

CHAPTER 2

SELECTED RESEARCH FIELDS ON EZRA-NEHEMIAH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews selected research fields of scholars on primary issues in Ezra and Nehemiah. The subject matters include the relationship of 1 and 2 Chronicles to Ezra-Nehemiah, the composition and chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah, date and authorship, theology of Ezra-Nehemiah as well as the relationship between non-Jews and the post-exilic Jewish community and other minor themes in Ezra and Nehemiah.

2. 2 SELECTED RESEARCH FIELDS ON EZRA- NEHEMIAH

2. 2.1 Introduction

The book of Ezra and Nehemiah has received much attention from Biblical scholars in the last twenty years.¹ Much of this attention is directed toward several aspects of the books. In the following, this research has reviewed selected literature and has outlined some of the major issues that have been subject to scholarly investigation in the last twenty years.

¹ See Clines (1984, 1990); Williamson (1985); McConville (1985); Bracy (1988); Blenkinsopp (1989); Throntveit (1992); Breneman (1993); Eskenazi (1993, 1994); Japhet (1994); Smith-Christopher (1994); Bowman (1995); Richards (1995); Van Wyk (1996); Brown (1998) and Grabbe (1998a & b).

2.2.2 Unity with 1 and 2 Chronicles

The first issue is that of the unity of 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah. Many scholars² (Clines 1984:2; Dillard & Longman III 1994:181; Throntveit 1992:9) previously advocated that 1 and 2 Chronicles as well as Ezra-Nehemiah are the works of a single author or editor. Those who advocated this theory pointed to the overlap in 2 Chronicles and Ezra (see 2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezr 1:1-3) as well as linguistic and theological similarities between the two books, to substantiate their arguments. Another reason is the evidence in 1 Esdras, which records 2 Chronicles 35 -36 and goes through Ezra without indicating any break between the narratives. Similarly, according to Breneman (1993:32), “the Jewish tradition found in the Talmud (Baba Bathra 15a),” supports the notion that 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are the work of Ezra.

However, in the last twenty years, many Biblical scholars³ seem to have come to a consensus that 1 and 2 Chronicles are the work of another author independent of Ezra and Nehemiah. Those who held this view proposed several reasons to support their arguments. Throntveit (1992:9) argued particularly against the supposed theological similarity by stating four major

² For a list of some of the scholars who had advocated for this unity, see Breneman (1993:32-35), though he himself supports a separate authorship.

³ Like Japhet (1968:371); Williamson (1985:xxi – xxiii); Breneman (1993:32-35); Dillard & Longman III (1994:180-181); Selman (1994); Richards (1995: 211-224) and Klein (1999:664).

theological differences. He explained that the emphasis of the Chronicler on David and his covenant is completely absent in Ezra-Nehemiah. Similarly, the Chronicler has ignored the exodus traditions which are very pervasive in Ezra-Nehemiah. In addition, the tolerant attitude to foreign marriages in 1 and 2 Chronicles is completely alien to Ezra-Nehemiah. Finally, the frequent use of the concept of retribution in Chronicles appears to be absent in Ezra-Nehemiah.

Similarly, Klein (1999:664) argued that the two works differ in their treatment of the Samaritans. According to him, the Chronicler is tolerant in his treatment of the Samaritans as opposed to the abhorrent attitude of Ezra-Nehemiah toward the same group. He also argued that the Chronicler made frequent references to the prophets but Ezra and Nehemiah seem to lay less emphasis on the role of the prophets. Moreover, the use of $\sim ynlytiN>h$; (the temple servants) and the 'sons of Solomon' are very pervasive in Ezra-Nehemiah (eg Ezr 2:40, 70; 8:20; Neh 7:73; 11:3-22), while the terms are almost completely absent in 1 and 2 Chronicles with the exception of 1 Chronicles 9:2. Another difference he reiterated was that according to Ezra-Nehemiah, Israel is limited to Judah and Benjamin while in Chronicles, Israel comprised of the twelve tribes.

