

Ezra 9-10 “The Power of the Gospel Revealed in the Weakness of the Law” Feb 10, 2019
Psalm 144
1 Corinthians 7:1-16

[skip verses 20-43 in the reading...]

Introduction: What About Ruth?

Okay, let’s just start with the obvious:

Wow!

They are sending away their *wives and children!*

Now, it’s true that the “romantic ideal” of marriage didn’t really exist back then –
but it’s pretty obvious from other OT texts that *love* did exist back then!

And these men are now sending away their wives and children.

The basic idea – which you see in Ezra’s prayer and in the peoples’ decision –
is rooted in the OT concept of how the unclean contaminates the clean.

In this case, the foreign wives, with their foreign gods, are “contaminating” the holy people.

Of course, if you know your OT history, you might be wondering – *what about Ruth?!*

Ruth was a Moabite.

The Moabites were expressly excluded from the Assembly of the LORD in Dt 24!

How could she be accepted into the tribe of Judah?

Ruth was King David’s great-grandmother.

How come she was allowed to marry in?

The reason is simple:

Ruth forsook her gods and her people and joined herself to Israel’s God.

As she said to Naomi:

“Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”

There’s no problem with a Moabite who denies herself, takes up her cross,
and follows the LORD!

The problem that Ezra identifies is *intermarrying with people who practice abominations*.
Namely, who worship foreign gods.

As we’ll see, if the question was simply “did you marry a foreigner?”

then then solution could have been implemented in a day.

“She’s a foreigner – get rid of her!! We’re done!!”

The reason why Ezra has to establish a commission

is in order to distinguish between foreigners who are like Ruth –
and who have joined themselves to Israel –

and foreigners who practice abominations,
and thus are teaching their children to worship other gods as well!

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 144,
which reflects upon this same theme.

In Psalm 144, the refrain is heard in verses 7 and 11 –
“rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners,
whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.”

And then, in contrast to the foreigners, we see “our children” in verse 12 –
“May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown”
(echoing the garden/farming language of Genesis 1-2)
“may our daughters be like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace”
(echoing the way in which Eve was “built” from Adam’s side).
If man was called to work and protect the sanctuary/Garden,
woman was *built* to be the sanctuary.

(We’ll be talking more about this on Wednesday night at the Sex and the Family of God study)

But in this way Psalm 144 helps us make some sense of what is happening in Ezra.
Foreign women and foreign temples are intimately bound up together.
If a foreign woman joins herself to Israel’s God,
then she is, by definition, *no longer* a foreign woman!

Sing Psalm 144A
Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

In verses 12-16, you can see the problem of Ezra looming in the background.
There are Christians in Corinth who have unbelieving spouses.
They know the Scriptures.
They remember that Ezra had required the foreign women and children to be sent away.
The question is: is that true for us as well?!

And Paul’s answer is *no* –
at least, *not necessarily*.
Something has changed since the days of Ezra.
Ezra certainly never hinted that the foreign wife
was “made holy” because of her husband!
That’s because in the OT, the *holy* did not have that sort of power.

That’s why I titled this sermon,
“The Power of the Gospel Revealed in the Weakness of the Law.”

Ezra had been sent to study, to do, and to teach the Law of God.

And all throughout the Law,
whenever the unclean comes in contact with the clean,
the clean becomes contaminated – and becomes unclean.

But when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us –
when God joined himself to our humanity
in the incarnation of the Son of God –
something changed!

As Joel has been preaching through Mark,
we keep seeing Jesus *touching* the unclean –
in Mark's gospel, Jesus touches a leper (1);
a woman with a discharge of blood (5);
even a dead person (5).

What I find remarkable about all this is that the Pharisees never accuse him
of being unclean because of all this.

And part of it is because it is too obvious to everyone what has happened:
when Jesus touches the unclean, they become clean!

The leper is cleansed – the woman's discharge is healed – the dead is restored to life!

The sanctifying power of Jesus reverses the flow of contamination!
Where in the OT, the unclean contaminates the clean –
in the NT, the clean *decontaminates* the unclean!

Have you ever wondered what Paul means by saying that the unbelieving spouse
is *sanctified* by the believing spouse?

This is it!

In Ezra's day, the contaminating power of the unclean was too strong!
The unclean spouse would contaminate the clean.
And therefore, children born to an unclean spouse
were *also* unclean.

But now that Jesus has come,
the clean spouse *decontaminates* (or *sanctifies*) the unclean!
That's why Paul says, "otherwise your children would be unclean,
but as it is, they are holy." (7:14)

In one sense the problem in 1 Corinthians 7 is the same problem as in Ezra 9-10.

