observed to be a dominant feature of the preceding unit of text. Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 280) regards Neh 8 as a textual unit and subordinates the festival celebrations (vv. 16 and 17) to what he perceives to be the major theme of the unit: reading, explaining, and obedience to the Law of God, which he reasons occupies the thrust of vv. 13, 14, 15, and 18. He observes that the only real point made about the festival in this text is that the prescriptions related to it were observed by the people.

unit closes noting that "they kept the festival seven days" (v. 18), which is followed by a

disjunctive clause that mentions a sacred assembly reminiscent of those required in the

Law on the eighth day of a feast week (Num 29:35).

Accordingly, most of the verbs of function have to do with elements specific to

this textual unit. The first verb of function in the text is נאספו "(they) were gathered," the

result of which is ולהשכיל אל־דברי התורה "to study the words of the Law" (a Hiphil

infinitive construct showing the result of the gathering). This gathering to study the words

of the Law sets the locus of this sequence. While gathering to study is not the same thing

as asking for an object to be brought, studying the Law and being taught the Law do both

relate to *understanding* the Law, and understanding the Law is the theme of the previous

scene. It does not, however, seem that the process of understanding the Law occupies the

same place of dominance within this second textual unit. Rather, *obedience* seems to

occupy this unit's narrative thrust and is accompanied by functions (finding v. 14; going

v. 16; making v. 16; returning v. 17; keeping v. 18). To begin with, understanding is not

mentioned. Plus, the studying once it is done yields only one apparent result: the

discovery that the people are supposed to dwell in booths; the fulfillment of which

becomes the dominant focus of this sequence.

This unit, like the previous one, can be understood to form a complete narrative.

Unlike the previous cluster of verses, however, there is a plural SUBJECT. Certain

leaders of the people, the family heads, priests, and Levites are the SUBJECTS who

gather (canonical function: Arrival vs. Departure) to Ezra to study the Law (an implied

potential contract: Mandating vs. Acceptance, as well as a realized canonical statement:

Communication vs. Reception). The SUBJECTS discover they are to live in booths

during the festival of the seventh month (v. 14). This legal prescription to construct

booths is the OBJECT the SUBJECTS found (v. 14 [PS 1 Function: Confrontation

statement]) and are required to communicate (v. 15 [PS 2 Domination vs. Submission

statement]) to the RECEIVERS, the Israelites. The situation of lack is the lack of

obedience by the Israelite people. This is recorded in 8:17b, "for since the days of Joshua,

son of Nun, until that day the Israelites had not done so." This lack is overcome (vv. 16-

17a [PS 3 Function: Attribution statement]), completing the Performance syntagm.

In this schema, Ezra is an actant HELPER, who aides the SUBJECTS in their

task. The OPPONENT is presupposed and would be the actant object disobedience. And

the SENDER is unspecified, unfulfilled. Moreover, an over-arching theme for this

narrative unit—*obedience to the Law*—is understood by readers. Accordingly, 8:13–18,

like 7:72b—8:12, forms a complete narrative unit, a story, which is not dependent on any

other story, yet syntactically and paradigmatically readers understand that these stories

are intimately connected. The question is how.

Moving Beyond the Surface Elements

So far a preliminary study of 7:72b—8:18 has shown there to be a number of

oppositions of action and canonical functions in these texts, yet there is no possible

overarching binary opposition for these units; moreover, there are two rather distinct, yet

thematically and syntagmatically connected, story units. Jean Calloud's warning, "The

more one remains on the surface of the text, the more its elements seem to have meaning

in themselves,"[81] is relevant here. The above findings deal with the enunciation of the

text. The text is composed of somewhat obvious units, which seem to be stories unto

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[81] Calloud, *Structural*, 8.

themselves; however, these units are syntactically joined together and have a sense of paradigmatic connectedness between them.

In structuring 8:1–12 as a closed unit, I followed the grammatical enunciation of the text and identified Ezra as the actant SUBJECT of the story.[82] However, this creates an interesting tension with the rest of the book of Nehemiah: Nehemiah, the clear hero of the first half of the book, is reduced to function as a HELPER agent to Ezra. While this seems to correspond to the switch from a first person to a third person narration style, it is an odd actantial shift in the story because Nehemiah has been a successful hero thus far, since he has fulfilled his mission to build the wall. This observation is accentuated by the perceived textual difficulty in 8:9, where Nehemiah appears to break into the narrative account and is listed before Ezra as one who teaches the people.

Calloud notes that actors are some of the "'constants' of the text."[83] To make Ezra the actant SUBJECT at this place in the book of Nehemiah is a mistake. Nehemiah preceding Ezra in 8:9 is a significant element of the text that reveals an underlying structure with Nehemiah as the SUBJECT. These things suggest that we should extend the boundaries of the text under consideration to include previous material from the book of Nehemiah to see if there is a way to bring Nehemiah as SUBJECT into this narrative.

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[82] Naturally, most scholars do not differentiate between SUBJECT and subject the way a narrative structural analysis does. So viewing Ezra as the primary character of this text is a common interpretation of Neh 8. See Clines (*Ezra*, 180), who observes that "the principal figure is plainly Ezra; it is doubtful whether Nehemiah plays any part here at all." Throntveit (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 94) notes "Ezra ...becomes the primary actor in the drama" and considers Nehemiah's role as supportive. Also, Talmon (*Literary*, 358) argues that Neh 8–9 are the culmination of the account of Ezra's reading of the Law, which was inserted for unknown reasons from an original location following Ezra 7–10. However, others view "the people" as being the primary actor in this account. Eskenazi (*Prose*, 127) regards Ezra as the most prominent leader in this account, yet he is subordinated to the main character, the people. And Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 291) rightly reasons that material in this chapter has been arranged to highlight Ezra's presentation of the Law, as well as the people's response to it.

[83] Calloud, *Structural*, 15.

The next step in discovering a binary opposition, then, is to increase the textual boundary of the Covenant Renewal Account to include material from Neh 7. The first hurdle in this course of action was the list of returnees (7:6–72a [ET 73]), which immediately precedes 7:72b. Accordingly, 7:1–4 seemed to be a summary of the wall building story, which dominates the first half of Nehemiah, so 7:5 became my new boundary for exploration.

Nehemiah 7:5 reads: "Then God put into my heart: 'I will gather the nobles and the officials, and the people for genealogical registration.' And I found the genealogical register of those who came up first, and I discovered written in it:" In the first half of 7:5, God puts into Nehemiah's heart the desire to gather the people for the purpose of genealogical reckoning. In the second half of this verse Nehemiah discovers a book of genealogies. The following verse, v. 6, is the beginning of a list of information from this genealogical book. The list beginning in v. 6 continues until v.72a (ET 73).

There are three verbs of function in 7:5. The first verb ויתן "to put" is translated with the subject of the verb "God"; the second, ואקבצה (from קבץ "to gather, assemble"), is a cohortative of resolve translated "I will gather"; and the third is an infinitive construct, להתיחש (from יחש "to enroll according to genealogy") translated following Holladay as "for genealogical registration."

The first verb, "to put," can be conceived of as a communication from God to Nehemiah. God put something into Nehemiah's heart. It is Nehemiah's responsibility to choose to follow this course of action or not. This verb suggests the canonical function Mandating vs. Acceptance and clearly advances the narrative. However, it provides no binary opposition that can link this pericope to the previously studied textual units. The

next verb, on the other hand, is an intriguing possibility since it is a synonym of the verb

אסף, which was explored earlier, the influence of which was found to be limited to its

respective textual units. While both verbs are used for gathering, קבץ can be used for

gathering food and people, specifically for assembling together or concentrating one's

forces (soldiers),[84] whereas אסף is a slightly broader term applying to food, money, and

people, which may also be used for gathering the harvest and euphemisms for death.[85]

Because the third verb, להתיחש is an infinitive construct it describes the result of קבץ—

the people were to be gathered for the purpose of genealogical registration.

The binary opposition between קבץ (Neh 7:5) and בדל (Neh 9:2) shows potential

for creating a dominant theme to span these chapters. In Neh 7:5, Nehemiah is mandated

(canonical function) to assemble the people for the purpose of a purifying reckoning by

pedigree (an opposition of action that sets a narrative trajectory); they are to be ordered

according to their family genealogies. The use of יחש to describe the result of the

gathering is important, since it carries a rich semantic value; genealogical reckoning is

the basis of Israel's unique identity—they were בדל, "separated," by God from the

nations around them to be a distinct ethnic group (Lev 20:24), and in 1 Chr 9:1 we read

that "all Israel was recorded by genealogies."[86] Yet, in the context of Nehemiah's story

the reader is aware that the people of Israel are intermingled with the nations around

them.[87] Such is the reason for the dividing of peoples that happens in Neh 9:2. Here, a

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[84] Holladay, *A Concise*, 312.

[85] Holladay, *A Concise*, 23.

[86] Janzen, "Scholars, Witches," 67. Janzen observes that the community surrounding Jerusalem referred to itself as "the children of the exile" and had well-defined external boundaries. He reasons this community produced writings such as Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah that placed great value on genealogies and exhibited them so that members of the community were able to authenticate their positions within the group by appeal to genealogical descent. See also, Weinberg, *Citizen-Temple*, 55.

[87] See Neh 9:2; 10:31; 13:1–3, 23–30a.

contrite and humbled group of Israelites separate themselves (a canonical function) from

the foreigners amongst them—a semantic field akin to genealogical reckoning.[88] The

following is an inquiry into how this binary opposition creates an over-arching theme

capable of spanning these textual units.

II. Establishing an Isotopy of Discourse

Greimas utilized the scientific term *isotopy* in his structuralist procedures. Isotopy

refers to "a bundle of redundant semantic categories subjacent to the discourse under

consideration."[89] The isotopy of discourse is the recognizable dominant theme of a text

that is capable of encompassing canonical functions and semantic *classemes* (themes) and

providing a level of coherence to the text.

The Isotopic Discourse of the Ethnic Purity of the Israelite People

The two verbs of function קבץ (Neh 7:5) and בדל (Neh 9:2) form an isotopic

discourse—the ethnic purity of the Israelite people. This theme is enriched by

Nehemiah's discovery of ספר היחש "the book of the genealogy" (7:5b) and the list of

returnees (7:6–72a) it contained for obvious reasons. However, this list is a reminder of

good questions to ask in structural analysis: What is the reason for this? What is gained

by this? Accordingly, what is the reason for *this* list in particular? What is gained by

placing *this* list within this narrative? Of course, this list serves as a genealogical basis for

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[88] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 150, observes that the use of בדל in mid-Persian period texts is "an interesting late biblical use of purity language to indicate characteristics of social groups with a concomitant emphasis on the separation of Israelites from foreigners."

[89] Greimas, *Du sens*, 10. In *Structural Semantics* Greimas explains isotopy as allowing a message to have a meaningful whole (IV.3.d). He also notes that isotopies may occur between narrative units and within them and reasons that the semiological level of a text may also be isotopic by means of the semantic units employed in the text (VI.3.e.).

enrolment, yet one thing in particular is intriguing about it. Found in this list (just prior to the summary of names of the returnees) in vv. 61–65 is an example of what can be termed 'the rules of order,' which can be connected to the process of genealogical reckoning.

