

Diminishing the Effectiveness of the Wall in Nehemiah: A Narratological Analysis of the Nehemiah Memoir and Third-person Narration

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DIMINISHING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WALL IN NEHEMIAH: A NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NEHEMIAH MEMOIR AND THIRD- PERSON NARRATION*

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INTRODUCTION

Scholarship has tended to assess the different narrators within the book of Nehemiah as proof of separate sources.¹ These diachronic studies are valuable in their own right and have been the dominant way of understanding the book of Nehemiah. Outside of a few studies,² however, a study of the whole of Nehemiah as a single coherent text has not been entertained thoroughly. Thus, the preliminary aim of this paper is to entertain a synchronic reading of Nehemiah through a narratological lens, with a special focus on each narrator's focus of emphasis.

In recent narratological studies, there has been some interest in the relationship between what is known as the intradiegetic narrator and the extradiegetic narrator within a narrative.³ Simply said, the intradiegetic narrator is the first-person narrator and the extradiegetic is the third-person narrator. An aspect of narratological studies which is useful for our study of Nehemiah is to understand the change in persons as stylistic transitions and the

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¹ E.g., T. Reinmuth, *Der Bericht Nebemias: Zur literarischen Eigenart, traditionsgeschichtlichen Prägung und innerbiblischen Rezeption des Ich-Berichts Nebemias* (OBO, 183; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002); J. L. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and Its Earliest Readers* (BZAW, 348; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).

² E.g., T. C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBLMS, 36; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); M. Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal in Ezra-Nehemiah (Neh 7:72b-10:40)* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

³ See, M. Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 21–39; W. Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 89–113.

author(s)' strategic arrangement to relay a message.⁴ These tools offered by the discipline of narratological studies may prove to be exceptionally helpful for the study of the relationship between the Nehemiah Memoir (NM), generally regarded to be Neh 1:1–7:5; 12:27–43; 13:4–31,⁵ and the rest of the third-person narrations.

To this end, this paper will begin by highlighting the various similarities and dissimilarities between the NM and the third-person narrations. One focal point of this study will be the wall which Nehemiah is so adamant to build (Neh 2:17). In this paper, I will put forward a case suggesting that the arrangement of the material effectively presents the rebuilding of the wall as an inadequate solution to Israel's problems.

SURVEY OF SOME PREVIOUS OBSERVATIONS ON THE WALL

To obtain a theological grasp of the wall in Nehemiah has been somewhat of an enigma in scholarship. While historical and archeological studies of the wall have been discussed at some length,⁶ the ideological and theological significance of the wall is one that is rarely discussed. Perhaps the reason behind this scarcity is best reflected in Oeming's statement that "the book of Nehemiah itself does not seem very concerned with the question of *why* the wall is so important for Nehemiah."⁷ In other words, the book of Nehemiah never systematically clarifies the significance of the wall.

Despite this lack of clarity, some suggestions have been made regarding the wall's meaning and functions. One which has

⁴ This perspective is by no means innovative. There have been others who have suggested reading the transitioning narrators as a stylistic tool (See, A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999], 73–74; M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [ISBL; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985], 12–13; Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 13–14).

⁵ Scholarly differences to what should be identified as the Nehemiah Memoir remain subtly different but largely congruent. For a comprehensive list of similarities and differences between various scholars see, L. L. Schulte, *My Shepherd, Though You Do Not Know Me: The Persian Royal Propaganda Model in the Nehemiah Memoir* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology; Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 16.

⁶ E.g., O. Lipschits, "Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Process in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century BCE," in O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 19–52; I. Finkelstein, "Jerusalem in the Persian (and Early Hellenistic) Period and the Wall of Nehemiah," *JSOT* 32 (2008): 501–20; D. Ussishkin, "On Nehemiah's City Wall and the Size of Jerusalem during the Persian Period: An Archaeologist's View," in I. Kalimi (ed.), *New Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 101–30.

