

**THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONCEPT  
OF 'YAHWEH'S PEOPLE' IN EZRA AND NEHEMIAH  
DURING THE EARLY POST- EXILIC PERIOD  
(539-350 BC)**

**BY**

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.....

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## DEDICATION

*This work is dedicated to the memory of my late parents Dinah Vembera Usue and Daniel Usue Atonko who have gone to be with the Lord on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004 and June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005 respectively and to my wife Joyce Member Ordue who has stayed by my side during the course of my studies at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. May this work be used for the building of the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

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There are many other people who have supported me during the period of my studies but due to the brevity of this space, their names have not been mentioned here. However, I am very thankful to all of them for their support. God knows how much you mean to me. My prayer is that God should bless each one of you for the role you have played in my life and for all the kindness you have shown to me during the course of my academic journey. May this work be used for the glory of God.

## ABSTRACT

This investigation is about the theological perspectives in Ezra and Nehemiah on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC). The study has utilized literary and historical methods with a theological perspective since the text of the Bible is a literary, historical and theological document (cf Gorman 2001:8; McKenzie & Haynes 1999:20-21). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah formed the primary sources of the research. The Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants, as well as the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty pattern have also been investigated as a background picture to the discussion in Ezra and Nehemiah.

The study reveals that there is both an exclusive and an inclusive perspective in Ezra and Nehemiah. Similar perspectives are found in the Abrahamic/Mosaic covenants. These perspectives concern the conception of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, foreigners and aliens.

On the one hand, the exclusive' theological perspective in Ezra and Nehemiah looks at those who did not go into exile and essentially, the rest of the other people as 'foreigners' or aliens; but primarily as those who are not 'Yahweh's people'<sup>1</sup>. Non-exiles were perceived as a threat to the religious, political, economic, social life, and progress of the early returned exiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Ezr 2:59-62; 4:1-3; 9:1-2; Neh 2:19-20; 7:61-65; 9:1-2; 13:1-9, 23-28; Van Wyk & Breytenbach (2001:1256).

On the other hand, the inclusive theological perspective in Ezra and Nehemiah viewed non-exiles or other nations/foreigners with sympathy and appreciation (cf Ezr 1:1-3; 3:7; 4:2; 6:13-14; 10:15; Neh 2:8-9). This group considered the so-called foreigners as partners, friends and human beings who could embrace Yahweh as their God.

In view of the dual perspectives, I have argued 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. Thus, this investigation has shown that Israel and essentially all other nations, races and people could become 'Yahweh's people' through appropriate covenant means. These covenant processes included:

- Yahweh's promise to become the God of the Patriarchs as well as the God of Israel (cf Gn 17:7-8);
- The notion of Abraham as the father of a multitude of nations (cf Gn 17:5);
- Circumcision (cf Gn 17:10-14);
- The blessing of other nations via Abraham and his descendants (cf Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14);
- Food provision (cf Ex 23:10-11; Lv 19:9-10; 23:22; 25:1-7; Dt 14:28-29; 24:19-21; 26:12-15);
- Sabbath keeping (cf Ex 20:8-11; 23:12; Dt 5:12-15);
- Celebration of Passover, feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles (cf Ex 12:17-20, 48-49; Nm 9:14; Dt 16:10-14);
- Equality of both the Israelites and the aliens before the law of Yahweh (cf Ex 12:49; Lv 24:22; Nm 9:14; 15:13-16, 29-30);
- Intermarriage (cf Tamar-Gn 38:6-30; Moses-Nm 12:1-2; Ruth-Rt 1:16-17; 4:13-22; Rahab-Jos 6:22-23 and Bathsheba-2 Sm 11:3, 26-27; 12:24-25);
- Sacrificial offering (cf Lv 22:17-20, 25; Nm 15:13-16) and
- Cities of refuge (cf Nm 35:14-15).



The reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah ignored this inclusive perspective of the two covenants. Ezra and Nehemiah adopted the exclusive perspective of both covenants as the basis for their reforms. This is a one-sided understanding of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant perspective on 'Yahweh's people'. A close reading of the two covenants reveals the openness of Yahweh, the God of Israel, to all nations, races, peoples and ethnic groups. Yahweh accepted all people who embraced him as their God through appropriate covenant means. Yahweh cannot be confined to a single group of people as presupposed in Ezra and Nehemiah. He cannot be localized!

#### **KEY TERMS**

Yahweh, God, Israel, Jews, exiles, foreigners, nations, aliens, covenant, treaty, people and land.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
Title page.....	i
Approval page.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	x
<b>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 MOTIVATION.....	5
1.3 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY.....	13
1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	14
1.5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.....	21
1.6 HYPOTHESIS.....	22
1.7 METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....	23
1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION, ORTHOGRAPHY AND TERMINOLOGY.....	26
1.8.1 Chapter division.....	27
1.8.2 Orthography.....	28
1.8.3 Terminology.....	29
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE BOOKS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH.....</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	32
2.2 DATE AND AUTHORSHIP.....	32
2.3 UNITY WITH 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES.....	36
2.4 COMPOSITION, CHRONOLOGY AND UNITY.....	40
2.5 SHESHBAZZAR AND ZERUBBABEL.....	51
2.6 BOOK OF THE LAW.....	55
2.7 OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND OF JUDAH.....	57
2.8 ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS OF THE STATE OF JUDAH.....	57
2.9 THEOLOGY OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH.....	59
2.9.1 Movement theology.....	60
2.9.2 Rebuilding of two walls.....	63
2.9.3 Theology of continuity.....	63
2.9.4 Theologies of crying, intermarriage, covenant, retribution and Torah.....	66
2.10 FACTORS BEHIND THE TENSION IN EZRA-NEHEMIAH.....	67
2.10.1 Prohibition of intermarriage.....	68
2.10.2 Women in Ezra 9-10 .....	71
2.10.3 Identity and attitude of the Samaritans.....	73
2.10.4 Concept of 'Yahweh's people'.....	75
2.11 SYNTHESIS.....	76

<b>CHAPTER 3 ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY AND ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>3.1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>3.2 ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY/COVENANT.....</b>	<b>83</b>
3.2.1 Definition of the term <i>tyrIB</i> .....	83
3.2.2 Origin and meaning of the term .....	84
3.2.3 Ancient Near Eastern treaty form.....	86
3.2.3.1 Identification of the covenant giver.....	90
3.2.3.2 Historical prologue.....	90
3.2.3.3 Stipulations.....	91
3.2.3.4 Preservation and periodic public reading.....	92
3.2.3.5 Witnesses to the treaty.....	93
3.2.3.6 Blessing and curses.....	93
3.2.3.7 Ratification ceremony.....	94
3.2.3.8 Imposition of the curses.....	95
<b>3.3 ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.....</b>	<b>96</b>
3.3.1 Literary context of the Abrahamic covenant.....	96
3.3.2 Structure of Genesis.....	97
3.3.3 Movement of the narrative.....	100
3.3.4 Characteristic elements of the Abrahamic covenant.....	104
3.3.4.1 Identification of the covenant giver.....	110
3.3.4.2 Historical prologue.....	113
3.3.4.3 Stipulations/obligations.....	115
3.3.4.4 Preservation and/or periodic public reading.....	118
3.3.4.5 Witnesses to the treaty.....	119
3.3.4.6 Blessing and curses.....	120
3.3.4.7 Ratification ceremony.....	125
<b>3.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.....</b>	<b>126</b>
3.4.1 Exclusive and inclusive character.....	126
3.4.2 Yahweh unilaterally administered the covenant.....	127
3.4.3 Goal(s) or value(s) of the Abrahamic covenant.....	128
3.4.3.1 Yahweh will be Abraham's God .....	128
3.4.3.2 Leadership, obedience, righteousness and justice.....	129
3.4.3.3 Abraham will be blessed and be a channel of blessing.....	130
3.4.3.4 Covenant as a means of Yahweh's self-revelation.....	130
3.4.3.5 Redemption of Abraham's descendants.....	131
3.4.4 Significance of name change.....	132
<b>3.5 EZRA, NEHEMIAH AND THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.....</b>	<b>133</b>
3.5.1 Introduction.....	133
3.5.2 Ezra, Nehemiah and the Abrahamic covenant.....	134
<b>3.6 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>3.7 EXCURSUS: Blessing of other nations.....</b>	<b>138</b>
3.7.1 Introduction.....	138
3.7.2 Passive interpretation of <i>barak</i> .....	139
3.7.3 Reflexive interpretation of <i>barak</i> .....	139
3.7.4 Examining the passive interpretation of the verb forms.....	140

<b>CHAPTER 4 ‘YAHWEH’S PEOPLE’ IN THE ABRAHAMIC AND MOSAIC COVENANTS.....143</b>	
<b>4.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....143</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>SOURCE OF THE NAME AND CULT OF ‘YAHWEH’.....145</b>
4.2.1	Israelite origin.....146
4.2.2	Non-Israelite origin.....151
4.2.3	Pentateuchal perspectives on Yahweh and his cult.....154
4.2.3.1	Pre-Mosaic source tradition.....159
4.2.3.2	Mosaic source tradition.....165
<b>4.3</b>	<b>YAHWEH’S PEOPLE IN THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.....169</b>
4.3.1	Introduction.....169
4.3.2	Yahweh promises to become Abraham’s God.....170
4.3.3	Significance of the name ‘Abraham’.....170
4.3.4	Circumcision.....171
4.3.5	Yahweh’s promise to other nations via Abraham.....173
<b>4.4</b>	<b>YAHWEH’S PEOPLE IN THE MOSAIC COVENANT.....175</b>
4.4.1	Introduction.....175
4.4.2	Israel (and other nations): the people of Yahweh.....177
4.4.2.1	Food provision.....178
4.4.2.2	Sabbath-keeping.....179
4.4.2.3	Celebration of Passover, feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles ....180
4.4.2.4	Equality before the Law of Yahweh.....182
4.4.2.5	Intermarriage.....183
4.4.2.6	Sacrificial offering.....184
4.4.2.7	Cities of refuge.....184
<b>4.5</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....186</b>
<b>4.6</b>	<b>EXCURSUS: Terms</b>
	•~[ i (people);
	•hA'hy> ~ [ i (people of Yahweh);;
and	
	• yMi [ i (my
people).....	187

<b>CHAPTER 5 PERSPECTIVES ON ‘YAHWEH’S PEOPLE’ IN EZRA AND NEHEMIAH.....189</b>	
<b>5.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....189</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>EZRA NARRATIVE.....192</b>
5.2.1	Structural projects.....192
5.2.1.1	King Cyrus’ orders.....192
5.2.1.2	Work on the altar.....197
5.2.1.3	Work on the temple.....199
5.2.2	Religious, social and cultural reforms.....207
5.2.2.1	Celebration of the Passover.....207
5.2.2.2	Marriage reforms.....209

5.2.3	Conclusion.....	218
<b>5.3</b>	<b>NEHEMIAH NARRATIVE.....</b>	<b>219</b>
5.3.1	Structural projects.....	220
5.3.1.1	King Artaxerxes' orders.....	220
5.3.1.2	Work on the city wall.....	223
5.3.2	Religious and social reforms.....	226
5.3.2.1	Confession of sins.....	227
5.3.2.2	Signing an agreement.....	229
5.3.2.3	Law of Moses.....	230
5.3.2.4	Sabbath reforms.....	234
5.3.2.5	Marriage reforms.....	236
5.3.3	Conclusion.....	243
<b>5.4</b>	<b>EXCURSUS: Terms associated with the <i>golah</i> community as 'Yahweh's people' .....</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6 SYNTHESIS .....</b>		<b>247</b>
6.1	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>247</b>
6.2	<b>MOTIVATION.....</b>	<b>247</b>
6.3	<b>RELEVANCE.....</b>	<b>249</b>
6.4	<b>METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....</b>	<b>249</b>
6.5	<b>AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.....</b>	<b>250</b>
6.6	<b>HYPOTHESES.....</b>	<b>253</b>
6.7	<b>SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS.....</b>	<b>254</b>
6.8	<b>FINAL SYNTHESIS.....</b>	<b>255</b>
6.9	<b>POSTSCRIPT.....</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>TABLE OF HEBREW TRANSLITERATION.....</b>		<b>259</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>		<b>261</b>

The degree PhD

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Emmanuel Usue was born in Nigeria in 1964. He obtained his High School certificate in 1984. He received a Diploma in Theology at RTCN (now RTS) Mkar in Nigeria in 1989. He was ordained as a pastor in 1990. He obtained his Masters and Doctor of Ministry degrees in Counseling at LPTS USA in 1998 and 2001 respectively. He did an MTh degree in the Old Testament with distinction at the University of Pretoria in 2004.

His thesis, entitled **Theological perspectives on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' in Ezra and Nehemiah during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC)**, deals with the conflict between the *golah* community and the *am ha'arets* regarding the religious, political and social reforms of Ezra and

Nehemiah. The study argues that the conception of 'Yahweh's people' lay behind the tension between the two above named groups. Consequently, two theological perspectives emerged in Ezra and Nehemiah on the concept of 'Yahweh's people'. One is exclusive, the other is inclusive. The study demonstrates that the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants provide a framework through which every other person could embrace Yahweh, the God of Israel as their God. Therefore, Yahweh cannot be confined to a single group of people, race or nation as presupposed by the leaders of the early post-exilic Jewish community in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Promoter : Prof Dirk J Human (University of Pretoria)

External examiners :

The degree PhD

**Dr Emmanuel Ordue Usue**

Emmanuel Usue was born on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1964 in Nigeria. He attended elementary and high schools in Buruku from 1973 to 1984. He professed Jesus Christ and was baptized in 1982. He obtained his Diploma in Theology at the Reformed Theological College of Nigeria Mkar (now Reformed Theological Seminary) in 1989. He was ordained as a pastor in 1990 at NKST Church Yaaya. He married Mrs. Joyce Usue in 1990. He did a BTh degree programme on a part-time basis for three years at RTCN.

But, he did not complete his BTh because he received a scholarship from abroad and moved and studied at LPTS, USA in a ThM degree from 1997 to 1998. His wife Joyce stayed in Nigeria. He obtained a DMin degree in 2001. Dr Usue received another scholarship to do a Master of Divinity degree in the Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary. He moved to WTS in 2000. He returned briefly to LPTS and received his DMin. degree certificate in 2001. At WTS, it became clear that his wife will not join him in the USA since she was denied the Visa. As a result, Dr. Usue transferred from USA to the University of Pretoria in December 2002. Here, he obtained his MTh degree in the Old Testament with distinction in 2004. He continued into the PhD programme until today. His promoter is Prof. D J Human.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The question “Who are Yahweh’s people?” can hardly be answered easily today because it might spark a whole range of responses or viewpoints from Jews and Christians alike (cf Goldingay 2003:224-226). This complexity may stem from the fact that what each religious group believes about the accounts from the Old and the New Testaments concerning the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ may differ from each other to a certain extent. This same question, I suppose, appeared to have sparked similar varied responses during the early post-exilic period in Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, if a religious Jew today, for instance, is confronted with the question “Who are Yahweh’s people?” he or she may likely say that the Israelites or Jews are Yahweh’s people. However, if someone poses a similar question to a Christian today, the Christian may likely say that all Christian believers are Yahweh’s people. Some other Christians may even argue further that since everyone is supposedly created by Yahweh, he is the God

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<sup>2</sup> For example, it appears from Ezr 2:59-63 and Neh 7:61-65 that some people supposedly understood themselves as ‘Yahweh’s people’; despite their self-understanding, they were excluded from priestly functions and from participating in the sacred assemblies of the returning exiles because there was a suspicion on their biological or genealogical background. In this incident, it seems obvious that the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ appeared to have been understood by certain returning exiles, restrictively to the true biological, or untainted proven descendants of Israel. Implicitly, no one outside this categorization could be recognised as ‘Yahweh’s people’ according to the exclusive theological perspective of some of the newly returned exiles (cf Van Wyk & Breytenbach 2001:1256; Smith 1996:555-556; see also Ezr 4:1-3; 9:1-2; Neh 2:19-20; 9:1-2; 13:1-9, 23-28).



of all human beings; therefore, all human beings are 'Yahweh's people' by virtue of creation (cf Ps 24:1-2; Jb 41:11).

The basis on which the above mentioned religious groups could sustain their beliefs on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' may appear to be more or less the same. On the one hand, the Hebrew Bible, which is considered by the Christian Church as the Old Testament, could be the basis on which a religious Jew may sustain his/her belief on the concept of 'Yahweh's people'. On the other hand, in addition to the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), the New Testament could be added to form the basis on which a Christian believer may sustain his/her viewpoint on the same concept.

Therefore, one may be tempted to argue that the cause of the variation between the two religious viewpoints concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' could be traced to the dissimilarity in the source material. This would mean the problem stems from the factor that the religious Jew bases his/her conviction on the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) while the religious Christian bases his/her viewpoint on the Christian Bible (which includes both the Old and the New Testaments). Consequently, if the source material of each religious group could be understood as the main factor for the difference of opinions concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people', our effort to harmonize the two religious viewpoints might be counter productive. This reconciliatory effort could end in a deadlock because neither of the religious groups would

probably be willing to relinquish their authoritative source material for another concerning their respective religious convictions.

Therefore, my premise is that the cause of the difference stems not so much from the source material itself. Rather, the interpretation of the source material seems to be the major factor behind the differences in each viewpoint concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people'. It seems that the concept of 'Yahweh's people' is understood by both religious groups in a sense that does not fully represent what the Old Testament portrays in its literary account. Similarly, it appears to me that the tension which a person immediately encounters in Ezra and Nehemiah on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' stems from misunderstanding the dual perspectives of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants by the author(s)/editor(s).

Hence, the premise to be investigated is that the concept of 'Yahweh's people', in my judgment, included the covenant believing Israelites and non-Israelites according to the inclusive theological perspective of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. In other words, both covenants give the impression that 'Yahweh's people', theologically, included not only the Israelites but also other covenant-believing human beings who might originate from different social, political, racial, national or geographical backgrounds.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> One can easily notice from this argument that the idea of covenant appears to be one of the central themes that lay behind the concept of 'Yahweh's people'. Another way of stating my argument is that a perspective of the two covenants reveals that whoever believes in and accepts Yahweh's covenant provisions (with Israel) becomes a member of the 'people of Yahweh'. Racial, national, tribal, or linguistic differences seemed to be less significant qualities that could have determined inclusion or exclusion from the covenant membership. Rather, the acceptance or the rejection of the covenant provisions determined a person's inclusion or exclusion from the

Pointedly, according to the testimony of certain passages from the book of Genesis<sup>4</sup>, Yahweh, the God of Israel, appeared to have shown appropriate covenant means through which he could embrace people from Israel and also those from other racial, ethnic, linguistic, national and or geographical backgrounds as his own. However, the viewpoint that seemed to dominate the stories in Ezra and Nehemiah appears to portray the contrary.<sup>5</sup>

Traces of the integration of other races into the community of Israel are difficult, particularly in the perspective of Nehemiah 9. However, “the Holiness Source and the Deuteronomistic texts did find ways to integrate the resident outsider of foreign origin into the body of Israel” (Becking 2003:27).

Therefore, the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ according to an inclusive theological perspective of the Pentateuch includes every covenant believing human being from Israel and from every other part of the world (cf Goldingay 2003:224-226). This viewpoint may form a major part of the focus of this investigation. The study will describe an inclusive theological viewpoint of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants on the conception of ‘Yahweh’s people’ and ‘other nations’ or ‘foreigners’. This consideration could provide a beam of light to understanding the apparent tension in Ezra and Nehemiah during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC).

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covenant community or from becoming ‘Yahweh’s people’. This perspective is discussed in chapters three and four.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Gn 12:3; 17:4-16, 19; 18:18, 19; 22:17, 18; 26: 2-5; 28:13-15 et cetera.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Ezr 2:59-63; 4:1-3; 9:1-5; Neh 2:20; 10:28-39; 13:1-9, 15-29.

## 1. 2 MOTIVATION

One of the first questions that normally comes to the mind of a reader in a study like this is: what has motivated the researcher to do an investigation on such a topic? My response to such a question is that there are a number of factors that have motivated me to do research on the concept of 'Yahweh's people.' The situation in my family as well as my religious and educational experiences, in one way or the other, have inspired me to write on the concept of 'Yahweh's people'. My interest to study the Bible academically and to contribute to the global theological discourse also forms part of this motivation.

I have come from an economically and educationally disadvantaged family. The underprivileged conditions of my family could have impeded my educational and economic progress. But the most decisive factor that has made a great impact on my life is the acceptance of Jesus Christ as my Saviour. The gospel of Jesus Christ was communicated to me when I was still a young person through my parents, guardians and church leaders. This gospel message was brought to our region by the united missionary activities of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa and the Christian Reformed Church of North America (DRCM/CRC) on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1911 (cf Usue 2001:7-9). Through a concerted missionary work of the two denominations, the gospel of Jesus Christ was received in many villages and communities within Tiv land (Nigeria). I learned from the Bible that God loves me and has died for my sins. I also learned that because of his love, I need to love others. I was

also, taught that all human beings have been made in God's image, irrespective of racial, ethnic, social, religious, economic or educational differences. Therefore, I was motivated to love every other person irrespective of their racial, economic, educational or religious differences et cetera.

Thus, that kind of background teaching gave me a sense of worth as a human being, as well as the impetus to show compassion to every other person, irrespective of their colour, race, language, ethnicity, nationality, religious, social/economic status. Through my interaction with certain Christian friends, I experienced God's kindness, care and support in various ways. I was supported in my educational training from primary to tertiary institutions. I could not have obtained a higher level of education, if it had depended entirely on my poor parents to pay for the cost. Those who provided for my educational expenses came from different ethnic or racial backgrounds. Yet, all of them were drawn together to support me because of their common sense of God's love for them and the desire to share that love unconditionally.

I experienced a similar kindness when I moved and studied in the United States of America. During my studies in the United States as from 1997 to 2002 (in Louisville and subsequently in Philadelphia), I was supported by a number of American Christian friends and a Church. Most of these friends were from other races. Yet, their desire to show God's love and kindness to others had motivated all of them to support me financially, materially,

prayerfully and otherwise. I obtained two post-graduate academic degrees from the United States through this godly loving support. As a result, my educational and religious background experiences gave me a loving heart for other people and a great respect for human life in general.

But there is also a negative part to my experiences which have contributed to my motivation to do research on this topic. I have observed and also experienced a certain form of injustice, discrimination, humiliation and mistrust or mistreatment et cetera in my family, church/denomination, ethnic tribe, my country Nigeria and in the United States of America.

Several members of my family seem to profess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. But there are conflicts, violence and jealousy et cetera among the family members in the last one and a half decades. These conflicts have caused a major rift between family members. Their sense of God's love for one another has suddenly disappeared.

Evidences of conflicts, jealousy, injustices and deprivation of others appear to be swelling up in my denomination and ethnic tribe. The issue of land ownership and other economic, religious and political factors have severed church members from one another. Since many Tiv people are farmers, the issue of land ownership has become increasingly contentious among them. The Tiv and other neighbouring tribes also have engaged in vicious land disputes. The contention invariably involves Christian church members.

As a result, hundreds, if not thousands of lives and property have been lost on both sides of the conflict<sup>6</sup>. Regrettably, some church members have participated in the conflict and even aggravated it. Instead of being part of the solution, they are part of the problem. For example, there has been land violence between Kusuv and Ikurav, Ipav and Ukan, Gaav and Ukan, Tsambe and Mbangugh, Nyiev and Nanev in the last one and a half decades. These groups are segments within the Tiv ethnic tribe. Apparently, the Christian church in Tiv land, in my judgement, has not demonstrated a strong resolve to find ways of reducing these conflicts nor have the Christians taken precautionary measures to try to keep them from happening. The Christian sense of God's love and kindness toward one another has been lost or at least neglected in these circumstances.

The denial to give my wife a USA Visa to join me during the course of my studies was another factor that motivated the choice of this topic. My wife and I provided the required documentation to the USA consulate in Nigeria for the Visa. She was however, denied the Visa. As an added effort to prove our case, the Missionary representative from the Christian Reformed Church of North America in my Church explained to the USA consulate that my wife and I would complete our studies and return home to teach at the Reformed Theological Seminary at Mkar. But the consulate was not convinced. So, I

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<sup>6</sup>See <http://www.vanguardngr.com/news/articles/2001/November/16112001/f4161101.htm>;  
"Focus On Central Region Tiv, Jukun Clashes" in UN Integrated Regional Information Networks  
October 24, 2001: <http://www.allAfrica.com/publishers>

lived in the USA for five years while my wife was at home in Nigeria. This was an unpleasant experience for our marriage. This factor later motivated me to transfer from the USA to South Africa where both of us could stay together while I completed my theological training.

I suppose that our experience would have been different if we were USA citizens seeking a visa to study elsewhere in the world. It would have probably been much easier for both of us to be granted the visa based on where we had come from rather than on the merits of our case. The impression I received from the USA consulate was that we were denied our basic human right to live together as a couple because of the presumption that we may be tempted to remain in the USA and not return home. This presumption was simply not true in our case. Secondly, it seemed to me that the facts we had presented to the USA consulate were mistrusted based on where we had come from, not on the basis of the reliability of the facts themselves. I think that every human being needs to be viewed with dignity and respect. Each person is made in God's image. Therefore, each person deserves to be treated with trust, respect, love and dignity. It seems to me that several of the ills and conflicts in the world today and the pain that people go through in some places could be reduced if this approach is adopted.

I am also interested in contributing to the global theological discourse on the Bible. My conviction is that the Bible is both a spiritual and an academic resource that could shape or transform my knowledge and conscience and



hopefully that of others who are involved in a similar task. This knowledge, I believe, could enhance the growth and unity of the Christian Church in Africa and in the world at large if it is appropriated properly.

Therefore, the various experiences from my family, church, tribe and from the USA have contributed partly to my motivation for this investigation. My positive experiences from my Christian upbringing have enabled me to possess a positive posture toward others and the willingness to show love, compassion and support to them, irrespective of their racial, economic, social, ethnic or religious differences.

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?

Reading the stories of the Bible over again, I came across similar stories of conflicts, especially those that related to Israel and their neighbours (cf Josh, 1 & 2 Sm, 1 & 2 Ki and 1 & 2 Chr). I could not justify the motives behind such conflicts. Though, it looks to me that Yahweh, the God of Israel had allowed some of the conflicts to occur as part of his judgement against other pagan

nations who had failed to acknowledge him, as their God. This viewpoint cannot be used to justify all the wars that have been reported in the Bible. Certainly, I do not subscribe to the notion of having to fight war in order to pave way for peace between two parties. My viewpoint is that there is always a way, for resolving political, economic, social or religious problems without necessarily shedding blood. If both parties are truly determined to seek peace, they will find it without a blood bath.

The premise or basis on which other conflicts are founded also might be disturbing; for example, the basis on which the contestation between the returned exiles and the rest of the other people in and around Judah was founded in Ezra and Nehemiah appears to be a single sided understanding of the Old Testament viewpoint. 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 returned exiles (cf Ezr 4:1-3). Consequently, 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. However, a close reading of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants concerning the

relationship between Israel and other people portrays the contrary. There is more than one perspective in the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants on 'Yahweh's people' (Israel) and other nations.

On the one hand, one may find an exclusive perspective on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations in both covenants as well as in the Old Testament in general. On the other hand, one may also find an inclusive perspective concerning 'Yahweh's people' (Israel) and other nations in the same covenants. In certain instances, the former perspective is emphasized above the latter. But one can find substantial Old Testament passages that support each of the two theological perspectives.

Therefore, it is left for an individual to decide upon a particular viewpoint and build a case on it. A reasonable discussion has already been done in support of the exclusive theological perspective concerning Israel's relationship with other peoples. My present effort will therefore, explore the inclusive perspective on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations. The Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants will be examined in this respect. The conception of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, aliens, and foreigners as portrayed in the two covenants will be described.

My major concern in this section should not be obscured. I have attempted to describe some of the factors that have contributed to my motivation to do an investigation on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' during the early post-exilic period in Ezra and Nehemiah. I have explained that my positive and negative

experiences from my family, church, ethnic tribe, country and from the United States of America have contributed to my motivation to do this study. I am also interested in making academic contribution to the theological discourse on the Bible in Africa and around the globe.

Consequently, the basis for the contestation between the returned exiles and the rest of the people living in and around Judah during and after the exile is at odds with my experience and in conflict with my understanding of the Abrahamic and of the Mosaic covenant perspectives on 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, foreigners and aliens. As a result, I have the motivation to investigate the conflict in Ezra and Nehemiah as well as the basis for it.

### **1. 3 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study will contribute its findings to the existing literature on Ezra and Nehemiah concerning the two theological perspectives on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC).

The inquiry will show that in my perspective, 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. An example, the violence in Tiv land which has affected many people could be reduced. I

believe that a peace could be achieved through appropriate dialogue, among the Christian religious groups. They could understand that they are 'Yahweh's people' and therefore, one family, irrespective of their other presumed differences. This knowledge could lead to a renewed religious unity.

Finally, the investigation will reveal how, in my opinion, 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 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.

#### **1. 4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Much work has been done by scholars on several issues in Ezra and Nehemiah during the last twenty years<sup>7</sup>. Through a brief study of this literature, it seems that little discussion has been done on the two theological perspectives in Ezra and Nehemiah on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, foreigners and aliens during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC). In other words, the concept of 'Yahweh's people' during the early post-exilic period in Ezra and Nehemiah appears to be one of the central theological trajectories that lay behind the conflicts in the books and

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<sup>7</sup> For example, 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); Grabbe (1998a & b); Klein (1999); Farisani (2004); Pakkala (2004) and Wright (2004) et cetera.

should have deserved much more attention among scholars.<sup>8</sup> The reasons being as follows:

- Tension in Ezra and Nehemiah

First, it may be observed that there appears to be a contestation between those who are perceived as foreigners<sup>9</sup> (i.e. non-exiles, non-Israelites or non-Jews) and those who had returned from the Babylonian exile on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' (cf Ezr 2:59-63; 4:1-3; 9:1-5; Neh 2:20; 10:28-39; 13:1-9, 15-29). This tension clearly reveals that certain returned exiles understood themselves exclusively as 'Yahweh's people'. On the contrary, some non-exiles also perceived themselves as 'Yahweh's people'. Consequently, these two opposing theological perspectives have contested against each other on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' throughout the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf Boccaccini 2002:82-83).

The above tension also seems to be one of the integral motifs that have driven the storyline from the beginning of the book of Ezra through the end of the book of Nehemiah. Grabbe (2000a:299; cf Allen 2003: 5-6) also asserts that "the main theme in Ezra is this conflict between those living in the land

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<sup>8</sup> Albertz & Becking (2003:xiii) shared a similar perspective when they argued that "religion played an important role in the emergence and the final identity of the Yahwistic community in Yehud" during the Persian period.

<sup>9</sup> It appears from Ezr 2:59-62; 4:1-3; 9:1-2; Neh 2:19-20; 7:61-65; 9:1-2; 13:1-9, 23-28 that several groups of people were considered as foreigners based on the suspicion held by some of the returning exiles that such people were biologically, geographically, or religiously different from them. On account of this suspicion, non-exiles were seen as outsiders rather than members of the Israelite community. In other words, since they were suspected to have come from elsewhere rather than from the exile community, they were excluded from certain religious and communal assemblies (cf Van Wyk & Breytenbach 2001:1256).

and those returning from exile, whether hindering the building of the temple or creating problems by intermarriage.” Therefore, if the passages<sup>10</sup> that deal with the contestation between the returned exiles (the so-called ‘Yahweh’s people’) and the non-exiles (or the alleged ‘non-Yahweh’s people’) are removed from these books, the narratives in the books may become so fragmented that no one would be able to make any sense out of them.

- Contribution of foreigners to the restoration of the Judean exiles

Second, it is self-evident from the two books that without the participation of certain alleged foreigners, such as king Cyrus<sup>11</sup>, Artaxerxes, Darius, et cetera in initiating the return of the post-exilic Jewish community, and in the rebuilding of the altar, the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem, the community would have achieved virtually very little in the restoration process. It is, therefore, very reasonable to argue that the active participation of the so-called foreigners or ‘non-Yahweh’s people’ in the restoration of the post-exilic Jewish community was of invaluable benefit, not just for the restored community, but also for the non-exiles or non-Jews as well. If such was the case, what was that benefit? To put it theologically, what kind of religious benefit would the alleged foreigners have achieved, given the fact that they had worked so much for the restoration of these returning Jewish exiles, the rebuilding of the altar, the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem?

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<sup>10</sup> Cf Ezr 1:1-10; 3:7; 4:1- 6:18; 7: 1-28; 8:36- 10: 44; Neh 1:11-2:10, 19-20; 4: 1-23; 6:1-7: 3; 13:1-31.

<sup>11</sup> Strikingly, the role of Cyrus is compared to that of a Davidic king in Roberts (2002:376-377).

- Inconsistent attitude of the returned exiles

Third, the seemingly inconsistent attitudes of the early post-exilic Jewish community also caused a concern for the need to explore the theological perspectives in Ezra and Nehemiah concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' during this period. On the one hand, the command to re-build the temple, erect an altar for Yahweh and re-build the city walls of Jerusalem was initiated and supported by the foreign kings (cf Ezr 1:1-2; 6:1-15, 21; 7:11-26; Neh 2:6-9). In addition, other foreigners also appeared to have assisted, by providing some building materials for the above projects (Ezr 3:7; cf 1 Ki 5:6-12). During all of the above mentioned instances, the returned exiles did not apply their exclusivistic logic to resist the efforts of some of these foreigners in helping them on the projects.

On the other hand, it appears that the early post-exilic Jews rejected attempts of some of their neighbours from participating in the reconstruction of those same projects during the same period on the logic that their religious commitment to Yahweh and their racial as well as geographical backgrounds were questionable (cf Ezr 2:59-63; 4:1-3; 9:1-2; Neh 9:1-5; 10:28-39; 13:1-9, 15-29). Why were there such contradictions of attitudes among the early post-exilic Jewish community? On what grounds did the community welcome certain presumed foreigners or 'non-Yahweh's people' to assist in the restoration process and refuse others from similar access?



- Permissive attitude to foreigners in the pre-exilic period

Fourth, it may also be argued that other passages from the Old Testament seem to suggest that there was less tension between the Jews and non-Jews on the conception of 'Yahweh's people' prior to the period of Ezra and Nehemiah. For example, there appeared to have been a relatively permissive attitude for the integration of foreigners in the Israelite religious and social life prior to the early post-exilic period (cf Becking 2003:27). Earlier, Moses is reported to have married a non-Israelite woman (cf Ex 2:21-22; Nm 12:1-3). Moses' father in-law Jethro, the Midianite, was also reported to have offered sacrifices to Yahweh and gave Moses some helpful instructions for his administration (cf Ex 18:9-26).

Other foreigners also were said to have been accepted and absorbed in the Jewish/Israelite community prior to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (e.g. Rahab, Bathsheba, and Ruth etc). A similar openness was present during king Hezekiah's reign (2 Chr 30:6-12) and during the reign of king Josiah (2 Chr 34:9). In both instances, those who resided in the northern part of Israel, irrespective of their ethnic affiliation, were welcomed to celebrate the Passover (the redemptive memorial event) in Jerusalem and to contribute to the work of repairing the temple.

Comparatively, Cogan (1988:291) argued that "the Chronicler and his audience were prepared to assimilate non-Israelites into the community of the worshippers of the God of Israel." According to him, this sort of openness

must have precipitated the tension between the Chronicler and his audience, versus Ezra and Nehemiah and their audiences. This seeming openness to certain alleged foreigners on the one hand and exclusiveness to some of them on the other hand also calls for the need to explore the concept of 'Yahweh's people' during the early post-exilic period from a theological standpoint of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

- Testimony of the book of Jonah

Fifth, I would like to put the concept of 'Yahweh's people' in light of a larger Old Testament context. The book of Jonah appeared to exemplify the struggle for the people of Israel to comprehend the relationship between Yahweh and other nations or the alleged foreigners (cf Dillard and Longman 1994:394-395). Some of the theological questions in the book of Jonah that might contribute to an understanding of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are:

- Does God care about foreigners or non-Israelites (such as the inhabitants of the city of Nineveh<sup>12</sup>) as much as he does about the Jews or Israelites (cf Grabbe 2000a:18)?
- Could foreigners be forgiven of their sins and be embraced by Yahweh?
- Should Yahweh's message be preached to foreign nations to persuade them to come to repentance?

Of course, it appears from the accounts in the Pentateuch that Yahweh also desires to relate and to bless the so-called foreigners through appropriate

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<sup>12</sup> Jnh 1-4:11...“Should I not be concerned about that great city?” Cf Knierim (1995:320) who argued that “Yahweh is universally merciful God, not only for Israel but also for Niniveh”.

covenant provisions he had made with Abraham and his descendants.<sup>13</sup> Yahweh reaffirmed his covenant commitment with Abraham (Gn 17:4-21; 18:18, 19; 22:17, 18), Isaac (Gn 26:2-5), and Jacob (Gn 28:13-15) to underscore the seriousness of the covenant promises.

In view of the above, it is apparent that the designation of Abraham and his descendants as the channel through which other nations might receive Yahweh's blessing, implicitly suggests *two things* (cf Gn 12:3; 17:4-16, 19; 18:18, 19; 22:17, 18; 26: 2-5; 28:13-15):

- First, that Yahweh is concerned about other nations just as he cares about Israel.
- Second, that the blessings of other nations or foreigners hinged on how the other nations related to Abraham or his descendants.

This latter implication may be understood as the divine reciprocal promise: "I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse" (Gn 12:3). The statement also suggests that other nations are inseparably tied to Abraham through the divine reciprocal covenant blessing. Yahweh provides the covenant blessing. He does it via Abraham. Now, how could Yahweh bless other nations if these nations are forced to completely disassociate themselves from Abraham and his descendants? This affinity of Yahweh to foreigners through Abraham and his descendants<sup>14</sup>, calls for the need to

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<sup>13</sup>Cf Gn 12:3; 17:4-16, 19; 18:18, 19; 22:17, 18; 26: 2-5; 28:13-15.

<sup>14</sup> There are similar allusions to this sweeping promise of blessing Abraham, his descendants and other nations in other passages apart from those that have been cited from Gn such as Ps 72:17; 87: 4-7; Is 19: 23-25.

explore the theological perspectives in Ezra and Nehemiah on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and on the covenantal role of Israel to other nations during the early post-exilic period.

## **1. 5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

There are several aims and objectives to this investigation.

First, the research aims at showing that certain passages from the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants, according to my viewpoint, provide a covenantal framework through which the concept of 'Yahweh's people' might be understood and applied to the covenant believing members of Israel and to other people who might originate from different races, nations, tribes and languages, who embrace Yahweh as their God through this appropriate covenant means.

Second, the inquiry will investigate and describe the theological perspective(s) in Ezra and Nehemiah concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and concerning other nations, foreigners and aliens during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC). The choice of this date is informed by the fact that the events that are reported in Ezra and Nehemiah are assumed to have occurred during this early post-exilic period (see chapter 2.2 for the discussion on the date of Ezra and Nehemiah).

Third, the study shall clarify 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.

Fourth, this inquiry plans to reveal that the author(s)/editor(s) of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah appeared to have 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).

## 1. 6 HYPOTHESES

The research has employed two 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.<sup>15</sup>*
- *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.*

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<sup>15</sup> 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.

## 1. 7 METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This research utilizes a multi-faceted method and design. Literary and historical methods are used with a theological perspective (cf Hasel 1991:194-208; Gorman 2001:8). My conviction is that the text of the Bible is a literary, historical and theological document (McKenzie & Haynes 1999:20-21). This means that the biblical text has a portrayal of certain events which it assumed to have happened in history. This biblical history is both literary and theological (cf Dillard & Longman III 1994:22; Enns 2000:23-25). In other words, 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, this inquiry has taken each of these three components, literary, historical and theological aspects, seriously. This is an integrated approach which is closely related to what Longman III (1997:113) said: “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.” In doing so, I disagree with a perspective that do not take into account the historical aspect of the Bible on the basis of its theological component<sup>16</sup>. As a matter of fact,

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<sup>16</sup> According to Lang (2002:177), “historians do not believe in a divine act of revelation that establishes a religion; foundational revelations are considered the subject of popular etiologies, as mere imaginative answers to the question of what the origins were, as tales from the inexhaustible repertoire of pious storytellers. While these tales give invaluable insight into the religious mentality of the Hebrews, they are historically of little worth.” My viewpoint is that this

“No history of Israel can proceed without some consideration of that religion, for it was this alone that set Israel off from her environment and made her the distinctive and creative phenomenon that she was. Apart from it Israel’s history neither is explicable nor, one might add, would it be especially significant” (Bright 2000:144).

In view of the above, the literary account of the theological history of the early post-exilic Jewish community on the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ in Ezra and Nehemiah is examined. The study has taken the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah as its primary sources of information. Attention is given to the issues that reveal the tension between the newly returned Jewish exiles and the rest of the other people in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The investigation also includes secondary literature that deals with the same tension during the Persian period. In addition, this research examines a few passages from the Pentateuch as well as from the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history in order to conceptualize the nature of Yahweh’s relationship to other nations in the context of his covenant relationship with Israel. Therefore, the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants are singled out and considered in this regard.

In summary, this investigation utilizes both synchronic<sup>17</sup> and diachronic<sup>18</sup> methods where appropriate. Despite the fact that my major task in this inquiry

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kind of scepticism concerning the historical value of the biblical portrayal of history is defective. It is true that the biblical writers had theological/religious motives for what they wrote. However, their accounts cannot be completely dismissed as having any historical significance. The point I would like to stress is that the historical aspect of the biblical account should also be taken seriously until it can be proven otherwise (cf Smith 1990:xxviii). Historians should not bring in their preconceived negative judgment on the text of the Bible as employed by Lang.

<sup>17</sup> Gorman (2001:12) defined synchronic method as that form of biblical exegesis that “looks only at the final form of the text, the text as it stands in the Bible as we have it.” Similarly, Wenham (1987:xxxiv) argues that “the new literary critic [synchronic critic] wants to understand how the

appears to concern the description of the conception of ‘Yahweh’s people’ as depicted in the Masoretic text of Ezra and Nehemiah and certain covenant texts (e.g. Gn 12:1-3; 15; 17 etc; cf Enns 2000:20-21), the task does not end there. In addition, certain texts which are considered in the study are understood better because of the integrated methods of investigation utilized here. Therefore, in order to conceptualize what Ezra and Nehemiah and other Old Testament texts say about the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’, I have employed both synchronic and diachronic methods in the investigation.

There are however, several diachronic arguments<sup>19</sup> concerning the historicity, reliability and sources of individual books of the Hebrew Scripture. Similar arguments (e.g. Breneman 1993:3543; Williamson 1985:xxiii-xxxv) had also been propounded on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>20</sup> There is no question that such arguments are valid in their own right. It is important for a biblical exegete to be familiar with matters that lie behind a given text namely sources, time sequence, original audience and authorial intention, et cetera.