Previously, Japhet (1968:331-371) had argued against the notion of common authorship. She explained that linguistic and theological similarities should be expected in both narratives because the writings seem to have fallen within the same period of time, the first century after the exile. She therefore saw no convincing reason to suggest that both works were written or edited by a single person or group. Similarly, the issue of linguistic similarities is disputed by Dillard and Longman III (1994:171) due to the fact that there are more linguistic dissimilarities than the linguistic commonalities in these works.

In view of the above mentioned reasons, I also support the view that the works have separate authors or editors. One should also bear in mind that the overlap at the end of 2 Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra could be explained. For example, one of the authors may have read the work of the other and may have decided to incorporate it in his work in order to serve his theological or historical purpose or purposes (Kraemer 1993:91; Dillard & Longman III 1994:171).

In addition, the extensive use of the books of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah by the author or editor of 1 Esdras does not necessary mean the various works were previously one work. According to Dillard and Longman III (1994:171), many scholars view 1 Esdras as a secondary development rather

than having any unity with Ezra-Nehemiah. Thus, I have opted to choose that both works have separate authorship.

2.2.3 Composition, chronology and unity

A second issue that seems to be very difficult for scholars to resolve is the composition and chronological sequence of Ezra and Nehemiah (Japhet 1994:189-216; Richards 1995:211-224). This subject inevitably leads to the argument concerning the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah.

One of the basic questions is: should Ezra and Nehemiah be regarded as one work or two separate works? Some scholars⁴ argue persuasively for the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah. According to them, Ezra and Nehemiah were originally regarded as one work. Also the Talmud proclaimed its unity (Williamson 1985:xxi; Breneman 1993:37). Moreover, this unity is also assumed by the Masoretes (Williamson 1985:xxi; Breneman 1993:37). The Masoretes⁵ considered the two works as one by tallying the number of the verses of Ezra and Nehemiah as one book and by identifying Nehemiah 3:32 as the centre of the book. Similarly, the author of Ecclesiastes may have assumed this unity (Williamson 1985:xxi; Breneman 1993:37). Some early

⁴ Childs (1979: 635); Eskenazi (1988) and recently, Dillard & Longman III (1994:180-181) and Breneman (1993: 37) etc.

⁵ Korpel and Oesch (2002: 121).

manuscripts of the Septuagint (LXX) as well as the Christian Canon of Melito of Sardis in the second century assumed the same unity (Williamson 1985:xxi; Breneman 1993:37). Ezra and Nehemiah were separated into two books during the Middle Ages. Origen was the first theologian to make this separation. Jerome acknowledged this separation in his Latin Vulgate (Dillard & Longman III 1994:180-181).

From a similar perception, Grabbe (1998b:94-96) identified several textual similarities that points to a single work. First, the identical list of returnees in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 according to him points to the unity of the books. He argued that this similarity was not a haphazard or accidental happening. It was one of the elements that were purposely designed to tie the works together.

Second, the mention of Ezra in Nehemiah 8 is invoked as another pointer to the unity of the two works. In elaborating on this, Grabbe (1998b:94) argued that the chronological sequence of the two works suggests that Ezra came before Nehemiah. But the occurrence of Ezra in the middle of the work of Nehemiah points to the unity of the books.

Third, Grabbe (1998b:94-95) also suggested that the abrupt ending of the book of Ezra presupposed a continuation of the narrative which would make the whole story a complete one. In view of this, Nehemiah picks up where Ezra had left and completes the remaining story.

Fourth, he (Grabbe1998b:95) pointed to the common themes in both works such as the return of the people from exile: In each case, it is the Persian king who does the sending through an official state decree; there was a threat to the community through intermarriage with the people of the land; and 'there is parallel structure from the two works.

