

THE STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH IN NEH 9:6-37

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1 INTRODUCTION

The prayer of Nehemiah in Neh 9:6-37 is structured in the background of a Covenant Renewal Ceremony¹ that began with the returnees of the people of Judah from the Babylonian exile. The nature of the Covenant Renewal ceremony is evident in the structural analysis of Neh 7:6-9:37. The text begins (Neh 7:6) with a names of the people who returned after the Babylonian exile, with the expression: וישבו לירושלים. אלה בני מדינה העלים משבי הגולה אשר הגלה נבוכדנצר מלך בבל. These people are grouped into priests, Levites, some of the people lived in Jerusalem, singers, gate keepers, temple slaves and all other Israelites (7:72). These people united together in the Temple gates and Ezra began to read the Torah of Yahweh (8:1-8). The response from the people is marked with a celebration of the feast of Sukkoth (8:13-18). The prayer in Nehemiah

¹ The Covenant Renewal Ceremony is a characteristic pattern of the OT. When the people of Israel have breached the covenantal relationship with Yahweh, the leader of the group renews the covenant through a sacrifice and thereby initiates the return of the people to Yahweh. The most important of them are seen in Exod 34 (Moses renews the covenant), Josh 8: 30-34 (Joshua renews the covenant after the incident at Ai), Jos 24 (Final renewal of the covenant after Joshua divided the land among the tribes of Israel), 2Kings 23 (Josiah renews the covenant after having heard the words of the Torah. The nature of the renewal ceremony consists in the reading of the law, and the people's response and the subsequently a prayer.

9:6-37, though part of the covenant renewal ceremony, it happened on the twenty fourth day (9:1), that is the next day of the feast of Sukkoth.² This article tries to explain the structure of the prayer of Nehemiah basing on the appellation of Yahweh used in the poetic narration of the text. The syntax of this poem is based on the prosaic-poetic syntactic structure developed by Prof. Alviero Niccacci ofm,³ through the use of the different verbal systems, the relationship among the verbal clauses and the noun clauses in the Hebrew prose and poetry. This analysis focuses on the type and the historical and theological indent of the prayer of Nehemiah which will provide a basic structure to the prayer that explains the quality of Yahweh and the nature of the people of Israel from Abraham to the present generation.

² In Neh 8:2,13,18 and 9:1 there are references to the days. 8:2 refers to the first day of the seventh month and in 8:9 it is said that, "This is holy to the Lord your God". In 8:13- 18 speaks about the festival of Succoth. After the accomplishment of the decrees commanded by God, they celebrate the feasts, fasts and festivals. But in Neh 9:1 it is said about the assembly and fasting take place in the twenty fourth day of the seventh month. This shows the uniqueness of the text. In the book of Leviticus, we read: "Speak to the people of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, for seven days, there shall be the festival of Succoth to the Lord. The first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. Seven days you shall present the Lord's offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a holy convocation and present the Lord's offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations" (Lev 23:34-36). When we count the days, they are 23. In Nehemiah 9,1 the author speaks about the twenty forth day which is next day of the festival of the booth.

³ He configured the verbal systems in Biblical Hebrew. According to him, the narration of a prose begins with a background and continues with a foreground. The former is introduced with qatal form of the verb (past) or a nominal clause and its corresponding verbal form in a narration is wayyiqtol. Both verbal forms denote the past tense. In a discourse, the background clause is represented through yiqtol/imperative and the corresponding foreground clause is weqatal/we yiqtol. These forms designate the future action of the verb. These coordination can be interrupted through any other forms, such as in a past narration interruption can be through qatal/nominal clause, while in the discourse it can be through yiqtol/qatal/nominal clause. The function of these interruptions is to explain the previous text; cfr Alviero Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (JSOTS 86), Sheffield, 1990.