Despite the validity of such diachronic arguments, my investigation has not exhausted every diachronic argument concerning the books of the Old Testament which this study has utilized. The investigation has been selective

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final editor viewed his material and why he arranged it in the way he did” (cf Dillard & Longman III 1994:96-97).

<sup>18</sup> Gorman (2001:15) also defined diachronic method as that form of exegesis that “focuses on the origin and development of a text....this approach is often referred to as the *historical-critical method*” (cf Wenham 1987:xxxiv).

<sup>19</sup> See Dillard and Longman III (1994: 38-48); Viviano (1999:57) and Rogerson, Moberly & Johnstone (2001:20-34).

<sup>20</sup>Cf chapter 2 of this study. It deals with Literature review on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.



in its use and analysis of biblical texts employing both diachronic and synchronic methods of investigation as deemed necessary or appropriate.

It should also be borne in mind that arguments concerning sources, for example, 'documentary hypothesis' on the Pentateuch are "always bound to be hypothetical, whereas the final form of the text is a reality" (Rogerson, Moberly & Johnstone 2001:49). Therefore, without ignoring the diachronic matters, this investigation used the final form of the text of Ezra, Nehemiah and hopefully the final form of certain passages from the Pentateuch and from the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history as its point of departure. In doing so, I concur with what Gorman (2001:23) had suggested [that] "all exegetes, whether beginners or professionals, deal directly with the final form of the text. It is this text that readers read, preachers preach, and hearers hear". As such, my use of an integrated method of literary and historical investigation in a controlled manner is open to constructive criticism where appropriate.

## **1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION, ORTHOGRAPHY AND TERMINOLOGY**

There are three aspects in this section. The first feature is the chapter division which provides introductory information on each of the six chapters of this investigation. The second part provides a brief explanation to the orthographical matters used in this research. The last aspect deals with the description of certain terminologies utilized in the study.

### **1.8.1 Chapter division**

Chapter one deals with introductory subjects. These include introduction, motivation, relevance of the study, statement of the problem, aims and objectives, research hypothesis, methodology, chapter divisions, orthographical information and the description of certain terminologies used in the dissertation.

Chapter two is a literature review on selected matters from Ezra and Nehemiah. These include 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).

Chapter three examines the Ancient Near Eastern treaty pattern and the Abrahamic covenant formula. The Ancient Near Eastern region serves as a socio-political and cultural background to the Old Testament. Thus, the concept of covenant is examined at the backdrop of the Ancient Near Eastern treaty pattern.

Chapter four investigates the source of the name and cult of Yahweh as a background to the discussion on the inclusive theological perspective concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and concerning other nations, foreigners and aliens in the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants.

Chapter five describes 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). The chapter shows how the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ underlies the contestation between the returned exiles and the people living in and around Judah during and after the exile in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Finally, chapter six synthesizes the content of the whole investigation. It also includes certain remarks on some of the issues that have been raised from the research.

### **1.8.2 Orthography**

This study uses the adjusted Harvard reference system<sup>21</sup> (author-date reference system) and the research ‘guidelines for students’ (Kritzinger 2001) suggested by the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria. The author, date of publication and page number(s) are used in brackets to indicate the source of an idea. The detail references are provided in the bibliography following the table of Hebrew transliteration.

Other materials used in the research are The New American Standard Bible 1995 (NASB, for most of the English Bible quotations), BHS- Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (4<sup>th</sup> ed. for Hebrews words, phrases and quotations) and LXX- Septuagint Rahlfs’ (Greek Translation of the Old Testament).<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup> See Kilian (1989).

<sup>22</sup> All these three versions (NASB, BHS and LXX) of the Bible are extracted from the Computer ‘Bible Works’ Version 6.0 (CD Rom edition).

Hebrew transliteration in this study is a modified version of Futato (2003). I have used both a transliterated Hebrew and the Hebrew itself interchangeably in the content of this dissertation.

### 1.8.3 Terminology

There are several terms that have been used in the content of this work to describe particular groups of people. For the sake of this research topic, the groups who returned from Babylonian exile to Judah under the leadership of Sheshbazzar or Zerubbabel, Jeshua (cf Ezr 1:8, 11; 2:1--2), Ezra (cf Ezr 7:1-7) and Nehemiah (cf Neh 2:7-9) have been called variously as the post-exilic Jewish community, the *golah* community, the returned/returning exiles, the Jewish exiles or the new Israelite community. Meanwhile, the people who remained in or around the land of Judah or Israel during and after the Babylonian exile are supposedly referred to as foreigners, aliens, other nations or the people(s) of the land. Therefore, this investigation should be understood as dealing with the tension between the Jews or Israelites who had returned from the Babylonian exile to the land of Judah versus the people who lived in and around Judah and Israel during and after the exile. The underlying factor behind the conflict is the conception of 'Yahweh's people'.

- Israelites<sup>23</sup> and Hebrews

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<sup>23</sup> Becking (2003:19) argued that the term "Israel" is a vague concept during the Persian period because it is used to refer to many groups of people such as the "descendants of the indigenous population of the kingdom of Judah, returnees from the Babylonian Exile, Mesopotamians exiled by Assyrians Kings, Mesopotamians joining returnees from the Exile, proto-Samaritans, and the like." However, this thesis uses the term in a limited sense as explained before not in a similar sense with Becking's theory.

These terms have been used in the research to refer to the descendants of Abraham through Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons who later became the twelve tribes of Israel as depicted in the Pentateuch and in the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history. The terms are used when references are made to the stories or passages from the Pentateuch and from the deuteronomic and deuteronomistic history to distinguish them from other surrounding tribes.

- Jews

The term Jews refers to those who are of Israelite descent in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The term is also used interchangeably to describe those of Israelite descent who had gone to exile or those of Israelite descent who had remained in the land of Israel/Judah during the Babylonian exile.

- Post-exilic Jews/Jewish community

This group refers particularly to those of Israelite descents who were taken to Babylon and later returned to the land of Judah between 538 and 400 BC. Other terms that are used to describe the same group of people include: the *golah* (הַלְלוֹאִים) community, the returned exiles, returning exiles, returning Jews, the holy seed/race and the post-exilic Israelites. The reader of Ezra and Nehemiah may find out that during the religious and social reforms in the early post-exilic period this group were encouraged to separate from the rest of the people who were living in and around the territories of Judah or Israel. In other words, the author(s) or editor(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah considered the returned exiles as the only legitimate descendants of the pre-exilic Israel.

On this note, the returned exiles perceived themselves exclusively as 'Yahweh's people'. This picture is depicted frequently in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah to the point that the Jews or Israelites who had remained in the land of Judah/Israel during the Babylonian exile are ignored or treated as outsiders, foreigners or as 'non-Yahweh's people' together with the rest of the other neighbouring people.

- Foreigners, aliens, sojourners or people(s) of the land

These terms are used interchangeably to describe those who are not Israelites by descent or those of Israelite descent who had not gone into the Babylonian exile. In the book of Ezra and Nehemiah, other terms are used to describe such groups, namely, the surrounding people or nations and neighbours of the returning exiles. Other groups that came under this classification also include: Canaanite tribes, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Egyptians, Ashdodites, Arabs, Sidonians, Tyrians and certain other tribes who were living around the Trans-Euphrates area.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE BOOKS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a literature review on selected matters that have formed part of the major concerns of scholarly investigation in Ezra and Nehemiah from the last twenty years.<sup>24</sup> The subject matters include date and authorship, the relationship between 1 and 2 Chronicles to Ezra and Nehemiah, the composition and chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah, Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, the book of the Law, the ownership of the land of Judah, the political status of the state of Judah and the theology of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as the tension between the returned exiles and the rest of the people. The conception of 'Yahweh's people' seems to lay behind this tension in Ezra and Nehemiah.

#### 2.2 DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

In what follows, the various scholarly conjectures concerning the date and authorship of Ezra and Nehemiah have been discussed. However, it should be noted that our reflection on date and authorship is related to the composition and chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah which has been discussed in the fourth section (2. 4) in this chapter. There, I have argued that

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<sup>24</sup> For example, 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), Grabbe (1998a & b), Klein (1999) and Farisani (2004) et cetera.

one sentence may not accurately describe the process which these works went through to arrive at the final stage. In other words, there were a number of independent sources which were used for the composition of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Consequently, it is difficult to explain the exact thing that happened in the process of compiling the various sources to form a single unit or narrative. In view of this complexity, scholars<sup>25</sup> have also found it difficult to identify the precise date(s) or author(s) of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. So, the following discussion is a conjecture on some of the probable or possible date(s) for the final editing of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as its probable author(s).

According to Clines (1984:12-14) the issue of dating Ezra and Nehemiah cannot be divorced from the issue of the relationship between these two books and 1 and 2 Chronicles as well as matters concerning authorship and sources of Ezra and Nehemiah. Clines stressed that the above mentioned tie is necessary due to several reasons.

First, the author(s) of 1 and 2 Chronicles as well as of Ezra and Nehemiah is thought by several other scholars<sup>26</sup> to have been Ezra the priest, his associate, his student or an unknown Chronicler. In this sense, whoever the

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<sup>25</sup>Cf Clines (1984:12-14); Williamson (1987:45-46); Dillard and Longman III (1994:181-182) and Klein (1999: 664-665) et cetera.

<sup>26</sup> For example Albright (1921:119-120), Bright (1960:81; 1981:398), Myers (1965:xlvi), Archer, Jr. (1964:396) and Grabbe (1998b:11) view these works as originating from one person or a group of persons. See also Breneman (1993:32-35), for the detail references and list of some of the scholars who had advocated for this unity though Breneman himself supports a separate authorship.



person might have been, he/she was responsible for the final editorial work on the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles together with Ezra and Nehemiah.

Second, Ezra and Nehemiah share certain theological, literary and historical features with 1 and 2 Chronicles. For example, both works are considered to have been written in the post-exilic period and both have included stories which are assumed to have happened in the post-exilic period. Given this tie, it has been claimed that there is more logic to discussing the issue of dating Ezra and Nehemiah together with matters concerning authorship and composition. However, this section will limit itself to the probable suggestions on date and authorship of Ezra and Nehemiah which occurred about 400 BC. The issues of composition, chronology and other related subjects will be discussed in other subsequent subsections.

Considering the internal textual evidences from Ezra and Nehemiah, some scholars<sup>27</sup> have conjectured that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah can be dated between 450 BC and 350 BC<sup>28</sup>. This is based on the assumption that there is no strong indication in the text of Ezra and Nehemiah which may suggest an earlier or a later date to the above suggestion. According to this perspective, all the events that have been reported in Ezra and Nehemiah are assumed to have happened between 539 BC and 400 BC. This proposal also

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<sup>27</sup> Cf Clines (1984:14); Williamson (1987:45-46); Breneman (1993:41) and Klein (1999:664-665).

<sup>28</sup> Though this viewpoint is also contested by others (cf Williamson 1985: xxxvi and Throntveit 1992:10-11) and recently by Farisani (2004:226-228) who argues for the final date as late as 300 BC).

is based on the assumption that Ezra or his associate(s) may have been the final author(s) or editor(s).

This study therefore agrees with others<sup>29</sup> that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah might have been written about 400 BC for the following reasons:

- As Clines (1984:14) had noted, if Ezra returned to Judah in about 458, 437 or 427 BC, there is little reason to doubt that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were completed by 400 BC.
- Breneman (1993:41) who supported this viewpoint reasoned that there is no specific event in Ezra or Nehemiah that might have pointed to a later period.
- Klein (1999:664-665) also contended that since the location of the author is agreed by scholars to have been in Palestine; and coupled with the assumption that Ezra and Nehemiah probably migrated to Judah in 458 and 445 BC respectively, the compositional activities of these books therefore, must have happened within this period.
- If so, the likely date could be about 400 BC. Consequently, this research will also assume that the final editorial work on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah may have transpired under the auspices of the Chronicler, Ezra, Nehemiah or their associates in about 400 BC in Palestine.

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<sup>29</sup> Clines (1984:14); Williamson (1987:45-46); Breneman (1993:41) and Klein (1999:664-665).

### 2.3 UNITY WITH 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES

A second subject of scholarly investigation is the unity of 1 and 2 Chronicles to Ezra and Nehemiah. Many scholars<sup>30</sup> previously advocated that 1 and 2 Chronicles as well as Ezra and Nehemiah are the works of a single author or editor. Those who advocated for this theory pointed to the overlap in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-3 as well as linguistic and theological similarities between the two books to substantiate their claims. Another reason for the assumed unity appeared to be the evidence from 1 Esdras, which recorded 2 Chronicles 35 to 36 and went through Ezra without indicating any break between the two 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 works of Ezra.<sup>31</sup>

However, in the last twenty years, many biblical scholars<sup>32</sup> seem to have come to a consensus that 1 and 2 Chronicles are the work of another author independent of Ezra and Nehemiah. Scholars who share this view proposed several reasons to support their contention. One such scholar is Throntveit (1992:9), who argues particularly against the supposed theological similarity.

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<sup>30</sup> For example Albright (1921:119-120), Bright (1960:81; 1981:398), Myers (1965:xlvi), Archer, Jr. (1964:396) and Grabbe (1998b:11). See also Farisani (2004:209-210); Breneman (1993:32-35), Clines (1984:2), Dillard & Longman III (1994:181) and Throntveit (1992:9) for a detail discussion and a list of some of the scholars who had advocated for this unity.

<sup>31</sup> Cf Hayes (1979:243-247) who also provides a good summary of this arguments from both sides in a manner one can easily grasp these issues.

<sup>32</sup> 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).

He stated four major theological differences. He explained that the emphasis of the Chronicler on David and his covenant (cf 1 Chr 3:1-9; 6:31-80; 11:1-29:30) is completely absent in Ezra and Nehemiah. Similarly, the chronicler seemed to have ignored the Exodus traditions which are very pervasive in Ezra and Nehemiah (cf Ezr 9:1-15; Neh 1:5-11; 8:1-13:31). In addition, the tolerant attitude to foreign marriages in 1 and 2 Chronicles is completely alien to Ezra and Nehemiah. Finally, the frequent use of the concept of retribution in Chronicles appears to be absent from Ezra and Nehemiah. Ensuing from the above stated reasons, it appears difficult to dismiss Throntveit's arguments because a close reading of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as 1 and 2 Chronicles appears to reveal that his arguments are true.

Similarly, Klein (1999:664) argued that Ezra and Nehemiah and 1 and 2 Chronicles differ in their treatment of the Samaritans. According to him, the Chronicler is tolerant in the treatment of the Samaritans as opposed to the abhorrent attitude found in Ezra and Nehemiah toward the same group of people. Klein also noted that the Chronicler made frequent references to the prophets while Ezra and Nehemiah seemed to lay less emphasis on the role of the prophets. Moreover, the use of *~ynIyṭiN>h;* (the temple servants) and the 'sons of Solomon' are very pervasive in Ezra and Nehemiah (e.g. Ezr 2:40, 70; 8:20; Neh 7:73; 11:3-22), while with the exception of 1 Chronicles 9:2, the terms are almost completely absent in 1 and 2 Chronicles. Another difference he reiterated was that according to Ezra and Nehemiah, the term 'Israel' refers to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin

while in Chronicles, 'Israel' comprises of the twelve tribes. Apparently, those who had returned from the Babylonian exile appeared to have been mostly from the Southern part of Israel. Nothing is specifically said about those who were exiled to Assyria in about 722 BC from the Northern tribes of Israel. Yet, according to Ezra and Nehemiah, those who returned from the Babylonian exile to Judah appeared to have referred to themselves as representatives of the pre-exilic Israelite community.

Previously, Japhet (1968:331-371; cf Farisani 2004:211-212) had rejected the notion of common authorship. She explained that linguistic and theological similarities should be expected in both 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah narratives because these works seemed to have fallen within the same period of time, the first century after the exile (i.e. between 539 to 400 BC). She therefore reiterated that there is no convincing reason which suggests that both works were written or edited by a single person or group of people. Similarly, the issue of linguistic similarities is disputed by Dillard and Longman III (1994:171-172), due to the fact that there are more linguistic dissimilarities than the linguistic commonalities when both works are compared to each other.

In view of the above mentioned reasons, I will argue in support of the view that Ezra and Nehemiah and 1 and 2 Chronicles have separate authors or editors for the following reasons:

First, it should be borne in mind that the overlap at the end of 2 Chronicles and at the beginning of Ezra could be explained in another way. For example, one of the authors may have read the work of the other and may have incorporated it in his/her work in order to serve his/her theological or historical purpose(s) (cf Kraemer 1993:91; Dillard & Longman III 1994:171).

Second, it can also be argued that the appearance of the decree of Cyrus at the end of 2 Chronicles could have been borrowed from the beginning of the book of Ezra for the purposes of providing an optimistic ending to the canon when Chronicles was the final work in the Hebrew Bible during the Talmudic period (cf Hayes 1979:244).

Third, the extensive use of the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah by the author or editor of 1 Esdras does not necessarily mean that the various works were previously one work. As attested by Dillard and Longman III (1994:171), many scholars view 1 Esdras as a secondary development rather than having any unity with Ezra and Nehemiah (cf Farisani 2004:213-214).

Fourth, 1 and 2 Chronicles exhibit a tolerant attitude toward the northern Israelites as well as foreigners while the books of Ezra and Nehemiah portray an unkind attitude toward similar groups of people. Thus, I concur with the assertion that 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah have separate authorship (cf Farisani 2004:215).

## 2. 4 COMPOSITION, CHRONOLOGY AND UNITY

Another matter that seems to be very difficult for scholars to resolve is the composition and chronological sequence of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf Japhet 1994:189-216; Richards 1995:211-224). This subject inevitably leads to the argument concerning the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah. The *crux* of the matter is that in order to discuss the sources that were used for the composition of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, one also needs to deal with the question of how and when those sources were brought together to form a coherent narrative as we have it. This process will therefore require that one would need to find whether there is unity in the Ezra and Nehemiah narratives.

In view of the above connections, one of the basic questions which could be asked about the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah is: should Ezra and Nehemiah be regarded as one work or as two separate works? Some scholars<sup>33</sup> argue persuasively for the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah. Their viewpoint is that Ezra and Nehemiah were originally or traditionally regarded as one work. The Talmud also proclaimed its unity (cf Williamson 1985:xxi; Breneman 1993:37). In addition, this unity is also assumed by the Masoretes (cf Williamson 1985:xxi; Breneman 1993:37). The Masoretes 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 (cf Korpel and Oesch 2002:121). Similarly, the author of Ecclesiastes may have

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<sup>33</sup> Childs (1979: 635); Eskenazi (1988), Breneman (1993: 37) and recently, Farisani (2004:215-223) and Dillard & Longman III (1994:180-181) et cetera have argued for the unity of the two books.

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

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

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



Third, Grabbe (1998b:94-95) also indicated that the abrupt ending of the book of Ezra presupposed a continuation of the narrative in Nehemiah which will make the two portions of the narrative, a complete one. In view of this, Nehemiah picks up where Ezra had left off and completes the remainder of the story.

Fourth, Grabbe (1998b:95) also pointed to the common themes in both works such as the return of the people from exile: In each case,

- The Persian king is the person who does the sending through an official state decree.
- There was a threat to the community through intermarriage with the people of the land.
- There is a parallel structure between the two works.

It might seem very difficult to dismiss the above arguments that support the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah, but some biblical exegetes<sup>34</sup> have disagreed with it. These have argued in favour of a separate individual existence of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. One among those who has contested vehemently against the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah is Kramer (1993:74-75). He rejected 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 have accepted the canonical arrangement of these works as a

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<sup>34</sup> Young (1964:378, 386); Harrison (1969:1150); Vanderkam (1992:55-75); Kraemer (1993:73-92); Japhet (1994:189- 216) and Klein (1999: 664).

unity; it is quite another thing to consider the literary condition of these two works when they were composed.

In addition, he identified a fallacy in Eskenazi's view on the unity of these books. Kraemer (1993:75) stated that Eskenazi has made a quick jump from Ezra to Nehemiah when he claimed that both works were centred on the expansion of the house of God. Kraemer (1993:75) dismissed that claim by emphasizing that the book of Ezra is about the rebuilding of the house of God. In Nehemiah, this notion of rebuilding the house of God is peripheral. Rather, Nehemiah is centred on the rebuilding of Jerusalem, particularly the rebuilding of its city walls.

Kraemer (1993:75-76) made other important observations in order to support his assertion that Ezra and Nehemiah have separate authorship. His observations are among those which I have singled out for a detail discussion as could be seen from what follows:

Firstly, Kraemer observed that the beginning of the book of Nehemiah clearly marks what follows as an independent composition. Kraemer's assertion can better be observed by putting the last verse in the book of Ezra with the first verse in Nehemiah, side by side, as shown below:

*"All these had married foreign wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children" (Ezr 10:44).*

*"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,..." (Neh 1:1).<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> The quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (1995).

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 solution that had been provided by Ezra to the problem. The passage sounds as a good ending to the narrative. An intermarriage problem is identified. Then, a divorce solution is proposed and enforced.

Nehemiah 1:1 begins with a superscription introducing the words of Nehemiah, as well as Nehemiah the figure who resides in a distant land away from Jerusalem. He obviously had no connection to the events of intermarriage in Jerusalem. There is no mention of the problem of intermarriage in the first chapter of Nehemiah. This evidently suggests that the passage in Nehemiah 1:1 has set out to provide its own distinctive narrative account as opposed to the continuation of the narrative of the book of Ezra as supposed by those who argue in favour of the unity of the two works (cf Hayes 1979:245). The book of Nehemiah provides its own distinctive solution to the problem that has been raised from the first chapter of the book. It has little or nothing to do with the events that have happened in the last chapter of the book of Ezra.

Secondly, Kraemer (1993:75) observed that the repetition of the list of returnees from Ezra 2 in Nehemiah 7 sustained the argument that these two books were formerly independent works. If this was not the case, what was the purpose for such a repetition, Kraemer questions?

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. If it were the same author, the story would have probably been situated in the book of Ezra where Ezra was carrying out his religious and marital reforms.

Fourthly, there are differences in literary styles between Ezra and Nehemiah. One difference is that Ezra is written in Hebrew and Aramaic while Nehemiah is completely written in the Hebrew language (Kraemer 1993:76). It has not been punctuated with any other language(s) apart from the Hebrew language.

Fifthly and lastly, there are distinctive ideologies between these two works. These 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 other cases (Kraemer 1993:77) the book of Nehemiah supports the scribal values.

I have supported Kraemer concerning his argument in favour of the separation of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. However, I have disagreed with his last reason which he has indicated that Ezra is a priestly book while Nehemiah is a lay work. My observation is that the content of both works does not reveal Kraemer’s argument to be true. For example, the book of

Nehemiah also reveals that priestly concerns were part of the focus of its author or editor just as the book of Ezra shows.<sup>36</sup>

In order to support the separateness of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Japhet (1994:196-197) has dismissed sharply the issue of the literary connection between the two works. 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 (cf also Klein 1999:664).

Arguments concerning the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah can further be understood in the context of issues like the composition and chronology (Japhet 1994:200-201). Japhet recognized the issues of chronology and composition as some of the tantalizing phenomena facing the student of Ezra and 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.

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 Cross<sup>37</sup> work on the Persian period to reconstruct the events in Ezra and Nehemiah during the Persian period. But despite the

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<sup>36</sup> Cf Neh 3:1,17, 20, 22, 28; 7:1, 39, 63-65; 8:2, 9, 13; 10:28, 32-39; 11:3, 10-12, 20-22; 12:1-47; 13:1-13, 22, 28-31.

enormous promise entailed in his work, Hoppe's reconstruction is not left unquestioned. Mor (1977:57-67) is one among those who disagree with Cross' addition of two names of priests apart from those listed in Ezra and Nehemiah.

I concur with Japhet (1994:201) whose perception of the chronology of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah seems to provide a better picture of what has taken place in these works. In view of this, the following discussion will take an in-depth look at her observations.

Japhet (1994: 201) explained that Ezra and Nehemiah describe a series of events and occasionally provide readers with various chronological facts (e.g. 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 and 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." However, Japhet quickly dismissed this method because it could lead any scholar to conclude that the author(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah is "a historian devoid of any sense[s] of structure or any consciousness of time, that is, not a historian at all" (Japhet 1994:207).

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<sup>37</sup> Cross (1966:201-211).

On the contrary, 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 and Nehemiah. In what follows, Japhet provides her understanding of the structure and chronology that seemed to have guided the thought of the author(s) or editor(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah. I have concurred with Japhet's viewpoint on the chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah due to the several factors she has presented in what follows:

Japhet (1994:208-209) asserted that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are 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). The period covered a span of twenty-two years, that is, from 538 BCE to 517 BCE.

The second part is Ezra 7 to 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). The 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 identified 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 rationality behind the historiographical method and time sequence adopted by the author(s) or editor(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah. She stated that the author(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to highlight this central fact which is, "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).

Following from the above explanation, Japhet (1994:216) asserted that in dealing with Ezra and 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 and Nehemiah had opted to deal with the two subjects in their mutual relation in order to express their common theological viewpoint. Today, the argument on the chronology of the events in Ezra and 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 from above (cf Breneman 1993:42-46).

Another aspect concerns the sources that were used for the composition of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Despite the diversity of views concerning the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah, there seem to be a general agreement by a number of scholars<sup>38</sup> on the sources that were used for the composition of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Though, there are a few differences on minor details, I will sketch in general, the sources, according to the various viewpoints of the scholars named from the preceding footnote. The table below describes the probable sources which were used for the composition or compilation of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

*Table 1. Sources used for the composition of Ezra and Nehemiah*

SN	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) <sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Grabbe (1998b:125- 182); Dillard & Longman III (1994:181); Japhet (1994:190) Breneman (1993:35-41) and Williamson (1985:xxiii-xxxiii, 1987:14-36).

<sup>39</sup> See Breneman (993:35, 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

3	Nehemiah's memoirs	Neh 1-7 and 11-13 (Neh 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

On a whole, the sources which were used during the composition of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah have been broadly accepted among scholars as shown from the table above. Much of the sources were derived from Ezra's and Nehemiah's memoirs. Some of the lists were found from previous records. The final editor(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah, whoever he/she might have been, had gathered these pre-existing memoirs, lists, letters, et cetera, and may have put them together. The most probable person(s) were Ezra, Nehemiah or their associates, the Chronicler or both. This exploration will therefore limit itself to the above mentioned broad contours of the sources.

## 2.5 SHESHBAZZAR AND ZERUBBABEL

The relationship between Sheshbazzar<sup>40</sup> (Ezr 1:8, 11; 5:14, 16) and Zerubbabel<sup>41</sup> (3:8; 4:2-3; 5:2 cf Hag 1:1, 14; 2:2, 21) is also a matter of

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belongs to Ezra memoirs. Other scholars such as Williamson (1985:xxviii) consider Nehemiah 9-10 as part of the Ezra memoirs. This matter has been left unresolved.

<sup>40</sup> A Babylonian name, *sassu-aba-usur* meaning "May Shamash [the sun god] protects the father [of this child]" (cf Alberty 2003:120; Williamson 1985:5 and Klein 1999:679) or 'Sin protects the son' (cf Brockington 1969:50-51).

<sup>41</sup> Hebrew *zerubabel* or Akkadian *zer-babili* meaning "offspring of [born in] Babylon" (cf Alberty 2003:120; Meyers 1987:1088; McKenzie 1976:952).

scholarly concern from Ezra and Nehemiah. Who are these two figures? Do the names refer to one person or to separate individuals?

Those who argue that these names refer to one person point out the following reasons. First, that both had been accredited to the laying of the foundation of the temple (cf Ezr 3:8; 4:3; 5:16). Second, that both had exercised a certain form of leadership among the first group of returnees (cf Ezr 1:11; 2:2; 3:2, 8; 4:2-4; 5:14). Third, that the name Sheshbazzar probably was an imperial/court name while Zerubbabel was for Jewish setting just as Belteshazzar was an imperial name for Daniel (cf Kidner 1979:139-146).

A similar biblical account is cited to support the view that both names refer to a single person. It is suggested that Azariah and Uzziah are used interchangeably in 2 Kings 15 to refer to one person but the author(s)/narrator(s) do not point out this relationship in an obvious manner (cf 2 Ki 15:1-2, 7, 13, 30, 32-34). The reader could only figure out this fact by reading the whole of chapter 15 closely.

A contrary argument to the above viewpoint is that Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel are two separate individuals (cf Klein 1999:679; Kidner 1979:139-146). The reasons for this viewpoint are as follows:

First, that Zerubbabel and his fellow leaders are quoted to have referred to Sheshbazzar as a figure of the past<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> "Also the gold and silver utensils of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, and brought them to the temple of Babylon, these King Cyrus took from

Second, that Sheshbazzar had returned to Judah with the first batch while Zerubbabel came back with the second batch during the reign of Darius I (522-486 BC) prior to Ezra's return. Unfortunately, the editor(s), because of his own personal reasons merged the first and second returns of the Babylonian exiles into one. Williamson (2004:13-14) supports the viewpoint that these are two separate figures but that Zerubbabel may have accompanied Sheshbazzar back to Jerusalem on the first return and may have worked under his authority until he succeeded Sheshbazzar as governor at the order of Cambyses.

Third, that Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were the official and unofficial leaders respectively of the first batch of returnees. So, when it came to the matters of dealing with the imperial court, Sheshbazzar functioned in such matters. However, Zerubbabel functioned in the Jewish settings particularly, on matters concerning the prophetic utterances, until he was officially appointed to the governorship of Judah after the sudden disappearance of Sheshbazzar (cf Kidner 1979: 141).

In what follows, I will argue in support of the viewpoint that both Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel are the names of one person because of several reasons.

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the temple of Babylon and they were given to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor" (Ezr 5:14 NASB) .

- Sheshbazzar assumed a certain form of leadership

Sheshbazzar is referred to as the prince/leader of Judah and as a result, he is given the temple articles to be taken to Judah (cf Ezr 1:8, 11). He led the first group of exiles to return to Judah. Therefore, whether he was a tribal leader or the governor of Judah, it is certain that he had assumed some form of leadership role among the early returned exiles. He had also contributed to laying down the foundation of the temple. Similarly, Zerubbabel also is accredited with a certain form of leadership responsibility as well as laying the foundation of the temple (cf Ezr 3:2, 8; 4:2-3; 5:2; Hag 1:1, 12-15). He is therefore listed among the first group who had returned from Babylon to Judah (cf Ezr 2:2; Neh 7:7). These reported similarities of Sheshbazzar's and Zerubbabel's responsibilities during the early post-exilic period can never be accidental. This can better be explained by viewing the two figures as one, rather than as two separate individuals.

- Sheshbazzar is omitted in the list of returnees (Ezr 2:1-70; Neh 7:6-73)

If Sheshbazzar was not the same person as Zerubbabel, why did the narrator choose to include the name of Zerubbabel without listing the name of Sheshbazzar from the list of the returnees (cf Ezr 2:1-70; Neh 7:6-73)? How could one account for this unprecedented omission of Sheshbazzar's name when he was duly recognized as one of the prominent leaders during the early post-exilic period (cf Ezr 1:8, 11; 5:14, 16)? There are however two possible explanations. The first explanation could be that Sheshbazzar was not a native-born Jew. Therefore, it was logically appropriate to exclude him

from the list of the returned Jewish exiles. This explanation obviously is a matter of speculation because if he was a non-Jew, why chose to credit him with the laying of the temple foundation, leadership role of some sort or the carrying of the temple articles to Judah (cf Ezr 1:8, 11; 5:14-16)? These are unlikely responsibilities to assign to a non-Jew, particularly at a time when the identity of the new community was being redefined and narrowed down (cf Ezr 4:3).

Therefore, the second explanation to the unusual omission of Sheshbazzar's name from the list of the returnees is, in my opinion, that he was probably the same person as Zerubbabel. This appears to be the only probable alternative reason that could account for the outright omission of the name of Sheshbazzar from the list of those who had returned from the Babylonian exile to Judah. As it has been suggested previously, the narrator(s) of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah used the name 'Sheshbazzar' in imperial/court settings while maintaining the name 'Zerubbabel' for the Jewish context for certain reasons unknown to us.

## **2.6 BOOK OF THE LAW**

Another subject of scholarly investigation is the book of the Law or Moses' law book (Ezr 3:2; 7:6, 10-14, 21, 25-26; Neh 8:1-10, 13-15, 18 etc). Is this law book similar to the present canonical Pentateuch? Is it the P source, the book of Deuteronomy, an unidentified law book or is it a lost book? There are differing viewpoints on this law book (cf Becking 2003: 22-26; Breneman

1993:47-48, 91; Williamson 1985:xxxvii-xxxix). But the majority of the scholars<sup>43</sup> have supported the view that the Law book or the book of Moses mentioned in various parts of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah "included parts, at least, of both D[euteronomy] and P[riestly Sources], in which case it was similar to, if not yet fully identical with, our Pentateuch" (Williamson 1985: xxxviii-xxxix).

My opinion is similar to the above mentioned viewpoint because of the reasons stated below. First, I support Breneman (1993:48) who argued that there is nothing specific in Ezra and Nehemiah which will suggest that this law book was just a fragment of some law codes. He pointed out that all parts of the Pentateuch are found in the Ezra and Nehemiah narratives.

Second, I also agree with Breneman's observation that the Pentateuch would never have been accepted by the Samaritans with so much enthusiasm if it had been a work recently presented by Ezra<sup>44</sup>. This explains why the Prophets and the Writings were refuted by the Samaritans because of the recency of the materials in question (cf Kidner 1979:159). I, therefore, conclude that the book of the Law or the Law of Moses referred to from various parts of Ezra and Nehemiah included the whole of, or at least a substantial part of the Pentateuch as we have it today (cf Graham 1998:206).

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<sup>43</sup> Cf Klein (1999:800), Breneman (1993:48), Williamson (1985: xxxviii-xxxix) and Brockington (1969:91).

<sup>44</sup> As we had already indicated previously, the Samaritans appeared to have been a group which were dissatisfied with the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. As such, it would have been very difficult for this group to have accepted the Pentateuch if it were edited substantially by Ezra (Soggin 2001:175).

## **2.7 OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND OF JUDAH**

The ownership of the land of Judah also is a source of concern in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Evidences from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah suggest that the land belonged to the *golah* (exile) community who had returned from Babylon to Judah (cf Ezr 2:1, 70-3:1; 4:3; 9:1-2; 10:10-11, 19; Neh 2:20; 9:2; 10:28-30; 13:1-3). Those who had remained in the land during the Babylonian exile have been ignored, forgotten or even pushed aside. The question therefore is “who owns the land?” Is it the exiles, the non-exiles or both? On what basis were those who remained in the land during the exile period considered as foreigners? To answer this question, we have argued in a subsequent section that the concept of ‘Yahweh's people’ might have been the underlying factor behind this redefinition of the Judean population and the ensuing exclusion of the non-exiles from the land of Judah and from the religious and social activities of the newly returned exiles (cf Smith 1996:547-556). We shall take up this matter in chapter five where the text of Ezra and Nehemiah is explored in greater depth.

## **2.8 ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS OF THE STATE OF JUDAH**

Another important concern in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is the establishment of Judah as an independent state or province. Was Judah an independent state prior to the arrival of Nehemiah or was it under the auspices of the state of Samaria? Evidences from Ezra and Nehemiah are not conclusive as to the nature of the administration of the state of Judah during the Persian period. Hence Williamson (2004:6) indicated that Ezra and



Nehemiah were not written primarily for historical interests; as a result, scholars who are bent on reading the materials for historical purpose(s) will find these materials very frustrating. Consequently, Williamson (2004:6) argues that the constitutional status of Judah and the position of its leaders can hardly be discerned from the Ezra-Nehemiah materials.

However, it appears from a close reading of the text of Ezra and Nehemiah that Judah had a certain form of political or administrative independence during or immediately after the exile (cf Williamson 2004:11). A few biblical texts (Ezr 2:1; 5:14; Hg 1:1) have been cited in this regard by Williamson in order to support his viewpoint. First, that Judah has been referred to as *medinah* (province or district) by Ezra 2:1. Second, that two officials (Zerubbabel and Sheshbazzar) have been referred to as *pehach* (governor) by Ezra 5:14 and Haggai 1:1. These two evidences suggest that Judah had at least a certain form of administrative independence headed by a governor prior to the arrival of Nehemiah. Accordingly, the following regions or districts are said to have made up the province of Judah; these included Jerusalem, Beth-hakkerem, Mizpah, Beth-zur, Keilah and Jericho (cf Williamson 2004:15).

Meanwhile, the state of Samaria also appeared to have assumed some form of a temporary administrative control over the affairs of the Judean region prior to the appointment and arrival of Nehemiah as governor (cf Williamson 2004:18; Boccaccini 2002:83-84). The presumption is that Tobiah, the junior

colleague to Sanballat, the governor of Samaria may have received a temporary appointment as the governor of Judah following the disturbances recorded in Ezra 4. His temporary appointment may well explain why he had close ties to Jerusalem. But Tobiah's appointment may have come to an end when Nehemiah assumed office as the governor of Judah.

The temporary administrative control of Samaria over Judah prior to the arrival of Nehemiah could explain why the governors and priests of Judah had to receive letters from the Persian central government in order to deliver them to the trans-Euphrates leaders concerning the affairs of the Judean region. So, it is likely that even though the Judean region possessed a certain form of administrative independence during and after the exile, the state of Samaria also exercised some level of temporary control at some point over the affairs of the Judean region (cf Breneman 1993:25-26, 31; Williamson 2004:33-35).

## **2.9 THEOLOGY OF EZRA AND 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 scholars<sup>45</sup> have speculated on what is the core theology of Ezra and Nehemiah. Obviously, their perception of this theology varies from one aspect to the other. In my attempt to discern these theological motifs, I have discovered some of the following major themes that

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<sup>45</sup> Clines (1984:25-31); Eskenazi (1988:1); Breneman (1993: 50-58); Green (1993); Kraemer (1993: 83-90) and Klein (1999:668-671).

have been suggested by scholars as the contours of the theology of Ezra and Nehemiah.

### **2.9.1 Movement theology**

One of the theological motifs in Ezra and Nehemiah represents the viewpoint of Eskenazi (1988:1). As I see it, it could better be described as a 'Movement theology'. Eskenazi (1988:1) noted that there are three theological motifs in Ezra and Nehemiah. These have been transformed from the pre-exilic period to the post-exilic era. The three themes to his movement theology include:

- A movement from the time of elite leaders to a time of community (post-exilic Jewish community).
- A time of narrow holiness to a time of encompassing holiness.
- A time of oral authority to a time of the authority of written documents (cf Dillard and Longman III 1994:186).

The three contours of this movement theology are explained in what follows:

- Elite leaders to a time of community

Eskenazi explained that in this circumstance, the Old Testament was previously concerned with individuals such as Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, and Daniel, et cetera. The community of the pre-exilic Israel was not the focal point of attention. However, in the post-exilic period, particularly in Ezra and Nehemiah, the attention was moved from the elite leaders to the returning Jewish community as a whole. The community had taken precedence over individual figures. For example, it is the community that

rebuilds the altar (cf Ezr 3:1-6), the temple (cf Ezr 3:7-13; 6:13-15) and the wall (cf Neh 3:1-32; 6:15-16). It is the community that requested the law to be read so they could hear it (cf Neh 8:1-8).

This first part to Eskenazi's movement theology concerning Ezra and Nehemiah could be accepted with some reservation. He argues that in the pre-exilic period, the community of Israel was not the centre of attention; rather, it was individual figures such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon, et cetera who were centre of attention. This is simply not the case. The Israelite community in the pre-exilic period was also at the centre of the events that had transpired within and around them. For example, the call and commission of Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt (cf Ex 2:23-3:22) was initiated by Yahweh, just as King Cyrus was appointed by Yahweh to initiate the return and restoration of the Jewish exiles (cf Ezr 1:1-11). In both of these redemptive episodes, the heart and mind of Yahweh was on the community of Israel as a whole, not just on the individuals like Moses, Joshua, Cyrus or Ezra, as Eskenazi may have wanted us to believe.

In addition, the construction of the tabernacle (cf Ex 35:1-40:38) and the temple (cf 1 Ki 6:1-8:66) was a team effort during the pre-exilic period just as it was a team effort during the early post-exilic period (cf Ezr 3:1-4:24; 6:1-22; Neh 3:1-4:23; 6:1-15). In all these building projects, the leaders were recognized for their wonderful leadership skills. Moses, Solomon, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and Nehemiah, et cetera were all acknowledged for their leadership abilities in both pre- and post-exilic periods. Yet, this personal

acknowledgement was not intended to obscure the work done by their respective communities.

- Narrow holiness to a time of encompassing holiness

Eskenazi (1988:1) contended that in the early post-exilic period, the concept of holiness was no longer restricted to a single place, possibly the temple; rather, it was extended to include the city and its wall, as well as, the community as a whole. This explained why the altar, the temple, and the city wall were consecrated when they were completed (cf Ezr 3:1-13; 6:13-18; Neh 12:27-47). In the end, we have a holy people dwelling in a holy city with a holy God.

- Oral authority to a time of written authority

Eskenazi (1988:1) asserted that there is a shift from oral authority to written documents in Ezra and Nehemiah. It is so astounding to see how written documents such as letters, edicts and 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, 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 (or of Moses) in order to address their present circumstances (cf Breneman 1993:52-53). In the perspective of Eskenazi, the above mentioned theological streams summarized the content of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

### **2.9.2 Rebuilding of two walls**

Contrary to the perception of Eskenazi, Green (1993:206-215) sees the theology of Ezra and Nehemiah in a different light. He understood Ezra and Nehemiah as being a theology of the rebuilding of two walls: the religious and the physical (cf Dillard and Longman III 1994:187). On the one hand, Nehemiah's wall physically separated the holy people of God from the unclean gentiles, who are understood to have been their enemies. On the other hand, Ezra's religious wall is the law of God. Ezra is commanded to teach the people of God this law. The law of God inevitably excluded the gentiles and those who were unclean from associating with the holy people of God in religious matters and social activities (cf Breneman 1993:51-52).

### **2.9.3 Theology of continuity**

Meanwhile, another important theology of Ezra and Nehemiah can better be described as the 'theology of continuity'. One scholar who saw Ezra and Nehemiah as containing the theology of continuity is Breneman (1993:50-58). According to him, there are a number of theological pathways in Ezra and Nehemiah. Some of these theological motifs I have already mentioned. However, Breneman's theological motifs which have not been discussed include:

- The continuity of God's plan and the people.
- The centrality of worship and prayer.
- The narration of God's active participation in the history of the world in order to shape it to His desired goal.

I will discuss each of the above theological motifs separately.

