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AUTHOR VERSUS SPEAKER: AN APPROACH FOR EXEGESIS OF
REDEMPTIVE HISTORICAL SUMMARIES IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

BY
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ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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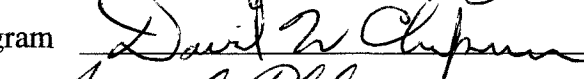
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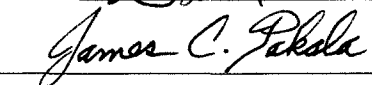
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ABSTRACT OF
AUTHOR VERSUS SPEAKER: AN APPROACH FOR EXEGESIS OF
REDEPTIVE HISTORICAL SUMMARIES IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE
by Cheryl Eaton

Redemptive historical summaries, sometimes called historical surveys or traditions, are instances of repetition in the Bible that summarize narrative accounts of God's interaction with his people. These instances of repetition summarize redemptive history in that they hit its high points. The summaries differ depending on the purpose for which redemptive history is being recounted.

Redemptive historical summaries that occur in biblical narrative, as opposed to freestanding summaries, such as those that occur in the Psalms, can be instances of narratives within narratives. In exegeting these summaries, a distinction must be made between the two communicative acts at work: that of the editor/author to his audience and that of the character to his audience.

This study focuses on the nature of the redemptive historical summaries couched in the narrative frames of Neh 9:1-10:40 and Acts 6:8-8:3, examining their structure, content, and purpose within the pericopes and the purpose of those pericopes within their larger narratives. The redemptive historical prayer of the Levites extends from the creation to the return of the exiles, while the redemptive historical speech of Stephen extends from the call of Abraham to the execution of Jesus.

This study uses C. John Collins' discourse-oriented literary methodology, distinguishing between the author/editor and speaker, and draws on the intertextual methodology of Richard Hays and the New Testament Use of the Old Testament

approach of Gregory Beale and D. A. Carson to examine aspects of the hortatory peaks of the summaries.

Findings include: (1) characteristics of narrative are exhibited by both the Hebrew of Neh 9:5b-10:1, and the Greek of Acts 7:2-53; (2) both the prayer and the speech have peaks that are separate from those of the narrative frameworks in which they are couched; and (3) just as the editor of Ezra-Nehemiah and Luke are distinct from the characters they portray in their written work, so does their communicative intent toward their readers differ from that of the characters to their audiences.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In Nehemiah 9, the subjugated remnant of Israel gathers in Jerusalem before God in sackcloth and earth, and, lead by a group of Levites, recount to him the history of his mighty acts on behalf of his people and their repeated rebellion. Having reminded him of his faithfulness and fortifying their faith in the retelling, they renew a covenant with him as they set out to rebuild their once-great nation. In recounting this event, the storyteller is encouraging the faith and perseverance of his Jewish audience, who struggle with the same tendency toward faithlessness as did their predecessors in the story, and who look toward the fulfillment of the promise of a Davidic king.

In Acts 7, an eloquent Hellenistic Jewish Christian stands before the Sanhedrin and recounts the history of God's presence with his people, fulfillment of his promises to them and work through his chosen servants to save them. He recounts Israel's chronic blindness to God's purposes, its stubbornness and idolatry. He answers charges that he has blasphemed the Law and Temple with counter charges that the Jewish leaders, stiff-necked and idolatrous as their forbearers, have made the Law and Temple an end in themselves and have murdered the one to whom the Law and Temple pointed. In recounting this event, the storyteller is explaining to his largely Gentile audience how the story came to them and is reinforcing their identity as God's people, even in the face of persecution and death.

Both accounts contain redemptive historical summaries, instances of repetition in the Bible that summarize narrative accounts of God's interaction with his people. These instances of repetition that are tucked into the story of the people of God are microcosms

of that story. They differ depending on the purposes for which redemptive history is being recounted.

The scholarship on the Covenant Renewal account in Ezra-Nehemiah and the Stoning of Stephen in Acts of the Apostles is vast. The books have been examined from the perspectives of historical, literary and rhetorical criticism.¹ Studies have included attempts to determine the plausibility of the accounts they contain, the sources from which they originated, and their relationship to other, similar works.

This study will focus on the nature of the redemptive historical summaries couched in the narrative frames of Neh 9:1-10:40 and Acts 6:8-8:3, examining their structure, content, and purpose within the pericopes and the purpose of those pericopes within their larger narratives. The redemptive historical prayer in Nehemiah extends from the creation to the return of the exiles, while the redemptive historical speech in Acts extends from the call of Abraham to the execution of Jesus. For the purposes of this study, interaction will be limited to previous research related to this focus.

The Literature Review will focus on monographs that overlap with my research topic, but I will also sample a few well-known commentaries, leaving others for their fuller discussions within the chapters. Related research for Ezra-Nehemiah includes that of leading critical commentator H. G. M. Williamson, with his examination of the arrangement of the material for purpose, Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, with her literary approach to the material, Michael W. Duggan, who built on Eskenazi's work and expanded it, and Mark J. Boda, whose study concentrates on the redemptive historical

¹ For a detailed survey of scholarship on Ezra-Nehemiah, see Michael W. Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal in Ezra-Nehemiah (Neh 7:72B-10:40): An Exegetical, Literary and Theological Study*, SBL Dissertation Series 164 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 1-56. For an overview of scholarship on Acts of the Apostles, see Marion Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context and Concerns* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press: 1994), 1-11.

material. Work in Acts of the Apostles related to the present study includes that of leading commentators F. F. Bruce and I. Howard Marshall, John Kilgallen, with his literary approach, Marion Soards, who examines its structure and relationship to the Septuagint, and Heinz-Werner Neurdorfer, who examines its context and purpose.

Related research on Ezra-Nehemiah

The structure and form the redemptive historical material takes in Nehemiah 9 has been much debated. As Williamson observes, it is difficult to classify. “The passage ... poses problems of classification even with regard to so basic a question as whether it is prose or poetry.”²

Williamson characterizes the prayer, which he contends was uttered by the Levites, as “rhythmic liturgical language,”³ but notes that the bulk of it functions as a narrative: “...[I]t is clear that the whole of the following historical retrospect (vv. 6-31) is intended to serve as a substantiation [to v. 5] in *narrative* style.”⁴ He notes its similarity to Psalm 106 and Isaiah 63-64, and speculates that all originated as laments that arose among those left behind in Judah after the Babylonian exile.⁵

Williamson views the structure of the summary material as divided into five sections, each featuring an aspect of God’s character: creation (9:6), which highlights his supremacy; Abraham (7-8), which highlights his righteousness; Exodus (9-11), which highlights his salvific acts; wilderness period (9:12-21), which highlights his faithfulness; and the land (9:22-31), which highlights his grace.⁶ Williamson points to the cyclical

² H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 306.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., my italics.

⁵ H G M. Williamson, “Laments at the Destroyed Temple: Excavating the Biblical Text Reveals Ancient Jewish Prayers,” *Bible Review* 6 (August 1990): 16-17, 44.

⁶ Ibid., 307-08.

pattern of the final section as mirroring the downward spiral of rebellion and judgment in Israel's history from the time of the judges to the Babylonian exile.⁷ He sees masterful editing at work in the larger pericope of Nehemiah 8-10,⁸ calling it, "a carefully constructed compilation around the theme of covenant renewal,"⁹ and the key to the purpose of Ezra-Nehemiah:

There can be little doubt that Neh 8-10 is to be seen as the climax of the work in this form and that these chapters were intended by the editor to function paradigmatically within his own later community as it struggled to maintain its identity and sense of religious purpose.¹⁰

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi also sees Nehemiah 8-10 as the climax of Ezra-Nehemiah, a story in three movements of a community's endeavor to build a house of God.¹¹ She likewise divides that section into three gatherings of the community, marked by the repetition of *qāṭṭ* (gather) in 8:1, 8:13 and 9:1 and the progression of commitment on the part of the people that culminates in the covenant renewal of 10:1-40.¹²

She views the structure of the redemptive historical prayer as divided into two major sections, staging (9:5) and "prayer/pledge" (9:6-10:40), and divides the second section into four smaller units: "The foundational paradigm: The relation between God and Israel" (9:6-10); "The historical retrospective" (9:11-31); "The present crisis" (9:32-37); and "The community response: the pledge" (10:1-40).¹³

⁷ Ibid., 315.

⁸ Williamson contends that each of the three chapters that make up the section are of "independent literary and historical origin," with Ezra as the most likely author of Neh 8, Ezra 7-8 and 9-10. Ibid., 276; xxxi-ii.

⁹ Ibid., xxxiv.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1988), 175.

¹² Ibid., 97.

¹³ Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, "Nehemiah 9-10: Structure and Significance," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 3:9 (2001): 12, <http://www.purl.org/jhs>.

Eskenazi suggests the prayer was an antiphonal recitation led by the Levites, and cites as examples Ezra 3:11 and Neh 8:5-7.¹⁴ Understanding the prayer, she says, is “crucial for perceiving the concerns” of the postexilic Israel.¹⁵

The prayer asserts that postexilic Israel is now reclaiming its past but with a difference. It says, (to paraphrase): “We are not like our ancestors. We would not despise God’s gifts when we received promised plentitude (which we, by the way, have not as yet seen). In fact, we prove ourselves loyal to God, even in adversity, and are grateful for the little we have, even in adversity.”¹⁶

Duggan, like Eskenazi, divides the Covenant Renewal account into three sections for the three gatherings that occurred in the seventh month: the first day (8:1-12); the second (8:13-18); and the 24th (9:1-10:40).¹⁷ Because of this, Duggan begins the Covenant Renewal account at 7:72b: וַיָּגַע הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעָרֵיהֶם (And when the seventh month had come, the people of Israel were in their towns).¹⁸ He contends that: (1) 11:1 is a sequel to 7:72a; (2) 7:72a serves as a “summary statement” to the previous pericope; (3) the change in the repetition of 7:72a from כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (all Israel) to בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (people of Israel) in 7:72b indicates a generational jump; and (4) 7:72b gives the temporal setting (seventh month) for the events that follow.¹⁹

Duggan sees the prayer as voiced by the Levites, and believes that while Eskenazi’s antiphonal theory is possible, the text offers no conclusive evidence.²⁰ He, like Williamson and others, notes the prayer has characteristics of both prose and poetry,

¹⁴ Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 100.

¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷ Ibid., 73.

¹⁸ Unless otherwise noted, English text throughout is ESV; Hebrew text is BHS; LXX is *Septuaginta* (Rahlfs); NT Greek text, Nestle-Aland. Hebrew texts cited follow Hebrew Bible versification.

¹⁹ Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal*, 71-72.

²⁰ Ibid., 162.

and he refers to it as a psalm.²¹ He divides it into two major sections: “God and Israel throughout the past” (9:6-31) and “God and Israel in the present” (9:32-37). He divides the first section into four smaller units: “YHWH’s foundational activity” (9:6-8); “The wilderness period” (9:9-21); and “The occupation and subsequent life in the land” (9:22-31).²² He further divides “The wilderness period” into two units: “The era of harmony” (9:9-15) and “The people’s rebellion and God’s mercy” (9:16-21), and notes the repetition of God’s provision in each section: guiding pillars of cloud and fire (9:12, 19); instruction by commandments (9:13-14) and Spirit (9:20a); and bread and water (9:15a, 20b).

Duggan calls the prayer the “theological summit”²³ of the book:

Moreover, the prayer’s conceiving of history in terms of successive cycles of rebellion, retribution, mercy and renewed life ultimately makes sense of the manner in which the book ends ... The book’s final episodes (13:4-31) illustrate a variety of failures to keep the covenant commitment (cf. 10:29-40) and thereby confirm the necessity of history’s continuing to unfold under the aegis of God’s justice and mercy as depicted in the Levite’s prayer.²⁴

Boda sees the prayer as a form that evolved from the lament tradition, and likens it to Psalm 106, especially, but also to Daniel 9, Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 1. He dates it, along with all but Ezra 9, to the exilic period.²⁵ Boda notes that while these texts are similar to the laments found in the Psalms, they also include elements of repentance, acknowledgement of the LORD’s justice, and request of return to or restoration of

²¹ Ibid., 162-63.

²² Ibid., 167-68.

²³ Ibid., 230.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mark J. Boda, *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 190. Boda dates the Nehemiah 9 material to the early Persian period.

homeland.²⁶ He views as the source of the redemptive historical summary “a Pentateuch which is very similar in form to the one possessed today.”²⁷

Boda divides the prayer into seven parts: “Hymnic Introduction” (9:5); “Praise of Yahweh as Creator” (9:6); “Abrahamic Tradition” (9:7-8); “Exodus-Wilderness Tradition” (9:9-23); “Conquest-Life in the Land” (9:24-31); “Present Predicament” (9:32-36); and “Cry of the People” (9:37).²⁸ He notes that the chronology of the wilderness material in Nehemiah 9 deviates from material in the Pentateuch, as occurs in Psalm 78, Psalm 105 and Psalm 106, and suggests it is arranged thematically rather than chronologically.²⁹

... [T]he composer is using these various tradition complexes for his own purposes. This was revealed particularly in the delineation of the tradition sequencing models for the Exodus-Wilderness and Conquest-Land tradition complexes. Both complexes reveal a God who consistently showed mercy to his people. They provide a pattern for renewal for the present generation, enacted through the present prayer.³⁰

Related research on Acts of the Apostles

The structure and purpose of this, the longest speech in Acts, have long been debated. Marshall observes:

If length is anything to go by, Stephen’s speech is one of the most important sections of Acts, yet the purpose of this speech is still much disputed. In form, it is a lengthy recital of Old Testament history, discussing in detail what appear to be insignificant points and culminating in a bitter attack on the speaker’s hearers. What is the speaker trying to do? Is the speech really a defence to the charges brought against him (6:11, 13f.)? Is its thought unique in Acts, or is it a carefully wrought contribution to the total message of Acts? And what is its structure?³¹

²⁶ Ibid., 41.

²⁷ Ibid., 190.

²⁸ Ibid., 75-80.

²⁹ Ibid., 78.

³⁰ Ibid., 87.

³¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 139-40.

Marshall sees three purposes to the speech: (1) Stephen's defense against the charges; (2) Stephen's "attack" of the Jews for failing to recognize the Messiah; and (3) a vehicle for explaining the rejection of the Jews and proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles in the flow Acts.³² Marshall points to similarities between the speech and the speeches given by Paul at Pisidian Antioch (13:16-23) and Athens (17:24f.), but believes Luke crafted into his narrative source material he acquired. "It fits admirably into what we know about Stephen from the surrounding narrative."³³

F. F. Bruce, to whom Marshall dedicates his commentary, delimits the pericope as 6:1-8:1a and sees the structure of the speech as divided into seven parts: "The Patriarchal Age" (7:2-8); "Israel in Egypt" (7:9-19); "Moses' early days" (7:20-29); "The Call of Moses" (7:30-34); "The Wilderness Wanderings" (7:35-43); "Tabernacle and Temple" (7:44-50); and "Personal Application, (7:51-53). He argues that the speech functions as a defense of Christianity, rather than a defense against Stephen's charges, given that it is not designed to win acquittal.³⁴

Like Marshall, Bruce believes Luke is working with source material, and suggests Luke's views differed somewhat from Stephen's. "Luke himself does not share Stephen's wholly negative estimate of the Temple: until late in his record he mentions it with respect..." Bruce sees two themes running through the speech: God's transcendence and Israel's longstanding rejection of his appointed "deliverers."

The opening words of Stephen's defense imply that the people of God must be on the march, must pull up their tent stakes as Abraham did,

³² Ibid., 140-41.

³³ Ibid., 141.

³⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 130.

leaving national particularism and ancestral ritual, and go out where God may lead.³⁵

Kilgallen refers to the first three sections of Stephen's speech as "stories," divides the speech into seven units, and delimits the pericope at 7:2-53. Kilgallen notes at the outset that he views the speech in Acts as a "christocentric" take on Jewish history, crafted to give a reason for the Temple's destruction in AD 70 and to fit the flow of the larger work.³⁶ He sees the accusations as an introduction, which "give a significant term (topos) and a guiding theme (Christological-liturgical) to the reader."³⁷ His divisions are: Abraham story (7:2-6); transitional verse (7:8); Joseph story (7:9-16); Moses story (7:17-43); Temple (7:44-47); and conclusion (7:51-53).

Kilgallen sees the speech as likening Temple worship to the idolatry committed by the Israelites in the wilderness, which explains the rapid movement of the story from Moses to the "attack on the Temple."

...[T]he temple is comparable to nothing less than that false worship of the desert. Do we mean to say that the worship of the Temple is indicated to be as idolatrous as that of the desert fathers? Not directly. ...The real lesson of the Moses story is not simply a christological one nor solely one of false worship; it is a combination of the two; if one rejects the savior, redeemer, prophet, one's worship must necessarily become unacceptable, if not idolatrous.³⁸

Soards characterizes the speech as "perplexing" and divides it into three major sections (leaving out the larger narrative): "Stephen's Reply in Story" (7:2b-50); "Stephen's Indictment of the Audience" (7:51-53); and "Tripartite Epilogue" (7:56-60b). He organizes the redemptive historical material into five units: "God and Abraham"

³⁵ Ibid., 34.

³⁶ John Kilgallen, *The Stephen Speech: A Literary and Redactional Study of Acts 7, 2-52* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 31.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 92.

(7:2c-8a); “Abraham and the Patriarchs (7:8b-e); “The Joseph Story” (7:9-16); “The Time of the Promise” (7:17-43); “From the Tent to a House for God” (7:44-50).³⁹

Soards cites five other outlines, which he calls reasonable, but remarks that all fail to include Stephen’s comments as he is being stoned (7:54-60).⁴⁰ He suggests Stephen’s vision “confirms the validity” of his speech and his description of it relates that Jesus has been exalted. “This divinely realized forgiveness through the raised, exalted Jesus is in fact the goal and plan of the Father.”⁴¹

Neudorfer suggests that as Luke orders his Gospel and Acts both chronologically and geographically according to Jesus’ Great Commission, he reinforces their flow with illustrations of similar movement in the lives of the characters in Stephen’s speech.⁴² He notes Luke’s use of verbs throughout that indicate movement, such as ἐξέρχομαι (go out; 7:3, 4, 7),⁴³ ἐξαποστέλλω (send out; 7:12), ἀποστέλλω (send out; 7:14, 34, 35), ἐξάγω (lead out; 7:36, 40),⁴⁴ and the noun ἐλεύσεως (approach, 7:52).

In noting the geographical flow of Acts from Jerusalem to the end of the earth, Neudorfer suggests Luke’s placement of the Stephen episode in the sixth and seventh chapters builds on the controversial notion of the gospel’s trajectory to the Gentiles, which he introduces with the Great Commission in 1:8 and Peter’s sermon in 2:14-40, then continues in the eighth chapter with the Philip episode.

Apart from its forensic character, the sole purpose of Stephen’s speech is, looking back, to take up problems which were perceived to be controversial, even divisive, namely the position of the followers of Jesus

³⁹ Marion Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context and Concerns*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press: 1994), 59.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 60.

⁴¹ Ibid., 69.

⁴² Heinz-Werner Neudorfer, “The Speech of Stephen,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 279.

⁴³ Neudorfer indicates v. 7; it also appears in vv. 3 and 4.

⁴⁴ Neudorfer indicates vv. 36 and 39, however, it is vv. 36 and 40 in which the verb appears.

with respect to the temple, the cult and the law, and at the same time point ahead by introducing the following reports of the mission in Samaria, at the same time providing crucial arguments for the subsequent discussion within the early church about the incorporation of gentile Christians as part of the covenant people Israel...⁴⁵

Neudorfer likens the content of Stephen's speech to that of other historical summaries in the Bible that admonish Israel against rebelliousness, such as Ezekiel 20, and Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch (13:16-41), and to those in extra-biblical literature, such as Josephus' first speech at the siege of the Jerusalem (Jewish War 5:376-419).⁴⁶

Goal of this work

While previous studies have examined – with little consensus – the form, structure and function of the redemptive historical summaries contained in the Covenant Renewal account in Nehemiah and the Stoning of Stephen in Acts, little has been done in terms of examining the narrative nature of the summaries themselves.

Both the Hebrew of the redemptive historical prayer contained in Neh 9:1-10:40 and the Greek of the redemptive historical speech given by Stephen in Acts 6:8-8:3 exhibit characteristics of narrative for those languages. If the accounts are narratives within narratives, exegeting them as such would shed light on the accounts themselves as well as their function in the larger stories. And given that the author/editor of each work is, at the very least, the editor of the redemptive historical summaries, distinguishing the intent of the speaker(s) with respect to his/their audience from that of the author/editor to his audience would provide additional insight into the passages.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 280.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 282.

Chapter Two will examine Neh 9:1-10:40 using C. John Collins' discourse-oriented literary methodology⁴⁷ and distinguishing between the author/editor and speaker. It will draw on the intertextual methodology of Richard Hays⁴⁸ and the approach of Gregory Beale and D. A. Carson⁴⁹ for analyzing the New Testament use of the Old Testament to examine aspects of the hortatory peak of the summary. Chapter Three will examine Acts 6:8-8:3 using the same approach.

Collins, in his method combining discourse analysis and literary criticism, offers nine expositional questions for examining biblical narrative: “(1) What is the pericope and who are the participants?; (2) What is the paragraph structure of the pericope, (including peak)?; (3) What is the basic sequence of events?; (4) How do those events follow causally from what comes before and affect causally what comes after?; (5) Are there repeated key words or roots (both within this pericope and across several pericopes)?; (6) How does the author present the characters?; (7) What devices does the author use to communicate his point of view?; (8) What is the passage about?; and (9) How are the covenantal principals on display here?”⁵⁰

Hays offers seven criteria for examining intertextuality: (1) “availability:” the supposed source would have been available to the original author and audience; (2) “volume:” degree of word repetition, syntactical patterns, etc.; (3) “recurrence:” how often the author alludes to the passage elsewhere; (4) “thematic coherence:” the fit of the supposed echo into the argument; (5) “historical plausibility:” the author would have

⁴⁷ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2006).

⁴⁸ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale: 1989).

⁴⁹ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

⁵⁰ Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 18-30.

intended and his readers have understood the supposed effect; (6) “history of interpretation:” others have heard the same echoes; and (7) “satisfaction:” the reading makes sense.⁵¹

Beale and Carson offer six questions for analyzing the New Testament use of the Old Testament: “(1) What is the NT context of the citation or allusion?; (2) What is the OT context from which the citation or allusion is drawn?; (3) How is the OT quotation or source handled in the literature of Second Temple Judaism or ... of early Judaism?; (4) What textual factors must be borne in mind as one seeks to understand a particular use of the OT?; (5) What is the nature of the connection as the NT writer sees it? Is this merely a connection of language?; and (6) To what theological use does the NT writer put the OT quotation or allusion?”⁵²

Chapter Four of this work will discuss the findings.

⁵¹ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29-30.

⁵² Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, xxiv-xxvi.

Chapter Two: Neh 9:1-10:40

The character of the LORD, “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,” impelled restored Israel to renew its covenant, and secured its hope in the enduring promise of a Davidic king who would one day lead his people in bringing the Gentiles into his kingdom.

Embedded in the narrative of Nehemiah 9-10, the prayer of the returned exiles in 9:5b-37 summarizes their redemptive history, and has been called the “theological centerpiece of Ezra-Nehemiah.”⁵³ At the focal point of the hortatory peak in 9:12-21, the speakers quote Ex 34:6, recalling another time of covenant renewal and promise in the history of this stiff-necked people.

At the opening of the pericope, the people are assembled, and are fasting in sackcloth and earth (9:1-4). Twenty-four days before, on the first day of the seventh month, they had wept as they heard the Law but were admonished by the governor, Nehemiah, the priest, Ezra, and the Levites to rejoice instead because the day was holy to the LORD (8:1-12).⁵⁴ Now, having celebrated both the privilege of hearing the Law, and the Feast of Booths (8:13-18), the people are humbling themselves before the LORD in mourning and repentance.

⁵³ Eskenazi, “Nehemiah 9-10: Structure and Significance,” 1.

⁵⁴ Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra Nehemiah*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc, 1965), 165. F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 222. So Myers and Fensham, who links them noting the “relationship” of “liturgical approach” between Nehemiah 8 and 9. The two disagree, however, on original chapter placement, with Fensham accepting it as is, and Myers, along with other scholars, positing that Nehemiah 9 should follow Ezra 10. I would argue that Nehemiah 9 does follow Ezra 10, though not immediately, and that the problems of Nehemiah 13, including that of marriage to foreign wives, is an example of Israel’s historical pattern of lapsing into unfaithfulness, much as this prayer acknowledges.

The situation of this pericope stems ultimately from the rebellion of the people of God against his covenant (Deuteronomy 28), his judgment of exile and his gracious promise to restore them (Dt 30:3). It follows causally from 2 Kgs 25:8-12, when the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's army destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple, broke down its walls, and exiled most of the people. It also follows causally from the promise of restoration the LORD made through his prophets, including Jeremiah (Jer 25:12-13; 29:10), from the return of Zerubbabel about 538 BC following the decree of the Persian King Cyrus (Ezra 1-2), from the rebuilding of the Temple in 516 BC following the decrees of the Persian King Darius (Ezra 6:6-12) and the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah (circa 520 BC), from Ezra's return in 458 BC⁵⁵ (Ezra 7-8), following the decree of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:11-26), Malachi's call to covenant faithfulness and the coming of the Messiah (circa 460 BC), and from the completion of the wall under Nehemiah (6:15; 445 BC).

The events of this pericope lead to the repopulation of Jerusalem (11:1 f.), the resulting dedication of the wall (11:27-43) and the provisions made for the Temple (12:44-17), given that the people here vow to observe all the LORD's commands (10:30) and provide for the proper functioning of the Temple (10:32-39). As the place where God chose to manifest his presence (2 Chr 5:13b-14), the Temple was essential to Israel's mission to be a light to the nations (Ex 19:4-6). The events here also have a direct bearing (10:28-39) on the reforms Nehemiah makes on his return 12 years later (Chap. 13).

The participants in the main storyline are the Levites, the people and God. Those in the embedded storyline are Abraham, the people's forefathers, Moses and God.

⁵⁵ Unless otherwise noted, the dates in this work conform to those found in K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 30-32, 73-74 .

Structure and Events Sequence

The paragraph is indicated by a connected set of actions.⁵⁶

- 9:1-5a: Setting and Start of Main Events Sequence – The *waw* plus the prepositional phrase *וּבַיּוֹם עֲשָׂרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה* (Now on the 24th day of this month) marks the beginning of the pericope at 9:1. The *הַזֶּה* (this) indicates the flow from the preceding pericopes: *בַּיּוֹם אֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי* (on the first day of the seventh month) of 8:2, and *וּבַיּוֹם הָשֵׁנִי* (on the second day) of 8:13. The people assemble, presumably in the square before the Water Gate as in 8:1-2, fasting and in sackcloth and earth. The main events sequence begins at 9:2 with the *wayyiqtol* *וַיִּבְדְּלוּ*⁵⁷ (and they separated) themselves from foreigners, and continues in 9:2 with the *wayyiqtol* *וַיַּעֲמֻדוּ* (and they stood), *וַיִּתְּנוּ* (and confessed), in 9:3 with *וַיִּקְוּמוּ* (and they stood), *וַיִּקְרְאוּ* (and they read) from the Book of the Law, in 9:4⁵⁸ with *וַיִּזְעַקוּ* (and they – *the Levites* – cried out) and *וַיֹּאמְרוּ* (and they said). This last *wayyiqtol* is followed by two imperatives spoken by the Levites to the people: *קוּמוּ* (stand) and *בָּרְכוּ* (bless).
- 9:5b-37: Redemptive Historical Prayer – A jussive 3mp *וַיְבָרְכוּ* (bless) followed by the 2ms suffix of the object *שֵׁם כְּבוֹדְךָ* (your glorious name) seamlessly changes the direction of the Levites' address from the people

⁵⁶ Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 20.

⁵⁷ Wayyiqtol is the storyline tense of Biblical Hebrew narrative. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary*, (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing Company), 20. He cites Robert Longacre, "Discourse Perspective on the Hebrew Verb: Affirmation and Restatement," in *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Walter Bodine (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 177-89; and Randall Buth, "The Hebrew Verb in Current Discussions," *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 5, no. 2 (1992): 91-105.

⁵⁸ The 3ms *וַיִּקְמוּ* (stood) is impersonal and acts as a passive. GKC §144.

to God⁵⁹ and opens the prayer, which is addressed to him, so that the wayyiqtol וַיֹּאמְרוּ (and they said)⁶⁰ of 9:5a covers both the imperatives there and the jussive⁶¹ in 9:5b.

Wayyiqtol, which Longacre characterizes as the “backbone” of Hebrew narrative,⁶² is the dominant verb form in this prayer, appearing 42 times from 9:6b through 9:30.⁶³ The *qatal* form opens the prayer in praise, appearing at the beginning and ending of sections and in the epilogue that occurs at 9:31 before the prayer turns into a petition at 9:32. Besides the 2ms that runs throughout this address to God, verbs, suffixes and pronouns are 3ms and 3mp from vv. 5b to 32, during the narrative portion, then predominately 1cp through v. 37, during the petition, although 3mp continues.

- 9:5b-8a is a confession of God’s character, praising him as Creator (9:6), the one who made a covenant with Abraham (9:8). The verb form of this opening is *qatal*.

⁵⁹ As Keil observes, the jussive serves as “an exhortation to the congregation ... to join in the praises following and to unite heartily in the confession of sin.... The invitation to praise God insensibly passes into the action of praising.” C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 149.

⁶⁰ The Masoretic Text indicates it is the Levites who are speaking the prayer: וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַלְוִיִּם (And the Levites said), which is followed by a list of names. The LXX begins 9:6 with the insertion καὶ εἶπεν Εὐδρας (and Ezra said) before “You are the LORD...” as do the RSV and NRSV. The GNT offers: “And then the people of Israel prayed this prayer.” While Ezra is depicted in 8:3 and 8:13 as reading and teaching from the Book of the Law, he is not mentioned in this pericope. Eskenazi’s suggestion of an antiphonal reading (*In an Age of Prose*, 100) makes sense, although it is not supported by the Hebrew. So Duggan (*The Covenant Renewal*, 162), who notes that extended prayers in other post-exilic biblical material are uttered by individuals. Keil sees the people joining silently in the Levites’ prayer. Keil, *Ezra et. al.*, 149. In any event, the people are included by the command of the Levites to stand and bless the LORD at the beginning (9:5a) and the 1cp at the end (9:32-37).

⁶¹ The LXX, however, translates וַיְבָרְכוּ as εὐλογήσουσιν, a future active indicative 3rd plural.

⁶² Longacre, “Discourse Perspective,” 178.

⁶³ Once each in 9:8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16 and 23; twice each in 9:10, 18, 27, and 29; three times each in 9:17, 22 and 30; four times in 9:24, 26 and 28; and six times in 9:25.

