Ezra 9-10 poses significant theological and ethical challenges to the contemporary Bible reader. Indeed, many scholars find the treatment of the “foreign wives” recorded in this episode so draconian that they cannot renounce the mass coercive divorce proceedings emphatically enough. A couple of recent examples make the point. David Janzen, for instance, compares the incident to a witch hunt while Julia O’Brien suggests that the incident evinces a community slipping into increasing sexism and racism.¹

Such responses are understandable, especially considering the many contemporary examples of harm caused by racism and sexism of various kinds. Even those who read Ezra-Nehemiah sympathetically cannot help but wince at the text’s severity. Furthermore, one cannot help but feel tension between the xenophobia on display in this text and the rather different attitude one finds in passages like Isaiah 56:3-8 where foreigners and eunuchs are promised full access to the sacred assembly in the era of the new temple. Caution is warranted, however, lest we prematurely judge the situation in Ezra 9-10 without adequately understanding the issues at stake. We can easily import our own contemporary concerns to the text without hearing the concerns of the text itself in its own setting.

Thus we should carefully avoid making a caricature of Ezra and the Golah community that he led.

What follows is an attempt to read Ezra 9-10 both critically and sympathetically by means of combining recent insights from anthropological analysis, canonical criticism, and theological reflection. Of particular interest is Ezra’s confessional prayer that serves as the centerpiece of the text and functions as a kind of distillation of the traditions and concerns that led to the austere divorce proceedings that follow in Ezra 10. Ezra’s confessional prayer can be viewed as standing in a similar relationship to the second temple as did Solomon’s dedicatory prayer to the first temple. Each of these prayers encapsulates the nature and agenda of the communities formed around these sacred centers as well as the function of the temples themselves. In fact, subtle, ironic allusions to Solomon throughout Ezra 9-10 may suggest that the Golah community’s situation is the nadir to the Solomonic regime’s apex. The two, however, stand not so much in a relationship of contrast or opposition as they do in a relationship of cause and effect.

**Key Interpretive Issues**

A number of interpretive issues related to Ezra’s prayer and its immediate context should be addressed before proceeding with a comparison of Ezra 9 with 1 Kings 8:22-53. First, the presentation of the intermarriage issue in Ezra 9:1 seems abrupt. It arises out of nowhere. One wonders what motivated the officials to approach Ezra with a report regarding the pervasiveness of mixed marriages in the community. Torrey appears to have been the first to suggest that Ezra 9-10 fits more naturally as the sequel to Ezra’s reading of the law in Nehemiah 7:72b – 8:18 and
that the latter text originally preceded the former.\(^2\) Ezra’s public reading of the law, therefore, originally provided the narrative rationale for bringing the issue to Ezra’s attention. This view has been adopted by most commentators since and is assumed in this study.

Regardless of its original arrangement, however, the task before the interpreter is to make sense of the text as we have it. The question, therefore, is how does the episode function in its current form. If the text has been rearranged, what motivated the relocation of Neh. 7:72b-8:18? A number of reasons have been suggested but a compelling explanation can be found in the narrative’s portrayal of the return to the land as a new exodus. The book of Ezra thus develops an extensive typology between postexilic events and episodes from Israel’s national epic.\(^3\) This typology is established early on when the Persian neighbors of those determined to return to the land supply them with everything necessary for returning and rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1:6) thus recapitulating the “plundering of the Egyptians” recorded in Exodus 12:36. With this typology in mind, one can understand the dismissal of “foreign wives” and the children born to them as tantamount to a new conquest paralleling the herem warfare prescribed in Deuteronomy 7 and executed in Joshua. In fact, the foreigners dismissed from the community are compared to Israel’s ancient Canaanite enemies in terms of their abominable practices and potential for defiling the sacred community (Ezra 9:1). In


its current arrangement, therefore, the report of the mixed marriage crisis complete with its allusion to Deuteronomy 7:1 follows on the heels of the departure from the new “Egypt” and the reentry to the land, thus strengthening the connection between the herem warfare waged under Joshua and the separation ritual performed under Ezra.\(^4\) Furthermore, it sets the separation from foreign wives as the first in a series of reforms instituted by Ezra and Nehemiah culminating in the climax of Ezra’s reading of the law and renewing the covenant in Nehemiah 8 – 10.\(^5\) As it stands, Ezra’s reading and renewal of the covenant forms a nice parallel with Joshua’s renewal of the covenant at Shechem (Joshua 23 – 24).