- Continuity of God's plan and the people

Breneman (1993:50) explained that one of the major theological objectives of Ezra and Nehemiah is to show that there is continuity between Israel's past history and the present. Both Ezra and Nehemiah showed that institutions such as the temple (cf Ezr 5:2, 11, 15; 6:7), the altar (cf Ezr 3:3), the wall (cf Neh 6:15-16), and festivals, such as, the celebration of the Passover, and the feast of tabernacles (cf Ezr 3:3-5; Neh 8:14; 12:24, 45), et cetera, were representatives of the previous pre-exilic institutions of Israel. So, the fact that similar institutions existed in the post-exilic period can sustain the argument that the previous period and its institutions have continued into the present and therefore have legitimized the present post-exilic period and its institutions and structures (cf Kidner 1979:21; Clines 1984:25-26; Williamson 1985:li; Throntveit 1992:11; Klein 1999:668).

- Centrality of worship and prayer

Another theological motif identified in Ezra and Nehemiah is the centrality of religious worship and prayer (cf Kidner 1979:24-26; Clines 1984:29). The rebuilding of the altar and the temple were specifically intended for religious worship and prayer. Sacrifices were also offered on the altar to God for religious purposes. The returned community celebrated the Passover and the feast of tabernacles. All of these things including the reading of the law became religious experiences. Similarly, the activities of private and congregational prayers were at the heart of the ministry of Ezra (cf Ezr 9) and

Nehemiah (cf Neh 9). Both leaders started their journey with prayer and sustained their mission with prayer. Clines (1984:30) argued that all these religious experiences were done for the glory of Yahweh, the God of Israel. These religious experiences were not meant to be an end in themselves. The goal was to glorify Yahweh in all things, hence the phrase: “we will not neglect the house of our God” (Neh 10:39).

- God’s role in history

Breneman (1993:54-55) also highlighted another theological concept which is part of the theology of Ezra and Nehemiah. According to him, Ezra and Nehemiah teach that God actively participates in and controls the history of the world to his desired end. He reiterated that Ezra and Nehemiah had shown that history is not a combination of meaningless, isolated events. History is neither a juxtaposition of purposeless events nor uncoordinated activities of the universe and its inhabitants. Rather, it is God who is actively controlling history. He is driving it to his desired goal particularly for the redemption of his people. This explained why God controlled the history of such kingdoms as Babylonia and Persia, et cetera to accomplish his purpose for disciplining and restoring his people, Israel. Williamson (1985:1) adds a related theological spin that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah take a positive perspective toward foreign rule by affirming the notion that there is a possibility of God’s people living a faithful life under foreign rule.



#### **2.9.4 Theologies of crying, intermarriage, covenant, retribution and Torah**

Kraemer (1993:83-90) also proposes some other motifs that seem to be contained within the books of Ezra and Nehemiah but these motifs are subsumed in the themes that have already been mentioned. He talks about other theological themes present in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, such as, the concept of crying (cf Ezr 3:12-13; 9:3-4; 10:1; Neh 1:4; 2:2; 5:1,6; 8:9), opposition to God's work (cf Ezr 4:4-5,24; Neh 5:7-8 ), intermarriage (cf Ezr 9:1-2; Neh 13:23-28), covenant (cf Ezr 10:3; Neh 9:8; 13:29), sin and punishment, and Torah (cf Ezr 3:2; 7:6, 10, 26 9:10-11; Neh 8:1-18).

Kraemer contended that the above mentioned concepts or themes are very pervasive in Ezra and Nehemiah; as a result, they contribute immensely to the establishment and restoration of the religious and social life of the post-exilic-community. Certainly, the above mentioned theological concepts are prevalent in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and this is illustrated above. However, this study will not elaborate in detail on these theological subjects. Rather, the following discussion will integrate some of these themes in a way that the concepts can be better understood. In other words, for the moment, I will discuss specifically the tension between the returned exiles and the supposed foreigners during the early post-exilic period in Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as, the factors that may have contributed to that tension.

## 2.10 FACTORS BEHIND THE TENSION IN EZRA-NEHEMIAH

One concern that has defined the point of departure of this investigation is the contestation between the returned Jewish exiles (who apparently saw themselves almost exclusively as ‘Yahweh’s people’) versus the non-exiles (who were perceived as ‘non-Yahweh’s people’) on the conception of ‘Yahweh’s people’ during the early post-exilic period<sup>46</sup>. Grabbe (1998b:100) holds a similar viewpoint concerning this tension. He argues that one of the central themes from Ezra and Nehemiah is the threat to the exile community by foreigners or peoples of the land. He explained that this threat surfaced at several points in Ezra and Nehemiah namely, during the rebuilding of the temple (cf Ezr 4-6); through intermarriage with foreign women under Ezra (cf Ezr 9-10); through a coalition led by Sanballat, Tobiah and Gershem against Nehemiah and the work of rebuilding the wall; as well as, through the foreign intermarriages (cf Neh 9-10; 13:1-3, 23-31). Grabbe reiterated that the counter theme here is that only the returnees were true members of the community, the true Israelites; and that anyone who had not gone to exile had no claim on Yahweh, or on the temple or on the land of Judah. What follows is a closer examination of some of the matters that reveal the intensity of this conflict.

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<sup>46</sup> Some scholars (cf Williamson 1985:li) have affirmed a similar tension but from a relatively different perspective. The two parties are regarded as “theocratic versus eschatological groups” by Williamson. He argued that on the one hand, the theocratic party exhibits subservient attitude to foreign rule while still maintaining faithfulness to Yahweh, the law and its institutions. On the other hand, the eschatological party appears to be completely dissatisfied with the present situation, thereby looking for or even working for the overthrow of foreign rule in order to establish an independent or messianic kingdom.

### 2.10.1 Prohibition of intermarriage

One of the areas where this contestation is immediately self-revealing, as I have already indicated above, is on the prohibition of intermarriage in Ezra and Nehemiah. There are specific passages both from Ezra and Nehemiah that have described the tension between the *golah* community and the rest of the people concerning intermarriage, for example Ezra 9:1-10:44; and Nehemiah 13:3-4, 23-28. The entire last two chapters of the book of Ezra have been dedicated to the stories of intermarriages to underscore the seriousness of this problem. Ezra appears to have exhausted every atom of his energy (body, soul and spirit) in order to remedy this situation. His restless attitude drew the attention of a large number of the returned exiles. These, vowed to separate from their foreign wives and children. Unfortunately for Ezra's point of view, not everyone was comfortable with this proposed divorce solution (cf Ezr 10:15 and Van Wyk & Breytenbach 2001:1256). The Ezra texts appeal to Yahweh's commandments, via his servants and prophets, as well as to Yahweh's covenant, as the basis for the harsh separation of marriages and families (cf Ezr 9:10-12, 14; 10:4-5).

Similarly, Nehemiah took a decisive measure against those who had intermarried with foreigners (cf Neh 13:23-28). Nehemiah brutally handled the matter as attested in his own memoirs.<sup>47</sup> It seems obvious that the issue of

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<sup>47</sup> "25 So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves..." 28 Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me" (Ezr 13:25, 28).

intermarriage had generated a lot of disagreement because a large number of people had intermarried with other peoples of the land. The outrageous reaction by the two figures, Ezra and Nehemiah, also shows that the problem was a pervasive one.

Consequently, one is forced to ask a number of questions: why did intermarriage become a controversial matter among these returned exiles? What was the motivation behind the ruthless divorce approach undertaken by Ezra and supposedly by Nehemiah? Could these unsympathetic marriage reforms be appropriately justified?

In search of possible solutions to this maze of marriage reforms, some scholars (cf Wolfendale 1974:143-144; Clines 1984:116-118; Klein 1999:732-733) assert that the intermarriage prohibitions in Ezra and Nehemiah were motivated by the concern to protect the monotheistic character of Judaism against the powerful syncretistic polytheism which was prevalent during the Persian period.

The post-exilic community was a small island in a great sea of peoples and religious traditions. As a consequence, it was pertinent that the covenant community remained pure in doctrine, customs, and ethical norms. Ezra's and Nehemiah's actions may have appeared harsh, but Ezra and Nehemiah reveal to us how imperative it was in God's plan that this covenant community

continue. If this assimilation continued unchecked, then, it would have meant the end of the community (Breneman 1993:52).

However, other scholars like Williamson (1985:l-li)<sup>48</sup> disagree with the above perception. Instead, Williamson contended that the intermarriage prohibition was motivated by Jewish racial prejudice. Maccoby (1996:156-157) clearly refutes this accusation on the ground that racism is based on racial superiority; but there is no trace in Israel's history which indicates that the Jews thought they were a superior race.

In my judgement, the prevalence of so many family lists from Ezra (cf 2:1-67; 8:1-14; 10:18-43), and from Nehemiah (cf Neh 3:1-32; 7:1-73; 10:1-27; 11:3-12:26), as well as, the emphasis on the exiles as the 'holy race' (cf Ezr 9:1-2) appeared to have contradicted Maccoby's argument (cf Smith 1996:556).

In other words, it is difficult to dismiss the charge of racism against Ezra and Nehemiah when one sees the prevalence of all these family lists of the returned exiles as well as their emphasis on the holiness of their race. Consequently, it is hard to overlook the accusation that racial prejudice was part of the motivation for the prohibition of intermarriage by Ezra and Nehemiah.

During Williamson's (1985:l-li) discussion on the theological message of Ezra and Nehemiah, he also observed that race and religion characterized this

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<sup>48</sup> Cf also Maccoby (1996:156-157), though Maccoby himself shares an opposite view.

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 (1985:132) insisted that it is difficult to reject the viewpoint that the post-exilic Jews saw themselves as racially different from their 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.

### **2.10.2 Women in Ezra 9-10**

Another event that reveals the tension between the returned exiles and others is the expulsion of women from the post-exilic community in Ezra 9-10. Janzen (2002:2-3) argues that the social consciousness of the returned exiles enabled them to view these women as dangerous. As a consequence, their expulsion was necessary in order to purge away the danger they had posed. Janzen reasoned that the expulsion of these women was a ritualized act of purification or more pointedly, a witch-hunt which was a purification ritual. But Janzen did not address the question of whether these women were truly foreigners as presupposed in Ezra 9-10 or whether they were Judeans who did not go into exile. This discussion will therefore consider this question below.

Previously, Eskenazi and Judd (1994:266-285) discussed this matter in their research work. Eskenazi and Judd did a research on the sociological and theological classification of the strange women in Ezra 9-10. Their findings seemed to suggest that the women classified in Ezra 9-10 as strangers were not really strangers as is sometimes supposed. According to Eskenazi and Judd, these women may have been Judahites or some of the Israelites who had never gone into either the Assyrian or the Babylonian exile (cf Grabbe 2000a:15). So, because of this the early Jewish returnees may have seen these women as appropriate marriage partners. This assumption is also sustained by the fact that Ezra 9:1-2 does not identify these women with certainty to be Ammonites or Canaanites people. In fact, they were not. Rather, these women seem to be identified as foreigners primarily on the basis of a new definition of foreigners found in Ezra. As a result, they were unjustly excluded from the early post-exilic community (cf Eskenazi and Judd 1994:285).

What kind of conclusion can be drawn from Eskenazi and Judd's research findings? My position is that there are several implications which could be deduced from their research findings.

- First, it can hardly be proven from the text of Ezra 9-10 that these women were foreigners or Ammonites/Canaanites.
- Second, these women seemed to have not returned from exile, rather, they were in the land during and after the exile; which was the reason why they were classified (identified) as the 'peoples of the land' (cf Ezr 9:1-2).

- Third, the fact that Ezra and Nehemiah attempted to redefine the concept of ‘the people of Yahweh’ to mean the returning exiles exclusively, inevitably rendered these women as ‘non-Yahweh’s people’ and therefore foreigners. In the viewpoint of Ezra and Nehemiah, they could not have intermarried with the Jewish returned exiles.

Stahl (1988:107-111) suggested that there is ambivalence about intermarriage in biblical texts. As a result, one cannot generally say a definitive word about intermarriage between Jews and foreigners (cf Grabbe 1998a). He cited several of Israel’s figures who had married foreign women or men. For example, Joseph, Moses, David, and Esther (who married a Persian king) had interracial marriages. These inter-racial marriages suggest to Stahl that there was a permissive attitude in previous generations in Israel until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

### **2.10.3 Identity and attitude of the Samaritans**

The tension between the returned Jewish exiles and the rest of the people is portrayed through the identity and attitude of the Samaritans in general<sup>49</sup>. It appeared from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah that some of the returned exiles seemed to have found it difficult to come to terms with the identity and attitude of their Samaritan neighbours. A similar observation has been made by Williamson (2004:23) who argues,

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<sup>49</sup> There appear to be a number of viewpoints about the origin and identity of the Samaritans according to Soggin (2001:175). One view which Soggin highlights is that the Samaritans are a group of Jews who fled from Ezra and Nehemiah’s marriage reforms from the southern part of Israel to the northern region during the fifth century BC. This group did not want to separate from their foreign wives or alliances. So, they migrated to Samaria and established their cultic life on mount Gerizim where their temple also was built (cf Williamson 2004:23-24).



“it is clear beyond a shadow of doubt that throughout the Persian period there continued to be fundamental differences of opinion within Judah concerning the attitude which should be adopted towards the descendants of the former northern kingdom of Israel”

Nevertheless, Cogan (1988:286- 292) pointed out that what is found in Ezra and Nehemiah concerning the Samaritans is different from what is in Chronicles. According to him, the accounts from Ezra and Nehemiah are 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.

On the contrary, the audiences from the book of Chronicles were very open and receptive to non-exiles or non-Jews. They were willing to integrate the non-Israelites in their communal and religious life, particularly, in the worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel. But in the eyes of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Samaritans were a tainted race, so their allegiance to Yahweh was questionable, given their alleged religious syncretism. Some of the newly returned exiles, including Ezra and Nehemiah, found it appalling to relate with the Samaritans in their religious life and communal living. Consequently, the radical isolationist policy of Ezra was an attempt to counter the wide-spread conviction and practice of a broad and conciliatory approach towards foreign relations (Williamson 2004:23). Therefore, one needs to understand from the above viewpoints why the theological conception of ‘Yahweh’s people’ also might have become one of the main sources of the tension during the early post-exilic period in Ezra and Nehemiah.

#### **2.10.4 Concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’**

What appears to be the decisive factor that precipitated the tension in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah was not racial prejudice only. Rather, it seemed that the conception of ‘Yahweh’s people’ in Ezra and Nehemiah during the early post-exilic period was behind the conflict. On the one hand, Ezra, Nehemiah and some of the returning exiles seemed to have held a conception that the returning exiles were exclusively ‘Yahweh’s people’. Based on this assumption, Ezra and Nehemiah thought that the returning exiles should not have intermarried with the rest of the other people of the land. These people were not regarded as ‘Yahweh’s people’. In the perspective of Ezra and Nehemiah, intermarriage with the people of the land constituted a defilement of the holy race as well as a breaking of the holy covenant between Yahweh and his people (cf Ezr 9:2; Neh 9:2).

On the other hand, certain returned exiles and non-exiles as well as other people living in and around Judah apparently conceived the idea that ‘Yahweh’s people’ not only included the returned exiles but also the non-exiles and essentially any person who embraced Yahweh as their God. In this perspective, those who embraced Yahweh as their God ought to have been considered as appropriate marriage partners with the returned exiles irrespective of their racial, social or ethnic differences. This second perspective appeared to have contrasted negatively with the perspective of Ezra, Nehemiah and some other returned exiles; hence the reason for the tension between the two perspectives becomes apparent. This is my premise

concerning the root cause of the tension between the returned exiles and the rest of the people who lived in and around Judah during and after the exile. This viewpoint forms a major part of this investigation.

## **2.11 SYNTHESIS**

It has been argued from the preceding discussion that the concept of 'Yahweh's people' lay behind the tension between the returned exiles and the alleged foreigners. This is rarely acknowledged by scholarly investigations on Ezra and Nehemiah. Whatever the factor(s) that might have sustained this limited acknowledgement or academic gap/oversight, this research is partly aimed at narrowing this discourse gap. This study therefore examines and describes the tension between the alleged foreigners and the returning exiles during the early post-exilic period. This is dealt with in chapter five.

Meanwhile, I have examined the Ancient Near Eastern treaty pattern and the Abrahamic/Mosaic covenants in the proceeding chapter. Ezra and Nehemiah premised their exclusive religious reforms on both covenants. Therefore, connections are made between the events in Ezra and Nehemiah and the Abrahamic/Mosaic covenants as depicted in the Pentateuch.

Furthermore, I have shown in chapter four that there is a covenant framework through which Israel and other nations could be regarded as 'Yahweh's people'. In other words, the chapter describes the inclusive theological perspective of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, foreigners and aliens.

## CHAPTER 3

### ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY AND ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the concept and practice of *tyrIB*. (covenant/treaty) in the context of the Ancient Near Eastern people, particularly, during the second millennium BC; Yahweh's covenant with Abraham<sup>50</sup>; the implications of the Abrahamic covenant and the relationship between the covenant promises which Yahweh had made to Abraham/his descendants and certain events that have transpired in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

There are four factors that have motivated me to discuss the concept of covenant in the context of the Ancient Near Eastern people in general and the Abrahamic covenant in particular.

First, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah appealed to the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants as the basis on which the returned Judean exiles assumed the exclusive right to own the land of Judah. The two covenants are also assumed to be the basis for the legitimization of the far-reaching religious and social reforms witnessed in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>51</sup> This appeal to the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant promises as the basis for the

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<sup>50</sup> Yahweh, the God of Israel made a covenant with the patriarch Abraham and his descendants and has been reported in Gn 15:1-19; 17:1-27, cf Gn 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14, et cetera.

sweeping religious and social reforms during the early post-exilic period appears legitimate through a surface reading of the above mentioned passages. Certain passages from the book of Genesis<sup>52</sup> and from other parts of the Pentateuch<sup>53</sup> also seem to point to such an interpretation.

Second, in my opinion, the Abrahamic covenant is the basis on which the Mosaic and other subsequent covenants in the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history are founded. Abrahamic covenant therefore, anticipates the Mosaic as well as other successive covenants (cf Gn 15:13-21; 17:2-10). It is obvious from the two examples of the Abrahamic covenant texts that Yahweh's covenant with Abraham would not be discontinued when Abraham died. Rather, the covenant would be continued with the descendants of Abraham. The covenant would remain active through an unspecified period of time.

Furthermore, since Abraham's descendants were not physically present at the initial covenant events between Yahweh and Abraham (Gn 15:1-19 and 17:1-27), it was necessary for Yahweh to conduct another covenant or renew his covenant with the descendants of Abraham (Israel) at a later stage in history. Such subsequent covenant contracts had to take the Abrahamic covenant as the reference point. This explains why later in the history of Abraham's descendants, the Mosaic, the Davidic, and other successive

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<sup>51</sup> Cf Ezr 9:1-15; Neh 1:5-10; 9:7-25; Ex 2:24; 3:16-17; 6:2-9; Dt 1:8; 6:10-12; 10:12-22; 30:19-20.

<sup>52</sup>The book of Genesis is colored with Yahweh's promises to Abraham and to his descendants concerning the inheritance of the land of Canaan (cf Gn 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-18; 15:7-21; 17:8; 22:17; 26:3-5; 28:13-15; 47:29-31; 48:21-22; 49:29-32; 50:12-14, 24-25).

<sup>53</sup>See Ex 2: 24-25; 3:7-10, 16-17; 6:2-8; Nm 34:1-12; Dt 1:8; 29:9-15; 34:4.

covenants were conducted between Yahweh and the people of Israel. These later covenant proceedings did not nullify the Abrahamic covenant contract. Rather, other successive covenant activities were built on top of the Abrahamic covenant framework. Therefore, the Abrahamic covenant, by implication may be understood as the foundational covenant on which the Mosaic and other successive covenant activities between Yahweh and Abraham's descendants were established.

Third, having read from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as certain Pentateuchal passages on the Abrahamic and on the Mosaic covenants, the claims made by Ezra and Nehemiah concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations can hardly be substantiated on the basis of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant promises. In other words, the two leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah have portrayed a very one-sided view of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant promises on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations. This one sided perception is evidenced in their harsh attitude toward other people living in and around Judah during the early post-exilic period regarding intermarriage, worship, structural projects and communal life.<sup>54</sup> This harshness toward other people suggests that such people were not considered as 'Yahweh's people'. Thus, 'Yahweh's people' in the perspective of Ezra and Nehemiah are restricted to the newly returned Judean exiles.

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<sup>54</sup>Cf Ezr 4:1-3; 9:1-10:44; Neh 2::20; 4:1-23; 6:1-7:3; 10:30; 13:1-31.

However, my close reading of the Abrahamic covenant<sup>55</sup>, as may be observed later in this chapter, seems to reveal that other peoples are to a reasonable extent linked with Abraham and his descendants through appropriate covenant procedures.<sup>56</sup> This is to argue that through appropriate covenant means, Abraham and his descendants had been selected by Yahweh as a channel through which Yahweh will embrace other nations as his own people. Yahweh would thereby bless them or they would receive his blessing (cf Vogels 1979:43). So, my opinion on the Abrahamic covenant is that foreigners or other nations were not completely excluded from associating with Abraham and his descendants. Other people were not severed from the benefits of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham and consequently with Moses and Israel as Ezra and Nehemiah seemed to have presupposed.

Therefore, the *crux* of the matter in my opinion is that one may find two perspectives that seem to be mutually exclusive, from the Abrahamic and from the Mosaic covenants concerning 'Yahweh's people' and other nations. On the one hand, there appears to be a perspective that supports the exclusive theological viewpoint of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Abrahamic and in the Mosaic covenants. For example, in the Abrahamic and in the Mosaic

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<sup>55</sup>Gn 12:1-3; 15:1-19; 17:1-27.

<sup>56</sup> Cf Gn 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 "Through you/your seed all nations will be blessed/shall receive blessing/shall bless themselves." No matter how one understands this recurrent phrase from Genesis, my opinion is that the common denominator to be noted here is, other nations could have a certain form of an acceptable relationship with Abraham or his descendants /seed in order that the nations might be blessed, bless themselves or receive blessings from Yahweh.

covenants, the descendants of Abraham are conceived as the beneficiaries of the covenant promises Yahweh had made with Abraham (cf Gn 15:18-21; 17:6-10, 18, 19, 21) to the exclusion of non-Abrahamic descendants. The Mosaic covenant makes references to the Abrahamic covenant as its basis (cf Ex 2:24, 25; 3:6-18; 20:1-2; Dt 1:8, 10, 11; 6:3-12, 18). This also suggests that the scope of the Mosaic covenant concerning those who could benefit from its promises does not differ significantly from that of the Abrahamic covenant. The Mosaic covenant, like the Abrahamic covenant, indicates that the Israelites were the main beneficiaries of the covenant promises which Yahweh had made with Israel via Moses (see above references).

A conclusion certainly, may be drawn that since both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants specifically identified the descendants of Abraham as the legitimate beneficiaries of Yahweh's covenant promises, no one else was entitled to benefit from these covenant promises apart from Abraham's descendants. Therefore, by implication, everyone else who was not a descendant of Abraham could be excluded from the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants.

On the other hand, despite the existence of the supposedly exclusive perspective in the two covenants concerning other nations and on the concept of 'Yahweh's people', a close reading of the two covenant promises will reveal that there is an inclusive point of view in both the Abrahamic and



Mosaic covenants concerning ‘Yahweh’s people’ and other nations<sup>57</sup>. This inclusive perspective contradicts the one-sided exclusive ideology of Ezra and Nehemiah on ‘Yahweh’s people’ and other nations. Unfortunately, the basis for the sweeping religious and social reforms during the early post-exilic period was this exclusive point of view.

Fourth, since the Ancient Near Eastern region is understood to have been culturally associated in certain respects with the biblical Israel (cf Dillard and Longman 1994:97-99; Baltzer 1971:89-90), I have provided an overview of the covenant practice(s) from the Ancient Near Eastern region as a background to the Abrahamic covenant activity. I suppose that this general background consideration will provide a better picture of how the concept of covenant may have functioned in the two Abrahamic covenant events in Genesis 15:1-21 and 17:1-27 as well as in the Mosaic covenant ceremony described in Exodus 19:1-24:18.<sup>58</sup>

This is to infer that both the Ancient Near Eastern region and the world of the Old Testament have formed the socio-cultural background to the book of Genesis and ultimately to the stories that have been documented in the Pentateuch concerning the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants (cf Walton & Matthews 1997:12-13).

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<sup>57</sup>Cf Gn 17:4-5, 12-14, 24-27; Ex 12:47-49; 19:5; 20:10; 22:21; 23:9, 12; Dt 10:14, 17-19; 29:10-15.

<sup>58</sup> The Mosaic covenant will be considered in chapter four.

### 3.2 ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY/COVENANT

In this section, I have examined the term  $\text{tyrIB.}$  (covenant), its origin and meaning as well as its content within the back-drop of the Ancient Near Eastern treaty concept and cultural practices, particularly, during the second millennium BC. The world of the Ancient Near Eastern people is understood to have been culturally associated with the Old Testament world, including the practice and the establishment of treaty/covenants (cf Dillard and Longman 1994:97-99; Baltzer 1971:89-90).

#### 3.2.1 Definition of the term $\text{tyrIB.}$ (*berit*)

The term  $\text{tyrIB.}$  (*berit*) appears to be very elastic in the Ancient Near Eastern world. Because of this elasticity, it is consequently argued (cf Soggin 2001:55; Robertson 1980:3-5; Gottwald 1987:202) that the original Hebrew meaning is also difficult to define in a straight-forward sense. Nevertheless, certain attempts have been made to define the Hebrew term, for example, Gottwald (1987:202) defined  $\text{tyrIB.}$  (*berit*) as:

“a formal, solemn, and binding agreement between parties in which there are obligations to do certain acts, or to refrain from doing them, and there are promises or threats of consequences that will follow on fulfilment or breach of the obligations”.

According to Gottwald (1987:202), the above definition does not necessarily capture the full meaning of this Hebrew term *berit*. In view of this limitation, he immediately suggested certain terms that appeared to have captured some aspects of this word. These terms include descriptions such as

agreement, arrangement, compact, contract, commitment, treaty, alliance, obligation, bond and relationship (cf Human 1983:142).

### 3.2.2 Origin and meaning of the term

The origin of the term *berit* (covenant) appears to be uncertain (cf Soggin 2001:55; Robertson 1980:5). However, there are several theories concerning the etymology of the word *berit*<sup>59</sup>. According to McConville (1997: 747) and Robertson (1980:5), one perspective is that the root of the word comes from the Hebrew word *barah* which means ‘to eat’. This meaning could be related to the covenant meal eaten by both parties when a covenant was carried out. However, McConville (1997:747) dismisses this verbal root linkage on the ground that *berit* is clearly attested as a Hebrew noun and therefore does not relate to any known Hebrew verbal root.

There are three other suggestions that relate *berit* to an Akkadian root (cf McConville 1997:747 and Barre 1992:654). One of these is the proposal that the term *berit* is derived from the Akkadian preposition *birīt*, which is related to the Hebrew preposition  $\text{!yBe}$  - between (cf Robertson 1980:5). In this regard, the word *birīt* has a connotation of *mediation*. It is therefore suggested that the word *birīt* and its meaning has evolved over a long period of time to the present form *berit* (covenant).

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<sup>59</sup> See also footnote 3 in Robertson (1980:5) for a detail explanation on the various etymological viewpoints concerning the term *berit*.

A second proposal relates *berit* to the Akkadian noun *biritu* which means ‘fetter’, or ‘clasp’ by which a covenant signifies a bond (cf McConville 1997:747; Barre 1992:654; Robertson 1980:5). In this sense, a covenant has an element of binding two or more people/parties together for a common purpose.

A third viewpoint is that *berit* may have come from the Hebrew verb *brh* which has a connection with the Akkadian verb *baru* (cf McConville 1997:747; Barre 1992:654; Robertson 1980:5) meaning ‘select for a task’ or ‘obligation’. The term ‘covenant’ could therefore be seen as entailing certain obligations or tasks for both parties.

A fourth suggestion does not relate *berit* to an Akkadian root but relates it to the Hebrew word *brr* which refers to the setting apart of a specific thing (cf McConville 1997:747).

Robertson (1980:6), however, is of the opinion that, despite the differing viewpoints concerning the etymology of the Hebrew term *berit*, the common denominator is that the result of a covenant is the establishment of a relationship “in connection with,” “with” or “between” people.

Since there is no consensus on the root meaning of the Hebrew noun *berit*, McConville (1997:747) argues that it is better to find its meaning on the use of the term or its function in the Ancient Near Eastern cultural context rather

than search for its meaning on etymological basis. It is to this suggestion that we will turn in the next section.

### **3.2.3 Ancient Near Eastern treaty form**

The origin or etymology of the term *berit* appears to have been difficult to ascertain as observed from the preceding discussion. However, this difficulty does not necessarily mean that the concept was totally absent from the socio-cultural or political life of the Ancient Near Eastern world. Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1180) succinctly argue that the concept and practice of covenant transactions began as early as the art of writing itself. Accordingly, a lot of treaties from *Ebla* were recorded and have been preserved till today (cf Baltzer 1971:9-10), dating from the Early Bronze Age (about 3500 BC) to the Iron Age (about 1000 BC).

One of the mistaken approaches to the study of the ancient and the biblical covenants identified by Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1180) is a situation whereby the practice of covenant is reduced to notions such as “a rigid literary form”, “a literary law code”, “a ritual act”, and “a theological or political idea or concept”. According to Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1180), the concept of covenant was understood and practiced in a variety ways in the Ancient Near Eastern world more than the above mentioned limited deductions. This is to assert that the practice of contracting a covenant was a significant aspect of the ancient cultures. The concept of covenant or treaty

practice operated to transcend a narrow parochialism and therefore to prepare the platform for a wider perspective on society and history.

Consequently, two broader categories of covenant concepts or practices in the Ancient Near Eastern region and in the Old Testament world had been identified by Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1179-1180), namely:

- Covenant as socially enacted historical reality which was expected to bring about functional changes in patterns of behaviour; and
- Covenant as a formal or a symbolic dogmatic concept which was supposed to be the object of tradition and belief.

Thus, Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1180) warned that scholars should recognize this varying function and use of the concept of covenant and its practice in the ancient world in order to avoid unnecessary parochialism or confusion.

In view of the above, certain broader characteristic elements of the Ancient Near Eastern treaties which existed generally in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages were identified (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1180) as follows:

- “Historical events that create relationships, usually (though not necessarily) between unequal partners;
- Customary ways of thinking characteristic of both parties, especially common religious ideas associated with deities
- Descriptions of norms for future behaviour (which are often confused with “laws”);
- Literary or oral forms in which the agreement is couched; and

- Almost always some ritual act that is regarded as essential to the ratification of the binding.”

Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1180) indicated that despite the pervasive practice of covenant transactions in the ancient world, it was the Bronze Age that produced the most sophisticated and most structured form of international treaties. They also argue that there is no reason to doubt that some of these treaty patterns originated from the Hittite treaty practices and that some of the characteristic elements of the treaty forms were common among various cultures in the Bronze Age.

Furthermore, not every treaty form or pattern exhibited all the characteristic elements of a treaty or covenant at the same time (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1180). This is to argue that sometimes certain characteristic elements could be lacking in one form of a covenant document but could be found in another document. Therefore, there was no absolute or rigid uniformity in the covenant patterns among the ancient Orient (cf Pfeiffer 1966:176). The modern scholarly idea that all the covenant events had to conform to a certain rigid or specific form or a strict legalistic pattern defined in advance is unfortunately alien to the ancient culture and specifically to the Bronze Age. This wrong notion of covenant formula has been rejected (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1180; cf Baltzer 1971:10).

The above conclusion appears to be supported by the classification of the various types of treaties or covenants in the second millennium BC put

forward by Barre (1992:654). He reasoned that during the second millennium BC, there were two broad types of treaties practiced in the Hittite Empire. These were the ‘international’ and the ‘domestic’ treaties. The international treaties were more common and were subdivided into two main categories. These included the ‘parity’ and the ‘suzerain-vassal’ treaties (cf Bruce 1980:328; Pfeiffer 1966:175). By definition,

“Parity treaties sought to establish nonaggression between the parties [sometimes of equal strengths] and to guarantee the stability of the respective ruling dynasties. Suzerain-Vassal treaties served to consolidate the hegemony of the Suzerain; the Vassal’s interests were clearly subordinate” (Barre 1992:654).

Therefore, the following characteristic elements have been drawn from the various Hittite international suzerain-vassal treaty patterns during the Late Bronze Age by Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1180-1183; cf Van Rooy 1977:282) in order to provide a better picture of what was involved in such treaty dealings.<sup>60</sup> These include:

- Identification of the covenant giver;
- The historical prologue;
- The stipulations;
- The provisions for deposit and periodic public reading;
- The list of witnesses to the treaty;
- The blessing and curses;
- The ratification ceremony; and
- The imposition of the curses.

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<sup>60</sup> McConville (1997:747) lists six characteristic elements of the Hittite International Suzerain-Vassal treaties following from the list provided by McCarthy (1981:51-52; cf Baltzer 1971:11-14; Pfeiffer 1966:175). These include: (i) titulary (introducing parties); (ii) historical prologue (rehearsing their past relations); (iii) stipulations; (iv) document clause (requiring the preservation of the document in the temple and its regular reading); (v) god list (i.e. witnesses to the treaty); and (vi) blessings and curses (invoked for keeping or violating the treaty).



In what follows, I will discuss the above characteristic elements of the Hittite international suzerain-vassal treaty patterns in order to understand the meaning and function of each of the above characteristic elements during the second millennium BC.

### 3.2.3.1 Identification of the covenant giver

Identification of the covenant giver was a typical way to mark the introduction of the treaty document. It has been regarded differently as the preamble or introduction (cf Dillard and Longman 1994:98; Barre 1992:655; Bruce 1980:328; Van Rooy 1977:282-283; Pfeiffer 1966:175). In many instances, the introduction began with a formula- “The words of...” was followed by the name of the Hittite king, his genealogy, his titles, and ends with the epithet- “the hero” (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1180; cf McCarthy 1981:51; Baltzer 1971:11).

### 3.2.3.2 Historical prologue

In the prologue of the treaties, the suzerainty king or party often recounted his past benevolence or good deeds to the vassal king/party and his country (cf Dillard and Longman 1994:98; Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1180). This section usually included an overview of the past relationship between the suzerainty king and the vassal's forefathers (cf Bruce 1980:328; Van Rooy 1977:282-283; Baltzer 1971:11). This became the ground for the vassal king and his country to enter into a covenant relationship and live in obedience to the suzerainty king (cf Barre 1992:655; Pfeiffer 1966:175). The concept of

'reciprocity' was strongly engrained in the rationale for this characteristic element as indicated:

“The narration of the past history emphasized very strongly the benefits that the great king had already bestowed upon the vassal in the past. The implication is, of course, that the common decency of gratitude would place the vassal under obligation to comply with the wishes of his benefactor” (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1181).

In other words, the past was recounted in order to instil a sense of appreciation in the mind of the vassal king/party and his subjects and as the reason or justification for their future obedience to the Hittite suzerainty king.

### 3.2.3.3 Stipulations

This section usually described the interests of the Hittite suzerainty king that the vassal king and his country were bound to protect when the covenant was finally ratified (cf Dillard and Longman 1994:98; Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1181). Accordingly, the stipulations were sometimes phrased in the case-law pattern (i.e. “if..., then...”) or in imperatival form (Barre 1992:655). In a few instances, the suzerainty king was obliged to guarantee the succession of the vassal's family to the throne of the vassal king (McCarthy 1981:51-52). Some of these prohibitions or stipulations prescribed by the Hittite suzerainty king to the vassal king and his country are known to have included the following:

- “Prohibition of any relationship with a country outside the Hittite sphere;
- Prohibition of hostility to other Hittite vassals;
- Immediate help to the great king in times of war;

- The vassal must not listen to any slandering of the great king but immediately report it to the king;
- The vassal must not hide deserting slaves or refugees;
- The vassal must appear once a year before the king to pay his taxes and to renew the treaty” (Bruce 1980:328; cf Bright 2000:151; Baltzer 1971:13-14).

#### 3.2.3.4 Preservation and/or periodic public reading

A copy of the covenant document was granted to the vassal king/party by the suzerainty king in order for it to be deposited or preserved in the temple of the local deity/deities of the vassal king. The suzerainty king also would keep another copy in the temple of his national god (McConville 1997:747; Dillard and Longman 1994:98; Barre 1992:655; Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1181; McCarthy 1981:52; Bruce 1980:328).

Accordingly, the suzerainty king would usually require the vassal king and his subjects to conduct a periodic public reading of the covenant document deposited in the temple in order that its stipulations could be incorporated into the political, social, economic and religious life of the subordinate party members (Bright 2000:151; Pfeiffer 1966:175). The frequency of this public reading of the covenant document varied from one covenant ceremony to the other, but it was generally scheduled to be read from one to four times a year (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1181). The public reading of the document could also suggest that even though the treaty ceremony was conducted between the suzerainty king and the vassal king, the covenant stipulations were binding on their respective subjects.

#### 3.2.3.5 Witnesses to the treaty

This section usually contained a list of various gods/deities, from the side of both the Hittite suzerainty king(s) and of the vassal king(s). The list of witnesses also included mountains, rivers, heaven, and earth, et cetera who served as guarantors to the treaty ceremony (Bright 2000:151; Dillard and Longman 1994:98; Bruce 1980:328; Van Rooy 1977:289; Baltzer 1971:14; Pfeiffer 1966:175). One of the grounds for calling this host of witnesses was to enable these witnesses to observe the conduct of the party/parties under oath and to carry out appropriate punishments and rewards connected with the covenant ceremony.

Furthermore, this god list was usually very comprehensive in order that no relevant god was left out for the vassal party to appeal to for protection if he wanted to violate the terms of the covenant after it had been contracted or ratified (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1181).

Another factor for calling divine witnesses to the treaty event was to enable the vassal party to use their conscience for self policing based upon their regard for the highest principles or divine principles rather than upon the fear of superior military force (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1181).

#### 3.2.3.6 Blessing and curses

Under this section, various blessings and curses which would apply to the vassal and his country/subjects in case of obedience or disobedience respectively, were usually described to the vassal king, sometimes in the

presence of his subjects; the gods and the suzerainty king may effect or carry out these various blessings and curses upon the subordinate party/parties when applicable (Bright 2000:151; McConville 1997:747; Dillard and Longman 1994:98; Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1181; Baltzer 1971:14-15). Some of these blessings and curses hinged upon matters such as health/wellbeing of individuals, their lands, livestock, agricultural cash-and-food-crops as well as freedom from external violence or aggression<sup>61</sup>.

### 3.2.3.7 Ratification ceremony

It has been argued (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1182) that the writing of the covenant document did not mark the end of the process of contracting the covenant. Additional functions were usually performed in order to ratify the covenant. There was no single rigid formula across the ancient Orient for ratifying a treaty or covenant transaction. However, some of the usual activities which were carried out during this ratification process involved the sacrifice of an animal as well as the eating of a common meal.

The idea of sacrificing an animal was to demonstrate how the vassal party would be treated if he and his subjects violated the covenant stipulations when the covenant takes effect. Meanwhile, the practice of eating a common

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<sup>61</sup> A typical example of the blessing and curse formula of the Hittite empire of the second millennium BC is supplied by McCarthy (1981:66-67) as follows: "The words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet- should Duppi-Teshub not honor these words of the treaty and the oath, may these gods of the oath destroy Duppi-Teshub together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, his land, and together with everything he owns". "But if Duppi-Teshub honors these words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet, may these gods of the oath protect him together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house (and) his country".

meal was carried out as an expression of social solidarity and peace between the covenant parties. This covenant meal sometimes could include the eating of bread and the drinking of wine as attested by a Mari document (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1194). Mendenhall and Herion also noted that since the activity of ratifying the covenant contract was a practical or visible activity, it was not written down in the covenant document.

#### 3.2.3.8 Imposition of the curses

This segment is not found in the Hittite suzerainty treaty formula or document but Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1182) indicated that there comes a stage when the suzerainty king would know that it was time to implement, enforce or impose the curses upon the vassal king after he and his subjects had violated the oath of the covenant. Furthermore, despite the fact that the gods were required to enforce certain curses upon the vassal party through natural causes, at the violation of the oath of the covenant, the suzerainty king was also the logical instrument to enforce some of the curses through his military intervention against the vassal king and his subjects.

In summary, we have noted that the idea of covenant carried a fundamental concept of 'relationship' between individuals, kings and their subjects, et cetera, within the Ancient Near Eastern Hittite treaty culture. This relationship could take different forms such as parity or suzerain-vassal treaty forms, et cetera, as we have discussed earlier. In view of this, the Abrahamic and the

Mosaic covenants shall be considered in this chapter and in the next one with reference to the concept of 'relationship'.

My argument therefore is to point out that through the institution of a covenant, Yahweh had established a relationship between Abraham, his descendants and other nations (cf Gn 15:1-21; 17:1-27; Ex 20:1-26; Dt 5:1-6:25; Bright 2000:149). This relationship was not a casual or an informal one. The relationship included the ultimate issues of life and death (cf Gn 17:14; Dt 5:33; 6:2, 15, 24; Robertson 1980:8). Therefore, the concept of 'relationship' should be taken seriously as one of the foremost theological, religious and socio-cultural centrepieces on which Yahweh established his covenant with Abraham, his descendants and other nations.

### **3.3 ABRAHAMIC COVENANT**

#### **3.3.1 Literary context of the Abrahamic covenant**

No passage in Scripture is isolated. Every verse occurs in the context of a larger literary framework. Because of this inseparable link of scriptural passages, it is very important to read a particular passage in light of its larger context in order to have a full grasp of what the smaller building-stone passages are all about (cf Gorman 2001:69). This principle leads this study to evaluate the literary context of the covenant God made with Abraham<sup>62</sup> in order to see how the covenant fits into Genesis as well as the Pentateuch as a whole.

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<sup>62</sup> Texts that deal with the Abrahamic covenant include: Gn 15:1-19; 17:1-27, cf 12:1-3.

### 3.3.2 Structure of Genesis

The structure of the book of Genesis has been described in several ways, for example, Wenham (1987:xxi-xxii), Dillard and Longman III (1994:48) and Matthews (1996:26-41) have identified two possible structures for the book (see also Von Rad 1972:5 and Westermann 1984:1; 1985:9). The first structure is directed by the term  $\tau\delta\omicron\lambda .AT \ hL,ae$  which is translated variously as ‘these are the generations’, ‘this is the family history’ or ‘this is the account of’ and they appear at least eleven times in the book of Genesis.<sup>63</sup> The second structure is divided traditionally into two main parts: (1) Primeval history (Gn 1:1-11:32), and (2) Patriarchal narratives (Gn 12:1-50:26). Von Rad (1972:5) and Westermann (1984:1, 1985:9) also followed this latter structure in their commentaries on Genesis.