⁷ M. Oeming, "The Real History: The Theological Ideas behind Nehemiah's Wall," in I. Kalimi (ed.), *New Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 135.

a similar approach to this study is Eskenazi's study of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative from a literary perspective. Eskenazi's study of Neh 1:1–7:5 suggests that the wall was an extension of the temple. She writes that the wall is, "[t]he completion of the architectural component of the house of God under Artaxerxes."⁸ And indeed Nehemiah's distress for the wall in connection with the temple—which is all narrated in the first-person—is found in Neh 4:7–24 where the house of God and the wall are coextensive.⁹

A similar observation has been made by Oeming's survey of theological schools of the Persian era and some texts from the ancient Near East. In order to warrant this finding, he cites the Inscription of Edfu which dictates that the Pharaoh was to construct an enclosing wall that marked the completion of the holy area of the temple.¹⁰ Comparable ideas are also shared by 20 building stories, as Hurowitz has shown, between the Sumerian era to Herod's construction of the Second Temple.¹¹ Nehemiah seems to fit in with the consistent pattern of lamentation concerning the destruction of the temple leading to a royal edict to reconstruct the wall and repopulate the refurbished city. Similarly, Oeming also emphasizes a few theological-symbolic significances of Nehemiah's wall: the wall's destruction as a sign of Israel's sin and God's punishment, the boundaries of the wall allowed the city to exist as a "holy city," and proper cultic procedures could only be completed within a purified wall.¹²

Both Eskenazi and Oeming's suggestions are indeed possible. However, one should notice that despite their difference in approach (Eskenazi being literary and Oeming who focuses on

⁸ Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 77.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁰ Oeming, "The Real History," 147–48.

¹¹ V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings* (JSOTSup, 115; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 118–24.

¹² Oeming, "The Real History," 142–43. The majority of proposals have been "secular" interpretations of the wall narratives. What is meant by "secular" is the attempt to explain the relevance of the building of the wall outside of explicitly religious reasons. Some examples include: the wall served a predominately political function (e.g., E. A. Knauf, "The Israelite Impact on Judaeae Language and Literature," in O. Lipschits and M. Oeming [eds.], *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 291–350); the wall was a primarily a defence against Samaritans (e.g., M. Noth, *Geschichte Israels* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963], 292–95); the wall has *no* theological significance and should be understood within the framework of economics (e.g., O. Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005], 168–73); all theological statements about the wall must be understood as secondary additions (e.g., Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*). Although I find the strict dichotomy of "secular reasons" and "religious reasons" problematic, it is undoubtedly possible. However, such a dichotomy is difficult to find on synchronic level. For an adequate treatment of this topic see, Oeming, "The Real History," 135–38.

extra-biblical sources) there remains a common thread between the two. These two studies are solely based on the information provided by the NM. Eskenazi arrives at her conclusion through a study of Neh 1–7:5,¹³ and in Oeming’s case, every significant point is made through references to the NM.¹⁴

The tendency of retrieving the wall’s theology from the NM can be understood from the reflection provided in the text itself. From the beginning of the book, Nehemiah’s reaction to the news that “the wall of Jerusalem is broken down” (Neh 1:3) is great distress to the point of mourning for days (Neh 1:4). Furthermore, a consistent focus on the wall is built in the memoir: Nehemiah’s plea to King Artaxerxes is to build a wall for the city (Neh 2:8); upon arrival in Jerusalem Nehemiah inspects the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:13); an emphatic call is made, “let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem” (Neh 2:17); various groups begin work on the wall (Neh 3:1–32); the wall is half completed by the community (Neh 4:6); a threat to the wall appears (Neh 4:7–23); Nehemiah describes his piety because he devoted himself to work on the wall (Neh 5:16); the wall is valiantly completed on the twenty-fifth day (Neh 6:15); the doors, gatekeeper, singers, and the Levites are appointed for the wall (Neh 7:1).¹⁵

The second part of the NM (Neh 12:27–43) also displays great affinity towards the wall.¹⁶ Generally regarded to be the dedication (חנכה) of the wall, a heavy emphasis is added concerning the wall through great “rejoicing” (שמחה), “thanksgiving” (תודות), and “singing” (שיר) (Neh 12:27). The remaining part of the NM continues with the leaders of Judah ascending onto the wall to give thanks and to enter into procession (Neh

¹³ Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 77.

¹⁴ See Oeming, “The Real History,” 138–40.