2 FIRST STANZA (V.6)

The text begins with a non-verbal sentence (*אַתָּה־יְהוָה לְבַדְּךָ*) in which *אַתָּה* and *יְהוָה* are two nouns in the nominative case that are connected with copulative form (*הוּא*). In discourse the non-verbal sentence functions as a new beginning.⁴ This verse is the heading of the first stanza. All the succeeding appellations of Yahweh explain the heading, “You are alone God”. The author presents the monotheistic concept of Yahweh. The pronoun referring to Yahweh *אַתָּה* is repeated twice in this verse.⁵ V.6b begins with a verbal clause whose subject is *אתה* and the objects of the verb are *הַשָּׁמַיִם*, *הָאָרֶץ*, and *הַיָּמִים*. In v. 6c the participial nominal clause is used with the subject *אתה*. These two verses, vv.6b and 6c are parallel in nature and are explanations to the first statement *אַתָּה־יְהוָה לְבַדְּךָ*. These verbs explain two actions of God, namely creation and vivifying. The prayer of Nehemiah, therefore explains two realities, namely Yahweh as the One God and all the things are created by Yahweh and thereby this verse explains the theology of the book of Genesis.

3. SECOND STANZA (VV.7-8)

V.7 begins with *אַתָּה־יְהוָה יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים* (You are the God, the Lord) a non-verbal sentence that stands as the foreground and functions as the second heading of the stanza. The author explains the revelation of Yahweh through Abram, whom Yahweh has chosen (*בָּחַר*).⁶ The effect of

⁴ Geiger, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 72-73.

⁵ *אַתָּה* (short form of *אַתָּה*) is used.

⁶ There are three consecutive actions which can be translated with conjunction *waw*, that explains or part of the heading of the stanza, *אתה הוא יהוה אלהים*. The letter *waw* before the verbs is epexegetically. That means the following verbs gives explanation to the verb *בָּחַרְתָּ*. The passage continues with *waw-qatal* (perfect) form of the verb (*וַיִּמְצָאֲתָ*). *Waw-qatal* form gives us the impression that there is another action (and you found) which is done by the same subject of the previous verse. The letter *waw* gets the same function of epexegetical usage.

Yahweh's selection is mentioned in the subsequent verbs, like brought him (הוצאתו) from the land of Chaldeans and established (שמת) his name as Abraham and cut a covenant (כרת ברית) with him. The purpose of these actions are mentioned in an infinitive clause (לתת את ארץ הכנני..).

Then there is shift to qal infinite absolute (וְכָרַת) which is used in place of the finite verb.⁷ There are repetition of the infinitive construct of (לתת) in vv. 7-8 there are past (qatal) verbs which are not co-ordinated to each other. The waw that stands before each verbs do not coordinate the previous past verbs, rather functions instead of a pronoun, אתה. Therefore, the first verb בחר in v.7 is explained in the succeeding verses. In v. 8, we have a wayyiqtol form (ותקם) that coordinates with the main verb בחר of v.7. Thus, the structure of the sentence will be: "You have chosen Abramand as a result you have made to raise your promises." Like Abraham, the people of Israel are chosen one and now Yahweh has made to raise his promises with them, which He has sworn to Abraham. Moreover, there is a shift from Abram (אברם) in v. 7a to Abraham (אברהם) of v. 7c. This shift resembles the book of Genesis, in which the call and commissioning of Abram (Gen 12-16), the name 'Abram' is used, while with the renewal of the covenant through the act of circumcision in Gen 17, the name of Abram is changed to Abraham. This shift may be the reason behind the prayer of Nehemiah when he uses this analogy. A causative clause is placed at the end of v.8: כי צדיק אתה, which functions as an inclusion to vv.7 and 8. In the beginning, the author gives the title of Yahweh as: אתה הוא יהוה אלהים and at the end a new title is given to Yahweh as: צדיק אתה הוא.

⁷ Steinmann, *Ezra- Nehemiah*, 525.