The two above proposed structures for the book of Genesis must be significantly appreciated. The above mentioned structures, to a great extent, capture various aspects of the story of Genesis. Nonetheless, since the book of Genesis is a complex text, its structure can be seen in different ways by different scholars. Consequently, my close reading of the book of Genesis reveals a structure which is slightly different from those that have been suggested from above.

My observation therefore, reveals that the book of Genesis contains another structure which I would regard as a structure bound or determined by the two

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<sup>63</sup> Cf Gn 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2.



themes ‘Creation and Re-Creation’<sup>64</sup>. This structure has two major parts which include, first, Creation (Genesis 1:1- 7:24) and second, Re-Creation (Genesis 8:1-50:26). Each of the two parts echoes four important biblical motifs. The four themes in both the first and the second part include creation or re-creation, blessing, sin, and God’s response. In each of the two parts, every event or narrative has fallen in one of the four mentioned categories. There is no event in each part which is completely isolated or independent from these four sub-structural categories. The following two diagrams therefore describe the ‘Creation and Recreation’ structure of the book of Genesis.

The first diagram (Table 2) describes a summary structure of the whole book so that the reader may capture the content of the structure at a glance while the second diagram (Table 3) describes an expanded version of it which includes important details from the book of Genesis.

*Table 2: Summary structure of the book of Genesis*

<b>SN<sup>65</sup></b>	<b>GENESIS 1:1-7:24</b>	<b>THEMES</b>	<b>GENESIS 8:1-50:26</b>
1	1:1-27	Creation/Re-Creation	8:1-20
2	1:28-2:25;4:25-5:32	Blessing	8:21-9:19
3	3:1-13;4:1-24; 6:1-6	Sin	9:20-11:7
4	3:14-24;6:7-7:24	God’s response	11:8-50:26 <sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> This ‘Creation and Recreation’ structure differs from other traditional structures proposed on the book of Genesis. I am solely responsible for its content as described in table 2 and 3.

<sup>65</sup> SN = Serial Number.

Table 3: Expanded structure of the book of Genesis

SN	PART 1 (GN 1:1-7:24)	THEMES	PART 2 (GN 8:1-50:26)	SN
1	<b>Creation</b>	GOD CREATE	<b>Re-Creation</b>	1
	God created 1:1	process	God remembered <sup>67</sup> 8:1	
	Water/deep 1:2, 6-10	water	Water, deep, flood 8:1-5	
	Heaven/ Earth 1:1	universe	Heaven/Earth 8:1-3	
	Livestock 1:20-25	creatures	Livestock 1:1,15-17, 19	
	Sun, moon, stars 1:3-5, 14-19	luminaries	Sun, moon & stars 8:22	
	Adam, Eve 1:26-27	humankind	Noah & family 8:1, 15-16, 18	
	God's image 1:27-27	nature of man	God's image 9:6b	
2	<b>Blessing</b>	GOD BLESSES	<b>Blessing</b>	2
	Fruitfulness 1:28	fruitfulness	Fruitfulness 8:22; 9:1,7	
	Rulership 1:28; 2:15	rulership	Rulership 9:2	
	Food 1:29-30; 2:16	food	Food 9:3	
3	<b>Sin</b>	SIN	<b>Sin</b>	3
	Sin anticipated 2:17	sin anticipated	Sin anticipated 8:21;	
	Adam & Eve ate 3:6	ate, drank, built	Drank 9:21; built Babel 11:4	
	Nakedness 3:7	1 <sup>st</sup> consequence	Nakedness 9:21-22	
	Fig leaves 3:7	human effort	Garment 9:23	
4	<b>God's response</b>	RESPONSE	<b>God's response</b>	4
	God appeared quickly 3:8	God appeared	God appeared later 11:5	
	Garment 3:21	cover	Human used God's example (cf Gn 3:21 and 9:23)	
	Man separated from garden and from God 3:23	separation	Later man separated from tower and from God 11:8-9	
	Promise of victory 3:15	promise	Promise of blessing 12:1-3	
	Short term response to sin	time frame	Long term response to sin	

<sup>66</sup> This section has a mixture of the three themes: sin, blessing and God's response. Sin aspect narrates the stories about the weaknesses/failures of humankind. Blessing aspect deals with God's blessing on humankind after the fall of Babel. The blessing includes fruitfulness/child bearing, material wealth and acquisition of land and property. God's response in one sense is his conferment of particular blessing to all other nations through Abraham and his descendants. God's response in this regard specifically relates to covenant promises and activities that include but also transcend Israel as a nation.

<sup>67</sup> The word *remember* (~yhiil {a/ rKoz>YIW •}), with reference to God as the subject, almost always denotes God's active response to an external situation (eg Gn 19:29; Ex 2:24; 1 Sm 1:19; Ps 105:42). So, the phrase "God remembered Noah and his creatures" in Gn 8:1 may in a sense be regarded as God's active way of calling (recreating) Noah and other creatures into existence after the flood.

	through Noah 6:1-7:24		through Abram 12:1-50:26	
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This 'Creation and Recreation' structure of the book of Genesis is not strictly chronological especially in the first eleven chapters of the book. It appears that the author(s)/editor(s) of the book of Genesis was not necessarily arranging his/her material in a strict historical chronological order. The editor(s) was more concerned with narrating the stories about creation/recreation, blessing, sin and God's response. This is not to suggest that the author(s)/editor(s) was completely disinterested in the events as they happened chronologically. Obviously, the author(s)/editor(s) had arranged some of the narratives from Genesis 12:1-50:26 in a more historical chronological order. However, the author(s)/editor(s) did not use historical chronology at the expense of the stories themselves.

### 3.3.3 Movement of the narrative

The movement of the narratives in a plot in Genesis as portrayed in the above 'Creation and Re-creation' structure may be described in each part (i.e. Part 1: Gn 1:1- 7:24 and Part 2: Gn 8:1-50:26) as follows.

In the first part, which is Creation, '*elohim* (~yhi1 {a /}) created the universe including humankind (Gn 1:1-2:25). He blessed them and all other things which he had made, as noted in the first two chapters of the book. There is a close relationship between '*elohim* and humankind because he made them in his image and likeness (cf Gn 1:26-27; see also Walton & Matthews 1997:18). He also made humankind vicegerent on earth (cf Gn 1:28-30; 2:15-17). As

vicegerent, humankind must do *'elohim's* will on earth and live in good relationship with their creator as well as with other creatures.

Unfortunately, Genesis 3:6-7 indicates that human beings failed or sinned against  $\sim y h i l \{ a / h w " h y \}$  (Yahweh *'elohim* or Lord God<sup>68</sup>). Yahweh responded in several ways toward humankind and his creation. First, human beings were separated from him<sup>69</sup>. Second, Yahweh pronounced a curse with resulting enmity between the serpent and the woman as well as between their seed (Gn 3:15). This verse may be understood as a curse as well as a promise of victory, superiority of humankind against the serpent or against various sources of evil temptations (cf Fretheim 1994:363; Robertson 1980:96-97).<sup>70</sup> But because of the pervasive nature of human sin (cf Gn 4:1-

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<sup>68</sup> Beginning with Gn 2:4 following, the name *'elohim* has been linked with the name *Yahweh*. Similarly, several divine names such as *'elohim*, *Yahweh* and *El-Shaddai* et cetera have been used interchangeably or side by side. Therefore, I have used these same names interchangeably in order to reflect the flexibility that exist in the final form of the text of the Pentateuch. It is with no doubt that the documentary hypothesis (for example the JEDP) has made several efforts to explain the sources of the documents which were used for the composition of the Pentateuch. The names of *Yahweh* and *'elohim* in some cases have been separated to suggest the separateness of the sources or documents. Despite this hypothetical source development, no one has ever come across any of these documents in a particular form as suggested by the JEDP documentary hypothesis. The documents are only hypothetical or educated guesses. However, the finished copy of the Pentateuch is already here though with some minor variations. This present version of the Pentateuch testifies to the work of a responsible editor(s) who has put the stories together to explain his presumably theological or religious viewpoint. In my judgment, the editor(s) assumes that his audience could understand that *'elohim*, *Yahweh*, *El Shaddai* et cetera refer to the same God. Where this is not so, the editor points it out. Therefore, I have used the divine names flexibly as attested by the final form of the Pentateuch itself.

<sup>69</sup> This separation is considered by other scholars as the symbolic description of the act of dying (cf Fretheim 1994:364, 369 with Gn 3:19, 23-24). When human beings are separated from *Yahweh*, they are by implication severed from their source of life and existence.

<sup>70</sup> There are differing views concerning the identity of the serpent in the above text (cf Westermann 1984:237), such as, the serpent is Satan in disguise; the serpent symbolizes human curiosity; the serpent is a mythological figure for prosperity, life and death, chaos, demon or God's enemy; the serpent is an animal that is clever. This study assumes that the serpent is used in Gn 3 to symbolize evil force in opposition to God/*Yahweh* (cf Is 27:1; 2 Cor 11:3; Rev 12:9;

24; 6:1-8), Yahweh almost wiped out humankind and other creatures completely from the face of the earth (cf Gn 7:21-24). However, he spared Noah, his family and some other selected creatures from every kind in order to have a renewed creation.

In the second part of the structure which is 'Re-creation', Noah, his family and few other creatures began a new life. Thus, the new life is understood as a recreated life (cf Gn 8:1-20). Human beings (Noah and his family) were reminded anew about their close relationship with Yahweh. They were made in God's image and likeness (cf Gn 9:6). They were blessed by God (cf Gn 9:1). They were also reminded of their role as God's vicegerent (cf Gn 9:2-3). They were obliged to live in obedience to God and in good relationship with their fellow human beings as well as with the rest of the other creatures (cf Gn 9:4-17).

Regrettably, humankind disobeyed or sinned against God (cf Gn 9:21-23; 11:3-4; cf 9:1, 7) as they had done in the first creation episode. God responded in almost the same ways as he did at the fall in the garden. Humankind was separated from Yahweh, this time, by scattering them all over the earth (cf Gn 11:8). Yahweh thereby, initiated a process through which he would renew his relationship with humankind via Abram/Abraham (Gn 12:1-3; cf Fretheim 1994:425-426). The covenant between Yahweh and Abram/Abraham (cf Gn 15:1-21; 17:1-27) may therefore be understood as

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20:2). This opinion does not negate the fact that the serpent could be an instrument of death or a means of obtaining life and healing (cf Nm 21:6-9; Jn 3:14).

Yahweh's renewed response toward human disobedience and their subsequent separation from Yahweh. In my opinion, Yahweh's renewed response via Abrahamic covenant was motivated by his love and desire to restore the relationship that had existed between himself and humankind including other creatures at creation, prior to the fall in Genesis 3 (cf Fretheim 1996:85; Soggin 2001:55).

Through Yahweh's relationship with Abraham, he will bless the entire human race and restore them to their vicegerent role (cf Gn 12:1-3). Yahweh's relationship with human beings and his creation must be accomplished through Abraham and his descendants via the covenant. The events that have followed the covenant, which Yahweh had made with Abraham and his descendants, may therefore be understood in two ways. Some of the events narrate an advancement of the Abrahamic covenant promises<sup>71</sup> while other events seem to derail the covenant promises from being realised.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the occurrence of positive and negative events that restrained or advanced the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant promises, the book of Genesis reveals that Yahweh, the God of Israel was successfully guiding and controlling the events and the covenant promises which he had made to Abraham and his descendants to his desired goal (cf Gn 50:19-21,24-25).

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<sup>71</sup> The birth of Isaac, a legitimate son of Abraham (Gn 21:1-7), indicates an advancement in the covenant promises God made to Abraham (cf Gn 15:4-6; 17:16-19).

<sup>72</sup> God tested Abraham by telling him to sacrifice his only son Isaac (Gn 22:1-12). Esau harbors a plan to kill his brother Jacob for receiving his blessing (Gn 27:41). These events almost derail or brought tension to God's covenant promise with Abram (Gn 15:4-6; 17:16-19).

As a consequence, every event that has transpired through Abraham and his descendants including the history of the world should not be considered as a haphazard or accidental happening. Rather, all the events that had happened in the life of Abraham, his descendants and in the life of other nations should be understood as moving toward Yahweh's ultimate goal for the establishment of covenant relationship with humankind via Abraham and his descendants. Thus, the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic history (Dt - 2 Ki) are a narration of the advancement of or derailment to the fulfilment of the covenant promises which Yahweh had made to Abraham and his descendants.

### **3.3.4 Characteristic elements of the Abrahamic covenant**

The passages that deal specifically with the covenant which Yahweh had made with Abraham include Genesis 15:1-21 and 17:1-27. Genesis 12:1-3 might be regarded as introductory background to the above covenant passages. The two Abrahamic covenant episodes have received considerable attention among biblical scholars for almost a century.<sup>73</sup>

Source criticism suggests that the two covenant texts originated from two separate source traditions (cf Brueggemann 1982:153; Westermann 1985:214-217, 256-257; Fretheim 1994:444, 457). Consequently, chapter 17 is considered as originating from the Priestly (P) source tradition (cf

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<sup>73</sup> Cf Rogerson, Moberly and Johnstone (2001:111-112, 138); Fretheim (1994:444); Wenham (1987: 326; 1994:18-19); Westermann (1985:214-217, 254-256).

Rogerson, Moberly and Johnstone 2001:112). However, there appears to be no consensus on the source of chapter 15. There is still debate about whether to assign chapter 15 to 'Yahweh' (J) and or to *'elohim* (E) source traditions (cf Rogerson, Moberly and Johnstone 2001:112; Westermann 1985:214, 216-217). But Westermann himself is reluctant to assign the chapter to any specific hypothetical source tradition; rather, he has regarded it simply as a patriarchal promise narrative which was designed to assure God's people in times of national danger. Fretheim (1994:445) notes that chapter 15 should be considered as originating from the exilic period when divine promises were a major topic of discussions.

Despite the above uncertainties concerning the sources of the two chapters, there is agreement on the idea that both chapters deal with Yahweh's covenant with Abraham, the patriarch. In view of this, my opinion is that chapter 15 is an account of the initial covenant activity between Yahweh and Abraham, while chapter 17 recounts Yahweh's renewal of his covenant with Abraham. Both passages, in my opinion, are likely to have emerged from the same source tradition since there is nothing extraordinary in any of the passages to point to a separate source tradition. Furthermore, it has already been argued that among the Hittite people, it was a usual practice for the suzerainty-vassal treaty covenant to renew their covenant (cf Bruce 1980:328; Bright 2000:151). Therefore, it is not strange to find a situation where Yahweh renews his own covenant with Abraham or his descendants as we have assumed to have happened in the two above covenant passages.



Consequently, there are several indications in each chapter that they could be linked or related to each other. The first indication which could relate the two chapters together is that Genesis 15:1-21 is historically prior to 17:1-27. The following discussion will clarify this historical chronology of the two covenants better.

At the time when the initial covenant (Gn 15:1-21) was contracted between Yahweh and Abraham, Abraham did not have his own biological child; as a result, he was contemplating having Eliezer, a servant in his own house to be his heir (Gn 15:2-3). Yahweh objected to Abraham's proposal; instead, he promised to provide Abraham with his own biological child (Gn 15:4). It is also clear that Abraham did not have a child from Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant, at the time when the initial covenant was made. But after the initial covenant event, Hagar delivered a son to Abraham. By then, Abraham was eighty six years old (Gn 16:16). Thus, the second covenant event or the renewal of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham (Gn 17:1-27) took place at a time when Abraham was already ninety-nine years old (Gn 17:1), while Ishmael was thirteen years old (Gn 17:25).

A second indication that links the two chapters together is that chapter 17:1-27 presupposes some knowledge about the events that had happened in chapter 15:1-21. For example, in Genesis 17:1, Yahweh commanded Abraham to walk before him and be blameless. On what basis did Yahweh make such a claim if the previous covenant event was not that basis?

Yahweh would not place upon Abraham a demand for a blameless walk, if he had no previous contact with Abraham, particularly, a contact in the form of a covenant.

Furthermore, Yahweh hurriedly brought in the idea of a covenant in Genesis 17:2, to remind Abraham about the basis for his above claim on his walk with him. Yahweh also brought in the promise of multiplying the descendants of Abraham in order to stress the fact that he had not forgotten the promises which he had made to Abraham concerning the provision of his offspring in chapter 15. Yahweh pointed out that Abraham would have a son through Sarah; this son would be the person Yahweh would continue the line of his covenant (Gn 17:19, 21). Thus, the promise of Abraham having a son from his own body is carried forward from chapter 15 to chapter 17 where the son is finally identified by the name Isaac (cf Gn 17:19, 21).

In view of the above reconstructed historical chronology and connections, it is understandable to regard the second covenant event as a covenant renewal, therefore, confirmatory or possibly complementary to the first covenant (cf Adar 1990:66; Rogerson, Moberly and Johnstone 2001:112). Another factor is that Genesis 15:1-21 does not possess some of the other relevant characteristic elements of an Ancient Near Eastern covenant formula. Therefore, Genesis 17:1-27 provides additional characteristic elements which were absent in chapter 15:1-21. For example, there were no covenant obligations for Abraham in Genesis 15:1-21. It should be noted once again

that the concept of covenant renewal was a usual practice among the Ancient Near Eastern people (cf Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1181; Pfeiffer 1966:175). So, it is not strange for Yahweh to contract a covenant with Abraham in chapter 15 and have the same covenant renewed in chapter 17. It also fits into the course of the plot and building of tension in the literary story of Genesis.

We had indicated earlier that the two covenant texts are considered as originating from two separate source traditions (J, E or P).<sup>74</sup> But this does not negate the fact that after all we are, in both chapters, dealing with the same God who contracted his covenant with the same person Abraham at two separate intervals. The first passage (Gn 15:1-17) describing the initial covenant ceremony; while the second passage (Gn 17:1-21) describing the renewal of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham. Therefore, this second covenant activity becomes a confirmatory covenant episode.

In addition, it seems that there is a historical chronology in the two chapters. The first covenant event happened when Abraham was less than eighty-six years old while the second covenant event was at a time when he was ninety-nine years old (cf Gn 16:16; 17:1, 24-26). As result of the above historical/literary chronology and connections between the two covenants, I will consider both chapters as a theological unit. I will discuss the two

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<sup>74</sup> Cf Rogerson, Moberly and Johnstone (2001:112); Fretheim (1994:444, 457); Westermann (1985:214-217, 256-257); Brueggemann (1982:153).

Abrahamic covenant events in relation to the characteristic elements found in the Ancient Near Eastern treaty form.

The characteristic elements of the Ancient Near Eastern treaty forms, as discussed previously, were not rigid. According to Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1180), the concept of covenant was understood and practiced in a variety ways in the Ancient Near Eastern world. During the second millennium BC, the Hittite Empire appeared to have produced the most sophisticated and a well organized form of the suzerainty-vassal treaty form.

On the contrary, Bright (2000:150-151) pointed out that the Israelite covenant formula could have hardly been derived from the Hittite empire because the Empire had already vanished from the scene when Israel arrived in Palestine. So, in his judgment, the covenant formula presented below, represents a general trend in the ancient Orient during the second millennium B C, but incidentally was transmitted to us through the texts of the Hittite Empire. However, Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1180) reiterated that there is no reason to doubt that some of these treaty patterns originated from the Hittite treaty practices and that some of the characteristic elements of the treaty forms were common among various cultures in the Bronze Age.

Therefore, the characteristic elements which are drawn from the various Hittite international suzerainty-vassal treaty patterns during the Late Bronze Age by Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1180-1183) and others (cf Soulen and Soulen 2001:200; Vogels 1979:2-6 and Bright 2000:150-151) will be

compared with those that exist in the two Abrahamic covenant episodes (Gn 15:1-21; 17:1-27). This comparison will give us a better picture of what is involved in the Abrahamic covenant<sup>75</sup> as a whole. The Ancient Near Eastern Hittite suzerainty-vassal treaty pattern discussed previously includes:

- Identification of the covenant giver;
- Historical prologue;
- Stipulations;
- Preservation and periodic public reading;
- Witnesses to the treaty;
- Blessing and curses;
- Ratification ceremony; and
- Imposition of the curses.

#### 3.3.4.1 Identification of the covenant giver

In both passages of the Abrahamic covenant (Gn 15:1; 17:1), Yahweh is the initiator and the one who is the covenant giver. In the first covenant event (Gn 15:1), Yahweh identified himself to Abram as his 'shield' and 'reward'; Yahweh also cautioned him about fear. Meanwhile, during the renewal of the covenant, Yahweh introduced himself as the 'Lord Almighty' (Gn 17:1). These introductory statements from Yahweh to Abraham could be understood in several ways.

When Yahweh made a statement of caution to Abraham from the first covenant encounter, Yahweh's appearance to Abram was in the form of a vision. But prior to Genesis 15:1, Yahweh had appeared to Abram and the

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<sup>75</sup> McConville (1997:747) lists six characteristics elements of the Hittite international suzerain-vassal treaties following from the list provided by McCarthy (1981:51-52; cf Pfeiffer 1966:175). These include: (i) titulary (introducing parties); (ii) historical prologue (rehearsing their past relations); (iii) stipulations; (iv) document clause (requiring the preservation of the document in the

mode of Yahweh's appearance seemed to have been left unexplained from that passage. Adar (1990:60) argued that 'vision' is a world of mystery. It is totally different from our natural world. God's appearance to Abram here in a vision is not visible to the eyes of Abram but audible to his ears. A contrary idea is suggested that Abram was awake, and was able to witness some visible appearances of the *Shechinah*, or some sensible token of the presence of the divine glory (Church 1973:30). Westermann (1985:218) said that this method of introduction presupposes prophecy (cf also Fretheim 1994:444) and therefore suggests a later period in the history of the monarchy comparable to other passages (cf 1 Sm 15:10; 2 Sm 7:4; 1 Ki 12:22; 16:1; 17:2, 8; 18:31; 21:17) from that period.

Concerning the statement of caution Yahweh had made to Abram, Speiser (1990:115) held the opinion that the promises Yahweh had made to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3, seemed to focus upon Abraham's descendants. But Abraham did not have a child before chapter 15. Therefore, this might have been heart-breaking for Abram (cf Ross 1988:308), because among the Ancient Near Eastern people, a son was responsible for burying his father after he had died and then inheriting his father's property. Since Abraham had no legitimate children of his own at that stage, he may have been very worried or anxious about the absence of his own biological son who could be the heir (cf Adar 1990:60; Walton & Matthews 1997:35).

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temple and its regular reading; (v) god list (i.e. witnesses to the treaty); and (vi) blessings and curses (invoked for keeping or violating the treaty).

Another reason for the caution might be that the story which preceded Genesis 15:1 suggests that Abram fought against his enemies and rescued his relative Lot from their hands. So, Abram might have been engulfed by an intense feeling concerning his experience from the rescue mission (Ross 1988:308). In view of Abram's inner state of mind or his exhaustion, he might have needed Yahweh's assurance, comfort and a great deal of certainty about the one who was communicating with him. Yahweh is not Abram's enemy. He does not appear to create another problem for Abram nor his relative Lot; rather, Yahweh's intention was to establish a friendly (covenant) relationship with Abram. Yahweh, therefore, declared that he was Abram's shield (šm) and his very great reward (daom. hBer>h; ^r>k' f.). The terms 'shield' and 'reward' are figurative or metaphorical descriptions of Yahweh's functions of divine care to Abram. These terms probably suggest that Yahweh is Abram's protection and provision (cf Keil & Delitzsch 1975a:210; Ross 1988:308).

According to the preamble found in chapter 17:1, Yahweh introduces himself as 'I am God Almighty' (yD;v; lae-ynIa]). This introduction also denotes Yahweh's repeated assurance to Abram. Yahweh is sovereign, powerful, mighty and metaphorically a mountain (cf Keil & Delitzsch 1975a:222-223; Ross 1988:330; Fretheim 1994:458; Rogerson, Moberly & Johnstone 2001:109). Yahweh's power, sovereignty, perfection and completeness show that he is dependable and trustworthy. Based on

Yahweh's nature and character, Abram could be assured that Yahweh's covenant relationship (tyrIB.) with him is dependable and trustworthy.

Abraham and his descendants are going to be safer and be blessed when he accepts Yahweh's invitation to have a covenantal relationship with him.

#### 3.3.4.2 Historical prologue

Another characteristic element in the Ancient Near Eastern treaty form was the historical explanation of the past relation between the higher party or the suzerainty king and the vassal king (Bright 2000:151; Vogels 1979:3; Nicholson 1986:57). Here, with regard to the Abrahamic covenant, the historical prologue can be found in Genesis 15:7.<sup>76</sup> In this verse, Yahweh explains his past relationship with Abram. We have already noticed from the Hittite treaty practice that the purpose of recounting the past was to instil a sense of appreciation in the mind of the vassal king/party and his subjects and as the reason or justification for their future obedience to the Hittite suzerainty king.

A similar motive might have undergirded Yahweh's statement described in Genesis 15:7. Here, Yahweh recounts his previous benevolent activities to Abram by reminding him that he had brought Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans to give him this present land.

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<sup>76</sup> Gn 15:7 "And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it."



Genesis 11:31-32<sup>77</sup> seems to suggest that Abram moved from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan through the initiative of his father Terah. The passage also appears to say that it was after the death of Abram's father, Terah, from Haran, on their way to Canaan, that Yahweh appeared to Abram and called him to leave his country (cf Gn 12:1). Should we therefore, understand that Terah and his family moved from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan through Yahweh's initiative as Genesis 15:7 seems to suggest or should we understand their move to be at the initiative of Terah, Abram's father (cf Gn 11:31)?

In answering the above question, I am convinced by the suggestion (cf Ross 1988:258-259) that Genesis 11:27-32 ought to be understood as a summary or an overview of Genesis 12:1-9. The reason is that the historical progression of the events narrated in this entire Abrahamic story would appear to be more chronological if Ross' suggestion is followed. The chronology of the events here is that Abram may have received Yahweh's call (Gn 12:1-3) and may have moved with his family including his father Terah to Haran. Afterwards, his father might have died in Haran (Gn 11:32), then Abram and his family including Lot might have moved from Haran to Canaan (Gn 12:4-5). At a later stage, Yahweh appeared to Abram in Genesis 15:1-21 in order to establish a covenant relationship with Abram. This explanation

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<sup>77</sup> Gn 11:31 - 31 "Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. <sup>32</sup> The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran".

seems to fit well with what Genesis 15:7 appears to suggest. The interpretation logically implies that Yahweh was reminding Abram in Genesis 15:7 of their past relationship. Abram had already begun to follow Yahweh's initiative, so he would likely consider establishing a covenantal relationship with Yahweh based upon their previous mutual relationship.

### 3.3.4. 3 Stipulations/obligations

A third characteristic element in the Ancient Near Eastern treaty form was the obligations of the vassal party<sup>78</sup> or in some instances it was mutual obligations (cf Vogels 1979:3; Nicholson 1986:57; Bright 2000:151). Such obligations were spelled out by the higher party or the suzerainty king to the vassal king/party (cf Ross 1988:327).

In the case of the covenant between Yahweh and Abram, Abram represented the vassal party. Yahweh was therefore, responsible for spelling out the covenant obligations for Abram. Yahweh spelled out in Genesis 17:1b, 9-14. The first obligation (v.1b) was that Abram should walk<sup>79</sup> before Yahweh and be blameless (~ymit' hyEh.w< yn:p'l. %Leh;t.hi). Abram was bound to obey Yahweh's covenant obligations. The use of the imperative

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<sup>78</sup> Such obligations included for example, the "Prohibition of any relationship with a country outside the Hittite sphere; Prohibition of hostility to other Hittite Vassals; Immediate help to the great king in times of war; the Vassal must not listen to any slandering of the great king but immediately report it to the king; the Vassal must not hide the deserting slaves or refugees; the Vassal must appear once a year before the king to pay his taxes and to renew the treaty" (Bruce 1980:328; cf Bright 2000:151).

<sup>79</sup> The word %Leh;t.hi is *hitpael*, imperative, masculine, singular, and means 'walk'. The use of *hitpael* imperative here denotes a strong command.

הַיְהֵאָו (to be) adds another impetus to the seriousness of the command. Abram must walk in the presence of Yahweh without any defect. He should be complete or perfect in his devotion.

A second covenant obligation which Yahweh spelled out for Abram included Abram's descendants and virtually Abram's infinite future generations. Abraham's immediate descendants, as well as, all his coming generations should keep Yahweh's covenant just like Abraham was expected to do (17:9<sup>80</sup>). Here, the covenant ties Abram to his future descendants.

This strong command also applied to the third covenant obligation which was circumcision (17:10-13). Abram was commanded to circumcise himself and all the males in his household as a permanent or memorable sign of Yahweh's covenant with him and his descendants including other nations. Every male should be circumcised. Whoever lives in Abraham's household should be circumcised.

The above covenant obligation of circumcision appeared to have extended beyond the blood related descendants of Abram. The covenant obligation covered the aliens, those that had been bought from foreigners, temporary residents and essentially everyone who lived under the auspices of Abram and his descendants. Any person who was brought (or who comes by

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<sup>80</sup> The word הַיְהֵאָו is *hitpa'el*, imperative, masculine, singular, and means 'walk'. The use of *hitpa'el* imperative as I had indicated earlier, denotes a strong command which must be carried out or obeyed by Abraham and his descendants for as long as they live. It is a timeless obligation.

himself) to live in the house of Abraham should keep this covenant law of circumcision.

In other words, the covenant sign of circumcision virtually tied Abram to his descendants as well as to his infinite generations that shall be born. In addition, the covenant sign of circumcision linked Abraham with foreigners, aliens, slaves or every other person who came to live under his auspices or under the care of his descendants. This sign did not discriminate nor does it exclude others on the basis of their race, language, tribe, social status, et cetera, provided the person was willing to live in obedience to the covenant laws (cf Gn 17:10-13). The keeping of the covenant laws, including the law of circumcision, was one of the essential prerequisites to living under the care and protection of the Abrahamic covenant. Any person who came and lived with Abraham or his descendants and kept the covenant laws became a covenant member by implication. A native born descendant of Abraham could be separated from Yahweh and from the Abrahamic covenant if he does not circumcise or keep these covenant laws.

Since a covenant involved blood-letting, circumcision practically bound a person by blood to Abraham and Yahweh's covenant. The sign of circumcision would always remind Abraham and his descendants, including foreigners, of Yahweh's covenant with them. Circumcision would also remind Abraham and his descendants, as well as foreigners, about the consequences of failing to obey the covenant laws/obligations.

#### 3.3.4. 4 Preservation and/or periodic public reading

We have already noted from the Hittite suzerainty-vassal treaty pattern that a copy of the covenant document was granted to the vassal king/party by the suzerainty king in order for it to be preserved in the temple of the local deity/deities of the vassal king; while the suzerainty king also would keep another copy in the temple of his national god (cf McConville 1997:747; Barre 1992:655; Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1181; McCarthy 1981:52; Bruce 1980:328). Accordingly, the suzerainty king would usually require the vassal king and his subjects to conduct a periodic public reading of the covenant document in order that its stipulations might be incorporated in the political, social, economic and religious life of the members of the vassal king/party (cf Bright 2000:151; Pfeiffer 1966:175).

But Yahweh's covenant with Abraham did not have a similar provision for the preservation and periodic public reading of the covenant document. However, the motive for the preservation of the covenant document and the periodic public reading of it was to impress the provisions of the covenant on the minds and hearts of the members of the vassal king/party in order that they would keep the terms of the covenant.

Thus, in my opinion, there are two obligations that have been impressed upon Abraham's mind that might be understood as fulfilling this characteristic element. The one is the command to circumcise (cf Gn 17:10-14, 24-27).

Circumcision was an external visible sign which would permanently remind Abraham and his descendants about their covenant relationship with Yahweh.

The other command was that Abraham should teach his children to keep the way of the Lord and to practice justice and righteousness (cf Gn 18:19). Abraham and his descendants would undertake *leadership* role and live in *obedience* to Yahweh and exhibit *righteousness* and *justice* in their relationship with others. This responsibility of teaching becomes a beacon by which the descendants of Abraham would know and keep this covenant. Therefore, the two above mentioned commands fulfilled the requirement of the periodic reading of the covenant document, since the essence of it was to impress its terms and obligations upon the minds of the vassal party members.

#### 3.3.4.5 Witnesses to the treaty

It has already been observed that during a normal Ancient Near Eastern treaty ceremony, the higher party invokes various kinds of witnesses such as gods, mountains, rivers, heavens, earth, et cetera, to serve as guarantors of the covenant ceremony (cf Bright 2000:151; Nicholson 1986:58; Bruce 1980:328; Vogels 1979:3; Pfeiffer 1966:175). These witnesses were expected to carry out appropriate punishment and rewards upon the vassal party in case of disobedience or obedience respectively.

The above purpose was not needed in the case of the Abrahamic covenant. According to Ross (1988:312), Yahweh himself was the witness, symbolized

in the passing of the fire pot between the severed animals since there was none greater than Yahweh to whom he could swear (cf Gn 15:17-18). In addition, Yahweh was responsible for carrying out the appropriate rewards and punishments. Thus, Yahweh did not need a witness to this covenant ceremony. Yahweh is God. There is no other god. Yahweh does not recognize any other god as a god. All the supposed gods were powerless or dead gods. So, it was appropriate for Yahweh not to call upon any other god to serve as a witness.

However, elsewhere, there are certain allusions to Yahweh's call for the heavens, the earth, the mountains and the valleys to be witnesses to his relationship with Israel (cf Dt 32:1; Is 1:2; Mc 6:1-2). These texts are not fundamentally covenant passages, but they reflect or reveal Yahweh's relationship with Israel essentially as covenantal. The heavens, earth, mountains and valleys are therefore summoned to serve as witnesses to what Yahweh is saying to his covenant partner Israel.

#### 3.3.4. 6 Blessing and curses

Another characteristic element in the Ancient Near Eastern Hittite treaty form discussed earlier was the pronouncement of blessing<sup>81</sup> and curses<sup>82</sup> by the suzerainty king/party over the vassal king/party should he obey or disobey the covenant terms respectively. It is asserted that the gods were summoned or called upon to bring curses or blessings upon the vassal party in case of

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<sup>81</sup> See Gn 15:4-5, 15; 17:6-8, 16, 19, and 21.

obedience or disobedience respectively (cf Vogels 1979:3; Nicholson 1986:58; Bright 2000:151). This pronouncement was done in two ways:

- First, the parties would pass between the severed animals that had been placed for that purpose (cf Adar 1990:63; Walton & Matthews 1997:41-42; Jr 34:8-9, 18-19), as a witness to what would happen to both parties should any of them violate the terms of the covenant.
- Second, the higher party would usually make a verbal pronouncement of the curses resulting from any violation of the covenant in addition to the passing between the divided animals. He/she would also pronounce the blessing for the vassal or lower party on the condition that the vassal party keeps the covenant.

Regarding the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham, Yahweh pronounced the covenant blessings and curses in both the first and second covenant texts (cf Gn 15:1-21; 17:1-27). He made several promises to bless Abram and his descendants and to curse them in cases of obedience or disobedience respectively.

Concerning the result of obedience, Yahweh made several promises to bless Abraham and his descendants in the following ways:

- First, Yahweh made a promise to provide Abram with a son who would come from Abram's own body (15:4-5) and he would also provide him with

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<sup>82</sup> See Gn 15:9-10, 17; 17:14.



long and peaceful years (15:15). Meanwhile, Sarah also would be blessed by Yahweh. She would give birth to the son whom Yahweh had promised to Abram (17:16, 19). Yahweh would eventually continue or establish his covenant relationship with Isaac, the son whom Sarah would bear with Abraham (cf 17:21). Consequently, Abram would become fruitful (17:6).

- Second, Yahweh would give to Abram and his descendants the land which began from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: this land would cover the Kenite, the Kenizzite, the Kadmonite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Rephaim, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Girgashite and the Jebusite tribes (cf 15:7, 18-21; 17:8).

- Third, Abraham would be the father of many nations (17:4). Surprisingly, Yahweh had already made him the father of many nations before he disclosed it to Abram (cf 17:5). Yahweh also made a promise to Abraham that kings would emerge from his descendants (17:6). This role of kingship may be understood as the vicegerent role assigned to Adam and Eve from the beginning of creation (Gn 1:28) and also to Noah and his family from the beginning of re-creation (Gn 9:1-3).

- Fourth, Yahweh would become the God of Abram and his descendants (17:8). Yahweh's promise that he would become Abraham's God seemed to suggest that Abram and his descendants would live under the protection, blessing and favour of Yahweh. Yahweh would protect and sustain Abraham and his descendants in the Promised Land and elsewhere. As a result,

Abraham should not look to other gods in times of trouble. Yahweh could care for and protect Abraham, and could also provide for all the needs of Abraham and his descendants.

- Fifth, Yahweh will bless Ishmael (cf Gn 17:20). Ishmael will be fruitful and will become the father of many tribes. Despite the fact that Ishmael would receive Yahweh's blessing, Yahweh would not make or continue the line of his covenant with Ishmael (cf Gn 17:21); rather, he will continue the line of his covenant with Isaac and presumably Isaac's descendants. In regard to this specific direction of the Abrahamic covenant, it is possible to argue that Ishmael may receive Yahweh's covenant blessings via Abraham and his descendants just like other nations, aliens, foreigners and tribes would receive similar covenant blessings through Abraham and his seed (cf Gn. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26: 4; 28:14).

Meanwhile, the curses which Yahweh pronounced over Abram/Abraham and his descendants in the course of disobedience are not immediately in view from the account in Genesis 15:1-21 but are found in Genesis 17:14. What is striking about the account from Genesis 15:17 is that Yahweh had committed himself to keeping his promises through the symbolic animal sacrifice.

The event of the smoking fire pot and the flaming torch passing between the severed animals represented the identification of the deity with the slaughtered animals as a guarantee of the reliability of the promise (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1190). Westermann (1985:228) relates this

passage to Jeremiah 34:18-22 and argues that both events represent “a conditional self-cursing under the form of the split animals; the one who passes between them calls their fate upon himself should he violate the obligation”. This would appear strange if God is to implicate himself to that depth but Fretheim (1994:449) dismissed such fear when he argued that,

“some commentators had difficulty conceiving of God as a participant in an oath of self-imprecation;....However, that God would swear that the animal’s fate would apply to God should the promises be broken is the most natural, and the more difficult, reading of rite....God commits to the promise at such a depth that God considers an experience of suffering and even death. This reveals the depth of the divine faithfulness to Abram and the divine willingness to become vulnerable for the sake of the promise”.

Therefore, if Yahweh does not keep his covenant promises, his fate is here symbolized in the event of the severing of the animals (cf Gn 15:9-10, 17; Keil & Delitzsch 1975a:214; Ross 1988:312 and Fretheim 1994:449). As the animals are slaughtered and Yahweh symbolically passes between the slaughtered animals, the same would apply to Yahweh if he breaks the covenant obligations or promises.

On the part of Abraham, he is obliged to keep the covenant terms by circumcising all the males in his household. Failure to circumcise will result in being severed from the covenant relationship or being cut off

(*h't' r>k .nIw>*)<sup>83</sup> from Abraham's household (cf Gn 17:14; Fretheim 1994:459). This would also mean that the person will be excluded from all the covenant blessings. It is the same word which is used for cutting a covenant (cf Gn 15:18). Since the process of making a covenant has an element of shedding animal blood, the consequences for disobeying the covenant obligations also may involve the shedding of blood by the covenant breaker.<sup>84</sup>

#### 3.3.4.7 Ratification ceremony

It has been noted previously that a covenantal relationship was viewed as a serious relationship among the Ancient Near Eastern people. In view of this, it was a usual practice to ratify the covenant so that it could have bearing and force upon the parties involved. We also learned that there was no single rigid formula across the ancient Orient for ratifying a treaty or covenant. However, some of the usual activities which were carried out during this ratification process involved the sacrifice of an animal as well as the eating of a common meal.

The idea of sacrificing an animal was to demonstrate how the vassal party would be treated if he and his subjects violated the covenant stipulation when it takes effect. According to Robertson (1980:14-15),

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<sup>83</sup> The word *h't' r>k .nIw>* used in Gn 17:14 is a *niphal waw* consecutive, perfect, third person, singular which is derived from the verb *ṭrk* meaning to 'cut off', 'kill' or 'eliminate' (cf Kelly 1992:384).

<sup>84</sup> This is my personal view concerning the theological implication of circumcision.

“At the point of covenantal inauguration, the parties of the covenant are committed to one another by a formalizing process of blood-shedding. This blood-shedding represents the intensity of the commitment of the covenant. By the covenant they are bound for life and death.”

Meanwhile, the practice of eating a common meal was the expression of social solidarity and peace between the covenant parties (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1194).

Thus, in the Abrahamic covenant, we had noted how Yahweh imprecated himself through the symbol of a fire pot and a flashing torch passing in the midst of the divided animals (Gn 15:17). Fretheim (1994:449) and Westermann (1985:228) have already dismissed any fear about Yahweh’s self-imprecation. His self-imprecation shows the depth of his commitment to his covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants. But Abraham and his household did not pass through the same divided animals for reasons not known to us; alternatively, Abraham and his descendants were made to bear a permanent sign of the covenant (cf Gn 17:11-14, 24-27).

### **3.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT**

#### **3.4.1 Exclusive and inclusive character**

There are a number of implications that could be noted from the Abrahamic covenant. One of them is that the Abrahamic covenant is both exclusive and inclusive in character. On the one hand, this covenant according to Genesis 15:1-21 and 17:1-27 was between Yahweh and Abraham. On the other hand the covenant was also between Yahweh (the higher party Gn 15:1, 18) and

Abraham (the vassal party Gn 15:1, 18) including his descendants (cf Gn 15:18-19; 17:6-8) as well as other people or foreigners (cf Gn 17:4-5, 12-14, 16, 24-27).

A practical example of this exclusive and inclusive scenario is found in the conversation between Yahweh and Abraham concerning Ishmael.<sup>85</sup> This conversation, if viewed on the surface, may appear as if Ishmael was completely excluded from the covenant programme between Yahweh and Abraham. Yahweh appears to be saying that he will not make a covenant with Ishmael but rather he will make it only with Sarah's child, Isaac.

But it turned out that Ishmael is also included in the covenant institution because he is also brought in to enjoy the Abrahamic covenant blessing (cf Gn 17:20; see also Goldingay 2003:225-226). In addition to his inclusion in the covenant blessing, Ishmael is also made to bear the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, which is, circumcision (cf Gn 17:26). Furthermore, foreigners are also brought in to bear the sign of the covenant (cf Gn 17:12-13, 23, 27). Finally, other nations are also anticipated to benefit from this covenant blessing (Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). The Abrahamic covenant therefore, may be understood as having both exclusive and inclusive dimensions in its nature and application (cf Adar 1990:66).