While it may seem very difficult to dismiss the above arguments for the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah, others⁶ have disagreed with the above conclusion and have argued in favour of a separate individual existence of the two books. One among those who argued vehemently against the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah is Kraemer (1993:74-75). He disagreed with the notion that the ancient believing community considered these works as a single book. According to him, it is one thing for the ancient community to accept the canonical arrangement of the works as a unity; it is quite another thing to consider the literary condition of these works at their inception. He made

⁶ Young (1964:378, 386); Harrison (1969:1150); Vanderkam (1992:55-75); Kraemer (1993:73-92); Japhet (1994:189- 216) and Klein (1999: 664).

reference to the fallacy in Eskenazi's view of the unity of the books by stating that Eskenazi has made a quick jump from Ezra to Nehemiah when he said both works were centred on the expansion of the house of God. Kraemer (1993:75) argued against that assertion and emphasized that the book of Ezra is about the rebuilding of the house of God but in Nehemiah this notion of rebuilding the house of God is peripheral. Nehemiah is about the rebuilding of Jerusalem, particularly its city walls.

Kraemer (1993:75-76) made other important observations in order to support his above mentioned claim. His observations are discussed in what follows. Firstly, he observed that the beginning of the book of Nehemiah clearly marks what follows as an independent composition. I suppose what Kraemer is asserting here can best be observed from the following two verses:

Ezra 10:44: All these had married foreign wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

Nehemiah 1:1: The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol,⁷

There is no evidence from the above two verses to suppose that there is a connection between the preceding passage in Ezra and the following one in Nehemiah. Ezra 10:44 is about the problem of intermarriage and the response to this situation. Nehemiah 1:1 introduced the words and the figure-

⁷ The quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (1977).

Nehemiah who resides distant from Jerusalem. He obviously had no connection to the events of intermarriage in Jerusalem. This evidently suggests that the passage in Nehemiah has set out to provide its own distinctive narrative not the continuation of the narrative in Ezra as supposed by those who viewed these works as one.

Secondly, Kraemer (1993:75) observed that the repetition of the list in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 sustained the argument that these works were formerly independent from each other. If this was not the case, what was the purpose of such a repetition? Thirdly, he (Kraemer 1993:76) pointed that the occurrence of the work of Ezra in Nehemiah 8 underscores the argument that these works were composed separately. Fourthly, there are differences in styles. One difference is that Ezra is written in Hebrew and Aramaic while Nehemiah is written in the Hebrew language only (Kraemer 1993:76).

A last factor is that there are distinctive ideologies between these two works which suggest the independent nature of the material in question. According to Kraemer (1993:77), "the book of Ezra is a priestly book; its concerns are the Temple, the priesthood and Levites, and purity-that is, the cult." In contrast, the book of Nehemiah is a lay work. In some cases it is ambivalent

about the priestly concerns. In certain cases (Kraemer 1993:77) it supports the scribal values.

The issue of the literary connection between Ezra and Nehemiah also has been dismissed sharply by Japhet (1994:196-197). She argued that between Ezra 1-6 and Ezra 7-10, one may easily find a literary and stylistic unity, whereas in Nehemiah 1-13 there is no such unity. This could best be explained by recognizing the distinctive nature of these two works (Klein 1999:664).

This argument concerning the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah can further be understood in the context of issues like the composition and chronology as suggested by Japhet (1994:200-201). She recognized the issues of chronology and composition as some of the tantalizing phenomena facing the student of Ezra-Nehemiah. She reiterated that one of the major tasks of someone who is working on Ezra and Nehemiah is to determine the correct order of historical events in these books and to understand the author or editor's perception of history and chronology.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to reconstruct the chronological events of Ezra-Nehemiah, Hoppe (1986:281-286) uses the Septuagint (LXX), the Qumran

Scrolls, the Masoretic text and Cross⁸ work on the Persian period to reconstruct the events in Ezra and Nehemiah during the Persian period. But despite its enormous promise, Hoppe's reconstruction is not left unquestioned. Mor (1977:57-67) also disagrees with Cross' addition of two names of priests apart from those listed in Ezra-Nehemiah.