A second issue impacting the interpretation of the text is the identification of the “people(s) of the land(s)” with whom members of the Golah community intermarried. Though traditionally interpreters have taken this designation to indicate that the wives in question were foreigners,\(^6\) recently the designation has

\[^4\text{One may object to associating the dismissal of the foreigners with the original conquest on the grounds that the temple is built in Ezra 3-6 thus disrupting the expected parallel sequence: exodus, conquest, settlement, temple construction. My response would be that Ezra 3 associates the 2\textsuperscript{nd} temple with the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness rather than with the first temple. This is evident in the fact that its construction is facilitated by materials donated by the returnees’ foreign hosts (Ezra 1:6) as was the Tabernacle’s construction by Egyptian donations (Exodus 12:35-36). Furthermore, a celebration of the Feast of Booths (Sukkoth) occurs upon the completion of the altar of whole burnt offering in Ezra 3:4 clearly recalling the wilderness period. This association is further supported by the statement in Ezra 3:3 that the construction of the altar was motivated in part by the community’s fear of the “peoples of the land” a situation more akin to their wilderness wandering (cf. Num 14:9) and an indication that the second “conquest” had not yet occurred.}

\[^5\text{Throntveit, 50.}

\[^6\text{Jacob M. Meyers, Ezra-Nehemiah (ABC; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 77. Meyers represents this traditional view though helpfully nuanced by Würthwein’s thesis that the term עַם הָאָרֶץ designates not only that they are foreign but that they}
been taken to refer to anyone who did not belong to the Golah community. Thus, in anthropological terms, Ezra 9-10 is an example of ethnic exclusivism in which ethnicity has less to do with racial distinction than it does with boundary maintenance of a cohesive group that has formed an identity on the basis of a shared history or heritage. Southwood explains the concept well.

During times of upheaval, conspicuous forms of boundary maintenance occur in conjunction with an increased focus on ethnicity. This provides a form of continuity and stability when all the familiar structures of existence are uprooted. However, ironically, in such times of uncertainty where ethnicity is necessitated, it is often those who are most similar, the proximate Others, rather than the profoundly different, that constitute the greatest perceived threats.

While one can see how this would be an apt description of the Golah community under Ezra’s leadership and how it is helpful in understanding the group dynamics at work, some scholars take this anthropological approach too far by denying any racial difference to the group under expulsion. The text’s own description of “the people(s) of the land” indicates that they were in fact the product are landholders who took over after the exile. Cf. Ernst Würthwein, Der ‘amm ha’arez im Alten Testament (BWANT, Band 69; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer-Verlag, 1936, 2010), 51-71.

7 Paul Redditt, Ezra-Nehemiah (SHBC; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 191-2. It is interesting that Redditt takes it for granted that the excluded persons are fellow Hebrews who remained in the land during the exile without even discussing the alternative view of their being foreign or of mixed blood.

of racially mixed unions that carried with it syncretistic religious connotations. A prime example is the Samaritan’s offer to help build the temple in Ezra 4:2. The Samaritan states, “Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here.” In 4:4 this group is clearly identified as “the people of the land” (יִשְׂרָאֵל) and the Samaritan’s self-description clearly refers back to 2 Kings 17:24-29. It seems best to identify these “people(s) of the land” as descended from mixed parentage resulting from the Assyrian policy of deportation and assimilation.