#### 3.4.2 Yahweh unilaterally administered the covenant.

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<sup>85</sup> "And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" 19 But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him (Gn 17:18-19).

The covenant ceremony between Yahweh and Abraham was unilaterally administered by Yahweh (Gn 15:1-21 and 17:1-27). Yahweh represented the suzerainty king while Abraham represented the vassal king. It was Yahweh who initiated the covenant (cf Gn 15:9-10; 17:2). Also he alone pronounced the purposes of the covenant (cf Gn 12:2-3; 17:7; 18:19). He alone spelled out the terms of the covenant (cf Gn 17:1, 9-14). Abraham was simply brought in to receive the blessings of the covenant and to keep the terms of it together with his descendants as well as other nations. Thus, this covenant can better be described as a unilateral covenant.

#### 3.4.3 Goal(s) or value of the Abrahamic covenant

Among the Ancient Near Eastern people, a covenantal relationship usually had specific goal(s) or value(s) (cf Mendenhall and Herion 1992: 1180). Like in any other committed relationship, the importance or value of such an agreement was highlighted in the process of making the covenant. If the covenant relationship had no value, it amounted to saying there was no basis for such a covenant to be contracted. In addition, both parties were required to know the value for establishing such a covenant relationship. Similarly, the Abrahamic covenant had specific relevant goals (cf Gn 12:2-3; 15:1, 4, 7; 17:4-8; 18:19) as follows:

##### 3.4.3.1 Yahweh will be Abraham's God

One of the main values or goals of the Abrahamic covenant was to provide a platform for Yahweh's relationship with Abraham and his descendants

whereby Yahweh will become their God and they will become Yahweh's people by implication (cf Gn 17:7). Before Yahweh would intervene in human history in a special way to execute long term plans for his creation after the event of Babel (Gn 11:1-9), he began by establishing a covenant<sup>86</sup> relationship with Abraham and his descendants (12:1-17:27). Through Yahweh's covenant<sup>87</sup> relationship with Abraham, Yahweh will become Abraham's God and Abraham and his descendants will become Yahweh's people. As a consequence of this covenant relationship, Yahweh will accomplish all other things he had promised to Abraham (Gn 18:19b).

#### 3.4.3.2 Leadership, obedience, righteousness and justice

Another value or relevance of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham and his descendants is found in Genesis 18:19.<sup>88</sup> Here, Yahweh stated that Abraham will have to direct his children and his household so that they would keep the way of Yahweh and may do what is right and just. In other words, from the perspective of the Abrahamic covenant, 'leadership', 'obedience', 'righteousness' and 'justice' are all at the heart of Yahweh's covenant

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<sup>86</sup> The fall of Adam and Eve (Gn 3:1-22) and the event of Babel (Gn 11:1-7) resulted in the severing of the loving relationship between Yahweh and humankind (Gn 3:23-24; 11:8-9). These events of human disobedience and separation from God became fundamental precursors to the re-establishment of a covenantal relationship between God and humankind through Abraham.

<sup>87</sup> One may ask 'why Yahweh used the means of a covenant to establish his relationship with Abraham and his descendants?' The answer is that Yahweh could have used any other means that accorded to his will to accomplish his purposes. However, it should be borne in mind that the concept of covenant was a familiar concept among the Ancient Near Eastern people. Therefore, Yahweh may have decided to use something which was already familiar among the people living in the region where Abraham had originated.

<sup>88</sup> Gn 18:19: "For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."



relationship with Abraham and his descendants. Abraham and his descendants were to undertake *leadership* role and live in *obedience* to Yahweh and exhibit *righteousness* and *justice* in their relationship with others. Through this process, other nations shall know and embrace Yahweh, the God of Abraham, and live in obedience to him.

#### 3.4.3.3 Abraham will be blessed and be a channel of blessing

Very crucial to the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant is the blessing with which Yahweh had planned to bless Abraham and his descendants. This blessing includes land, children, wealth and nations (cf Gn 12:2; 15:4-5, 18-21; 17:2, 4-6, 16, 19, 20; see also Goldingay 2003:218). Abraham and his seed also shall become a channel of Yahweh's blessing to other nations (cf Gn 12:3; 15:4,7; 17:4-8; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4-5; 28:14). Other nations are linked to Abraham and his descendants in order that they might receive the blessing that Yahweh had promised them via Abraham (see Excursus 3.7 for details on the blessing).

#### 3.4.3.4 Covenant as a means of Yahweh's self-revelation

It has been asserted (cf Walton 2001:382, 401) that Yahweh chose Abraham and his descendants for several meaningful purposes. One of the central purposes was for Abraham and his descendants to serve as instruments through which Yahweh will reveal himself to his creation (cf Ross 1988:260; Walton & Matthews 1997:36-37). Abraham and his descendants could benefit from the covenant (e.g. by having land, prosperity, national identity etc) if they

remained faithful to the covenant obligations. So, Yahweh brought this self-revelatory purpose to fruition through the mechanism of a covenant which he had established with Abraham and his descendants.

My opinion is that, Yahweh's desire to reveal himself is subordinate to the concept of covenant relationship. The concept or idea of relationship appears to be the bigger umbrella under which Yahweh would accomplish his other relevant goals for Abraham, his descendants, and other nations. It is understandable that when Abraham and his descendants work together in a covenant relationship, their understanding of Yahweh and their knowledge of his will would naturally expand and progress. Therefore, God's self-revelation would become a subordinate factor to the controlling factor of *relationship*.

#### 3.4.3.5 Redemption of Abraham's descendants

Another value of the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham was the redemption of Abraham's descendants and the judgment of the nation that shall enslave them.<sup>89</sup> The event of salvation and judgment appeared to have been embedded in the covenant purposes between Yahweh and Abraham as indicated from the above reference. Before the redemptive episode shall take place, Abraham's descendants shall live as slaves in a foreign nation, suggestive of Egypt; but Yahweh shall judge that nation and then redeem his

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<sup>89</sup> "God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions" (Gn 15:13-14; cf 48:21; 50:24-25).

people and bring them to the land which he had promised to Abraham and his descendants (cf Gn 15:13-16).

In a similar way, Abraham and his descendants or seed shall serve as a channel through which Yahweh shall bless other nations (cf Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4-5; 28:14). In other words, the seed of Abraham by implication becomes the means of blessing as well as the linchpin between Yahweh and other nations. In these covenant promises, there is, therefore, an inseparable link between Yahweh and Abraham as well as between Yahweh and other nations (cf Dt 10:12-22). The covenant obviously imposes a mediatory function upon Abraham and his descendants between Yahweh and other nations in order that Yahweh's relationship, self-revelation, lordship and blessing would be known, received, revered, and enjoyed by other nations.

#### 3.4.4 Significance of name change

There was a great deal of significance which was attached to the names of persons in the ancient world (Walton & Matthews 1997:44). Specifically, the Hebrew thought was that a name could reveal or express something about the nature and character of its bearer (cf Rogerson, Moberly and Johnstone 2001:264; Moberly 1992:5; 1 Sm 25:25). According to the Ancient Near Eastern tradition, the giving of a name to someone would show that the person who gave the name had control or power over the one who was named. It is therefore argued that similar perception supposedly undergirded the Adamic authority in naming the rest of the other creatures which Yahweh

had made (cf Parke-Taylor 1975:1; Gn 2:19-20). Adam also named his wife, *hV' êa.î* (woman, cf Gn 2:23), probably as an indication of her closeness to him but also as suggestive of his headship over his female partner. Obviously, Adam and Eve were given the mandate to rule over the rest of the other creatures (cf Gn 1:26-30; 9:2-3).

Thus, from the above understanding of the importance of naming, it could be argued that when Yahweh changed Abram's and Sarai's names to become Abraham and Sarah (Gn 17:5, 15), it denoted that Yahweh had control and authority over the course of their lives and destinies henceforth. A similar viewpoint has also been suggested by Freedman (1992:39) who argued that "Genesis introduces the longer name as part of the covenant God made with Abram, so the new name confirmed God's control and marked a stage in the patriarch's career" (cf Fretheim 1994:459; Wenham 1994:21).

### **3.5 EZRA, NEHEMIAH AND THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT**

#### **3.5.1. Introduction**

There are several connections between the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the covenant promises which Yahweh had made in the Pentateuch to Abraham and his descendants. First, the status of other nations or foreigners has been spelled out in the Abrahamic covenant. Second, the author(s)/editor(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah attempted to connect certain events from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah to the covenant promises which Yahweh had made to Abraham and to his descendants, as has been

discussed above. In view of this, the following discussion will describe how the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the Abrahamic covenant promises have been connected to each other.

### 3.5.2 Ezra, Nehemiah and the Abrahamic covenant

The strength of the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah and the Abrahamic covenant promises is shown by the appeal which Ezra and Nehemiah have made to Yahweh's covenant promises to Abraham.<sup>90</sup> This appeal obviously suggests that there is a theological link between the events that have happened in Genesis<sup>91</sup> and those that took place during the period of Ezra and Nehemiah.

For example, Nehemiah 9:7-8 is situated in the context of the Israelites' confession concerning their disobedience and intermarriage with the people of the land. In the passage, it is more compelling to argue that the returned exiles intended to demonstrate their legitimacy to the land of Judah during the early post-exilic period by appealing to the Abrahamic covenant promises as their basis. The newly returned exiles appear to assert that the election of Abram, his name change, and the covenant/promises Yahweh had made to him and his descendants defined the status of the post-exilic Judean

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<sup>90</sup> Neh 9: 7-8. 7 "Thou art the LORD God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, And gave him the name Abraham. 8 "And Thou didst find his heart faithful before Thee, And didst make a covenant with him To give him the land of the Canaanite, Of the Hittite and the Amorite, Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite-To give it to his descendants. And Thou hast fulfilled Thy promise, For Thou art righteous (The quotation is from New American Standard Bible 1995).

<sup>91</sup> Cf Gn12:1-3; 15; 17; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4-5; 28:14.

community with respect to land usage, marriage custom, worship, and structural projects such as rebuilding the temple and the city wall.

In view of the above presupposition, the returned Jewish exiles saw themselves as inseparably tied to the previous Israelite community and to their land, worship, marriage custom, and other functions through the covenant promises Yahweh had made to Abraham (cf Williamson 1985:318-319; Blenkinsopp 1989:303-304; Breneman 1993:236-237; Klein 1999:810-811). These Judean exiles understood themselves as the legitimate descendants of Abraham, who ought to reap the benefits of the covenant blessing Yahweh had promised to Abraham. Thus, in their perspective, no one else had the privilege to dwell upon this land and enjoy its benefits as predetermined by the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants.

Nehemiah 9:7-8 is also closely related to Ezra 9:10-15. The two texts concern the prayers about Israel's disobedience through intermarriage. Though the two passages do not mention the rest of the other covenant promises, the texts inescapably force its readers to see the inseparable link that exists between the covenant promises which Yahweh had made to Abraham and to the pre-exilic Israel and the events that have occurred during the early post-exilic period.

My argument therefore, is that if the covenant promises between Yahweh, Abraham and his descendants were so central in deciding the status of the early post-exilic Jewish community concerning the ownership of the land,

worship, and marriage, and other functions, the same principle should be seen to be in operation through the covenantal role of this early post-exilic Jewish community toward other nations. This is to suggest that the covenant role of the early post-exilic Jewish community also included the extension of God's covenantal relationship and blessings (Gn 12:1-3; 17:7; 18:18-19; 22:18; 26:4-5; 28:14) to other nations. Abraham and his descendants were to mediate between Yahweh and other nations in order that Yahweh's promises to bless other nations via Abraham and his seed shall be accomplished.

Therefore, to my mind, as the covenant promises determine who should own the land of Judah, who should worship or who should be their marriage partners, the same covenant promises determine how Israel should relate with other nations or foreigners. The role of Abraham and his descendants as the hinge pin or the mediator between Yahweh and other nations should have been acknowledged by these Judean exiles as they had done with the other covenant promises.

Fretheim (1994:426) argues that the entire history of Israel and their role to the nations was constituted and shaped by God's covenant promises. The covenant determines the relationship between Abraham and his descendants with other nations. Israel cannot shy away from this covenant role of being a channel of Yahweh's blessing to other nations. Israel must function as an instrument through which Yahweh's knowledge and blessings may reach other nations.

In the case of intermarriage, it should be borne in mind that it was not essentially prohibited for its own sake, as the events in Ezra and Nehemiah seemed to have presupposed. The context of Deuteronomy 7:1-26, where intermarriage was prohibited and elsewhere in the Pentateuch, clearly reveal that Yahweh's intention was to safe-guard Israel from the worship of other gods. Yahweh did not want Israel to worship other gods. This was a usual practice in the Ancient Near East for the suzerainty king to prohibit the vassal king and his subjects from having any official dealing with another king, particularly the king that was antagonistic to the Hittite suzerainty king. Consequently, prohibiting intermarriage was done to address the issue of idolatry and religious syncretism. It had no ethnic, racial, or nationalistic motive; rather, its objective was religious or theological. In view of this, the early post-exilic Jewish community (539-350 BC) are unavoidably tied to other races, tribes, and nations through the Abrahamic covenant.

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has discussed the concept and practice of *tyrIB*. (covenant/treaty) in the context of the Ancient Near Eastern people, particularly, during the second millennium BC; Yahweh's covenant with Abraham<sup>92</sup>; the implications of the Abrahamic covenant and the relationship between the covenant promise(s) which Yahweh had made to Abraham and his descendants and certain events that have transpired in the books of Ezra





particularly the promise that concerns the blessing of other nations through Abraham and his descendants. The Hebrew word  $\text{Wkr>b.nIw>}$  (be blessed) which appears in two verb forms from several passages in Genesis listed above will be discussed.

The basic concern in the following section is that scholars<sup>94</sup> have contended about the correct translation and interpretation of the word  $\text{Wkr>b.nIw}$  used for “blessing”.<sup>95</sup> The concern among scholars (e.g. Hamilton 1990:374; Wenham 1987:277) here is whether the *niphal* be translated as a passive<sup>96</sup> (shall be blessed), middle (shall find blessing) or reflexive (shall bless themselves) voice.

### 3.7.2 Passive interpretation of *barak*

Wenham (1987:278), Sarna (1989:89, 90, 183) and other scholars<sup>97</sup> argue that even though the verb forms for the word  $\text{Wkr>b.nI}$  in Genesis 12:3b could be translated as a reflexive or a passive voice, it is most appropriate to translate the word as a passive voice. Sarna (1989:89, 90, 183) argues further that, on the one hand, the reflexive meaning suggests that other nations were to use Abraham’s name in invoking blessing upon themselves. On the other hand, the passive interpretation points toward other nations being blessed by Abraham and his descendants.

Hamilton (1990:375) also argues that Psalm 72:17b may be a support for a passive interpretation of *barak* in Genesis 12:3. According to him, both LXX and Vulgate translate the *barak* in Psalm 72:17b as a passive verb form. He also disputed the truism that the *hitpael* form is never translated passively. He cited the works of Kaiser (1978:13) and Allis (1927:281), to support his own premise.

Kaiser (1978:13) argued that the two verb forms of *barak* found in the five passages from Genesis (cf Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14) have been rendered as passives by the Samaritan, Babylonian (Onkelos) and by the Jerusalem (Pseudo-Jonathan) Targums. Similarly, Allis’ (1927:281) study has shown that there are 18 Old Testament references where the *hitpael* form may have a passive meaning<sup>98</sup>. Hamilton (1990:375) added Proverb 31:30; Ecclesiastes 8:10; and Psalm 72:17 to Allis’s list. In doing so, he reiterated that “it is best to retain the passive force of 12:3, and to see in this last of seven phrases [Gn 12:1-3], with its emphatic perfect, the culmination of this initial promise of God in the patriarch” (cf Ellington 1994:203-207).

### 3.7.3 Reflexive interpretation of *barak*

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The English translation and the Hebrew version of the passages are extracted from the English-NASB (New American Standard Bible) and the Hebrew-BHS (4<sup>th</sup> edition) versions of the Bible respectively, for us to have a better picture of the issues at stake in this discussion.

<sup>94</sup> See Hamilton (1990:373-376) for a list of some of the scholars.

<sup>95</sup> Hamilton (1990:374), Wenham (1987:277), Waltke (2001:206) and Leupold (1942:414).

<sup>96</sup> Hamilton (1990:374) argues that “if the verb in question has passive force, then [Genesis] 12:3 clearly articulates the final goal in a divine plan for universal salvation, and Abram is the divinely chosen instrument in the implementation of that plan.”

<sup>97</sup> Walton (2001:402-403) and Hamilton (1990:375).

<sup>98</sup> These references include Gn 37:35; Nm 31:23; Dt 4:21; 23:9; 1 Sm 3:14; 30:6; 1 Ki 2:26; Job 15:28; 30:16, 17; Ps 107:17, 27; 119:52; Is 30:29; Lm 4:1; Ezk 19:12; Dn 12:10; Mi 6:16.

Scholars<sup>99</sup> who support reflexive interpretation claim that the inherent idea of the *niphal* is reflexive; as a result, this *niphal* should be interpreted as a reflexive, similar to the *hitpael* form of Genesis 22:18 and 26: 4 and Psalm 72:17b. But Sarna (1989:89, 90, 183) argues that whether one translates it as passive or reflexive, it still carries the same implication, which is, if those who bless Abram are blessed, and all families of the earth bless Abram, then it follows that all families would be blessed or find blessing in him, given the context of the word.

In my opinion, it is misleading to regard a reflexive meaning of a verb as being the same with a passive voice as Sarna appeared to have presupposed. It should be noted that the reflexive voice conveys the idea of an action which is carried out by the subject upon himself/herself. While the passive voice of a verb conveys the idea that an external action is carried out on an object without the active participation of the object in the action. The object here becomes a passive beneficiary of the action of the subject. So, it is grammatically incongruent to regard the passive voice as carrying the same meaning with the reflexive voice as suggested by Sarna (1989:89, 90, 183). Consequently, the following section will examine the interpretation of the Hebrew verb of *barak* as a passive voice in light of the discussion put forward by Walton (2001:392-394).

#### 3.7.4 Examining the passive interpretation of the verb forms.

This study agrees partially with Walton and other Bible interpreters<sup>100</sup> who suggest that all the verb forms for the word *barak* be translated passively. But Walton (2001:392-394) has offered an explanation of these verb forms which is loaded with a number of problems and is thereby misleading in certain aspects. He appears to disagree with those who translate the verbs forms as reflexives<sup>101</sup> by arguing that all five passages are covenant formulations. But given the fact that these are covenant formulations does not necessarily mean that all the verb forms of *barak* should be interpreted reflexively, according to Walton. He argues further that the *Niphal* and the *Hithpael* were used by the author to convey the author's specific idea on the blessings that other nations might receive through Abraham.

Walton (2001:393) continues that within the context of the two passages which contain the *hithpael* forms (i.e. Gn 22:18 and 26:4), "the blessing declaration is immediately preceded by clauses of domination over land/cities of their enemies (22:17; 26:4), and immediately followed by an acknowledgment that this condition will come about because of an act of obedience (22:18; 26:5)." These two passages have been distinguished from the other three texts (i.e. Gn 12:3; 18:18; 28:14) because of certain features like domination, acknowledgement, and obedience. The force of the *hithpael* voice according to Walton, serves the above mentioned features (domination, acknowledgement, and obedience) better.

Further, he (Walton 2001:393-394) argued that the use of the preposition *ב*, following the verb 'bless', describes the one whose care, protection and favor are desired and relied upon. Consequently, in Genesis 22:18 and 26:4, the *hithpael* form is used and the preposition *ב* is added to "your seed," to suggest that other nations

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<sup>99</sup> Such as Leupold (1942:414), Albrektson (1967:79), Kaiser (1978:13-14), Vogels (1979:43), Weinfeld (1980:426) and Waltke (2001:206).

<sup>100</sup> Cf Luther (1960:260), Church (1973:26), Leale (1974:232), Keil & Delitzsch (1975a:193,194) and Walton (2001:402-403).

<sup>101</sup> E.g. Leupold (1942:414) and Waltke (2001:206).

will get the protection and favor through Abraham's seed. In other words, the *hithpael* form is used here to express people's efforts or interests to grovel to Abram's seed.

But a close reading of the five passages reveals that not only the two suggested passages (Gn 22:18; 26:4) are preceded by an act of domination on the part of Abraham and his seed as Walton seemed to have presupposed. The remaining three passages (Gn 12:3; 18:18; 28:14) also have an element of domination explicitly or implicitly. For example, in Genesis 12:2 and 18:18, God promised Abraham that he will become a great nation. This promise actually found its fulfillment in the event of the descendants of Abraham subverting the control of and taking over the land of the Canaanites as well as establishing their kingdom known as the kingdom of Israel in that land.

Similarly, in Genesis 28:13-14, God made a similar promise. Here, God specifically mentioned the parameters of the land. Already, some other nations were living on that same piece of land. So, if the land was to be given to the seed of Abraham, what would be the fate of those nations who were already living in that land? It is obvious that the nations would have to make way for the descendants of Abraham to take over the land. This implicitly suggests an act of domination on the part of Abraham and his seed over the cities and land of their enemies.

Furthermore, in my understanding of the Hebrew grammar, the preposition *b.* should not have been given as much emphasis as suggested by Walton (2001:393-394). Walton seems to argue that the above preposition prefixed to Abraham's name or his seed in Genesis 22:18 and 26:4 suggest that other people will have to actively seek favour or Abraham's blessing; whereas in Genesis 12:3; 18:18 and 28:14, the blessing will come to other nations without their effort. But one finds the preposition *b.* in almost all of the five passages being prefixed to the name Abraham, his seed, or to a pronoun referring to Abraham or his descendants. So, it is misleading to make a serious case for a passive interpretation based upon the appearance of the preposition *b.* prefixed to the name of Abraham or his descendants as Walton appears to have suggested.

By contrasting the two passages (i.e. Gn 22:18; 26:4) with the remaining three texts (i.e. Gn 12:3; 18:18; 28:14), Walton (2001:394) explained that these last three passages have the *niphal* voice, suggesting that this blessing will come to other people or nations through Abraham, his family or his seed without people's attempt to ingratiate themselves with Abraham, his family or his seed. This blessing is not conditioned on obedience and does not come as a result of domination. In this sense, Walton argues that the passive translation of the above three passages be preferred<sup>102</sup>.

As I have alluded from above, Walton's argument that the above remaining texts suggest that people will receive Abraham's blessing without their attempt to obtain it cannot be substantiated. For example, Genesis 12:2-3 shows that the blessing other nations will receive from Yahweh via Abraham are conditioned. They are based on the manner in which such nations would relate to Abraham. If their relationship with Abraham and his seed is in line with what Yahweh has promised, they will also be blessed; but if it is not, they would be cursed. So, it seems that the blessing other nations would receive from Yahweh via Abraham in Genesis 12:3 is also conditional.

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<sup>102</sup> The passive translation of the passages include: "And in you all the families of the earth **shall be blessed**" (Gn 12:3b); "since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth **will be blessed**?" (Gn 18:18); "and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth **be blessed**" (Gn 28:14).

Those nations who bless Abraham will be blessed but those who curse Abraham would also be cursed.

Walton also seems to argue that the blessing from these three passages would come to Abraham not on the condition of obedience. But contrary to Walton's viewpoint, Genesis 18:18-19 suggests that Abraham will have to keep the way of Yahweh and do justice and righteousness so that Yahweh will accomplish what he had promised Abraham. The use of a prepositional particle ! [ ;m ; ] . (in order that) in Genesis 18:19 is meant to introduce a purpose clause. It means that what Yahweh had spoken previously must be carried out before Yahweh will accomplish what he had promised. Yahweh's fulfilment of the promise is in this verse based on Abraham's obedience, introduced by the prepositional particle ! [ ;m ; ] . .

Despite the limitation of Walton's viewpoint, the conclusion he and others have reached about the interpretation of *barak* as passive voice in the five passages serves as the only viable alternative interpretation, according to my understanding. As it has been argued by Allis (1927:281), Kaiser (1978:13) and Hamilton (1990:375), there are several other witnesses to the passive translation of all the five passages such as the Samaritan, the Babylonian (Onkelos), the Jerusalem (Pseudo-Jonathan) Targums, the Septuagint (LXX) and other English versions namely, the New International Version, the King James Version and the New American Standard Version. Therefore, given the immense number of witnesses to the passive interpretation of the verb form of *barak*, I also concur with this passive rendering of all the five passages.

## CHAPTER 4

### **‘YAHWEH’S PEOPLE’ IN THE ABRAHAMIC AND MOSAIC COVENANTS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I will examine some of the major scholarly viewpoints concerning the source of the name and cult of ‘Yahweh’. I will also discuss the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ in the perspective of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants as portrayed in the Pentateuch. The intention is to show that both Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants provide a framework through which every human being could embrace ‘Yahweh’, the God of Israel, as their God.

The Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants’ framework includes the function 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; Passover celebration; equality of both the Israelites and the aliens before the law of Yahweh; intermarriage; sacrificial offering and cities of refuge. As a consequence, ‘Yahweh’s people’ from the viewpoints of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants include the Israelites and other people who embrace ‘Yahweh’, the God of Israel, as their God. The biological, genealogical, racial, economic, linguistic, nationalistic or geographical differences did not exclude other nations from embracing Yahweh through the Abrahamic/Mosaic covenants.

Theologically, there are a number of covenants that Yahweh had made with Israel directly or indirectly, namely, Abrahamic (cf Gn 15:1-21; 17:1-27), Mosaic (cf Ex 19:1-24:18), and Davidic (cf 2 Sm 7:1-29; Ps 89:1-52; 23:5) covenants, just to mention a few that will be considered in this investigation. These covenants, in my judgment, possess exclusive and inclusive points of view concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and concerning other nations/foreigners. However, the focus in this chapter is not to describe all the various viewpoints of the above mentioned covenants. Rather, the focus is on describing an inclusive theological perspective of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and concerning other nations, foreigners and aliens.

There are two theological perspectives on the concept of 'Yahweh's people' in the Abrahamic and in the Mosaic covenants as portrayed in the Pentateuch. On the one hand, it appears from the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants that 'Yahweh' is exclusively linked with Israel as their God; thus, a surface reading of the Pentateuch could lead to a conclusion that Yahweh recognised Israel as his own people at the exclusion of all other nations, peoples, or ethnic groups.<sup>103</sup>

On the other hand, a close reading of the Pentateuch reveals that there are some allusions to the inclusion of other nations, peoples, ethnic groups, or foreigners/aliens in the application or operation of the Abrahamic and the

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<sup>103</sup> For example, cf Nicholson (1986:23-24) and Gn 17:7-8; Ex 3:6-10; 12:43, 45; 20:1-2; Dt 5:1-7; 6:1-25; 23:1-6; 1 Ki 8:33-34.

Mosaic covenants.<sup>104</sup> In other words, there are certain provisions in the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants for other nations or foreigners to embrace Yahweh, the God of Israel, as their God. Derivatively, other nations/foreigners therefore, could be regarded as ‘Yahweh’s people’ through this appropriate covenant means. This inclusive theological perspective of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants will therefore, be described in this chapter.

The discussion shall begin with some scholarly hypotheses concerning the *source* of the *name* and *cult* of ‘Yahweh’. The argument is not intended to establish the exact source of the name ‘Yahweh’ and his cult; rather it is to provide a general picture of the major scholarly hypothesis concerning this subject matter in order to enrich the background of the theme of this investigation. In other words, the objective is to offer a literary framework to the subject of ‘Yahweh’s people’ and other nations treated in this and the following chapters.

#### **4.2 SOURCE OF THE NAME AND CULT OF ‘YAHWEH’**

The importance of the name  $\text{h}w" \text{h}y >$  in the Old Testament can best be illustrated by its numerous occurrences in the text of the Old Testament. The name appears at least 6,007 times<sup>105</sup> or possibly even as many as 6,823 times (cf Rogerson, Moberly & Johnstone 2001:265; Lang 2002:206; Parke-

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<sup>104</sup> 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.

<sup>105</sup> According to the statistics derived from Bible Works Version 6.0.



Taylor 1975:5). Therefore, in what follows, main scholarly discourses concerning the source of the name 'Yahweh' and his cult will be examined in relation to what is portrayed in the Pentateuch. A few viewpoints shall be considered in this regard, namely, the Israelite, the non-Israelite and the Pentateuchal considerations concerning the source of the name and cult of 'Yahweh'.

#### 4.2.1 Israelite origin

The original pronunciation of the name  $hw"hy>$  appeared to have been lost by the Israelites due to certain religious scruples concerning the name during the Persian period (cf Rogerson, Moberly and Johnstone 2001:264-265). The pronunciation of the name 'Yahweh' was specifically prohibited in compliance to the regulation from Leviticus 24:16 which states that "Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death".<sup>106</sup>

Lang (2002:206-207) explained that the use of the name was restricted to two core institutions that defined the Jewish identity. These institutions included the sacred scripture and the temple in Jerusalem. The priests were specifically allowed to use the name  $hw"hy>$  during worship at the temple in

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<sup>106</sup> New American Standard Bible 1995.

Jerusalem. But after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD by the Romans, the Jews ceased to call/speak or pronounce this name.

Consequently, the four consonants  $\text{hw}^{\text{h}}\text{y}$  or YHWH (i.e. Tetragrammaton) had been given the vowels of  $\text{y}^{\text{h}}\text{n}^{\text{h}}\text{I}^{\text{h}}\text{d}^{\text{h}}\text{o}^{\text{h}}\text{a}^{\text{h}}$  (*adonay* my Lord) by the Masoretes. The *hatef patah* of *adonay* becomes a mere vocal *shewa*, and we now have  $\text{hw}^{\text{h}}\text{y}^{\text{h}}$  which is transliterated as ‘Yahweh’ (cf Rogerson, Moberly & Johnstone 2001:264-265; Van der Toorn, Becking & Van der Horst 1999:910). But in the Jewish *Mishna*, the divine name is usually written by combining the vocal *shewa* with *qames*.

The name  $\text{hw}^{\text{h}}\text{y}^{\text{h}}$  (Yahweh) is mostly identified with the official God of Israel, both in the Northern Kingdom and in Judah (cf Van der Toorn, Becking & Van der Horst 1999:911; De Moor 1997:10-11). This explains why the content of one of the earliest extra biblical texts has mentioned the name ‘Yahweh’, namely, the Victory ‘Stela’ or ‘Stele’ of Mesha and the ‘Khirbet el-Qom’ burial inscription (cf Lang 2002:207). The Victory ‘Stela’ text is claimed to have been written by Mesha, the king of the Moabites from the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC (cf Rogerson, Moberly & Johnstone 2001:265; De Moor 1997:12-13). In it, the king claimed to have defeated the Israelites in war and had taken the “[r]ly” of Yahweh and dragged them in front of his god *Chemosh* (Van der Toorn, Becking & van der Horst 1999:911).

Other places, according to Rogerson, Moberly and Johnstone (2001:265; cf Vriezen 2001:45-80; De Moor 1997:11-12) where the name 'Yahweh' occurs include *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* (ninth-eighth century) and at *Arad* and *Lachish* ostraca (sixth century). It is evident from these inscriptional pieces that 'Yahweh' is associated with Israel and not with any other tribe or group of people. But Lang (2002:177-178) uses a similar *Kuntillet 'Ajrud's* inscription to argue that the inscription describes Yahweh to have come from Teman, apparently from the region of Edom. It is likely that Lang might have read a different inscription which is derived from the *Kuntillet 'Ajrud's* family.

The viewpoint of Bright (2000:148) is that Israel's God was Yahweh from the beginning. It was from the desert that Israel had brought their worship of Yahweh into Palestine. As a matter of fact, according to Bright, no trace of the cult of Yahweh could be found in Palestine prior to the arrival of the Israelites. Israel's religion was communicated to her in the desert by Moses. Israel believed that she was rescued from Egypt by Yahweh, her God; and through the covenant, Yahweh had made Israel his own people (cf Ex 6:7-8).

It has also been suggested that though Yahweh was a well-known deity in Israel before 1000 BC, he became a national God among the Israelites at the beginning of the monarchy (cf Van der Toorn et al 1999: 918-919; De Moor 1997:12, 263). Some of the events that contributed to the recognition of Yahweh as the patron deity during the monarchy included: first, king David brought the Ark of the covenant from Benjamin and set it up in Jerusalem (cf

2 Sm 6:1-23). King Solomon later brought the Ark and set it up in the temple which he had built for Yahweh (cf 1 Ki 8:1-21). Second, Solomon also dedicated the temple, its furnishing and the entire people of Israel to the service and honour of Yahweh (cf 1 Ki 8:22-66).

Meanwhile, De Moore (1997:14-33) has compiled a list of theophoric personal names from all the tribes of Israel beginning from as early as the second millennium BC up to the period of David. He discovered that there are 188 *Elohistic* names, 163 *Yahwistic* names and 47 other theophoric names (cf Tigay 1986; 1987). This led De Moor (1997:33, 39, 40) to conclude that the evidences suggest that the names of El and Yahweh were designations of the same God of Israel long before David made Zion the national center for the worship of Yahweh. De Moor (1997:33, 39-40) also reasoned that the presence of the theophoric toponyms during the period prior to the monarchy suggests that Israel did not take over the land of Canaan completely by force; rather, it was a gradual, non-violent take over. As a result, there was a limited desire to automatically change the names of certain existing Canaanite cities. But it is also possible that the Israelites were not yet such strict monotheists (cf Vriezen 2001:45-80; Dijkstra 2001:81-126).

Smith (1990:7-8 cf 2001:143) describes the relationship between El and Yahweh as a father and son nature. He argues that the original God of Israel was El. This is evidenced from the name: IsraEL, which bears an epithet (el) of their God. According to Smith (1990:7-8), the genesis that led to the acceptance of Yahweh as the God of Israel could be inferred from

Deuteronomy 32:8-9<sup>107</sup>. In this passage, El had assigned each nation or group of people as a portion to his respective sons. Israel was therefore assigned to Yahweh as his people. Smith also pointed out that there is no biblical polemics against El. This could better be explained on the basis of the fact that Israel assimilated El in their worship of Yahweh.

Unfortunately, Smith has failed to account for the other sons of El. He has also failed to tell which nations were assigned to the unidentified sons of El. Smith (1990:8) cited Joshua 22:22<sup>108</sup> to support his theory but the passage appears to undermine his viewpoint on the father-son relationship between El and Yahweh. If Yahweh was the son of El, this passage should have said 'El is the god of gods because he is the father to all the other gods'. But the passage says that the 'God of gods is Yahweh'. Therefore, Yahweh takes precedence over the rest of the existing gods according to Joshua 22:22. As a result, Yahweh can no longer be conceived as a son to El or to another god as presupposed by Smith (1990:7-8).

The viewpoint of De Moor (1997:323-324) concerning the relationship between El and Yahweh is more convincing. De Moor (1997:333) dismisses the viewpoint that Yahweh was a foreign god who merged with El in Canaan.

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<sup>107</sup> <sup>8</sup> "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, When He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. <sup>9</sup> "For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance" (New American Standard Bible from Bible Works Version 6.0).

<sup>108</sup> "The Mighty One, God, the LORD, the Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows, and may Israel itself know. If *it* was in rebellion, or if in an unfaithful act against the LORD do not save us this day!" (New American Standard Bible from Bible Works Version 6.0).

He suggests that El and Yahweh were two names used interchangeably to designate the same God by the Israelite right from the beginning (cf Mondriaan 2004:588-592). But evidences that connect storm god to Yahweh also abound in scripture which could render this argument inconclusive.

#### 4.2.2 Non-Israelite origin

A non-Israelite origin of the name 'Yahweh' and his cult is that Yahweh may have been worshipped or at least known by the Edomites, Midianites, Kenites or other related South-Western Semitic tribes before extending to Judah and later on to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.<sup>109</sup> There are two Egyptian texts from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Century BC that have connected the worship of Yahweh to the Edomites and to the Midianites (cf Van der Toorn et al 1999: 911-913). It is argued that the two texts speak about "Yahu in the land of the Shosu beduins" and "Seir", which could be located between the regions of the Midianites and the Edomites. These texts also assert that Yahweh was worshipped by nomads who were from Edom and from Midian before the cult reached Israel (contra De Moor 1997:124-125).

The above mentioned hypothesis appears to converge with the Old Testament tradition which suggests that Yahweh came from similar places such as Edom and Seir (cf Jdg 5:4; Ps 68:7/8), Sinai, Seir and Mount Paran (cf Dt 33:2), and Teman and Mount Paran (cf Hab 3:3). Lang (2002:177-178) points out that some biblical passages (cf Gn 25:1-34; 27:1-28:9; Dt 23:7) suggest that Edom descended from Esau. Since Esau was the brother of

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<sup>109</sup> Cf Mondriaan (2004:583-587); Lang (2002:177-178); Rogerson, Moberly & Johnstone (2001:266); Day (2000:429); Van der Toorn et al (1999: 911-913) and Hyatt (1980:78).

Jacob/Israel, it is likely that the cult of Yahweh may have originated from the Edomites. This means that the Israelites may have learned about Yahweh from their brother nation, the Edomites (Esau).

Another theory of the origin of the name 'Yahweh' and his cult which is similar to the above mentioned theory is suggested by Hyatt (1980:80). He argues that the name and cult of 'Yahweh' probably originated from the Amorites but later on in history, Yahweh became a patron deity to one of the ancestors of Moses; from there, Yahweh became the patron deity of the clan of Moses and finally, through the mediation of Moses himself, Yahweh became the God of the Hebrews or Israelites as a whole during their migration from Egypt to the land of Canaan.

The above theory concerning the Amorite origin of the cult of Yahweh is unlikely to have been true. This is because the Israelites were already prohibited from having any ties with the Canaanites tribes, including the Amorites (cf Ex 34:11-16). If the cult of Yahweh had originated from the Amorites, there would have been no reason to prohibit the Israelites from having any relationship with them. The Exodus passage presupposes that the Amorites were worshipping other deities, not Yahweh, the God of Israel (cf Smith 1990:xx). Therefore, it is inconceivable to suggest that the source of the cult of Yahweh was derived from the Amorites.

Two major viewpoints concerning the source of the name and cult of 'Yahweh' have emerged from the above discussion. One is that the name and

cult of 'Yahweh' originated from Israel. The other viewpoint is that the name 'Yahweh' and his cult originated from other nations who surrounded Israel prior to their settlement in the land of Canaan.

How did the cult of Yahweh gain credence in Israel if the source of the name and cult of Yahweh originated elsewhere rather than in Israel? To answer this question, it has been suggested that some nomadic people from the Kenite tribe introduced the cult to the Israelites via Moses (cf Van der Toorn et al 1999: 911-913). Another version of this Kenite theory assumes that Hobab or Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, a Midianite priest, was a worshipper of Yahweh among the Kenite tribe. He happened to introduce the cult of 'Yahweh' to Moses. Then Moses established the cult in Israel<sup>110</sup> (cf Rogerson, Moberly & Johnstone 2001:266; Hyatt 1980:78; Parke-Taylor 1975:21).

However, there is doubt about the Midianite-Kenite theory of the origin of the cult of 'Yahweh' because of reasons put forward by Hyatt (1980:78-79; see Mondriaan 2004:585-587). According to him, the argument that Jethro is referred to as a priest of Midian can be countered with the simple fact that Jethro was never referred to as a priest of Yahweh. The Old Testament has never indicated that Yahweh was the deity of the Midianites or the Kenites. It is also doubtful whether the Israelites would have followed Moses out of Egypt if he had introduced to them a complete foreign god of whom they had never heard about. Furthermore, there is no indication in the context of

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<sup>110</sup> Cf Jdg 1:16; 14:11; Nm 10: 29; Ex 2:16; 3:1; 18:1, 10-12.



Exodus 18:12 to regard it as a ceremony whereby the Israelites were inducted into the worship of Yahweh.

As a matter of fact, in my opinion, Jethro appeared to have been very surprised at his realization that Yahweh could deliver the Israelites from Egypt with such a powerful hand. This realization prompted Jethro to say: "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people" (Ex 18:11). Therefore, this ceremony and Jethro's exclamation of surprise here, suggest that Jethro also might have learned about Yahweh via Moses not the other way round (cf De Moor 1997:311; Brueggeman 1994:825; Fretheim 1991:196-197).

#### 4.2.3 Pentateuchal perspectives on Yahweh and his cult

There are several contesting viewpoints on the source of the name and cult of 'Yahweh' from the Pentateuch (cf Dijkstra 2001:81-89). For example, Genesis 4:26 suggests that the source of the cult of 'Yahweh' is traced concurrently or immediately following the birth of Enosh, the son of Seth<sup>111</sup>. But prior to this identification, the name 'Yahweh' has appeared several times in Genesis 2:4-4:16. If the depiction of the order of events that had taken place during the primeval history in Genesis is to be taken literally, then how should these earlier references (cf Gn 2:4-4:25) to the name and cult of 'Yahweh' be understood in light of the later suggestion that men began to call upon the name of 'Yahweh' immediately following the birth of Enosh (cf Gn 4:26)?

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<sup>111</sup> "And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then *men* began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Gn 4:26).

Furthermore, to complicate this matter, there is another viewpoint in Exodus, which suggests that Moses was the first person to have been introduced to the name and cult of 'Yahweh'. This claim is portrayed in the story of Yahweh's conversation with Moses in Exodus 3:14-16<sup>112</sup> and 6:2-5.<sup>113</sup> What seems to be one of the major problems about these passages is that, if Moses was the first person to have been introduced to the name 'Yahweh', as these two above source traditions (the *Elohists* and the *Priestly* respectively) seem to have presupposed, why then would Yahweh's name appear prior to the time of Moses?

The above differing viewpoints lead this investigation to pose the following questions:

- First, what is the source of the name and cult of Yahweh according to the Pentateuch?
- Second, does the source of the name and cult of Yahweh predate the birth of Enosh (cf Gn 2:4-4:16)?

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<sup>112</sup> "14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup> God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations."<sup>16</sup> "Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt".

<sup>113</sup> "2 God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD; <sup>3</sup> and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by* My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them."<sup>4</sup> "I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned."<sup>5</sup> "Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant".

- Third, should the source of the name and cult of Yahweh be situated at the period immediately following the birth of Enosh (cf Gn 4:26)?
- Finally, should the source of the name and cult of Yahweh be associated with the period of Moses as Exodus 3:13-15 and 6:2-5 seem to presuppose?

Few solutions have been offered by scholars (cf Dijkstra 2001:81-89) but I will discuss the documentary solution in what follows. Other solutions will be discussed separately (see section 4.2.3.1 & 4.2.3.2 for alternative solutions).