The solution is different because Paul is writing *after* the incarnation of the Son of God.

Now, I think God has a very strange sense of humor.
I set up my preaching schedule back in 2002.

Back in 2002 as I was working out my plan for preaching through the whole Bible,
I decided that it would be a good idea to preach on Ezra-Nehemiah
at the end of the preaching plan.
So for 17 years I've been planning on preaching Ezra-Nehemiah *now*.

Do you know what the major problems are in Ezra-Nehemiah?
Ezra's major problem is with foreigners.
Nehemiah's major problem is building a wall.

And of course, the theme of the whole book is "Make Jerusalem great again!"

The parallels to our current political situation are useful.
Because they reveal the stark *difference* between Ezra and our rulers today.

Watch Ezra: what does he *do* in our passage?
After he hears the report of the officials, he tears his garment and his cloak,
he pulls hair from his head and beard,
and sits appalled until evening.
He fasts – and then he prays –
and he confesses the corporate sins of his people,
recognizing that *he too* falls under judgment because of this sin.

Then, after his prayer, what does he do?
Does he start ordering everyone around –
blasting vindictive messages against all the wrongdoers?
No, he waits for one of the sons of the wrongdoers to propose a solution.
(Shecaniah is the son of Jehiel – one of the men named on the list).
When the assembly gathers together, he calls them confession –
he calls them to repentance – and to bear fruit in keeping with repentance!

And then he appoints a commission to take care of the matter.
He doesn't micro-manage the situation.

Ezra has come to study, to do, and to teach the Law of God.

1. What Is the Problem? "The Holy Seed Has Mixed Itself with the Peoples of the Land" (9:1-15)

a. The Problem of Mixed Marriages (v1-2)

After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. ² For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race^[a] has mixed itself

with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.”

Verses 1-2 set up the problem of mixed marriages –
but does so in a somewhat odd way:

Notice who the people of Israel have intermarried with:
“the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites,
the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.”

Most of these nations had disappeared centuries before!

The reason why Ezra uses these designations is because these were the nations
forbidden in the Law of Moses.

The Law of Moses said nothing about intermarrying with Samaritans
because the Samaritans didn't exist in Moses' day!

Ezra's point is that what the people of Israel were doing in his day
is *exactly* what Moses had forbidden!

And that is why the problem is that “they have not separated themselves
from the peoples of the lands with their abominations”!

This is as much a problem today as it was in Ezra's day.

The apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:11,
that we are aliens and exiles who must “abstain from the passions of the flesh
that wage war against your souls.”

The Christian must separate from the peoples of the lands with their abominations.

If your wife – if your husband –
expects you do something that God says is abominable –
then you must separate yourself from that situation!

(When Paul talks about the unbeliever “consenting to live” with the believer
in 1 Corinthians 7,
that consent includes the idea that the unbeliever
is willing to let the Christian live like a Christian!)

If the unbeliever says “I consent to living with you –
but only if you act like you are not a Christian” –
that is not consent.

In verse 2, I really wish that the ESV had not translated it “holy race.”

The term there is *holy seed*.

There is no such thing as a “holy race” in the bible.

There is a *holy seed* –

which will come to its grand conclusion in *the seed*
to whom all the promises were made – namely Christ.
Paul points out in Galatians 3 that the word seed is singular
(both in Hebrew and in English “seed” is a collective singular,
so that you cannot distinguish the singular and plural)
And since Christ is the holy seed,
if you are in Christ, then you become part of the holy seed as well!

So the problem in verses 1-2 is that Israel is falling back into their old habit
of intermarrying with the surrounding nations,
and thereby worshiping foreign gods.

When you understand that context,
you can easily understand Ezra’s response:

b. “Not Again!!” Ezra’s Response to the Problem (v3-15)

i. Fasting and Torn Garments: a Bodily Response (v3-4)

³ *As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled.* ⁴ *Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.*

How do you respond to seriously bad news?!

I want you to think about this –

because Ezra has a *bodily* response to bad news.

He doesn’t go on a rampage and start smashing windows and rioting in the streets.

In other words, he doesn’t *harm others* in response to bad news!

His response is directed *at himself* –

but in a very ritualized, stylized manner.

In other words, the harm is relatively minor and temporary.

He tears his garment (it will need to be repaired or replaced).

He pulls hair from his head and beard (he’ll look a little funny for a little while)

And he fasted.

All of these things are designed to signal to others around him

that he takes this problem *very seriously* –

and they should too!