- 9:8b- 11 recounts God's faithfulness to his covenant, and the bondage in and redemption from Egypt. The embedded events sequence begins at 8b with the *wayyiqtol* וַתִּקַּח (and you have kept), and ends with a background comment at v. 11b evidenced by the *waw* plus *qal* participle followed by the *qatal* וְאַתְּ-רִדְּפֵיהֶם הַשְׁלַכְתָּ (*lit.* and their pursuers you cast).⁶⁴
- 9:12-22 recounts Israel's rebellion and God's gracious provision in the wilderness, and serves as the hortatory peak of the embedded narrative, set apart by parallelism that marks the focal point: God's gracious character. (See below). The *waw* plus a noun and location change opens this section, evidenced by the absence of the *wayyiqtol*. The section closes with the conclusion of a series of five parallel verses that begins in v. 12.
- 9:22-31 recounts the conquest, and the judges, monarchy and exile.⁶⁵ The *wayyiqtol* וַתָּבִיֵאם (you brought) resumes the events sequence and opens the section. The *wayyiqtol* chain of the embedded storyline ends in v. 30. The section closes with a repetition (v.31, cf. 17) of God's merciful character in epilogue, evidenced also by the absence of *wayyiqtol*s. The declaration of God's character links to the next section, which contains a petition.
- 9:32-10:1 The change in the verb form from the 3mp of the preceding verses to 1cp, along with the emphatic marker (וַעֲתָה);

⁶⁴ My translation.

⁶⁵ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 315. As Williamson notes, the writer conveys Israel's history from the judges to the exile in a cyclical pattern reminiscent of the period of the judges.

and now), marks the beginning of this section, and indicates the events recounted in the embedded storyline have culminated in the situation of the worshippers (מִיָּמֵי מַלְכֵי אַשּׁוּר עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה; from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day).⁶⁶ The worshippers again remind God of his character and covenant faithfulness before making their subtle petition: אֲלֵי־מַעַט לִפְנֶיךָ אֵת כָּל־הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר־מָצְאָתָנוּ (Let not all the hardship that has found us seem little before you...).⁶⁷ The main narrative peaks at 10:1: וּבְכָל־זֹאת אָנֹכְנוּ כֹרְתִים: אֶתְּמַנָּה (And on account of all this, we make a binding, written covenant).⁶⁸

10:2-40: Covenant Renewal ⁶⁹ – The reconstituted Israel renews its covenant with God, submitting it in writing with the seals bearing the names of Nehemiah, the priests,⁷⁰ Levites and the other leaders of the people. They vow to observe the Lord’s commandments, including refraining from foreign marriage (10:30), adhering to Sabbath regulations (10:31), and providing for the proper functioning of the Temple (10:32 ff).

⁶⁶ My translation.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Aside from the explicit mention of making a covenant in writing (10:1), reference to God switches from second person (מִצְוֹתֶיךָ “your commandments;” 9:34) to third person (מִצְוֹת יְהוָה “commandments of the LORD;” 10:29).

⁷⁰ Ezra’s name does not appear among the priests.

Therefore, the structure of the pericope is:

Table 2.1 Structure of Neh 9:1-10:40 ⁷¹

I.	Setting; Start of Main Event Sequence (9:1-5a)
II.	Redemptive Historical Prayer (9:5b-37)
	A. Praise of God Creator/Covenant maker (5b-8a)
	B. Exodus (vv. 8b- 11)
	C. Wilderness (vv. 12-21) <i>Hortatory Peak</i>
	D. Conquest – Restoration (vv. 22-31)
	E. Petition (9:32-10:1) <i>Action Peak</i> (10:1)
III.	Covenant Renewal (10:2-40)

Boda divides the prayer into seven sections, breaking vv. 5-8 into three sections “Hymnic Introduction” (v. 5); “Praise of Yahweh as Creator” (v. 6) and “Abrahamic Tradition” (vv. 7-8). He extends his “Exodus-Wilderness Tradition” section to include v. 23, and bases his divisions on the boundaries of the doxology and historical accounts rather than any grammatical evidence.⁷²

Duggan divides the prayer into two major sections: vv. 6-31 and vv. 32-37, breaking the opening vv. 6-8 into a section he calls “YHWH’s foundational activity.” He bases his divisions on inclusio and the repetition of אַתָּה (you) in “confessional statements” in vv. 6 and 32b, which bracket the first section from the present-tense plea of the second section, and points to a bracketing by אַתָּה again at v. 6 and v. 8. He also points to what he sees as a rhetorical contrast of harmony (vv. 9-15) with rebellion (vv.

⁷¹ While my diagram differs from Eskenazi’s, I am indebted to her for the format. Eskenazi, “Nehemiah 9-10,” 11.

⁷² Boda, *Praying the Tradition*, 75-80; 90-114

16-21).⁷³ However, Duggan does not consider verbal aspect or function, and his sectioning of v. 15 from v. 16, abruptly breaks the narration as it builds to a peak.⁷⁴

In Eskenazi's two major sections of 9:1-5 and 9:6-10:40, she combines much of the redemptive historical storyline into one section: 9:11-31, reasoning, "Creation, the election of Abram/Abraham and the redemption from Egypt are not simply an item in the historical retrospective but belong to the unit that defines the basic relation between God and the community – past and present."⁷⁵

She warrants this by: (1) the use of the first plural אֲבוֹתֵינוּ (our fathers) in 9:9, which provides "a link with past generations glaringly missing" from the rest of the summary; (2) the temporal phrase הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה (as of this day), which forms a "temporal" bridge that matches the "relational" bridge of "our fathers" and also bookmarks (along with הַיּוֹם, today) the third unit (9:32-37); and (3) the reversal, beginning in 9:11, in the subject/object order, with nouns preceding verbs.⁷⁶ However, Eskenazi does not consider the verbal aspect or function either, which clearly include the Exodus account in the redemptive historical narrative.

Williamson, who sees five aspects of God's character as dividing the prayer into five sections, separates 9:6-8, into creation (9:6) and Abraham (7-8), with no mention of verb function.⁷⁷

Hortatory Peak of Embedded Narrative: Neh 9:12-21

The hortatory peak of the embedded narrative is set off by a series of five parallels.⁷⁸ This effect halts its flow, and forces a lingering over⁷⁹ Israel's wanderings in the

⁷³ Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal*, 164.

⁷⁴ See below.

⁷⁵ Eskenazi, "Structure and Significance," 12.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁷ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 308.

wilderness, thereby emphasizing God's gracious character and faithfulness despite his people's chronic rebelliousness. The peak⁸⁰ evokes texts from Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and the Psalms, which are arranged to emphasize a focal point that underscores the message of the prayer.

A. Guidance:912: וּבַעֲמֹד עָנָן הִנְחִיתָם יוֹמָם וּבַעֲמֹד אֵשׁ לַיְלָה לְהָאִיר לָהֶם אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ־בָהּ

(By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go.)

Text evoked: Ex 13:21: וַיְהִי הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בַּעֲמֹד עָנָן לְהַנְחֵתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וּלַיְלָה בַּעֲמֹד אֵשׁ

לְהָאִיר לָהֶם לָלֶכֶת יוֹמָם וּלַיְלָה

(And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light that they might travel by day and by night.)

B. Instruction: 9:13-14: וְעַל הַר־סִינַי יֵרְדָּתָּ וְדִבַּר עִמָּהֶם מִשְׁמַיִם וַתֵּתֵן לָהֶם מִשְׁפָּטִים יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתוֹרוֹת

אַמֵּת חֻקִּים וּמִצְוֹת טוֹבִים וְאֶת־שַׁבַּת קֹדֶשׁ הוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם וּמִצְוֹת

וְחֻקִּים וְתוֹרָה צוִיתָ לָהֶם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדְּךָ

(You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant.)

⁷⁸ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 313-14. Williamson notes the parallel structure, but we differ on the repetition of the land, which he argues begins a new section..

⁷⁹ Collins notes a similar poetic parallelism in the exalted prose of Gen. 1:27. *Genesis 1-4*, 72.

⁸⁰ Longacre, "Discourse Structure, Verb Forms and Archaism in Psalm 18," *Journal of Translation* 2 (2006), 18. Longacre discusses marks of the didactic peak as including the emergence of the theme and a place where action is "held in abeyance."

Texts evoked: Ex 19:20a; 20:1 ff.: וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה עַל־הָרַ סִינַי

(The LORD came down on Mount Sinai...);

Ps 19:9a-10b: פְּקוּדֵי יְהוָה יִשְׁרִים מְשֻׁמְחֵי־לֵב... טְהוֹרָה עוֹמֶדֶת לְעַד

מִשְׁפָּטֵי־יְהוָה אֱמֶת צָדִיקוֹ יִחְדּוּ

(The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart ... the rules of the LORD are true and righteous altogether);

C. Food/Water 9:15a: וְלֶחֶם מִשָּׁמַיִם נָתַתָּה לָהֶם לִרְעֹכָם וַיָּמִים מִסֵּלַע הוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם לֶצֶמָאֵם

(You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst)

Texts evoked: Ex 16:15b: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם הוּא הֶלֶחֶם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם לֶאֱכֹלָה

(Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.”)

Ex 17:6a: הִנְנִי עֹמֵד לְפָנֶיךָ שָׁם עַל־הַצּוּר בְּחֶרֶב וְהִכִּיתָ בַּצּוּר וַיֵּצֵאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מַיִם וְשָׁתָה הָעָם

([The LORD said to Moses...] “Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.”

D. Land 9:15b: וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לָבוֹא לְרִשֶׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּאתָ אֶת־יְדְּךָ לָתֵת לָהֶם

(...and you told them to go in and possess the land that you had sworn to give them.)

Text evoked: Deut. 1:8a: וְחֻקִּים וְתוֹרָה צִוִּיתָ לָהֶם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדְּךָ

([“The LORD said...”] See, I have set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers...”)

E. Rebellion: 9:16- 17a:⁸¹ וְהֵם וְאֲבֹתֵינוּ הִזְדִּדוּ וַיִּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עַרְפָּם וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתֶיךָ וַיִּמָּאֲנוּ לְשֹׁמֵעַ

וְלֹא־זָכְרוּ נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּהֶם וַיִּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עַרְפָּם וַיִּתְּנוּ־רֹאשׁ לְשׁוֹב לְעִבְדָתָם בְּמִרְיָם

(But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return them to slavery in Egypt.)

Texts evoked: Ps. 78:11:⁸² וַיִּשְׁכַּחוּ עֲלִילוֹתָיו וְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר הָרָאם נֶגֶד אֲבוֹתָם עֲשֵׂה פֶלֶא

בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׂדֵה־צִעֲוֹן

(They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them. In the sight of their fathers, he performed wonders in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.)

Num. 14:4: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו נִתְּנָה רֹאשׁ וְנָשׁוּבָה מִצְרָיִמָּה: Num. 14:4

(And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”)

Deut. 9:13 רָאִיתִי אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עִם־קֹשֶׁה־עַרְף הוּא Deut. 9:13

([The LORD said...] “I have seen this people, and behold, this is a stiff-necked people.”⁸³

F. Focal point: 9:17b⁸⁴ וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהִים סְלִיחוֹת תַּחֲנוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ־אֲפִים וְרַב־ וְחֶסֶד וְלֹא עֲזַבְתָּם: 9:17b

(But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

⁸¹ The apostasy recounted here is taken from the incident in Numbers 14, when faithless Israel refuses to enter the Promised land and seeks to return to Egypt. It occurs in the Biblical story after Israel's apostasy with the golden calf in Exodus 32, which is followed by the LORD's self-revelation to Moses (Ex 34:6-7), the focal point here. The order of the two acts of apostasy is reversed in the prayer. See below for further discussion of the implications of the placement in the redemptive historical prayer.

⁸² Boda, *Praying the Tradition*, 149. Boda notes the similarity to the wording to Pss 105 and 106.

⁸³ My translation.

⁸⁴ See more below.

Text evoked: Ex 34:6: יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת...נשא עון ופשע וחטאה

([The LORD ... proclaimed...] “The LORD, the LORD, a God

merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love

and faithfulness ... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.)

E. Rebellion: 9:18: אף כִּי־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל מִסֶּכֶה וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֶה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נִאֲצוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת:

(Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, “This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,” and had committed great blasphemies)

Text evoked: Ex 32:4: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ עֵגֶל מִסֶּכֶה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם

([...and he *Aaron*] ... made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

A. Guidance: 9:19: וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים לֹא עֲזַבְתָּם בְּמִדְבָּר אֶת־עַמּוּד הָעָנָן לֹא־סָר מֵעֲלֵיהֶם בְּיוֹמָם

לְהַנְחִיחָם בַּהֲדָרְךָ וְאֶת־עַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ בַּלַּיְלָה לְהָאִיר לָהֶם וְאֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ־בָּהּ

(...you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire at night to light for them the way by which they should go.)

Text evoked: Ex 13:22. לֹא־יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הָעָנָן יוֹמָם וְעַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ לַיְלָה לִפְנֵי הָעָם

(The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.)

B. Instruction: 9:20a: וְרוּחְךָ הַטּוֹבָה נָתַתָּ לְהַשְׁכִּילָם

(You gave your good Spirit to instruct them...)

Text evoked: Num 11:17b וְנִשְׂאוּ אִתָּךְ בְּמִשְׁאֵל הָעָם וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא אִתָּהּ לְבַדָּךְ

וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא אִתָּהּ לְבַדָּךְ

(And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them and they shall bear the burden of the people with you so that you will not bear it alone.)

C. Food/Water 9:20b-21 וּמִנֶּה לֹא־מִנְעַת מִפִּיהֶם וּמִים נָתַתָּה לָהֶם לְצִמְאֻם וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה כָּל־יְמֵיהֶם

בְּמִדְבָּר לֹא חָסְרוּ שְׁלֹמֹתֵיהֶם לֹא בָּלוּ וְרַגְלֵיהֶם לֹא בָצְקוּ

(...and did not withhold your manna from their mouth or water from their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.)

Text evoked: Ex 16:35 וַיֵּכְנוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲכָלוּ אֶת־הַמָּן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה עַד־בָּאָם אֶל־אֶרֶץ נוֹשָׁבִת אֶת־הָמָן
אֲכָלוּ עַד־בָּאָם אֶל־קְצֵה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן

(The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to a habitable land. They ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.)

Deut. 8:4 שְׂמָלְתְּךָ לֹא בָלְתָה מִעָלֶיךָ וְרַגְלְךָ לֹא בָצָקָה זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה

(Your clothing did not wear out and your foot did not swell these forty years.)

D. Land 9:22: וַתִּתֵּן לָהֶם מַמְלָכוֹת וְעַמִּמִּים וַתְּחַלֶּקֶם לַפָּאָה וַיִּירָשׁוּ אֶת־אֶרֶץ סִיחֹן וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ מֶלֶךְ חֶשְׁבּוֹן
וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ עוֹג מֶלֶךְ־הַבָּשָׁן

(And you gave them kingdoms and people and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan.)

Text evoked: Num 21:23-24 וְלֹא־נָתַן סִיחֹן אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל עֹבֵר בְּגִבְלוֹ ... וַיִּכְהוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לַפִּי־חֶרֶב
וַיִּירֶשׁ אֶת־אֶרְצוֹ

(But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. ...And Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword and took possession of the land...)

Text evoked: Num 21:33-34 וַיֵּצֵא עוֹג מֶלֶךְ־הַבָּשָׁן לִקְרָאתָם ... וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה ... אֶל־תִּירָא אוֹתוֹ
כִּי בְיָדְךָ נִתְּתִי אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־עַמּוֹ וְאֶת־אֶרְצוֹ וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ לְסִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן

(...And Og king of Bashan came out against them. ...But the LORD said ... “Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand, and all his people and his land. And you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon.”)

The structure of the hortatory peak emphasizes its focal point with a series of five psalm-like parallels: God's guidance through pillars of cloud and fire at 9:12 and 19; God's instruction through his commandments and by his Spirit in 9:13-14 and 20a; God's provision of food and water at 9:15a and 20b-21; God's charge to possess the land he has given Israel in 9:15b and 22, and finally Israel's rebellion 9:16-17a and 18.