¹⁵ Neh 1–7:5 is regarded to be part of the NM by virtually all commentators: S. Mowinckel, *Die Nehemia-Denkschrift*, vol. 2 (Studien zu dem Buche Ezra-Nehemiah; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964), 14; G. von Rad, “Die Nehemia-Denkschrift,” *ZAW* 76 (1964): 176; U. Kellerman, *Nehemiah: Quellen, Überlieferung und Geschichte* (BZAW, 102; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967), 74; S. Japhet, “Periodization between History and Ideology II: Chronology and Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah,” in eadem, *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 419–21; D. J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 4; H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1985), xxiv; J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1989), 46–47.

¹⁶ The attempt to locate which editorial work Neh 12:27–30 conforms to has been notoriously difficult. While it is true that Neh 12:27–30 lacks an unambiguous first-person narrator, because of its complex structure it has led many to argue that it is an excerpt from the NM which has been reworked by the editor (see, Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 370). Also, although it has been suggested that “they sought out” (בקשו) indicates the third-person nature of the narrative (e.g., Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 284), the third-person plural verb is an inconclusive piece of evidence for the text not being a part of the NM. There are places within the undisputed sections of the NM that we find the use of a third-person plural verb (e.g., Neh 3:1 [ויעמידו] קדשוהו).

12:31). It is abundantly clear that the NM has a strong focus on the wall. The necessity of building, completing, and dedicating the wall are all found in the first-person narrations. Hence, the emphasis on the wall is so apparent and impossible to deny. In due course, however, we will see that the material outside of the NM does not share the same focus and goals of the NM.

THE EXPLICIT FOCUS ON THE LAW IN THE THIRD-PERSON NARRATIONS

The third-person narration, differing from the NM, has its focus on something different: the law. The first entrance of the third-person narrator is in Neh 8 and in tandem with this entrance is also the first occurrence of the word “law” (תורה) [Neh 8:1]. Immediately, the reader will notice a difference in tone as the narrative unfolds with a significant focus on the necessity to observe and revere the law.

At the very inception of the narrative, the people gather and tell the scribe, Ezra, to “bring the book of the law Moses” (Neh 8:1). Already the tone is different as it is the people, and not the leader (i.e., Nehemiah) who initiate the reading of the law.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the text takes a remarkable turn. Firstly, Ezra the scribe is elevated onto a “wooden platform” (מגדל) resulting in the visibility and audibility of the reading of the law. We are also told that the platform “had been made for this purpose” (עשו לדבר) [Neh 8.4], indicating that premeditated constructions were made specifically for the hearing of the law.

The narrative continues with the response of the people. Neh 8:5–6 reads:

and when he [Ezra] opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

This description led Fried to suggest that the law of Moses is exalted to more than a mere book and has become a manifestation or an epiphany of YHWH.¹⁸ The evidence for this is that “they bowed” (וישתחו) [Neh 8:6] as a “reaction to the presence of the divine.”¹⁹ These actions displayed by the people should not be overlooked. Postures such as lifting hands and bowing heads with faces to the ground may be signs of true reverence towards the law.

This focus on the law perpetuates throughout the narrative: interpretations of the law of God are given to the people (Neh 8:8); the people weep after hearing the words of the law (Neh 8:9); on the second day, more study of the law is conducted and

¹⁷ Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 97.

¹⁸ L. S. Fried, “The Torah of God as God,” in N. MacDonald and I. J. de Hulster (eds.), *Divine Presence and Absence in Exilic and Post-Exilic Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 294.

¹⁹ Fried, “The Torah of God as God,” 294. Fried offers examples from Exod 34:8, Num 22:31, and 1 Sam 24:9.

Sukkot is found written in the law (Neh 8:13–15); Ezra reads the book of the law day by day (Neh 8:18). Moreover, this emphasis on the law does not stop at chapter 8. Neh 9 contains more reading and adherence of the law (Neh 9:2–3), and Ezra’s retelling of the history of Israel contains the giving of the law at Sinai and their ancestor’s failure to observe those laws and commandments (Neh 9:13–17, 26, 29, 34).

Most of the remaining parts of the third-person narrations are lists of leaders and priests (Neh 10:1–27; 11:3–12:26). In the latter list (Neh 11:3–12:26), there are components which emphasize the people’s occupations (e.g., Neh 11:6, 9, 10–12, 19), some of which may seem like an emphasis on the wall. The most relevant of these are Neh 11:11–12, 19, and 12:25. Neh 11:11–12 describes Seraiah as the “officer of the house of God” and the associates who “did the work of the house.” Neh 11:19 and 12:25 mention the gatekeepers. While there remains a slight focus on the house of God, there is still no mention of the wall.

