

Global Bible Commentary

Daniel Patte, gen. ed. *Global Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004),

Danna Nolan Fewell, "Ezra and Nehemiah", *Global Bible Commentary*, ed. Daniel Patte, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 128

Ez. 2:6: The whole assembly together (those who returned from exile) was forty-two thousand three hundred sixty, besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty-seven; and they had two hundred male and female singers."

Ez. 9:1b-4...The officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel, 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. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way." When I heard this, I tore my garment and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled. Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles ..Ez. 10: 2-3: **We** have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land.. So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

10:15 Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levites supported them...v.18: There were found of the descendants of the priests who had married foreign women, of the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19 They pledged themselves to send away their wives..

Fewell claims that many of the books of the Hebrew Bible were written in the first part of the Persian period (ca 538-332 B.C.E.), that is the time of Ezra (who launched his reform against mixed marriage ca 457/458 B.C.E.) and Nehemiah (governor of Judah ca 445-433 B.C.E.). In her view, Genesis was also probably written during this period.

Eskenazi and Judd (1994) suggest that an imbalance in the ratio of women to men may have been part of the initial problem for the returnees. Returnees married women who stayed in the land of Israel during the exile. This might suggest that at some point, the number of returning women increased to an adequate proportion. 129

The issue of marriages with 'women of the land' which Ezra presents as a religious issue, an issue of purity, also had a social and economic dimension that recent studies have investigated.

According to the work of Daniel Smith-Christopher (1991), using the sociological theory of hypergamy, he argues that the men involved were attempting to "marry up" on the social ladder. He supposes that the "foreign women" were not ethnically foreign at all, but were Jewish women who had not been in exile. He follows Williamson (1985) who argues that 'people of the land' (i.e., the surrounding

community that had remained in the land) controlled much of the territory and enjoyed economic and social advantages that the returned exiles did not share.

Willa Mathis Johnson (1999), exploring how Persian marriage practices play into Persian politics of land control, pushes the hypergamy theory further and argues that the ‘foreign women’ were women from Persian noble families who were given, along with access to Persian controlled land in Palestine, to some of the men of Judah who were in position of leadership.

Heard (2001) sees that ‘Mesopotamian’ wives would have been perceived as more geographically and politically connected to the Persian government and consequently not the same kind of threat to ethnic identity as the ‘people of the land.’”

Kenneth Hoglund argues: In Ezra-Nehemiah reform ethnic exclusivity conformed to Persian political policy (1992). He argues that both reformers (Ezra and Nehemiah) were sent to the Restoration community in the mid-fifth century precisely because of the need to insure continued control over the community in the face of the challenges resulting from the Egyptian Revolt (1992).

Danna Nolan Fewell, Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, *Global Bible Commentary*, Daniel Patte, gen. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 129.

According to Fewell, there is similarity between Hagar and foreign women; Hagar was part of the property Abraham received from the king of Egypt in exchange of Sarah (Gen. 12:16). Later interpreters speculated that Hagar was Pharaoh’s own daughter. But then the story of Abraham’s sending away Hagar and her son can be viewed as a justification to dismiss the foreign wives and their children. The question of the ethnic origin of Sarah remains open. Finally, according to the Genesis narrative (25:1-6), Abraham also sent away the children of his third wife, Keturah. This text, too, would support the Ezra-Nehemiah reform.

Danna Nolan Fewell, Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, *Global Bible Commentary*, Daniel Patte, gen. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 130.

Jonathan was the only one demanded in Ezra 10:15, “the truth is that you are disrupting – no, worse, destroying lives with this new edict. You are tearing families apart. You are leaving women and children homeless with no place to go and no way to take care of themselves.”

Danna Nolan Fewell, Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, *Global Bible Commentary*, Daniel Patte, gen. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 132.

Luke

Justin Ukpong, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, *Global Bible Commentary*, Daniel Patte, gen. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 385-390.

Mark

Jesus heals Gerasene Demonic (Mark 5:1-20)

Jesus and his followers crossed the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. Gerasa is one of the ten cities of the Decapolis. Decapolis was a loose confederation of territories created by the Roman Empire when Pompey integrated Syria into the Empire in 63 B.C.E., when the Hellenistic cities on the east side of the river Jordan were taken from Jewish control. The Roman legions stayed in the region to keep peace. Gerasa was one of the main Hellenistic cities that prospered through commerce. Jews continued to reside in the region. From this history the story in the text might reflect the tension between the people of the Decapolis and the Roman legions, between the people of the Decapolis and their Jewish neighbors, and between Palestinian Jews and Rome as a colonial power.

The Demonic: a Man with Unclean Spirit

The story describes the situation of the sick man who was in chains, shackles, was violent, out of control, and injured himself. He lived among tombs. Kinukawa points out social and economic implication; he has lost all relationship with his family, he has been cut off from all human contacts; he feeds himself by begging from the people who visit the tombs of their dead ancestors and relatives. Though living he was treated as dead; physical isolation from his kin, totally marginalized from the community and considered unclean, he is socially alienated, as “other.” In sum, he symbolizes society’s outcasts (Kinukawa: 369).

According to Kinukawa, unclean spirit symbolizes disabled people unable to maintain proper social relations in their community. His behavior might be his way of struggling with harsh circumstances. Or the man might represent someone with a mind colonized by demons, someone who has internalized the collective anxiety of a community under social, political, economic, or religious oppression. A subjugated community might repress its anguish and turn on itself, as symbolized by the possessed man. Thus Jesus exorcism can be read as a politically symbolic action against severe exploitation that prevents people from living decent human lives (Kinukawa: 369).

According to Kinukawa, the reality of this exploitation becomes clearer when the demon replies, “My name of Legion; for we are many” (5:9). The name reveals the origin of the social, political, and economic oppression at the center of the story: The Roman Empire and its military might be stationed in the Decapolis. Usually a legion consists of two thousand to three thousand infantry. When the demon entered the swine “the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea” (5:13). Kinukawa suggests that Mark chose the words *legion* and *swine* to mock the oppressing Romans. Sometimes swine functions as a metaphor for foreigners, because most Jews avoid swine as unclean (Lev. 11:7-8). Since the number two thousand also corresponds to the size of a legion, it is another indication that this herd symbolizes a legion (Kinukawa: 370).

The story implicitly insists that the removal of the Roman colonial control is imperative for the demoniac and thus for society's outcasts; they need to be liberated. But removing the legion threatens others; it would destabilize the whole structure of society and bring political dangers. Therefore, the story continues: "They began to beg him to leave their neighborhood"(5: 17). Those begging Jesus to leave are most certainly the swineherds' owners and keepers. According to Kinukawa, their pleading reveals ambivalent feelings. They may desire the demise of the legion, the Roman control, yet they feel threatened by the resulting social changes (Kinukawa: 370).

Kinukawa speculates so far as to interpret the man with unclean spirit as a foreigner because the Jew regarded swine as unclean and disgusting. If he is a foreigner, the story may represent the beginning of Jesus' mission to Gentiles. Anyway, the story is reflecting the torment, suffering, and pain caused by Roman oppression and the Jewish antipathy toward the empire, especially among those "others" marginalized by the rulers (Kinukawa: 370).

From the story we can see that Jesus stands with the victims of imperial oppression. His exorcism of the demon is a symbolic subversive political action against the oppressive occupation (Source: *Global Bible Commentary: Mark*: Kinukawa, Hisako: 368-371).

Hisako Kinukawa, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Global Bible Commentary*, Daniel Patte, gen. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 367-.

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