When some of the returnees (those who came up from תל מלח [literally "Mound of Salt"]), sought their pedigree among the names, they could not find their names recorded therein. The result was ויגאלו מן־הכהנה "so they were desecrated out of the priesthood" (v. 64). There can be no doubt that the semes provided for readers in this event (vv. 61–64) have been carefully chosen. There are three semes in particular that are noteworthy: 1) זרע "seed" (v. 61), 2) the rare התיחש, "those registered in the genealogy" (a masculine plural hithpael participle from יחש [v. 64]), and 3) ויגאלו "they were desecrated" (from גאל, "to defile, pollute," translated following BDB). It was previously noted that יחש has a rich semantic value since genealogical pedigree is the basis of Israel's unique identity. It is now observed that this present usage of the triconsonantal root יחש helps establish a related concern for genealogical registration and joins the present list with the one Nehemiah found. All three occurrences of the root יחש in Nehemiah are in ch. 7.[90]

Interestingly, the root גאל "defile" occurs only twice in Nehemiah, here and in 13:29. In 13:29, Nehemiah, after chasing away one of the sons of Joiada for having married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, calls upon God to remember them על גאלי הכהנה "on the grounds of their desecration of the priesthood." This prepositional phrase

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[90] Two of are found in v. 5 (the verbal noun להתיחש and the noun in construct ספר היחש "the book *of the genealogy*") and one in v. 64 (the verb התיחש, "those registered in the genealogy").

is marked by the noun in construct גאל translated "desecration." In the list of returnees

the priests who cannot prove that they are of Israel "were desecrated" out of the

priesthood for potentially polluting it. In ch. 13, the defilement is not something done to

the priests; rather, it is something Nehemiah calls for God to do *to them* because of their

support of foreign intermarriage. Moreover, this text was about Eliashib the high priest's

family, and it is not lost on readers that Nehemiah has already revealed that Eliashib was

allied with Tobiah, the Ammonite servant, read traitor (13:4–9). This twofold use of the

root גאל creates a semantic tie between the passages and reveals an underlying purity

system in the book of Nehemiah that reinforces the exogamy of priests as impurity.[91] As

well, this semantic link suggests thematic continuity (purity for the community) between

the Covenant Renewal Account and the final verses of Nehemiah.

Consequently, this story of the priests from תל מלח and the semantic tie to the

priests Nehemiah condemned in ch. 13 undergirds the separation from foreigners

recorded in Neh 9:2. Accordingly, 9:2 begins ויבדלו זרע ישראל מכל בני נכר "And the seed

of Israel separated from all foreigners." This use of זרע is not to be overlooked.

Furthermore, it is found, yet again, in the subsequent penitential prayer (9:8) this time

identifying "his (Abraham's) seed" as being the recipients of God's promised covenant

blessings.[92] That these are the only three occurrences of the seme זרע in Nehemiah is

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[91] Harrington, "Holiness and Purity," 107. Harrington reasons that the term טמא, which is usually associated with physical processes of the body, was not a strong enough term for the defilement that came to the community through exogamy of priests. She reasons that גאל "defile, pollute" appears to be a later form of געל, "which is a strong term for defilement with the sense of nausea and loathing," and was introduced by the writer of Ezra-Nehemiah to convey the severity of the offence of intermarriage within the priesthood.

[92] Boda, *Praying*, 195. Mark Boda's extensive study on the penitential prayer found in Nehemiah 9 reveals an insight about the focus of 9:8—it has been reshaped to bring praise to Yahweh for fulfilling his promise to Abraham. This subtle reshaping suggests a human/divine dialectic that occurs in the prayer. In 9:8, Boda

significant. As such, they are evidence of an over-arching isotopy of discourse that unites

these separate literary units. These expose the hidden *constructed* character of this text.

Consequently, the reader of 7:5—10:40 innately understands Israel's unique identity as a

covenant community, as well as their restoration hope and the basis of faithfulness to

their covenant God that underscores this hope. The underlying isotopic discourse of

ethnic purity, then, is firmly established within the narrative poles of קבץ (Neh 7:5) and

בדל (Neh 9:2).

Further establishing the integrity of this proposed isotopy of discourse is a

consideration of two terms that span the narrative sub-units comprising the Covenant

Renewal Account: the phrase על־עמדם "in their standing-place" and the previously

observed אסף "to gather."

"Standing-Place"

There is a seme found in Neh 8:7 and 9:3 that warrants exploration. Roland

Barthes advised structural analysts:

> We must be suspicious of the naturalness of notations …Every statement,
> however trivial and normal it may appear to be, must be evaluated in structural
> terms by a mental test of substitution. When confronting a statement or a sentence
> fragment, it is always necessary to consider what would happen if that trait were
> not noted or if it were different.[93]

The phrase על־עמדם "in their standing-place" (the masculine noun עמד, standing-place

[BDB]) strikes the reader as unique. Not only is it unique because this exact Hebrew

construction (this noun plus a governing proposition) is found only nine times in the

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explicates that the composer's desire is to engender hope in the Israelite people while extracting grace from God.

[93] Barthes, "A Structural Analysis," 117.

Hebrew Old Testament (limited to the writings of Nehemiah, 2 Chronicles and Daniel),

but because it occurs immediately following the separation of the seed of Israel from

foreigners. The semantic value of this term is one of "assigned positions." It refers to

assigned places for groups within Israel, with a high probability that these places were

ordered according to family heads. If this term was not applied to these gatherings, one

could postulate that the people gathered together loosely, even in a disorganized fashion,

but this is not the case. The people were gathered in an organized manner.

Moreover, Nehemiah's mandate קבץ "to gather" the people for a reckoning of

their pedigree also conveys orderliness. Though the people seem to have gathered (אסף)

themselves together (8:1, 13; 9:1), the term "standing-place" is a syntagmatic and

paradigmatic connection to the governor's command קבץ "to gather" (7:5) that brings to

light the orderliness of the gatherings that took place. Reinforcing this more "official" use

of the seme על-עמדם "in their standing-place" is the remaining other use of the term in

Nehemiah. In Neh 13:11, Nehemiah, after rebuking the officials for neglecting the temple

and not providing for the Levites, records, "Then I assembled them (the Levites) and

caused them to stand in their standing-place."[94] This reference clearly signals a

prescribed order for the Levites; they were to be in designated positions for their temple

duties, and it was Nehemiah who gathered them to these positions. It makes good sense

that the gathered people called to assembly by Nehemiah for the purpose of genealogical

reckoning would be said to be in their "standing-place." Accordingly, this phrase is also a

use of repetition linking these scenes to Nehemiah's mandate.

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[94] Usage of this rare construction in 8:7, 9:3, and 13:11 may aid in establishing a tie between the Covenant Renewal Account and the NM, since 13:11 is recognized by some scholars as belonging to the Nehemiah Memoir. See Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 5. Fensham includes Neh 1:1—7:72a and 11:1—13:31 in a possible Nehemiah Memoir. And Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxiv) notes that broadly speaking Neh 1–7; parts of 12:27–43, and 13:4–31 are thought to be included in the Nehemiah Memoir.

"To Gather"

The verbs קבץ (7:5) and אסף (8:1, 13; 9:1) are synonymous. Their combined

usage in the Covenant Renewal Account syntagmatically links together the various sub-

units of the account. It was noted that קבץ (7:5) is a more official summons to gather and

that אסף functions as a narrative opposition within the various sub-units. It was also

observed that אסף is not to be understood as the verb bound in the binary opposition with

בדל (Neh 9:2) that shapes the isotopic discourse capable of spanning the Covenant

Renewal Account—קבץ (Neh 7:5) and בדל (Neh 9:2) have set the narrative *locus* of the

text. However, this discourse of the Israelite peoples' purity does span four distinct

narrative units. Within these units, אסף is used repetitively. אסף, therefore, gains a

specialized usage within the Covenant Renewal Account—it functions as an organizing

principle for the purifying gathering.

The Primary Basis for Not Seeing a Connection between Neh 7:4–72a and 7:72b—10:40

It was observed earlier that Duggan rejected the move to connect Neh 7:4–72a to

7:72b—10:40 based on his understanding of the plain sense of the text. He cited four

arguments from tradition that opposed this connection and provided two of his own. The

four arguments he cited all have to do with the weak connection of 7:4–5 and the list of

returnees connecting to the repopulation account of the city of Jerusalem beginning in

11:1.[95] Connecting 7:4–5 to the populating of Jerusalem in 11:1 is a common concern

among scholars and rightfully so, *if* this was the intention behind Nehemiah's observation

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[95] Duggan, *Covenant*, 68–73.

about the few people and houses within Jerusalem.[96] However, this may not be the case.

While these words may serve as *foreshadowing* the decision to repopulate the city, they

are most fully concerned with the lack of guardians, whom Nehemiah had positioned at

their homes to aid in protecting the city.[97] These inhabitants were employed to keep an

eye on the movements of treacherous people, who were carrying messages in and out of

the city to Tobiah.

This reading of Neh 7:4 sees continuity between Nehemiah's betrayal by certain

members of the populace (6:1–14, 17–19) and measures to insulate the city from

outsiders who did not seek its welfare (7:1-4), and his compulsion to *begin* a purification

of the people by means of genealogical reckoning (7:5). Treachery, not repopulation, is

the central concern of the presenting story in chs. 6–7. Therefore, interpreting treachery

as the catalyst for the actions recorded in 7:1–5 is reasonable. Moreover, treachery is a

manifestation of the *impurity* that characterizes Jerusalem, which calls to mind Hanani's

report of evil and shame (1:3). Besides, treachery thickens the plot of the story and

underscores the need for a hero to right the wrongs that have been happening in

Jerusalem and Yehud.

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[96] Some scholars who make the connection between 7:4–5 and 11:1 are Fensham (*The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 242), who writes regarding 11:1 that "the solution to the problem of 7:4 is given," and Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 276–7) observes that 11:1 resumes the theme of 7:4–5a, which is broken off. Other scholars include the genealogical list in making this connection between Neh 7 and 11. Torrey (*Composition*, 248) argued long ago that 11:1 is the "immediate and necessary continuation of 7:69." Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 268–70) joins 7:72a to 11:1 and observes that readers expect the dedication of the walls but that the narrative moves to consider a new topic, the reduced population of the city, which is broken off after the list (7:72a) and resumed in ch. 11. Clines (*Ezra*, 178–80) also sees a narrative break after the genealogical list that resumes in ch. 11, however, he locates Neh 9:38—10:39 after Neh 13 (p. 199). However, contra to these, Kaufmann (*History*, 377) does not think Neh 11:1 is the sequence of Neh 7:4, and does not attribute the event in ch. 11 to the work of Nehemiah.

[97] Kaufmann, *History*, 377. Kaufmann observes that Neh 7:4 explains the need of safety for the community within the walls of the city, which is also the cause of the aforementioned arrangements made in Neh 7:2–3. Kidner (*Ezra & Nehemiah*, 103) also makes this connection, noting that the posting of guards from the citizenship is a realistic "further precaution" allowing the people to defend what mattered most to them. Clines (*Ezra*, 178) observes that Neh 7:4–5 "may serve" as a reason for the security measures in 7:1–3, but subsumes all activity in ch. 7 to an overarching quest by Nehemiah to repopulate the city (177).

It should also be noted that Duggan, himself, constructs a narrative chiasm spanning Neh 6:1—12:43, which places the covenant renewal at the centre.[98] It seems likely that the distinct elements of these narrative units have been arranged in relation to one another, and not as completely separate elements. In addition, this understanding of Neh 7:1–5a underscores the importance of the list of returnees' (7:6–72a) function within the chosen isotopic discourse of ethnic purity—treachery and wrong-doings manifest the impurity of the Israelite people

Greimas writes that a new context allows for the introduction of a new isotopy.[99] The bulk of the content offered in Neh 6 and 7 is not a fitting conclusion to the book of Nehemiah; rather, these chapters reveal a shift in narrative concern from the wall-building program to the community that resides within the walls of Jerusalem. These syntactical units about treachery and wrong-doings reveal impurity within the community and serve to prepare the reader for the changes necessary in the community; they introduce another program: Nehemiah's efforts to control what was happening *in* the city. We read of the gates and walls being guarded, people being stationed at their homes, and then we are sharply confronted with Nehemiah's statement that God put into his heart the desire to assemble the people for the purpose of genealogical registration. This isotopic discourse has been prepared for in the minds of readers. There is impurity abounding within the city and its people, and God is about to work through Nehemiah to bring a corrective.

It has been shown that there is an isotopic discourse of the ethnic purity of the Israelite people that spans Neh 7:5—10:40, and that stories of treachery within the

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[98] Duggan, *Covenant*, 72.
[99] Greimas, *Structural Semantics*, 80–1.

community in ch. 6 have led readers to Nehemiah's actions in ch. 7. Next we will apply Greimas's actantial model and syntagms of a sequence to the Covenant Renewal Account.