In the NT, Paul and Barnabas rent their clothes when confronted with idolatry.

In Acts 14, the people of Lystra started saying that Paul and Barnabas were gods.

When Paul and Barnabas heard this,

“they tore their garments and rushed out among the multitude, crying,

‘Men, why are you doing this?

We are also men, of like nature with you.” (14:14-15)

ii. **“Our Iniquities Have Risen Higher than Our Heads: the Shame and Guilt of the Remnant (v5-9)**

⁵ *And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God,* ⁶ *saying:*

“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.

In Ezra’s prayer, you can see a clear connection between iniquity, guilt, and shame.

In terms of historical order, iniquity comes first.

Without sin, there would be no guilt – and there would be no shame.

But the one who has sinned is now guilty –
and that guilt results in shame.

And when it comes to *prayer*,
the first problem is shame.

How can I lift my face to God?

How can I approach the Holy One?

I am ashamed.

Notice that Ezra is *personally innocent* of the sin!

He is not married to a foreign woman!

But he is part of a community that is living contrary to God’s law.

You can see the logic of this in verse 7:

⁷ *From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. And for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today.*

Our sin rendered us guilty.

And for our sin, we as a people, have been put to shame.

Israel’s sin led to their exile – it led to Nebuchadnezzar destroying the temple,
and taking the people captive to Babylon!

Of course, during the days of the kings,
many ordinary Israelites faithfully followed the LORD.

They weren’t personally guilty of any of the sins which brought judgment on Jerusalem.

The most obvious example is the prophet Jeremiah.

He remained faithful through all those years.

But his innocence did not spare him from the corporate guilt of Jerusalem.
And so when judgment fell on Jerusalem, Jeremiah suffered with the rest.

The suffering of Jerusalem was his suffering –
and the *shame* of Jerusalem was his shame –
the humiliation of belonging to a failed people.

Now Ezra has the same experience.

Verses 8-9 then describe the current situation:

⁸ But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold^[b] within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. ⁹ For we are slaves.

(Ezra speaks of being “slaves” because there is still no Davidic king –
Israel was still in bondage to Persia!)

Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection^[c] in Judea and Jerusalem.

The word “protection” is the word “wall.”

The wall hasn’t been built yet –
but as we have seen already,
the temple isn’t *really* complete
until the city wall is rebuilt,
so that they can be protected!

But a city wall is *nothing* without the favor of the LORD!

And this is where Ezra turns in the second half of his prayer (verses 10-15):

iii. “None Can Stand Before You”: We’re Doing It All Over Again (v10-15)

¹⁰ “And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, ¹¹ which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land that you are entering, to take possession of it, is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness.

¹² Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.’

Verses 11-12 allude to Deuteronomy 7.
Israel needs to be a *holy people* – a *holy seed* –
otherwise the blessing of Abraham will never come to the nations!

And that is Ezra's fear.

If Israel does it again – or better,
if the *remnant* – the little that is left of Israel! – does it again,
what will become of Israel?

¹³ *And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, ¹⁴ shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape?*

And in verse 15, Ezra says:

¹⁵ *O LORD, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.*”

We have a problem.

We have a sin problem.
And our sin problem results in a guilt problem.

And our guilt results in there being nothing left of the people of God!

Ezra faces squarely the problem that Paul will articulate “there is none righteous –
no, not even one.”

“None can stand before you because of this.”

If God should deal with us as we deserve –
we would be cast into the fires of hell forever!

So what is the solution?

It is curious to watch what follows –
because Ezra plays a rather small role in the solution!
Ezra has *demonstrated* the problem (in his tearing his clothes and fasting).
Ezra has *declared* the problem (in his public prayer).

But then *others* take the lead in proposing the solution.

2. What Is the Solution for Ezra? Put Away These Wives and Their Children (10:1-44)

a. Repentance Requires Action: Shecaniah's Proposal (v1-5)

10 While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly. ² And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. ³ Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord^[d] and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law. ⁴ Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it." ⁵ Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath.

Now, note who proposes the solution – in chapter 10, verse 2.

Shecaniah is the one who proposes making a covenant with God
to put away the foreign wives and their children;

Shecaniah, the son of Jehiel – of the sons of Elam.

Now look over at chapter 10, verse 26.

Jehiel, of the sons of Elam,

appears on the list of those who had married foreign wives (10:26).

Shecaniah's father – or some other close family member who shared the name –
was one of the guilty!

But Shecaniah recognizes that family loyalties take a back seat to loyalty to God.

Look also at verse 6:

Ezra stays in the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib (10:6).