However, Japhet's (1994:201) perception of the chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah seems to provide a good picture of what has taken place in Ezra-Nehemiah. In view of this, the following discussion will take an in-depth look at her observations. From the outset, Japhet (1994: 201) said that Ezra-Nehemiah describes a series of events and occasionally provides the readers with various chronological facts (eg Ezr 1:1; 3:8; 4:24; 5:13 etc), but such facts do not seem to be in line with an overall chronological sequence of the history of these events. Given this complexity, Japhet wondered whether it will be better if anyone wishing to sort out the chronological sequence of events in Ezra-Nehemiah "must do it on the basis of unsystematic comments scattered through the book, comparing them with extra-biblical information derived from various sources, primarily the kings of Persia." She quickly dismissed this method because it may lead any scholar to conclude that the author of Ezra-Nehemiah is "a historian devoid of any sense of structure or any consciousness of time, that is, not a historian at all" (Japhet 1994:207).

⁸ Cross (1966:201-211).

In view of the above, Japhet (1994:208) suggested that the best method to sort out issues of chronology and history is to examine the author's view of history and chronology on a historiographical-literary level. This might lead one to understand that the author had a very clear concept of time and history which provides the bedrock or framework for the structure of Ezra-Nehemiah. Japhet therefore provided her understanding of the structure and chronology that seemed to have guided the thought of the author(s) or editor(s) of Ezra-Nehemiah.

Japhet (1994:208-209) asserted that Ezra-Nehemiah is structured in two main parts. The first part is Ezra 1-6. This period deals with Cyrus' decree in the first year of his reign and ends with the dedication of the Temple in the sixth year of the reign of Darius (Ezr 6:15). This period covered a span of twenty-two years, that is, from 538 BCE to 517 BCE.

The second part is Ezra 7- Nehemiah 13. This period deals with the arrival of Ezra in Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezr 7:7), and continues to the arrival and work of Nehemiah in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes (Neh 1:1; 2:1). This history ended in the thirty-third year of the reign of Artaxerxes (Neh 13:6-7). This period covered a span of twenty-six years, that is, from 458 BCE to 432 BCE.

There are certain similarities that Japhet (1994:208-214) has noted from the above periodization as can be observed in what follows. First, each of the periods lasts only one generation, that is, between twenty and thirty years. Second, in each of these periods, the people are led by two men. In the first period, Zerubbabel and Jeshua led the community; in the second period, Ezra and Nehemiah led the community. Third, the two periods are marked by the major projects. The rebuilding of the Temple marked the first period while the rebuilding of the city wall marked the second period. Japhet however acknowledged the complexities in the author's choice and organization of sources which were available to him/her. Notwithstanding, she explained the rationale behind the historiographical method and time sequence adopted by the author or editor of Ezra-Nehemiah by stating that the author(s) wanted to highlight this central fact that

“Change and renewal in the life of Judah were the result of initiative on the part of the Persian kings and the Jews of Babylonia, rather than any action in Judah itself, whether political or spiritual. God extended grace to Israel-that is, to those who returned from exile-by means of the kings of Persia” (Japhet 1994:216).

From the above explanation, Japhet (1994:216) asserted that in dealing with Ezra-Nehemiah, one must understand the chronological sequence of events as complementary to the composition of the sources even though they both differ from each other. In this regard, the author(s) or editor(s) of Ezra-Nehemiah had opted to deal with the two in their mutual relation in order to express their theological viewpoint. Today, the argument on the chronology of

events in Ezra-Nehemiah still seem to be hanging in the balance but evidently the weight of the argument appears to be in favour of the traditional view which Japhet has proposed above (cf Breneman 1993:42-46).

Another aspect concerns the sources that compose the books of Ezra-Nehemiah. Despite the divergence of views concerning the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah, there seem to be a general agreement by a number of scholars⁹ on the sources that were used in the composition of Ezra and Nehemiah. Though, there are few differences on minor details. I will sketch on a general aspect, the sources, according to the various viewpoints of the scholars named above. The table below describes the sources.