One final interpretive issue to resolve is the nature and function of the list of nations to which the people(s) of the land are compared in Ezra 9:1. According to the MT eight nations are mentioned: Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. The first four of these are derived from Deuteronomy 7:1-3 where Israel is prohibited from intermarrying with the occupants of the land they are about to inherit. The Ammonites and Moabites are added to this list from Deuteronomy 23:4 where they and their descendants are banned from the congregation. The inclusion of the Egyptians and the Amorites in this list has baffled interpreters. The Amorites are mentioned in Deuteronomy 7:1 but one wonders why they are separated from the other nations derived from the traditional seven originally slated for annihilation. Egypt simply seems out of place. It is precisely these two anomalies in the list that launches the investigation that will be the focus of the remainder of this paper. First, MT’s Amorites is likely a

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9 Throntveit,
corruption of what originally read “Edomites.” In fact, this variant appears in 1 Esdras 8:66. This would bring the list into alignment with Deuteronomy 26:8-9 where the Edomites and Egyptians are mentioned shortly after the Ammonites and Moabites as being allowed into the assembly after the third generation. The MT’s reading is easily explained as a case of metathesis and resh/daleth confusion thus understandably deriving “Amorite” from “Edomite” (מרי א vs. דמי א). Further confirmation of this reading may be found in the abundant archeological evidence of a thriving Idumean culture located a short distance from Jerusalem at Maresha during the late exilic and early post-exilic era. This suggests that this remnant of Edom could well have been a source of the foreign women accused of contaminating the Golah community via intermarriage.

Though nothing is said in Deuteronomy 23:8 regarding intermarriage with an Edomite or an Egyptian, the same two ethnicities are mentioned as being among the foreign wives Solomon took for his harem in 1 Kings 11:1. As 1 Kings points out it was precisely Solomon’s foreign wives that was his undoing. This is the first of a

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11 Alternatively, one could argue that an original “Edomite” was changed to Amorite to align this text with Deut. 23:7 which prohibits abhorrence of Edomites, thus falling in line with the scribal practice of harmonization. Cf. Karel Van der Toorn, Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 7.

number of allusions to the Solomonic tradition that punctuate Ezra 9-10 and that help to explain the zealous aversion to such intermarriages that threaten the Golah community in our text.

*Solomonic Allusions in Ezra 9*

Nehemiah indicts Solomon as having sinned with regard to his intermarriage to foreign women. In fact, he points to him as an illustration of the fact that even one who enjoys unprecedented divine favor and wisdom is not exempt from the dangers posed by assimilation via intermarriage (Neh. 13:26). In more subtle ways Solomon’s precedent profoundly influences the attitudes and actions that unfold in Ezra 9.

To begin with, Ezra extends the prohibition of intermarriage beyond the strict confines of the Mosaic law insisting that intermarriage with any non-Israelite constitutes a breach of Torah. The only other text in the Hebrew Bible to adopt a similar stance is 1 Kings 11:1-2 where all of Solomon’s intermarriages with various foreigners are condemned on the basis of a quotation of Exodus 34:16. In context, however, Exodus 34:16 applies this prohibition only to the nations inhabiting Canaan at the time of Israel’s emergence in the land. 1 Kings 11:1-2 extends this prohibition and thus grants Ezra a precedent for his interpretation and application of this prohibition in his own context. Ezra’s “Torah” therefore seems to include this tradition preserved in 1 Kings 11:1-2.

This connection encourages a rereading of Ezra’s prayer and its immediate context in light of the Solomon tradition, particularly his dedicatory prayer in 1 Kings 8. For example, the officials indict the community leaders as particularly at
fault for initiating and encouraging the practice of intermarriage as did Solomon near the beginning of the Davidic dynasty. Ezra's prayer, therefore is preceded and followed by the same threat that frames 1 Kings' account of the temple's construction and dedication culminating in Solomon's prayer (cf. 1 Kings 3:1; 7:8; 11:1).