- The documentary solution

The documentary hypothesis (JEDP) has attempted to identify and classify the various documents that were used to form the Pentateuch (cf Dillard and Longman 1994:40-48). This effort provides an alternative solution concerning the above questions. The solution, though, is still contested (cf Enns 2000:104-106). The hypothesis suggests that the name 'Yahweh' and his cult appear to have come from Yahweh, the J source tradition of the Pentateuch (cf Bright 2000:97; Matthew 1996:293-294; Hayes 1979:15-20; Vogels 1979:18-19). The first appearance of this name from the Hebrew Bible occurs in Genesis 2:4, which is also credited to the J source tradition (cf Enns 2000:104; Dillard and Longman 1994:41). Therefore, the pre-Mosaic worship of Yahweh belonged to this oldest layer of the Pentateuch (cf Dijkstra 2001:84).

The Yahwist tradition has been revised and extended by the *Elohist* redactor at a later stage in history (cf Dijkstra 2001:84). This *Elohist* redactor inserted Exodus 3:7-15 in his revised version to introduce and explain the name 'Yahweh' to Moses and Israel. Dijkstra (2001:86) argues that the reasons for the JE redactor were twofold:

- He/she wanted to explain the name 'Yahweh' to his/her audience; and
- To establish a uniform pronunciation and an official centralized liturgical usage of the name Yahweh.

The final redactor- P (Priestly), combined all the documents of the Pentateuch together and also attempted to harmonize the J and E versions of the revelation of the name and cult of Yahweh by inserting his version in Exodus 6:2-3 (cf Dijkstra (2001:87). This final redactor was influenced by the ideas which were being developed from Babylon and Persia concerning the neglect of the true worship of Yahweh (cf Jos 24:14; Ezk 20:5-7). In response to this negligence, the final Pentateuchal redactor acknowledges that the Patriarchs were not devoid of the knowledge of Yahweh. Though, they were not yet familiar with the name 'Yahweh'. Yahweh had appeared to them in the form of *El Shadday* (God Almighty cf Gn 17:1; 35:11; 48:3). Therefore, this final redactor endeavoured to harmonize the two versions of the source of the name and cult of Yahweh. The one tradition claims that Yahweh was known to the Patriarchs; while the other tradition claims that Yahweh was revealed exclusively to Moses.

Therefore, the solution of the documentary hypothesis to the questions raised from above is that each of the three to four source traditions provides their theory of the source of the name and cult of Yahweh in a distinctive manner. The differing viewpoints concerning the source of the name 'Yahweh' and his cult in the Pentateuch is explained on the presupposition that their source traditions differ from one another. This means that the J source tradition bases its account concerning the source of the name and cult of Yahweh on Genesis 4:26; the *Elohists* source tradition bases its account on the same subject on Exodus 3:13-15; while, the *Priestly* source tradition bases its account on the source of the name and cult of 'Yahweh' on Exodus 6:2-5.

Following from the above conclusion, a charge of inconsistency for labelling the documents according to the divine names is placed against the documentary hypothesis (cf Matthew 1996:293; Moberly 1992:43) because the name 'Yahweh' and the origin of the cult of Yahweh have also been found in the documents that have been ascribed to the *Elohists* and *Priestly* source traditions rather than the designated J source tradition.

A question that comes to mind is: why use the divine names to classify the sources of the Pentateuchal documents if this usage could not be demonstrated clearly and could not be applied consistently in the Pentateuch? In other words, if the divine names are used in order to classify the various source traditions of the Pentateuchal documents, this principle should have been followed in a consistent manner by those who proposed

and advanced the JEDP theory. In this case, whenever someone comes across a particular divine name, the person could quickly identify the source of a passage with that divine name. But since this consistency is not reflected in the explanation given by the documentary theory, it is unfortunately misleading to adopt its viewpoint wholly concerning the source of the name and cult of 'Yahweh'. The JEDP method for identifying the various source traditions of the Pentateuch is therefore not convincing (cf Dillard and Longman 1994:44-48). The solution provided by the JEDP hypothesis concerning the source of the cult and name of Yahweh is not compelling because of its practical incoherency/inconsistency (cf Wenham 1987:56-57).

Meanwhile, several scholars<sup>114</sup> have also attempted to provide other solutions to the questions raised by the revelation of the divine name. But each solution is not devoid of problems; yet, I shall discuss a few of the suggested solutions which include the Pre-Mosaic source tradition and the celebrated Mosaic source tradition (cf Ex 3:13-15; 6:2-3).

#### 4.2.3.1 Pre-Mosaic source tradition

Evidence from the book of Genesis<sup>115</sup> suggests that the source of the name and cult of 'Yahweh' predated the period of Moses. According to De Moor (1997:325), it is already an established fact from both biblical and extra-

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<sup>114</sup> Cf Rogerson, Moberly & Johnstone (2001:264-272); Enns (2000:101-108, 173-175); Matthews (1996:293-294); Moberly (1992); Fretheim (1991:62-66); Durham (1987:39-41, 76-77).

<sup>115</sup> Gn. 2:4, 7, 15, 18, 21; 3:1, 8, 13, 21; 4:1, 4, 6, 9, 13, 15, 26; 5:29; 6:3, 5; 7:1, 5, 16; 8:21; 9:26; 10:9; 11:5, 8; 12:1, 4, 7, 17; 13:4, 10; 14:22; 15:1, 4, 7, 18; 16:2, 5, 7, 9, 13; 17:1; 18:1, 13, 19, 22, 26, 33; 19:13, 16, 24, 27; 20:18; 21:1, 33; 22:11, 14; 24:7, 12, 21, 27, 31, 40, 42, 44, 48, 51; 25:21; 26:2, 12, 22, 24, 28; 27:7, 20, 27; 28:13, 16, 21; 29:31, 35; 30:24, 27, 30; 31:3, 49; 32:10; 38:7, 10; 39:2, 5, 21, 23; 49:18.

biblical evidence that Yahwism was older than Moses. Part of these evidences linked the origin of the name and cult of 'Yahweh' to the period immediately following the birth of Enosh (cf Gn 4:26; Moberly 1992:53). The name 'Yahweh' had also appeared in the period prior to the second story of the creation of Adam and Eve (cf Gn 2:4, 5). The appearance of the name 'Yahweh' prior to the birth of Enosh could simply be explained as editorial insertion (cf Matthew 1996:293-294). The main problem here is the apparent conflicting claims from Genesis 4:26 and Exodus 3:13-15; 6:2-5 concerning the origin of the name and cult of 'Yahweh'. To which period is the origin of the name and cult of 'Yahweh' attributed? In other words, is it before the emergence of Moses or during his period? In what follows, the hypothesis that the name and cult of Yahweh predated Moses will be examined.

Westermann (1984:339-344) has attempted to provide a distinction between the two periods (that is, the period of Enosh and that of Moses), but his explanation is not devoid of certain difficulties and therefore, not persuasive. The distinction made by Westermann between the calling upon the name of Yahweh in the primeval period and the revelation of the name to Moses is not clear. For example, Westermann (1984:339-340) argues that there is no contradiction between the two passages (cf Gn 4:26 and Ex 3:13-15); and that the J source tradition in Exodus 3 is not talking about the beginning of the worship of Yahweh. Rather, J is concerned with the beginning of the history of the people of Israel in Exodus while in Genesis J is making a primeval statement that has nothing to do with Exodus. According to him, Genesis

4:26 is saying that the general cult of Yahweh began in the primeval period. As a result, J was able to express this in the words “Man began to call on the name of Yahweh.” Therefore, J did not mean a very definite Yahweh cult began, but a general Yahweh cult had begun.

Where the problem lies, in the viewpoint of Westermann, is in this: the practice of the cult of Yahweh during the period of Enosh is understood by Westermann (1984:339-340) as religion in general (cf Wenham 1987:116; Von Rad 1972:113); while Exodus 3 and 6 is about God’s history in Israel and Yahweh religion specific. Accordingly, “J wants to say: the period before the meeting between God and his people... was not simply a time bereft of God. It is not as if people cried out into the void and God never answered or acted. Here too it is a question of Yahweh, the one God” (Westermann 1984:340).

Few things therefore, could be noted from Westermann’s viewpoint. First, Westermann appears to ignore the fact that both passages (Gn 4:26; Ex 3:13-15; 6:2-5) are concerned with the ‘name’ and ‘cult’ of Yahweh, whether as a central focus or as a subsidiary subject. Second, the religion and history distinction supposedly created by Westermann concerning the two passages is not convincing. This is because Genesis 4:26 is concerned with the beginning of Yahweh religion just as Exodus 3 and 6 are concerned, whether directly or indirectly. Both passages are historical narratives, though, with a theological motive(s). The author(s)/editor(s) of both passages are attempting



to provide a historical perspective concerning the source and the significance of the name and cult of Yahweh.

Therefore, the major problem between the above passages is whether the revelation of the name and cult of Yahweh predated the historical Moses as suggested by Genesis 4:26 or originated with Moses as supposed by Exodus 3 and 6? Enns (2000: 101-108, 173-175) provides a more compelling explanation to these apparently contradictory claims concerning the origin of the name and cult of Yahweh. It is to his explanation that this discussion shall turn in the next paragraph.

Enns (2000:106) argues that the account from Exodus 3:14-15 is intended to underscore the precise identity of the God who is now communicating with Moses. This account is not purposed to introduce a new name to Moses (cf Matthew 1996:294). The name of Yahweh predated Moses.<sup>116</sup> De Moor (1997:268-269, 325) also argues in support of the idea that Moses is not the first person to have been introduced to the name and cult of Yahweh. However, Moses was responsible for the introduction of a strict monotheistic

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<sup>116</sup> But this viewpoint has been objected to by Moberly (1992:65-67) who argues that there is no difference between the meaning of the name 'Yahweh' from Genesis and its meaning in Exodus. It cannot be said that the patriarchs only pronounced the name 'Yahweh' without having any notion of its significance; such a thing would be an alien practice among the Hebrew people. In my opinion, Moberly missed the major focus of this perspective. Enns (2000:105-106) and those who support his viewpoint are simply saying that the patriarchs and the Israelites already knew their God as Yahweh. However, the manner Yahweh had revealed himself to the patriarchs previously was not decisive and far reaching as in the event of the exodus. Therefore, it is through the event of the exodus that the Israelites would know their God fully. The centrality of the exodus is an indisputable fact in the history of the Israelites. The religious, political, social and historical identity of the Israelites is anchored substantially upon the events of the exodus.

Yahwism which was motivated by his burning bush experience (cf Ex 3:1-6; Dt 33:16). Similarly, Leupold (1942:228) argues that Yahweh worship began with Adam and Eve and developed into a public worship at the time of Enosh (cf also Speiser 1990:37).

Therefore, Enns (2000:106) reasoned that God is leaving no doubt in Moses' mind about who is speaking with him. God is saying to Moses that "I am Yahweh, the 'I AM', the God of the patriarchs. The one you have heard about is the one speaking with you now". There are several reasons that have been put forward by Enns (2000:105-106) to support his above mentioned viewpoint.

First, if Moses was attempting to establish his credibility before the Israelites, a new name would not help him in this matter. Furthermore, as it has been suggested by Hyatt (1980:78-79) it is doubtful whether the Israelites would have followed Moses out of Egypt if he had introduced to them a completely foreign god of whom they had never heard.

Second, God's association with the Patriarchs is not a novelty here. Therefore, the phrase: "this is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation" (Ex 3:15b) refers not only to the tetragrammaton (YHWH), but also to the entire preceding part of the verse: "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to

you”. If the phrase: “the God of your fathers” is not introduced here for the first time, neither the tetragrammaton (YHWH).

Third, the use of the name ‘Yahweh’ previously (Ex 3:2, 4, and 7) indicates that the term is not introduced in Exodus 3:14-15 for the first time. Furthermore, if there is variation on the use of the divine names (*Elohim* and *Yahweh*) both before and after Exodus 3:14-15, then from a literary perspective, the narrative cannot be understood as a new revelation of the name of God.

Fourth, the phrase “forever” (עַד־לְעוֹלָם־עַד) in Exodus 3:15 most likely refers to perpetuity through all time; that means, backwards and forwards. This means that ‘Yahweh’ has always been God’s name. Therefore, the force of verse 15 rests on the presupposition that ‘Yahweh’ is not a new name. The proper understanding of the verse is: “I am Yahweh, the God of the Patriarchs. This has always been my name and shall continue to be my name”.

Fifth, the fact that the name ‘Yahweh’ was not the focus of the first conversation between Moses and the Israelites in Exodus 4:29-31 underscores the viewpoint that the encounter between Moses and Yahweh did not focus on the revelation of the name ‘Yahweh’ for the first time.

Similarly, Exodus 6:2-3 has also been objected to by Enns (2000:174-175) as an account of the revelation of God’s name. Rather, it is an account about the significance of the name “Yahweh” which Moses and the Israelites will have

to understand through the redemptive activities of their God. The saving character of Yahweh is the central focus of this revelation. By being delivered from the Egyptian bondage, the Israelites will come to know Yahweh in a way that the Patriarchs did not know, that is, his extraordinary redemptive power. Consequently, this event results in the following:

- The Israelites will become the people of Yahweh;
- Yahweh will become their God; and
- The Israelites will know that Yahweh has delivered them.

Thus, the account of Exodus 3 and 6 is not intended to introduce an unknown name to the Israelites via Moses. Yahweh was already known and worshipped by the Patriarchs and subsequently by the Israelites. What was not known by the Israelites was the full meaning, implication or explication of the name 'Yahweh'. Yahweh introduced the full theological significance of his name to the Israelites via Moses in order to assure him and the Israelites about the certainty of his covenant promises to the Patriarchs. The events of the exodus will soon testify to Moses and to the Israelites the significance of the name 'Yahweh'.

#### 4.2.3.2 Mosaic source tradition

Moberly (1992:5-104) has dedicated a substantial part of his book to addressing the problem of the Mosaic source of the name and cult of Yahweh and the use of the name 'Yahweh' from Genesis. He supports the hypothesis that Moses was the first person to have been introduced to the name

‘Yahweh’, as claimed by Exodus 3:13-16 and 6:2-5 (cf Moberly 1992:34-36). I will describe few details from this perspective in what follows.

Moberly (1992:24-25, 60) argues that Exodus 3:13-15 has attempted to portray the name, the meaning of ‘Yahweh’ and the nature of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel mediated through a prophetic human agency. The name ‘Yahweh’ was given by God to Israel via Moses. This name carries a unique significance and authority for Israel. Generally, the story also depicts a new beginning in the history of Israel which was different from what had happened during the period of the Patriarchs. This incident lays a foundation for a future terrain on which Yahweh’s relationship with Israel was to be construed. It creates the *nexus*: Yahweh-Sinai-Moses-Israel. The *nexus* can later be expanded in the following manner: Yahweh-Sinai-holiness-Moses-prophecy-Israel.

Furthermore, Moberly (1992:24, 25) suggested that the above passage also emphasizes the significance of and the perpetuity of the name ‘Yahweh’. Israel knew the God of their fathers (the Patriarchs), but they did not know him as ‘Yahweh’. Now, Israel will know their God as ‘Yahweh’ via Moses.<sup>117</sup> He is the same God who related to Israel’s Patriarchs. But from this point forward, he shall be known as ‘Yahweh’. Moses and the subsequent prophets

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<sup>117</sup> The above perspective is similar to that of Bright (2000:970) who argues that all the patriarchs worshipped the same God but at different periods, he was known or called by various names such as El Shaddai (Gn 17:1; 43:14; Ex 6:3 etc), El ‘Elyon (Gn 14:18-24), El ‘Olam (Gn 21:33), El Ro’i (Gn 16:13; cf Yahweh *Yir’ eh*, Gn 22:14) and *el Bethel* (Gn 31:13; 35:7) with the exception of the name ‘Yahweh’ Therefore, the account from Exodus 3:14-16 and 6:2-5 is an attempt to link the God who appeared to Moses with the same God who was worshipped in the primeval history and in the patriarchal period.

shall be the medium by which Yahweh shall speak to Israel (cf Dt 5:22-33; 18:18-22).

Concerning Exodus 6:2-3, Moberly (1992:27) explained that the passage reaffirms the previous conversation between Yahweh and Moses concerning the new name (cf Ex 3:13-15). After the first conversation, Moses went to Egypt and talked to Pharaoh but Moses' request to the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, was rejected. Out of disappointment, Moses returned to Yahweh for a second time. Yahweh's response to Moses, this second time, was to reassure him that what Yahweh had promised previously was still in place. In other words, Yahweh's speech to Moses in Exodus 6:2-8 is an explication of his name which was revealed to Moses from their first encounter. Childs (1974:115) shares a similar viewpoint concerning the meaning of the name 'Yahweh' when he argues that the name 'Yahweh' relates to the essence of God's purposes with Israel. Such purposes included:

“First, there is the promise to deliver: ‘I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.’ Secondly, there is their adoption into the covenant as the people of God: ‘I will take you for my people, and I will be your God.’ Thirdly, there is the gift of the land which had been promised to the Fathers: ‘I will give it to you for an inheritance.’ The name of Yahweh functions as a guarantee that the reality of God stands behind the promise and will execute its fulfilment” (Childs 1974:115; cf Moberly 1992:28).

Moberly (1992:29) indicated that Moses has been given reasons from the past in order that he and the people of Israel could trust Yahweh in the present. As a result, the covenant which Yahweh had made with Abraham from Genesis 17:1-27 is brought to the fore in this second conversation

between Yahweh and Moses. The covenant between Yahweh and Abraham represents Yahweh's commitment which shall never be nullified by the Egyptian opposition.

“Thus, the purpose of Exodus 6:2-3 is related to the purpose of the divine speech as a whole—a reassurance to Moses rooted in God's covenant with the patriarchs, a reaffirmation of his commission, a reminder of the privileged knowledge of God he was given at the burning bush and of what this will mean for him and for Israel” (Moberly 1992:31).

The overall discussion can be summed up as pointing to the fact that the original source of the name 'Yahweh' can hardly be determined with certainty. However, there are certain indications from Genesis (cf Gn 4:26; 8:20; 12:7; 13:4; 15:1-18; 17:1-27) that a certain form of Yahweh worship (whether private or public) had existed prior to the revelation of the monotheistic Yahwism at the time of Moses. Furthermore, it cannot be proven that there was absolutely no knowledge of the name and cult of Yahweh prior to Yahweh's revelation to Moses. Therefore, the perspective offered by Enns (2000: 101-108, 173-175) from the previous discussion demands much more recognition concerning the debate on the revelation of the name and cult of Yahweh during the primeval and Mosaic periods.

Enns (2000:106) argues that the account from Exodus 3:14-15 is intended to underscore the precise identity of the God who is now communicating with Moses. This account is not purposed to introduce a new name to Moses (cf Matthew 1996:294). The name of Yahweh predated Moses. De Moor (1997:268-269, 325) also argues in support of the idea that Moses is not the

first person to have been introduced to the name and cult of Yahweh. However, Moses was responsible for the introduction of a strict monotheistic Yahwism which was motivated by his burning bush experience (cf Ex 3:1-6; Dt 33:16). Similarly, Leupold (1942:228) asserts that Yahweh worship began with Adam and Eve and developed into a public worship at the time of Enosh (cf also Speiser 1990:37). This investigation therefore adopts the position that the name and cult of Yahweh predated Moses. The significance of the name 'Yahweh' was to be revealed to Israel in the redemptive episode.

### **4.3 'YAHWEH'S PEOPLE' IN THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT**

#### 4.3.1 Introduction

The concept of 'Yahweh's people' is invariably intertwined with Yahweh's covenant with Abraham and subsequently with Israel via Moses.<sup>118</sup> The nature of Yahweh's relationship with Abraham in which Yahweh shall become the God of Abraham and the God of his descendants has been understood as covenantal (cf Bright 2000:149; Gn 17:7-8). If Yahweh's covenant with Abraham and his descendants was to be nullified or discontinued, the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham as well as his descendants also could have been severed. Derivatively, Abraham and his descendants also could only be 'Yahweh's people' on the basis of this covenant. The moment the covenant would be nullified or cancelled, the entire structure of Yahweh's relationship with Abraham could fall apart.

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<sup>118</sup> See *Excursus* on the Old Testament use of the terms:  $\sim [ i ; hA 'hy > \sim [ i ;$  and  $yMi [ i$  ; in chapter 4.6.



Thus, the institution of the covenant served as a vehicle or platform by which Abraham and his descendants could be regarded as 'Yahweh's people'. The covenant becomes a beacon on which that relationship could be sustained from one generation to the other. As a result, any other person who could be understood as 'Yahweh's people' would have to pass via the Abrahamic covenant. The Mosaic covenant provides a similar platform whereby Israel could be called Yahweh's people. It also provides a platform through which other nations, foreigners or aliens could participate in the religious life of the Israelites as Yahweh's people. Some aspects of the Abrahamic covenant whereby other people could be included in the covenant and be recognized as 'Yahweh's people' included the following.

#### 4.3.2 Yahweh promises to become Abraham's God

The promise that Yahweh had made to become the God of Abraham and his descendants (Gn 17:7-8<sup>119</sup>) can be viewed as a significant platform by which Abraham and his descendants could invariably become 'Yahweh's people'. This is to argue that, if Yahweh becomes the God of Abraham and his descendants through this covenant promise, then Abraham and his descendants inevitably were to become 'Yahweh's people' by virtue of this same covenant. Other people who embrace the Abrahamic covenant could also be recognized as 'Yahweh's people' because the covenant was the

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<sup>119</sup> "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. <sup>8</sup> "I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gn 17:7-8).

platform by which Yahweh's relationship with Abraham and his descendants was established.

#### 4.3.3 Significance of the name 'Abraham'

The change of Abram's name to Abraham by Yahweh may also be viewed as an aspect relating to the concept of 'Yahweh's people' (cf Gn 17:5). It has already been noted that in the Ancient Near Eastern tradition, naming someone in certain instances symbolized ownership or power over someone (Walton & Matthews 1997:44; Fretheim 1991:64; cf Gn 1:28 and 2:19-20). As a consequence, the renaming of Abram to become Abraham suggests that Abraham is adopted by Yahweh as his own son. Also Abraham's descendants are derivatively adopted and owned by Yahweh as his own people by the token of that same covenant (cf Ex 4:22).

Abraham's name change therefore portrays his new relationship with Yahweh as well as his new relationship with other nations who embrace Yahweh as their God. This is to argue that the name change also related in a certain sense to the function of Abraham as the father of multitude of nations. This fatherhood of Abraham extends beyond the boundaries of his blood related descendants. Abraham's fatherhood covered other nations who might come and submit to Yahweh through Abraham and his descendants by means of the covenant (cf Gn 12:3; 17:4-5, 12-16; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4-5; 28:14). Corollary, other nations could also be considered as 'Yahweh's people' via Abrahamic covenant by virtue of his function implied by his name change.

#### 4.3.4 Circumcision

The covenantal aspect of circumcision may also be understood as a means whereby Abraham and his descendants, as well as other nations, could become 'Yahweh's people' (cf Gn 17:10-14<sup>120</sup>). Circumcision was an activity, distinguishing Abraham and his descendants from other nations and sealing Abraham and his descendants to Yahweh in a covenant relationship (cf Fretheim 1994:461; Wenham 1994:22-24). The covenant obligation of circumcision requires Abraham and his descendants to circumcise. In addition, all those who are under the auspices of Abraham are also required to be circumcised.<sup>121</sup>

Abraham adhered to the covenant obligation of circumcision (cf Gn 17:23-27). He circumcised every male in his household, including Ishmael and foreigners who were born in his house or who were bought elsewhere as slaves. As a consequence, this event obviously portrayed the covenant obligation of circumcision as one of the means by which Abraham, and his descendants as

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<sup>120</sup> 10 This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.11 "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.12 "And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a *servant* who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants.13 "A *servant* who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.14 "But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (NASB).

<sup>121</sup> "And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. 13 A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant "(Gn 17:12-13; see New American Standard Bible 1995).

well as other nations or foreigners may be understood as ‘Yahweh’s people’ and might as a consequence participate in the religious and social life of Israel.<sup>122</sup> When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, those who were born in the wilderness had to be circumcised by Joshua. This was done in order for them to be recognised by Yahweh as his people (cf Jos 5:2-9).

The negative side of the command to circumcise males is that Abraham and his descendants could lose their privileged relationship with Yahweh if they failed to circumcise males as stipulated in the covenant (cf Gn 17:14). Similarly, other nations could never be recognized as covenant members if they failed to circumcise males. The covenant obligation of circumcision therefore became one of the qualifications whereby Abraham and his descendants, as well as other nations, could be regarded as ‘Yahweh’s people’ or could lose this status based upon their obedience or disobedience.

#### 4.3.5 Yahweh’s promise to other nations via Abraham

Another allusion for other nations or foreigners to embrace Yahweh as their God and thereby become ‘Yahweh’s people’ via Abrahamic covenant is couched in the blessing promise (cf Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).

God’s covenant promise entails a blessing to other nations (or other nations

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<sup>122</sup> Brueggemann (1982:155) argues that “circumcision announces that Israelites belong only to this community and only to this God.... Circumcision as a positive theological symbol functioned in Israel as a metaphor for serious, committed faith. Thus the tradition speaks of the circumcision of the heart (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Ezek. 44:7).” I suppose, the importance of circumcision should not be viewed as limited to the Israelites only; it applies to foreigners as well, specifically to those who also denounced their foreign gods and embraced the God of Israel. Such foreigners were regarded as members of the Israelite community (or proselytes) because they had embraced Yahweh, the God of Israel as their God (cf Cohn-Sherbok 2003:572-573).

to receive his blessings) through Abraham or his offspring/seed. This blessing promise could be considered as an inclusive aspect whereby Yahweh was to become the God of other nations. The covenantal promise of 'blessing' obviously links Yahweh to other nations via Abraham and his descendants. The presupposition is that there can be no other way for other nations to receive the covenantal blessing promised by Yahweh if those nations are totally separated from Abraham or his descendants.<sup>123</sup>

In other words, Yahweh may become not only the God of Abraham and his descendants but also the God of other nations who receive Yahweh's blessing through Abraham. The function of Abraham as the bridge through which Yahweh's covenant blessing could reach other nations is immediately evident from the event in which Abraham and Lot welcomed strangers into their respective homes (cf Gn 18:1-8; 19:1-3). The implication of their hospitality is that Abraham and Lot practically began to apply the covenant obligation of being a channel of Yahweh's blessing to other nations (cf Gn 12:3-4). Therefore, the covenant promise of blessing other nations via Abraham became a hinge pin by which other nations could also be considered as 'Yahweh's people' in the Old Testament.

Regarding the Abrahamic covenant, this discussion has noted that there are several aspects of the covenant whereby Yahweh could regard Abraham and

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<sup>123</sup> Fretheim (1994:424) argues that "God's choice of Abraham will lead to blessings for all the families of the earth...God's choice of Abram serves as an initially exclusive move for the sake of a maximally inclusive end. Election serves mission (in the broadest sense of the term)." Walton (2001:402) also contends that "In Abram, all nations of the earth were blessed as they were shown what God was like and as the means were provided for them to become justified, reconciled to God, and forgiven of their sins."

his descendants as well as other nations or foreigners as his own people. These covenant aspects include: Yahweh's promise to become the God of Abraham and his descendants; the significance of the name 'Abraham'; circumcision and Yahweh's promise to bless other nations or foreigners via Abraham. Therefore, other nations who embrace Yahweh through the Abrahamic covenant could also be regarded as 'Yahweh's people'.

The next discussion will focus on a similar inclusive perspective of the Mosaic covenant whereby Israel, including other nations who embrace Yahweh via the provisions of the Mosaic covenant, could be regarded as 'Yahweh's people'.

#### **4.4 'YAHWEH'S PEOPLE' IN THE MOSAIC COVENANT**

##### **4.4.1 Introduction**

This section discusses the concept of 'Yahweh's people' from the perspective of the Mosaic covenant. The rationale for examining the concept of 'Yahweh's people' from the perspective of the Abrahamic and of the Mosaic covenants has already been stated in the third and the fourth chapters. I will restate briefly the rationale for this section in order to clarify my point of interest.

First, Ezra and Nehemiah appealed to the Abrahamic and to the Mosaic covenants as the basis on which their far reaching religious and social reforms, during the early post-exilic period, were founded.<sup>124</sup> But, my argument here is that the Mosaic covenant contains two perspectives. The

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<sup>124</sup> Cf Ezr 9:1-15; Neh 1:5-10; 9:7-25.

one is exclusive and the other is inclusive. Ezra and Nehemiah based their reforms on the exclusive perspective of the Abrahamic and of the Mosaic covenants. The inclusive point of view of the same covenants had been ignored. Therefore, this section is partly aimed at describing the inclusive perspective of the Mosaic covenant.

Second, the Abrahamic covenant formed a theological basis on which the Mosaic covenant was founded (cf McConville 1997:749).<sup>125</sup> This is the case because Abraham's descendants were not physically present at the initial covenant event between Yahweh and Abraham (cf Gn 15:1-21; 17:1-27). As a result, the Abrahamic covenant anticipated the Mosaic covenant theologically. The Mosaic covenant allowed Abraham's descendants to physically enter into the covenant. It therefore provides a platform for the inclusion of the descendants of Abraham in Yahweh's covenant with him.

In view of the above, this section will describe the concept of 'Yahweh's people' in the perspective of the Mosaic covenant. The discussion will show that the concept of 'Yahweh's people' includes Israel (the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and other nations or foreigners who embrace Yahweh as their God through the Mosaic covenant framework.

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<sup>125</sup> Cf Gn15:13-21; 17:2-10; Ex 2:24; 3:16-17; 6:2-9; Dt 1:8; 6:10-12; 10:12-22; 30:19-20.

The covenant between Yahweh and Israel via Moses is described in Exodus 19:1 to 24:18 (cf McConville 1997:749).<sup>126</sup> But the event of the exodus is narrated within the context of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants.<sup>127</sup> As a result of this connection, my discussion will utilize certain passages from the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This is to argue that these four books describe the operation of Yahweh's covenant with Israel via Moses as they came out of Egypt to Sinai and subsequently to the verge of the Promised Land, the land of Canaan.

#### 4.4.2 Israel (and other nations): the people of Yahweh

There are several references whereby Yahweh has been quoted to have referred to himself as the 'God of Israel' or to have referred to Israel as his 'own people'<sup>128</sup>. This concept of Israel as 'Yahweh's people' or Yahweh as the 'God of Israel' is also linked with the concept of Yahweh as the God of Israel's 'fathers' or 'Patriarchs' (i.e. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)<sup>129</sup>. Thus, the concept of 'Yahweh's people' is founded upon the covenant which Yahweh had made with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as the covenant he had made with Israel via Moses. The Israelites can legitimately be regarded

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<sup>126</sup> There are many scholars (cf De Moor 1997:208-210) who dispute the reliability of the events of exodus. But every scholar is entitled to their respective view points concerning the exodus. My aim here is not to argue for or against the reliability of the event of exodus. However, the biblical and some other extra-biblical witnesses supporting the event of exodus have given me a relative sense of certainty concerning the reliability of the events of exodus (cf De Moor 1997:211-245). Therefore, I will consider the stories concerning the establishment of the Mosaic covenant as factual rather than as folktale or fiction.

<sup>127</sup> Cf Gn 15:13-16; Ex 2:24-25; 3:6-10, 16-17; 6:3-8; 19:3-8; 32:11-16.

<sup>128</sup> Cf Ex 3:7, 10; 4:22-23; 5:1, 3; 6:7; 7:16; 8:1, 20-21; 9:1, 13; 10:3; 19:5-6; 20:2, 7.

<sup>129</sup> Cf Ex 2:24-25; 3:6, 15-16; 4:5; 6:3, 8; 32:13; 33:1.



as ‘Yahweh’s people’ based upon their acceptance of both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants.

The Mosaic covenant provided certain ways in which other nations, aliens or foreigners could be included in the covenant and thereby become Yahweh’s people<sup>130</sup>. The following discussion will deal with some of these ways.

#### 4.4.2.1 Food Provision

The Pentateuch suggests three ways to provide food for the widow, orphan, alien, and sometimes Levites. The Israelites were urged to provide some left-overs from their fields during the harvest period for these groups of people to scavenge (cf Lv 19:9-10; 23:22; Dt 24:19-21). In addition, every third year, a tithe of all produce was to be reserved for widows, orphans, sojourners and Levites (cf Dt 14:28-29; 26:12-15). Similarly, every seventh year, the land was to be left uncultivated. Anything that produced by itself from the uncultivated land was for the widows, orphans and sojourners (cf Ex 23:10-11; Lev 25:1-7). Obviously, aliens or foreigners might live in the land of Israel before they could have access to this food provisions.

My argument therefore is that aliens or foreigners were welcomed or included in the social and religious structures of Israel, the people of Yahweh. As a

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<sup>130</sup> For example, when the Israelites came out of Egypt, there were other people who came out with them (Ex 12:38). These people were not pushed away from following the Israelites. It is most likely that these other people also may have entered the Promised Land and may have settled down with the native Israelites. Enns (2000:418) argues that the inclusion of aliens and servants in the Sabbath commandment presupposes that there were elements of aliens and foreigners among Israelites when they went out from Egypt. Moses specifically anticipated the presence of foreigners and aliens among the Israelites (cf Nm 15:14-15). As a result, he instructed that foreigners be allowed to sacrifice in the temple just like native Israelites (cf Davies 1995:153-154). The law did not discriminate against foreigners or aliens.

result, they were to be treated favourably by the native born Israelites. The food provision clearly reveals a number of things. First, the food provision presupposes that foreigners were accepted in Israelite community. They were part of the social and religious structures of the Israelite community. Second, since foreigners were accepted, a provision was made for them to receive good care just as the native Israelite widows, orphans and Levites. As a consequence, through the food provision, a foreigner together with a widow, an orphan, a Levite and an Israelite had shared Yahweh's food blessing together. There was no distinction because theologically, they are all 'Yahweh's people' (cf Ex 19:5; Ps 24:1-2).

#### 4.4.2.2 Sabbath-keeping

Another covenant obligation was Sabbath-keeping (cf Ex 20:8-11; 23:12; Dt 5:12-15). God commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath day holy. They were to rest from their labour on that day. All Israelites had to observe the Sabbath law, including aliens, strangers and slaves who were in their midst. The keeping of the Sabbath day was a religious practice in Israel from one generation to the other. It was a day which Yahweh had consecrated for his own covenant people to rest from their labour and worship him.

The Sabbath day also reminded Yahweh's people about Yahweh's own rest after he had created the whole world (cf Gn 2:2-3). The inclusion of aliens or foreigners in the Sabbath observance suggests that these people were required to know Yahweh, embrace him and revere him as their creator just

as the Israelites did. In addition, these aliens or foreigners were also allowed to observe other sacred days or religious festivals that were stipulated to be observed by the native born Israelites (cf Ex 20:8-11; 23:12; Dt 5:12-15). Thus, aliens could worship Yahweh as their God, together with the native born Israelites, because both are ultimately 'Yahweh's people'.

#### 4.4.2.3 Celebration of Passover, feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles

The celebration of the Passover, the feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles were other ways in which foreigners or aliens were incorporated into the religious life of the Israelite people (cf Ex 12:17-20, 48-49; Nm 9:14; Dt 16:10-14). It is evident from these passages that aliens were allowed to participate in the celebration of the above religious festivals together with the native-born Israelites. This was an instruction from Yahweh to the Israelites via Moses and Aaron. Aliens who were circumcised were to be allowed to participate in the celebration of these feasts together with the native Israelites (cf Ex 12:48).

The Passover was an event that reminded Yahweh's people, the Israelites, about their redemptive experience from Egypt. This event had derived its meaning from the redemption Yahweh had accomplished for his people, the Israelites. But why did Yahweh instruct Moses and Aaron to allow foreigners or aliens living among them to also celebrate the same redemption together with the native born Israelites? My opinion is that aliens or foreigners who had

embraced Yahweh, the God of Israel, inevitably became part of 'Yahweh's people'. The acceptance and the inclusion of Ruth, the Moabite woman, in the Israelite community illustrate my viewpoint here. The redemption of 'Yahweh's people' was therefore, by implication, conferred in retrospect upon the aliens or foreigners who embraced Yahweh as their God. Thus, through the celebration of the Passover, aliens and foreigners together with the native born Israelites commemorated their redemption as Yahweh's redeemed people.

Meanwhile, during the celebration of the feast of Weeks, both the Israelites and the aliens or foreigners living among the Israelites were required to present their freewill offering to Yahweh in proportion to the blessing they had received from Yahweh. This event was significant because both the Israelites and the aliens were blessed by Yahweh without discrimination. Both of them had obligations to acknowledge and thank Yahweh for his food provision.

The feast of Tabernacles was celebrated to commemorate Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan and a time when they were staying in tents and booths. It reminded them of Yahweh's protection during the wilderness period. So, the fact that aliens were allowed to celebrate this event also suggests that they were part of Yahweh's family. Some of them probably also came out of Egypt as redeemed people together with the native born Israelites (cf Ex 12:38; Nm 11:4; Jos 8:35).

From the above discussion, it is apparent that foreigners were among those who came up out of Egypt (cf Ex 12:38). The incident of the Israelites coming out of Egypt was a redemptive experience. Other people who had already abandoned their native land and embraced Yahweh during the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land could celebrate the Passover. In this context of the redemption of Yahweh's people, foreigners could also celebrate the redemptive festival. Foreigners therefore were incorporated as part of 'Yahweh's people' through the celebration of the Passover, feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles.

#### 4.4.2.4 Equality before the Law of Yahweh

Foreigners and native-born Israelites were equal before the Law of Yahweh (cf Ex 12:49; Lv 24:22; Nm 9:14; 15:13-16, 29-30). The law of Yahweh, both ceremonial and ethical, had the same application to the native-born Israelites as well as to the alien. The things that these Laws prescribed for the native-born Israelite were also required from the alien or foreigner living among the Israelites. The Pentateuch therefore suggests that God could execute justice (including the death penalty) for the cause of widows, orphans, aliens and strangers (Ex 22:21-24<sup>131</sup>; 23:9; Dt 10:18).

If an alien, stranger, orphan, or widow is mistreated, the guilty person was never to go unpunished. The above cited references also show that aliens

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<sup>131</sup> Ex 22:21-24 says that, "And you shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, *and* if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless."

and foreigners existed in the Israelite community. The fact that a special plan was devised to care for the aliens and foreigners sustains the notion that they were not totally excluded from the midst of the Israelites. They were part of the religious and social structures of the Israelite community through appropriate covenant means. Thus, from this perspective, foreigners could be regarded as part of 'Yahweh's people'. Therefore, both the alien and the native Israelite were required to obey Yahweh's law.

#### 4.4.2.5 Intermarriage

Intermarriage was another way in which foreigners were integrated into the Israelite community (cf Houten 1991:61). Though, it appears from Deuteronomy 7:3 that intermarriage was forbidden totally. Apparently, Deuteronomy 7:4 and the context of this passage suggest that intermarriage prohibition is not necessarily the focus of the passage. Verse 4 indicates that idol worship is the main focus of the passage. Israel is to desist from worshipping other gods. They must not worship the gods of the Canaanites nor any other gods except Yahweh (cf Ex 20:3-6; Dt 5:7-10). There is no question that the entire history of Israel is tainted with the temptation to worship other foreign gods<sup>132</sup>. This led to the prescription of a severe penalty for idolatry (cf Dt 13:6-11).

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<sup>132</sup> Cf Ex 23:24; 34:13-14; Dt 12:2-3; Jos 24:2, 14; 1 Ki 15:12-13; 16:13, 31-33; 2 Chr 33:3-9; 34:33; Ezk 20:7.

In view of the above prohibition against idolatry, Israel was forbidden to intermarry with other people (foreigners) because they might be tempted to worship other gods apart from Yahweh, who redeemed them from Egypt (cf Ex 23:33; Von Rad 1979:68). Implicitly, Israelites could intermarry with foreigners only when it was obvious that such women or men would totally denounce their foreign gods and embrace Yahweh, the God of Israel (cf Williamson 1985:130; Breneman 1993:149). The cases of Tamar (cf Gn 38:6-30; cf. Mt 1:3), Moses (Nm 12:1-2), Ruth (cf Rt 1:16-17; 4:13-22; Mt 1:5b), Rahab (cf Jos 6:22-23; Mt 1:5a) and Bathsheba (cf 2 Sm 11:3, 26-27; 12:24-25; cf. Mt 1:6b) are sufficient examples to warrant such a line of thought. Therefore, through intermarriage, foreigners, aliens, or people from other nations could become part of 'Yahweh's people' when they denounced their foreign gods and embraced Yahweh, the God of Israel as their God (cf Ezr 6:21).

#### 4.4.2.6 Sacrificial offering

Yahweh is reported to have made a provision for aliens, sojourners, or foreigners who were living among the Israelites to offer sacrifices to him if they wished to do so (cf Nm 15:13-16<sup>133</sup>; Lv 22:17-20, 25). The law prescribing the offering of various sacrifices to Yahweh was to be the same for the Israelites and foreigners or aliens. No one was to be discriminated

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<sup>133</sup> <sup>13</sup> 'All who are native shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD. <sup>14</sup> 'If an alien sojourns with you, or one who may be among you throughout your generations, and he *wishes to* make an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD, just as you do so he shall do. <sup>15</sup> 'As *for* the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns *with you*, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the LORD. <sup>16</sup> 'There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you.'"

against on the basis of his race or nationality. However, both the Israelites and the aliens were prohibited from offering a defective animal to Yahweh. Since sacrificial offering was a significant aspect of Israel's religious relationship with Yahweh, the inclusion of foreigners in this cultic activity suggests the recognition of foreigners as part of Yahweh's people together with the native born Israelites.

#### 4.4.2.7 Cities of refuge

The Israelites were instructed to set up six cities of refuge where a person who committed unintentional murder could run into and take refuge (cf Nm 35:14-15). Yahweh had instructed that aliens and foreigners who committed unintentional murder could also take refuge in these cities just like a native Israelite.<sup>134</sup>

Furthermore, another provision was made by Yahweh to forgive unintentional community sins including those of the aliens and foreigners (cf Nm 15:26, 29). Moses is reported to have instructed the Israelites, including foreigners, to offer sacrifices to Yahweh for the unintentional sins the community might have committed. Accordingly, Yahweh shall forgive both the native-born Israelites and aliens/foreigners who had offered sacrifices for their unintentional sins.

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<sup>134</sup> <sup>14</sup> 'You shall give three cities across the Jordan and three cities in the land of Canaan; they are to be cities of refuge.<sup>15</sup> 'These six cities shall be for refuge for the sons of Israel, and for the alien and for the sojourner among them; that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.'