Table 1. Sources that compose Ezra-Nehemiah

S/N	DESCRIPTION	REFERENCES
1	A historical review	Ezr 1-6
2	Ezra's memoirs	Ezr 7-10 and Neh 8-10 (NB: 9-10 is debated) ¹⁰
3	Nehemiah's memoirs	Neh 1-7 and 11-13 (NB: 9-10 is debated)
4	Lists	Ezr 1:9-11; 2; 7; 8:1-14; Neh 3; 10:18-43; 11:3-36; 12:1-26
5	Letters	Ezr 1:2-4; 4:11-22; 5:7-17; 6:2-22; 7:12-26

⁹ Grabbe (1998b:125- 182); Dillard & Longman III (1994:181); Japhet (1994:190) Breneman (1993:35-41); Williamson (1985:xxiii-xxxiii, 1987:14-36).

¹⁰ See Breneman (1993:35, 38-40) and Clines (1984:4-9). There is debate among the above mentioned scholars concerning Nehemiah 8-10. A number of scholars agree that Nehemiah 8 belongs to Ezra memoirs. Other scholars like Williamson (1985:xxviii) include Nehemiah 9-10 in the Ezra memoirs. This matter has been left unresolved.

On a whole, the sources that are part of the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah have been broadly accepted among scholars as shown above. This exploration will therefore limit itself to these broad base contours of the sources.

2.2.4 Date and Authorship

Our reflection on the subject matter of composition and chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah has led to the awareness that one sentence may not accurately describe the process that these works went through to the final stage. This is to highlight the fact that there were a number of sources that composed the books. Consequently, it is difficult to explain the exact thing that happened in the process of compiling the various sources to form a single unit. In view of this complexity, scholars¹¹ have found it difficult to name the date(s) and author(s) of Ezra-Nehemiah with precision. Nonetheless, they have conjectured on some possible dates for the final editing of the works and the probable author(s). In the following, we have sketched briefly some of the various conjectures concerning the date and authorship of Ezra-Nehemiah.

According to Clines (1984:12-14) the issue of dating Ezra-Nehemiah cannot be divorced from the issue of the relationship between the books and 1 and 2 Chronicles as well as the issues of authorship and sources of Ezra-

¹¹Clines (1984:12-14); Williamson (1987: 45-46); Dillard and Longman III (1994:181-182) and Klein (1999: 664-665).

Nehemiah. This is due to several reasons. An important reason is that the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles as well as Ezra-Nehemiah is viewed by other scholars (see the section for the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah to 1 and 2 Chronicles paragraph one for a list of such scholars) to have been Ezra the priest, his associate, his student or the unknown Chronicler. Whoever the person might be, he/she was responsible for all the above mentioned works.

Another reason is that Ezra and Nehemiah share certain theological, literary and historical features with 1 and 2 Chronicles. Both works are post-exilic material. Given this tie, it is more logical to discuss the issue of dating Ezra and Nehemiah within the context or framework of the authorial and compositional work of both texts. Apparently, if this suggestion is followed consistently, it may turn this discussion back to the issues that have been dealt with in the previous sections and as such will inevitably become a circular argument. Consequently, this section will limit itself to the probable suggestions on date and authorship of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Considering the internal textual evidences from Ezra-Nehemiah, some scholars¹² have conjectured that Ezra-Nehemiah can be dated between 450 BCE and 350 BCE (though this is not without question. Cf. Williamson 1985:xxxvi; Throntveit 1992:10-11). This is based on the assumption that

¹² Clines (1884:14); Williamson (1987:45-46); Breneman (1993:41) and Klein (1999:664-665).

there is no strong indication in the text of Ezra and Nehemiah which may suggest an earlier or a later date to the period they have suggested above. From their perspective, all the events that have been reported in Ezra and Nehemiah are assumed to have happened between 539 BCE and 400 BCE. This proposal also is based on the assumption that Ezra or his associate may have been the final author(s) or editor(s).