It is also instructive to notice the postures that both Ezra and Solomon adopt in preparation for their respective petitions. Ezra 9:3 portrays Ezra as tearing his robes and the hair out of his head and beard upon hearing of the intermarriages in the community. He sits desolate until the time of the evening sacrifice as the most pious among the Israelites gathered around him. A similar though larger assembly gathers around Solomon during the dedication of the First Temple. The mood, however, is completely different. In 1 Kings 8 there is a tremendous spirit of celebration. In Ezra 9, however, a spirit of contrition prevails.

Solomon prays before the assembly with his palms spread out toward heaven. Ezra similarly spreads his hands to the LORD in preparation for prayer. The phrase in both contexts is identical though in 1 Kings 8:22 it is expressed in the third person as narrative and in Ezra 9:5 in the first person as memoir

These are the only two instances in the Hebrew Bible where this ritual hand gesture is immediately followed by the quotation of the prayer. In both cases the extended open palms

facing heaven appear to indicate supplication – empty hands ready to receive whatever the deity is inclined to offer.\textsuperscript{14} Solomon’s gesture seeks divine favor and forgiveness for any who pray at or in the direction of the temple (1 Kings 8:28-30). Ezra’s gesture is much more urgent and immediate, grasping for the favor and forgiveness for which Solomon prayed.

Perhaps even more significantly, this posture for prayer is part of one of Solomon’s explicit petitions for divine pardon for Israel’s sins (1 Kings 8:38). Ezra’s adoption of this posture recalls Solomon’s petition and perhaps in Ezra’s mind strengthens his appeal on the basis of Solomon’s prior prayer. At the same time, however, one cannot help but feel the ironic tension of the fact that it is the very sin for which Solomon was condemned that necessitates the pardon that Solomon anticipated and for which Ezra asks.

In light of this irony, perhaps it is not insignificant that the prayer terminology in Ezra 9:5 differs in one detail from the very similar terminology in 1 Kings 8:38. Whereas Solomon speaks of spreading the palms toward “this house” (וּפֹרֶשׂ כָּפַי אֲלִיְהֵיהַ הוָה: ) referring to the temple, Ezra indicates that he spread his palms “toward YHWH, my God” (וַאֲפַרְשֶׂה כָּפַי אֲלִיְהֵיהַ אֲלֵי הָוָה). Ezra’s omission of temple language may reflect a chastened and consequently more sobered assessment of the temple and its role in the community’s relationship with YHWH. It

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 657.
is no guarantor of divine mercy. Its mere existence should not be taken as an indication of YHWH’s unequivocal support of the Golah community and its actions.

The attention that both texts give to the posture adopted for prayer and the similarity of their postures strengthen the relationship between the two prayers. Ezra adopts a kneeling posture throughout his prayer (Ezra 9:5) while Solomon is portrayed as standing at the beginning of the prayer (1 Kings 8:22) but kneeling at the end (1 Kings 8:54).\(^\text{15}\) Kneeling in prayer is an indication of self-abasement in the face of the *mysterium tremendum* of YHWH’s imminent presence. For Ezra, it is a physical manifestation of the sentiment he expresses in Ezra 9:6. He states, “O my God! I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift, my God, my face to you.” Thus, Ezra does just the opposite in adopting a posture for prayer. He kneels and faces the ground even while raising his palms. The posture is also in keeping with the preponderance of servile language in Ezra’s prayer. It simultaneously bespeaks Judah’s position under Persia and the underlying theological reason for her subjection to foreign domination – the ongoing, though lightening, judgment of God (Ezra 9:9).\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\) The Chronicler conflates these verses in 2 Chronicles 6:13 apparently uncomfortable with the apparent contradiction in stances. Cogan, however, points out that standing and kneeling are appropriate for different moments in prayer as illustrated in a number of biblical texts as well as in the cult socle of the Middle Assyrian Period depicting Tikulti-Ninurta as both kneeling and standing before the symbol of the god Nusku. Cf. Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings* (AB 10; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 288.