On the other hand, the narrative that exists between the two lists (Neh 10:28–11:2) exhibits a strong focus on the law. In fact, in Neh 10:29 the people make an “oath” (שבועה) to “walk in God’s law” (ללכת בתורת האלהים). The significant event of oath-making in the book is certainly noteworthy to the point where it has been postulated to be the climax of what is generally known as the Covenant Renewal.²⁰ The event of taking an oath is undoubtedly significant as it is the only time in the book where such an explicit action is mentioned.

CONTRASTING ELEMENTS

We have already seen preliminary differences in the specific focuses of each narrator. The NM has a greater emphasis on the wall while the third-person narrator has focused their narrative on the law. This section seeks to show that these differences are not implicit but are made forcefully.

A noticeable trait of the third-person narration is the lack of any mention of the wall and its complete focus on the law. Such a trait is quite unusual. For the first seven chapters of the book, which is the first-person narrator (who also happens to be the main protagonist of the book), the theme of the law is completely absent. While a counterargument can be made that Neh 11:1–12:26, which is part of the third-person narration, is a narrative presupposing the completion of the wall in Neh 7:4–5, it is strange nonetheless that the wall lacks continuous mention. This is especially true when the wall is abruptly picked up again in Neh 12:27 which is part of the first-person narrative.²¹

On the other hand, as the third-person narrations lack a reference to the wall, the NM never uses the word “law” (תורה). In the first and largest portion of the NM (Neh 1–7:5) the reader is not unjustified to expect the explicit usage of “law” (תורה)

²⁰ Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal*, 235.

²¹ It must be noted that my thesis is not that the third-person narrator lacks any knowledge of the wall, but rather that they choose not to mention it.

within Nehemiah's confession found in Neh 1:5–11. The language comes tremendously close. Words such as “commandment” (מצוה [Neh 1:5, 7, 9]), “statute” (חק [Neh 1:7]), “ordinance” (משפט [Neh 1:7]), are used but the use of “תורה” cannot be found.²² The lack of the “law” here should not be underemphasized. תורה understood from its very introduction in Neh 8:1, is represented generally as a “book,”²³ and outside of this usage is found in Ezra's penitential prayer (Neh 9:6–37). Interestingly, the penitential prayer contains similar vocabulary to Neh 1:5–11 (מצות [Neh 9:13, 14, 29, 34], חק [Neh 9:13, 14], משפט [Neh 9:13, 29]). At the same time, however, in conjunction with these words, the narrator elects to add “תורה” amongst them (Neh 9:13, 14, 29, 34). Eskenazi remarks that Neh 1–7:5 “reiterates the importance of written documents less vigorously than do the sections which precede and follow.”²⁴ However, we can be more specific by saying that the reiteration of the law is less vigorous. Since the NM does implicitly make reference to the law, it is impossible to say that it is utterly disinterested in the law. Still, for one reason or another “תורה” is never employed.

The same point can be made of Neh 13:4–31: the word “law” (תורה) is never used. The narrative continues in the voice of the first-person narrator with the returned community's failure to adhere to the Sabbath (Neh 13:15–18) and show rebellious tendencies by intermarrying (Neh 13:23–31). Both the topics of Sabbath and intermarrying are dealt with in the third-person narrations as part of the law. In Neh 9:14 the Sabbath is seen as a festival given in tandem with the law and in Neh 10:28–31 the whole “scandal” of foreign marriage is explicitly regarded as a violation of “the law of God.” Furthermore, just before Neh 13:4–31, Neh 13:3 emphatically notes that “the law” (התורה) commanded a separation of “all those of foreign descent.” However, in the NM, the failure to observe the Sabbath is approached with a rhetorical question about whether Israel's “ancestors” would have acted the same way (Neh 13:18) and the intermarriage problem is compared with Solomon's failure of having foreign wives (Neh 13:26).