Previously, we learned that scholars have a relative consensus on the sources (see table 1 on page 34) that are part of the composition of Ezra and Nehemiah. It was obvious that much of the sources were derived from Ezra and Nehemiah memoirs. Some of the lists were found from previous records. Whoever was the final editor(s), the person(s) may have gathered these pre-existing memoirs, lists, letters etcetera and may have put them together. The most probable person(s) could have been Ezra or Nehemiah with their associates, the Chronicler or both, etcetera. The researcher does not have a contrary opinion to the date and authorship of Ezra-Nehemiah as already suggested by the above named scholars¹³. So, this research also assumes that the final editorial work on Ezra-Nehemiah may have happened between 450 BCE and 350 BCE, under the auspices of the assumed author(s) or editor(s). This assumption is based on the internal textual evidence as

¹³ Clines (1984:14); Williamson (1987:45-46); Breneman (1993:41) and Klein (1999:664-665).

already suggested by the above named scholars. There is no specific event in Ezra or Nehemiah that might have pointed to the contrary suggestion.

2.2.5 Theology of Ezra-Nehemiah

There is no question that the theology of Ezra-Nehemiah is so divergent that it can hardly be summarized in a single sentence (Williamson 1985:xlvi). In view of this complexity, a number of scholars¹⁴ have speculated on what is the core theology of Ezra-Nehemiah. Obviously, their perception of this theology varies from one aspect to the other. In an attempt to discern these trajectories, here follow some of the major themes that have been suggested by scholars as the contours of the theology of Ezra-Nehemiah.

Eskenazi (1988:1) discerned three theological trajectories that have been transformed from the pre-exilic period to the post-exilic era in Ezra-Nehemiah. He saw a movement from the time of elite leaders to a time of community (post-exilic returning Jews); a time of narrow holiness to a time of encompassing holiness; and a time of oral authority to a time of the authority of written documents (cf. Dillard and Longman III 1994:186). Eskenazi (1988:1) explained that in the first circumstance, the Old Testament was

¹⁴ Clines (1984:25-31); Eskenazi (1988:1); Breneman (1993: 50-58); Green (1993); Kraemer (1993: 83-90) and Klein (1999:668-671).

previously concerned with individuals such as Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David and Daniel etcetera. The community of the pre-exilic Israel was not so central. However, in the post-exilic period, particularly in Ezra-Nehemiah the text is concerned with the returning Jewish community as a whole. The community had taken precedent over individual figures. It is the community that rebuilds the altar, the temple and the wall. It is the community who requested the Law to be read to their hearing.

Second, the concept of holiness is no longer restricted to a single place, possibly the temple; rather, it is extended to include the city and its wall as well as the community as a whole. This explains why the altar, the temple and the city wall were consecrated when they were completed. In the end, we have a holy people dwelling in a holy city with a holy God.

Third, there is a shift from oral authority to written documents in Ezra-Nehemiah. It is so astounding to see how written documents such as letters, edicts, law codes et cetera. controlled and drove the political, economic, religious and social landscape of this post-exilic community. The kings of Persia initiated the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the temple and the city wall through written edicts and letters. Ezra and Nehemiah rallied the community to become a united political and religious force by re-interpreting

and re-applying the written documents especially the Law of their God in order to address their present circumstances (cf Breneman 1993:52-53).

On the contrary, Green (1993:206-215 cf Dillard and Longman III 1994:187) sees Ezra-Nehemiah as a theology of the rebuilding of two walls-the religious and the physical walls. On the one hand, physically, Nehemiah's wall separates the holy people of God from the unclean gentiles who are also their enemies. On the other hand, Ezra's wall is the Law of God. Ezra is commanded to teach the people of God this law. This law of God inevitably excludes the gentiles and those who were unclean from associating with the holy people of God (cf Breneman 1993:51-52).

Breneman (1993:50-58) viewed Ezra –Nehemiah as having a number of theological trajectories. Some of the themes include those that have already been named above. Those that have not been discussed includes emphasis on the continuity of God's plan and the people; the centrality of worship and prayer; and a narration of God's active participation in the history of the world, shaping it to His desired goal.