The above command also emphasizes that the same law applied to everyone who sinned unintentionally whether he/she was a native-born Israelite or an alien. Yahweh took the safety of both the native-born Israelites and foreigners/aliens seriously. This implicitly suggests that foreigners as well as the native-born Israelites were equally important in the sight of Yahweh. Therefore, foreigners were incorporated into the religious and social life of the Israelites through the appropriate covenant requirements because ultimately all of them who embraced Yahweh became part of 'Yahweh's people'.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

In summation, it is obvious that there are certain provisions in both the Abrahamic and in the Mosaic covenants which indicate that Yahweh embraces the native-born Israelites together with other nations, aliens or foreigners as his own people. Other nations could embrace Yahweh as their God and therefore, could associate with the Israelites in religious and social life as part of 'Yahweh's people'. The Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants provided a framework for this inclusion. These covenants' framework 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 covenant provisions for other nations (including Israel) to become part of 'Yahweh's people' support the argument in this chapter that both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants contained not only an exclusive viewpoint concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations; but also the above covenants provided an inclusive perspective concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and concerning other nations, foreigners and aliens. Accordingly, all other nations, foreigners and aliens who embrace Yahweh, the God of Israel as their God could become part of 'Yahweh's people' together with the native-born Israelites. The events from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah will therefore be examined in chapter five. This inclusive perspective of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants concerning the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and concerning other nations, foreigners or aliens will be borne in mind.

**4.6 EXCURSUS:** Terms: • ~[ ; (people);  
• hA'hY> ~[ (people of Yahweh) ; ; and  
• yMi [ ; (my people)

- ~[ ; : This term has been used more than 1,950 times in the Old Testament (cf Lipinski 2001:164). The term has also appeared in certain Semitic languages and ethnic groups such as the Amorites, Mesopotamians, Phoenicians, Punic, Ammonites, Moabites, North and South Arabic languages, and in the Aramaic language (cf Lipinski 2001:166-170). The term has several meanings in the Old Testament contexts. It could mean kinsman, fellow-tribesman, relative, tribe, nation, people, and persons (cf Fohrer 1973:205).

- When the term ~[ ; is combined with the word #r<a' (h' it could be understood as citizens with full rights or heathen nations. The term was used to refer to the Israelites during the monarchical period (cf 2 Ki 14:21; 23:30). But after the Babylonian exile, the term #r<a' (h' ~[ ; was used to describe those who had remained in Judah during the exile and had intermarried with other inhabitants of the surrounding regions (cf 2 Ki 24:14; Ezr 9:1-2, 11; 10:2, 11; Neh 10:29, 31-32; 13:23; ).

Blenkinsopp (1989:108) explained that the term ‘peoples of the land’ used through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah refers to the inhabitants of either Judah or its neighboring provinces such as Samaria and Idumea et cetera. These people were not part of the returned exiles and were therefore by definition religiously suspect. According to Lipinski (2001:176-177), the term was also applied in this same period to the Samaritans (cf Ezr 4:4) and to the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine (cf Ezr 3:3; 9:1; Neh 9:30).

In the West Semitic languages, the word ~[ ; may refer both to individual and collective persons (cf Lipinski 2001:169-170). In the individual sense, in modern Arabic language, it may refer to an ancestor, a great grand father, a paternal uncle, or a father-in-law. Collectively, the word could mean a clan, a group of people, a multitude, or a religious assembly. Thus, the Old Testament appears to appropriate these various meanings in its literary account.

Brown, Driver and Briggs (1999:769) describe its various meanings to include: kinsman (on father's side), ancestor, and father's kinsmen. Certain passages where the term is used in relation to other terms have also been listed to include: Gn 25:8 wyM' [ ; -la, @sea'YEW: (of joining kinsmen in sheol); Gn 17:4 h'yM, [ ; me vp, N<h; ht'r>k.nIw> (severed from living kinsmen); Ex 31:14 h'yM, [ ; br, Q, mi, cf 30:33; 30:38; Lv 17:9; 21:14 hV'ai xQ; yI wyM' [ ; me; 2 Ki 4:13 yMi [ ; -!B, (son of my kinsman).

- hA'hy> ~[ ; : A combination of ~[ ; /yMi [ ; with hA'hy> in the Old Testament usually occurs in the context of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. For example, Yahweh is reported to have made a covenant promise that ~T, Pa;w> ~yhi\_l{ale( ~k, Pl' ytiyyIih'w> ~k, êk. AtâB. `yTik.L;h;t.hiw> ~[ '(l. yliî-Wyh.Ti (I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people Lv 26:12; cf Ex 6:7; Dt 26:17-18; 29:12-13; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezk 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zech 8:8). Lipinski (2001:172) argues that the use of ~[ ; /yMi [ ; with hA'hy> in various passages from the Old Testament suggests that Yahweh and Israel would be understood henceforth as a family, blood relative or a newly established kinship relationship (cf 1 Sm 2:24; 2 Sm 1:12; 6:21; 2 Ki 9:6). There are also other phrases that describe a similar relationship between Yahweh and Israel. For example, \$m' [ ; 'your people' (cf Hab 3:13; Ps 3:8-9; 79:13) and AMâ [ ; 'his people' (cf Ps 29:11; 78:71). But the expression hA'hy> ~[ ; in Judges 5:11, 13 refers to the 'army of Yahweh'. This is a unique expression from the covenant meaning discussed previously. Meanwhile, the cultic and religious gathering of Yahweh's faithful is also frequently regarded as the hw"hy> ~[ ; û 'people of Yahweh' (cf Nm 11:29) and ~yhi\_l{a/h' ~[ ; ä the "people of God" (cf Jgs 20:2). The sense that the term hA'hy> ~[ ; ('people of Yahweh' or 'Yahweh's people') has been used in this research is in the context of Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel including other nations and peoples who embrace Yahweh as their God.

## CHAPTER 5

### PERSPECTIVES ON ‘YAHWEH’S PEOPLE’ IN EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will discuss two contesting theological perspectives in Ezra and Nehemiah. The contestation concerns the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ as well as other nations, foreigners or aliens during the early post-exilic period (539-350 BC). I will describe the issues that show evidence of the tension in Ezra and Nehemiah. These matters include the reconstruction of structural projects (such as altar, temple, and wall), as well as, religious, social, and cultural reforms conducted by Ezra, Nehemiah and the Judean returned exiles during this period.

A close reading of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah builds the impression that there are exclusive and inclusive theological viewpoints in the books. These concern the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ and ‘other nations’, ‘foreigners’ or ‘non-exiles’ (cf Ezr 2:59-63; 4:1-3; 9:1-5; Neh 2:20; 10:28-39; 13:1-9, 15-29).

Farisani (2003:35) confirms this when he argues:

“When one reads Ezra-Nehemiah, one immediately detects a contestation between the returned exiles and the *am haaretz*. By the returned exiles here we are referring to all the Jews who were taken into exile by the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., and returned back home with the assistance of the Persian King Cyrus in 539 B.C. The *am haaretz* are those Jews who did not go into Babylonian exile but stayed in Palestine”.

On the one hand, a close reading of Ezra and Nehemiah reveals that there is an 'exclusive' theological perspective in the books.<sup>135</sup> This group looks at non-exiles and the peoples of the land (*am ha' arets*) as 'foreigners' or aliens; and primarily as people who did not belong to Yahweh.<sup>136</sup> Some of the returned Judean exiles who adhered to this exclusive theological viewpoint regarded other people as a threat to the religious, political, economic, social life, and progress of the new community.

As a matter of fact, one of the factors that prompted this suspicion against other people was the underlying assumption that the returned Judean exiles were exclusively 'Yahweh's people', while others were not (cf Ezr 4:1-3; 9:1-2; Neh 2:20; 9:1-3; 13:1-3). Accordingly, the rest of the non-exiles and other peoples of the land were treated as those who did not belong to Yahweh and were therefore foreigners to this region (cf Boccaccini 2002:82-83). This exclusive theological position also appears to be held by some of the leading religious and political figures during the early post-exilic period. These leading figures included Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and some of their associates. The feeling is that the far reaching religious, social, and cultural reforms narrated in Ezra and Nehemiah were motivated or driven largely by

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<sup>135</sup> It appears from Ezr 2:59-62; 4:1-3; 9:1-2; Neh 2:19-20; 7:61-65; 9:1-2; 13:1-9, 23-28 that several groups of people were considered as foreigners based upon the suspicion held by some of the returning exiles that such people were biologically, geographically, or religiously different from them. Because of this suspicion, non-exiles were seen as outsiders rather than members of the Judean/Israelite community. In other words, since non-exiles were suspected to have originated from elsewhere rather than from the newly returned Judean community, they were excluded from certain religious and communal assemblies of the newly returned Jewish community (cf Van Wyk & Breytenbach 2001:1256; Smith 1996:555-556).

<sup>136</sup> See *Excursus* on the terms associated with the *golah* community as the 'people of Yahweh' in chapter 5.4.

those who adhered to this exclusive theological position concerning other nations, foreigners, or other peoples of the land (*am ha' arets*).

On the other hand, there is an inclusive theological perspective in Ezra and Nehemiah that views other nations, foreigners and non-exiles, who were living in and around Judah during and after the exile, with sympathy and appreciation (cf Ezr 1:1-3; 3:7; 4:2; 6:13-14; 10:15; Neh 2:8-9). Those who adhered to this inclusive theological viewpoint considered the alleged foreigners as partners, friends, and human beings whom Yahweh could use to achieve his holy plans and purposes. To a larger extent, the adherents of this position appear to have been more open to foreigners than those who subscribed to the exclusive viewpoint.

This inclusive theological perspective does not necessarily see every foreigner as a threat to the Jewish/Israelites' identity and relationship with Yahweh. The view perceived others as legitimate human beings who could ally with Israel in religious matters as well as social and communal life. It also incorporated every human being who embraced Yahweh, the God of Israel, as his/her God, as part of 'Yahweh's people'. This inclusive theological standpoint was held by a few individuals among the returned exiles and some of the non-exiles as well as certain foreigners/other people who were living in and around Judah during and after the exile (cf Ezr 3:7; 4:2; 6:8-9, 13, 21; 7:21-23; 8:36; 9:1-2; 10:15 ).

Therefore, in what follows, this investigation will expose and describe the two contesting theological perspectives. The concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’, in my judgment, underlies the contestation between these exclusive and inclusive theological standpoints, as might be shown from the proceeding discussions.

## **5. 2 EZRA NARRATIVE**

There are several matters in the Ezra narrative that have exposed the contestation between the exclusive and inclusive theological perspectives on the conception of ‘Yahweh’s people’ and other nations, foreigners, or non-exiles. The issues include the reconstruction of structural projects (cf king Cyrus’ orders - Ezc 1:1-11, altar - Ezc 3:1-6 and temple - Ezc 3:7-6:22), religious, and social reforms (cf Ezc 6:19-22; 9:1-10:44) conducted by Ezra and the leaders of the returned exiles, including their associates. The examination of the Ezra narrative will focus on the conception of ‘Yahweh’s people’ and other nations or foreigners by the two opposing theological viewpoints. These opposing theological perspectives are evidenced in the following subject matters.

### **5.2.1 Structural projects**

#### **5. 2.1.1 King Cyrus’ orders**

A narrative from the book of Ezra identified an outstanding foreigner, king Cyrus, as Yahweh’s instrument (cf Ezc 1:1-11; Is 41:2, 25; 44:28-45:1, 13; Jer 25:11-12; 29:10; 51:9-11). This sympathetic report about a foreigner or a non-exilic person portrayed an inclusive theological viewpoint. For example, king

Cyrus' work is reported to have been completely driven by divine conviction from the heart.<sup>137</sup> Cyrus appeared to do nothing except that which fulfilled Yahweh's promise through the prophet Jeremiah (cf Ezr 1:1; Jer 25:11-12; 27:22; 29:10; 51:1-12). A foreign king was unlikely to obtain the knowledge of Yahweh. He could not access Yahweh's prophetic promises. But in this passage, the king is reported to have been in full compliance with Yahweh's prophetic promises concerning Israel. From the inclusive point of view, it is possible for a foreigner to be used by Yahweh to accomplish his divine purposes.

But this portrayal of a foreign king claiming to have received a special commission from Yahweh to release his people and to rebuild his temple in Jerusalem raises a concern. The concern is about the authenticity of the content of this decree (cf Ezr1:1-4).

According to some scholars (cf Bright 2000:362, Throntveit 1992:14, Breneman 1993:67 and Klein 1999:678), it is evident from an inscription found on the Cyrus Cylinder that king Cyrus had a political motive for freeing the captives. The king believed, that, if the captives could be given a certain level of religious and socio-political autonomy, they would be more loyal to his administration (cf also Albertz 2003:116). In view of this, it is argued that Cyrus freed all the captives. Not only were those from Judah set free, but also those from other nations. Furthermore, the Cyrus Cylinder also names

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<sup>137</sup> The place where knowledge, wisdom, love and rationality dwells, according to the Hebrew wisdom literature (cf Pr 3:1, 5; 4:21, 23; 6:21; 7:3; 10:8; 22:17-18; 23:15).



*Marduk* as the god who appointed Cyrus as king. It was not Yahweh, as presupposed by Ezra 1:1-4 (cf Blenkinsopp 1989:75; Clines 1984:34-37).

Concerning the authenticity of the content of this decree, it has also been suggested that (cf Williamson 1985:9-10) the biblical writer or editor was not only concerned with facts of history but most of all with the divine ordering and theological interpretation of the facts of history. From a theological perspective, Cyrus' actions were done in order to fulfil the word of prophet Jeremiah (cf Jer 25:11-12; 27:22; 29:10; 51:1-12). Consequently, Yahweh's sole purpose for raising Cyrus was to destroy Babylon and to assure that the temple might be built in Jerusalem and that the exiles might return. Cyrus, from the author(s)/editor(s) viewpoint, was subservient to Yahweh's purposes for his exiled people.

There is also support for a theory that the content of this decree of Cyrus, as reflected in Ezra 1:1-4, is not authentic (cf Grabbe (1998b:128). Several factors have been cited to support this viewpoint (cf Albertz 2003:121). First, the theological colouring of the text suggests that Cyrus' edict must have been edited to suit the ideology or theological predisposition of the writer(s)/editor(s) of Ezra. Second, there is no convincing parallel to the decree of Cyrus as reflected in the book of Ezra. All the known decrees of Cyrus differ significantly from the one in Ezra. Third, the fact that the decree is written in Hebrew creates suspicion that it must have been an insertion or

invention of another writer since it is unlikely for Cyrus to have written a decree in the Hebrew language.<sup>138</sup>

It could, however, be argued that whatever motive Cyrus might have possessed in his mind or whoever may have influenced him to release the exiles from Babylon, the author(s)/editor(s) reported that he was influenced by Yahweh, the God of Israel from the heart (cf Ezr 1:2). Therefore, the testimony of the author(s)/editor(s) of the book of Ezra 1:1-2 on Cyrus' decree should be given the benefit of the doubt concerning authenticity of this decree. The reasons being the following:

- First, it is a historical fact that some of the exiles had returned to Jerusalem as suggested by this decree.
- Second, the temple was also rebuilt, though, not without some difficulty, as indicated by the same decree.
- Third, the reconstruction of the city and its walls took place without any stiff resistance from the Persian administration (except for the Trans-Euphrates regional government – Ezr 4:1-24; 6:13-14; Neh 4:1-23; 6:1-19).

Therefore, the above enumerated successes suggest that there was a general positive predisposition from the Persian government towards the

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<sup>138</sup> Previously, Hamrick (1970:433) reasoned that the Persian government was most likely in consultation with the leaders of the Jewish exiles about their return to Judah. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that this edict reflected a Jewish flavour. It is also possible that the author(s) of Ezra may have retouched the document. But it should be born in mind that the Persian king was also concerned with the welfare of the Jewish people as evidenced in one of the Cyrus Cylinders.

Jewish exiles as presupposed by this decree of Cyrus (Ezr 1:2-4). Consequently, it is likely that there was an attitude of cooperation between the Persian government and the leaders of the Jewish exiles. This cooperation provided a platform for the restoration of the temple, city/walls and the religious/social life of the newly returned community. These successes confirm the content of the decrees of Cyrus and that of the subsequent Persian kings to be essentially true.

Ezra 1:2 reports that Cyrus had acquired his authority from Yahweh, the God of heaven to rule the kingdoms of the earth and specifically to build a temple for him in Jerusalem in the territory of Judah. The narrative portrays Cyrus as resembling king Solomon (cf 1 Ki 5:4-6). Both of them had a common obligation from Yahweh, namely, the building of Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem. Both of them were renowned kings. They both recognized that Yahweh was responsible for giving them the political and religious mandate to rule and to build the temple. Ezra 1:1-4, therefore, is narrated from the inclusive theological standpoint. Since both their tasks are a mandate from Yahweh, no other person could successfully oppose or obstruct Yahweh's authoritative mandate. Thus, the tone is set for Yahweh's plan to take its course in the book of Ezra.

The description of events moves from verbal proclamation to actualization (cf Ezr 1:3-11). King Cyrus permitted the Jewish exiles to leave and rebuild the temple and urged that everyone (irrespective of their racial, ethnic, or

linguistic differences) should contribute to Yahweh's project (cf Ezr 1:2-6). Does this order imply that the exiles, exclusively, should rebuild the temple without involving other people who were living in and around Judah? This question is addressed in the section that deals with the reconstruction of the temple (cf 5.2.1.3).

Meanwhile, Cyrus also reverses the action of his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. He removed all the temple articles (of the house of Yahweh), from the Babylonian temple. Cyrus handed the articles over to Sheshbazzar<sup>139</sup> the prince of Judah. Every item was counted, so that nothing was diverted to another place (cf Ezr 1:7-11). Then the first group set their feet on their way to Jerusalem (cf Ezr 2:1-70).

#### 5.2.1.2 Work on the altar

There is an allusion to the beginning of the tension between the returned exiles and other people who were living in and around Judah concerning the rebuilding of the altar (cf Ezr 3:1-6; see also Ex 20:24-25; 27:6-7). This narrative plot reflects an exclusive theological perspective. The work of rebuilding the altar begins and continues to the end amidst fears about the 'people of the land' (תְּאֶרְצָא הַיְמֵי אֵלֵינוּ; cf Ezr 3:1-3). The phrase "amidst fears about the people of the land" in verse 3, seems to originate from the exclusive theological standpoint. The allusion to the fear entertained by

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<sup>139</sup> See the discussion on the identity of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel in chapter 2.5.

the returning exiles suggests that some people had been excluded from participating on the work of rebuilding of the altar.

My opinion is that the focus of this pericope (Ezr 3:1-6) is on the success of the reconstruction of the altar. The text also talks about the function of other people who were living in the land where the Jewish exiles had returned and resettled. The passage makes a claim that the people of the land (תְּאֵרֵי הָאֲרָצָה) constituted an object of threat and fear (חֹמֶת אֲבָרָה) for the Jewish exiles during their work on the altar (cf Ezr 3:3).

To my surprise, there is no indication from Ezra 3:1-6 on what these other people of the land might have done. There is no apparent reason for the fear entertained by the Judean exiles. Who are these people of the land? Are they Judean remnants who had stayed behind in Judah during the exile? Unfortunately, the text gives no answer to these questions. However, the people of the land could have been Judah's neighbors such as Edomites and other foreigners mentioned in Ezra 4:9-10 (cf Klein 1999:691; Blenkinsopp 1989:98). Similarly, these people were from Ashdod, Samaria, Ammon, Moab, Edom, peoples of foreign descent (including part Jews) living in Judah, and Jews who had compromised their faith (cf Breneman 1993:91-92).

An altar was rebuilt in the past (cf Jr 41:5) after the destruction of the temple of Solomon. But the altar was destroyed by the returning Jews. Therefore, the

altar which is reported in Ezra 3:2-3 was the third one (cf Fensham 1982:59). The action of destroying the second altar engendered the tension between the peoples of the land and the newly returning Jewish exiles (Fensham 1982:59). This viewpoint lacks any literary or historical support and therefore, is not convincing. The role of the people of the land during the reconstruction of the altar was basically not appreciated. The reason is that *ḥayyē ʾeretz* (the people of the land) constituted an object of fear to those who were reconstructing the altar (cf 1 Esd 5:49-50).

#### 5.2.1.3 Work on the temple

This narrative of Ezra 3:7-6:22 deals with the reconstruction of the temple. The plot appears to be portrayed from an integrated exclusive and inclusive theological perspective. In my opinion, the two theological viewpoints were interwoven together to form a story plot, probably by the final author(s)/editor(s). The text depicts a series of mixed experiences between the newly returned exiles and those who surrounded them concerning the reconstruction of the temple.

On the one hand, the exclusive theological perspective seems to report that the returning Judean exiles commenced work on the rebuilding of the temple, but they encountered opposition from various enemies, individuals, groups, kings, or foreigners (cf Ezr 4:1-24). This opposition led to a delay on reconstructing the temple, for a certain period of time, before the building process was later resumed and completed.

On the other hand, the argument from the inclusive viewpoint is that despite the alleged opposition to the work of rebuilding of the temple, some people from foreign nations contributed positively to the reconstruction of the temple (cf Ezr 3:7; 6:8, 13-14). One example is the people of Tyre and Sidon.

Previously, Ezekiel 28:1-26 had portrayed the people of Tyre and Sidon as notorious idolaters who took pride in their beauty and knowledge; they dealt maliciously with Israel and other nations. Therefore, from the exclusive theological standpoint, there is no reason why the people of Tyre and Sidon could have participated in rebuilding the holy temple of Yahweh. They were foreigners and therefore, unholy seed (cf Ezr 9:2) and potential enemies of the newly returned Jewish community. But most importantly, the people of Tyre and Sidon were not conceived as 'Yahweh's people', according to the exclusive theological standpoint of the newly returned exiles.

However, Ezra 3:7 reports that the people of Sidon and Tyre contributed immensely to this work by supplying logs of wood from Lebanon (cf 1 Ki 5:18; 1 Chr 22:2, 4, 15; 2 Chr 2:8-18). Even the returned exiles welcomed the participation of these alleged foreigners. They provided food, drink and oil for the Tyrians and the Sidonians (cf 3:7b). It is rather unfortunate that when some of these surrounding people (the so-called enemies, cf Ezr 4:1) offered to assist in the same project, their request was turned down (cf Ezr 4:2-3). However, it turned out that the work was later completed at the orders of a foreigner, king Darius (cf Ezr 6:14-15).

There are two questions concerning the rejection of the peoples of the land to assist in the reconstruction of the temple (cf Ezr 4:1-3). First, how did the returnees identify those who offered to assist in the reconstruction work as enemies of the new community? Second, did Cyrus' orders (cf Ezr 1:1-4) specifically exclude other people from offering assistance to the work on the temple?

Ezra 4:1-5 is offered from the exclusive theological point of view. The passage reveals that the people, whose help was rejected, were enemies of the *golah* community. Therefore, they could not be allowed to assist in rebuilding the temple (cf Ezr 4:1). It is difficult to determine just how the returning Judean exiles identified these people as their enemies, prior to what these so-called enemies would do. The narrative, according to my judgement, suggests that the so-called enemies had made a genuine request. They wanted to assist in the reconstruction of the temple. They also provided the reason for their request (cf Ezr 4:2). These people claimed to have worshipped and sacrificed to Yahweh, the God of the returned exiles. This took place long before the exile had ended. I believe that this appeal to Yahweh and to their religious commitment to his cult should have been believed. Yet, the *golah* community did not accept their claim. This rejection has led to a suggestion that:

“the author's identification of the neighbors as the 'adversaries of Judah' (cf Ezr 4:1) may already prejudice the case. [The author] is so passionately in favor of the Golah community as the true Israel that one suspects that he sees every tactic of their neighbors in the worst possible light.



Should not there have been some investigation of the adversaries' claim to have worshipped the God of Israel for more than 150 years?" (Klein 1999:700).

In my opinion, the self introduction of the alleged enemies as people who were brought to the region by Esarhaddon (cf Ezr 4:2) marked them clearly as foreigners even though they may have lived here for more than 150 years.

Blenkinsopp (1989:107) notes that there was a deportation and a relocation of people under the period of Esarhaddon from 681 to 669 BC (cf also Fensham 1982:66; Is 7:8-9; Kidner 1979:49; 2 Ki 17:24). Therefore, it was possible for these people who were labelled as enemies to be Yahweh-worshippers as stated in their claim. There is scriptural indication (cf Jr 41:5) that after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple, a delegation from Samaria came down to the South in order to present offerings at the ruined site of the temple. Cohn-Sherbok (2003:78) also asserts that "after Nebuchadnezzar's invasion worshippers continued to make a pilgrimage to the Temple site. These Jews offered their assistance to Zerubbabel, but he refused since he did not regard them as real Jews: they were of uncertain racial origins and their worship was suspect."

The process by which the exiles perceived this request as non-authentic remains a puzzle. It is probable that the response was considered against the backdrop of the previous incident (cf Ezr 3:3; Klein 1999:694). The exiles had entertained fears of the people of the land during the reconstruction of the

altar. For some reason, the returning exiles rejected the request of their neighbours or alleged foreigners in categorical terms.<sup>140</sup>

Another reason why the leaders of the exiles claimed exclusive right to rebuild the temple was based on the orders of king Cyrus (cf Ezr 1:2-4; 4:3; 5:13, 16-17; 6:3-4). There is no clear indication, from the above texts, that the orders of Cyrus allowed the *golah* community exclusive right to reconstruct the temple without the support of others. If this order was so exclusive, the participation of the Sidonians and the Tyrians (cf Ezr 3:7) should have also been rejected. They also did not belong to the *golah* community. But the fact that the people of Sidon and Tyre were allowed to help with the reconstruction work points to the reality that Cyrus' orders were not as strictly exclusive as the Jewish leaders appeared to portray in this incident (cf Ezr 4:1-3).

Blenkinsopp (1989:107) dismissed the above claim. He argues that the appeal to Cyrus' orders was a smoke screen purposefully designed by the Jewish leaders to conceal the real motive for the rejection of the request. According to him, there were other reasons that might have led to this rejection. First, it was possible that the syncretic religious practice of the petitioners contributed to the rejection of their offer for assistance (cf Hg 2:10-14). Second, a major part of the opposition toward the restoration of the Judean state and its religious and political structures came from this

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<sup>140</sup> "But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel said to them, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us" (Ezr 4:3 NASB).

surrounding region. This gives the impression that both the offer to assist and its rejection were motivated by political factors (cf Fensham 1982:67). If the Jewish leaders had accepted the offer to share the labour, the petitioners would have obtained a measure of administrative control over the temple and its services.

Grabbe (2000b:406) questioned the authenticity of Cyrus' order. He reasoned that the order had been reworked by the editor(s) of Ezra to such an extent that it cannot be trusted to have been authentic as depicted in the book of Ezra. The reworking seems to be ideological. He also, argues that the editor(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah portray the population of the land of Judah as if there were no Jews left behind during the deportation. He, therefore, insists that a substantial number of people still remained in the land after the deportation. These had taken over the farms and important areas. As a result, it was to be expected that a conflict would ensue over several subject matters between the Jews who stayed in the land during the exile and those who returned from the Babylonian exile (cf Washington 2003:429-430; Ezk 8:1-18; 11:14-21; 33:23-29). Therefore, the tension between the people of the land and the *golah* community concerning the rebuilding of the altar, temple, city walls, and the issues of intermarriage should be understood at the backdrop of this anticipated conflict.

The following unfolding events appear to support Grabbe's (2000b:406) conclusion. The people of the land<sup>141</sup>, after the rejection of their request, unfortunately reverted to a series of embarrassing political and social disturbances. These included threats, frustration, discouragement and opposition toward the reconstruction of the temple. In addition, they used political strategies that succeeded in halting the project for a period of time.<sup>142</sup>

Ezra 4:3-24 depicts an exclusive theological standpoint; hence, non-exiles or foreigners are portrayed in the narrative plot from the darkest possible manner as enemies to the cause of Yahweh and his people.

On the contrary, from an inclusive theological perspective, it is pointed out that the work was later resumed and completed not only through Yahweh's initiative, but also at the orders of a foreign king (cf Ezr 6:1-22). From the exclusive theological standpoint, there was no partnership between foreigners (including their kings) and the returned Jewish exiles (cf Ezr 3:3; 4:3). Nevertheless, Ezra 6:13-15 portrays a different point of view. This narrative

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<sup>141</sup> "The people around them". This is one way of characterizing those who were excluded from the *golah* community. Some of these people were identified by names such as Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, Rehum, Shimshai (Ezr 4:7-9, 17, 23), Tattenai-governor of Trans-Euphrates and Shethar-Bozenai (Ezr 5:3, 6; 6:6, 13). Klein (1999:695) explains that during the post-exilic period particularly in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the term 'people around them' refers to those who have not gone to exile, those who were not considered to be Jews, and those who were not full members of the *golah* (exile) community.

<sup>142</sup> On the contrary, Hg 1:2 indicates that the work on the house of Yahweh was stopped by the initiative of the *golah* community. There is no indication in the book of Haggai to show that the work had been stopped by the peoples of the land who were opposed to it.

reveals that the work had succeeded as a result of Yahweh's command, but also as a result of the decrees of foreign kings.<sup>143</sup>

From an inclusive theological viewpoint, Yahweh, the God of Israel, uses other people who might be considered by the *golah* community as unholy to accomplish Yahweh's holy purposes. However, from the exclusive theological perspective, this text, Ezra 6: 13-15, portrays an absurd report because foreigners are alleged to have contributed positively to the success of Yahweh's programme.

In the preceding section, I have examined various issues concerning the reconstruction of structural projects. The projects included king Cyrus' order (Ezr 1:1-11), altar (Ezr 3:1-6) and temple (Ezr 3:7-6:22). I have argued that these subjects reveal the tension between the exclusive and inclusive perspectives. The *golah* community is depicted in the construction of the projects as 'Yahweh's people'. The peoples of the land are excluded from the so-called 'Yahweh's people group'. But the peoples of the land also made some attempts to be recognized as 'Yahweh's people'. This continued until the end of the above named projects.

In the following, I will examine the religious, social, and cultural reforms of Ezra and his associates. The discussion will reveal how the tension between the inclusive and exclusive theological positions continued to the end of the

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<sup>143</sup> These include kings Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes (cf Ezr 6:14-15). The kings performed as a result of Yahweh's initiative.

book. It will also reveal how the concept of ‘Yahweh’s people’ lay behind this contestation.

## **5.2.2 Religious, social and cultural reforms**

### 5.2.2.1 Celebration of the Passover

This narrative of Ezra 6:19-22 provides an allusion to the subject of foreigners who celebrated the Passover festival with the *golah* community. The plot portrays an inclusive theological stance on the Passover celebration. The sense of the passage suggests that the returned exiles celebrated their Passover not only with their corporate Israelite returnees, but also with other gentiles, who had separated themselves from the practices of their gentile neighbours (cf Ezr 6:21<sup>144</sup>; Williamson 1985:85; Klein 1999:713).

Breneman (1993:121) and Keil and Delitzsch (1975b:92) assert that these people who separated themselves from the practices of their gentile neighbours were Jews who had remained in the land during the exile (cf also Throntveit 1992:36; Batten 1972:153). However, Klein (1999:713) and Williamson (1985:85) objected to that viewpoint by insisting that the people were gentiles rather than Jews (cf also Blenkinsopp 1989:132-133; Myers 1965:54). Klein (1999:713) cites two passages from the Pentateuch (cf Ex 12:43-49 & Nm 9:14) to support his viewpoint that foreigners were allowed to participate in the Passover if they were circumcised.

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<sup>144</sup> Ezr 6:21 “And the sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to *join* them, to seek the LORD God of Israel, at *the Passover*.”

Similarly, Kidner (1979:60) had previously argued that this verse is an important one purportedly written in order to correct the impression from Ezra 4:1-3 that the returned Jewish community was an exclusive party. This exclusivist impression persists in other incidents though, but in this particular passage, those who converted to Yahweh-cult, found an open door in Israel as for example, Rahab and Ruth had done. Therefore, it is most probable that the people who celebrated the Passover together with the exiles may have been foreigners or gentiles who had separated themselves from their gentile practices.

Clines (1984:97) takes an integrated position by arguing that the phrase “all those who separated themselves from the uncleanness of their gentile neighbours”(cf Ezr 6:21) refers to both the Jews who had not gone into exile as well as the gentiles who had sought and embraced Yahweh the God of Israel.

My viewpoint is that Ezra 6:21 presents an inclusive theological viewpoint concerning the celebration of the Passover. The above phrase is likely to refer not only to the Jews who remained in the land but also to non-Jews who had separated themselves from their gentile practices in order to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel. By implication, the text makes a distinction on the one side, between gentiles or foreigners who may relate with the *golah* community in religious matters and, on the other side those who may not. The

passage seems to emphasize the separation from gentile practices and the seeking of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

The celebration of the Passover was permissible to other nations, aliens or foreigners, who were circumcised (cf Ex 12:17-20, 48-49; Nm 9:14). This criterion was part of the fundamentals in becoming a covenant member and for inclusion in the Passover celebration. Therefore, it is most likely that this criterion was not abandoned after the exile; rather, it was emphasized and applied to this incident in order to highlight the continuity of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants for this post-exilic community. The two covenants are portrayed as part of the basis on which religious, political and social reforms of both Ezra and Nehemiah were conducted (cf Ezr 9:11-14; Neh 1:5-10; 9: 7-8).

But the question is: will the above criterion stand the test of time in the new community or will it be sidelined as new religious leaders emerge and re-interpret the Torah of Moses? This question should be kept in mind as we continue to examine subsequent narrative plots.

#### 5.2.2.2 Marriage reforms

From Ezra 7:1 to the end of the book, the narrative introduces Ezra, the priest and scribe. He seems to function as the leading figure in the matters that have been described in the subsequent narrative plots. Ezra is armed with orders from a foreign king Artaxerxes to execute religious reforms and in addition, to carry out other executive functions (cf Ezr 7:1-10:44).



The story continues with Ezra delivering the contributions to the temple as well as the orders from the king to the governors and leaders of Trans-Euphrates (cf Ezr 8:24-36). The local leaders were directed by the foreign king, as reflected in the orders, to provide assistance to Ezra's mission. The function of the assumed enemies is reversed by the orders of this foreign king. Instead of being an instrument of threat and confusion, the orders from Artaxerxes mandated the leaders of Trans-Euphrates to assist in the success of Ezra's mission in whatever way possible. In Ezra 4:1-24, the peoples of the land had offered to assist in the reconstruction of the temple but their offer was rejected. Thus, the rest of that chapter describes how these alleged foreigners frustrated the work and brought it to a standstill.

But now, the orders of the foreign king helped to change the position of the *golah* community; thus, they accepted the contribution from the leaders of the Trans-Euphrates (cf Ezr 8:36). This was what the peoples of the land had already offered to do earlier but their offer to assist in the reconstruction of the temple had been rejected by the returnees (cf Ezr 4:1-3). Now, the support of the peoples of the land is mandated by the orders from a foreign king and surprisingly, their support is welcomed by the leaders of the *golah* community. Would Ezra take a moderate view and policy toward the peoples of the land or would he side with adherents of the exclusive perspective (cf Ezr 4:2-3)? The issue of intermarriage unveils how Ezra responded to the matters relating to foreigners, aliens, peoples of the land, and other nations.

The story plot of Ezra 9:1-10:44 is recounted from an exclusive theological perspective. Part of the story, especially Ezra 9:1-15, is a first person narrative, probably by Ezra himself. The remaining part, mainly Ezra 10:1-44, is narrated by another person (author(s)/editor(s)).

As Ezra faces his mission, he does not waste much time in making it known that he had encountered a serious fundamental religious wrongdoing among the alleged 'holy race'. This wrongdoing is intermarriage (cf Ezr 9:1-2<sup>145</sup>). Ezra spends a substantial part of his time handling this fundamental religious and social anomaly (cf Ezr 9:3-10:44). He clearly stated the problem:

- The people of Israel have joined the peoples of the land in their abominations; and
- That they have also mingled the 'holy seed' with the peoples of the land by intermarrying with them (cf Ezr 9:1-2).

The identity of the peoples of the land has already been discussed previously<sup>146</sup> but a distinction is made in Ezra 9:1-2, to classify the two groups of people who are involved in the alleged problem. Therefore, it is worth discussing the question of identity once again in order to clarify and conceptualize the nature of the problem in the narrative plot.

It is evident from Ezra 9:1-2 that the people who are labelled "the peoples of the land" are not Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites,

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<sup>145</sup> Ezr 9:2 says:  $\tau A c r ' a ] h ' y M e [ ; B . v d , Q o h ; [ r ; z < W b r > [ ' t . h i$  (i.e. They have mortgaged the holy seed with the people of the land).

<sup>146</sup> See the section on the reconstruction of the altar in chapter 5.2.1.2.

Moabites, Egyptians, or Amorites (cf Breneman 1993:148). The accusation clearly reveals that the people in question have similar practices to those of the other nations listed from above. Therefore I support the viewpoint that the peoples of the land are not one of these above mentioned Canaanite tribes.

The peoples of the land (Ezr 9:1-2) are those who had not gone into exile and who had not been fully absorbed into the *golah* community (Klein 1999:733). At the time of Ezra, the Canaanite tribes that have been listed in Ezra 9:1 did not exist anymore (Clines 1984:119). The peoples of the land in this incident are non-Jewish or partly-Jewish descendants of the Moabites and the Edomites who were living in and around Judah during and after the exile (Clines 1984:119; Blenkinsopp 1989:175). Accordingly, the editor(s)/author(s) of this narrative brought a list of heathen nations together probably from Genesis 15:19-21; Exodus 3:8, 17; 33:2; 34:11; Nehemiah 9:8 and Deuteronomy 7:1-6 et cetera, in order to indicate that there is prohibition of intermarriage with heathen nations in the *torah*.

The reason why the prohibition of intermarriage was applied to this situation is doubtful because the Law did not prohibit intermarriage between the Israelites and the Edomites or the Egyptians (Clines 1984:119; cf Dt 23:7). Therefore, it is assumed that Ezra and his associates might have re-interpreted the deuteronomic law (cf Dt 7:3-4) and re-applied it to the new situation to support the current religious and social exclusive reforms (Clines 1984:119).

The above assumption also finds support from a research conducted by Eskenazi and Judd (1994:266-285) on the sociological and theological classification of the strange women in Ezra 9-10. Their findings suggested that these women, classified as strangers, were not really strangers as the editor(s)/author(s) may have presupposed. The women may have been Judahites or Israelites who had never gone into either the Assyrian or the Babylonian exile (cf Grabbe 2000a:15). Thus, it may have happened that the early Jewish returnees saw these women 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 people because they were not. Rather, the notion of redefining the identity of true Israelites during the early post-exilic period appears to have made these women to be considered or labelled as foreigners (cf Grabbe 1998b:138).

On hearing this charge against the returning exiles (Ezr 9:1-2), Ezra breaks into tears, rends his clothing, and pulls out his hair and sits down for the whole day (cf Ezr 9:3). Everyone who trembled at this incident joined Ezra in his self-abasement (9:4). Ezra confessed Israel's sin later in the evening (cf Ezr 9:5-10:4). He made the case very obvious: intermarriage between these returned exiles and other peoples of the land constituted a serious breach of Yahweh's covenant laws. First, the holy race is mingled (cf Ezr 9:3). Second, intermarriage is viewed as an act of making a covenant with the people of the land (cf Ezr 9:11-12). Third, intermarriage also means that the *golah* community was being unfaithful to Yahweh and to his covenant (cf Ezr 10:2).

How could this great religious and social transgression be remedied? The next pericope provides a solution from an exclusive theological standpoint.

The narrative (Ezr 10:3) makes it obvious that the only alternative solution to the above problem was the renewal of the covenant. The covenant between Yahweh and the *golah* community or the holy race (seed) must be renewed. During such a ceremony, every person who had married a foreign woman was required to divorce that woman together with her children. That meant total or absolute separation from foreigners. Most people accepted the plan to divorce the so-called foreign women (Ezr 10:10-15). Only a handful of people did not accept the proposal (cf Keil & Delitzsch 1975b:131). It is argued that the four people mentioned in Ezra 10:15 took a more rigid and exclusive approach than the divorce proposal (Klein 1999:742-743; Williamson 1985:156-157). On the contrary, Keil & Delitzsch (1975b:131) assert that the four people actually opposed the divorce proposal. These were more sympathetic towards the alleged foreigners than the majority of the returnees who accepted the divorce proposal.

The fact that the stance of the four men is not explained in this passage may suggest that they had taken an opposite view concerning the decision to divorce the alleged foreign women (cf Allen 2003: 80). It is most likely that the whole community may have prevailed over the four men. Thus, since the majority is expected to carry the vote, the divorce proceedings were carried out on the insistence of the majority. Finally, those who rejected the above

divorce proceedings were ignored (cf Ezr 10:15; see Van Wyk & Breytenbach 2001:1256). As a consequence, the process of divorce took its toll upon the alleged foreign women and their children (cf Ezr 10:18-44).

In view of the divorce proceedings, the question may be asked: which book of the Law did Ezra use as his basis for this painful divorce solution? Did Ezra derive the law prohibiting intermarriage from Deuteronomy 7:3<sup>147</sup>? Grabbe (1998b:146-147) explained that the book of the Law (or Moses) referred to in several passages by Ezra and Nehemiah may have been the complete Pentateuch (cf also Graham 1998:206). This does not mean that the Law book was the final copy as we have it in the canon today. It only means Ezra had all five books of the Pentateuch in his Law book. Grabbe (1998b:146-147) also noted that Ezra and Nehemiah contain several passages that have been derived from all the five books of the Pentateuch.<sup>148</sup>

If Deuteronomy 7:3 was Ezra's basis, it looks to me as if the author(s)/editor(s) of Ezra re-interpreted this passage in a peculiar way in order to support Ezra's exclusive religious and social reforms (cf Blenkinsopp 1988:200-201). It is evident from the context of Deuteronomy 7:3 that idolatry was the focus of the prohibition. Nowhere in the Pentateuch do we find an explicit rejection of intermarriage without the worship of foreign gods as the

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<sup>147</sup> Dt 7:3 "Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons."

<sup>148</sup> See a detail discussion on the book of Moses/Law in chapter 2.6.

main reason for that prohibition (cf also Breneman 1993:149; Williamson 1985:130-131).

It is a further question of how Ezra would interpret other biblical passages<sup>149</sup> that clearly contained cases of intermarriage between the Israelites and other people or foreigners. The above mentioned passages indicate that foreigners who embrace Yahweh, the God of Israel, could intermarry legitimately with the people of Israel. Ezra referred to Moses' law as the basis on which his divorce proceedings were sustained. But Moses is reported to have married an African woman<sup>150</sup> (cf Nm 12:1-3). Therefore, a conclusion could be made that Ezra re-interpreted the deuteronomic passage or a related law to support his exclusive religious and social reforms.

However, it is a fact that Ezra's decision on intermarriage was unacceptable to some other people (cf Ezr 10:15<sup>151</sup>). The passage provides a hint of this opposition but fails to tell what really happened to those who opposed Ezra's divorce proposal. Were these opponents excluded from Israel together with their families or were they allowed to remain among the supposed 'holy race'?