III. Applying Greimas's Actantial Model and Syntagms of a Sequence to Neh 7:5—10:40

A) The Contract Syntagm

Neh 7:5 begins with the contract syntagm: "Then God put into my heart." Here the actantial position of SENDER is filled by God—He is the communicator of the mandate: "to gather the nobles and the officials, and the people for genealogical reckoning" (7:5). Nehemiah receives this mandate and is therefore identified as the SUBJECT actant. The OBJECT of the mandate—that which is communicated to the RECEIVERS—is a gathering for the purpose of genealogical reckoning, which when viewed as what the RECEIVERS are lacking can be understood to be ethnic purity. The RECEIVERS of this OBJECT, ethnic purity, are "the nobles and the officials, and the people," who I will refer to as the Israelites.

1) CS 1 Mandating vs. Acceptance (Neh 7:5)

The first of the two statements that make up this contract syntagm (referred to as CS 1) is Mandating vs. Acceptance. Nehemiah's response to God's mandate is one of acceptance. Nehemiah's immediate response, "And I found the book of the genealogy of

those who came up first," reveals his will to act on God's mandate; as such, his response

is a modal statement of volition.[100]

The actantial scheme is:

SENDER   ⟶   **OBJECT**   ⟶   **RECEIVERS**
God   Genealogical Registration   The Israelites

                                   ↑

HELPER(S)   ⟶   **SUBJECT**   ⟵   **OPPONENT(S)**
                             Nehemiah   Foreigners, unknown personages
                                                         within Israel, traitors
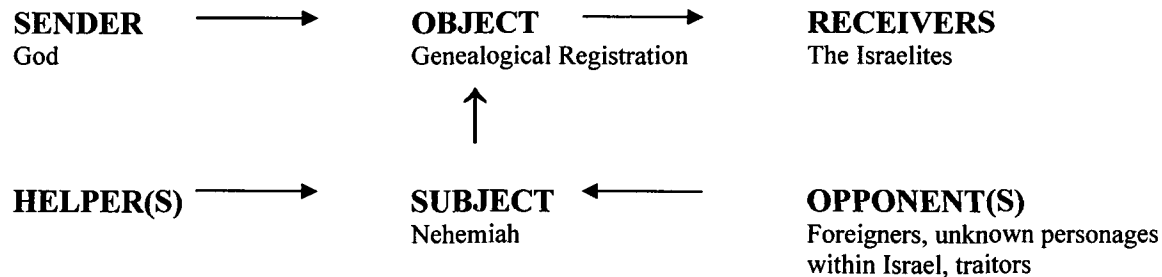
Table 2: Actantial Scheme of CS 1

2) CS 2 Communication vs. Reception (Neh 7:5—8:8)

Also revealed in the above sentence is that Nehemiah receives the HELPER

object, the book of the genealogy, to aide him in his quest to bring ethnic purity. Along

the axis of power (SUBJECT vs. OBJECT) this statement is a modal statement of

power/cognition.[101]

Neh 7:6–72a is a transcript of the record that was found by Nehemiah. Since the

OBJECT being communicated is ethnic purity based on genealogy, the information

contained in this HELPER object is intimately connected to the contract God established

with Nehemiah.

Returning to Neh 7:72b—8:12, my earlier exploration of these verses culled an

actantial scheme that positioned Ezra as SUBJECT. It now becomes clear that what I was

seeing in these verses was actually structural elements within the manifestation that,

because I isolated them from the isotopic discourse established in Neh 7:5, were confused

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[100] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 44.
[101] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 44.

with the actants of the manifestation.[102] Thus analyzing this scene as a closed textual unit

confused the actantial categories of the story begun in Neh 7:5. This is the quintessential

problem with paradigmatic gathering done in isolation of syntagmatic ordering: "These

elements manifest only a part of [the] structure: they evoke, suggest, and presuppose the

structure."[103] While Ezra is clearly the grammatical subject of many of these verses and

could be conceived of as the actant SUBJECT on a microscopic level, a structural

analysis mindful of the whole presenting syntagm considers what elements precede and

follow the elements in question and establishes an actantial scheme that is beyond the

level of sentences.[104]

Accordingly, Nehemiah is not a HELPER to Ezra in these verses; rather, the

inverse is manifested—Ezra is actualized as a key HELPER personage who aides

Nehemiah in his mission to communicate the OBJECT, ethnic purity, to the

RECEIVERS, the Israelites. Along this trajectory, the Law of God is also an actant

HELPER object that, when understood correctly, brings understanding to the people.

With this in mind, the gathering of the people in Neh 8:1a, is understood to be a narrative

opposition (when combined with the departure in Neh 8:12) that progresses the narrative

i.e., the people are now assembled, and Neh 8:1b–8 highlights the communication of

added HELPERS.

Within this scene, the actant RECEIVERS, the Israelites, ask Ezra to bring the

Law to them (Neh 8:1), and Ezra responds positively to their request. In the ensuing

narrative more HELPERS, which for the purpose of this analysis shall be termed minor

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[102] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 42, notes that "actants are …structural elements which should not be confused with the actors of the manifestation."
[103] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 26.
[104] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 25.

HELPERS, aid Ezra in his task to bring the Law: vv. 2–3 intellectual ability (capacity of

hearers), v. 3a lengthy duration (quality time), v. 3 attentiveness (quality of listening), v.

4 a wooden stage built for the occasion (inanimate object), v. 4 persons standing with

Ezra (quality of authoritativeness), vv. 4–5 height (quality of seeing), v. 7 more support

persons including Levites who teach the people (quality of support/knowledge), v. 8 clear

reading (quality of hearing) and understanding and discernment (quality of reception).

Beyond these observations, an OPPONENT (villainy) is presupposed—a hindered view

of Ezra and an inability to hear/see/understand Ezra (bad qualities); things which are

sufficiently overcome by the HELPERS Ezra receives. Resultantly, Ezra, the Law, and

the Levites et al. are understood to be adequate HELPERS given to Nehemiah to help

him accomplish his task. So far in the narrative the realized canonic statements are:

CS 1 Mandating vs. Acceptance (7:5)
CS 2 Communication vs. Reception (7:5 and the list (vv. 6–72a) + 7:72b—8:8)

The actantial scheme is:

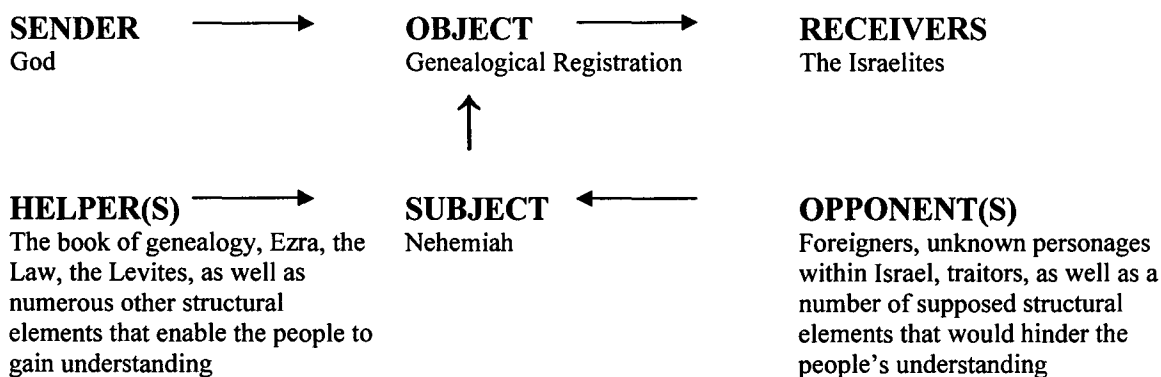| SENDER $\longrightarrow$	OBJECT $\longrightarrow$	RECEIVERS
God	Genealogical Registration	The Israelites
	$\uparrow$	
HELPER(S) $\longrightarrow$	SUBJECT $\longleftarrow$	OPPONENT(S)
The book of genealogy, Ezra, the Law, the Levites, as well as numerous other structural elements that enable the people to gain understanding	Nehemiah	Foreigners, unknown personages within Israel, traitors, as well as a number of supposed structural elements that would hinder the people's understanding

Table 3: Actantial Scheme of CS 1/CS 2

…

And the contract for the quest that follows—the isotopy that sets the narrative

trajectory—is ethnic purity, evoked in the mandate to gather the Israelites for

genealogical reckoning.

B) The Disjunction/Conjunction Syntagm

In Neh 8:9 Nehemiah appears on the scene.[105] In the established narrative

trajectory Nehemiah now has sufficient HELPERS to help him accomplish his task.[106]

Since Nehemiah is present and teaching the people, his arrival at the gathering is

presupposed. Therefore a conjunction syntagm is realized. This conjunction syntagm can

bring a measure of resolve to the confusion noted by scholars in the following verse (v.

10).[107] Since Nehemiah is the hero behind the enrolment that is taking place, this

statement connects the verses about HELPER actants (7:72b—8:8) to the preceding

elements (the mandate to gather and the finding of the list) and functions to advance the

narrative to the performance syntagm that follows this statement. It is therefore

reasonable to assume that Nehemiah is the grammatical subject of the somewhat unclear

phrase ויאמר "And he said" (v. 10), and that his primary presence (his position is prior to

Ezra and the Levites) and instruction are understood to be both expected and authoritative

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[105] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 284. Blenkinsopp argues that Nehemiah is an addition from the time when the work of Ezra and Nehemiah was synchronized and notes that the verbs in this verse and the following are in the singular. Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 279) also regards Nehemiah's name as an addition not just by an editor of the final form Ezra-Nehemiah, but of a secondary addition to earlier editorial activity, and therefore not a part of an original text. He concludes, however, that the singular use of the verbs is permissible. See also Clines, *Ezra*, 185.

[106] Min (*Levitical Authorship*, 110) regards Nehemiah's appearance as an editorial insertion that highlights the unity that existed between the two leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah, the Levites, and the people. Seeing unity within this group is a fair interpretation of this text, however, I am hesitant to overlook Nehemiah's place of prominence in 8:9, since an editor could have just as easily inserted Nehemiah's name after Ezra's.

[107] Duggan, *Covenant*, 92. Duggan notes that Ezra alone is the speaker in v. 10, despite the usage of the same singular verb (cf. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 279). He cites three factors that lead to this determination: 1) the sequence of statements in the immediate context would be redundant otherwise, 2) Ezra is the one speaking prior to the Levites in v. 11, and 3) this would be consistent with the profile of the leaders being developed in this unit.

at this gathering. The canonic narrative statement is: DS Function: Arrival of Nehemiah.

My translation of 8:9 follows:

> Then Nehemiah, the governor, and Ezra, the priest and scribe, and the Levites, who taught the people, said to all the people: "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn and do not weep." For all the people wept as they listened to the words of the Law.

Before moving on to the performance syntagm, the following scenario can be theorized based on the revealed syntagmatic order. The people, who are now able to clearly understand the Law of God, are grieved deeply by what they have understood.[108] While it is certainly conceivable that neglect of Sabbath observance and certain laws centered on commerce incited tears and remorse from this people, it is more probable that this confrontation between Nehemiah, his helpers, and the people is more closely knit to the purpose of the gathering for genealogical reckoning. Such a reckoning when enacted upon a community, many of whom who have not been attentive to the Law of Moses, would have resulted in the forced tearing apart of families and friends. As such, the emotions of uncertainty and fear connected to the impending separation and loss would certainly have produced weeping and mourning.