4. THIRD STANZA (VV.9-15)

This section is built upon different small units, which narrates the Exodus events of the people of Israel. The subject of the action is always Yahweh (אתה הוא יהוה אלהים), for the verbs are in the second person singular (יתאמר, הודעת, השלכת, בקעת, ותעש, ותתן, שמעת, ותרא). The events are described in a sequence: You (Yahweh) has seen the afflictions and the cry of the people in Egypt, He gave them signs and wonders whose explanation is described with a causative clause (כי). The author describes the result of this action (You made to you the name as of this day) (v.10).

In v.11-15 the author initiates a new theme in the Exodus event, the division of the waters (והים בקעת), which is expressed through x-qatal, as a background to the foreground construction with a wayyiqtol form in v.11b (ויעברו בתוך הים). There are different strophes in vv. 11-15 based on the various events narrated in these verses. V.11c is an explanation to the previous verbal clause, which states that the people of Egypt drowned in the water like a stone. Thus, v.11 functions as the second event in the Exodus narrative described in the prayer of Nehemiah, which is parallel to the narration in Exodus 14-15.

The third event of Exodus is narrated in v.12, the pillar of the cloud. The two nouns, ענן and אש are parallel in v. 12, which are joined with one verb הנהיתם (made to rest) forms a new unit. The functions of the cloud and the fire in the wilderness is given in an infinitive construct form (להאיר להם). This strophe explains the wilderness experience of the people of Israel (Num 10:32).

Vv.13-14 explain the fourth event in the Exodus narration, the events at Mount Sinai. Yahweh descended from heaven and spoke with the people by giving them ordinances (משפטים), statutes (חקים) and laws (תורות) (Exod 20). Yahweh sanctified the Sabbath and it made known to the people (v.14) and He gave them bread (לחם) from heaven (Exod 16:4-

10) and water from the rock (Exo 15:22-31). These incidents are described separately in each verse.

3 FOURTH STANZA (VV. 16-31)

This large stanza is composed of different strophe which has a structural composition. There is a considerable difference between vv.6-15 and 16-31, the former gives the nature of Yahweh through three titles, *צדיק אתה הוא*, *אתה הוא יהוה אלהים*, *אתה הוא יהוה לבדך*. The latter part explains the nature of the people of God, their rebellion and the experience of the mercy of Yahweh. The poet explains the rebellion of the people in different stages of their life and at the same time he portrays the mercy of Yahweh over the people of Israel. Thus this stanza is Rebellion of the people vs mercy of Yahweh.

3.1 FIRST STROPHE (VV.16-17)

The verbal clause in v. 16 begins with an *x-qatal* form that initiates a new segment in the entire unit. The subject of the verb *הזידו* in this verse is *אבותינו* (our fathers). The rebellion of the fathers is the theme in this verse. The nature of the people towards the gifts of God is said that they acted presumptuously. The verbs in 16b and 16c⁸ are coordinated that form the foreground of the poetic narration. The rebellion of the people is expressed in the following wayyiqtol verbal forms in v.17ab. There are two phases in v. 17, the first phase of this sentence the verbs *וַיִּמְאֲנוּ* and *וַיִּקְרְוּ* are plural, as it refers to the plural nouns in the previous verse. The second phase of the verse, on the other hand, describes God with usual wordings *וַאֲתָהּ אֵלֹהִים קְלִיחוֹת*, though the word is plural it goes with God. All other words of adjectives are in singular form. These two clauses make anti-congruence parallelism, in which the nature of the people is contrasted with the nature of Yahweh. In v. 17abc, the rebellion of the

⁸ *welo -qatal* form functions as the negation of *wayyiqtol*.

people and in v. 17de explains the mercy of Yahweh. The appellations of Yahweh are: forgiving God, gracious, compassion, slow to anger, great in steadfast love and one who do not forsake (v.17e). The revelation of Yahweh to Moses in Mount Sinai is also embodies all these appellations (Exod 32).

3.2. SECOND STROPHE (V. 18)

This strophe begins with the rebellion of the people through making the molten calf and adoring them saying that this is the god who has taken us from Egypt (v.18). The poet, on the other hand, explains the mercy of Yahweh in the wilderness experience of the people until they entered the Promised Land and captured the cities (vv.19-25).