Therefore, it is evident that the NM and the third-person narrations have contrasting elements. While the NM gets close

²² Kapelrud and Yoo contend that תורה consistently refers to the same legal document and other legal terminologies reflect something different (A. S. Kapelrud, *The Question of Authorship in the Ezra Narrative: A Lexical Investigation* [Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1944], 21; P. Y. Yoo, *Ezra and the Second Wilderness* [OTM; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016], 100).

²³ Neh 8:3 describes the “book of the law of Moses” (see Neh 8:1, ספר תורת משה) being read before the men and the women. Neh 8:7–8 treats the law as something to “understand” (בין) and “read” (קרא). In Neh 8:9, the words of the law are “heard” (שמע). In Neh 8:13–14 the words of the law are written. Neh 8:18 explicitly calls the “law of God” a “book” (ספר). Neh 9:3 describes the law as a “book” (ספר) which was read.

²⁴ Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 87.

to mentioning the law, it never does, and the third-person narrations are uninterested in the wall.

DIMINISHING THE WALL THROUGH TRANSITIONS

This leads us into some observations concerning the placement of the NM and the third-person narrations. There are exactly two places where a transition is made from the NM to the third-person (Neh 7:5 to 7:6 and Neh 13:43 to 13:44). On both occasions, the transitions effectively diminish the focus on the wall.

Evidence of the wall being diminished can be found in Neh 6:15–7:5. This is made clear by the placement of the narration. Within the content of chapters 6 and 7, the completion of the wall is described not only as an unlikely event but also as one that was accomplished through divine assistance (Neh 6:16). But this highly successful event is abruptly cast into the background as the narrative swiftly switches to third-person narration introducing for the first time in the book of Nehemiah the “book of the law of Moses” (ספר תורת משה [Neh 8:1]). The abrupt shift between the wall and the law has led to diachronic assessments of Neh 8, proposing it was originally located somewhere else.²⁵ Even by standard diachronic studies, the sudden shift is noteworthy. However, for our purposes, the shift is significant because it effectively diminishes the completion of the wall.

A possible objection to the previous point is to notice the gap between Neh 7:5 and Neh 8. Between Neh 7:5 and Neh 8:1 there is an extensive census list. The list is a genealogy of the first returnees (Neh 7:5). In reference to the elongated census list, one can ask: if the law is so important, then why the delay? The census list, however, should be understood as a necessary element in order to build a climax towards the Covenant Renewal (Neh 7:72b–10:40) which in essence is a reappraisal of the law (e.g., Neh 8:13–15; 9:3; 10:29).²⁶ Moreover, the census is an activity divinely inspired in order to create some kind of demographic basis for the reallocation of the population to Jerusalem (Neh 7:5).²⁷ Yet within the whole narrative strategy, the census gives concreteness to the recipients of the hearing of the law and subsequently the covenant renewal. It was only those who were included in the genealogy who benefitted from the reappraisal of the covenant. Thus, the census list must exist as a necessary building block towards not only the law but also the climactic covenant renewal.

²⁵ E.g., J. Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe: The Development of Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah 8* (BZAW, 347; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 136–77.

²⁶ The exact delimitations of the Covenant Renewal account are not unanimous. With regards to the start of the Covenant Renewal, Antonius H.J. Gunneweg (*Ezra*, [KAT; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1985], 103–39), contends that Neh 7:4 marks the start of the Covenant Renewal. Similarly, Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 277), contends that Neh 7:5b marks the beginning. However, what confines the end of the Covenant Renewal is almost unanimous (Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal*, 68).

²⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 281.

The second example of a transition that diminishes the importance of the wall is found between the events of Neh 12:1–43 and the third-person narrations of Neh 12:44–13:3.²⁸ The former section describes the dedication of the wall. However, this momentous event celebrated by the NM is only eclipsed by a strong focus on the law in Neh 12:44–13:3. Initially, the narration displays a less explicit emphasis on the law. It is mentioned in verse 44 that men were appointed and contributions, first fruits, and tithes were gathered as “required by the law.” However, the emphasis on the law is intensified from Neh 13:1–3, “On that day they read from the book of Moses (בספר משה) in the hearing of the people...when the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.” The foregrounding of the law from Neh 12:44–13:3 overshadows the dedication of the wall.