Therefore, the structure of the peak is:

Table 2.2: Embedded Action Peak at Neh 9:12:21

A. Guidance 9:12
B. Instruction 9:13-14
C. Food / Water 9:15a
D. Land 9:15b
E. Rebellion 9:16-17a
F. Focal Point 9:17b
E. Rebellion 9:18
A. Guidance 9:19
B. Instruction 9:20a
C. Food / Water 9:20b-21
D. Land 9:22

Williamson, who notes the first three parallels, taking the 9:22 as the beginning of a new section, also recognizes v.17b as "the key statement in this section." He notes it is "sandwiched" between the two incidents of rebellion.⁸⁵ Duggan arranges the verses into two categories "Gifts in the wilderness" (9:12-15) and "The people's rebellion and God's mercy (9:16-21), which captures the parallels of the first three of God's provisions listed above, but not of the land. He also sees 9:22 beginning a new section."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 314.

⁸⁶ Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal*, 167.

Focal point 17b: Citation of Ex 34:6

At the focal point of the hortatory peak (v. 17b), the author quotes Ex 34:6, evoking the whole of the LORD's self-description from Ex 34:6-7, as well as the account surrounding it.

Neh 9:17

וַאֲתָהּ אֱלֹהִים סְלִיחוֹת חַנוּן וְרַחוּם אֶרְךָ-אֲפִים וְרַב-
וְחֶסֶד וְלֹא עֲזַבְתָּם

But you are a God ready to forgive,
gracious and merciful, slow to anger and
abounding in steadfast love, and did not
forsake them.

Ex. 34:6-7

וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה עַל-פָּנָיו וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל
רַחוּם וְחַנוּן אֶרְךָ אֲפִים וְרַב-חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת
נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאֵלִפִּים גִּשָּׁא עוֹן וּפָשַׁע וְחַטָּאת וְנִקָּה לֹא
יִנָּקֶה פֶקֶד עוֹן אֲבוֹת עַל-בְּנִים וְעַל-בְּנֵי בָנִים
עַל-שִׁלְשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים

The LORD passed before him and
proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a
God merciful and gracious, slow to
anger, and abounding in steadfast love
and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love
for thousands, forgiving iniquity and
transgression and sin, but who will by no
means clear the guilty, visiting the
iniquity of the fathers on the children
and the children's children, to the third
and the fourth generation."

There are several differences between the quote and the original.⁸⁷

- The second half (Ex 34:7; cf. 20:5-6) is left out. Boda suggests that the first half has become a liturgy that is incorporated here.⁸⁸ Duggan calls the quote a "standard creedal formula," but offers no suggestion about its truncation.⁸⁹

Neither Williamson nor Eskenazi mentions it. Given the situation of the people of Israel gathered for the prayer, with its emphasis on the iniquity of their

⁸⁷ Keil, *Nehemiah et. al.*, vol. 4, 152. Keil convincingly suggests the ו before חֶסֶד is a clerical error.

⁸⁸ Boda, *Praying the Tradition*, 151.

⁸⁹ Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal*, 211.

forefathers, and their lamentation over their subjugation לְמַלְכִּים אֲשֶׁר־נָחְתָה עָלֵינוּ (to kings you have set over us because of our sins; 9:37-38), it is difficult to imagine that the second half of God's self-revelation was lost on the Levites at the very least.

- אֱלֹהִים is used rather than the אֱל of the original. Both are generic terms for God.⁹⁰
- קְלִיחוֹת (forgiveness) is added. The noun, which is likely being used as a synonym for the participle נִשָּׂא of Ex 34:7, appears in elsewhere in the OT only in Ps 130:4 and Dan 9:9, both of which are used in relationship to God's forgiveness. Moses employs the related verb קָלַח, which is used exclusively of God in the Scriptures,⁹¹ in seeking God's forgiveness for Israel after the people's unfaithfulness with the golden calf (Ex 34:9), which occurs in the same pericope as the original text, and which is recounted in the verses immediately following the focal point (vv. 18-19). He and the LORD both use the verb, Moses seeking and the LORD granting his pardon (Num 14:19-20) following the refusal of Israel to enter the Promised land.
- The word order רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן (merciful and gracious) is transposed, and is repeated in v. 31. This may be the influence of its use elsewhere in Scripture. It occurs transposed from the original in three (Ps 111:4; 145:8; Jonah 4:2) of its five other previous occurrences.⁹² (It is quoted in its original order in Ps 86:15 and Ps 103:8). The term חַנּוּן (gracious), cognate with Akkadian enēnu, hanānu "to grant a

⁹⁰ R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), s.v. "אלה," by Jack B. Scott. (Hereafter TWOT) The terms are separate but perhaps related generic terms.

⁹¹ All 46 occurrences in OT involve God's forgiveness. So Walter Kaiser, "קָלַח," in *TWOT*, 626.

⁹² The writers of the Chronicles (2 Chron. 30:9) and Joel (2:13) also transpose the original order in (See discussion of dates below), and there are other, more faint echoes, such as Ps. 112:4.

favor,” Ugaritic *hnn* “to be gracious, to favor,”⁹³ conveys the sense of compassionate response to the deep need of another.⁹⁴ Closely related in meaning,⁹⁵ are *רחום* (merciful) and *חֶסֶד* (steadfast love). David, in Psalm 103:13, likens God’s mercy (root *רחם*) to the compassion a father has on his children, while Moses in Ex 33:19, links it to God’s sovereign choice.⁹⁶ The LXX translates the phrase *רַב־חֶסֶד* (abounding in steadfast love) in Ex 34:6, and Neh 9:17 as *πολύελεος* (very merciful). The secular Hebrew usage carries the idea of relationship, although scholars argue whether the idea of freedom or covenant responsibility is in view, and its theological use includes a sense of faithfulness. As Harris observes: “That all this simply says that God keeps his oath seems trivial. The oath is kept because it is the loving God who speaks the oath.”⁹⁷

- *אֱמֶת* (faithfulness) is left off, but *לֹא עָזַבְתָּם* (you did not forsake them) is added. This may be an echo of Josh. 1:5, given that the wording there (*וְלֹא אָעִזְבְּךָ*) is identical save for person, and the verses immediately following the peak of the embedded narrative concern the conquest (vv. 22-25). The phrase also could serve as an illustration of *אֱמֶת*. Rather than quoting the original verbatim, it is pointing to an example of God’s faithfulness: He did not abandon his faithless people.

The original context of Ex 34:6 finds Moses interceding on behalf of the Israelites after their rebellion with the golden calf (Exodus 32). Moses, seeking reassurance, asks to see God’s glory (Ex 33:18) that he may know God in order to find favor in God’s sight (Ex 33:13). In response, God makes all his goodness pass before Moses and proclaims

⁹³ Edwin Yamauchi, “חֶסֶד et al.,” in *TWOT*, 302.

⁹⁴ Ibid.; also BDB, 377 and DBLH, 2843.

⁹⁵ Yamauchi lists them as synonyms. *TWOT*, 302.

⁹⁶ Leonard J. Coppes, “רַחֲמִים et al.,” in *TWOT*, 842.

⁹⁷ R. Laird Harris, “חֶסֶד,” in *TWOT*, 306.

before him his name (Ex 33:19). The LORD proclaims his name (Ex 34:5) by revealing his character (Ex 34:6-7).

Moses then bows his head and worships, asking again that the LORD forgive (קָלִיָּהּ) his stiff-necked people (עַם־קָשֶׁה־עֲרָף) and continue in their midst. The LORD then renews his covenant with Israel and asks Moses to write down its obligations (Ex 34:10-28).

Moses later quotes from Ex 34:7 in interceding for the Israelites who refused to trust in God despite his record of faithfulness and mighty acts and rebelled against his command to enter the Promised land (Numbers 14).⁹⁸ Therefore, both accounts of rebellion are tied to God's self-revelation and the focal point they help underscore in the redemptive historical prayer.

The reason the accounts are transposed in the prayer is not clear. It may be tied to the fact that a covenant renewal ceremony also followed the golden calf incident (Ex 34:10-28). Boda suggests the accounts are thematic in nature, representing "levels" of rebellion, with the golden calf "representative of the most severe examples." He notes the use of הִלֵּךְ for emphasis at the beginning of v.18.⁹⁹ The emphasis, however, could be used because this is the second incident of rebellion, an incident listed after the LORD's faithfulness is showcased at the focal point of v. 17b. And Boda observes later in discussing the verb הִלֵּךְ (show contempt), used of the people's rebellion in Num 14:11: "When הִלֵּךְ is used in Num 14 and 16, the verdict from Yahweh is severe. In Num 14, none of those who showed contempt against his leadership (וְהַמְרִיבִים) will enter the land; all

⁹⁸ Ex. 34:7 echoes Ex. 20:6.

⁹⁹ Boda, *Praying the Tradition*, 78.

will die.”¹⁰⁰ The profound lack of trust the Israelites show God on the brink of the Promised Land is no less serious than their apostasy with the golden calf.

David quotes Ex 34:6 in Ps 86:15, where he recalls the LORD’s faithfulness in entreating his protection,¹⁰¹ and in praise hymns Psalm 145 and Psalm 103, which also recalls God’s faithfulness to Moses and the people of Israel. The verse also is echoed in the praise hymn Ps 111:4.¹⁰²

Later,¹⁰³ the writer of Chronicles evokes Ex 34:6 in Hezekiah’s proclamation to Judah and to the remnant of Israel, urging them to gather in Jerusalem to observe Passover in the second month. In echoing the verse, the author appeals to God’s character of grace and mercy as an assurance that he would not reject his people if they repented of not keeping his commands.

The prophet Joel¹⁰⁴ quotes Ex 34:6 (2:13), showcasing God’s grace in urging the people to return to God “with torn hearts and not just torn clothing.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ 153

¹⁰¹ Kidner makes the interesting observation: “Not all their enmity may be undeserved, for all he knows; so it is God’s mercy that he invokes, even before God’s faithfulness...” Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 1973), 313.

¹⁰² Indeed, the ancient confession reverberates throughout the Psalms, speaking of God’s faithfulness to his people and to individuals who seek his mercy. They include: 5:7; 13:5-6; 25:6-7; 26:3; 36:5-9; 40:1-10, 11-17; 51:1-2; 54:1-3; 57:3; 69:13-18; 77:7-9; 89:1-4, 15-18; 92:1-5; 99:8; 100:5; 103:3-19, 8-13, 17-18; 105:8; 106:34-46; 109:9-12; 111:2,4; 115:1-8; 116:5-7; 117; 119:76-77; 145:8; and the introductions to Pss 26, 32, 51, 57, 85 (and scattered throughout), 86, 108, 111 and 119. I’m indebted to the research of Dr. C. John Collins for this information.

¹⁰³ Although many scholars argue that Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah are the compilation of the same editor/writer, it is more likely that Chronicles is a later work. Its language use and points of concern are different, and it is placed at the end of the Hebrew canon. Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 136-37. For a summary of the views, see Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxxiii-xxxv.

¹⁰⁴ The date of Joel is uncertain, with some scholars dating it to as early as the 8th Century BC. It is more likely, however, that it is post-exilic, given no mention made of a king, or of syncretism or idol worship. C. John Collins, “Study Guide for Old Testament Prophetical Books” (St. Louis, MO: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2006), 138. R.A. Stewart, “Book of Joel,” in *New Bible Dictionary*: 3rd ed. D. R. W. Wood (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 591.

¹⁰⁵ C. John Collins, “Study Guide for Old Testament Prophetical Books,” 139.

In the New Testament, James evokes 34:6 in his sermon letter (5:11), urging Christians to persevere despite suffering as they await the return of Christ. He urges them to consider the humility and endurance of the prophets and Job before pointing them to the purpose of the LORD and his character of compassion and mercy.

Early church father Athanasius later echoes Ex 34:6 in combination with Deut 32:4, in arguing that faithfulness or trustworthiness is an attribute of God.¹⁰⁶

As Durham observes, Ex 34:6-7 is an ancient confession of faith, “connected with Israel’s oldest perceptions”¹⁰⁷ of the Lord and of his relationship with those he deems his own.

Key words

Several words are repeated in this pericope and across Ezra-Nehemiah:

- ארץ (the land) occurs six times in the redemptive historical prayer (9:6, 15, 23, and 24, where it appears three times), twice more in the larger pericope of 9:1-10:40 (10:31-32), and a total of 15 times in Ezra-Nehemiah.
- בְּ (by / in hand) occurs five times in the redemptive historical prayer (9:14, 27, 28 and 30, where it appears twice), once more in the larger pericope (10:30) and a total of 10 times in Ezra-Nehemiah. It is used as an idiom of God’s commands through Moses and the prophets, and well as an idiom for defeat of Israel by its enemies and Israel’s defeat of its enemies. Also, יָד (hand) appears nine times in Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh 10; 2:8, 18) in reference to God working out his purposes and giving his servants success.

¹⁰⁶ Athanasius, “Select Works and Letters,” ed. Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. IV* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 351.

¹⁰⁷ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 545.

- הַשָּׁמַיִם (the heavens/heavens) occurs nine times in the redemptive historical prayer (9:6, where it occurs four times, 9:13, 15, 27 and 28) and total of 16 times in Ezra-Nehemiah. It is used as part of God's title, as his creation and the place from which he blesses or from which his provision comes.
- עָזַב (forsake) occurs four times in the redemptive historical prayer (9:17, 19, and 31) of God not forsaking his people despite their rebelliousness, once (9:28) of God forsaking his people for their rebelliousness into the hand of their enemies, once in the larger pericope (10:40) of the people vowing not to forsake their contributions to the Temple, and a total of 10 times in the whole of Ezra-Nehemiah, including 13:11, of the people forsaking the Temple.

Some words occur throughout Ezra-Nehemiah but not in the redemptive historical prayer.

They include:

- הָעָם (the people) occurs 44 times in Ezra-Nehemiah, including twice in the covenant portion of the pericope (10:15, 29) but not once in the redemptive historical prayer.
- בַּיִת (house of God, of the LORD, at Jerusalem) occurs some 45 times in Ezra-Nehemiah, including nine times in covenant portion of the pericope (10:33, 34, 35, 36, 37, where it occurs twice, 38, 39 and 40) but not once in the redemptive historical prayer.
- יְרוּשָׁלַם (Jerusalem) occurs 63 times in Ezra-Nehemiah but not once in the redemptive historical prayer or the covenant.

Literary devices and characterization

The composite nature of Ezra-Nehemiah is evident from the various documents that comprise the work, including the first-person accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah¹⁰⁸ and the fact that the completed work appeared sometime afterward, given the notation 12:26: אֵלֶּה ... בְּיָמֵי נְחֶמְיָה הַכֹּהֵן וְעֶזְרָא הַכֹּהֵן הַסּוֹפֵר (These [were] ... in the days of Nehemiah, the governor and Ezra, the priest and scribe). These features set apart the editor of the work from his characters.

The editor presents the people (the seed of Israel/inheritors of the covenantal promises) as repentant and worshipful, gathering before the LORD in sackcloth and earth, separating themselves from foreigners, confessing their own and their fathers' sins, listening attentively to the reading of the law, worshipping God (9:1-3) and describing themselves as slaves (9:36-37). They vow, along with the Levites, to keep the LORD's commandments (10:30).

The editor presents the Levites as devout, leading the people in repentance and worship (9:5) and affixing their own names to the written covenant on behalf of themselves and the people (10:1-27).

The Levites and people present their forefathers as stubborn and rebellious (9:16-17, 26, 28-30) unfaithful from the outset (9:18), and led by unfaithful, wicked kings (9:34-35). They confess God as universal Creator (9:6), as sovereign (9:7, 10-11), defender of and provider for his people (9:10, 12, 15, 19-21), author of the Law (9:13-14, 29, 34), just in warning his people through prophets and judging them with oppression by other nations and with exile (9:26-28, 30, 32-33), gracious in his forgiveness and in

¹⁰⁸ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxiv, xxviii. The generally accepted view is that the "Ezra Memoir," as it is called, includes Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah 8, although some scholars include Nehemiah 9-10, and the "Nehemiah Memoir" includes Nehemiah 1-7 as well as portions of 12:27-43 and 13:4-31.

raising up saviors (9:17, 19, 27-28, 31-32), patient (9:30) and faithful to his covenant with his people (9:8, 22-25, 31, 32, 35).