V. 18 begins with a *protasis* of the double clause. The words ‘אף כִּי’ (even when) opens the clause with a protasis, which is the subordinate clause and the foreground clause is introduced by the verb of saying: ויאמר, which introduces a discourse in the strophe. Then the main clause continues with wayyiqtol (ויעשו), whose object is נִאֲצוּת גְּדֻלּוֹת.⁹

3.3. THIRD STROPHE (VV.19-21)

Vv. 19-25 speak of the great mercy of Yahweh towards the people of Israel in the wilderness as well as in the possession of the land. The strophe begins with a title as we have seen in v.6 and 7. ואת ברחמים הרבים is the heading or title given to this text and is parallel to v. 17d. The qatal or x-qatal verbs in vv.19-21 explains the events narrated in the wilderness. These verses are parallel to the previous lines of the poem. There are symmetrical¹⁰ and anti-thetically parallelism in these verses. The salutation ואתה in v. 19 contrasts with והם in v.16, the merciful nature of Yahweh is contrasted with the disobedience of the people. V. 18 depicts

⁹ Steinmann, *Ezra- Nehemiah*, 527.

¹⁰ V. 19 speaks of the cloud and fire that is parallel to v. 12 where we have the same expressions.

the apostacy of the people of God, but the mercy of Yahweh is longer than the apostacy that is in vv. 19-25.

After the title, אתה ברחמיך הרבים in v. 19, the description of the forgiveness of Yahweh is mentioned as: לא עצבתם במדבר (you did not forsake them) functions as the description of events in which Yahweh has cared for the people of Israel. Then the nature of the forgiving love is followed in v. 19b-21 in six verbs, namely, לא סר (v.19b), לא מנעת (v. 20b), לא חסרו (v. 21ab), לא בלו (v.21c) and לא בצקו (v.21d). The positive nature of Yahweh towards the people is explained through verbs, such as, נתת (v.20a), נתתה (v.20c) and כילכלתם (v.21a). The word במדבר in v. 21b forms an inclusion with v. 19).

The first instance of Yahweh's care is mentioned in v.19b, through the pillar of the cloud and pillar of the fire.¹¹ The second instance is seen in v. 20a: "You gave them good spirit to instruct them" ורוחך הטובה נתת (להשכילים).¹² The third explanation of the phrase לא עצבתם in v.19 is given in v.21 with a pilpel verbal form, כלכלתם (You sustained them in the wilderness for forty years). The nature of Yahweh's care and concern is explained in v. 21b through verbs לא חסרו, לא בלו and לא בצקו (did not lack, their clothes were not wear out and their feet were not sworn).

3.4. FOURTH STROPHE (VV. 22-25)

In vv.22-25 explain the events that are explained in the book of Joshua. Yahweh gave them the kings and the people conquered the land by throwing away the kingdoms of the land. This ideology is present in

¹¹ The word את in v. 19b joined with the noun עמוד is a non- accusative את, that is a syntagma. Therefore, the noun עמוד הענן is the subject of the verb לא סר (the pillar of the cloud did not depart from upon them). V. 19b has an ellipsis of the verb in the second strophe, לא סר. This strophe also shows a symmetrical parallelism:

את עמוד הענן לא סר מעליהם בוימם להחנהתם בהדרך
את עמוד האש לא סר בלילה להאיר להם הדרך אשר ילכו בה

¹² . The concept of רוח אלהים (Spirit of God) is also noticed in v. 30b.

the book of Judges. The action of Yahweh and the actions of the people have symmetrical parallelism: וירשו=ותתן, ויבאו=ותביאם. There is a refrain in vv.22-25 (They possessed the land=they possessed the houses)¹³, which forms an inclusion to the fourth strophe.