Moreover, the ensuing verses in Nehemiah reveal that separation from foreigners is a key concept communicated in the Law of Moses. It is the people who read from "the book of the Law of the LORD their God" (9:3) who separate themselves from foreigners. Readers also learn that the Law of Moses is explicitly connected to separation from intermarriage with foreigners in 10:29–31 (ET 28–33). As well, in 13:1–3, readers

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[108] I see coherence between 7:5, the list of returnees (7:6–72a) and this gathering, that regards intermarriage specifically as the cause for the peoples' weeping and mourning. This is the position of Rudolph (*Esra und Nehemiah*, 149), who sees continuity with Ezra 9–10, but it is countered by Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 117), who thinks the vagueness of the context does not support this line of reasoning. This view raises the question of whether or not readers of Nehemiah may have had the book of Ezra in their possession; however, while this is certainly a possibility, I would reason for awareness on the part of readers of the events pertaining to Ezra's reforms, and not necessarily the written form of these.

encounter the refrain: "On that day they read from the book of Moses…and when they heard the Law they separated all the mixed people from Israel." Within the isotopy of ethnic purity the isotopic elements of weeping and mourning do not seem out of place or odd; rather, these can be reasonably linked to an impure people coming to fresh learning and understanding of what is required of them in genealogical reckoning, which is based on the exclusivity of Israel made plain in the Law of Moses.

C) The Performance Syntagm

1) PS 1 Function: Confrontation

The performance syntagm consists of three statements that express the carrying out of the contract mandated in CS 1. Immediately following the conjunction syntagm above the reader encounters the first statement of the performance syntagm. This statement marks the moment of confrontation between the SUBJECT and the "lack," which is ethnic impurity indirectly provoked by the OPPONENT, the foreigners, who are intermingled with the RECEIVERS, the Israelites. My translation of Neh 8:9–10 follows:

> Then Nehemiah, the governor, and Ezra, the priest and scribe, and the Levites, who taught the people, said to all the people: "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn and do not weep." For all the people wept as they listened to the words of the Law.

> And he said to them, "Go and eat choice food and drink sweet drinks and send portions to those who have nothing; for this day is holy to our Lord, and do not be grieved for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Nehemiah (joined by Ezra and the Levites) confronts the people. The verb of function אמר "he said" manifests this confrontation. Here, Nehemiah tells the people the day is holy and urges them to stop weeping and mourning, and to do things that correspond well to the events of the day. Nehemiah's final thought, "the joy of the LORD

is your strength" suggests the new OPPONENT quality, weeping and mourning, may be dominated by the HELPER quality, the joy of the LORD. These combined exhortations (in vv. 9 and 10) are both an affront to the emoting populace and an attempt to mollify them. Accordingly, 8:9–10 fulfill the canonic narrative function Confrontation vs. Association on the basis of Exclusion vs. Integration. Nehemiah's words are punctuated by the disjunctive clause that follows them: "So the Levites hushed all the people saying, 'Be quiet, for this day is holy, and do not be grieved'" (8:11).

Therefore, Nehemiah, the SUBJECT actant, who is echoed by the other HELPER actants, is the leading voice who addresses the RECEIVERS, the grieving Israelite people. Another OPPONENT would be the weeping and mourning (quality of emotional response) which is opposed on the axis of power by the HELPER actant, the joy of the LORD.

The four imperative perfect commands ("go," "eat," "drink" and "send") issued by Nehemiah in v. 10 are actant HELPER qualities that help suppress the people's grief and re-direct their focus to that of celebration and care for fellow citizens. Yet it is the mandated וְאַל־תֵּעָצֵבוּ "and do not be grieved" (a negated Jussive Niphal from עָצַב "to hurt, grieve") that seems to strike at the heart of the matter. If the people respond positively to this behest they will be choosing a path of obedience to the process of genealogical registration, which Nehemiah has orchestrated.

The actantial scheme is:

SENDER ⟶ **OBJECT** ⟶ **RECEIVERS**
God Genealogical Registration The Israelites

↑

HELPER(S) ⟶ **SUBJECT** ⟵ **OPPONENT(S)**
The book of genealogy, Ezra, the Nehemiah Foreigners, unknown personages
Law, the Levites, as well as within Israel, traitors, as well as a
numerous other structural number of supposed structural
elements that enable the people to elements that would hinder the
gain understanding, the joy of the people's understanding, grief
LORD, actions: go, eat, drink,
send

Table 4: Actantial Scheme of CS 1/CS 2/DS/PS 1

Structurally the next performance syntagm will be PS 2 Function:

Domination/Submission. This is a statement expressing either Nehemiah's domination of

OPPONENTS (foreigners, foreign influence), which is realized by the people choosing to

obey him, or his submission to his OPPONENTS, which is conveyed if the people choose

not to obey him. If the statement is PS 2 Function: Submission the performance syntagm

ends.

2) PS 2 Domination

Neh 8:12 contains the second process statement of the unfolding performance

syntagm. My translation of 8:12 follows: "Then all the people departed to eat and drink

and to send portions and make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words

that were made known to them." In this verse, the people heed Nehemiah's words and the

narrative continues to progress. Therefore, Nehemiah dominates the OPPONENTS. Thus

far then, the realized canonic statements are:

CS 1 Mandating vs. Acceptance (7:5)
CS 2 Communication vs. Reception (7:5 and the list (vv. 6–72a) + 7:72b—8:8)
DS Function: Arrival of Nehemiah (8:9)
PS 1 Function: Confrontation (8:10)
PS 2 Function: Domination (8:12)

And the topical contract is ethnic purity, specifically the mandate to gather the Israelites for genealogical registration.

Neh 8:12 brings to a close the present textual unit (7:72b—8:12). The unit has been shown to be connected to the previous textual unit (7:5–72a), yet it also forms a narrative that is complete. Again, we can benefit from asking the question, What is gained from this text? While there is much that is gained, one thing stands out: the Israelite people gain an understanding of the Law of God.[109]

The final statement of the performance syntagm that is begun in this narrative unit is not realized until Neh 9:1–2. Before the reader encounters this statement, however, Neh 8:13–18 is encountered in the manifestation. These verses form another textual unit, a sub-sequence that breaks into the main narrative providing information about the actant the Israelites (the RECEIVERS). An earlier exploration of these verses concluded that they formed a story that is somehow set within a larger story. It is now apparent that these verses do form a sub-sequence.[110] Relevant to this sequence then, is a question Jobling rightly asks: "How does a sub-unit contribute to the meaning of the larger narrative?"[111] What is gained in this story? As this story relates to the isotopic discourse of ethnic purity, a sense of willingness on the part of the people, led by the family heads and cultic

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[109] Min (*Levitical Authorship*, 115) observes that there is an emphasis on reading and teaching the Law that is consistent throughout Ezra-Nehemiah, which is based on the understanding that knowledge of the Law would keep people from going astray.

[110] Patte (*Structural Exegesis*, 51) notes that a sub-sequence tells the story of one of the other actants.

[111] Jobling, *The Sense*, 63.

leaders, to obey the Law of Moses is what stands out in this text. That the heads of the family houses are singled out here is significant, since these would have had a measure of influence and were no doubt looked to in times of societal structuring.[112]

In the verses immediately preceding this sequence readers are made aware of how the people came to a place of understanding the Law of Moses. Now, the reader encounters a finding of a prescription—a requirement of the Law—and gains insight into how the people respond to what they have learned. With clarity of mind, they *do* what they have found. The reader is now confronted, not only with a people of understanding, but also with an obedient people, who have volition to abide by the Law of Moses. Nehemiah 8:17 is a case in point of how rare obedience to some prescriptions of the Law had been. Nehemiah 8:17 reads

> Indeed, all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths; for since the days of Joshua, son of Nun, until that day the Israelites had not done so.

The second part of this verse is revealing and provides a point of contrast to the present willingness of the people to obey the Law. Within this sub-sequence the family heads and cultic leaders have led by example; they searched the Law and obeyed what they found. The people too responded to the finding of their leaders and constructed booths and held a festival. The above actions reveal the willingness of the Israelites to align themselves with Torah. Accordingly, what is gained in this textual unit is a sense of the people's obedience to live according to Torah.

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[112] Relevant to this isotopy of discourse is what Weinberg (*Citizen-Temple*, 55) observes about the importance of having a genealogy for the בית אבות "house of the fathers" of the sixth to fourth century BCE. He concludes it was "no minor formality, but was an important attribute" and not having a recognizable family tree could exclude a collective from the community. In this textual unit, 8:13–18, the heads of the fathers are added to the previous unit's list of characters. Weinberg estimates this social institution to encompass roughly 54% of the members of the community, so the appearance of these rulers is significant and reveals willingness on the part of those who led this dominant collective—the בית אבות—within the community to abide by the traditions discovered in the Law of God.

Moreover, this sequence when combined with the previous textual unit provides readers with an understanding that immersion into the Law of God and participation in rich cultic rituals enables the Israelites to rekindle and nurture a sense of identity and national pride.[113] As such, the importance of the separateness of the Israelite people, which is called for in Neh 7:5, is reinforced by the cultic practices—unique to the Israelite people—discerned in Neh 7:72b—8:18.
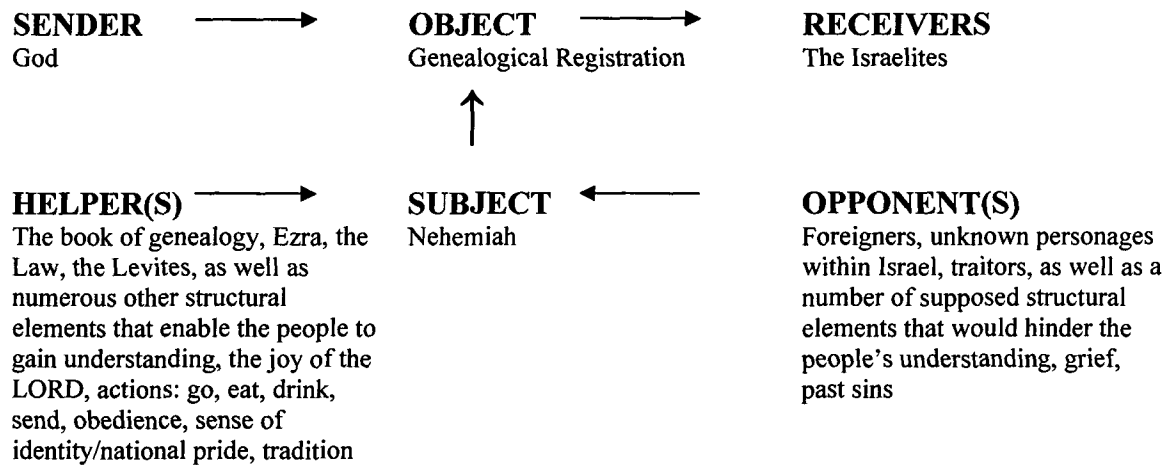
The actantial scheme is:

SENDER ⟶ **OBJECT** ⟶ **RECEIVERS**
God   Genealogical Registration   The Israelites
                        ↑
HELPER(S) ⟶ **SUBJECT** ⟵ **OPPONENT(S)**
The book of genealogy, Ezra, the   Nehemiah   Foreigners, unknown personages
Law, the Levites, as well as   within Israel, traitors, as well as a
numerous other structural   number of supposed structural
elements that enable the people to   elements that would hinder the
gain understanding, the joy of the   people's understanding, grief,
LORD, actions: go, eat, drink,   past sins
send, obedience, sense of
identity/national pride, tradition

Table 5: Actantial Scheme of CS 1/CS 2/DS/PS 1/PS 2

3) PS 3 Function: Attribution

The final statement of function in the performance syntagm is the statement of attribution, which describes the reception of the OBJECT by the RECEIVERS. Nehemiah 9 is loaded with rich semes and action. This final scene opens with the

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[113] Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations," 154, observes that complete narratives can link up with other complete narratives to create larger literary units. So narratives, which are self-contained literary units, may be understood to form parts of larger narrative wholes. Accordingly, Neh 7:72b—8:12 joins with 8:13–18 to reveal a prescriptive means for the cultivation of Israelite identity. These identity forming observances bridge Nehemiah's call to genealogical reckoning (7:5) and subsequent list of genealogies (7:6–72a), with the account of national confession of sin, separation from foreigners, and commitment to observe the commands of the LORD found in Neh 9–10.