For Solomon the posture may be more ritualistic. This is not meant in a pejorative sense, but simply as an observation regarding the obviously ritualistic context of the celebration of the temple's completion and its dedication. Cogan has persuasively argued on the basis of ANE iconography and royal inscriptions that standing and kneeling are appropriate for different moments in liturgical or ritual prayers. It is certainly conceivable that as Solomon's prayer turns toward appeals for divine mercy regarding Israel's potential and future sins that he adopts the more contrite posture. In so doing, however, he anticipates precisely the kind of scenario described in Ezra 9 and Ezra 9 may well be confirming this link. The irony is that despite Solomon’s contrite posture, he proceeds to enter into mixed marriages thus setting Israel on a course of apostasy and judgment. Ezra picks up where Solomon left off, on his knees head bowed before YHWH, but not as a ritual act. Ezra’s posture is ad hoc and spontaneous in response to the revelation of prolific mixed marriages.

A key aspect of Solomon’s prayer is his request that YHWH would ever be attentive and responsive to the prayers offered toward the temple particularly supplications for pardon (1 Kings 8:30). Ezra seems to presume this divine disposition toward his holy dwelling when he states in his prayer “But now for a short while . . . God has given us a stake in his holy place.” Ezra’s emphasis on the brevity of the window of opportunity represented by the Golah community’s return to the land and resumption of temple worship reflects a humility and tentativeness noticeably absent in Solomon’s prayer. Ezra seems to view the Golah community’s situation as gracious but probational and, therefore, vulnerable (Ezra 9:13-15).

17 Cogan, 288.
On the other hand, Solomon seems to anticipate Ezra’s situation when he requests that YHWH give the exiles favor in the eyes of their captors (1 Kings 8:50). Ezra acknowledges in his own prayer that this is precisely what YHWH did (Ezra 9:9). Thus the two prayers connect in terms analogous to prophecy and fulfillment as though Solomon were proleptically interceding for the Golah community. Part of Ezra’s recognition of divine grace is the fact that the exiles’ Persian overlords demonstrated unprecedented mercy in allowing the exiles to return and in providing funds for the rebuilding of their temple. Ironically, it was Solomon’s apostasy that launched the trajectory leading to the exiles’ situation and it appears that the cycle is already beginning to repeat itself.

An interesting difference between the two prayers, however, regards their respective attitudes concerning the temple’s future. Solomon seems not to entertain the possibility of the loss of the temple (cf. especially 1 Kings 8:48) though he does envision the possibility of exile (1 Kings 8:46-53). This may explain the reason for the divine address to Solomon in 1 Kings 9:1-9 in which YHWH emphasizes the destruction of the temple as a possible consequence of apostasy. For Ezra, however, the possibility of the loss of the temple is very real (Ezra 9:8, 15).\(^\text{18}\) It appears that Ezra is eschewing the very presumption that led to Solomon’s disconnect between his prayer and the consequences of his marital practices.

The two prayers also share an interesting and significant structural feature. Ezra’s prayer turns on two occurrences of a significant transitional phrase marking

critical junctures in the logic of his confession. The phrase is “but now” (וְַעַתֶּה) and the two instances occur together in succession at Ezra 9:8-10 (see accompanying table with parallel Hebrew and English texts).\(^\text{19}\) Together they draw a pair of contrasts that stand in dramatic tension and form the central spiritual conundrum of the confession. The first of these occurrences (9:8) introduces a contrast between the present and surprising respite of grace that led to the Golah community’s return to the land on the one hand and Israel’s long history of sin and judgment culminating in the exile on the other. The second occurrence (9:10) introduces the contrast between God’s gracious provision of a fresh start on the one hand and the community’s utterly inappropriate response to that new beginning on the other – namely, their participation in the defilement of the “people(s) of the land(s).”