In v.23 we notice a new section concerning the children of Israel when they were multiplied. V. 23a functions as the background clause whose foreground is explained through wayyiqtol in v. 23b. In v.24c we notice a play of words or paranomasia, כנע and הכנענים.¹⁴ The foreground of the action of the people as a result of Yahweh's bringing them to the land is mentioned in v. 25abcd with the verbs, עָדָן, אָכַל, יָרַשׁ, לָכַד. In vv. 23-25, the action of Yahweh is mentioned in v. 23b, while the result of the action from the part of the sons of Israel is explained in vv.24-25. This strophe enumerates the mercy of Yahweh to the people of God by bringing them in to the land and planting them in the mountain of Yahweh (Exod 15:17).

3.5. FIFTH STROPHE (V. 26) REBELLION OF THE PEOPLE

This verse portrays the rebellion of the people of Israel who became disobedient to Yahweh and His precepts. The wayyiqtol construction, though depend upon the previous wayyiqtol and the subject being the same as that of the previous one, the nature of the action is different from the other. It is evident through the verbs use in v.26. explains the reaction of the people of God over the goodness received from Yahweh. There occurs wayyiqtol chains (וישלחו, וימרדו, וימרו), which are explained by the clause in x-qatal and the evil inclinations are again repeated with wayyiqtol (ויעשו). The rebellion of the people is that they slaughtered the prophets of Yahweh. This strophe is parallel to vv. 16-18, which speak of

¹³ the verb וירשו forms the refrain: וירשו את הארץ, וירשו את ארץ סחון

¹⁴ Michael W. Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal*, 187.

the rebellion of the people of which the climax is explained with ויעשו נאצות גדולות (vv.18c and 26d).

3.6. SIXTH STROPHE (VV. 27-30)

This strophe explains the Mercy of Yahweh in the midst of the rebellion of the people. Here the poet reiterates the theology of the book of Judges, the sin of the people, Yahweh gave them into the hands of their enemies, the people cried out before Yahweh and Yahweh gave them a savior (Jud 3:7-10). The words, ישע, שמע, צעק, צרר, צריהם, נתן, מרד, are used in v. 26-27 to explain the nature of the rebellion of the people and the mercy of Yahweh. The same ideology is noticed in vv. 28 and 29, the continued rebellious action of the people and the great compassion and mercy from Yahweh. These verses have parallel structures:

V. 27 is the action from Yahweh against the people in the wayyiqtol form. This is antithetical to v. 22, where the word נתן is used in a positive sense in v. 22, while the same word is used in a negative tone in v. 27. Vv. 26 and 28a are thematically parallel that people rebelled against Yahweh:

וימרו וימרדו בך וישלחו את תורותיך
וכנוח להם ישובו לעשות רע לפניך

Vv. 27a and 28b are parallel that Yahweh gave them into the hands of their adversaries:

ותתנם ביד צריהם
ותעזבם ביד איביהם

VV. 27de is parallel to v. 28b: People cried out to Yahweh

ובעת צרתם יצעקו אליך
וישובו ויזעקוך

Vv. 27d is parallel to v. 28f: Yahweh heard the cry of the people. In these parallel versus the same expressions are mentioned:

ואתה משמים תשמע

Here too one finds a word play, the word **צרה** in the noun form and in the verbal form. V.27c again uses the word **צרה** and employs an x-yiqtol clause which is used in the poetry with a past reference to time.

VV. 29-30 form a parallel structure, depicting the merciful act of Yahweh and the rebellious nature of the people. The parallel clauses are the following:

The action of Yahweh: V. 29a=v.30b: ותעד בם ברוחך ביד = ותעד בהם להשיבם
נביאך

Rebellion of the people: v. 29b-e=v.30b: והמה הזידו ולא שמעו למצותיך
ולא האזינו = ובמשפטיך הטאו בם ויתנו כתף סוררת וערפם הקשו ולא שמעו

The punishment of the rebellion is expressed in v. 30c: ותתנם ביד עמי הארצת

Hence this strophe emphasizes on the mercy of Yahweh amidst the rebellion of the people of Israel.