Israelites gathering together "in fasting and sackcloth, and with earth upon them" and

confessing "their sins and the iniquities of their fathers" (9:2).[114] This contrite group is

referred to as זֶרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל "the seed of Israel," and they בדל "separate" from them

everybody who is a foreigner.[115] This is the anticipated attribution of the performance

syntagm. Use of "the seed of Israel" instead of "the Israelites" is a destabilization of the

term "the Israelites" that is commonly applied in Nehemiah to the actant group the

Israelites, the RECEIVERS. Furthermore, this destabilization has occurred along the

isotopic axis of ethnic purity which includes the realization of exclusion of non-Israelites

from Israel.[116] Accordingly, it forms the following semantic contradiction: the ideological

seed of Israel vs. the intermingled, disobedient state of Israel.[117]

Greimas extensively developed an elementary structure of signification, known as

the semiotic square,[118] in an effort to show the relations between values in a semantic

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[114] Nehemiah 9:1–5 has sparked many a scholarly discussion. The transition from joy and celebration to fasting and repentance combined with the separation from foreigners can seem liturgically out of place, even odd. Here, Clines (*Ezra*, 189) is typical of scholars, "it seems very strange that an eight-day festival of joy should be followed, after an interval of only one day, by a special day of national mourning." See also Torrey (*Composition*, 31–33), who first drew attention to this perceived difficulty; however, Fensham (*The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 222) counters this position by noting that the Israelites were already weeping and mourning prior to this transition and were instructed to celebrate a feast of joy, and that it would have been natural for them to return to thinking about their sins after the time of this feast.

[115] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 309. Williamson sees no logical reason for the separation of the Israelites from foreigners to be recorded at this point in the narrative. He argues that if this separation originally belonged to a combined Neh 8–9 narrative that separation would have come at the beginning of ch. 8 and not in its present location. He reasons that its present location suggests the recorded gathering is independent of the preceding celebrations. I would counter by noting that a paradigmatic reading of the whole narrative supports the separation in its present location, since ethnic purity is the goal of these gatherings and is the implied result of that which is learned from Torah and grieved over by the people (Neh 7:72b—8:12).

[116] Harrington, "Holiness and Purity," 112–15. Harrington writes that בדל is not explicitly a purity term, but observes that Ezra-Nehemiah makes the most of this term in the sense of physical separation from that which is impure by utilizing it exclusively to show separation from people or their impurity.

[117] Min, *Levitical Authorship*, 108, regards the setting of Neh 8, 9, and 10 to be deliberate and notes that the careful structure of these chapters reveals the following pattern: proclamation of the Law (Neh 8), confession (Neh 9), and renewal of commitment to the covenant (Neh 10). He sees this pattern as revealing the author's ideology. See also Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxxiv, who interprets Neh 8–10 as the climax of the combined work, Ezra-Nehemiah, and reasons that these chapters were structured to form identity and religious resolve.

[118] Patte, *Religious*, 224, summarizes the semiotic square created by Greimas in an accessible manner.

system. This semiotic square system provides a fundamental pattern for organizing

semantic values. Accordingly, a semiotic square is suggested in this text: the Seed of

Israel (S) vs. Foreigners (non S), which involves the following relations of

Impure/Intermingled Israelites (both S and non S) and Pure Foreigners/Proselytes (neither

S nor non S). In this ordered and ideological semantic universe, the semantic term זרע

ישראל "seed of Israel" invokes feelings of national pride and reminds readers that Israel is

a covenant community called out from other nations to live separated to God.[119] The

basis of this separateness is determined by genealogical reckoning. Furthermore, those

who exist in this system of relations in a situation of disobedience are understood to be in

a relation of contradiction to the fundamental order of society. This is a semantic

opposition that is most fully revealed in the restorative and transformational shift the

Israelite people undergo in the Covenant Renewal Account.

The values contained in this relational system may also be drawn out of the

theological prayers offered by Nehemiah (Neh 1) and the Levites (Neh 9), as well as

throughout the book; for instance, we see this signification underscored in 13:27, where

Nehemiah describes the fall of the mighty King Solomon as having been based solely on

his indiscretion towards marrying foreign women.[120] A diagram of this semiotic square is

here offered:

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[119] Min, *Levitical Authorship*, 115, relates the giving of the Law in chs. 8–10 to the story of separation from foreigners in 13:1–3 and reasons that a proper understanding of the Law of God led people from going astray and marrying foreigners.

[120] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 159. Smith-Christopher notes that in Nehemiah readers understand that foreign marriages are primarily a political problem that involves Jewish aristocracy and local government leadership. This is why Nehemiah chose a political example, Solomon, in 13:27 for his illustration. Smith-Christopher follows Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 365) in seeing a web of relationships between the temple aristocracy in Jerusalem and the Tobiads and Sanballats.

S = Seed of Israel ⟷ -S = Foreigners

-S̄ = Pure
Foreigners/
Proselytes

S̄ = Impure/
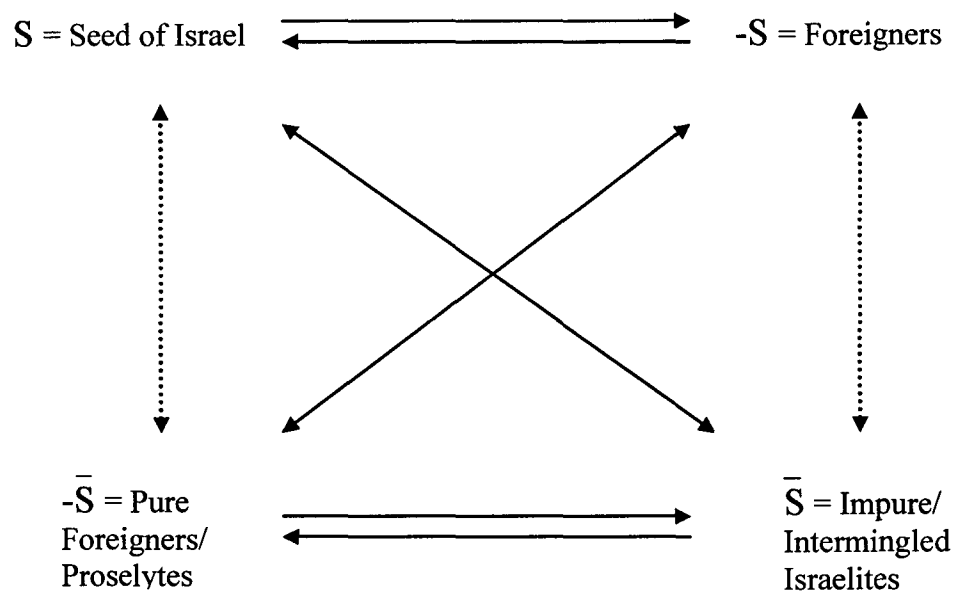Intermingled
Israelites

Table 6: Greimas's Semiotic Square

To conclude, this portion of the analysis exposes Nehemiah as the hero of the narrative that spans 7:5—10:40. Along the axis of communication, he is the actant SUBJECT commissioned by God (SENDER) to assemble the Israelites (the RECEIVERS) for genealogical registration (OBJECT of ethnic purity). Along the axis of volition, he is discovered to have the will to do this. Along the axis of power, he receives many HELPERS to aide him in carrying out this mission. Along the way, it is discovered that the people also have understanding and volition to be obedient to the Law of Moses (7:72b—8:18). As such, the actant RECEIVERS, the Israelites, undergo a transformation of character and allegiance. This shift is actualized in 9:1–3. This scene is the specific attribution of the binary opposition קבץ (Neh 7:5) and בדל (Neh 9:2).

Nehemiah 9:4—10:40 (ET 39) is a record of the remainder of the actions associated with the event of the Covenant Renewal Account. Moreover, since there is no date reference given after the reference in 9:1 until the phrase ביום ההוא, "On that day"

(12:44), the proposed concluding boundary of the Covenant Renewal Account is the

joyous celebration that occurs at the dedication of the wall (12:43).[121] Therefore, the

Covenant Renewal Account contains a number of sub-sequences that further define the

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[121] Very applicable here is what Amit (*Biblical*, 108) has observed regarding the narrator's use of time: "As a rule, the reader should look closely at what scene in the story is the longest, which one enjoys a relatively long time of narration, and the means by which this is achieved." The twenty-fourth day spans chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12 of Nehemiah. This huge chunk of Nehemiah is contrasted sharply by the narrator's minimal reference to the eighth day, which inhabits one lonely phrase found in Neh 8:18. Moreover, there is a noticeable absence of literary markers after this event. These have been replaced with key phrases like ביום ההוא "on that day" (Neh 12:44, 13:1) that connect the content of the final verses of Neh 12:44—13:31 to the furthest boundary of events connected to the Covenant Renewal Account (Neh 12:43). Accordingly, these days found in the seventh month hang loosely against a post-exilic era, but are anchored enough in narrative time for an author to effectively move readers through a theologically constructed history of events. It is more than interesting, however, that there is no specific day mentioned for the dedication of the walls. The simple conclusion for this is the narrator wanted readers to include the oath ceremony and dedication of the walls in the events of the twenty-fourth day, else they would have provided readers with a date for these vastly significant events. The reader is connected to the twenty-fourth day from the eighth day without interruption. Childs (*Introduction*, 630–38) reasoned for a theological motivation behind the final shaping of this account. I propose the following theological motivation. The chronology and subject matter of these events evoke the memory of Solomon's dedication of the temple as recorded in 2 Chr 7. In 2 Chr 7, Solomon, along with a great assembly, held a feast in the seventh month for seven days, which was followed with a sacred assembly on the eighth day. Then, "On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their homes, joyful and glad of heart for the prosperity that the LORD had granted to David and to Solomon and to Israel his people" (7:10, ESV). Interestingly, this passage is the only one in the Old Testament with a similar chronological construction to that of our present text having mention of 1) a great assembly, 2) in the seventh month, 3) which contained a festival week, 4) that ended with a sacred assembly on the eight day, 5) which was followed by a date in the third week of the month, in this case the twenty-third. The construction found in Nehemiah is strikingly similar to this account. Moreover, in both accounts there is joy and a reference to people's homes: in 2 Chr 7, this happens in v. 10, and in our present story the Israelites have gathered from their towns (v. 7:72b). A fuller inspection yet of the account in Chronicles rewards readers with a theological tie that binds Neh 9 with 2 Chr 7. After recording the successful completion of the temple by Solomon, the Chronicler records something unique that happens on the night of the twenty-third—a visit from God, in which God is recorded as having said, "if my people who are called by my name *humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways*, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive *to the prayer* that is made in this place" (2 Chr 7:14–15, ESV, italics mine). These are beautiful and powerful words of promise and restoration for a people caught in a cycle of sinful disobedience and opposition to the ways of God—a people remarkably similar to the Israelites living in Persian-period Yehud during the time of Nehemiah and Ezra. Where the similarities between Neh 9 and 2 Chr 7 really coalesce, then, is when we consider that the twenty-fourth day time reference in Neh 9 is immediately followed by God's covenant people humbling themselves in sackcloth and ashes and fasting, and having repented of their evil ways, specifically their intermingling with foreigners. Even the sceptical must conclude that the similarity between what is promised in 2 Chr 7 on the night of the twenty-third and what is enacted on the day of the twenty-fourth in Neh 9 is no coincidence. The promise of God to bless his covenant people if they walk with him according to his laws is being intentionally called to mind by the author of Neh 9. Moreover, the actions of the people on the day of the twenty-fourth, which include separation from foreigners, praying a penitential prayer, making a written oath to follow God, and holding a ceremony to abide according to the Law of God solidify this observation.

actant the Israelites (the RECEIVERS). These are the penitential prayer 9:5b–37, the

written oath 10:1–40 (ET 9:38–10:39), the commitment to repopulate Jerusalem and

subsequent lists of those who did (11:1–12:26), and the dedication of people, gates, and

walls (12:27–43). The element within these textual units that is most often associated

with the idea of covenant renewal is the written agreement (10:1 [ET 9:38]). This

agreement was entered into by the separated people of Israel who have gained

understanding and a willingness to obey God. As such, these sub-sequences are to be read

as events pursuant to, yet not distinct from, the Covenant Renewal Account.