Imbedded within this second contrast is a third occurrence of עַתֶּה. This one, however, introduces not a contrast but a conflated paraphrase of Deuteronomy 7:3 and 23:6 presented as the conclusion to a divine discourse warning of the danger of defilement in the land. The appeal to Deuteronomy 7:3 and 23:6 forms the core of Ezra’s confession of the community’s breach of covenant, serving to define the precise nature of their sin and the threat that such an infraction poses to the community’s future in the land. Perhaps most importantly it also lays the foundation for the drastic measures taken in Ezra 10 in an attempt to remedy the breach of covenant.

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid, 93-94.
Each of these critical moves in Ezra’s prayer responds in some way to the logic of Solomon’s prayer and its surrounding context. For example, the appeal to Deuteronomy 7:3 and 23:6 only applies to the situation described in Ezra 9:1-2 if Ezra and his community are assuming the extension of these prohibitions to all foreigners that we first find in the account of Solomon’s apostasy in 1 Kings 11:1-8.

Similarly, Solomon orients his petitions around two statements beginning with “and now” (וְַעַתֹּ) as well. As in Ezra, they occur in immediate succession in 1 Kings 8:25-26.

In Solomon’s prayer, the two statements beginning with וְַעַתֹּ (“and now”) introduce a series of petitions based on the Davidic covenant. The effect of these petitions is to view the completion of the temple and YHWH’s filling it with his presence as a first installment on the promises of the Davidic covenant that bode well for the fulfillment of the remainder of those promises. What Solomon requests is confirmation of the Davidic covenant in the form of a divine guarantee closely associated with the temple and the enduring nature of its structure and rituals.

Ezra, on the other hand, while recognizing the completion of the second temple as an overture of grace and the opening of a door to a more hopeful future for Judah, seeks no guarantee of divine blessing on this basis. To the contrary, he underscores how tentative this new beginning is, how precarious the Golah community’s situation is in this repatriation of their ancestral land that is now home to a very mixed and, in a very real sense, foreign culture. The backdrop of the completed second temple, in fact, exacerbates in Ezra’s mind the severity of the
offense, particularly since it potentially quarantines the implicated members of the community from the precincts of sacred space.

The issue of ritual purity and sacred space underscores a particularly ironic contrast between Solomon’s and Ezra’s prayers evident in 1 Kings 8:41-44. At this point in his prayer, Solomon asks that YHWH would treat the foreigner who comes and makes petition at the temple as he does the Israelite – that he would hear and grant the foreigner’s request. By contrast, Ezra appears to seek the exclusion of foreigners from this assembly (9:11-12). The very issue raised by intermarriage has to do with the purity of the community and who may participate in the sanctity of land and temple (Ezra 9:10-12).

At the same time, however, Solomon concludes his prayer with the recognition that Israel has been set apart from the other nations (1 Kings 8:53). It is this aspect of Israel’s vocation that occupies Ezra’s prayer perhaps to an extreme. The contrast between the two texts, however, points to the complication that always perplexes God’s people. On the one hand Israel is called to be a light to the nations and to adopt an inclusive stance toward them that encourages their participation in God’s expanding kingdom. On the other hand, Israel cannot do this if she assimilates to the surrounding culture and compromises the leverage of her holiness.

The unqualified openness to foreigners expressed in Solomon’s prayer is laudable for its embrace of Israel’s ultimate calling to be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6). In the larger context of 1 Kings, however, it is also followed by Solomon’s apostasy largely due to his heart being drawn away by his foreign wives. It is to this
last concern that Ezra responds in his prayer and in the separation from foreign wives that he oversees in Ezra 10.

A possible precedent for the expulsion of the foreign women and children carried out in Ezra 10 is located shortly after Solomon's dedicatory prayer in 1 Kings 9:24. Here the reader is informed that Pharaoh's daughter was removed from the City of David after the temple's construction into a special palace Solomon had built for her. The Chronicler expands on this note in a most intriguing way by including Solomon's rationale for his wife's relocation: “My wife shall no longer live in the city of David, King of Israel; for holy are the places to which the Ark of YHWH has come.” Is the Chronicler reflecting a tradition, known also to Ezra, that indicated that even Solomon recognized the need to distance his foreign wives from the sacred precincts of the temple? If so, Ezra and the community he led may have felt that Solomon did not go far enough. After all, this action did not prevent his apostasy at the hands of his foreign wives.