3.7. SEVENTH STROPHE (V.31) MERCY OF YAHWEH

This verse is the conclusion to the first part of the covenant renewal ceremony, depicting the nature of Yahweh (vv.6-15) and the rebellion of the people vs the mercy of Yahweh (vv.16-30). V.31 forms an inclusion to the poem from vv.19-31, where we have the same expressions of Yahweh as: **אתה ברחמיך הרבים ולא עזבתם** appears in vv.19 and 30. Appellations of Yahweh in v:31, **אל חנון ורחום**, are the reflections of v. 17. Therefore, this verse is a conclusion to the stanza of vv.19-31.

Thus, the fourth stanza (vv.16-31) forms a single unit in which there are seven strophes that explain the nature of Rebellion of the people and the mercy of Yahweh. After this explanation, the poet turns to the present stage of the people of Israel who are the returnees from Babylon (Neh 7:6). These people have not yet rebuilt the Temple of Jerusalem and therefore they have become servants.

4 FIFTH STANZA (VV.32-37) YAHWEH AND ISRAEL IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT

V. 32 begins with a macro syntactic structure with *ועתה* that can be a conclusion to the above-mentioned themes. With *ועתה* begins a present reality. The poet presents the nature of Yahweh (vv.32-33) and the present crisis of the people of Israel, even the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions (vv.34-35). These crises occurred due to the sins of the people of Israel. The crisis is pictured by the expression: “we are slaves” (v.36).

The poet is explaining the conditions of the people of God in first person plural form. The present people are experiencing their own hardships. The nature of Yahweh is depicted in the nominal clause: *אלהינו האל הגדול הגבור והנורא*. This verse has an ellipsis in the second clause. The appellations are connected with *waw*. Next appellation is in a participial nominal clause: *שמר הברית וחסד*. The third appellation is in v.33: *ואתה צדיק*. The word *חסד* is the attribute of Yahweh in v. 17d and the word *ברית* in v.32 explains the covenant (*ברית*) of Abraham presented in v.8.

The sad situation of the people of present generation is depicted in v.32c: *אל ימעט לפניך את כל התלאה אשר מצאתנו* (let him not consider too little before you our hardship that has befallen us). The first person plural pronominal suffix is given explanation by the succeeding nouns with preposition *ל*.

In v. 33 we have the third appellation of Yahweh as *צדיק*. Here the poet emphasizes the nature of Yahweh and the nature of the present generation.

The nature of Yahweh is: *כי אמת עשית* (v.33b)

Nature of the generation:

a. *אנחנו הרשענו* (v.33c)

b. לא עשו תורתך (v.34a) the subjects of the verb עשה is placed as the casus pendens of the clause;

c. ולא הקשיבו אל מצאותיך ועדותיך (v.34b)

d. לא עבדוך (v.35a)

e. לא שבו (v.35b)

In v. 35, the nouns בטובך and בארץ are given attributive adjectives and the corresponding explanations with a relative clause אשר. These are parallel statements.

והם בממלכותם ובטובך הרה

ובארץ הרחבה והשמנה

אשר נתת להם= אשר נתת לפנייהם

V.36 forms an inclusion with the phrase: הנה אנחנו עבדים: that comes at the beginning and end. Also the preposition with pronominal suffix עליה indicates the הארץ אשר נתת לאבותינו.

V.37 has two participial clauses, namely with מרבה and משלים. The subject of מרבה is תבואתה, the pronominal suffix added to it is referring to הארץ of v.36. The indirect object is מלכים. The subject of the second participle משלים is also מלכים.

The verse ends with first person personal pronoun אנחנו that forms an inclusion to vv.36-37 and even makes a inclusion with v.33c. The expression ובצרה גדולה אנחנו reflects v. 27: ותתנו ביד כריהם. Therefore taking vv.33c-37, the present generation acted wickedly against the Torah of Yahweh, they have become slaves. The nature of the present generation is that they acted wickedly against the law of Yahweh and have becomes slaves. But the nature of Yahweh is always merciful and compassionate from the beginning till this time (even in the future), from the selection of Abram (v.6) and during the exodus event (vv.16-31). Therefore, the poet

insists on the present generation to meditate over the mercy of Yahweh to amend the ways of life.