The editor of Ezra-Nehemiah places at the climax of his work the covenant renewal ceremony. Readers witness a prayer on the lips of the Levites that not only recounts Israel's redemptive history but embodies the situation of the worshippers themselves. The defiant rebelliousness of the worshippers' forefathers is contrasted with their own repentance. Through the narrative prayer, readers are told the story of Israel's cyclical pattern of rebellion, repentance and renewal, and they wonder what will happen next. The editor's skillful positioning as an epilogue Nehemiah's return to find the covenant broken confirms readers' speculations and compels them to turn their reflection inward.

Rhetorical goals of the prayer and larger pericope

The Levites' rhetorical goal in evoking Ex 34:6 for those assembled in Neh 9:5b-10:1 resembles but is separate from that of the author/editor to his readers in Neh 9:1-10:40, although each seeks to incite the active embrace of the covenant based on the character of the covenant God.

For those assembled, recitation to God of the redemptive story (9:8:b-31), whose main characters are God and their forefathers, ties them as a people both to the iniquity of their fathers and to their inheritance in the promise. At the peak of their story lies a four-fold parallel of illustrations of God's past faithfulness to his covenant people: guidance, instruction, provision and land. It is on the assurance of these same pillars that the reconstituted Israel must rebuild its devastated nation.

But the peak of the story also contains a warning: parallel accounts of apostasy. The one they recount first was prompted by fear; the second – which was also followed by a covenant renewal ceremony – was prompted by impatience. Both stemmed from a profound lack of trust in God and resulted in the rejection of his purposes in favor of safety and assimilation – rejection that ultimately swept their nation into the judgment of exile. The remnant, returned from exile but still in bondage (9:36-37) and surrounded by enemies (Nehemiah 4, 6), faces the same temptations to apostatize. In undertaking to be faithful to a renewed covenant, they must trust in their God, whose character is the focal point of their story and their hope for the future.

Meanwhile, the readers of the story are viewing the events from the perspective of some years later (12:26). The vows of the covenant, set out in 10:2-40, serve as a foreshadowing of the rebellion to come: refrain from marriage with foreign women (10:30, cf. 13:23-24), observe the weekly Sabbath (10:31; cf. 13:15-16), make regular contributions of tithes, offerings and firstfruits to the house of God (10:32-37), provide for the Levites (10:37-38, cf. 13:10) and store contributions in the chambers at the house of God (10:37, 39; cf. 13:4-5,7).

The priest Ezra and the governor, Nehemiah, like two facets of Moses,¹⁰⁹ teach the returned exiles the law, intercede for them, and work to reform them. In the flow of the larger narrative, Ezra, on whom the hand of God rests, is appointed by the Persian king Artaxerxes to bring the law (Ezra 7:6) and ignite the proper worship of God at the rebuilt Temple. Nehemiah, on whom the hand of God also rests (Neh 1.8), is appointed to rebuild the city wall, presides with Ezra over the events leading to the covenant

¹⁰⁹ I'm indebted to Dr. Brian Aucker for his observation of the similarity between Nehemiah's and Moses' return to and confrontation of the people about their rebellion.

renewal ceremony, then signs the covenant seal as governor. Returning to find the covenant blatantly broken, the indignant Nehemiah, not unlike Moses shattering the tablets at the foot of Sinai, sets about reforming the city.

The short-lived vows of faithfulness, along with the dismal record illustrated in the cyclical pattern of rebellion in the story-like prayer, serve as a warning to the readers as they await the Davidic heir promised by Malachi (circa 460 BC), who calls them to covenant faithfulness. At the focal point of the prayer is the ancient confession that rallied the ragtag remnant to its renew its vow, a confession which David himself celebrated, and a confession on which they can rely as they take their part in the story and strive to get it right.

Chapter Three: Acts 6:8-8:3

In Luke's presentation, Jewish leaders, who have murdered the Righteous One because of a misdirected devotion to the Law and the Temple, stone to death the prophet sent to confront their rebelliousness, and unwittingly help usher in the fulfillment of the promise that a Davidic heir will lead his people in bringing the Gentiles into his kingdom.

Embedded in the narrative of Acts 6:8-8:3, the redemptive historical speech of Stephen in 7:2-53, and the reaction it draws, marks a turning point in the early Church. His stoning sparks a persecution that sends the gospel to the end of the earth, despite the scandal of Messiah's shameful death and barriers of religion, culture and language.

The pericope begins at 6:8, narrowing the focus of the previous pericope (6:1-7) from the seven men appointed to ensure equitable distribution among Hellenist and Hebrew widows of the church at Jerusalem to one of the seven in particular: Stephen. The pericope ends at 8:3 after Stephen's burial, with the imperfect verbs ἐλυμαίνετο (devastating) and παρεδίδου (handing over) drawing the action to a close in an epilogue describing Saul's persecution of the now-scattered church. The narrative then shifts with οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες (now those who had been scattered) in 8:4 to the spread of the gospel and the ministry of Philip, another of the seven, in Samaria.

The participants in the main storyline are Stephen, Jews from the synagogue called Freedmen and Jews from Cilicia and Asia,¹¹⁰ the Holy Spirit, the Sanhedrin, false

¹¹⁰ Luke's wording concerning the groups who rose up and disputed with Stephen is a bit puzzling, as the variety of scholarly opinions attests. Views range from one, so Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 186-87, to five, so E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised English ed., 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973-87), II-478, cited by Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 187. However, Luke's use of two definite articles (τῶν ἐκ ... καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ) points to two separate groups; so Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the*

witnesses, the unnamed high priest,¹¹¹ Saul and the Triune God. Others mentioned include the people, elders and scribes. Interestingly, priests are not mentioned among the participants, perhaps because a great many had become obedient to the faith (6:7).

The main participants in Stephen's speech are God, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the children of Israel, Aaron, Joshua, David and Solomon.

Structure and Events Sequence

The paragraph is indicated by a connected set of actions.¹¹²

6:8-7:1 Background and Setting – The use in 6:8 of the imperfect ἐποίει (was doing) indicates background:¹¹³ Stephen was doing wonders and signs among the people. The beginning of the events sequence occurs in 6:9, and is marked by δέ plus the aorist indicative ἀνέστησαν.¹¹⁴ Jews rose up against Stephen. Verse 6:10 offers the simultaneous background observation, evidenced by a shift from the aorist to the imperfects ἴσχυον and ἐλάλει, tied to the previous verse by the conjunction καί,¹¹⁵ that they did not have the power to best him in debate. The events sequence continues with aorist indicatives and adverbial participles in 6:11 with

New Testament, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967, reprinted 1999), s.v. “Λιβερεῖνοι” by Hermann Strathmann, 4:265, and I. H. Marshall, *Acts*, 137.

¹¹¹ David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Annas” by Bruce Chilton, I: 258. Annas served as high priest AD 6-15, so this is possibly Annas (4:6). Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, ix 1, 198 in the *The Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. by William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1987), 537. Annas was father of five high priests. He also was the father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas (Jn 18:13). Annas evidently was the power behind the position, given that Luke refers to him as high priest (Acts 4:6), and refers to him and Caiaphas together as “high priest” (ἀρχιερέως Ἄννα καὶ Καϊάφα, Lk 3:2).

¹¹² Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 20.

¹¹³ Ibid., 22.

¹¹⁴ Aorist indicatives and aorist adverbial participles denote the event line. Ibid., 22.

¹¹⁵ “Spesso, infatti, quella transizione temporale serve a comunicare un’informazione di cui si intende sottolineare la contemporaneità, la repentinità o la sorpresa.” “Often, in fact, the tense transition works to communicate information about which one intends to underline simultaneity, unexpectedness or surprise.” Alviero Niccacci, “Dall’aoristo all’imperfetto, o dal primo piano allo sfondo: un paragone tra sintassi greca e sintassi ebraica,” *Liber annus* 42 (1992): 96. Jessica Patterson translated the journal article.

τότε ὑπέβαλον (then they instigated) men to speak against him, in 6:12 with συνεκίνησάν τε (and they incited) the people, elders and scribes, καὶ ἐπιστάντες (and approaching), συνήρπασαν (they seized) Stephen and καὶ ἤγαγον (and they brought) him before the Sanhedrin, in 6:13 with ἔστησάν (and they set up) false witnesses who made accusations against Stephen, in 6:15 with καὶ ἀτενίσαντες (and gazing) at him and εἶδον (they saw) that Stephen's face was like that of an angel, and in 7:1 with εἶπεν δὲ (and he (the high priest) said) to Stephen "Are these things so?"

7:2-53 Redemptive Historical Speech – The δὲ plus the imperfect ἔφη (and he (Stephen) said) in 7:2 serves as a transition from the main to the embedded narrative of the redemptive historical speech that follows. Stephen answers the high priest's question beginning with the imperative: ἀκούσατε (listen). He appeals to the Sanhedrin as "brothers and fathers" (ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες,) and uses the first person plural (τῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ / our father Abraham). The dominant verb forms of the speech are aorist indicative and aorist adverbial participle.¹¹⁶ The καὶ plus the aorist indicative appears 27 times,¹¹⁷ the δὲ plus the aorist indicative, seven times,¹¹⁸ the καὶ plus the aorist participle, twice,¹¹⁹ and the δὲ plus the aorist participle four times.¹²⁰ All of this indicates that the redemptive

¹¹⁶ The aorist indicative appears 80 times in the redemptive historical speech; the aorist adverbial participle, 18 times.

¹¹⁷ Once each in 7:3, 17, 21, 22, 24, 29, 34, 39, 42, 43, 45, 46 and 52; twice each in 7:5, 15, 16 and 41; three times each in 7:8 and 10.

¹¹⁸ In 7:6, 11, 25, 29, 33, 42 and 47.

¹¹⁹ In 7:24 and 30.

¹²⁰ In 7:12, 14, 21 and 32.

historical summary is itself a narrative.¹²¹ Stephen ends his speech with an indictment in vv. 51-53, shifting to the second person plural (ὁμεῖς / you; οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν / your fathers).

- 7:2-8: Recounts God's presence with Abraham before the Temple existed, and entrance, through circumcision, into the covenant community before the law of Moses existed.¹²² The flow of the embedded events sequence is interrupted by a series of καὶ and proper nouns – a list of patriarchs – closing this section at 7:8b.
- 7:9-16: Recounts the story of Joseph, whose introduction in 7:9 shifts the focus from Abraham and marks the opening of the section. It notes that although Joseph was rejected by his brothers, God made him ruler and, through him, delivered Israel during a time of famine. The section closes in 7:16, with the depiction of Jacob's and Joseph's remains being carried out of Egypt and Joseph's remains being buried in a tomb in Shechem.¹²³
- 7:17-34: Recounts the story of Moses, opening in 7:17 with the simultaneous background information (marked by the imperfect

¹²¹ Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 22.

¹²² William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1984), 74. Circumcision served as a sign of separation, consecration and inclusion in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:13-14). Joseph B. Tyson, "Works of the Law in Galatians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92:3 (Spring 1973): 429. By the first century AD, circumcision evidently had become tied to the keeping of the law of Moses (Acts 21:21, cf. Gal. 5:3; Rom. 2:25). And Tyson observes "Noministic service is chiefly associated with circumcision and food laws."

¹²³ Stephen telescopes several events. In the Exodus, the children of Israel carried Joseph's remains out of Egypt, and the remains were buried (Josh. 24:32) on land Jacob had purchased from the sons of Hamor at Shechem (Gen. 33:19) in the Promised Land. Israel's children had already carried his remains to the Promised Land, when they buried him south of Shechem at the cave at Machpelah, east of Mamre, which Abraham had purchased from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 50:13). Stephen is depicting Abraham as having purchased ground at Shechem by his descendant, Jacob. The land at Shechem and the cave at Machpelah are both part of the land God promised to Abraham's offspring. The next section of the redemptive historical speech opens with the time of the promise drawing near (7:17).

ἤγγιζεν) that the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in 7:6-7 (was approaching) as the people ἠύξησεν (increased) and ἐπληθύνθη (multiplied) in Egypt. It notes that Moses expected his brothers, who rejected him, to have understood God was saving them from bondage in Egypt through him. The section closes with a direct quote from the LORD that he will now deliver his people.

- 7:35-43 Notes that Moses, the rejected ruler and redeemer, prophesied the raising up of another prophet like himself, that Israel turned away from him, the law and God to idols, and so God turned away from Israel. Amos 5:25-27 is evoked to underscore this point.¹²⁴ The emphatic, five-fold repetition¹²⁵ of the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος, beginning at 7:35a, briefly interrupts the flow of the embedded events sequence and marks the beginning of this section. The sequence resumes at 7:39b¹²⁶ with the aorist ἐστράφησαν (and they turned); καὶ ties it to the previous clause. The section closes with the quote from Amos.
- 7:44-50 Notes that God gave the tabernacle, and Solomon built a house¹²⁷ for him, but God, who made all things, does not dwell in houses made by men. The beginning of the section is marked by the imperfect ἦν (was) and a shift in subject from the law to the

¹²⁴ See below.

¹²⁵ Vv. 7:35a, 35b, 36, 37 and 38.

¹²⁶ Both 7:38b and 39a are relative clauses subordinate to οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ γενόμενος (this is the one who was).

¹²⁷ It is interesting to note that the tabernacle, also called בֵּית יְהוָה (house of the LORD) in 1 Sam 1:7, 24, is called הֵיכַל יְהוָה (temple or palace of the LORD) in 1 Sam. 1:9; 3:3 and 2 Sam. 22:7.

Tabernacle/Temple. The term τὴν σκηνὴν (the tent) from the Amos quote in v. 43 of the previous section is picked up in v. 44 and links to the new section, however, the shift in focus from the law (and Israel's disobedience to the law) to the Tabernacle/Temple marks the new section. The section and the embedded narrative close with Is 66:1-2.

- 7:51-53 Stephen switches from the first person plural to the second person plural, marking the beginning of this section, as his appeal becomes an indictment and he reaches the peak, confronting the Sanhedrin and others present with their rebelliousness, equating it with the historic rebelliousness of unfaithful Israel. They are rebellious, stubborn, they do not keep the Law and they have rejected the Righteous One.

7:54-60 Stoning of Stephen – With the close of the speech in the previous verse, the main narrative resumes as the present adverbial participle ἀκούοντες (hearing) and the imperfects διεπρίοντο (they became infuriated) and ἔβρυχον (ground *their teeth*) of 7:54, give the reaction of the Sanhedrin and others gathered. The events sequence resumes in 7:55 with the aorist participle ἀτενίσας (gazing) and aorist indicative εἶδεν (he saw). The pace slows at the Action Peak, as Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazes into heaven and sees Ἰησοῦν ἑστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ (Jesus standing at the right hand of God), and then announces to the crowd what he is seeing,

referring to Jesus as τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (the Son of Man).¹²⁸ Luke underscores for his readers Christ's position at the right hand of God by first describing what Stephen is seeing in 7:55, and then repeating it in Stephen's own words in 7:56.¹²⁹ The action then speeds up with a series of conjunctions (δὲ, twice, and καὶ, six times) connecting a series of aorist participles and indicatives in 7:57 with κράξαντες δὲ (and crying out), those listening συνέσχον (stopped) their ears, καὶ ὤρμησαν (and they rushed) at Stephen, in 7:58 with καὶ ἐκβαλόντες (and after they cast *him* out) they stoned him, καὶ ... ἀπέθεντο (and they laid down) their garments at Saul's feet. Stephen calls out to the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit and not hold the sins of his executioners against them. The sequence ends at 7:60 with καὶ ... εἰπὼν ἐκοιμήθη (and having said *this*, he fell asleep).