DIMINISHING THE WALL THROUGH AN ANTICLIMACTIC ENDING

As seen above, there are distinct differences between the priorities of the NM and the third-person narrations. In narratology it can be said that the third-person narrator holds a more evaluative perspective. That is, the nature of first-person narrator is that it “can only ‘see’ their own past or present thoughts.”²⁹ This is not to say their perspectives are valueless, but that it is only on an extradiegetic level that one can look into the mind of the characters and thus make a judgment beyond what the intradiegetic narrator is able to do. The intradiegetic narrator in Nehemiah can be presumed to be the character Nehemiah (Neh 1:1) and the extradiegetic narrator is unspecified and omniscient.³⁰

²⁸ All the scholars mentioned in note 15 consider Neh 13:1–3 to be separate from the NM. There are, however, a number of scholars who challenge the authenticity of the whole of chapter 13: G. Steins, *Die Chronik als kanonisches Abschlussphänomen. Studien zur Entstehung und Theologie von 1/2Chronik* (BBB, 93; Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum Verlag, 1995), 198–205; R. G. Kratz, *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments* (UTB, 2157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 69–74. Some critics have separated Neh 13:1–3 as not part of the NM because of its specific use of the law (see, T. Reinmuth, “Nehemiah 8 and the Authority of Torah in Ezra-Nehemiah,” in M. J. Boda and P. L. Redditt [eds.], *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader* [Hebrew Bible Monographs, 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008], 248–49), a warrant of this sort for our study is problematic due to its circularity. Instead, I concur with Wright who notices that Neh 12:44–13:3 is formulated either in the third-person or passive voice allowing Nehemiah to “relate first-hand how he *alone* perceived and brought about an awareness of the abuses which the community *later* decided to correct” (Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 191 [emphasis original]).

²⁹ Fludernik, *Introduction to Narratology*, 38.

³⁰ See, S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOT, 70; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 17–23; Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 58–83.

In the case of the book of Nehemiah, the evaluative perspective of the third-person narrator is the persistent insistence that the law needed to be observed through careful study. There is an interesting development of the narrative, however. Despite the third-person narrator holding the ability to evaluate the doings of the first-person, the final events of Nehemiah end quite awkwardly and anticlimactically in first-person. The book ends with Nehemiah seeing the Israelites married to the women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab (Neh 13:23) and the offspring unable to speak the ethnic language (Neh 13:24). Nehemiah reprimands the unfaithful both physically and verbally (Neh 13:25–27) and the agonizingly cries out, “Remember me, O my God, for good” (Neh 13:31). The anticlimactic nature of the final chapter has led some commentators to believe chapter 13 was originally placed elsewhere.³¹ Blenkinsopp even calls the ending, “a complicated and not very satisfactory editorial arrangement of the material.”³²

Up to this point, we have already seen the contrasting focuses of the two narrators. Moreover, not only is it contrasting but the consistent transition of emphasis to the law between every significant event concerning the wall has a diminishing effect. For this reason, it is not necessarily unreasonable to have an anti-climactic ending in Nehemiah with the wall finished yet the community still failing to uphold the laws of God. We are told that the wall succeeded in stopping foreign merchants and sellers from entering into the land (Neh 13:20–31). However, it did not help the community within the wall with their ability to observe God’s ordinances which was the very thing the NM laments in the first chapter (Neh 1:4–11). The wall is then ultimately diminished as a cosmetic attempt to fix the real problem of obeying and following the law.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is apparent that the arrangement of the narrative of Nehemiah ultimately diminishes the importance and anticipated effectiveness of the wall. The narrative effect of arranging the third-person narrations immediately after every major achievement concerning the wall narrated in the NM is one of diminishment. Also, while the NM makes its focus on the law implicit by either not utilizing “תורה” or not mentioning the law at all, the third-person narrations are replete with references to the “תורה” and lack any remark concerning the wall. Furthermore, the reader is again prompted to see a diminishing of the wall through the anti-climactic ending. Even though the third-person narrator has the intrinsic ability to evaluate the overall events, the book of Nehemiah ends with the NM. In the end, we see that the wall, although succeeding in keeping certain foreigners out (Neh 13:20), nevertheless fails to stop the community

³¹ E.g., M. A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 120–26.

³² Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 353.

from acting in disobedience. Overall, the arrangement of Nehemiah from a narratological perspective effectively diminishes the wall's significance as a remedy for reform.