Thus, the whole poem of the prayer of Nehemiah depicts a covenant renewal ceremony, beginning with the reading of the Torah (Neh 8) and the celebration of the feast of Sukkoth (Neh 8:13-17) that culminates in the prayer of repentance (9:6-37). All the characteristic patterns of the covenant renewal ceremony are employed in this prayer. Therefore, the covenant renewal ceremony of Joshua in chapter 24 and that of Nehemiah in chapters 8-9 are similar in content and structure.

5 STRUCTURE OF NEH 6-37

1. First Stanza: 9:6
9: 6b-c
Title of the Psalm: אתה הוא יהוה לבדיך
Psalm on Creation
2. Second Stanza: vv.7-8
אלהים
Subtitle of the Psalm: אתה הוא יהוה
Abram's Call and Selection
3. Third Stanza: vv. 9-15
vv.9-10 Afflictions of the People in Egypt
vv.11-15 Exodus experience of the People: Yahweh's Gift and Concern
4. Fourth Stanza: vv.16-31
 - a. First Strophe: vv.16-17
vv. 16-17c Rebellion of the People
vv. 17d-e Mercy of Yahweh
 - b. Second Strophe: v.18
v.18 Rebellion of the People
 - c. Third Strophe: vv. 9-21
v.19 Subtitle: אתה ברחמיך הרבה לא עזבתם במדבר
vv.19-21 Mercy of Yahweh

d. Fourth Strophe: vv. 22-25

Vv. 22-25 Possession of the Land

e. Fifth Strophe: v.26

v.26 Rebellion of the People

f. Sixth Strophe: vv. 27-30

vv.27-28 Reaction of Yahweh against the People

vv. 29-30 Mercy of Yahweh vs Rebellion of the People

g. Seventh Strophe: v.31: Conclusion to vv. 16-30

v.31 Nature of Yahweh as רחמה and חנון

5. Fifth Stanza: vv. 32-37

Vv. 32-37 Present Situation of the People

v.32 Subtitle: אלהינו האל הגדול

vv. 32-33 Nature of Yahweh

vv. 34-35 Rebellion of the People

vv. 36-37 Present Situation of the people as Slaves

6 TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

vv. 6-8: You are God the Lord,

(You) who chose in Abram

That (you) brought him out from Ur of Chaldeans

(you) placed his name Abraham.

(you) found his heart is faithful before you

And (you) cut with him the covenant

In order to give the land of Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorites

The Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Gergashite, to give to his descendants
thus (you) fulfilled your word,
for you are righteous.

VV. 9-10: (you) saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt
While (you) heard their cry over the sea of reeds.
and (you) gave signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants
and all the people of his land
Because (you) knew that they acted insolently against them
And (you) made your name as (it is) this day.

V. 11: And you divided the sea before them
As a result, they went in the midst of the sea on the dry land
That is, you cast down their oppressors in to the depths
as stone into the mighty waters

V. 12: You made them to rest the day by the pillar of the cloud
By the pillar of fire in night in order to give light to them the way
In which they should go.

Vv. 13-15
And upon mount Sinai you came down
In order to speak with them from heaven
And as a result gave them the right ordinances and true laws and good
statutes and commandments.
Your holy sabbath you made to them
the commandments, and statutes, and law you made known them, by the
hands of Moses, your servant.

Bread from heaven you gave them for their hunger
 water from the rock you brought for them when they are thirst
 And you told them to go in to possess the land
 Which you lifted up (by) your hand to give them

Vv. 16-17

But when they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck

And they did not obey your commandments.

And they refused to listen

And did not remember the wonders which you made among them

And they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their bondage in Egypt.

VV. 17e: But you are God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love did not forsake them.

V. 18: Even when they made for themselves a molten calf

Then he said “this is your God who brought you from Egypt”

And therefore they committed great blasphemies

Vv. 19-25

In your great mercy you did not forsake them

The pillar of cloud did not depart from them in the day

Nor the pillar of fire, in the night, which lighted for them the way

In which they should go.