Eliashib is on the list of singers who had taken foreign wives (10:24).

In other words, "in this faithlessness
the hand of the officials and the chief men has been foremost."

Ezra has only been here for four months –
but already his study of the Law, his *doing* of the Law, and his teaching of the Law
is bearing fruit.

Shecaniah says:

"Arise [Ezra], for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it."

And so Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath
that they would do as had been said.

b. The Proclamation and the Assembly of the Ninth Month (6-15)

⁶ Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night,^[e] neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.

And so, after Ezra fasted through the night, a proclamation was made.
(Notice again that it's not just *Ezra* that made the proclamation!)

i. The Proclamation: Come, or Be Banned (v7-8)

⁷ And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, ⁸ and that if anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.

Verses 7-8 say that you've got three days to come to Jerusalem
or else you will forfeit your property and you will be banned from the congregation!

In other words, this is serious business.

We have got to get this right – and so if you don't show up,
you are saying that you don't want to be part of God's people!

Remember – in the OT, Israel is the son of God.

Israel is the Holy Seed.

If Israel fails, there will be no salvation for the human race!

ii. The Assembly in the Rain: Ezra's Call to Confession (v9-11)

⁹ Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. And all the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain. ¹⁰ And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. ¹¹ Now then make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives."

And so all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered within the three days!

It was the 20th day of the 9th month – and there was heavy rain.

Just imagine the scene!

There's a heavy downpour –

everyone is soaked to the skin! –

but so serious is the situation that no one suggests waiting until tomorrow!

Ezra stands up and says:

"You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. ¹¹ Now

then make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.”

When there is serious sin, it needs to be dealt with *immediately*.

Don't wait!

Confess your sin to the LORD – and bear fruit in keeping with repentance!

If you have done what is *evil* in the sight of the LORD,
stop it! – and turn away from that evil!

Notice that in verse 11, we see the two parts of repentance:

first, there is the confession – the acknowledgement of wrongdoing –
yes, we have sinned;

but second, there is *doing his will* – the turning away from evil and doing what is right.

Our Shorter Catechism says that “repentance unto life is a saving grace,

whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin –

and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ –

does, with grief and hatred of his sin –

turn from it, unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.”

Just saying “I'm sorry” is *not* repentance.

Confessing your sin is an important *part* of repentance –

but it is by no means the *whole* of repentance!

The thief who says, “I'm sorry I stole that \$200,000 –

but I'm really enjoying my new Lamborghini!” –
he doesn't understand repentance!

You can't just say “yeah that was wrong” –

you have to separate yourself from that sort of lifestyle.

And you have to *make right* what you did wrong.

You have to give back the \$200,000 (with interest – at least!).

In the case of these men of Israel who had married idolatrous women,

their repentance will require them to send their wives away –

and the children too!

Why the children?

Think of it this way:

the foreign wife *didn't deserve this*.

She married him in good faith –

thinking that this was okay!

You're *not* going to take her kids away too!

Of course, first, if there is a question of guilt,

then we need to take the time to determine *who is guilty!*

A rush to judgment could result in a really bad outcome!
Imagine how quickly Ruth could have been run out of Bethlehem!
She's a Moabite – get rid of her!

It's a good thing that in our 'enlightened' day,
we 'never' rush to judgment –
we 'never' see witch hunts running amok!
Who cares whether he's innocent or guilty!
Run him out of office!!

But in Ezra's day the Assembly of the LORD was not governed by the mad passion of a mob!
It operated by wisdom!

iii. "It Is So": the Decision of the Assembly (v12-15)

¹² *Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, "It is so; we must do as you have said.*
¹³ *But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain; we cannot stand in the open. Nor is this a task for one day or for two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter.* ¹⁴ *Let our officials stand for the whole assembly. Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every city, until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us."* ¹⁵ *Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supported them.*

And so the Assembly says, "It is so; we must do as you have said."

But it's going to take a while!
As we saw earlier,
if the problem was simply a factual problem – she's a foreigner! –
then all they would need to do is to identify the foreigners and get rid of them.
But the question is *not* "are you a foreigner?"
The question is *are you a foreigner who is committed to the abominations of the nations?*
Or are you a foreigner who is committed to the LORD God of Israel?

And that will require a process of investigation!
Pay careful attention to the proposal in verse 14:
Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every city, until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us.

There must be an investigation that will determine who is *actually guilty!*
"The Israelites are willing to undergo the extraordinary pain
of separating from wives and children

in order to be a people that obeys the Torah
and that stands before God” as the seed of Abraham. (Levering, 111)

Jesus challenges us to have the same standard.