The completed actantial scheme for the Covenant Renewal Account is:

CS 1 Mandating vs. Acceptance (7:5)
CS 2 Communication vs. Reception (7:5 and the list [vv. 6–72a] + 7:72b—8:8)
DS Function: Arrival of Nehemiah (8:9)
PS 1 Function: Confrontation (8:10)
PS 2 Function: Domination (8:12)
       Sub-sequence about the people who learn obedience (8:13–18)
PS 3 Function: Attribution (9:1–3)
       Sub-sequence: penitential prayer (9:4–37)
       Sub-sequence: oath and commitment to God (10:1–40 [ET 9:38–10:39])
       Sub-sequence: repopulation of Jerusalem and lists (11:1—12:26)
       Sub-sequence: dedication of people, gates and wall (12:27–43)

The following completed actantial model for the Covenant Renewal Account

spans the events narrated in 7:5—10:40:

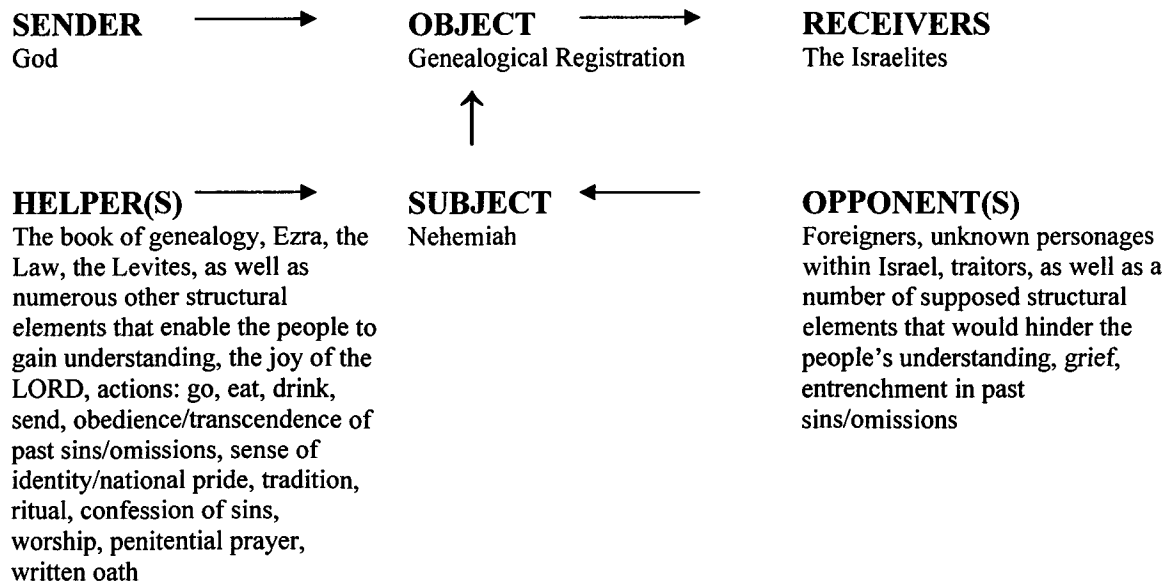|		
SENDER ⟶ God	**OBJECT** ⟶ Genealogical Registration ↑	**RECEIVERS** The Israelites
HELPER(S) ⟶ The book of genealogy, Ezra, the Law, the Levites, as well as numerous other structural elements that enable the people to gain understanding, the joy of the LORD, actions: go, eat, drink, send, obedience/transcendence of past sins/omissions, sense of identity/national pride, tradition, ritual, confession of sins, worship, penitential prayer, written oath	**SUBJECT** ⟵ Nehemiah	**OPPONENT(S)** Foreigners, unknown personages within Israel, traitors, as well as a number of supposed structural elements that would hinder the people's understanding, grief, entrenchment in past sins/omissions

Table 7: Actantial Scheme of CS 1/CS 2/DS/PS 1/PS 2/PS 3

How the Covenant Renewal Account is joined to the broader book of Nehemiah

has just been touched upon and is the subject of the next section of this thesis.

Chapter 3: A Proposed Narrative Structure for Nehemiah

How the previously discerned syntagms of a sequence connect with the broader

book of Nehemiah is an intriguing question that is best answered using Greimas's

revision of Propp's narrative structure for folktale.[122] Greimas's narrative structure

contains three types of sequences: correlated sequences (initial and final sequences of a

story), topical sequences (that form the main topic of the narrative), and sub-sequences

(that complement the correlated or topical sequences).[123] These sequences form the basis

of any narrative structure. The following is a concise summary of these narrative

sequences as re-interpreted by Greimas from the work of Propp:

> A) An initial correlated sequence. A narrative opens with an established social
> order that is in a state of dysfunction and whose citizenry may not be able to
> fulfill its social contract (mandate). The story follows the actor(s) attempts,
> whether successful or not, to repair the original social order and re-establish the
> potential for fulfilling the original contract.

> B) A series of topical sequences. Topical sequences convey how a hero is
> mandated to restore the disturbed social order. This restoration to order comes
> about by means of a fulfilled topical contract. In Russian folk tales the topical
> contract is established in a sub-sequence called the "qualifying test," which relates
> the story of how the hero acquires a helper to aid him/her in carrying out the
> topical contract that is able to counteract whatever disrupts the original social
> order. Propp's "main test" is the attempt to carry out this contract. If the hero is
> successful in fulfilling the topical contract he/she receives a further mandate—
> termed by Propp the "glorifying test"—which, once completed, endows the hero
> with some type of glorification.

> C) Final correlated sequence. If a topical sequence is successful the final
> correlated sequence occurs. In this sequence, the social order/contract of the
> initial sequence is re-established, and the citizenry of this social order is, once
> again, able to carry out their mandate.[124]

The following is an analysis of the book of Nehemiah based on these sequences.

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[122] Calloud, *Structural*, xi. Calloud comments that "narrative structure is a specific way to interrelate semantic units." Accordingly, sequences provide narrative structure that interrelates semantic units enabling readers to intuitively sense levels of coherence within a narrative.
[123] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 37–39.
[124] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 38.

An Initial Correlated Sequence

Nehemiah 1:1 is the beginning of a clearly defined structure for the narrative in question. The opening words of the book, דברי נחמיה בן־חכליה, establish Nehemiah as the author. The opening scene of the book recounts the report Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, brings to Nehemiah about Jerusalem, as well as Nehemiah's passionate reaction to it. In v. 3 Nehemiah learns that those who have returned to Jerusalem are ברעה גדלה ובחרפה והחומה, "in great evil and reproach," and that the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are ruined. Nehemiah's response is one of deep grief and humility before God; he sits down, weeps, mourns for days, fasts, and prays to God (1:4). His prayer is a penitential prayer to his covenant God. Rodney Werline observes that it follows the order: "appeal to YHWH to hear the prayer (vv. 5–6); confession of sins (v. 7); reference to Deuteronomy's promises (vv. 8–9); and a final request for national and personal success (vv. 10–11)."[125] Werline also notes that this prayer reveals that its author did not feel the complete restoration promised in Deuteronomy had been fulfilled, and that this was because of sin.[126]

This opening scene of Nehemiah aligns with Propp's initial sequence. The ideal social order for Israel at this time in its history is the restored community carrying out a renewed contract of faithfulness with God (1:9), but this was not the report (interrogation vs. response[127]) from Jerusalem that Nehemiah received. Instead of glimmers of restoration and visions of faithfulness, Nehemiah is affronted by news of evil and disgrace that blot the covenant community. He confesses to God, חבל חבלנו לך ולא־שמרנו

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[125] Werline, *Penitential*, 53.
[126] Werline, *Penitential*, 56.
[127] Greimas, "Structural Semantics," 173.

את־המצות ואת־החקים ואת־המשפטים אשר צוית את־משה עבדך, "We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the ordinances, nor the statutes which you commanded your servant Moses." The double use of חבל speaks to Nehemiah's assessment of the community's spiritual distortedness. Even a casual glance at this prayer divulges Nehemiah to be a man of passionate faith.[128]

Hanani's account also reports that the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned, and readers get the idea that this information somehow affects the ability of the people to live faithfully before God. Therefore, the book of Nehemiah opens with a disrupted social order (the contract of faithfulness between the Israelites and God is broken), and people living with a *lack* of faithfulness, who exist in a city with diminished walls and gates to separate them from the influence of the nations surrounding them; so they have a hindered capacity to carry out their contract of faithfulness with God.

<div align="center">The Topical Sequences</div>

The "Qualifying Test" Sub-sequence

Nehemiah's last request of God leads readers from the scene of prayer and into the courts of the Persian king. In Neh 1:11, Nehemiah requests that he may prosper and find mercy before this man (the king). This sequence aligns well with the "qualifying test" Propp analyzed. This test "describes how the hero acquires some type of helper ...[so that he will be] in a position to carry out the topical contract which requires him to

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[128] Davies, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 94–5. In accordance with my own view that Nehemiah was written with the intent of shaping faithful hearers, Davies observes that Nehemiah's speech (chs. 1–2) is aimed at those who would listen to it after the events had occurred, and considers covenant membership and purity in marriage relations to be a means of fostering identity, not final barriers.

neutralize whatever disrupts (or threatens to disrupt) the original social order."[129] The

following nine verses (2:1–9) describe how Nehemiah gains the approval of the King of

Persia to go to Jerusalem, along with written letters—an actant HELPER object (Propp's

"helper," possibly even a magical object)—to aid him in his new found task: so ואבננה "I

might rebuild it," which is Nehemiah's topical contract.[130] Thus, Nehemiah procures

documents from the king allowing him to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, which readers

have learned has broken walls and ruined gates; therefore, he is set on a course to

neutralize the city's *lack* of physical separateness from the cities around it. Jerusalem's

lack of physical separateness from the surrounding nations is interpreted as a key

component to the disrupted social contract of faithfulness that characterizes the city's

inhabitants in the initial opening scene of Nehemiah.

It should be noted that there is no hint in these verses, that King Artaxerxes is

aware of any other intention of Nehemiah's other than his plan to rebuild the city of

Jerusalem; moreover, these verses, when contrasted with Nehemiah's moving prayer in

the preceding verses are noticeably void of any spiritual content, let alone spiritual plan

of action that is known to the king. Nehemiah has approval to build the city of his

father's, not necessarily to create a safe place for the spiritual renewal he knows must

happen. The topical contract for the story is posed by Nehemiah to the king with a

cohortative verb, expressing volition and urgency תשלחני אל־יהודה אל־עיר קברות אבתי

ואבננה "send me to Judah to the city of my fathers' graves, that *I might build it*" (2:5).

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[129] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 37.

[130] Wright, "Seeking, Finding and Writing," 277–304. Wright explores passages in Ezra-Nehemiah that contain accounts of seeking-and-finding written traditions. He makes known that the seeking and finding of texts by this community reveals the central role written texts played in the restoration, and postulates that the seeking-and-finding of texts was an administrative procedure that helped solidify the political identity of the community at Jerusalem.

Once accepted this contract to build the city becomes the trajectory of the story that follows. The qualifying test scene ends with Nehemiah with a band of army captains and horsemen travelling to Jerusalem (2:9–10).

The Main Sequence

The main sequence of the topical contract begins with Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem (2:11). Interestingly, the first thing Nehemiah does is to sneak out at night (taking a few men with him) and explore the condition of the walls (2:12a). He tells nobody מה אלהי נתן אל־לבי לעשות לירושלם, "what God had put within his heart to do for Jerusalem" (2:12b). This subversive action reveals that he may have been aware of existing internal corruption within the city. A few verses later he reveals his plan to build the walls to the inhabitants of the city saying, לכו ונבנה את־חומת ירושלם "Come and *let us build* the wall of Jerusalem" (2:17). This is another use of a cohortative verb by Nehemiah. It expresses the topical contract to build the city.