(In) your good spirit you gave instructions to them

And the Mannah, you did not withhold from their mouth

And the water you gave for their thirst.
Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness
They lacked (nothing)
Their clothes did not wear out
Their feet did not swell.
And you gave them kingdoms and peoples
And allotted to them every corner
So they took possession the land of Sihon
And the land of king of Heshbon
The land of Og, king of Bashan.
You multiplied their descendants like stars of sky
And you brought them into land
Which you promised told their fathers
To go and possess.
Thus, their descendants went in and possessed the land
And you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land the Canaanites
And gave them into their hands with their kings and people of the land
So that they might do to them as they would
Thus, they captured fortified cities and a rich land and took possession
of houses full of all good things, cisterns hewn out, vineyards, olive
orchards, and fruit trees in abundance.
So that they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves
by your great goodness.

V. 26

But they were disobedient and rebelled against you and rejected your law

And (even) killed your prophets who gave testimony in order they may turn to you

While they committed great blasphemy.

Vv. 27-28

As a result, you gave them into the hands of their enemies

Who made them to suffer

And in the time of their suffering, they cried to you and you heard from heaven

And according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies

As soon as they had rest, they did evil before you

And you abandoned them to the hands of their enemies; So that, they had dominion over them.

When they had turned and cried to you

You heard from heaven and you delivered them many times according to your mercies

Vv. 29-30

And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law

whenever they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments.

Even then they sinned against your ordinances which a man should do and live by them.

They gave a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck as they would not obey.

Though you bear with them many years you warned them by your spirit through hands of your prophets, they would not give ear.

As a result, you gave them to the hands of the peoples of the lands.

V. 31

Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make end all them nor forsake them

Because you are gracious and merciful God

Vv. 32-37

And now our God is the Great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps the covenant and the faithfulness. Let it be not little in your eyes all the travail that has been found before our kings our chiefs and our priests and our prophets and our fathers and all your people from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day.

For you have done truth, but we have done wickedly.

Our kings, chiefs and our fathers did not do your Torah and did not heed to your commandments and your testimonies which you made to testify in them.

But they, in your great kingdom which you gave to them and the great and rich land which you gave before them did not serve you and did not return from their evil works.

Behold, we are servants on this day as for the land you have given to your fathers to eat its fruit and its good.

Behold we are its servants.

Its (land) produce has become great to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins, and they reigned over our bodies and our cattles according to their pleasure. But we are in great distress.

7 CONCLUSION

In sum, the above structural analysis of the prayer in Neh 9:6-37 portrays a poetic structure to the prayer having five stanzas. These clusters present the theological content of the revelation of Yahweh to the people of Israel. In fact, it represents the whole story of creation, un creation and re-creation of the people of Israel. The poet analyses the qualities of Yahweh as the Merciful and compassionate God, who is slow to anger and rich in faithfulness in relation to the rebellious people of God whom Yahweh has chosen. Nehemiah, who makes this prayer recalls the entire salvation history of the people of Israel and presents it in relation to the present crisis of the people. For the second Temple Judaism has undergone serious violations of the law of Yahweh in the rebuilding project of the Temple of Jerusalem. The returnees from Yahweh engaged in making their own fortified houses, while the Temple of Yahweh was in ruins (Hag 1:4-5). The practice of the mixed marriage is also a stumbling block in the formation of the Judaism and the eventual rebuilding process of the Temple (Ezra 10:16ff). Therefore, there is a need for the covenant renewal ceremony, which consists of the reading of the Torah (Neh 8) and celebration of the feast of Sukkoth (8:13-17). The reading of the Torah might have accompanied with the commemoration of the Mercy of Yahweh in all the circumstances of the life of the people of Israel. Hence, the prayer of Nehemiah in Neh 9:6-37 is part of the covenantal renewal ceremony which is in Neh 7:6-9:37.