8:1-3: Resolution and Epilogue – The imperfect and present participle ἦν συνευδοκῶν (approved) provide an off-storyline¹³⁰ glimpse into Saul's mindset, and the first half of an inclusio completed in 8:3. The phrase ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ (and *there* arose on that day), introduces the epilogue in 8:1, speeding up the time frame through the next two verses. The imperfects ἐλυμαίνετο (was ravaging) and παρεδίδου (was handing over) of 8:3 bring the action to a close.¹³¹

¹²⁸ A reference to the Messianic figure in Dan. 7:13.

¹²⁹ Robert E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse* (New York: Plenum Press, 1983), 26-27. Longacre calls this device "rhetorical underlining."

¹³⁰ Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 22.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Therefore, the structure of the pericope is:

Table 3.1: Structure of Acts 6:8-8:3

I. Setting, Staging (6:8-7:1)
II. Redemptive Historical Speech (7:2-53)
A. Law (Circumcision) & God's presence before Moses & Temple (7:2-8)
B. God used rejected Joseph to save Israel (7:9-16)
C. God used rejected Moses to save Israel (7:17-34)
D. Israel and the Law (7:35-43)
E. Israel and the Tabernacle/Temple (7:44-50)
F. Israel's rejection of God's presence in Christ and of law (7:51-53) ^{HP¹³²}
III. Stoning of Stephen (7:54-60) ^{AP¹³³}
III. Resolution and Epilogue (8:1-3)

There is a parallelism evident in the structure of the Redemptive Historical Speech as Stephen answers the question, "Are these things so?" In asking this, the high priest is referring to the charges brought by the false witnesses that Stephen never ceases to speak words against 1) this holy place¹³⁴ and 2) the law, and that he has said Jesus will 3) destroy this place and 4) change the customs Moses handed down.

The speech opens by recounting God's presence with his covenant people before Moses and the Temple and ends with Israel's rejection of God's presence in Christ – the Righteous One – and of the Law that pointed to him. These bracket points Stephen makes about God's appointments of Joseph and Moses, both rejected rulers, to redeem Israel, and of Israel's rejection of the Law and misunderstanding of the Tabernacle/Temple.

¹³² Hortatory Peak

¹³³ Action Peak

¹³⁴ Although major witnesses to the Book of Acts, including three Primary Alexandrian manuscripts, omit τούτου (this) from τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου τούτου (this holy place), it seems likely from the τὸν τόπον τοῦτον in v. 14 that Stephen's speech occurred before the Sanhedrin in its place of assembly at the Temple. So Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000), 298.

There also is a promise-fulfillment theme underlying the embedded narrative. It includes that of land (7:5a; cf. 7:45); offspring (7:5b; cf. 7:8, 18); the foretelling of 400 years of slavery (7:6; cf. 7:19, 34, 36); judgment on the oppressive nation (7:7a; cf. 7:34, 36); worship “in this place” (7:7b; cf. 7:45-47); and a prophet like Moses raised up by God (7:37; cf. 7:52).

Bruce’s division of the speech into five units¹³⁵ breaks Stephen’s Moses narrative into three units, ending the unit he calls “Israel in Egypt” with the Pharaoh’s oppression at 7:19, and beginning the Moses narrative at Moses’ birth (7:20). The break is not supported by either the grammatical structure, which marks the beginning of the new section in v. 17 with the imperfect ἤγγιζεν: Καθὼς δὲ ἤγγιζεν ὁ χρόνος τῆς ἐπαγγελίας (And when the time of the promise approached),¹³⁶ or the Pentateuch, which itself divides the story between Joseph’s death at the end of Genesis, and the Pharaoh who didn’t know Joseph at the beginning of Exodus.

Bruce separates Moses’ “early days” (7:20-29) from his “call” (7:30-34). The division could be supported by the change in time and setting: Καὶ πληρωθέντων ἐτῶν τεσσεράκοντα (Now, when forty years had passed). However, the absence of the imperfect and the overall structure of the continuing Moses narrative argues for one unit.

Neither Soards¹³⁷ nor Kilgallen¹³⁸ makes a division in the portion of Stephen’s narrative involving Moses (7:17-43). However, the rhetorical structure of the five-fold οὗτος, beginning at 7:35a, which interrupts the events sequence until 7:39b, and the Amos quote, set the section apart.

¹³⁵ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 130.

¹³⁶ My translation.

¹³⁷ Soards, *The Speeches in Acts*, 59.

¹³⁸ Kilgallen, *The Stephen Speech*, 31.

Hortatory Peak of Embedded Narrative: Acts 7:51-53

In building to his hortatory peak, Stephen quotes two OT passages. The first caps his discussion of Israel and the Law (7:35-43).

Acts 7:42b-43

μὴ σφάγια καὶ θυσίας προσηνέγκατέ μοι
ἔτη τεσσαράκοντα ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, οἶκος
Ἰσραὴλ;
καὶ ἀνελάβετε τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μολοχ
καὶ τὸ ἄστρον τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῶν Ραιφαν,
τοὺς τύπους οὓς ἐποιήσατε προσκυνεῖν
αὐτοῖς,
καὶ μετοικιῶ ὑμᾶς ἐπέκεινα Βαβυλῶνος.

‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and
sacrifices,
during the forty years in the wilderness,
O house of Israel?
You took up the tent of Moloch
and the star of your god Rephan,
the images that you made to worship;
and I will send you into exile beyond
Babylon.’

Amos 5:25-27

μὴ σφάγια καὶ θυσίας προσηνέγκατέ μοι
ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη, οἶκος
Ἰσραὴλ;
καὶ ἀνελάβετε τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μολοχ
καὶ τὸ ἄστρον τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῶν Ραιφαν,
τοὺς τύπους αὐτῶν, οὓς ἐποιήσατε
ἑαυτοῖς.
καὶ μετοικιῶ ὑμᾶς ἐπέκεινα Δαμασκοῦ,
λέγει κύριος, ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ
ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and
sacrifices,
in the wilderness[during the] forty years,
O house of Israel?
You took up the tent of Moloch
and the star of your god Rephan,
their images that you made for
yourselves.
And I will send you into exile beyond
Damascus, says the LORD; God
Almighty is his name.

The quote follows the LXX rather than the Hebrew,¹³⁹ and is different from the LXX in several ways:

¹³⁹ The LXX deviates from the Hebrew in Amos 5:26: כִּי־יִקַּח מַלְאָכָיו וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּתוֹכָם וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּתוֹכָם וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּתוֹכָם (You shall take up Sikkuth your king, and Kiyyun your star-god – your images that you made for yourselves). See Footnote 145. The reason is beyond the scope of this work, however, as Marshall notes, *Acts*, 154, either text would support Stephen’s argument.

- The word order is transposed from the original ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη (in the wilderness forty years) to ἔτη τεσσαράκοντα ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (forty years in the wilderness). The change is minor with no effect on the meaning, and could stem from quoting the LXX from memory or from a different Greek translation¹⁴⁰ of Amos.
- The wording is changed from the original τοὺς τύπους αὐτῶν, οὓς ἐποιήσατε ἑαυτοῖς (their images, which you made for yourselves) to τοὺς τύπους οὓς ἐποιήσατε προσκυνεῖν αὐτοῖς (the images, which you made to worship). The latter makes explicit the implication of the former and, again, could stem from quoting from memory.
- Δαμασκοῦ (Damascus) in the original becomes Βαβυλῶνος (Babylon). In prophesying to the Northern Kingdom (ca. 760 BC) of impending judgment, Amos describes it as “exile beyond Damascus.” Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 BC and its inhabitants were exiled “beyond Damascus” to various parts of the empire.¹⁴¹ From the vantage point of Stephen’s speech in Acts, the exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, as well as that of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which fell to Babylon in 586 BC, were both in the past. His substitution, aimed at inclusivity, is a rhetorical device meant to illustrate the historic rebelliousness of Israel as a whole and God’s resulting judgment.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Melvin K. H. Peters, “Septuagint,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1093. There were many Greek versions of the various books of the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁴¹ K. Lawson Younger Jr., “The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no.3 (July 1999): 482.

¹⁴² So Marshall on inclusivity, *Acts*, 153; contra Bruce, who sees a substitution of the exile of the Southern Kingdom “perhaps as being more relevant in a Jerusalem setting.” Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 146.

In the original context of Amos 5:25-27, the prophet confronts the Northern Kingdom about its persistent idolatry and a superficial worship of the LORD that has become repulsive to him. According to Amos 1:1, Amos prophesies during a time Uzziah is reigning in Judah (ca. 776-735 BC), and Jeroboam II in Israel (ca. 791-749 BC) – about 760 BC.

Scholars disagree about what is meant by Amos 5:25, whether its rhetorical question¹⁴³ – μή σφάγια καὶ θυσίας προσηγάκατέ μοι ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη, οἶκος Ἰσραὴλ; (Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, in the wilderness [during the] forty years, O house of Israel?) – expects a negative or positive answer and whether Stephen's use runs counter to its original intent.

There are three main views: (1) Stephen's use contradicts original intent. Both call for a negative answer. The original points to Israel's heart-faithfulness in the wilderness as preferable to the system of sacrifices and offerings given at the time of Amos, while Stephen uses it to show that historically unfaithful Israel brought sacrifices and offerings to false gods in the wilderness;¹⁴⁴ (2) Stephen's use contradicts original intent. The original calls for a positive answer and points to Israel's faithfulness in the wilderness, while Stephen's quote calls for a negative answer and points to unfaithful Israel's sacrifices and offerings to false gods in the wilderness;¹⁴⁵ (3) Stephen's use coincides with original intent, with both calling for a negative response and pointing to

¹⁴³ The Hebrew begins with the adverb *u*, which is generally taken as an interrogative. See below.

¹⁴⁴ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 204.

¹⁴⁵ Marshall, *Acts*, 153.

Israel's historic rebelliousness – Israel, historically idolatrous, brought sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness, but not to the LORD.¹⁴⁶

It is more likely, however, that Stephen's use coincides with the original intent. Although his question and that of the LXX translation call for a negative response while the Hebrew calls for a positive response, Stephen captures the essence of the message.

The adverb *הֲ*, which begins the Hebrew sentence of Amos 5:25, *הֲזָבַחַם וּמִנְחָה*, is not necessarily an interrogative requiring a negative response. It can mark an “exclamatory nuance,” so that the sentence would carry the sense: “Indeed, you brought me slain beasts and offerings in the wilderness!...”¹⁴⁷ The next two verses (5:26-27) refer to Israel's idolatry¹⁴⁸ and the LORD's impending judgment of exile on Amos' generation. Israel's unfaithfulness dated to the wilderness period (Dt 32:15-18; Ezek 20:13, 15-16, 24) – contra Bruce and Marshall, who understand Amos 5:25 to be referring to a period of Israel's faithfulness.¹⁴⁹ By Amos' time, its worship violated the regulative principle¹⁵⁰ for appropriate worship because of its idolatry (Ex. 20:3), its synchronistic mindset (Lev. 10:3) and its apathy (Deut. 10:12).

“...Amos' point is that they did bring sacrifices, and under Moses' leadership, and it did not stop God from judging the wilderness generation for their unfaithfulness; how much more now that the “regulative principle” is so grossly violated!”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Kilgallen, *The Stephen Speech*, 86-87. Kilgallen does not address whether the question calls for a positive or negative response, but he seems to assume a negative response.

¹⁴⁷ Joüon-Muraoka §161b, which cites Amos 5:25 as an example.

¹⁴⁸ David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.vv. “Rephan,” “Sakkuth and Kaiwan,” by Samuel A. Meier, 5:677, 904. Sikkuth and Kiyyun, or Sakkuth and Kaiwan, may refer to the Mesopotamian name and title, respectively, of the planet Saturn, which was worshipped as a god, or Sikkuth could refer to a portable shrine or tabernacle, hence the LXX translation τὴν σκιην. Likewise, Rephan, in the LXX translation, stems from Greek transliterations of Kiyyun.

¹⁴⁹ Bruce, *The Acts*, 144; Marshall, *Acts*, 153.

¹⁵⁰ C. John Collins, “A Study Guide for the Old Testament Prophetical Books,” rev. ed. (St. Louis: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2006), 25.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

The second OT passage Stephen quotes in building to his hortatory peak caps his discussion of Israel and the Tabernacle/Temple (7:44-50):

Acts 7:49:50

Ὁ οὐρανός μοι θρόνος,
 ἢ δὲ γῆ ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν μου·
 ποῖον οἶκον οἰκοδομήσετέ μοι,
 λέγει κύριος,
 ἢ τίς τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεώς μου;
 οὐχὶ ἡ χεὶρ μου ἐποίησεν ταῦτα πάντα;
 Heaven is my throne,
 and the earth is a footstool for my feet.
 What kind of house would you build for
 me, says the LORD,
 or what is the place of my rest?
 Did not my hand make all these things?

Isa 66:1-2

Οὕτως λέγει κύριος
 Ὁ οὐρανός μοι θρόνος,
 ἢ δὲ γῆ ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν μου,
 ποῖον οἶκον οἰκοδομήσετέ μοι;
 ἢ ποῖος τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεώς μου;
 πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα ἐποίησεν ἡ χεὶρ μου,
 καὶ ἔστιν ἐμὰ πάντα ταῦτα, λέγει κύριος,
 καὶ ἐπὶ τίνα ἐπιβλέψω
 ἀλλ' ἢ ἐπὶ τὸν ταπεινὸν καὶ ἡσύχιον
 καὶ τρέμοντα τοὺς λόγους μου;

Thus says the LORD:

‘Heaven is my throne,
 and the earth is a footstool for my feet.
 What kind of house would you build for me?
 Or of what kind is my place of rest?
 For all these things, my hand made
 and all these things are mine, says the LORD.
 And upon whom will I look, except upon the
 one who is humble
 and quiet and trembles at my words?

Again, the quote follows the LXX rather than the Hebrew,¹⁵² and is different from the

LXX in several ways:

¹⁵² The LXX deviates from the Hebrew of Is. 66:2: וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר יָדִי יָצְרָה וְיָקָם כָּל-אֲשֶׁר נָאֵם יְהוָה וְאֶל-כָּל אֲשֶׁר אָבִיט אֶל-עַנִּי וְנִכְהָרִיתִי וְתָרִיד עַל-דַּבְּרִי (All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and

- The change from the original ἡ ποῖος τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεώς μου (Or of what kind is my place of rest?) to ἡ τίς τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεώς μου (Or what is the place of my rest?). The omission of the qualitative interrogative pronoun ποῖος (Of what kind?) might have the subtle effect of changing the question involving the resting place from type to location, supporting Stephen's argument that God's presence is not confined to one location. However, as Porter points out, "[m]any grammarians posit that there is a loss of distinction between ποῖος and τίς in Hellenistic Greek."¹⁵³
- The change from the original of πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα ἐποίησεν ἡ χεὶρ μου (for all these things, my hand made) to οὐχὶ ἡ χεὶρ μου ἐποίησεν ταῦτα πάντα (Did not my hand made all these things?). The addition of the negative οὐχὶ changes the LORD's comment of Isaiah in to a question that demands the response: Yes! And emphasizes Stephen's contention that God is transcendent.
- The omission of all but the first part of Is 66:2: ... וַיִּהְיֶיךָ כְּלִיאֶלֶה נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְלֹא־יָהָא אֲבִיט ... אֶל־עֲנִי וְנִכְה־רִיחַ וְתָרַד עַל־דְּבָרִי (...and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word) in the Hebrew, and ... καὶ ἔστιν ἐμὰ πάντα ταῦτα, λέγει κύριος, καὶ ἐπὶ τίνα ἐπαβλέψω ἀλλ' ἢ ἐπὶ τὸν ταπεινὸν καὶ ἡσυχίον καὶ τρέμοντα τοὺς λόγους μου (...and all things are mine, says the LORD. And upon whom will I look, except upon the one who is humble and quiet and trembles at my words) in the LXX. The reason for the omission may be that the first part is all

trembles at my word.) The LORD's transcendence over his creation implies his ownership, which the LXX makes explicit.