Space does not permit an exhaustive study of the building project. In brief, Nehemiah, along with the help of a dedicated work force, is able to overcome foreign opposition and rebuild the city walls and gates in just fifty-two days. This story of rebuilding is framed in report cycles that are patterned around Nehemiah's exchanges with his enemies. By 4:17 (ET 4:23), readers sense that the main sequence is nearing completion. However, an unexpected interruption in the pattern of report cycles and wall building happens in 5:1.[131] There is a great outcry from the people that ushers readers into

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[131] Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 94. Kidner observes that as the walls near completion a new menace of hunger and exploitation is revealed. This is a more subtle problem underlying Israelite society that threatens the structure of the community itself. Fensham (*The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 191) writes that the gravity of this problem is exposed by the unusual reference to the wives who joined in making this

a series of stories that bring to light strife, opposition and treachery within the community.[132] These are sub-sequences to the main sequence of wall-building that reveal impurity within this community and function as foreshadowing the events that will follow Nehemiah's wall-building mission. Here, the faithful actions of Nehemiah are juxtaposed against the greedy, the unjust, and the profane actions of certain unfaithful members of the community—many of whom are in positions of power.

The "Glorifying Test" Sub-sequence

Following the aforementioned sub-sequences is a final statement about the completion of the wall (6:15–16). This brief statement is immediately followed by three verses (all beginning with disjunctive clauses) that, again, break into the narrative and provide new information about the state of affairs within the community (6:17–19). The information gleaned in these verses is poignant. Readers learn that many in Judah are בעלי שבועה "bound by oath" to Tobiah, the חרי יהודה "the nobles of Judah" sent many letters to Tobiah reporting Nehemiah's deeds, and Tobiah sent letters to frighten Nehemiah. It is also learned that reports of Tobiah's טובתיו "good deeds" were given to Nehemiah. Naturally, this information jolts readers, who are aware that Tobiah is an enemy of Israel (4:15; 6:1). As such, Tobiah is the embodiment of foreign influence that leads to impurity of mind and body.

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complaint. He notes that this reference to woman complaining stands out in a book where women are very much in the background.

[132] In Neh 5:1–13 חרים "elders" and סגנם "rulers" are implicated in charging unjust interest and impoverishing their kin; in 5:14–19 the former governors are said to have laid heavy burdens on the people; and in 6:1–14, readers learn of a plot to kill Nehemiah in the temple by Tobiah, Sanballat, Geshem, Nodiah the prophet, and Shemaiah the secret informer.

Nehemiah's response to the above information is to man the city's gates with guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to extend the duties of these guards to the front porches of their own houses, and to enforce set times (during the light of day) when the gates were to be opened (7:1–3). He is hoping to stem the tide of information going in and out of Jerusalem. Then, another disjunctive clause breaks into the narrative: "Now the city was spread out and large, but the people within it were few and no houses had been built" (7:4). This clause is an explanatory disjunctive[133] that supplies further information about the state of Jerusalem: there are few people and few houses that have been rebuilt. The import of this upon readers is knowledge that, despite Nehemiah's best efforts to guard the city, the conditions within the city do not favour these measures being effective enough to eradicate the existing treachery.

However, Nehemiah is not done with his measures of societal reform. Nehemiah 7:5 brings awareness to readers of an additional mission. Like his first mission to build the wall (2:17), which was accompanied with a God-felt compulsion, this mission has also been given to Nehemiah by God. Nehemiah says, "God put into my heart: 'I will gather the nobles and the officials, and the people for genealogical reckoning'" (7:5a). The information contained in this verse is not to be overlooked. The first time God placed something into Nehemiah's heart it was the inspirational command to build the city, beginning with the walls (2:5, 17);[134] the accomplishment of which was the potential

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[133] Lambdin, *Introduction*, 164. Lambdin notes that explanatory or parenthetical uses of the disjunctive clause break into the main narrative and supply new information that is relevant to the narrative.

[134] It could be reasoned that what God put in Nehemiah's heart was only one thing, to gather the people with the result of genealogical reckoning. Thus Nehemiah's saying that he did not tell anyone of this aspect of his mission in 2:12 would foreshadow the events of ch. 7. Accordingly, one wonders how anyone in the city could not have known about his plans to rebuild the city when Nehemiah's stately arrival, papers from the King detailing his construction plans (papers which governors within the region have seen), and apparent widespread knowledge of his desire to bring good to the city are considered. This seems to be a solid argument in favour of one God placed mission extant to his plans to build. However, Nehemiah's

elimination of Jerusalem's misfortune; now, Nehemiah is going to gather the people for the purpose of a purifying enrolment—a mission that reflects Nehemiah's passion for spiritual matters expressed in the first chapter (1:4–11), and which has the potential of creating reform based on Israel's unique identity.

In the previous chapter it was noted that 7:5 is the beginning of a new isotopic discourse of ethnic purity, it is now to be observed that this latest mandate from God to Nehemiah (and consequently from Nehemiah to the people) can be understood to be Propp's *re-quest* that leads to the hero's glorification. Propp notes that as soon as "the hero has been successful [in this case, when the wall building is accomplished] he receives still another mandate which, once carried out, provides some type of glorification for the hero."[135] Interestingly, Neh 7:5 is the last instance of first person narration until Neh 12:31.[136] And Neh 12:31 is located in the final scene of the content associated with the Covenant Renewal Account (7:5—12:43). As such, first person autobiographical narration forms a narrative inclusion that contains the events of Nehemiah's glorifying test. This observation suggests Nehemiah employed a literary device—use of narrative style—to tell this part of his story of good will.[137]

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disclosure "I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem" is recorded within his two cohortative pleas to rebuild and it does come on the heals of his secretive night mission to explore the walls, so the text seems to make Nehemiah's plans to rebuild the secretive mission.

[135] Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 37.

[136] I would reason that use of narration techniques, such as switching from a first person to a third person record, along with the structuring of content around lists and historical information, was a literary device used during the time of this text's composition. Accordingly, Talmon (*Literary*, 361) notes that the autobiographical genre, which Nehemiah often writes in, may have been an innovation of the post-exilic period. Torrey (*Ezra Studies*, 248) reminds us of how all-encompassing the idea of a Chronicler (whether figure or editorial group) has been on Ezra-Nehemiah study. He considers the first person narratives in Neh 1–6 to come from the hand of Nehemiah, but argues against first person narration being the rule for determining authorship. He reasons that the Chronicler is responsible for the interpolated section, 7:70—10:40, as well as the first person narratives in 12:27—13:31, which were "simply Ezra (i.e., the Chronicler) under another name."

[137] It is commonly understood that Nehemiah's first person memoirs were the means he employed for his self-glorification; however, it may be that Nehemiah crafted the text of the Covenant Renewal Account

Immediately following this revelation of mission to gather the people, Nehemiah finds another actant helper object, "the book of the genealogy," (7:5b which contained the list of returnees, 7:6–72a). This list is a literary means of tying the present Israelite community to the past community of returnees; it also serves the function of providing a basis for the enrolment of the people according to families, and reveals the caution exercised in ascribing to members of the community citizenship, who could not prove their familial ties.

The people Nehemiah is mandated to assemble gather together and ask for the Law. They weep and grieve its demands at first, but are encouraged to find joy in their LORD. Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites are helpers who aid the people in reconciling their belief systems. They are gathered with the good intent of being reckoned. The need, however, is more than just that of an un-reckoned people, it is that of an impure people.

The glorifying test has initiated the beginning of the reintegration and the restitution of original order in society.[138] In this sequence readers are able to discern that Nehemiah's mandate to gather the people for the purpose of genealogical reckoning has led the community in a month long journey towards spiritual renewal. Along the way they have immersed themselves in the Law of God (7:72b—8:12) and have re-learned what it is to obey God in the keeping of the Law, rituals and traditions unique to the Israelite people (8:13–18). In accordance with the dominant theme of purity that spans the Covenant Renewal Account and encapsulates this journey, the people of God have also purified themselves by confessing their sins, separating themselves from foreigners (9:1–3), praying a penitential prayer of confession and hope (9:4–37), committing

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with the intent of showing the faithfulness of others who worked alongside him, and settled on letting the transformation of the community itself testify to the overwhelming good he had accomplished for it.
[138] Greimas, "Structural Semantics," 175.

themselves to following God and Torah in a meticulous written agreement (10:1–40 [ET 9:38–10:39]), vowing to repopulate the city (11:1), and in dedicating themselves, along with the gates and the walls (12:30).

Space does not permit a full treatment of Greimas's reduction of Propp's categories of function; however, a few key observations from these are warranted at this time. The first is found in Propp's category of deception vs. submission.[139] Propp observes that in the final part of the story the recognition of the hero is contrasted with the revelation of the traitor. In this locus the hero is often a non-revealed hero throughout much of the story, whereas the traitor is masked, disguised. Greimas notes, "To this camouflaged manifestation of the hero corresponds, at the end of the narrative, his transfiguration …he manifests his veritable nature of the hero."[140] Savvy readers pick up on Nehemiah's righteousness in his actions and prayer recorded in Neh 1, but these aspects of this burly and brash governor tend to get pushed to the back of readers' minds by the end of the wall building enterprise. Yet, Nehemiah is certainly a spiritual hero of the faith and is recognized as such in the end of the narrative, beginning with the ascription 12:47a "In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, a portion for each day," which elevates Nehemiah to the status of the famed Zerubbabel. This recognition continues through his recollection of good deeds and calls for remembrance before God, such as his "so I cleansed them from everything foreign" (13:30a). Mark Boda has rightly drawn attention

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[139] Greimas, "Structural Semantics," 173–4. The observation regarding deception vs. submission comes form Greimas's section on *Alienation and Reintegration.*

[140] Greimas, "Structural Semantics," 173.

to this shift in the characterization of Nehemiah that occurs in the second half of

Nehemiah noting, "Nehemiah is transformed from wall builder to religious reformer."[141]

A Final Correlated Sequence

It seems that Nehemiah's rebuilding and reforms have created a space for the

Israelites to carry out their original social order of faithfulness. Against this backdrop of

reform Neh 13 is a wet blanket.[142] In these final verses readers learn of how deep the

treachery had been and how shameful the community had acted. The influential priest

Eliashib had been aligned with the enemy Tobiah and even provided him with a large

room in the temple, displacing its vessels (which are signs of restoration hope [vv. 4–9]).

Readers discover that the temple and Levites were not cared for properly (vv. 10–13),

that foreign trade practices were the norm (vv. 15–22), as was intermarriage with

foreigners (vv. 23–30).

However, against this sullen tapestry of treachery and shame Nehemiah waxes

faithful: he throws Tobiah's furniture out of the temple dwelling,[143] restores the vessels

and has the rooms cleansed, he rebukes the rulers and provides for the temple and

Levites, he rebukes the nobles of Judah and restores Sabbath rest, and he contends with

those who have married foreigners and cleanses the priesthood of foreign relationships.

Readers intuitively sense that Nehemiah's actions—beginning with the rebuilding of the

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[141] Boda, "Redaction," 54. In this thorough and fascinating study of Neh 7:6—12:26 Boda proposes that all the content contained within 7:6—12:26 is a record, or series of records, that Nehemiah found in 7:5.

[142] Eskenazi, *Prose*, 123. Eskenazi reasons that the end of Ezra-Nehemiah is a coda that follows the previous content like a late addition that functions as an appendix.