The references to Solomon's intermarriages with foreigners and the parallels to his dedicatory prayer may serve to underscore a more significant connection that potentially sheds considerable light on both the prayer and separation ritual of Ezra 9-10. Solomon's foreign wives appear to be interpreted as political marriages, unions entered into for the opportunity they offered to secure Israel's upward mobility and national security (1 Kings 3:1). This was likely the reason that

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20 The MT literally says “in the house of David” (בְבֵיתַד וִיד) but I, along with most commentators, have opted for the OG rendering “in the city of David” (ἐν πολεί Δαυιδ). Cf. Sarah Japhet, 1 & 2 Chronicles (OTL; Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 1993), 626.
amassing a large harem was explicitly prohibited in the law of the king (Deut. 17:17).\(^{21}\)

In anthropological terms, this constitutes the phenomenon of hypergamy – the practice of marrying into wealthy, established families for the purposes of greater political and economic advantage.\(^{22}\) Smith-Christopher has argued convincingly that this was precisely the phenomenon occurring in the Golah community in Ezra 9-10.\(^{23}\) The “people(s) of the land(s)” with whom members of the Golah community intermarried were probably landholders of mixed ethnicity who took over control of the land after the exile.\(^{24}\) It is understandable that many in the Golah community would have seen intermarriage with these as a means of regaining a foothold in power and property within the land,\(^{25}\) but at what cost?

Solomon attempted a similar strategy with regard to enriching and securing his kingdom and look what happened.

\(^{21}\) Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 256.

\(^{22}\) Note how the larger Solomonic tradition often critiques Solomon for this practice. For example, Song of Songs 8:11-12 may well be alluding to this practice metaphorically when negatively comparing Solomon’s vast and numerous “vineyards” compared to the lover’s one vineyard. Cf. Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 219-20.


\(^{24}\) This view was first argued by Ernst Würtwein. Cf. Ernst Würtwein, *Der ‘amm ha’arez im Alten Testament* (BWANT, Band 69; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer-Verlag, 1936, 2010), 51-71.

This view, if correct, may mitigate some of the ethical concerns surrounding Ezra’s prayer and the separation ritual described in Ezra 10. It is often assumed that this action jeopardized the economic wellbeing of the women and children in question. If, however, hypergamy à la Solomon, and not just exogamy, is the issue in the text, then the separation ritual could well have been to the Golah community’s disadvantage economically and politically speaking.  

Conclusions

The preceding comparison of Ezra 9:5-15 to 1 Kings 8:22-53 has demonstrated that a number of correspondences exist between the two prayers that may shed light on the theologically and ethically problematic response to the mixed marriage crisis in Ezra 9-10. These correspondences lead to broader correlations between the larger Solomon narrative and Ezra 9-10 that further elucidate the perspectives and motives that led up to the expulsion of foreign wives recorded in Ezra 10.

First we observed that Ezra 9-10 assumes the same expansion of the prohibition of intermarriage in Deuteronomy 7 and 23 to all foreigners as is found in 1 Kings 11:1-8. Only in these two texts is the deuteronomic prohibition so comprehensive and absolute.

Second we noted that both Solomon’s and Ezra’ prayers are framed by reports of intermarriage that warn of the dangers of cultural assimilation. This

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26 Smith-Christopher, 146. Smith-Christopher helpfully points out regarding the proper framework for reading Ezra 9-10, “The second, and wider, circle within which Ezra must be read is not only other biblical examples of priestly attitudes and ideologies but also in the context of minority and refugee behaviors in circumstances of subordination.”
concern is the explicit motivation for Ezra’s prayer and a subtle but powerful

counterpoint to Solomon’s prayer.