¹⁵³ Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 137.

Stephen needs to make his point. However, it is likely that just the opening words of Is 66:2 would bring to mind not only the rest of the verse, but also Is 66:3-4, which falls in line with the perfunctory worship Amos decries and underscores Stephen's argument, and Is 66:5, which, interestingly, brings to the minds of Luke's readers Stephen's own situation.

The oracle containing Isaiah 66:1-2 does not tie it to a specific occasion.¹⁵⁴ Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom ca. 740-680 BC during the reigns of Ahaz (ca. 735-715 BC), Hezekiah (ca. 715-686 BC) and Manasseh (ca. 687-642 BC). Despite reforms under Hezekiah, during much of Isaiah's service, worship in Judah had become an external religion, and idol worship that had taken place in Israel had seeped down into Judah.

Included in the portion of the book that seeks to prepare God's people for the coming salvation (Chapters 56-66), Isaiah 66:1-2 uses royal imagery to convey God's transcendence as creator. His words echo those of Solomon at the dedication of Temple (1 Kings 8:27, 2 Chr 2:6)

The concept of God's status as king over his creation is also found in Isaiah 37:16, and similar imagery of the LORD ruling from his throne in heaven is found in the Psalms.¹⁵⁵ The prophet Jeremiah speaks similarly of God's transcendence (Jer 23:24).

¹⁵⁴ Critical arguments that Chapters 40-66 reflect the exilic period are beyond the scope of this work. However, support for single authorship of Isaiah includes but is not limited to linguistic similarities between Isaiah I (1-39), II (40-55) and III (56-66) such as "Holy One of Israel," thematic connections, tradition of attribution to Isaiah by Ben Sira, Josephus and the NT, and that the idolatry condemned reflects Canaanite rather than Babylonian practices. For an in-depth discussion, see Collins, "A Study Guide for the Old Testament Prophetic Books," 39-44. Collins cites John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); Amos Hakham, *Da'at Mikra: Isaiah, vol. 1* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1984); and Rachel Margalioth, *The Indivisible Isaiah: Evidence for the Single Authorship of the Prophetic Book* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1964).

¹⁵⁵ Including Pss 11:4; 103:19; 123:1.

In the New Testament, Jesus alludes to Isaiah 66:1 during his Sermon on the Mount, in a discourse against taking oaths rather than simply being truthful. He warns his disciples not to swear by heaven or earth, reminding them that they are God's throne and footstool (Matt. 5:34-35). In Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21), he speaks of God's transcendence and its implications for worship. As Collins notes, "God is much more concerned about the manner than the place."¹⁵⁶

Paul, in his address to the Stoics as well as the Epicureans and polytheists at the Aeropagus, talks of God's transcendence in the same terms, tying it to his creation of all things and noting that he does not live in man-made temples (Acts 17:24).

In his Revelation, John describes the risen Christ seated on his heavenly throne (Rev. 4:2). His authority over all things is again tied to his role as creator (Rev. 4:11).

Reaching his hortatory peak (7:51-53), Stephen launches into an indictment of the Sanhedrin and others present calling them:

- Σκληροτράχηλοι (stiff-necked ones). The phrase, קָשֶׁה-עֹרֶךְ in the Hebrew, σκληροτράχηλος in the LXX, appears six times¹⁵⁷ in the Pentateuch and once in Proverbs. The LORD uses the phrase three times to describe the Israelites in connection with their worship of the golden calf, a rebelliousness that draws his wrath, which threatens to consume them (Ex 32:9; 33:3, 5). Moses uses it once in interceding for the people (34:9) and twice in admonishing them (Dt 9:6, 13). Proverbs warns (Prv 29:1) that the stiff-necked אִין מִרְפָּא פִתְעָ יִשְׁבֵּר (will suddenly be broken beyond healing).

¹⁵⁶ C. John Collins, "John 4:23-24, 'In Spirit and Truth': An Idiomatic Proposal," *Presbyterion* 21 (Fall 1995): 120.

¹⁵⁷ The LXX deviates from the Hebrew at Ex 32:9, missing the verse וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה רְאִיתִי אֶת-הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עַם-קָשֶׁה-עֹרֶךְ הוּא (And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.")

- ἀπερίτμητοι καρδίαις καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν (uncircumcised in heart and ears). The phrase in whole or in part appears at least four times in the OT (Lv 26:41; Jer 6:10; 9:26; Ezek 44:9) in connection with the LORD's resulting wrath, judgment and/or exile. Stephen continues his indictment, saying:
- ὑμεῖς ἀεὶ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ ἀντιπίπτετε (You always resist the Holy Spirit). The reference recalls Israel's grieving of God in its defiance of his purposes (Is 63:10) and its rebellion that grieved him in the wilderness (Ps 78:40).
- τίνα τῶν προφητῶν οὐκ ἐδίωξαν οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν; (Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?) The reference echoes such words as those of Elijah to God under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel (1Kgs 19:10); of the Chronicler recalling the apostasy of Judah under Zedekiah (2 Chr 36:16); of the returned remnants' prayer of repentance and renewal (Neh 9:26); of Jesus' words to his disciples during his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:12) and of his chilling words to the υἱοὶ ... τῶν φονευσάντων τοὺς προφῆτας (sons of those who murdered the prophets; Mt 23:31, cf. 23:29-36). They also foreshadow Stephen's own death.
- ἀπέκτειναν τοὺς προκαταγγείλαντας περὶ τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ δικαίου (They [your fathers] killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One). The reference hearkens back to Jesus' words to the Pharisees and lawyers in Lk 11:51 (cf. Matt.23:35) and also may stem from an extra-biblical source or sources.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ James Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research, With a Supplement* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press for Society of Biblical Literature, 1981), 125-26. References to Isaiah's martyrdom, for example, are found in other literature of roughly the same period, such as the apocryphal *Lives of the Prophets*, and the three-part pseudegraphic *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, the first part of which may date to the 2nd century BC.

- τοῦ δικαίου, οὗ νῦν ὑμεῖς προδόται καὶ φονεῖς ἐγένεσθε (the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered). The reference to Jesus, his trial and crucifixion, recalls Peter's words to the astonished crowd gathered at Solomon's portico (3:14; cf. 3:9-26). The reference to Jesus as the Righteous One, found in the NT outside Acts in 1 John 2:1, may have been a title used of Jesus by the early believers, such as Ananias, given Paul's reference in his speech before the crowd of Jews outside the barracks in Jerusalem (22:13-15). And it is not inconceivable that Stephen was present for – and possibly even converted at – the time of Peter's speech (4:4), and therefore would have retained much of what Peter had said, including Peter's reference to Jesus as the Righteous One and his reference to Moses' prophecy of God's raising up another like himself (3:22; 7:37). Paul, who witnessed Stephen's speech and martyrdom and was converted a short time later by the risen Christ, likely retained much of what Stephen had said. It is not implausible that he, along with others (8:2), such as Philip perhaps, provided Luke with the material from which he reconstructed Stephen's speech. While scholars, such as Marshall,¹⁵⁹ have noted similarities between the speech of Stephen and those of Peter or Paul, none seems¹⁶⁰ to have proposed the possible explanation of Stephen having witnessed Peter's speech and Paul having witnessed Stephen's. Marshall goes so far as to note: "Attempts to relate the outlook of the speech to that of other early Christians or early Christian groups (such as the writer to the Hebrews) have not led to any certain results."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Marshall, *Acts*, 141-42.

¹⁶⁰ I could not find any scholars who suggested this possibility.

¹⁶¹ Marshall, *Acts*, 142.

Stephen's reference to Jesus as the Righteous One makes a more direct allusion to Is 24:16 than did those of Peter and Paul. It is interesting that Stephen seems to draw from the Hebrew rather than the LXX, although given the variety of Greek translations of the OT (noted earlier) he may have been alluding to version closer to the Hebrew:

Acts 7:52b	Is 24: 16	Is 24: 16
τοῦ δικαίου, οὗ νῦν ὑμεῖς προδότηαι καὶ φονεῖς ἐγένεσθε	מִכְנֹף הָאָרֶץ וְמִרְתַּשׁ מִצְנֹנוּ צָבִי לְצִדִּיק וְאָמַר רְזִי-לִי רְזִי-לִי אוֹי לִי בְּגָדִים בְּגָדִים בְּגָדִים בְּגָדִים	ἀπὸ τῶν περὺγων τῆς γῆς τέρατα ἠκούσαμεν Ἑλλῆς τῷ εὐσεβεῖ. καὶ ἐροῦσιν Οὐαὶ τοῖς ἀθετοῦσιν, οἱ ἀθετοῦντες τὸν νόμον
... the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered...	From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One. But I say, "I waste away. Woe is me! For the traitors have betrayed, with betrayal, the traitors have betrayed."	From the ends of the earth we hear wonders: Hope for the Devout One. But those who reject the law will say, "Woe to those who reject."

The title צָדִיק (the Righteous One) also appears in Is 53:11, the fourth of Isaiah's four Servant Songs, in which the priest-like servant intercedes for his people, offering himself as a sacrifice for their sins and בְּדַעְתּוֹ יִצְדִּיק צָדִיק עֲבָדִי לְרַבִּים (by his knowledge shall the Righteous One, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous). In Prv 21:12, the Righteous One refers to the LORD, who observes the wicked and throws him down to ruin. The title also appears of the Messiah in 1 Enoch 38:2 (When the Righteous One appears...) of the coming day of judgment. Portions of the pseudepigraphic book date from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD.¹⁶²

¹⁶² E. Issac, "1 (Ethiopic Translation of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Vol. 1: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*, ed. James Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 7.

- οἵτινες ἐλάβετε τὸν νόμον εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων καὶ οὐκ ἐφυλάξατε (You who have received the law as delivered by angels and have not kept it). The reference apparently recalls the LXX translation¹⁶³ of Dt 33:2 of the LORD coming down from Sinai, ἄγγελοι μετ' αὐτοῦ (angels with him).

Key Words

Luke repeats several phrases, words or their roots across several pericopes. They include:

- πλήρης πνεύματος (filled with the Spirit), various forms of this phrase appear a total of 14 times in Luke and Acts. It appears three times of Stephen, either directly or indirectly, in Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55. In these instances, as well as in Lk 4:1 and Acts 11:24, Luke uses the adjective πλήρης (full). He uses the verb πίμπλημι (fill) with the genitive in Lk 1:15, 41, 67; and Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, and the verb πληρόω (fill) with the genitive in Acts 13:52. Each of the instances is used with the genitive of material πνεύματος (See Footnote 134).
- τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα (wonders and signs), the phrase appears twice in the present pericope in 6:8 and 7:36. It also appears in 2:43, and transposed, σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (signs and wonders), in 4:30, 5:12; 14:3 and 15:12.
- διαπρίω (infuriated), the phrase appears only once in this pericope (7:54) and only twice in the NT, the other appearance being 5:33 in describing the Sanhedrin's reaction to Peter's speech. It carries the sense of being sawn asunder, and appears once in the LXX (1 Ch 20:3) in describing labor.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ The Hebrew speaks of the LORD coming from Sinai לְמִיַּיִנוּ אֵשׁ בָּרָבָה לְיָמֵינוּ (from ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand).

¹⁶⁴ BAGD, 235.

- διασπείρω (scattered), forms of which appear in 8:1, 8:4 and 11:19, all of which involve the persecuted church. Interestingly, Luke uses the term διασκορπίζω, which also can be translated “scattered”, in Gamaliel’s speech (5:37) of the followers of false Messiahs, and in his gospel in verses where the context is judgment (Lk 1:51) or waste (Lk 15:13, 16:1).
- δύνάμις (power) appears in Luke and Acts 25 times,¹⁶⁵ all of which involve supernatural empowerment by God.
- μάρτυς (witness), forms of which appear 15 times in Luke and Acts in the context of false witnesses (Acts 6:13), witnesses in general (Lk 11:48; Acts 7:58), and witnesses of the gospel (Lk 24:48; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15, 20 and 26:16).

Literary devices and characterization

Luke, as the writer of Luke-Acts, clearly sets himself apart from his characters, both in his prologues in Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1, in which he discusses his purpose for his two-volume work, and also when he himself enters the narrative beginning at Acts 16:11. Both Stephen and Luke give great attention to characterization in this pericope, and use various devices to underscore their points.

In answering the high priest’s question, Stephen addresses the Sanhedrin in the Hebrew rhetoric of promise and fulfillment, as does Paul when he addresses Jews in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (13:16-41).¹⁶⁶ Stephen characterizes Joseph and Moses as

¹⁶⁵ Lk 1:17, 35; 4:14, 36; 5:17; 6:19; 8:46; 9:1; 10:13, 19; 19:37; 21:26-27; 22:69; 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:22; 3:12; 4:7, 33; 6:8; 8:10, 13; 10:38 and 19:11.

¹⁶⁶ Although there are many similarities between the speeches, there are also many differences, which include: Stephen refers to God as ὁ θεὸς τῆς δόξης (the God of glory), while Paul refers to him as ὁ θεὸς τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου Ἰσραὴλ (the God of this people Israel); Stephen refers to Moses as leading the people out of Egypt and performing signs and wonders (7:31), as being with them in the wilderness and delivering

rejected by their people but appointed by God as rulers and redeemers, subtly modeling them as types of Jesus Christ. He subtly characterizes Jesus as the prophet Moses prophesied God would raise up (7:37), refers to him as Messiah by calling him the Righteous One and charges them with his murder.

Stephen tailors his redemptive historical narrative to the charges brought against him, and begins by identifying himself to his audience, such as by calling them ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες (brothers and fathers; 7:2) and referring to τῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ (our father Abraham; 7:2). Speaking before them as a prophet, Stephen illustrates their misdirected devotion to the Law and the Temple by quoting a prophet to the Northern Kingdom and then a prophet to the Southern Kingdom. He continues his use of first person plural through 7:44 (τοῖς πατράσιν ἡμῶν, with our fathers), then suddenly distances himself from his audience in 7:51, calling them stiff-necked, uncircumcised in hearts and ears, and referring to οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν (your fathers) 7:51-52. While the change in tone could stem from fact that Luke likely does not recount the entire speech, Stephen may have intended the abrupt change in tone. He may have taken an approach similar to that of Nathan in confronting David about his sin (2 Samuel 12), or perhaps he recognized he was getting nowhere with his audience. In any event, the abrupt change in the tone of Stephen's speech is a factor that supports its historicity, contra Dibelius, who contends that Luke composed the speeches in Acts.¹⁶⁷

the law at Sinai (7:38), and it is Moses the people refuse to obey (7:39), while Paul refers to God leading the people out of Egypt (13:17), putting up with them in the wilderness (13:18), destroying the nations (13:19), giving them judges (13:20), Saul (13:21) and David (13:22); and Stephen's reference to Jesus is veiled: the Righteous One (7:52), while Paul's is more explicit: David's offspring, the Savior Jesus whom God promised (13:23). These differences do not point to a difference of opinion, rather to different audiences for different purposes: Stephen is answering specific charges about the blaspheming the law and temple, while Paul is building a bridge to bring the Jews the gospel.

¹⁶⁷ M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. by Mary Ling, ed. by Heinrich Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 3.

Luke characterizes Stephen as a trustworthy, godly, Spirit-empowered Hellenist,¹⁶⁸ steeped in Scripture, courageous, wise and eloquent.