In Luke 14:26, Jesus says,

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother
and wife and children and brothers and sisters,
yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

An atheist once used this passage to mock Christianity,
saying that it was absurd to tell people to hate their own families to follow Jesus.
Of course, he divorced his wife
and got his girlfriend pregnant before the papers were signed –
so apparently he thinks its fine to hate his wife –
just not to follow Jesus!

It is rare that God calls people to leave their spouses and children.
But if that is what faithfulness to God’s word demands,
then that is what we will have to do!
Now – let’s be clear – you may only leave your spouse and children
where God’s word demands it!
This isn’t a personal, subjective feeling!

In Ezra’s day – as in Paul’s day – as in our day –
we need to follow the clear teaching of God holy word!
And – as in verses 16-44, we need the wisdom and judgment of the Christian community.

c. The Verdict of the Select Commission (v16-44)

¹⁶ Then the returned exiles did so. Ezra the priest selected men, ^[1] heads of fathers' houses, according to their fathers' houses, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to examine the matter; ¹⁷ and by the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

And notice in verses 16-17 that the process takes three months.

¹⁸ Now there were found some of the sons of the priests who had married foreign women: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah, some of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers. ¹⁹ They pledged themselves to put away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt. ^[g] ²⁰ Of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah. ²¹ Of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah. ²² Of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah. ²³ Of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. ²⁴ Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

²⁵ And of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah,^[L] and Benaiah. ²⁶ Of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah. ²⁷ Of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza. ²⁸ Of the sons of Bebai were Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. ²⁹ Of the sons of Bani were Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth. ³⁰ Of the sons of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh. ³¹ Of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, ³² Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. ³³ Of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. ³⁴ Of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, ³⁵ Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi, ³⁶ Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, ³⁷ Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasu. ³⁸ Of the sons of Binnui:^[L] Shimei, ³⁹ Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, ⁴⁰ Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, ⁴¹ Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, ⁴² Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. ⁴³ Of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah. ⁴⁴ All these had married foreign women, and some of the women had even borne children.

I didn't read the list of names.

But it's worth noting that there are 111 names on the list –
including four from the high priestly family,
thirteen other priests and ten Levites,
and 84 others from the rest of Israel.

So it's widespread– but over all, a rather short list.

We've seen before that there were over 42,000 families that returned with Zerubbabel,
and another 1500 families that returned from Babylon with Ezra.

So, if only 111 men out of the more than 43,000 exiles are guilty of these marriages,
then it would seem that they caught the problem quickly.

Or, perhaps it would be better to say that they only punished cases
where the woman was an unrepentant idolater.

If a woman said that she would follow the LORD, and train her children in God's Law,
she would not be sent away.

You may wonder – how come there are no references to foreign men?

If you gave your daughter to a foreign man,
that was bad,
but foreign men are not part of the Jewish Assembly –
and therefore outside the reach of Ezra's mandate.

Conclusion: The Sanctifying Power of the Gospel to Cleanse the Unclean

Okay, so what do we do with this?

First, we need to see the sanctifying power of the gospel to cleanse the unclean!
Paul is faced with the same question in Corinth

that Ezra had to deal with in Jerusalem 500 years before.
But Paul says that *unlike* Ezra, there is no necessary contamination.
The believing spouse *now* sanctifies the unbelieving spouse,
so that the children are no longer unclean, but *holy*.

In Christ, the power of the gospel – the power of the *holy* –
is *greater* than the power of the unclean.

And the application of this goes way beyond marriage.
The power of Christ's holiness *decontaminates* everything he touches.

Now, let me give you a warning.

There are some people who take this as a license
to go places where they shouldn't go!

If you struggle with lust,

don't go to a porn shop with the idea that you can bear witness to Jesus there!

Yes, the holiness of Jesus *decontaminates* everything he touches!

But *start* by letting him touch *your life*!

The woman with a discharge would never have been made clean
if she did not touch the hem of Jesus' garment!

She had to *believe* in Jesus – she had to *trust* that he would cleanse her –
and then she had to *touch* his garment.

Even so – *you need to trust Jesus!*

His holiness can make you clean!

He can do it –

but you are going to have to trust him.

And that means you need to show up.

Jesus offers to meet *you* in the preaching of the Word –
and in the breaking of the Bread.

Jesus promises that “there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children
for the sake of the kingdom of God,
who will not receive manifold more in this time,
and in the age to come eternal life. (Luke 18:28-30)

In this life – you will receive a new family – the family of Jesus.
The church is to be that new family that lives together as one.

And in the age to come, eternal life –
the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting!