

CHAPTER 6

SYNTHESIS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I have synthesized the whole investigation. I have recapitulated on what the research was intended to accomplish and how it has been accomplished. This recapitulation includes my motivation for the study, its relevance, methodology and design, aims and objectives, hypothesis, a summary of chapters, a final synthesis and postscript.

6.2 MOTIVATION

I had indicated in chapter one (1.2) that existential and academic factors have motivated me to do the research on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' in Ezra and Nehemiah during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC). The situation in my family as well as my religious and educational experiences, in one way or the other, have inspired me to do the study. My interest to study the Bible academically and to contribute to the global theological discourse also forms part of this motivation.

The conflicts and some of the inhumane treatment which I have witnessed in my family, church, ethnic tribe, and country, in the last one and a half decades have disturbed me. These are at odds with my religious conviction, upbringing and experience. These have prompted me to question the religious conviction of other individual Christians who participate in and facilitate the continuance of such conflicts. How could the so-called Christian

church members take weapons and kill each other on the basis of their sectional, ethnic, racial, religious and or other perceived differences?

Ensuing from the above, the premise or basis on which the conflict in Ezra and Nehemiah was founded also disturbed me. I have the impression from Ezra and Nehemiah that other peoples of the land (*am ha'arets*) pledged allegiance to Yahweh, the God of Israel, but their pledge was ignored or rejected by the *golah* community (cf Ezr 4:1-3). To my judgment, these returned exiles considered themselves exclusively as 'Yahweh's people'. As a result, they undertook a thorough religious and social reform. This led to the exclusion of many other people living in and around Judah from the religious, cultural and social gatherings of the returned exiles. Strangely, the returned exiles appealed to the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants as their basis for carrying out such sweeping reforms.

Therefore, the above existential and academic factors motivated me to do a research on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' in Ezra and Nehemiah during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC) and in the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants. The author(s)/editor(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah appealed to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants as the bases for the exclusive reforms.

6.3 RELEVANCE

This research has three relevancies.

First, the study contributes its findings to the existing academic and theological literature on Ezra and Nehemiah on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC).

Second, the inquiry shows that certain passages from the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants appeared to have provided a covenantal framework through which many people from Israel and from other nations might be understood as 'Yahweh's people'. This covenant framework, if understood appropriately, could reduce the unhealthy Christian religious and communal division that might exist today between different groups of people, races, tribes, languages and nations, et cetera.

Finally, the knowledge of what has taken place in Ezra and Nehemiah might enable religious Christians and Jews alike to avoid similar re-interpretation and application of certain related or comparable biblical texts to support a current conflict situation.

6.4 METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This investigation has utilized an integrated research method. Literary and historical methods have been used with a theological perspective (cf Gorman 2001:8; Hasel 1991:194-208). My conviction is that the text of the Bible is a literary, historical and theological document (cf McKenzie & Haynes 1999:20-21). In other words, the biblical text portrays certain events which it assumed

to have happened in history. This biblical history is theological (cf Dillard & Longman III 1994:22; Enns 2000:23-25). Thus, biblical writers used literary devices to write the theological history. They wrote the history with a theological purpose, motive or goal (cf Miller 1999:20-21; Merrill 1994:48; Warfield 1927:429).

As a consequence, I have employed each of these three components: literary, historical, and theological aspects, in the investigation. The method is an integrated approach which is closely related to the assertion that, “it is not only possible, it is necessary to integrate literary analysis with the study of history and the text’s ideology (theology). They are all aspects of the text’s act of communication....Literary analysis can distort our understanding of the message of the bible if practiced alone” (Longman III 1997:113). Therefore, I have employed both aspects as deemed appropriate. Utilizing the above integrated method, the following aims and objectives have been investigated.

6.5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

There are four major aims and objectives that this investigation has fulfilled.

First, the research has shown that certain passages from the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants, provide a covenantal framework through which the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ might be understood to include the covenant believing members of Israel and other people, races, nations, tribes and languages, who embrace Yahweh as their God through this appropriate covenant means.

This objective has led me to investigate the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant provisions on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, aliens, and foreigners. Chapters three and four of this investigation deals with this matter. The inclusive perspective of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, foreigners and aliens has been described.¹⁶³

The study has shown that certain provisions from the two covenants provide a framework through which other nations, peoples, foreigners, and aliens could embrace Yahweh as their God. Those who embrace Yahweh, thereby, become 'Yahweh's people'. These covenant provisions included the following:

- Yahweh's promise to become the God of the Patriarchs, as well as, the God of Israel;
- The notion of Abraham as the father of a multitude of nations;
- Circumcision;
- The blessing of other nations via Abraham and his descendants;
- Food provision;
- Sabbath keeping;
- Celebration of Passover, feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles;
- Equality of both the Israelites and the aliens before the law of Yahweh;
- Intermarriage;
- Sacrificial offering; and
- Cities of refuge.

The second aim and objective that has been accomplished in this study is the description of the two theological perspective(s) in Ezra and Nehemiah on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC).

¹⁶³ Cf Gn 12:3; 17:4-5, 12-13, 16, 20, 23-27; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Ex 12:19; 20:10; 22:21; 23:9, 12; Lv 19:33-34; 24:22; Nm 15:14-16; 35:15; Dt 1:16; 10:18-19; 14:29; 16:10-14; 23:7-8; 27:19.

This objective is achieved in chapter five. Two theological perspectives on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, foreigners, and aliens have been identified and described in that chapter.

The theological perspectives are exclusive and inclusive. The exclusive theological viewpoint appears to dominate the stories in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, thereby, sidelining or suppressing the inclusive theological viewpoint. However, this investigation has been able to point out certain instances where the inclusive theological perspective is utilized in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Third, the study has clarified what seemed to be the basis on which certain people (for example, the returning exiles) were perceived as 'Yahweh's people' while others (for example, non-exiles) were perceived differently in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. This basis appeared to be the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. But an investigation of both covenants shows that there is appropriate covenant framework through which other people could become 'Yahweh's people'. In other words, both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants have an inclusive point of view on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, aliens, and foreigners. This inclusive perspective of the two covenants has been described in chapter four.

Finally, this inquiry has shown that the author(s)/editor(s) of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah re-interpreted certain passages from the Pentateuch and from the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history in a peculiar way to support the

exclusive religious and social reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah during the early post-exilic period (cf Becking 2003:27-29).

This task is accomplished in chapter five. I have compared some of the re-interpreted passages from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah with the original passages drawn from the Pentateuch and from the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history. This comparison reveals that certain passages from the Pentateuch and from the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history were re-interpreted in a peculiar way in order to support the exclusive reforms of Ezra, Nehemiah and other leaders of the *golah* community. The investigation therefore confirms the hypotheses that follow.

6.6 HYPOTHESES

This investigation has confirmed the following hypotheses:

- *First, the study demonstrates that Israel and virtually all other nations, languages, tribes and people could become 'Yahweh's people' through appropriate covenant means as evidenced from certain passages from the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants.*¹⁶⁴
- *Second, this investigation shows that the author(s) or editor(s) of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah re-interpreted certain passages from the Pentateuch and from deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history in a peculiar way to support the exclusive religious and social reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah.*

¹⁶⁴ Cf Gn12:3; 17: 5, 7-8, 10-14; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; 38:6-30; Ex 12:17-20, 48-49; 20:8-11; 23:12; Lv 19:9-10; 22:17-20, 25; 23:22; 25:1-7; Nm 9:14; 12:1-2; 15:13-16, 29-30; 35:14-15; Dt 5:12-15; 14:28-29; 16:10-14; 23:10-11; 24:19-21; 26:12-15; Jos 6:22-23; Rt 1:16-17; 4:13-22; 2 Sm 11:3, 26-27; 12:24-25.

6.7 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

The following is a brief summary of each of the six chapters that this study has contained.

In chapter one, I have discussed introductory subjects. These included introduction, motivation, relevance of the study, statement of the problem, aims and objectives, research hypotheses, methodology, chapter divisions, orthographical information and the description of certain terminologies used in the study.

A literature review on selected matters from Ezra and Nehemiah is accomplished in chapter two. These included the date and authorship, unity between Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 and 2 Chronicles, composition, chronology and unity between Ezra and Nehemiah, Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, book of the law, ownership of the land of Judah, administrative status of the state of Judah, theology of Ezra and Nehemiah and factors behind the tension between the newly returned Jewish exiles and non-exiles during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC).

In chapter three, the Ancient Near Eastern treaty pattern and the Abrahamic covenant formula were described. This study presupposed that the Ancient Near Eastern region served as a socio-political and cultural background to the Old Testament. Thus, the concept of covenant was described at the backdrop of the Ancient Near Eastern treaty pattern.

Chapter four investigated the source of the name and cult of Yahweh as a background to the discussion on the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ and other nations, foreigners, and aliens in the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants as well as in Ezra and Nehemiah.

In chapter five, I have described the inclusive and exclusive theological perspectives on the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ and other nations, foreigners and aliens in Ezra and Nehemiah during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC). I have argued that the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ lay behind the conflict in Ezra and Nehemiah. This conflict is between the returned exiles and the people living in and around Judah during and after the exile.

Finally, chapter six provides a synthesis of the content of the whole investigation. It also contains certain remarks on some of the issues that have been raised from the research.

6.8 FINAL SYNTHESIS

In conclusion, I would like to restate the usefulness of the result of this investigation.

First, as it has already been pointed out in this research, the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ appears to lay behind the tension that exists in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC). Unfortunately, scholarly investigations on the books have given limited attention to this factor. Therefore, this investigation has given some

considerable attention to the subject. It is hoped that other scholars may take this stream of argument further in their future discussions on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. If this is done, the current academic gap on the above issue will eventually be narrowed down. This is also to acknowledge the fact that this investigation has not exhausted the discussion on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' in Ezra and Nehemiah; rather, it is one step toward a lengthy journey that will be treaded by further research work.

Second, the inquiry has shown that in my judgment, certain passages from the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants provided a covenantal framework through which many people from Israel and from other nations might be regarded as 'Yahweh's people'.¹⁶⁵ These covenant provisions included Yahweh's promise to become the God of the Patriarchs as well as the God of Israel; the notion of Abraham as the father of a multitude of nations; circumcision; the blessing of other nations via Abraham and his descendants; food provision; Sabbath keeping; celebration of Passover, feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles; equality of both the Israelites and the aliens before the law of Yahweh; intermarriage; sacrificial offering; and cities of refuge.

The above named covenantal framework, if understood appropriately, could reduce the unhealthy Christian religious and communal divide that might exist today between different groups of people, races, tribes, languages and

¹⁶⁵ Cf Gn 12:3; 17:4-5, 12-13, 16, 20, 23-27; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Ex 12:19; 20:10; 22:21; 23:9, 12; Lv 19:33-34; 24:22; Nm 15:14-16; 35:15; Dt 1:16; 10:18-19; 14:29; 16:10-14; 23:7-8; 27:19; 1Ki 8:41-43; 2 Chr 6:32-33; Is 2:1-4; 49:6b; 60:1-3; 66:23; see Goldingay (2003:224-226); Allen (1999:497); Keil & Delitzch(1975b:130) and Seow (1999:79).

nations, et cetera; for example, the violence that has happened in Tiv land and has affected many people including the various Christian Churches in this region could be reduced. This could be achieved through appropriate Christian dialogue, knowing that as Christian religious groups, they are 'Yahweh's covenant people' and therefore, one family, irrespective of other presumed differences.

Third, the investigation reveals that the author(s)/editor(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah re-interpreted certain texts from the Pentateuch and from the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history to support the exclusive religious and social reforms during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC). This knowledge, it is hoped, might enable religious Christians and Jews alike to avoid similar re-interpretation and application of certain related or comparable biblical texts to support a current conflict situation. It is my conviction that if every human being is viewed as a legitimate person who is made in God's image and therefore deserves to be treated with trust, respect, love and dignity, several of the ills and conflicts in the world today and the pain that some people go through in some places could be reduced.

6.9 POSTSCRIPT

Therefore, the question "who are Yahweh's people?" is answered by this investigation. According to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, the answer is that all other nations, foreigners and aliens who embrace Yahweh, the God of Israel as their God through appropriate covenant provisions are 'Yahweh's

people' together with the covenant believing Israelites. This is an inclusive theological perspective of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants.

As a consequence, the exclusive theological perspective that has driven the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah is a one-sided understanding of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant perspective on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, races, foreigners or ethnic groups. A close reading of the two covenants has revealed the openness of Yahweh, the God of Israel (and the community of Yahweh) to all nations, languages, peoples, and ethnic groups, who embrace him as their God through appropriate covenant means. The early post-exilic Jewish community, in my judgment, did not have an exclusive right to worship Yahweh on the basis of the above named covenants as presupposed in Ezra and Nehemiah. Yahweh cannot be confined to a single group of people. He cannot be localised!