Third we considered the striking similarities of the prayer postures assumed
by Ezra and Solomon. In one sense, Solomon’s posture as well as his explicit
mention of those who “spread their palms toward this house” anticipates Ezra’s
humble posture and implicit petition for divine mercy. On the other hand, Ezra’s
avoidance of explicit mention of the temple as playing any role in his confession and
plea for mercy suggests a markedly different attitude toward the temple than
Solomon’s. Ezra deemphasized the temple while emphasizing YHWH’s immediate
presence, thus acknowledging the danger that the temple can be an obstacle rather
than an aid to genuine communion with God when viewed as a guarantee of divine
favor.

Next we looked at the way that Solomon’s supplications for divine favor and
forgiveness for all those who pray at or toward the temple find fulfillment in Ezra’s
prayer of confession and repentance. Particularly significant in this regard is
Solomon’s request that God grant his people favor among their captors – an
expression of divine grace and fidelity that Ezra specifically mentions. Once again,
however, the prayers differ with respect to the temple’s future. Solomon seems not
to entertain the possibility of the temple’s destruction. Ezra, on the other hand, has a
more sober assessment, having been chastened by the historical destruction of
Solomon’s temple.

We then noted the parallel structure of the two prayers marked by analogous
use of “and now” (וְַעַתָּה). This parallel structure, however, only serves to highlight
an important contrast. Whereas in Solomon’s prayers the phrase links partial fulfillment of the Davidic covenant with anticipation of that covenant’s confirmation and consummation, in Ezra’s prayer the phrase holds two dramatic tensions in contrast. First, Israel’s history of apostasy is contrasted with the present, tentative moment of grace enjoyed by the Golah community. Second the present moment of grace is contrasted with Israel’s ungrateful response of assimilation to the surrounding culture thus again launching the same cycle of apostasy initiated by Solomon.

Finally we observed the prayers’ contrasting attitudes toward ritual purity vis-à-vis Israel’s relationship to foreigners. Solomon’s prayer displays a remarkable openness to foreigner’s participation in prayers directed toward the temple. This attitude is consistent with the cosmopolitan nature of Solomon’s reign. Arguably, however, it was an undisciplined openness that jeopardized Israel’s holiness and risked the loss of her positive influence on the nations. Thus, Ezra’s prayer emphasizes the opposite dynamic in Israel’s complex relationship with other nations – separation for the sake of ritual purity and access to the temple rituals.

We noted, however, a potentially significant link between the narrative following Solomon’s prayer and the separation ritual carried out in Ezra 10. Solomon’s relocation of Pharaoh’s daughter to her own palace outside of Jerusalem (1 Kings 9:24) is interpreted in Chronicles as motivated by the sanctity of the city due to the presence of the Ark and temple within it (2 Chron. 8:11). Solomon thus reflects a similar concern to Ezra’s though he fails to address it adequately. Ezra,
having learned the lesson of Solomon’s apostasy, may over correct, but his concerns are not unfounded.

The culmination of all of these parallels between 1 Kings 8 and Ezra 9 is the consideration that, like Solomon, members of the Golah community practiced a kind of hypergamy – intermarriage for the sake of improving one’s political and economic prospects. This calls the common assumption that the Golah community were the powerbrokers in the situation whose xenophobia disadvantaged the expelled wives and children into question. Much of the sociological and anthropological evidence points in the other direction. The Golah community was more likely the disadvantaged minority seeking reentry into landholding and inheritance by means of these marriages. This illegitimate means of regaining the promise was emphatically renounced by Ezra and his community in light its disastrous consequences in the life of Solomon.

The issue, therefore, in Ezra 9-10 is not whether foreigners can be inducted into the community by means of conversion and subsequently become eligible for marriage (as was the case, for example, with Rahab and Ruth and as anticipated by Isa. 56:3-8). This is neither denied nor affirmed by Ezra. Rather the issue is intermarriage with those whose practices undermine Mosaic orthodoxy for the sake of regaining ownership in the land.