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<sup>149</sup> See e.g. the cases of Tamar in Gn 38:6-30, cf. Mt 1:3; Ruth in Rt 1:16-17; 4:13-22, cf. Mt 1:5b; Rahab in Jos 6:22-23, cf. Mt 1:5a and Bathsheba in 2 Sm 11:3, 26-27; 12:24-25, cf. Mt 1:6b et cetera.

<sup>150</sup> Moses' wife is reported to be a Cushite woman. The word *Cush* is used in many instances to refer to the black race or Africa (cf Adamo 2001:11-15; Olson 1996:70-71). According to Adamo, Ethiopia is mostly identified with Cush in biblical stories (cf Gn 2:13; 2 Ki 19:9; Is 11:11; 20:3-5; 43:3; 45:14; Ezk 30:4-5; 38:5; Nah 3:9). He (2001:15) therefore argues convincingly that Moses' wife was from Cush or Africa and not from Arabia or elsewhere as presupposed by others (cf Davies 1995:118-119; Budd 1984:136; Baldwin s.a: 349).

<sup>151</sup> Ezr 10:15 "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, with Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supporting them."

(seed)? It is not known, but the probability is that the latter option was carried out.

Eskenazi and Judd (1994:285) already indicated from their sociological studies that these women were unjustly excluded from the *golah* community by the reforms of Ezra. There are several important points which could be deducted from Eskenazi and Judd's research findings:

- First, it can hardly be proven from the text of Ezra 9-10 that these women who were expelled from the *golah* community were foreigners like Ammonites or Canaanites as Ezra's reforms appeared to have presupposed.
- Second, these women were not members of the returned exiles; rather, they were in the land during and after the exile. Thus, part of the reasons they were identified as 'peoples of the land' was that they had remained in the land during the exile.
- Third, the fact that Ezra and his associates attempted to redefine the concept of 'Yahweh's people' exclusively as the *golah* community, inevitably rendered these women as 'non-Yahweh's people'; therefore, foreigners in their own land and unfit to intermarry with the *golah* community.



Ezra's concept of holiness (cf Ezra 9:2<sup>152</sup>) concerning the *golah* community is irreconcilable with other passages like Deuteronomy 9:4-6.<sup>153</sup> Both the pre-exilic Israel and the *golah* community had possessed the land not because of their own righteousness or holiness. According to the deuteronomic passage, it was because of the wickedness of the nations. But in this incident, the women who are divorced from their partners were not reported to be wicked as described by the deuteronomic law. Nothing is specifically said about these women except that they were not members of the redefined Israelite (*golah*) community. The narrative leaves the reader(s) pondering even about the situation concerning the families that had been separated. What was the fate of the babies and women that were left without a male supporter and vice versa? How will such children deal with the reality of being separated from their families (cf Klein 1999:746)? There are no answers given to these questions. The book of Ezra ends on this sad note.

### 5.2.3 Conclusion

In the preceding section, we have been discussing the tension between the *golah* community and the peoples of the land concerning the reconstruction of

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<sup>152</sup> Ezr 10:2 "For they have taken some of their daughters as *wives* for themselves and for their sons, so that **the holy race has intermingled** with the peoples of the lands."

<sup>153</sup> Dt 9:4-6 says: "4 Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD is dispossessing them before you. 5 "It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. 6 "Know, then, *it is* not because of your righteousness *that* the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people".

structural projects in the land (cf king Cyrus' orders Ezr 1:1-11, the altar Ezr 3:1-6 and temple Ezr 3:7-6:22); religious and social reforms (cf Ezr 6:19-22; 9:1-10:44) conducted by Ezra and the leaders of the returned exiles, including their associates. The discussion on the Ezra narrative reveals that the concept of 'Yahweh's people' is used to denote exclusively the *golah* community from an exclusive theological perspective.

However, the concept of 'Yahweh's people' was also viewed from an inclusive theological point of view, where it not only includes the *golah* community, but also all other people who embrace Yahweh, the God of Israel as their God. Therefore, there is tension in the book between the two theological perspectives concerning the concept of Yahweh's people and concerning other nations, foreigners or the peoples of the land. This inclusive theological perspective has been sidelined, suppressed or ignored at certain points.

The following discussion will also focus on a similar tension between the two perspectives as portrayed in the book of Nehemiah.

### **5.3 NEHEMIAH NARRATIVE**

There are several matters from the Nehemiah narrative that expose the contestation between an exclusive and an inclusive theological perspectives concerning the concept of Yahweh's people and concerning other nations or foreigners. These issues include the reconstruction of structural projects (like the orders from Artaxerxes about the reconstruction of the walls and city of Jerusalem), and religious and social reforms conducted by Nehemiah and the

elders of the returned Jewish community. The discussion will focus on the two theological perspectives as exposed in the above mentioned matters. The concept of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations, foreigners or other peoples of the land underlies this tension.

### **5.3.1 Structural projects**

#### 5.3.1.1 King Artaxerxes' orders

In this narrative plot (cf Neh 1:1-11), Nehemiah hears a disturbing report about the returning exiles and the city of Jerusalem (cf Ant 11:159-163<sup>154</sup>). He is deeply moved by the plight of those who have returned from exile to Jerusalem. This narrative plot depicts an exclusive theological standpoint. The story focused on describing the deplorable plight of the *golah* community and the city of Jerusalem (cf Fensham 1982:151). The living conditions of those who had remained in the land during the exile period appear to have been ignored. Rather the people who remained in the land together with the so-called foreigners are portrayed in a bad spotlight (cf Neh 2:10, 19-20; 4:1-23; 6:1-19). Nehemiah, therefore, plans to rebuild the city wall in order to ease the plight of the people who had returned from exile to Jerusalem (cf Neh 2:5). He is determined to uplift the status of the *golah* community from shame and disgrace to honour and dignity (cf Neh 2:17).

Hence forth, there are incidents where the concern to establish the *golah* community exclusively as Yahweh's people is met with resistance from the

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<sup>154</sup> Josephus' Works: Antiquities.

peoples of the land. These peoples of the land also wanted to associate with the *golah* community in religious and social life as ‘Yahweh’s people’. Consequently, the peoples of the land are described either as enemies to the cause of Nehemiah (from an exclusive theological perspective) or as source of help toward the same cause (from an inclusive theological perspective). There are striking similarities between the narrative plot of Nehemiah 2:1-9 and the plot in Ezra 1:1-11. First, in both instances, it is a foreign king who provides orders for a project to be carried out in Judah. King Cyrus gave the orders to reconstruct the temple (cf Ezr 1:1-4), while king Artaxerxes gave the orders for the city wall to be rebuilt (cf Neh 2:8).

Second, in both cases, Yahweh is reported to have worked in specific individuals to accomplish the desired purposes for the *golah* community. For example, in Ezra 1:1, Yahweh stirred up the heart of king Cyrus to provide the orders to free the exiles and to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. In Nehemiah 2:8, 18, God hears Nehemiah’s prayers and places his good hand upon Nehemiah in order that the requests he had made to king Artaxerxes were answered in his favour. Therefore, Nehemiah’s narrative on the favourable predisposition of the king toward his requests depicts a foreigner in a bright limelight. This narrative plot portrays an inclusive theological perspective. A foreign king becomes Yahweh’s instrument to provide favourable conditions to improving the plight of Yahweh’s people. Also, the wife of Artaxerxes does

not raise any objection to Yahweh's cause (cf Neh 2:6). It seems that she was favourably predisposed to the plan to grant Nehemiah's requests.<sup>155</sup>

A third similarity is that Nehemiah received letters from a foreign king, Artaxerxes, who ordered the governors and leaders of Trans-Euphrates to support his cause (cf Neh 2:7-9) just as Ezra did (cf Ezr 7:11-28). Unfortunately, the leaders of the Trans-Euphrates, on hearing this news, were disturbed, because someone had come to promote the welfare of the Jews (cf Neh 2:10). The question was: will these foreigners support Nehemiah's cause as was the case with Ezra (cf Ezr 8:36)? Or will they become instruments of threat and intimidation to Nehemiah's cause?

These first two chapters of Nehemiah might create mixed feelings in the reader about the role of foreigners for Israel or particularly for the *golah* community. On the one hand, foreigners, such as king Artaxerxes and his wife showed a favourable attitude toward Yahweh's cause. They supported it by providing written orders to the leaders of the region to assist the project. On the other hand, other foreigners supposedly expressed bad sentiments toward the plan which would improve the conditions of the returned exiles (cf Neh 2:10, 19). With this ill will, the question arises: what would constitute the nature of the role of foreigners in Yahweh's cause? Would the peoples of the land support or derail the cause of reconstructing the wall which was

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<sup>155</sup> Kidner (1979:81) argues that the mention of the queen may suggest that the positive action of the king toward Nehemiah's request may have been influenced by the queen (cf also Blenkinsopp 1989:215).

spearheaded by Nehemiah? This subject will be discussed from the section that follows.

### 5.3.1.2 Work on the city wall

In the Nehemiah narrative plots (cf Neh 2:10, 19-20; 4:1-23; 6:1-7:3), non-exiles attempted to derail Yahweh's work which Nehemiah had come to accomplish. Some of the alleged foreigners/enemies (i.e. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem; cf Neh 2:10, 19-20) expressed their negative sentiments about the prospect of the returned exiles. As result, they began to try to sabotage the work. This narrative depicts an exclusive theological point of view concerning 'Yahweh's people' and concerning other nations or foreigners. Sanballat<sup>156</sup> the Horonite, Tobiah<sup>157</sup> the Ammonite official and Geshem<sup>158</sup> the Arab are not portrayed as part of Yahweh's people even though some of them seemed to be Yahweh worshippers. As the story in Nehemiah progresses, these three figures are portrayed in the darkest possible way. They are regarded as enemies to the cause of Yahweh and his people. Every move on

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<sup>156</sup> Sanballat's place of origin-Horonite is reported from Scripture and from other sources variously (cf Blenkinsopp 1989:216-217) as one of the regions surrounding the land of Judah namely, 1. Hauran (cf Ezk 47:16, 18) east of the Sea of Galilee; 2. Horonaim, in Moab (cf Jr 48:34); or 3. Upper/Lower Beth Horon, two key cities 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem (cf Jos 10:10; 16:3, 5; 1 Macc 3:16; 7:39). Sanballat was the leading political opponent of Nehemiah (cf Neh 2:19; 4:1, 7; 6:1-2, 5, 12, 14; 13:28). He also held a position as the governor of Samaria (cf Neh 4:1-2).

<sup>157</sup> See details about the Hebrew names 'hY"biAj) and his son !n"âx'Ahy on page 233 paragraph one.

<sup>158</sup> Geshem is thought to have been in charge of north Arabian confederacy which covers northeast Egypt to north Arabia and southern Palestine (cf footnotes in NIV Study Bible 1995:688-689).

the part of the alleged enemies/foreigners is viewed in the text as an attempt to derail Yahweh's cause for his people-the *golah* community.

Meanwhile, Nehemiah unveils the plan to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls to the returned exiles (cf Neh 2:17-19). When their neighbours or alleged enemies heard the plan, they began to oppose the whole mission. What was their motive for their opposition? Grabbe (1998b:161) has suggested that, the fundamental motivation to this opposition was the exercise of political authority over the Judean region. Prior to Nehemiah's coming, the state of Samaria exercised some form of temporary authority over the affairs of the Judean region. But this situation was later discontinued (cf also Williamson 2004:11, 18, 33-35; Breneman 1993:25-26, 31; see Ezr 2:1; 5:14; Hg 1:1).

Tobiah, the junior colleague of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, probably received a temporary appointment as the governor of Judah (cf Williamson 2004:11, 18, 33-35; Breneman 1993:25-26, 31). This followed the disturbances recorded in Ezra 4. His temporary appointment may well explain why he had close ties to Jerusalem (cf Neh 13:4-9). But Tobiah's appointment may have come to an end when Nehemiah assumed office as the governor of the province of Judah. As a consequence, Nehemiah was a threat to the three prominent leaders (i.e. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem) with regard to the administration of the affairs of the Judean region. The mutual advantage of Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem over the Judean region was lost when Nehemiah resumed work as governor of Judah (cf also Grabbe 1998b:161; Albertz 1994:526-527).

However, Nehemiah was convinced that the God of heaven would grant success to his servants who rebuilt the wall (cf Neh 2:20). But he made a statement from the last part of the verse which seems to have no prior reference. He argued that these alleged enemies (i.e. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem) had no share in Jerusalem or in any claim or historical right to Jerusalem. What share, claim or historical right does Nehemiah refer to? Is it the right to live, worship, do business, own property or to socialize in Jerusalem?

For Klein (1999:761), Nehemiah's statement here means "his opponents will have no political share in Jerusalem (cf 2 Sam 20:1; 1 Ki 12:16), no claim to exercise jurisdiction or citizenship there, and no right to participate in the worship at the Jerusalem Temple (cf Ezr 4:3)." Similarly, Blenkinsopp (1989:226-227) argues that Nehemiah's statement may be regarded as a declaration of political, judicial, economic, and religious independence on behalf of the Judean region. Nehemiah's motive was that, these foreigners had neither political association nor any legal rights to exercise jurisdiction or right to participate in the Jerusalem cult.

Therefore, Nehemiah's statement (cf Neh 2:20) on the rights of the so-called enemies suggests that they had no political control over the affairs of the Judean region; but also the religious right that might have allowed these supposed enemies access to Yahweh's cult in Jerusalem seemed to be nullified by Nehemiah (cf Neh 13:7-9). In the perspective of Nehemiah, those



who had the right to worship Yahweh in Jerusalem were only the returned exiles (cf Fensham 1982:169). Foreigners, from his perspective, had no right to participate in the cult of Yahweh. Nehemiah's viewpoint converged with the exclusive ideology of other leaders such as Zerubbabel, Joshua, Ezra and their associates discussed previously (cf Ezr 4:3).

As the work on reconstructing the wall progressed, the narrator from an exclusive theological standpoint, wasted no time in letting the reader know that foreigners constituted a major anti-Jewish force in their attempt to halt Yahweh's work (cf Neh 4:1-23 & 6:1-19). Nehemiah was not scared, rather he prayed to his God and organized his people to face this threat. Finally, the mission was accomplished. Foreigners were led to admit that the work was possible through the hand of God (cf Neh 6:16).

### **5.3.2 Religious and social reforms**

Nehemiah and the leaders of the *golah* community undertook extensive religious and social reforms as described from an exclusive theological standpoint. The following discussion will expose the tension between the two theological perspectives. The concept of 'Yahweh's people' underlies this contestation as depicted in what follows.

### 5.3.2.1 Confession of sins

The occasion for the confession of sins is narrated in Nehemiah 9:1-38. This story is portrayed from an exclusive theological point of view. Those who returned from exile had gathered in order to confess their sins in the process following the celebration of the feast of Booths. The text made it obvious that those who participated in the religious assembly had separated from foreigners (cf Neh 9:2). This incident logically excluded all people of foreign descent from participating in the religious assembly. Foreigners were objects of separation from in order to qualify to participate in the penitential assembly (cf Neh 9:2).

Why did the separation from foreigners become the criterion for the inclusion or exclusion in the penitential assembly? Williamson (1985:311) observes that the use of the word *zera* (seed) of Israel and the separation from *goyim* (foreigners) in Nehemiah 9:2 suggest an exclusive racial understanding of Israel's own identity. However, Clines (1984:190) and Keil and Delitzsch (1975b:236) are more sympathetic to Nehemiah and his group. They argue that their action was not marital separation. It was not only Israelites who were to be admitted to the assembly. Rather, it was a voluntarily renunciation of the connections with foreigners and of their practices. The congregation of the *golah* community read from the book of Moses (cf Neh 8:1-18) and were motivated to obey what Yahweh had prescribed in that law. Following from the desire to obey the law of Moses,

the community celebrated the feast of Booths. After this feast, the *golah* community convened the penitential assembly.

Concerning the feasts of Booths, the law of Moses (cf Dt 16:14) made provisions for foreigners, aliens, servants, and other nations who were living in Israel to participate in the celebrations. The law of Moses also allowed foreigners to participate in the celebration of the Passover and the feast of Weeks (cf Ex 12:17-20, 48-49; Nm 9:14). But the law of Moses was silent about the participation of foreigners in the penitential assembly. However, given the fact that the other three major feasts were permissible and accessible to foreigners, it may have been possible for foreigners to also participate in the penitential assembly (cf 1 Ki 8:41-43; 2 Chr 6:32-33).

The only exception to the above viewpoint is whether Ezra had a separate law book, which was substantially different from the current Pentateuch or not? However, the discussion on the law of Moses in chapter two already revealed the contrary. From that examination, it is most likely that the law of Moses mentioned in various parts of Ezra and Nehemiah was basically similar to the present Pentateuch. Therefore, the basis on which all foreigners were barred from participating in this penitential assembly is difficult to determine on the basis of the Mosaic law alone.

As a result, I will draw a conclusion about this penitential prohibition of foreigners (cf Neh 9:2). Ezra and Nehemiah seemed to have re-interpreted the supposed Mosaic law in a peculiar manner in order to support their

exclusive religious and social reforms. This had influenced their understanding of the concept of 'Yahweh's people' and other nations or foreigners. Foreigners, from the exclusive theological standpoint are not 'Yahweh's people'. Therefore, they could not be allowed to participate in the penitential assembly of the *golah* community who claimed to represent 'Yahweh's people' exclusively.

#### 5.3.2.2 Signing an agreement

The *golah* community moved from their confession of sins to signing a resolution which they had made at the end of their penitence (cf Neh 9:38-10:39). Those who had participated in signing the agreement and those who had subscribed or pledged to its prescriptions are reported to have separated themselves from the peoples of the land (cf Neh 10:28). The *golah* community now used the same criterion that was employed for participation in the penitential assembly (cf Neh 9:2) for the signing of agreement (cf Neh 10:28). Breneman (1993:246) argues that it was necessary for the new community to separate themselves from foreigners in order that they might maintain the distinctive beliefs and ethical principles of the community (cf Fensham 1982:238). The situation in the time of Ezra-Nehemiah called for this separation in order to secure the continuity and identity of the redeemed community.

However, Clines (1984:205) and Blenkinsopp (1989:314) indicated that this group was the proselytes who had separated themselves from the practices

of their gentile neighbours. They then took an oath in support of this agreement. They saw this incident as similar to the occasion in which certain gentiles, who had separated themselves from their gentile practices, were allowed to participate in the Passover festival (cf Ezr 6:21).

The emphasis of Nehemiah (10:28) is on the purity of those who pledged allegiance to the agreement. The author(s)/editor(s) seemed to be so much akin to describing his/her conviction that the purity of this new community depended heavily upon their ability to separate from the people of the land as far as possible. The consciousness of the *golah* community about their separate historical and racial identity also was expanded to include distinctive religious and social identity. Consequently, the community pledged to keep away from intermarriage and from violating the Sabbath (cf Neh 10:30-31). Each of these two commitments shall be treated separately from below.

#### 5.3.2.3 Law of Moses

The narrative of Nehemiah 13:1-9 concerns the reading of the law of Moses, presented from the exclusive theological vantage point. The first three verses in this narrative plot indicate that the returning exiles read from the law of Moses in order to draw conclusions for their religious and communal life. As soon as the book of Moses was read, the assembly learned that this law book prohibited the Ammonites and the Moabites from entering into the sacred assembly of the Israelites. The reason therefore, was clearly stated (cf Neh 13:2). Both tribes did not show hospitality to the Israelites but requested

Balaam to curse Israel. The prohibition appeared to be similar to the prohibition in Deuteronomy.<sup>159</sup>

The discussion concerning this Law book has already been carried out in chapter two. It will therefore not be repeated in this section. However, my investigation assumes that the book of Moses mentioned several times in Ezra and Nehemiah was similar to (or at least a substantial part of it was) the current Pentateuch. If this assumption is taken into consideration, the incident in Nehemiah 13:1-9 appears to be at odds at some points with the spirit of Deuteronomy 23:3-8 (cf Clines 1984:237-238). For example, after the *golah* community had read from Deuteronomy 23:3-8 (I suppose), they decided to exclude everyone of foreign descent from their sacred assembly. But the basis for this sweeping exclusion in Deuteronomy prescribes something different from the actions of the *golah* community.

First, Deuteronomy 23:3-8 indicates that those who were specifically prohibited from participating in a religious assembly of the Israelites were the Moabites and the Ammonites. But even concerning these two tribes/nations, their children after the tenth generation could participate in the Israelite assembly (cf Dt 23:3). Other ethnic tribes/nations or races were not

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<sup>159</sup> Dt 23:3-8: “<sup>3</sup>No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their *descendants*, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD, <sup>4</sup> because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. <sup>5</sup> “Nevertheless, the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you. <sup>6</sup> “You shall never seek their peace or their prosperity all your days. <sup>7</sup> “You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not detest an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. <sup>8</sup> “The sons of the third generation who are born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD.

specifically included in this prohibition. This fact suggests the possibility of admitting some other foreign nations if they embrace Yahweh as their God.

Second, two separate nations were specifically permitted to participate in the Israelite assembly (cf Dt 23:7-8). These included the Edomites and the Egyptians. No mention was made by the *golah* community that the same Mosaic Law made a provision for the Israelites to associate themselves with the Edomites and the Egyptians in their religious gatherings. The text of Nehemiah is silent about this inclusive aspect derived from the same deuteronomic law.

Therefore, the question is: what motivated the *golah* community to expand the deuteronomic law to apply it to all generations of foreigners in this incident? For example, in the passage, Tobiah (cf Neh13:4-5) though an Ammonite<sup>160</sup> and also the grandson of Eliashib (cf Neh 13:28) were flushed out on the basis of this prohibition. Consequently, a few things might be pointed out here.

- First, the context of Deuteronomy 23:3-8 suggests that it is possible for other nations to have fellowship with the Israelites in their religious assembly. It is also possible for the Ammonites and the Moabites who came after the tenth generation, to enter the assembly of the Israelites.

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<sup>160</sup> Tobiah the Ammonite (Neh 2:10), must have surpassed the tenth generation limit prescribed in Dt 23:3.

- Second, the Hebrew name 'hY"biAj) means “My goodness is Yahweh”. This theophoric name suggests that Tobiah might have been a worshipper of Yahweh. His son also bears the name !n"âx'Ahy which means “Yahweh is gracious”. His son got married to the daughter of Meshullam who participated in the group that reconstructed the walls of Jerusalem (cf Neh 3:4, 30; 6:18). Tobiah had a close relationship with Eliashib the Priest (cf Neh 13:4-7). He may have been a governor of Trans-Jordan. Grabbe (2000b:406) has rejected the view that Tobiah was an Ammonite. He suggested that Tobiah was a Jewish person who was probably a Persian official, although his family home was in the old area of Ammon (see also Boccaccini 2002:86).

In view of Tobiah's allegiance to Yahweh and his people, it is expected that by all probability, he would have received a positive treatment from the hands of the *golah* community. As a matter of fact he had received a favorable treatment until Nehemiah resumed his duty as the governor of the Judean region for the second term (Neh 13:4-9). Then he was ill treated and thrown out.

But, on what basis did Nehemiah and the *golah* community completely exclude all foreigners (instead of Ammonites and Moabites) from their sacred assembly? Blenkinsopp (1989:351) argues that Nehemiah 13:1-3 is an editorial insertion that bears a liturgical resemblance of reading the scripture



in the temple and synagogue. The purpose was to provide a scriptural warrant for Nehemiah's following actions (cf Williamson 1985:385). Breneman (1993:268) cautions that this incident should not be viewed as racial exclusivism because foreigners could become part of Israel by conversion (cf Ezr 6:21 and Rt 1:16-17). Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine the exact reason(s) on which all foreigners were excluded from the *golah* community.

The deuteronomic passage, in my opinion, does not warrant such an extreme interpretation and application undertaken by Nehemiah and his fellow returnees. The conception of the *golah* community, as 'Yahweh's people' motivated the author(s)/editor(s) of this book to re-interpret the deuteronomic passage exclusively in order to support the religious reforms of Nehemiah (cf Myers 1965:207-208). However, it is important to note that not every person adhered to this rigid perspective with regard to the foreigners or other nations. For example, Eliashib, the priest and probably some of his associates had shared an inclusive theological viewpoint with regard to 'Yahweh's people' and other nations/foreigners. Thus, he provided a place at the temple premises for Tobiah, who was probably a Jew (cf Grabbe 2000b:406). At least he seemed to be a convert to Yahweh worship as portrayed by his' and his son's names (cf Neh 6:18; 13:4-9). But the exclusive reforms of Nehemiah saw him as an enemy to the *golah* community or at least as an outsider.

#### 5.3.2.4 Sabbath reforms

Nehemiah 13:15-22 (cf 10:31) depicts the reforms of Nehemiah concerning the Sabbath. The Sabbath reform conducted by Nehemiah was congruent with Yahweh's command to his people in the Pentateuch (cf Ex 20:8-11; 23:12; Dt 5:12-15). There, God had commanded the Israelites to keep the Sabbath day holy. They were to rest from their labour on that day. The Israelites had to observe the Sabbath law. It also applied to aliens, strangers and slaves who were in their midst.

Thus, the law of the Sabbath did not discriminate against foreigners, aliens or other nations within Israel. Both the Israelites and the foreigners were required to rest on that day. Therefore, the *golah* community and the aliens or foreigners needed this admonition to confront their lack of keeping the Sabbath. Nehemiah wanted neither the *golah* community nor the people of the land to keep on violating the Sabbath.

However, despite Nehemiah's interest for the Sabbath to be kept, he failed to suggest the alternative thing that should be done on the Sabbath instead of the usual business activities. It is expected that he could have invited the peoples of the land to come and worship Yahweh on the Sabbath. This would have kept them busy doing something good instead of doing business on that day. Thus, an invitation to worship Yahweh on the Sabbath would have naturally deterred both the *golah* community and the alleged foreigners from deviating from the Pentateuchal law. Nehemiah seemed to protect the *golah*

community from foreign influence. But he lost sight of the inclusive aspect of the Sabbath law.

### 5.3. 2.5 Marriage reforms

I will examine the case of intermarriage between the *golah* community and the alleged foreigners in Nehemiah (cf Neh 13:23-28; cf 10:30). Intermarriage problem was dealt with in Ezra 9:1-10:44. Nehemiah encountered a similar problem when he resumed duties as the governor of Judah. This issue is depicted from the exclusive theological point of view. Nehemiah took notice of the intermarriage between the returned exiles and the neighbouring peoples. Several problems ensued which had motivated Nehemiah's marriage reforms.

- Language problem

As a consequence of the intermarriages, many of the children produced from this relationship spoke foreign languages rather than the language of Judah (cf Neh 13:24). Nehemiah seemed to be worried that the language of Judah would suffer extinction if this trend continued. It is true that the language of a people contributes to the formation of their self and national identity (cf Williamson 1985:397; Blenkinsopp 1989:363). So, the loss of a people's language could be construed as a loss of their personal and national identity (cf Clines 1984:247; Kidner 1979:131). Apart from that, the Jewish children were expected to know the language in which the *torah* was written in order to

read it and to keep its rules, regulations and decrees for a faithful relationship with Yahweh (cf Klein 1999:849).

Fensham (1982:267) points out that since Hebrew was the language of the Yahweh cult, people with a different language could not be allowed to participate in Jewish religious life. Nehemiah's religious aspiration for the *golah* community was to become a wishful thinking, if the new generation did not know their own language. Therefore, the need to take drastic measures against intermarriages became apparent.

- Lesson from the past

Nehemiah was worried also about a repetition of what had happened to king Solomon from the past (cf Neh 13:26-27; Williamson 1985:399). He was an outstanding king in the history of Israel and endowed with wisdom. As a matter of fact, he was deeply loved by Yahweh. But, despite all these credentials, he was misled by his foreign wives into worshipping foreign gods. Thus, according to deuteronomic deuteronomistic tradition, he sinned against Yahweh, the God of Israel (cf 1 Ki 11:1-13).

One goal of studying history is to know the past, and then to shape or correct the present and also to prepare for the future. Similarly, Keto (2001:xi, 3-5) notes that the knowledge of the past "assists societies to create and recreate their social, cultural and political identities as well as to adopt a preferred vision for the future". A spiritual or religious component could be added to Keto's list of identities. This means that the past also helps people to know, to

form and to shape their religious and spiritual identity in order to plan for the future. Thus, Nehemiah was probably concerned that the *golah* community needed to learn from the experience of king Solomon. Otherwise, their spiritual or religious identity in the future was at stake.

- Leadership by example

The grandson of Eliashib, the high priest was involved in this same obscenity by intermarrying a daughter of Sanballat (cf Neh 13:28-30). Previously, Tobiah was also alleged to have married a daughter of Shecaniah while his son Jehohanan married the daughter of Meshullam (cf Neh 6:17-18). This state of affairs could explain why Tobiah had been given a space in the temple store rooms (cf Neh 13:4-5). But Grabbe (2000b:406) is convinced that Tobiah was not an Ammonite as claimed by the narrative of Nehemiah. He was rather a Jew. If Tobiah was an Ammonite, the action of Nehemiah could be justified in some way (cf Neh 13:7-9). But if he was not, the basis for the ill treatment of Tobiah is difficult to determine.

The behaviour of Eliashib's grandson, who married a daughter of Sanballat, was perceived by Nehemiah to be a bad example set by a member of a priestly family (cf Williamson 1985:399). It was a notorious defilement of the priestly order as well as of the covenant of priesthood (cf Lv 21:14). Nehemiah knew that, since priests were spiritual or religious leaders, what they said and did could affect the general populace positively or negatively. The behaviour of the grandson of Eliashib could set a negative precedent for

the *golah* community. It was considered as the highest form of religious apostasy (cf Fensham 1982:267).

Therefore, being hard pressed by all these problems, Nehemiah fiercely repudiated the Jews who had committed such an abhorrent thing by intermarrying with the peoples of the land such as Ashdodites, Ammonites and Moabites (cf Neh 13:25). He rebuked them, called curses on them, beat some of them and pulled out their hair (cf Ezr 9:3-4). He forced them to take an oath in God's name so that they could separate from their foreign partners (cf Ezr 10:3-5; 16-17). He pointed out that Solomon had failed because of such foreign marital relationships. The returning Jews were not greater than Solomon. As king Solomon had failed religiously (which was precipitated by inter-marriage: cf 1 Ki 11:1-8; Neh13:26-27), the *golah* community members who had married foreign women could fall in a similar manner.

I have treated the subject of intermarriage in chapters two (cf 2.10.1) and five (cf 5.2.2.2; Ezra 9:1-10:44). In chapter two, it was evident that certain scholars (cf Wolfendale 1974:143-144; Clines 1984:116-118; Klein 1999:732-733) are convinced that intermarriage prohibition in Ezra and Nehemiah was motivated by the concern to protect the monotheistic character of Judaism against the powerful syncretistic polytheism which was prevalent during the Persian period.

Similarly, Breneman (1993:52) asserted that the post-exilic community was a small island in a great sea of peoples and religious traditions. As a

consequence, it was pertinent that the covenant community remains pure in doctrine, customs, and ethical norms (cf Fensham 1982:260). Ezra's and Nehemiah's actions seem to be radical, but the books of both Ezra and Nehemiah inform us how imperative it was in God's plan [according to their perspective(s)] that this covenant community continue to exist. Unchecked assimilation between the *golah* community and other people would have meant the discontinuation of the *golah* community. Thus, the survival of a people could have been part of the driving force behind this reform (Blenkinsopp 1989:363).

However, other scholars such as Williamson (1985:I-li)<sup>161</sup> disagree with the above opinion. Instead, he contended that the intermarriage prohibition was motivated by Jewish racial prejudice. Maccoby (1996:156-157) also disagrees with the above 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.

My opinion is that the prevalence of so many family lists from Ezra (cf 2:1-67; 8:1-14; 10:18-43) and from Nehemiah (cf Neh 3:1-32; 7:1-73; 10:1-27; 11:3-12:26) as well as the emphasis on the exiles as the 'holy race' (cf Ezr 9:1-2) appeared to have tipped the weight of this argument against Maccoby's conclusion (cf Smith 1996:556).

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<sup>161</sup> Cf also Maccoby (1996:156-157), though Maccoby himself shares a contrary viewpoint.

In other words, it is difficult to dismiss the charge of racism against Ezra and Nehemiah when one sees the prevalence of all these family lists of the returned exiles as well as their emphasis on the holiness of their race. Consequently, it is hard to overlook the accusation that racial purity was part of the motivation for the prohibition of intermarriage by Ezra and Nehemiah. But in my opinion, the driving force behind these reforms was the conception of 'Yahweh's people' exclusively or primarily as the *golah* community. Hence, those who did not belong to the *golah* group inevitably could not be considered as appropriate marriage partners.

In chapter five (5.2.2.2), my investigation indicated that Ezra introduced divorce proceedings as one of the measures to deal with the problem of intermarriage. It seemed also that Deuteronomy 7:3 was the basis on which Ezra sustained his reforms. However, it is obvious that Ezra re-interpreted Deuteronomy 7:3 in a peculiar way in order to support his exclusive religious and social reforms. Otherwise, it is apparent from the context of Deuteronomy 7:3 that idolatry was the focus of the prohibition. Nowhere in the Pentateuch do we find an explicit rejection of intermarriage without having the worship of foreign gods as the main reason for that prohibition (cf Breneman 1993:149; Williamson 1985:130-131).

Similarly, Nehemiah seemed to be concerned about the temptation to worship other gods as king Solomon did. I therefore, assume that Nehemiah's interpretation reflects the spirit of the deuteronomic prohibition on



intermarriage. However, there is a twist in the measures which Nehemiah undertook to address this problem. The next paragraph explains this twist.

Nehemiah completely excludes any possibility that a foreign woman could embrace/worship Yahweh the God of Israel via the process of intermarriage. He portrayed a one-sided theological standpoint concerning intermarriage. According to Nehemiah, since intermarriage is discouraged by the Mosaic law and since Solomon the greatest king had sinned by worshipping other gods, deductively, every Israelite who had married foreign women could undoubtedly fall in a similar trap as king Solomon did. However, the stories of Ruth, the Moabitess, Zipporah the Midianite, Bathsheba the Hitite and Rahab the Canaanite, et cetera who served as good examples of the possibility of a genuine conversion to Yahweh cult through intermarriage elude Nehemiah during his religious and social reforms.

Therefore, what can be said for the aforementioned elusion and consequently for Nehemiah's abhorrent treatment of those who had intermarried with foreign nations? I have argued that the concept of Yahweh's people seemed to lay behind the mental process of Ezra, Nehemiah and their associates. Their conception was that the *golah* community were exclusively 'Yahweh's people'. Despite this exclusive religious self-identification, other people in Ezra and Nehemiah also conveyed the conception that Yahweh's people does not only refer to the *golah* community; rather, it refers to other people, nations or foreigners who embrace Yahweh as their God. Eliashib, the high

priest, and his associates represented this latter standpoint (cf Neh 13:4-5, 7, 23-28). Thus, these two perspectives lay behind the theological tension in Ezra and Nehemiah. The subject of intermarriage therefore, is one of the subject areas where this tension has surfaced.

As a subsidiary motivation for the outright prohibition of intermarriage, it is also possible that the prevalence of so many family lists in Ezra (cf 2:1-67; 8:1-14; 10:18-43) and in Nehemiah (cf Neh 3:1-32; 7:1-73; 10:1-27; 11:3-12:26) as well as the emphasis on the exiles as the 'holy seed/race' (cf Ezr 9:1-2) suggest that the *golah* community considered themselves as racially distinct from the rest of the other people. Hence, intermarriage between the *golah* community and the peoples of the land was inconceivable and could not be tolerated from the exclusive theological standpoint. This racial integration could contaminate the 'holy race/seed'. Consequently, it became very difficult to dismiss the accusation that racial purity was part of the motivation for the prohibition of intermarriage during the periods of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf Williamson 1985:I-li).

### **5.3.3 Conclusion**

This chapter reveals two conflicting theological perspectives in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah concerning the concept of Yahweh's people and concerning other nations, foreigners, aliens or the peoples of the land. Consequently, several subject matters have reflected this tension. This includes the reconstruction of the structural projects like the altar, temple, and

wall, as well as, the religious and social reforms conducted by Ezra, Nehemiah and their corporate returnees.

On the one hand, Ezra, Nehemiah and other returned exiles adopted an exclusive theological viewpoint on 'Yahweh's people' and on other nations, peoples of the land, foreigners and aliens.

On the other hand, a few people had resisted this outrageous exclusive ideology of Ezra, Nehemiah and their associates. Instead, such a viewpoint had adopted an inclusive theological standpoint on the same concepts. This resulted in a heightened theological controversy between the two parties on the issue.

Within the frame of reference of the former group, total separation from foreigners was one of the distinctive characteristics for the holiness of the early post-exilic Jewish community (cf Smith 1996:556). Those who are 'Yahweh's people' are the *golah* community. No person outside this understanding was to be acknowledged as part of 'Yahweh's people'. This exclusive theological viewpoint is the dominant perspective in the two books.

However, the inclusive theological perspective is more sympathetic with foreigners. This perspective grows from a few other returned exiles, certain Jews who had remained in the land during the exile and some other neighbouring peoples. The adherents of this viewpoint resisted the brutal reforms of Ezra-Nehemiah and other returned exiles (cf Ezr 10:15; Neh 6:17-19; 13:4-5, 7-8, 23-28). Rather, they had adopted an open posture towards

the alleged foreigners as shown by their social and religious integration. In this perspective, foreigners could be allowed to partner with the Jews in religious and social matters.

The sweeping exclusive reforms are allegedly based upon the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants.<sup>162</sup> But the investigation of both covenants and the Ezra-Nehemiah texts reveals the contrary. This exclusion portrays a partial understanding of the perspectives of the two covenants. The Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants made provisions for foreigners to associate with the Israelites in religious and social matters. These covenant provisions included:

- Yahweh's promise to be 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 foreigners before the law of Yahweh;
- Intermarriage;
- Sacrificial offering; and
- Cities of refuge.

Therefore, this investigation confirms that the author(s)/editor(s) of Ezra, Nehemiah re-interpreted certain passages from the Pentateuch ideologically in order to support the religious and social exclusive reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah.

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<sup>162</sup> Cf Ezr 9:1-15; Neh 1:5-10; 9:7-25; Ex 2:24; 3:16-17; 6:2-9; Dt 1:8; 6:10-12; 10:12-22; 30:19-20.

#### 5.4 EXCURSUS: Terms associated with the *golah* community as ‘Yahweh’s people’

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah used various terms to refer to the *golah* community as ‘Yahweh’s people’ and vice versa. The people who did not go into exile were not regarded as ‘Yahweh’s people’. The following references therefore, strengthen the argument in this chapter that the author(s)/editor(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah re-interpreted certain passages to support the exclusive reforms. Consequently, several passages repeatedly refer implicitly or explicitly to the *golah* community as the people of Yahweh. Terms like אֱמָנָא [ / ^ M < + [ ; ; (‘his people’/‘your people’: cf Ezr 1:3; Neh 1:10; 9:32) have been used in this exclusive sense. The possessive pronouns ‘his/your’ refer to Yahweh, while the term ‘people’ refers to the *golah* community. The following references further illustrate this exclusive understanding of the *golah* community as ‘Yahweh’s people’.

- לאֵֶרֶף־יְיָ יְהֵאֵל { a / ' h w " h y > (‘Yahweh, the God of Israel’: Ezr 1:3; 3:2; 4:1, 3; 5:1; 6:14, 21, 22; 7:6, 15; 8:35; 9:4, 15).
- וַיִּתֵּן אֲבֹתֵינוּ יְהֵאֵל { a / h w " בְּהֵי > (‘Yahweh the God of our fathers’: Ezr 7:27).
- ~ k , ( y t e b o a ] יְהֵאֵל { a / h w " בְּהֵי לִי ; (to ‘Yahweh the God of your fathers’: Ezr 8:28; 10:11).
- ' y h ; l { a / h w " ׁ h y > (‘Yahweh my God’: Ezr 7:28; 8:5, 6; Neh 2:8, 12, 18; 5:19; 6:14; 7:5; 13:14, 22, 29, 31).
- ~ h , בְּיַהֲוֵהָל { a / h w " ׁ h y > (‘Yahweh their God’: Ezr 5:5; 7:16; Neh 9:3, 4; 12:45).
- ~ k , ׁ y h e l { a l e ׃ (toward ‘your God’: Ezr 4:2, 7:14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 25, 26; Neh 9:5).
- ' w y h ' l { a / h w " ׁ h y > (‘Yahweh his God’: Ezr 7:6, 9; Neh 13:26).
- וַיִּתֵּן אֲבֹתֵינוּ יְהֵאֵל { a / (‘our God’: Ezr 4:3; 8:17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 25, 30, 33; 9:8, 9, 10, 13; 10:2, 3, 14; Neh 4:4, 9; 5:9; 6:16; 9:32; 10:29, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 36, 39; 13:2, 4, 18, 27).
- • y h i A d b . [ ; אֲמַתֵּי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי (‘we are his servants’: Ezr 5:11; Neh 2:20).
- ^ † D > b . [ ; / ^ y d < \_ b ' [ ] לאֵֶרֶף־יְיָ יְנַעֲבֵב . (‘your servant’/ ‘sons of Israel your servants’: Neh 1:6, 10, 11).

## **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.<sup>163</sup>

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).

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<sup>163</sup> 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.*<sup>164</sup>
- *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.*

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<sup>164</sup> 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'.<sup>165</sup> 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

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<sup>165</sup> 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 & Delitzsch(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!

**TABLE OF HEBREW TRANSLITERATION<sup>166</sup>**

Name	Final	Alphabet	Transliteration
Alef		a	'
Bet		B	b
		b	v
Gimel		g	g
Dalet		d	d
Hey		h	h
Vav		w	v
Zayin		z	z
Chet		x	ch
Tet		j	t
Yod		y	y
Kaf	&	K	kh
	§	k	k
Lamed		l	l
Mem	~	m	m
Nun	!	n	n

<sup>166</sup> This table of Hebrew transliteration has been taken from Futato (2003), the Bible Works Version 6.0 and has been modified, particularly the column on the transliteration of alphabets and vowels.

Samek		S	s
Ayin		[	,
Pey		P	p
	@	p	f
Tsade	#	c	ts
Qof		q	k
Resh		r	r
Sin		f	s
Shin		v	sh
Tav		t	t

### VOWELS

Name	Vowels	Transliteration
qamets	◌	a
patach	◌;	a
chatef-patach	◌]	a
tsere	◌e	ee
segol	◌,	e
chatef-segol	◌/	e
chireq	◌i	i
chireq-yod	◌yi	i
cholem	◌o	o

cholem-vav	<b>A</b>	o
qibbutz	<b>u</b>	<b>u</b>
shureq	<b>W</b>	<b>u</b>

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