Regarding the issue of continuity, Breneman (1993:50) explained that one of the major theological objectives of Ezra-Nehemiah is to show that there is

continuity between Israel's past history and the present. Ezra-Nehemiah showed that institutions such as the temple, the altar, the wall, the celebration of the Passover, the feast of tabernacles etcetera were representatives of the previous pre-exilic institutions of Israel. So, the existences of such institutions in the post-exilic period sustained continuity of the past (cf Clines 1984:25).

Another theological trajectory in Ezra-Nehemiah is the centrality of religious worship and prayer (cf Clines 1984:29). The rebuilding of the altar and the temple were specifically meant for religious worship and prayer. Sacrifices were offered on the altar to God. The returned community celebrated the Passover, the feast of tabernacles and the reading of the law as a religious experience. Similarly, prayer was at the heart of the ministry of Ezra (Ezr 9) and Nehemiah (Neh 9). Both leaders started their journey with prayer and sustained their mission with prayer. Clines (1984:30) observes that all these religious experiences were done for the glory of God. They were not meant to be an end in themselves. The goal was to glorify God in all things, hence the phrase: "we will not neglect the house of our God" (Neh 10:39).

Breneman (1993:54-55) also highlights the theological concept that God actively participates in the history of the world. He reiterates that Ezra-Nehemiah has shown that history is not a combination of meaningless,

isolated events. Rather, it is God who actively controls history to His desired goal for the salvation of His people. Similarly, God controlled the history of such kingdoms as Babylon and Persia to accomplish His purpose for disciplining and restoring His people, Israel.

Kraemer (1993:83-90) also proposes some other motifs that seem to underlie the books of Ezra and Nehemiah but those motifs are subsumed in the trajectories that have already been discussed above. Mention is made of the concept of crying, opposition, intermarriage, covenant, sin and punishment, and Torah. Kraemer argues that these concepts are very pervasive in Ezra-Nehemiah; as a result, they contribute immensely to the establishment and restoration of the religious and social life of the post-exilic-community. This study will not elaborate on these concepts in detail but will discuss specifically the relationship between Jews and foreigners in the post-exilic period.

2. 2. 6 Relationship between Jews and foreigners

One concern that has defined the point of departure of this investigation is the relationship between Jews and foreigners concerning their religious life and communal living during the post-exilic period. One aspect of this relationship is the rationale for the prohibition against intermarriage in Ezra and Nehemiah. Concerning this feature, some scholars (Wolfendale 1974:143-

144; Clines 1984:116-118; Klein 1999:732-733) assert that intermarriage prohibition in Ezra and Nehemiah was motivated by the concern to protect the monotheistic character of Judaism against the powerful syncretistic polytheism that was prevalent during the Persian period.

On the contrary, other scholars such as Williamson (1985:1-11; cf Maccoby 1996:156-157, though Maccoby himself shares an opposite view) disagreed with the above perception. Instead, they argued that the prohibition was motivated by Jewish racial prejudice. Maccoby (1996:156-157) clearly refuted this accusation on the ground that racism is based on racial superiority; supposedly, there is no trace in Israel's history which indicates that the Jews were a superior race.

Nonetheless, a contrary perception seems to underlie Williamson's (1985:1-11) thought during his discussion on the theological message of Ezra-Nehemiah. Williamson observed that race and religion characterized this post-exilic Jewish community rather than nationality. According to him, "the Jewish community is urged to observe a strict program of separation in order to maintain its identity...[This] is found in each of the four great sections of these books, and is the source of much of the opposition which the people faced" (Williamson 1985:1-11). With this firm conviction, Williamson concludes

his argument by stating that it is difficult to dismiss the proposition that the post-exilic Jews saw themselves as racially different from its neighbours. Ezra misapplied the concept of the seed of Abraham-the elect (holy people) of God (not for their racial superiority) to be a blessing for other nations (Gn 12:3, 7; Dt 7:6-7), but he has turned this to racial prejudice (Williamson 1985:132).