[143] Greimas, "Structural," 174. Greimas observes in Propp's episodic unit, treachery vs. misfortune, that "treachery corresponds [to] the punishment of the traitor but misfortune is liquidated, in a redundant manner, by the restitution of the Good to the Community at first, and the victory over the traitor and by the compensation to the hero later, by marriage [restitution]." Accordingly, the preeminent Tobiah is revealed to be unfaithful and Nehemiah is shown to be faithful to God.

wall and ending with these matters of purification—have restored Jerusalem to a safe

place for societal reform. The people who were living with a lack of faithfulness in an

unprotected city and with a hindered capacity to carry out their contract of faithfulness

with God now have every opportunity to return to a faithful way of living. Nehemiah has

rebuilt the city and led its inhabitants in spiritual reform. As such, Nehemiah is the hero

who establishes good for the community and brings the society back to a place where it

can function according to its original social order of faithfulness.

Summary of the Analysis

It has been shown that there is an initial and final correlating scene in Nehemiah,

as well as sequences that align well with each of Propp's three tests that comprise a

Topical Sequence. There is the qualifying test to gain reception of the adjutant (written

documents to rebuild the city). This is followed by the main test: a contract "to build" the

city; the consequence of which is the liquidation of the misfortune (non-separateness of

the city which is understood to have been preventing faithful living). And finally, there is

the glorifying test: a re-quest mandated to Nehemiah from God to lead the people in a

purifying enrolment, which brings about the consequence of his recognition (as a man of

faith).

One of the aims of Russian Formalism is the disentanglement of the dominant

elements constituting a piece of art.[144] This methodological movement sought simplicity

of plot and this is certainly evidenced in the analysis just offered. Propp's analysis when

applied to the whole of Neh 1–13 reveals the proposed structure found in Neh 7–10

(along with the events of the twenty-fourth day pursuant to these) to be an intricate part

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[144] Jameson, *Prison House*, 43.

of the overall "meaning effect" produced by the book, which is the communication of

Nehemiah's success in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem—including both the physical

separation of the city and the spiritual separation of its inhabitants from the surrounding

nations. This rebuilding of the city constitutes a restoration of Israelite society in

Jerusalem to its original order, however, this is not explicitly recorded in the words of the

text of Nehemiah, yet it is what the text is saying.[145] This analysis brings a renewal of

perception to the reader that helps the reader see the complex world of Nehemiah in a

new and simplistic light—the restoration to separation and purity of the Israelite people

in Jerusalem.[146] Accordingly, reading Nehemiah's Covenant Renewal Account mindful

of the unifying level of coherence of ethnic purity is evidenced to be an accurate reading

of the book, since this account joins agreeably with the rest of the book of Nehemiah.

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[145] Via, *Kerygma*, 13. Via refers to a hiddenness or unconscious that joins to the structuralist theory of structure and references Heidegger (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 136) in stating that a part of the goal of interpreting texts is to reveal "what is said in the text but not in its words."
[146] Jameson, *Prison House*, 52.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

Summary

The goal of this thesis was to apply a narrative structural analysis to the Covenant

Renewal Account in Nehemiah to ascertain if there is an underlying "deep" structure that

connects this account to the broader story of Nehemiah. By employing a narrative

structural analysis, it was proven that there is an underlying structure for the Covenant

Renewal Account. The narrative trajectory of this structure is established in Neh 7:5,

where a quest for the purity of the Israelite people that spans Neh 7:5—12:43 is

embarked upon by Nehemiah.

At the outset of this analysis, a search for binary oppositions and canonical

functions was undertaken. The binary opposition between קבץ (Neh 7:5) and בדל (Neh

9:2) was discovered to be a leading binary opposition for this text. These verbs (קבץ and

בדל) form the isotopy, "ethnic purity," which is the unifying level of coherence

established for the Covenant Renewal Account. It was also shown that a number of

canonic narrative statements normative to "story" are fulfilled in this discourse. As well,

the list of returnees, commonly understood to be a basis for genealogical registration, was

discovered to contain information pertinent to the genealogical reckoning process that is

semantically and syntagmatically connected to Nehemiah's mandate to reckon the

Israelites and the separation that occurs in Neh 9:2.

Moreover, a fresh reading of Neh 7:4 was offered that views treachery, not the

repopulation of Jerusalem, as the central concern of the presenting story in Neh 6–7.

Here, the observation of few people and few houses was understood to both foreshadow

the repopulation account and function as a literary bridge joining the stories of

Nehemiah's betrayal (Neh 6:1–14), Tobiah's treacherous grip on Jerusalem (6:17–19), and Nehemiah's measures to insulate the city from those who did not seek its good (7:1–3) with his volition to *begin* a purification of the people by means of genealogical reckoning (7:5). Finally, Ezra, whose actions are mostly confined to Neh 8,[147] was understood to be a supportive aid for Nehemiah in his quest for purity.

In the second part of this analysis, a Proppian approach to Nehemiah was offered. It was here that the unifying level of coherence for the second half of Nehemiah—purity—was seen most clearly. It was found that the book of Nehemiah opens with a disrupted social order (a contract of faithfulness with God that is broken). The people in Jerusalem were living in "evil and shame" with diminished walls and gates to separate them from the influence of the nations surrounding them. In response to this brokenness, Nehemiah undertook a heroic quest to rebuild the city of God.

In the qualifying test Nehemiah received written documents to aid him in this quest. The topical contract "to build" the wall was embarked upon and he travelled to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the city amidst foreign opposition. Right when readers expect the proclamation that the walls have been rebuilt chs. 5–7 break into the narrative and overshadow the joy of the moment. By Neh 7 readers have learned that the wall has indeed been rebuilt; however, the focus of readers has been drawn into the underlying story of Jerusalem—a story of treachery and impurity. The analysis revealed that as Nehemiah navigated these treacherous waters he was given a second mandate from God—this time to קָבַץ the Israelites for a genealogical registration. Like the previous mission to build (2:17), he accepts this mission with the same volition as the first (in both

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[147] In Neh 12:36 Ezra leads a processional at the wall dedication ceremony.

cases there is the usage of a cohortative of resolve). Thus he embarks on the story's

glorifying test: a re-quest mandated from God to lead the people in a purifying enrolment,

which would bring about the consequence of his recognition (as a man of faith).

Since Nehemiah was a warrior figure and the temple cult was steeped in sacrilege

it became necessary for a new leader, Ezra, aided by a new office, the teaching Levite, to

help Nehemiah fulfill his goal of ethnic purification. These helpers instructed the people

so that they could understand the Law of God (8:1–12), obey its precepts (8:13–18), and

even come to call it בספר תורת יהוה אלהיהם "the Law of the LORD *their* God." Like

Nehemiah, Ezra came from the Diaspora to rekindle an identity that seems to have been

lost by those who had previously returned. Once the people *understood* their calling and

identity it became essential that they בדל from the impurity they were in and set

themselves apart for their covenant partner, Yahweh. This purifying action is followed

with the second longest penitential prayer in the Old Testament. This was the time of

Israel's restoration and separation from the nations around them.

Finally, Nehemiah has often been thought of as brash and assertive. He is a

Persian Diasporic hero with a top-down style of leadership; however, rather than use his

strong personality for his own gain (as so many in Jerusalem did), he risked much—a

good job, the esteem of those who knew his pedigree בן־חכליה "son of Hacaliah," and his

personal safety—to travel to a city in ruins and give his strength to rebuilding it.

Childs reasoned that Ezra-Nehemiah "should not be held to the standards of

'modern historical writing', but rather, the material ought to be viewed with the

understanding that it has been structured and consciously arranged to transmit some

authorial purpose."[148] For a community living amongst those who did not care for the

sacred things of God, which was beginning to mend its relationship with their God, one

potential "authorial purpose" behind the book of Nehemiah is that it was constructed to

be a kind of heroic advice tale—akin to modern folktales—that inspired readers. As such,

the story of Nehemiah would have been cherished as sacred literature that nurtured in its

readers a passion for heroic resolve to live upright for the community of faith and their

covenant God.

Brash and assertive, yes—are these always bad?—yet also vigilant, working day

and night, unwashed with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other (4:17); resilient

in the face of adversity (chs. 5, 6, and 7); resourceful, notably in spy-catching (7:3);

tactical, functioning within his service to the king to help restore the temple and

community; tough; and devoted to a just cause and to his God—Nehemiah is exactly the

person this entrenched community needed to get unstuck, renewed, and purified (12:30).

Overall, Propp's analysis, when applied to the whole of Nehemiah, revealed the

proposed structure found in Neh 7–10 to be an intricate part of the overall "meaning

effect" produced by the book. Accordingly, the second half of Nehemiah (7–13) joins

agreeably to the first half of Nehemiah (1–6) by means of the story's hero, Nehemiah,

entering into a new quest for the purity of the Israelite people.

Implications

This analysis affects future Ezra-Nehemiah studies by showing that the Covenant

Renewal Account and overarching story of Nehemiah have narrative coherence, which is

based on the binary connection between קבץ and בדל, and the discovery of the theme of

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[148] Childs, *Introduction*, 635.

treachery and impurity that undergirds Neh 6–13. The following is a brief summary of these implications.

The Connection between קבץ and בדל

Nehemiah's heart felt compulsion to rekindle a sense of ethnic nationalism and peculiar identity through genealogical reckoning came at a time of society rebuilding and of covenant disobedience—the once separate people of God were intermingled with the foreigners around them. However, before this people separated themselves from the foreigners around them and renewed their commitment to Torah they needed to first understand the demands of Torah and build momentum in obedience to Torah. In order for this to happen the people of God were assembled and confronted by the reality of their rich heritage and ethnic privilege. This manifested in the people a willingness to understand the Law of God and to obey its requirements. Accordingly, the people קבץ before they בדל and they בדל before they agree to עשׂה "do" all that is written in the Law of God (10:30 ET 29).

Narrative Coherence

It has been shown that it is possible to read Neh 7 and 8–10 without attempting to reconstruct the received shape of the text or view its pieces only as distinct units. Through detection of an underlying structure and an isotopy of discourse—ethnic purity—the Covenant Renewal Account is understood to be central to one of the over-arching themes of Nehemiah, treachery and impurity. This theme is evidenced in the second half of Nehemiah (7–13) by the multiple structural links between the Covenant

Renewal Account and Neh 12:27—13:31 (themes of treachery, purity, the purification of the people, and Nehemiah as one who organizes purification to name a few). Moreover, Neh 13 has always provoked the question, Why evoke such feelings in an audience if you are telling them that the restoration has happened? The answer to this question is you would only do this if you were punctuating the previous dysfunctional status of the community, return to order, and potential for living faithfully that has been restored to the community by its hero. Accordingly, a Proppian analysis of the book of Nehemiah revealed a potential theological motivation: the restoration of a disrupted social order of faithfulness. This motivation was found to be evidenced most clearly in the penitential prayer offered in the Covenant Renewal Account (9:5–37), which is intimately connected with the ideology of Nehemiah (as understood in his prayer, Neh 1:5–11) and the actions of those who claim to be "the seed of Israel" (9:2, 8).

Treachery and Impurity as a Hermeneutical Key to Interpreting Neh 7:4

The question of where one places emphasis in their reading of Nehemiah is brought to light in this analysis. A close reading of the text reveals impurity to be what plagues the city of Jerusalem. However, if readers make repopulation of the city of Jerusalem the sole focus of Neh 7:4, they will diminish the many accounts of treachery, shameful dealings and evidences of foreign pollution that existed within this fragmented and maladjusted society that Nehemiah was seeking to bring good to (Neh 5:1–5, 15; 6:10–14, 17–19). Nehemiah 7:4 is most fully a commentary on the lack of good people— who could help stem the tide of evil that has been washing through Jerusalem—residing within the once holy city, not merely of the number of inhabitants within the city. To read

Neh 7:4 in light of this theme treachery and impurity is to see the contrast between the actions of evil doers who did not care for the well being of Jerusalem to the actions of the righteous who desired for this city to be holy yet again; it is to see crumbling walls and spirits sharply contrasted with renewed fortifications and spiritual zeal.

Besides these three specific implications, the results of this analysis also suggest that future study of the distinct literary units combined in Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 1–6; 7–10, Neh 1–13), as well as an in-depth analysis of the compositional ordering of these, would be beneficial.

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