Luke repeatedly refers to Stephen as being full of the Holy Spirit (6:3, indirectly, and in 6:5 and 7:55). He singles out Stephen in his listing of the seven appointed to handle the daily distribution of the Jerusalem church, placing him at the head of the list and inserting the descriptive clause: ἄνδρα πλήρης πίστεως καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου (a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit). He refers to Stephen as being πλήρης χάριτος καὶ δυνάμεως (full of grace and power), notes that he was performing τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα μεγάλα (great wonders and signs) among the people (6:8). He describes Stephen's face during his appearance before the council as like that of an angel (6:15), and portrays him as gazing into heaven and seeing δόξαν θεοῦ (the glory of God), and Jesus at God's right hand (7:55). Both descriptions bring to readers' minds Moses at Mount Sinai (Ex 24:16; 34:29-35). Stephen's audience should see what Luke makes apparent to his readers: Stephen's words are God's.

In recounting that the Jews were unable to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke, Luke evokes Jesus' promise of provision to his followers (Lk 21:15) using the same terms σοφία (wisdom) and ἀνθίστημι (withstand), and in the case of the latter, the same form (ἀντιστῆναι).

In his portrayal of Stephen's martyrdom, Luke evokes Jesus' trial and death, recounting accusations brought by false witnesses (6:13; Lk 23:2; cf. 20:25); intercession for their killers (Lk 23:34; 7:60) and the commending of their spirits, Stephen's to Jesus

¹⁶⁸ Stephen is a Greek name, as are the names of the other seven appointed after a complaint by the Hellenists (6:5), and those who dispute with Stephen are Hellenists (6:9).

(7:59) and Jesus' to the Father (Lk 23:46). In this, the reader is reminded of Jesus' words about a fully trained disciple being like his teacher (Lk 6:40).

To set off his action peak, Luke uses repetition¹⁶⁹ and slows his narrative. First, he depicts Stephen gazing into heaven and describes that he is seeing Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ (Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 7:55). Luke then has Stephen himself describe to the crowd what he is seeing (7:56). Stephen's reference to Jesus as τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (the Son of Man), echoes Jesus own self-description.¹⁷⁰ Luke underscores for readers the implication not only by his repetition but by the reaction of the crowd. Having borne Stephen's condemnation with little more than rage and teeth-grinding (7:54), they now rush at him, ears plugged against his "blasphemy" of depicting Jesus as the Son of Man (he whom Daniel depicts as sharing God's glory; 7:13-14) standing at God's right hand. They cast Stephen out of the city and stone him (7:57-58).

Luke seems to describe the Jews who originally rise up in opposition against Stephen as belonging to two groups,¹⁷¹ one from a synagogue¹⁷² made up of Freedmen, Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and another from Cilicia and Asia. He characterizes them as dishonest and conniving. Rather than considering Stephen's arguments when they are bested in debate (6:9) by his Holy Spirit-empowered wisdom and eloquence (6:10), they work secretly to arrange for slanderers to stir up the people, elders and scribes against

¹⁶⁹ Robert E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse* (New York: Plenum Press, 1983), 26-27. Longacre calls this device "rhetorical underlining."

¹⁷⁰ A reference to the Messianic figure in Dan 7:13, Jesus refers to himself this way repeatedly – five times in Luke alone (Lk 9:22, 12:10; 21:27; 22:48; 24:7).

¹⁷¹ See Footnote 1.

¹⁷² John R. McRay, "Inscriptions," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2 vols., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 1:1040. A Greek inscription dedicating a 1st Century synagogue on Mt. Ophel in Jerusalem was discovered during excavations in 1913-14. The inscription makes reference to synagogue ruler Vettienos, a Roman name, which may indicate a Jewish slave who had been freed and named for his master.

him, and bring against him witnesses, whom Luke explicitly describes as ψευδεῖς (false) (6:11-13).

Luke characterizes the high priest,¹⁷³ the Sanhedrin and the others listening to Stephen as stubborn and rebellious (7:51), who, though recognizing that Stephen's face is ὡσεὶ πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου (as the face of an angel; 6:15), literally refuse to listen, συνέσχον τὰ ὦτα (stopping their ears) evidently from hearing blasphemy (7:57). He describes them as διεπρίοντο ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν (cut to the heart). He uses the same verb (διαπρίω) and form earlier in 5:33 in describing Sanhedrin's reaction to Peter's speech but emphasizes the crowd's fury here by adding ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν. He echoes his own previous wording in 2:37 to underscore the contrast between their reaction and the response of the (εὐλαβεῖς) devout Jews who κατενύγησαν τὴν καρδίαν (were cut to the heart) in response to Peter's similar address, which ended in the rebuke: Ἰησοῦν ὃν ὑμεῖς ἐσταυρώσατε (Jesus, whom you crucified; 2:36; 2:23). A hapex legomenon, κατανύσσομαι carries the sense of sharp anxiety or remorse.¹⁷⁴

Luke describes Saul as a νεανίας (young man) who approves of Stephen's execution. While he makes no mention of Saul's participation in the actual stoning, he underscores Saul's complicity in Stephen's death by noting here and repeating later in the then-Paul's own words (22:20) that those who did stone Stephen left their garments in Saul's care, apparently to free their arms so they could throw the stones with greater ease, accuracy and force.

¹⁷³ Interestingly, he does not name the high priest here, even though he quotes him directly. In fact, of the 10 times (Lk 3:2; 22:50, 54; Acts 3:2; 4:6; 5:17, 21, 27; 7:1; 9:1) Luke appears to be referring specifically to Annas, he names him only twice.

¹⁷⁴ BAGD, 523. The verb also is used in the LXX of Ahab in humbling himself before the LORD (1Kgs 1:27, 29) and of Daniel on his frightening vision and encounter with a man on the banks of the Tigris (Dn 10:15).

Rhetorical goals of the speech and the larger pericope

Stephen's arrest and appearance before the Sanhedrin link up with those of Peter and John in Chapter 4 and the apostles in Chapter 5, though neither of those appearances includes a speech that is a redemptive historical summary. Like Peter (4:8), Stephen is described as being full of the Spirit¹⁷⁵ as he is speaking (7:55, also 6:10), and in both cases, the Sanhedrin marks, though does not seem to understand, their empowerment (4:13, 6:15). This empowerment of the Holy Spirit is that which Jesus prophesied and promised in Lk 12:11-12 and 21:12-15, and also in Acts 1:8, in which he tells his followers they will be his witnesses in "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Stephen's martyrdom ignites a persecution that propels the church out from Jerusalem into Judea and Samara (8:1) with a momentum mirrored by the flow of Luke's narrative (8:4, 40, 11:19-24; 26:20), so that by the end of the book, Jesus' witnesses are proclaiming his gospel at Rome, whose empire stretches to the end the earth (23:11; 28:28-31).

The events of this pericope also introduce readers to Saul, whom readers are told approved of Stephen's execution (8:1). Luke thus foreshadows his later prominence in the book. The Pharisee (23:6, 26:5) will have a life-altering encounter in Chapter 9 with the risen Christ that turns him from the church's persecutor (9:13-14, 21, 26; 22:17-20) into its apostle Paul (13:2-3; 14:14).¹⁷⁶ Paul will later recount his speaking to the risen

¹⁷⁵ C. John Collins, "Ephesians 5:18: What does πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι Mean?" *Presbyterion* 33/1 (Spring 2007), 15. While the term Luke uses for "filled" to describe Peter is the verb πίμπλημι (a shortened form of ἐμπίμπλημι used in the LXX for the Hebrew מִלֵּא), and the term he uses to describe Stephen is the adjective πλήρης, its related verb πληρῶ is equivalent in meaning to the LXX term. Luke uses both with the genitive of material, πνεύματος, as does the LXX in Ex. 28:3 and Deut. 34:9. The phrase is used in OT texts (see also Ex. 31:3, 35:31 and Micah 3:8) to describe the equipping of a member of God's people for a task to benefit the people.

¹⁷⁶ Luke uses οἱ ἀπόστολοι in describing Paul and Barnabas, although Barnabas' inclusion indicates Luke is using the term in the more general sense of "one who proclaimed the gospel" (BAGD,

Christ about having been present at Stephen's stoning, and Luke makes clear his anguish over his role in Stephen's death (22:20). As apostle, Paul will also give a redemptive historical speech to a Jewish audience (13:16-41), although the situation and speech are very different than Stephen's.

Stephen's encounter with the risen Christ in this pericope, namely his instantaneous description of it, sends the already enraged crowd (7:51) over the edge and results in his execution. Luke seems to draw comparisons between Stephen and Jesus in their arrests and appearances before the Sanhedrin, in the false witnesses against them (Acts 6:13-14; Lk 23:2) and in mob-driven atmosphere surrounding their unlawful executions¹⁷⁷ (Acts 7:57-58; Lk 23:20-23). Luke quotes Stephen as referring to Jesus as “τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου” (the son of man; 7:56), linking Stephen's use of the title with Jesus own use in five previous occurrences,¹⁷⁸ and of course, with Daniel's use (Dn 7:13). Stephen's description of Jesus at the right hand of the power of God recalls Jesus' own words before the Sanhedrin (Lk 22:69), the very words, in fact, that helped clinch his execution as far as the Sanhedrin was concerned (Lk 22:70-71).

Stephen's rhetorical goal seems far different than that of Luke. Answering charges that he has blasphemed the Law and Temple, Stephen draws largely from the Septuagint as he stands before the Palestinian Sanhedrin and the mixed crowd. Filled with the Spirit, and therefore speaking prophetically, he masterfully weaves a history of the people of God designed both to counter the accusations against him and to illustrate

122) rather than in the more specific sense of the twelve (2:37; 5:29), to whom Paul refers as τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους in his letter to the Galatians (1:17). However, Paul counts himself among them (1 Cor. 15:8-10).

¹⁷⁷ John, in his Gospel, later recounts the Sanhedrin itself noting that it could not lawfully execute anyone (Jn 18:31). Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: 1993). Keener makes the observation that under Roman law, the Sanhedrin could not lawfully impose capital punishment except in cases of a foreigner entering the temple.

¹⁷⁸ Lk 9:22; 12:10; 21:27; 22:48; and 24:7.

that the trajectory of their shared history, Law and Temple all point to the Messiah: Jesus. Quoting Amos 5:25-27 and Isaiah 66:1-2, Stephen underscores the unfaithfulness and rebelliousness inherent in a tradition that has blinded them to God's purposes, making the Law and Temple an end in themselves and seeking to tie the transcendent Creator and Redeemer to one location and one people.

In Stephen's speech, Luke shows that the gospel's trajectory from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the end of the earth was fueled by a persecution sparked by Stephen's death. Moreover, Stephen's speech encapsulates Luke's purpose for his two-volume work, Luke-Acts. The orderly account seeks to address a fourfold paradox: a humiliated, crucified Messiah rejected by his own people; the incorporation into the people of God of outsiders such as God-fearers, Samaritans and Gentiles while seeming insiders, such as the high priest, Pharisees and scribes are left out; the suffering of those closest to God: the Church; and the advance of the gospel despite such seemingly overwhelming obstacles as culture, religious and philosophical differences, distance and persecution.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ C. D. Agan III, "NT330 Acts & Paul Lecture Notes" (St. Louis, MO: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2010), 3-4.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that narrative accounts in the Bible containing redemptive historical summaries can be instances of narratives within narratives, and so in exegeting these summaries, a distinction must be made between the two communicative acts at work: that of the editor/author to his audience and that of the character to his audience. Previous studies have examined the form, structure and function of the two redemptive historical summaries, but none has exegeted them in terms of their narrative nature and dual intent.

Summary of argument

First of all, characteristics of narrative are exhibited by both the Hebrew of the redemptive historical prayer contained in the larger narrative framework of Neh 9:1-10:40, and the Greek of the redemptive historical speech contained in the larger framework in Acts 6:8-8:3. The *wayyiqtol*, called the “backbone” of Hebrew narrative,¹⁸⁰ is the dominant verb form in the Levites’ prayer of Neh 9:5b-10:1, appearing 42 times. The aorist indicative and aorist adverbial participle, which, like the *wayyiqtol* in Hebrew, indicate storyline in Greek,¹⁸¹ are the dominant verb forms in Stephen’s speech of Acts 7:2-53, appearing 80 and 18 times respectively.

Secondly, both the prayer in Nehemiah and the speech of Stephen have peaks that are separate from those of the narrative frameworks in which they are couched. The narrative of the Levites’ prayer within the larger narrative of the covenant renewal ceremony peaks with psalm-like parallelism at Neh 9:12-21, contrasting God’s

¹⁸⁰ Longacre, “Discourse Perspective,” 178.

¹⁸¹ Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 22.

faithfulness with Israel's rebelliousness. The peak of the larger narrative of Neh 9:1-10:40 occurs at 10:1 with the announcement that the people are renewing their covenant with God with a written covenant. Stephen's speech peaks at Acts 7:51-53, with his indictment of the Jewish leaders, while the larger narrative peaks at 7:55-56, with Stephen's vision of the risen Christ standing at the Father's right hand, which prompts Stephen's death by stoning.

Finally, just as the editor of Ezra-Nehemiah and Luke are distinct from the characters they portray in their written works, so does their communicative intent toward their readers differ from that of the characters to their audiences. The Levites, possibly leading the people in an antiphonal recitation, are addressing the LORD for the purpose of confession, petition and covenant renewal. Their narrative peak emphasizes a focal point that underscores the prayer's thrust: God is gracious and faithful to the covenant despite the chronic rebelliousness of his covenant partner. The editor of Ezra-Nehemiah builds on that truth in order to encourage his readers that despite the failure of their forefathers and the failure of these characters, they may depend on God's gracious character as they themselves strive to be faithful to the covenant. The Spirit-filled Stephen speaks for God as he answers the charges against him before the Sanhedrin with an indictment against the Jewish leadership for its blind rebellion against God's purposes. Luke uses the account of Stephen's speech and martyrdom to encapsulate the overarching purpose of his two-volume book: "to further the world-wide spread of the Christian gospel by assuring readers that it represents the fulfillment of God's saving purposes, despite the paradoxes inherent in its message."¹⁸²

¹⁸² Agan "Lecture Notes," 4.

Taking into account the narrative style and the function of the verbs helps to better define the structure of the summaries and identify a peak that may be separate from that of the larger narrative framework, therefore pointing to a separate communicative intent. Taking into account differences in communicative intent helps to address possible misconceptions, such as a perceived lack of continuity between Stephen's view of the Temple and Luke's.

Implications for further study

In light of the findings of this study, other summaries contained within narratives in the OT and NT,¹⁸³ including Ezekiel 20,¹⁸⁴ should be examined to determine whether they also exhibit the characteristics of narratives and whether exegeting them as such, differentiated from the larger narratives that frame them, leads to a better understanding of the passages.

A study of free-standing summaries, such as that of Psalm 106, for narrative features or lack of narrative features, may further support this thesis as well as shed light on how best to exegete those summaries.

The study also has implications for the discussion involving "the role of theological analysis in relating the Bible to contemporary issues."¹⁸⁵ Redemptive historical summaries, whether embedded in a larger narrative or freestanding, such as found in the Psalms, are microcosms of the larger biblical story of God's interaction with his people. Their recounting bridges generations and imparts identity and purpose. A

¹⁸³ For example, Dt 6:21-24, 26:5-9; Jo 24:2-13; and Acts 13:17-41.

¹⁸⁴ A study of Ezek 20:1-28 would be especially interesting in juxtaposition to Nehemiah 9, given that there, the LORD recounts redemptive history to the people. However, although the wayyiqtol is present, appearing 28 times, it is not the dominant verb form, and therefore, this summary may not be a narrative.

¹⁸⁵ Gary T. Meadors, "Introduction," in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadows (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 8.

better understanding of how Biblical characters and writers use redemptive historical summaries to assist their audiences in living out of their part in the story can only serve to illuminate the current discussion.

. It is because any narrative inevitably has some effect on its addressees and consequences in the real world (whether or not these effects and consequences are overt or hidden) that we have to recognize that narratives are, among other things, a kind of political action. Narratives, in short, carry political and ideological freight.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 227.

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