Consequently, Stahl (1988:107-111) was careful not to side with any of the above views. To this effect, he explains that there is ambivalence about intermarriage in biblical texts. As such, one cannot say a definitive word about intermarriage between Jews and foreigners (cf Grabbe 1998a). He cited a couple of Israel's figures who had married foreign women. Joseph, Moses, David, and Esther (who got married to a Persian king) had interracial marriages. This suggests to him that there was a permissive attitude in previous generations in Israel until the time of Ezra- Nehemiah.

A second aspect that concerns the relationship between Jews and foreigners is the conclusion reached by Eskenazi and Judd (1994:266-285) concerning the women in Ezra 9-10. They researched the sociological and theological classification of the strange women in Ezra 9-10. Their findings seem to suggest that the women classified in Ezra 9-10 as strangers were not really strangers as others may have supposed. According to them, these women may have been Judahites or some of the Israelites who had never gone to

exile. So, it may have happened that the early returnees saw them as appropriate marriage partners. This assumption is also sustained by the fact that Ezra 9:1-2 does not recognize these women as Ammonites or Canaanites because they were not. On the contrary, the notion of redefining the identity of true Israelites made them to be considered as foreigners. As a result, they were unjustly excluded from the post-exilic community (Eskenazi and Judd 1994:285).

A third issue concerns the relationship of Jews to the Samaritans. Cogan (1988:286- 292) pointed out that what is found in Ezra-Nehemiah concerning the Samaritans is different from what is in Chronicles. According to him, Ezra-Nehemiah is a report of the *Golah* community, who were struggling to re-establish their cultic life in Jerusalem. This group literally advocated separation from foreigners and encouraged purity of the post-exilic community. The audience of the Chronicles was very open and receptive to non-Jews. They were willing to integrate with the non-Israelites in their communal living and religious life, particularly, in the worship of the God of Israel.

2.2.7. Other issues

There are a few other minor issues that have concerned scholars in the study of Ezra-Nehemiah but these are not at the core of their discussions, hence,

this research will just mention them in passing. Klein (1999:667) has mentioned and discussed such issues as we may observe in what follows.

The first matter is the relationship between Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. Who are these people? Do the names refer to one person or to separate individuals? The second concern is the establishment of Judah as an independent state. Was Judah an independent state prior to the arrival of Nehemiah or was it under the auspices of the state of Samaria? The third subject is the book of the law mentioned in Nehemiah 8. Is this law book similar to the present canonical Pentateuch? Is it the P source, the book Deuteronomy, an unidentified law book or is it a lost book? The fourth issue concern the original owners of the land of Judah. Evidence from Ezra-Nehemiah suggests that the land belonged to the *Golah* (exile) community who had returned to Judah. Those who had remained in the land during the exile seem to have been ignored. The question is “who owns the land”, the exiles or the non-exiles? On what basis were those who remained in the land during the exile considered as foreigners?

Of course, the above mentioned subjects cannot be easily brushed away in a study of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. Nevertheless, the scope of this present research is very limited so the researcher has opted to just mention these issues without in-depth discussion or analysis of any of them.

2. 3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it seems apparent from the overall preceding discussions that there are diversities of opinions among scholars concerning the identity of foreigners in the early post-exilic period. The question, "Who is a foreigner?" can produce differing answers, just as the question, "who is a Jew during this period?" will do the same. Similarly, the relationship between the early post-exilic Jewish community and non-Jews can hardly be determined with certainty nor defined in a single sentence. It is also very difficult to point out specifically the theological assumptions that under-girded the response of Ezra and Nehemiah concerning the religious life and communal living of the returning Jews and others.

In view of the above mentioned difficulties, this study will therefore attempt to clarify the identity of foreigners during the early post-exilic period as documented in Ezra and Nehemiah. This study also attempts to show the specific nature of the relationship between the early post-exilic Jewish community and non-Jews in Ezra and Nehemiah. Finally, attempts will also be made to uncover Ezra and Nehemiah's theological presuppositions that led to the manner in which the returning exiles related to other residents of the region. Connections will be sought between the events in Ezra and Nehemiah and the covenant promises God made with Abraham and his descendants concerning the blessing of other nations.